

God's Word

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[0 : 0 0] As we begin this morning, I've been reflecting on an experience I had this spring of being the lacrosse coach, one of the lacrosse coaches for my son's lacrosse team.

It was a learning experience for all of us, me included, maybe more so. It was the first year of our school being a varsity program, and sometimes we didn't know what we knew, what we didn't know.

I certainly didn't know what I didn't know as a coach until I started, and I saw it in the players as well. There would be times when they would go out and run around but didn't know what they were doing because they had had no instruction.

Sometimes they would run to the wrong end of the field. Sometimes they didn't know where they were supposed to be positioned because we hadn't taught them. Sometimes they would go out there and think they were doing what we had told them, but in fact do something totally different.

And that created its own level of chaos. And sometimes they heard what we had taught them to do, and then they decided that they were just going to do their own thing anyway.

[1 : 0 8] And all of these things happened. What was encouraging to me, though, was to see how many of them would come and say, Coach, what did I do wrong? Coach, how can I do this better? They had a hunger to learn and grow, and they were seeking out more instruction and learning and knowledge so that they could improve, so that they could be better lacrosse players.

I wonder if this dynamic is also true, even more so in our spiritual lives. The same dynamics that I saw in these boys. At times we are running around, not sure what to do, and mucking things up.

Sometimes we think we know what we should be doing, and we're doing those really hard, but in fact we're not doing the right thing. Sometimes we know what we ought to be doing, and we just don't want to do it.

We think we know better, and so we do our own thing. But I got a little taste of what I think God must be like, because God delights when we are hungry to learn from, to hear and obey His words.

When His people seek Him out, then we see His kingdom expressed. And this is what we're going to talk about a little bit today as we continue our series in the book of 2 Chronicles.

[2 : 4 6] We will be in 2 Chronicles chapter 17 and 18. That is page 344 in your pew Bible if you want to pull that out. 2 Chronicles 17 and 18, and the importance of God's people seeking God's Word for them.

Now, I know we have some family visiting, and some of you may not be as familiar with the context of 2 Chronicles. So remember, this is a book written about the history of the kings of Israel after the kingdom had ended and gone into exile and then been restored.

Okay? So there was a lot there that I just summarized, but this is the big picture of the history of Israel. And Chronicles was written as the people of God were returning to the land that God had given them and trying to figure out where do we go from here.

I don't know if this is helpful, but Pastor Nick said this this week in staff meeting. He said kings was written earlier, the same history, but it was written earlier during the exile to explain to the people of Israel, how did we get here?

How did we get to exile? Chronicles is written after the exile to try to teach God's people, how do we go forward from here?

[4 : 08] How do we live as God's people after the exile? What does that look like? And the book is looking back to say, what do we have to learn from what happened before so that we can know what it means to pursue God?

Now, we're looking today at the story of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, and we're not going to look at everything in his. In fact, there are four chapters of Jehoshaphat.

We're not going to try to cover all of that today. You might be glad. It's already 5 of 11. So, we're only going to...we're going to look at two chapters, and we're actually going to pull one theme, because one of the things that we've seen as we're looking through the book of 2 Chronicles, there are themes that are repeated over and over again.

Things like, seek the Lord, that God blesses His people when they seek the Lord. The importance of right worship, of putting away false gods and worshiping other idols, and worshiping in the temple God's one true.

The way that God is rewarding those who obey, and when He judges and brings consequences to those who disobey His instructions and words. So, these are some of the big themes.

[5 : 22] Today, we're going to pull out one more theme, and that is the importance of seeking and heeding God's words. So, that's our introduction.

We're going to look...we're going to begin by reading the beginning of chapter 17 together. So, I'm going to read that, and then we're going to pray, and then we'll look at it together. So, 2 Chronicles chapter 17, verse 1.

1 Chronicles 1.

And then, there's a lot more in the chapter that we're going to just stop in there.

So, this is the beginning of Jehoshaphat's reign. Let me pray and ask for God's help as we look at it this morning. Lord, thank You for Your Word and that it speaks to us.

[7 : 00] Lord, even as we have just sung, we pray that Your Word would shape our minds and our hearts and our hands and our wills so that we might know You and do Your will.

Lord, we thank You for Your Spirit that helps us to do this. Lord, I pray for Your help this morning that I might speak the words that You would have me speak, that I would faithfully proclaim Your Word, and that we together would sit under and receive Your Word this morning.

Be with us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, the big idea this morning is that God's people are to love the teaching and hearing of God's Word to us.

