Knox Presbyterian Church, Manotick May 5, 2024

2 Kings 20: 1-6; Matthew 26: 14-16, 20-25, 47-50; 27: 3-5

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**“Betrayal and Death Yet Hopeful”**

If you’ve ever read through 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, you will know that the Scriptures portray each king of Israel and Judah that reigned on the basis of their doing right or wrong from God’s perspective. That was the bottom line on their lives. And these things were written down thousand of years ago so that readers such as you and me might ask ourselves the same question, “Are you doing right or wrong from God’s perspective?” Do you know God’s perspective so that when you meet Him face to face, (and we all will meet Him face to face to receive our final judgment from Him) you may respond to Him with the knowledge of what He has taught us from Scripture about a relationship with Him?

If you’ve read these historical books about the kings of Israel and Judah, you will know that most of the kings of Judah did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord and all the kings of Israel (the northern kingdom) did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. We are to be warned by such written history. The good news is that there were a few that did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. They chose against the competing idols or gods of the region, just as the Lord encourages us to choose against the addictions of our times. In those days, it was the sexual gods of Baal and Ashteroth, the self-destructive god of Molech that demanded the murder of children, and other gods that would demand drug and alcohol abuse, much like most of the addictions today that are still killing people whether the addiction is legal or not.

One of these kings who loved the Lord and walked in David’s ways of faithfulness to God was Hezekiah. We read about him in 2 Kings 20. You can read about the good reforms he did against the foreign gods and how he trusted God in prayer when he was faced with his nation being wiped out in chapters 18 and 19. But I want to focus on chapter 20 because it is a unique moment in his life and in our lives as well.

Hezekiah got sick, just as we get sick from time to time. But this sickness made him feel like he was at the point of death. And there were prophets who spoke to kings in those days with the word of the Lord. The well known Isaiah was given the task of telling Hezekiah to put his house in order, for he was going to die with this sickness. Now some of us have experienced this death sentence at the hands of doctors and others, who tell us we have a sickness that will soon or not so soon kill us. Have you had that experience? If not, you do know that Statistics Canada publishes the death rate of Canadians every year: one hundred out of one hundred Canadians will die. So we know we must die. Yes? How many aren’t sure?

So Hezekiah was given the message that he was about to die. He needed to put his house in order: that is, not just the legal papers of a will and testament, but to make sure he was in right relationship with the Lord. Today, **now** is a good time for you to do the same. Do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour? Have you repented of your sin, answering Jesus at the door of your heart (Rev. 3:20), asking Him to come into your life, your house and to take over every part, all that you own, have, and all of your relationships? Have you asked Him in? Do so now. Right down that you done so on May 5, 2024. *Cinco de mayo*. Declare it your dependence day on Jesus. Know for sure you are His and He is yours.

Hezekiah was not keen on going to be with the Lord in that particular season of his life. We don’t know why exactly. Maybe it was simply because he felt he had more living to do before he went to be with the Lord. Those are hard calls. But he prays and cries before the Lord and the Lord grants him another fifteen years of life. Now if you knew you only had fifteen years to live, how would you live it for Jesus? I’m 65. I’m faced with that question most days. It’s a good question: what is the Lord calling you to live out every day? What is your legacy? What is your hope? Where is your hope placed? We will all die. What does God want you to do with the time He has given you, whether short or long, whether you are young or old. Remember Jesus was just a young man when He accepted what His Father told him would be a much shorter life than most.

Hezekiah was given a second message from Isaiah stating he would now receive an extra decade and a half. He was told this within a few minutes of being told the first message of his impending death. God was gracious to him. But if you read the rest of Hezekiah’s story, you see that Hezekiah did not use the rest of his fifteen years wisely. In fact, he made some grave errors, like showing his treasures to representatives from Babylon. Stunningly, after receiving a message from the Lord that would see his children becoming eunuchs in Babylon, Hezekiah rejoices not for their future pain and problems, but for the fact that he personally would not see it. It seems that a selfish perspective in Hezekiah has taken up residence rather than a godly one. How about you? If you knew you only had so long to live, how might that change your perspective on your hopes and dreams right now? What does God want you to reprioritize as your top reason for living right now? Can you answer that question? Know Him. Love Him. Love others.

Hezekiah reminds us that every day we have a choice. Will we start our days with knowing Him, reading His Word, listening to Him, and talking to Him? Or will we start them some other way? Ending the day this way is also beneficial.

Death is not a happy or simple subject. But our deaths remind us we are not God. Death is the context from which we all gain perspective as we stare into eternity. This physical life will pass away. The current heaven and earth will pass away. (Rev. 21:1) But there will be a new heaven and earth, and we will have new resurrection bodies. But meanwhile we live here until we get there. How can we live here wisely?

Jesus never promised us an easy life as a follower of His. In fact, He says that we must choose Him above our parents, family, our spouses, relatives and closest friends. (Luke 14: 25-27) How can this be? Jesus set an example of his following God even when his own family was not believing or even ridiculing him (John 7: 1-9) We too have choices. Let them be choices for God, for Jesus.

Jesus calls us to a costly life of following Him. This life has suffering and even betrayal as a part of it. James teaches clearly. (James 1:2ff.) Peter teaches this clearly (1 Peter 2:21). We don’t like to hear this. I don’t. But it is true. So how do we process the suffering and even the betrayal? We must first admit it is happening, lay it out before the Lord and talk with our friends and companions for prayer support.

