

Royal Lessons from Judah - 2 Chronicles 26:16-23 Uzziah Part II: Pride - The Reason for my Downfall!

Professor J Christy Wilson, a church pastor and missionary tells this story from his one of his own church's experience...

In 1971, the Afghan government ruled by King Mohammed Zahir Shah gave a small new group of foreign Christians permission to plant a church in Kabul. It was the only Christian church building permitted on neutral soil in Afghanistan. The Afghan government permitted this place of worship only for use among the foreign community; it was never to be used by the Afghan people.

One Sunday morning, only two years after the sanctuary's dedication, soldiers arrived and began to hack away at the wall between the street and the church building. One gentleman in the congregation went to Kabul's mayor and prophetically warned, "If your government touches that house of God, God will overthrow your government!" The mayor responded by ordering the congregation to turn over their church for destruction, thereby eliminating the need for the Afghan government to pay compensation.

"This building does not belong to us but to God," the people of the church replied. "We can't turn it over for destruction." And they proceeded to serve tea and biscuits to the soldiers who were destroying their place of worship.

On Tuesday, July 17, 1973, the Afghan soldiers completed their destruction of the church building. That very night, King Mohammed Zahir Shah, who began his rule in 1933 as a 19 year old and taken full control of the government in 1964 was overthrown in a bloodless coup, and the 227-year-old monarchy in Afghanistan came to an end forever. The rest of that story is told in the history books where he was later given the honorary title Father of the Nation. This is a history that is incredibly kind towards him yet omits mention of this true story. So what of his Epitath if God was to write it? How about 'Pride - The Reason for my Downfall!'

Just like King Mohammed Zahir Shah, Uzziah came to the throne as a teenager and then later in historical terms is rated kindly as one of the top six best rulers of Judah. So what happened to him then?

The 16 year old Azariah whose name meant *the LORD has helped*, which upon his coronation was changed to Uzziah, *My Strength is the LORD*. One made King by the people reigning well for nearly 40 years until something happened. The verses we have read today in Part Two of Uzziah's story reveal the ways that God's blessings can lead us away

from Him. That we must guard our hearts from the danger of Pride when we experience success or prosper. Uzziah provides a clear example of the problem. For he is a perfect example of Pride being the reason for his downfall!

How do God's Blessings lead us away from Him?

Let's look at that now with the first point recapping on last week where we learnt that in the good years of Uzziah's Reign...

1. God Blesses His Servant Who is Doing Right vv1-15

There we learnt that it is in the heart of God to bless and prosper or make successful those whom He loves, having all their physical and spiritual needs provided for. The key being v.5 ...as long as this hard-working Visionary King lived and ruled in the fear of the LORD, in obedience to his commandments all the while continuing to seek the LORD, as in trample, wear out and beat a path to him on a frequent basis to worship the LORD, consult and ask for his wisdom and guidance. As long as Uzziah sought the LORD, God prospered him and gave him success in all that he did. A great show of his power and strength included leading the coalition force that stopped the Westward expansion in its tracks of the regions superpower of the time, Assyria, ruled by King Tiglath-Pileser. It was at this time, nearly 40 years into Uzziah's reign that we pick up our Bible reading today vv16-23 'The Bad Years of His reign'.

2. The Blessings Cause Uzziah to Forget His Place v.16

The important thing here is not that Uzziah was burning incense. There's nothing intrinsically evil in burning incense on the Brazen altar in the Temple Courts. The sin was that burning incense in the temple was part of the priests' job (v. 18), as outlined in the Mosaic Law. Uzziah by entering the Temple to do this was stepping beyond his God given authority as King; he forgot His proper place. He got too Big for His own Boots! This was important because his was not to be a nation where all the authority rested in one person. And Uzziah needed to understand that His authority was not without limit. He was a Son of David, not a Son of Aaron in the line of priest's who were all Levites. By this time his Godly counsel Zechariah the prophet, who had understanding in the visions and fear of the LORD and had taught Uzziah in God's Word and how to understand and receive it, had died. At some point after Zechariah's death Uzziah had ceased to humbly and wisely seek, or beat that previously well-trodden path to God. We can actually do similar things. For instance, when forget how much of what has come our way in the form of blessings is from beyond us. We begin to think we're the ones who have made it all. In our humanity