We're going to look at it in three steps. Here's your outline. If you're looking for it, we want to be people who are loving the teaching of God's Word, loving the hearing of God's Word, and loving God's final Word.

So, that's what we will look at this morning, loving the teaching of God's Word. Just starting in chapter 17, when Jehoshaphat started out, he did really well, right?

[8 : 11] He did well in lots of areas. He did put in military fortifications. He purified the worship of Israel. Again, those are other themes that we'll cover more strongly at other times.

But one of the interesting things that he did is in verses 7 through 10 that I want to read now, he created a system of teaching in Israel.

So, chapter 17, verse 7, he says, in the third year of his reign, he sent out his officials, and they list all the officials, and I'm going to skip through them for time, to teach in the cities of Judah.

And with them, the Levites, and then another bunch of names. And with these Levites, the priests, and two more names. And they taught in Judah, having the book of the law with... the book of the law of the Lord with them.

And they went about throughout all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. One of the things that Jehoshaphat did explicitly was to send his officials, the Levites, the priests.

[9 : 23] It was everyone at all levels of government, all the different branches, were united in this task, playing the roles that God had given them more broadly.

If you look back into Exodus, you can see how all these people were set up. But their roles were to teach the people about who God was, and specifically God's Word, right?

It says specifically that they were teaching from the law of God, the book that God had given them. And this refers to the Scriptures, the revelation that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai, the law and the writings that come after that.

And so they had all of these things to teach and remind the people of who God is, of what God has done, and what it meant to be God's people, and how they are to live.

And it emphasizes that this was not just for the officials, but this was for all people. So he sent these men out to the whole country so that all the people, each one, individual Jews... This is so helpful to see.

[10 : 32] It wasn't just that the religious leaders were supposed to know God's Word, but that every single citizen of the community was meant to know God's Word.

And this was important because they were having to think about how to live distinctly in this time period when those around them were not doing so.

Did you notice when I read the beginning of chapter 17, it said specifically in verse 4, right? He sought the God of his Father and walked in his commandments and not according to the practices of Israel.

Now, if you were here last week, you remember there's a distinction. In this verse, Israel is being used to describe the northern kingdom. The people of God at this point in history had been divided, and this is describing the northern kingdom under a king named Ahab.

And it was not a great... It was still ten tribes of the people of Israel, but they were not following the Lord properly. And Jehoshaphat was distinguishing himself from the northern kingdom by teaching the law of the Lord.

[11 : 39] And let me show you how difficult or how distinct this was. I'm going to read from 1 Kings 16, chapter 16, verse 30 to 33, a little bit about what Ahab and his rule was like.

And Ahab, the son of Omri, did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ephbaal, the king of Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him.

He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

So this was, up to this point, the worst king ever. He was doing everything wrong with regard to how to be God's people living in God's land.

He was worshipping other gods. He was bringing in foreign treaties. He was building false idols to worship. He was doing everything wrong. So Jehoshaphat in the southern kingdom was saying, we are going to be distinct from that.

[13 : 01] We are going to be different by actually following and teaching God's Word to us. This was a high value for Jehoshaphat, and he loved the teaching of God's Word.

Now what about us? What does it look like for us to love the teaching of God's Word? Well, the first thing is that it has to come with conviction that God's Word is good.

2 Timothy 3, verses 16 and 17, Paul reminds the church of this. All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

We need to be convinced that this is good for us and that we need to believe that it is true, right?

Just like those lacrosse boys who are running around the field, they had to believe that my instruction was good for them to want to follow it.

[14 : 22] Now, my instruction sometimes wasn't good, and we had to work through that, but I'm not infallible. But God is, and God's Word is. And so to follow it is a good thing.

And we need to recognize that this will come in a context, and we know this already, but in a context where there are many voices that are saying other things other than God's Word.

So in 2 Timothy chapter 4, verses 3 and 4, Paul warns Timothy this, for the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

So God's Word warns us that we live, that every Christian has always lived in a context where there is a tidal pull, a current that pulls away from actually here listening to the teaching of God's Word, that we will, in our hearts, want to pursue teachers that say things that we want them to say, things that will suit our own passions, that will fulfill our own desires.

that will conform to the values of the world around us and not be distinctive in the way that Jehoshaphat wanted and the way that God calls us to be distinctive from the world around us.

[15 : 58] And we need to recognize that there's a danger and that we may easily get caught up in these currents. And look, I could sit here and pick on a few cultural things, sexual morality or end-of-life morality or ethics or those sorts of things to say, golly, God's Word says something really important in how distinct we're meant to be from the world around us.

