

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Story: Chapter 17 – The Kingdom Falls
Pastor Dave Scherrer - January 29, 2012

We are coming up on the 100th anniversary of the tragic sinking of the famous ocean cruise ship the R.M.S. Titanic. On April 14, 1912, the night of the ill fated run in between ship and iceberg, the high paying clientele was in a good mood. The captain offered to let the first class passengers, who paid as much as \$85,000 for their ticket in today's money, telegraph home to their loved ones about their trip as a marketing tool. The switch board was swamped by officers making good on the promise to send messages out. So swamped in fact that they did not pick up any of the six radio communications that they were headed into an ice field. The one warning that they did respond to they simply coded back to the sender this six word answer:

... .. - - / .. - - / .. / .. - - / - - - - —
("shut up I am busy" in Morse code)

One of any number of famous warnings that didn't get listened to:
The space shuttle Challenger and the now famous O-ring by Roger Boisjoly
Pearl Harbor and the Japanese bombing
The warning to George Armstrong Custer that there were lots of Indians by his scouts

Not every warning results in a disaster, but some do. For almost over three hundred years God had been sending prophets to Israel and Judah for them to worship and obey God alone or suffer terrible consequences, consequences spelled out in no uncertain terms. But not only did they not obey; they mocked God's prophets and killed them.

2 Kings 21:1-7 (page 231 of The Story)

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. His mother's name was Hephzibah. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. He built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will put my Name." In the two courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger.

He took the carved Asherah pole he had made and put it in the temple, of which the LORD had said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever.

Finally Israel was swept away by the Assyrians in 722 BC and then in this chapter of the Story we read of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the invading Babylonians in 586 BC.

Sometimes I wonder who is to blame in these kinds of circumstances. Most likely there is lots of blame to go around, kings, priests, obliging people. One thing though God clearly puts lots of blame on the king's who failed to lead their people into obedience.

The Kings:

Hezekiah	716-687	29 years	Good
Manasseh	687-642	55 years	Bad
Amon	642-640	2 years	Bad
Josiah	640-608	31 years	Good
Jehoahaz	608	3 months	Bad

Jehoiachin	608-597	11 years	Bad
Zedekiah	597-586	11 years	Bad

It is interesting that when leadership leads well, the nation is blessed. When the king is evil the nation suffers. This is still true; leadership counts! One thing I want to say about our church. We are led well. Over the last five years we have made a strategic effort toward a very specific biblical form of leadership called Elders. We have resisted the urge that so many churches have gone to of being a staff led church. We are an elder led and staff supported church. That means there is protection from the fate that can sometimes happen to an individual leader. At 4Cs we seek the prayerful leadership of those who are called as overseers. I very much believe in the leadership of the staff too, but you should be comforted that there are those from within this congregation that seek Christ's heart, vision and values for our fellowship following the leadership of the Spirit. This is not my church, it is God's church and you through your elders lead this church.

At the time of the fall the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel were God's prophets to the southern Kingdom of Judah. Over and over, they brought relentless, almost offensive, messages of doom to the kings Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin. This terrible season in the life of God's chosen is about more than life just the obvious:

Lower story: Life is hard and then you die

In fact to some extent God agrees:

Ezekiel 6:3-5, 7

'You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Sovereign LORD. This is what the Sovereign LORD says to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys: I am about to bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your high places. Your altars will be demolished and your incense altars will be smashed; And I will slay your people in front of your idols. I will lay the dead bodies of the Israelites in front of their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars.

Lamentations 3:19-20

¹⁹ I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.
²⁰ I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me.

This is still the story that many in the world today think is our plight. One trial after another and then life is over. We simply squeeze out as much pleasure or moments of respite from the sorrows of life that we can before we die.

Thomas Hobbes wrote, "The life of man; solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Life is hard and then you die.

But the Upper Story truth to this story and to every story is that God's grace seeks us out, seeks out our lives and seeks to redeem each one for his purposes and to bless us in those purposes.