Jesus was betrayed. We all know this intellectually. In fact, we are reminded every Holy Week that one of his closest followers betrayed him. We remember his name, Judas Iscariot. The name has become synonymous with betrayal. We read his story and we wonder. How could he have done such a thing? And yet I trust you know your own sin and rebellion enough to answer that question. Judas and Peter weren’t all that different for those few hours, rebellious, denying, betraying their Lord. The difference was that Judas committed suicide so that there was no chance for reconciliation like there was for Peter. I believe we need always be opponents of suicide, assisted or not. We can talk more, if you wish.

What was it like for Jesus to experience His gift of prophecy when calling Judas to become one of His disciples, one of His apostles? (Mark 3:19) Can you imagine knowing in advance getting to know someone who would eventually betray you with the result being you tortured to death? How would you react to meeting the person you know would betray you to death?

Jesus received Judas as He did all his disciples, with warmth and love. Jesus treated Judas as He did all his disciples, even allowing him to become the Treasurer for the group. That was a position that you might think Matthew as a former publican, tax collector, would have been more gifted. But for whatever reason, Judas did that and Scripture tells us that he helped himself to the group’s money when he felt like it. (John 12:6)

Please note that even someone who is against Jesus as Judas was cannot derail Jesus from His mission. And yet it cost Jesus, because Jesus felt the wounds of that betrayal. Have you ever thought about what Jesus went through, for us, besides the beatings, the flogging and the crucifixion itself?

I know we are supposed to take it in, every Holy Week, to some degree. But I don’t think we have put ourselves in Jesus’ shoes, until we go through in some small part what He went through…back to 1 Peter 2:21… “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”

A part of reflecting on what has happened to me in this denomination I have served my whole adult life, for over forty years, has been a growing sense that not only have I been personally betrayed by those who used to be friends and colleagues, but also have been betrayed by the institution itself. As Phil said in the Presbytery meeting, one of the hardest parts of what has happened has been the fact that the Church adopted legislation, a remit, that clearly and distinctively permits conservative Christians such as Phil and me, to hold biblical views of marriage and sexual ethics, but at the same time continue to practice ministry and write new policy as if we are the losers and the ones who have no place in the denomination. It is sad and it is painful. It is a part of following Jesus, as strange as that might sound.

So what is Jesus calling us to be in these days? We are called to be all the more committed to His Gospel, and all that He has done that we cannot do for ourselves to have relationship with God and win people to God, all those who are willing to say “yes” to Jesus and Jesus’ way. But Jonathan, won’t that be hard to sell a Gospel, if people understand that pain and suffering are a part of that package deal that includes the joy of salvation and the desire to be truth speakers and seekers, no matter what? The Holy Spirit is the One who draws others to our message. He is kind. The Holy Spirit knows what to do when it was difficult to accept new people into the Church. Take the apostle Paul, who had been called Saul, who had been arresting, jailing and condemning Christians to death. Who in their minds would accept such a man into the church? Barnabas was one such man. (Acts 9:27) We need more like him. He wasn’t perfect, but he welcomed someone others would not. A welcoming ministry is a big part of church. An invitational ministry is a big part of church. Try to make sure everyone gets into a small group during the week. That’s the church that meets during the week. That was Jesus’ method for fulfilling His mission and ministry was: small groups. I’m a big believer in Bible study; even if you use the name “life group” or “cell group” or “prayer group,” make sure you study the Scriptures in that group. Care for one another as well.

The only way we go forward in the midst of experiences of betrayal is by forgiveness and reconciliation. We know Jesus met again with Peter (John 21: 15-19) who had denied and betrayed Jesus in the garden before He was tortured to death. Peter was asked three times if he loved Him. Those three times reversed the three denials that Peter had spoken out a few days earlier. We can forgive and reconcile as God gives us grace to do so. It is often not easy or straightforward what that meeting will be like. But if there are individuals who come to mind who have wronged you, make a list. Become aware of the person who has hurt or betrayed you. Bring them first to the Lord. And if you are able, and it makes sense to try and meet with them, express your forgiveness and a desire to start anew. If further damage would be done, you can forgive them before the Lord, but forgiveness and reconciliation in person are important parts of the healing process. Also, you may need to forgive that person several times in your heart, as God reveals or brings up new details or memories. Choose the healing path of forgiveness. Otherwise, we choose anger and bitterness, which even when we do so unconsciously does not improve our lives or others’ lives.

These are not easy subjects to address and I know in doing so, there may be many questions and concerns that come up. Again I encourage you to seek out friends, leaders and others who can help you through the pain of confronting difficult emotions and experiences. If you are not sure who to speak to, you can always ask if the one you approach is willing to hear you and pray with you. That can help. Be sure to seek out trusted believers who will care about what you are going through.

Let us trust the Lord for the ways in which we can be completely discouraged and use those avenues of discouragement to become inroads of mercy, grace, kindness, patience and care for God to work in us and others.

Let us pray. “For all those who feel like the burden of being badly hurt or even betrayed is something that cannot be broached, give us what we need, O God, to open ourselves to you anew, to entrust our lives to you anew, to give this congregation and its future to you anew, and to know once again that You desire our best and are extremely creative and bringing good from evil contexts. We remember Joseph who said to his brothers: ‘You intended harm…you meant evil against me but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today… (Genesis 50:20 ESV) Let us continue to trust this God whose kindness and goodness can accomplish more than we ask or imagine. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”