But let me instead pick on some more core values that I think where we love things that the world loves sometimes more than God's Word, where we would prefer to have a God who doesn't judge us rather than having a God who loves righteousness and goodness.

We prefer to have a God who serves our needs rather than a sovereign God who knows what is best for us. We prefer a gospel, a message of good news that tells us our life is going to be the best life ever with prosperity at every turn rather than a gospel of the cross.

And we prefer a gospel of works that says if we can just do the right things, check the right boxes religiously or in the world that somehow we will be okay with God.

These are some of the currents, the deeper currents that I see where we prefer to choose to see God through our own lenses rather than letting the God of the Bible reveal Himself as He is.

[17 : 32] So friends, how do we at Trinity love the teaching of God's Word? Well, hopefully, our small groups are defined as people who gather around God's Word.

So, if you're not in a small group and you may not fit into one of our formal small groups but are you meeting with other people to talk about God's Word regularly so that you can look at it together and encourage one another?

I don't know if you've ever thought about this but when we preach on Sunday morning we don't preach topically for a very explicit reason because we want God's Word to define the agenda for what we preach on week to week.

So, we choose a chunk of Scripture and then we preach through it sequentially and we do that intentionally because as much as the elders would love to preach to you on this topic and this topic and this topic and this topic we send that off to Sunday school because we want God to define the agenda of what we say from the pulpit every Sunday.

We want God's Word to say this is what needs to be said to my people today and as Nick and I and the elders prepare to preach we always want to say God let this be your Word speaking not ours.

[18 : 56] and of course we always want to encourage you to be engaged in regular personal Bible intake. Love the teaching of God's Word by having an app on your phone listening to God's Word if you have a hard time sitting down and reading getting a good study Bible so you can not only read it but actually study it and get into it and understand it memorizing Scripture I'm always encouraged when I visit homes and in the bathroom there's like a there's a Bible verse you know taped to the mirror so that when we wake up in the morning there's God's Word just in the warp and woof of the life of this family.

These are some ways that we can love God's Word. Jehoshaphat didn't just prioritize the teaching of God's Word though he also sought to hear God's Word and so in chapter 18 we see Jehoshaphat seeking to hear from God in the midst of quite a challenging situation.

Now prophets are one of the ways in the Old Testament that God speaks to his people and we see a prophet coming into this. I'm going to try to go through this really quickly. In chapter 18 Jehoshaphat against wisdom made an alliance with Ahab and we think this was probably a good-hearted attempt to unify Israel but it was unwise because as we've seen earlier Ahab was not a good king and so and Ahab says hey since we're in this alliance let's go up and recapture this town that we had lost this town of Ramoth Gilead and so so in verses one through four of chapter 18 this is the setup for what happens next.

So now if you want to turn with me chapter 18 verse 4 they're about to go up and this is what God's word says and Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel inquire first for the word of the Lord and then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together four hundred men and said to them shall we go up against Ramoth Gilead or shall I refrain and they said go up for God will give it into the hands of the king but Jehoshaphat said is there not here another prophet of the Lord of whom we may inquire and the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat there is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord Micah the son of Micaiah the son of Imlah but I hate him for he never prophesied good concerning me but always evil and Jehoshaphat said let not the king say so and then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said bring quickly Micaiah son of Imlah now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting on their thrones arrayed in their robes and they were sitting at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria and all the prophets were prophesying before them and Zedekiah the son of Chenanah made for himself horns of iron and said thus says the Lord with these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed and all the prophets prophesied and said go up to Ramoth

Gilead and triumph the Lord will give it into the hands of the king okay did you get all that in summary they're going up and Jehoshaphat says wait wait wait we don't want to go without hearing from the Lord don't you have any prophets of the Lord and Ahab says sure I've got 400 guys in my pocket and they're here to say go do whatever the king wants and so they show up and you know what they say let's go do what the king wants and Jehoshaphat smells a rat and so he's like wait but is there anyone who actually inquires of the Lord and when again when you see the Lord the way it's written with all capitals that's Yahweh that's the God of Israel the way he revealed himself to Moses way back when and so so so he says isn't there anyone and Ahab says oh yeah there's this one guy but he's so annoying because he never says anything good about me and and Jehoshaphat says if he seeks the Lord let's bring him in and so they send for this prophet of the Lord but in the meantime the end of this section imagine this circus right these two kings are sitting on a throne and there are 400 prophets prophets and it feels like it's this just big pomp and show of supporting the king and this this one priest