The Upper Story: There are no more painful endings

Ezekiel has a famous prophecy that says it all (p. 246 in the Story)

Ezekiel 37:7-14

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'

Many of you will not be very familiar with this little book in the Old Testament. It was written by the prophet Jeremiah in response to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in about 587 BC. It tells us of the horrible destruction and loss of life and starvation through siege. But in the middle of the book there are some of the sweetest words that God has given to us about himself. Jeremiah says,

Lamentations 3:21-25

²¹ Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

²² Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

²⁴ I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

²⁵ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;

I am not here today to say that life is not sometimes filled with terrible hardship and broken-heartedness. Everybody would walk out saying I was a hopeless religious freak. No, even Jesus told us "In the world you will have tribulation." But he also said, "Take heart, I have overcome the world!" Here is the trouble with our world:

Nobody notices a bridge that doesn't fall

At our men's study last week, Male Call, we were talking about noticing the love of God and our own love for God and Don Read staggered us all with this bit of profundity. "Nobody notices a bridge that doesn't fall." We are trained by our culture to only count as news that which is tragic and un-reconciled. Bridges that fall and the people that are killed as a result, that kind of thing we notice. But the hundreds of thousands of bridges that "do their job" - that is not news. It is also not the way God wants us to live. In the midst of the tribulations God wants us to be aware of his blessings and His sustaining grace.

I have a couple of practical suggestions this morning that may very well change your life if you make these habits. The first one is a habit I think that you should put on and the second is a habit I fear you should practice taking off. The Apostle Paul often said put off the old man and put on the new. Let me explain.

God is offering a different life, a different lifestyle - where we purposefully seek after him and his purposes and his blessings. We should practice 'noticing God' as Pastor Mike has a habit of saying. Is it a normal part of your day to close out the day saying to someone, perhaps your roommate or your spouse, "How was your day?" which focuses on your daily tasking? Instead

how about closing your day with “What did you notice about God today?” Mike regularly makes this challenge to the men at Male Call.

Philippians 4:8-9

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Another way of putting it is to . . .

Discipline your life to be on a ‘God hunt’

My friend Ron Hutchcraft would send his teenage boys out each morning before school on a God hunt. He would say, “Have a good day, find God today. I will be excited to hear about it!” It takes discipline and encouragement to start a regular habit of looking for God and His blessings and His purposes.

Even in that terrible time of despair that we have read about in these last few chapters of God’s dealings with the children of Israel, in the middle of prophecies of ruin, God told Jeremiah to tell the people of Judah to go on a God hunt:

Jeremiah 29:10-14a

This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you...

If Jesus had a life verse of his own sayings this one might have been it:

Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

If this is a habit you should put on think about putting off an old habit of death.

Pursue a personal culture of life.

To do this you will have to take off a culture of death. For the last few weeks we have been talking about choosing life, but in our world that means taking off the trappings of non-life first. Everything from sarcastic teasing to slasher movies need to be examined as to their worthiness in our lives. As a young Christian I read the verse about our freedom in Christ “everything is permissible” and thought wow I don’t have to be so legalistic about things, and that was true. But as I get older in Christ the second half of that verse – “But not all things are profitable” has more merit, more weight, for me. Examine your life and see if there is a culture of padding the truth that is robbing you of integrity, a culture of cynicism and negativity that is impacting those around you, a habit of movies and music that celebrate evil and death, put these off and put on life.

How I live my life matters. Where I put my mind and heart matters to how I live my life.

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” – C.S. Lewis, *Is Theology Poetry?*

There are no more painful endings

There are painful moments in life, to be sure. In the world we have tribulations and persecutions and the evils of loss and disappointment. But in Christ we can live above the disappointments and see the grace of God behind the sadness. And we choose to live there instead. Next week we will begin to talk about the remnant of the captive Jews that are coming home to start over. These remnant believers have much to say to us I think.

“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”