[23 : 45] Zedekiah makes a crown of horns and says with this horn you will go and have great victory and and you just think what in this context how strong Jehoshaphat is to say but don't we need to hear from the Lord where there's all this cultural pressure to just go with the flow but he doesn't do it he doesn't do it the story goes on it continues in verse 12 and the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him behold the words of the prophet with the words of the prophet with one accord are favorable to the king let your word be like the word of one of them and speak favorably but Micaiah said as the Lord lives what my God says that I will speak and when he had come to the king the king said to him

Micaiah shall we go to Ramoth Gilead to battle or shall I refrain and he answered them go up in triumph they will be given into your hand but the king said to him how many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord and he said this is now Micaiah responding and he said I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains as sheep that have no shepherd and the Lord said these have no master let each return to his home in peace and the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me but evil and Micaiah said therefore hear the word of the Lord I saw the Lord sitting on his throne and all the host of heaven standing at his right hand and on his left and the Lord said who will entice Ahab the king of Israel that he may go up and fall at Ramoth Gilead and one and one said one thing and another said another then a spirit came forward and said before the Lord saying

I will entice him and the Lord said to him by what means and he said I will go out and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets and he said you are to entice him and you shall succeed go out and do so now therefore behold the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets the Lord has declared disaster concerning you okay did you get all that this is great drama this would be a great TV show can you imagine this scene so Micaiah comes in and the guy who's bringing him says hey Micaiah like everyone's saying they should go up can you just like agree can you say the same thing too so that everyone will be happy and and Micaiah's like no I'm a prophet of the Lord I'm called to speak God's word so I'm going to do whatever God says now then confusingly when he gets there and the king asks him the first thing he does is seemingly parrot what all the other prophets are saying which raises a question why is he doing this is this really what he's saying and and it it makes lots of commentators think he's being ironic here he's saying yeah okay here this is what it sounds like if I'm going to say what everyone else says it's also possible given what we see later that the Lord is wanting to use his prophets to give a lying spirit so that it will entice Micaiah to go or entice Ahab to go up so so it's a little unclear exactly what Micaiah is doing there but fascinatingly even Ahab the evil king who isn't seeking the Lord this isn't Jehoshaphat this is Ahab saying oh come on Micaiah

I know that's not what you have to say to me it's got to be something worse than that you're just telling me to go up and do what I want that can't be really what God is saying it's fascinating right Ahab is the one who calls him out and Micaiah says yeah you're right that's not actually all that I have to say in fact what I see is Israel without a shepherd and in fact you should not go up but you should go home in peace go back to your towns and be at rest this is actually what God is saying to you if you were to listen and Ahab says see I told you and Micaiah continues and he tells the story of what's going on in this heavenly throne room where there's this discussion between God and his angels the spirits saying how can I get to my plan because my plan is for Ahab to go up and to do this thing and he's going to be killed and so they have this back and forth and then I will put a lying spirit in the prophets and they will speak these words and then Ahab will go up and do this thing and then he will be destroyed and so Micaiah lays bare the inner workings of what God is doing how God sovereignly is using lying prophets to carry out his sovereign will now it's fascinating to see what happens then right because Ahab who got the first one and said no that can't be it now here's these things and if you read the rest of the chapter what he does is he says well that doesn't matter everyone else is saying we should go up so let's go up together but I've got a great idea

I'm going to disguise myself so I don't look like the king and I'm going to let you Jehoshaphat look like the king so that when we go together you'll be leading us and no one will know that I'm the king so who's ever going to want to kill me and so that's the idea he tries to hide by disguising himself they go up the enemies recognize that Jehoshaphat isn't Ahab God delivers Jehoshaphat miraculously when he's the target of their initial attack they then break off their attack and in a fascinating turn of events it says a man in his innocence that's the better translation of the word in his ignorance innocence just shoots an arrow and in God's sovereignty it flies through and it pierces through Ahab's armor and he dies by the end of that day and so God's word is fulfilled and the plant and the armies are defeated they don't win the battle they don't win the day but they do go home in peace now what are we to make of this story this is true of lots of chronicles where we're like okay what is the point of all this because one of the big questions that I have is Jehoshaphat was he obeying or disobeying the word that he heard from God about this because God's plan was for them to go up so that Ahab would be killed and Jehoshaphat knew that

[31 : 05] I think that's giving him way too much credit to be honest I think Jehoshaphat was the little brother was the weaker of the two kings and Ahab said we're gonna do this let's go do this and Jehoshaphat said well I guess maybe we can try and do that because I don't know what else to do because I want to unify Israel that's my read on it you know here's the question for you for coffee hour was he wise enough to see God's hand and to follow along or was he foolish enough to really believe that by being Ahab's ally this would be a good thing it doesn't say what his motivations were we do know at the beginning of chapter 19 another prophet comes and he rebukes Jehoshaphat for his alliance with Ahab he says you should not ally with this wicked man who does not follow the Lord what we do see in all this story is that Jehoshaphat longed to hear God's word and there's a little question at the end about whether he actually obeyed it so but he did long to hear God's word and friends this is what God would want for us as well now we might ask ourselves but does God still speak are there still prophets that we should be seeking out who can come and say thus saith the Lord well

Jesus has given us a better fulfillment than that if you remember in John 16 in the Garden of Gethsemane or not in the Garden of Gethsemane in the Last Supper as Jesus is teaching he says this in John chapter 16 verses 12 through 14 he says I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now when the spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth for he will not speak on his own authority but whatever he hears he will speak and he will declare to you the things that are to come he will glorify me for he will take what is mine and declare it to you and friends what God did is he filled his initial followers with the Holy Spirit and he's continued to fill his church with the Holy Spirit through the apostles writing we have this book that is the writings of those inspired by the Holy Spirit to write scripture and we as believers in Christ have the Holy Spirit in us allowing us to understand

God's word the Bible says that without God's help we are unable we are blind to seeing the truth of God but that when God's spirit is at work in us we are able to see the truth of God's word and this is a glorious thing and we will have to have this discernment because as we've talked about before there will be false teachers there will be those who will come and say I'm not going to read it but 2 Peter 2 talks about false prophets coming along who will teach destructive heresies and will live destructive lives to hurt those who come how do we discern false teaching from true well here are a couple of thoughts this probably isn't comprehensive one whatever we teach should be consistent with all of what the Bible says it's easy to pick and choose this is my favorite verse I like this one

God so loved the world great yes God loved the world but God's love is shaped in all sorts of nuances by the rest of the Bible so let's make sure we understand that what we're teaching is in is in with the whole Bible the second thing I would say is that all teaching needs to be consistent with the gospel of the cross and resurrection of Jesus it must be infused with humility and triumph it must so patterns of both death and life of suffering and sanctification so much false teaching goes to one or the other sides of those equations and it's either all triumph with no suffering or it's all suffering and no triumph finally whatever the teaching is it should exalt Jesus Christ it should point to him because John 14 tells us that the spirit will come to teach us about Christ and it's so easy for our teaching to fall into exaltation of human reason or human wisdom

God forbid that you would come and want my wisdom when you come on Sunday morning what you need is God's wisdom and my role by God's grace is to teach that to you and when I'm wrong because I'm not infallible you can rebuke me you can challenge me and we can talk about it but recognize that it's not about exalting a human wisdom or a human reason and it's not exalting of an alternative way for us to find salvation and be acceptable to God right there is only one gospel and it is the gospel of grace by grace you have been saved through faith and this not of yourselves is the gift of God so that no one may boast not of works so those are a couple of litmus tests as you think about false teaching look for these things when these things are true these will be helpful when they are missing then we need to be aware and be wise

[36 : 45] I've gone way long I'm going to close this quickly but God's people are to love the teaching and the hearing of God's word but finally we need to recognize that we need to love God's final word more than anything else Hebrews 1 says this long ago at many times in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son whom he appointed the heir of all things and through whom also he created the world he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature and he upholds the universe by the word of his power after making purification for sin he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high friends this is God's word to us so that we might know him the word of God made flesh that dwelt among us and we have beheld his glory it is about

Jesus at the end of the day this is how God has revealed himself to us and when we want to know how to be God's people we look to Jesus when we want to know how we become a part of God's people we trust and believe in Jesus that his life and death and resurrection for us is our salvation and by faith in him we have life with him Jesus himself rebuked the teachers of the law in his day saying you search the scriptures because you think in them you have eternal life and it is they that bear witness about me yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life so if you're ever worried that we worship the Bible more than Jesus recognize that Jesus himself said no the Bible is given to us so that we know him better so that we know him in his fullness and so that we can understand him and this is how we know him and this is what 2nd Chronicles in the story of Jehoshaphat at least one slice of it is teaching us that God's people are to love the teaching and the hearing of God's word and to worship his final word to us let's pray together

Lord thank you for your word and thank you for the teaching that you give us in it Lord thank you that you are not a God that we have to guess or have some spiritual experience in order to know but Lord thank you that you have made yourself known through your word and finally through Jesus oh Lord we pray that we would be those who love you and love your word we pray this in Jesus name amen amen to amen to amen to