we identify ourselves with the heightened place we've been lifted to. Does this thought remind you of someone else in the Bible? How about Satan? Otherwise known as the angel Lucifer, who led all the angels in heaven in their worship of God. Lucifer, because of his role believed that he was the greatest and should therefore be equal to God, sitting on the throne with God and be worshipped, if not actually replace God, in an elevated role. Lucifer believed in his own popularity as the worship leader in heaven. Pride led to his downfall - he was kicked out of heaven by God. Unlike Satan's story, in our Bible passage today...

3. God Opens up a Moment of Repentance vv 17-18.

Perhaps it's more accurate to say that it opens up a moment for possible repentance.

You've got to give credit to these brave priests. This is a time when flouting the authority of the king could easily cost your life.

Yet they bravely stood up against the wrong that Uzziah is doing.

Uzziah's pride, though, does not allow him to acknowledge his error.

We can presume that he was likely incensed, pun intended, by their brazen rebuke. He would have been incredibly upset.

We too have a choice to make in such moments:

Will we humble ourselves and repent or will we cling to our pride?

Sadly, often the choice is to not humble ourselves and repent.

Think of the spouse who sits alone knowing that they were wrong in what they said, yet their pride will not allow them to say the words "I am sorry I was wrong". "I apologise please forgive me."

Think of the co-worker, family or club committee member who continues to argue their point when everyone else in the room has made it clear their idea is unwise or a bad one. It's not that they truly and deeply believe their idea is right – it's that they've publicly planted their stake in the ground and their pride will not allow them to retreat or change their hearts and minds for the good of all.

4. If We Fail to Repent – Judgment Falls! vv19-20

If we allow our pride to keep us from repenting, it's very likely that judgment will fall. Now, it may not fall as quickly as it did for Uzziah, where it came almost immediately. Sometimes it's days later, sometimes weeks. It might be years later. In some cases, it might not be until the Final Judgment. But we can say, though, from our experiences that the judgment on pride usually does fall. Think of how often someone who is full of themselves finds that out, after destroying close relationships or alienating business partners, distancing them from God.

In this case, as usually happens, the judgment fits the sin. Uzziah is trying to take a higher place than he deserves in the temple system. The leprosy is not a random punishment. It's a direct rebuke to his actions. In the Old Testament temple system, someone with leprosy, along with a number of other physical problems was not allowed to be in the temple.

This is God pretty much saying,
 "You think you can do everything in the temple?
 Well, here's your punishment: now you can do nothing in the temple."
 Which in anyone's life could look like:

- Letting natural consequences fall;
- Broken relationships;
- Isolation; and of course
- Distance from God.

5. There May Be a Point Where the Sin Can Be Forgiven BUT the Consequences Cannot be Undone v21

Just because a sin can be forgiven doesn't mean that there will be no lasting consequences. For instance, An affair can be forgiven by God, but the marriage may be irredeemable and divorce inevitable or, An angry tirade of words can be forgiven by co-workers, but might still result in being fired by the boss.

Sometimes we are too casual about our sin and God's "fix-it" ability. We can be thankful that we serve a forgiving God, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't run from sin as quickly as we can.

In this story, it seems that Uzziah repents of his anger and what he did in the temple, as evidenced by him hurriedly leaving the temple without further argument. But that doesn't change the fact that he has leprosy until the day he died. It's interesting that v.20 indicates that Uzziah was suddenly "*eager to leave.*" He would no doubt be much quicker to acknowledge his error at this point, but it's too late as far as the punishment and its consequences go.

From the Reign of Israel's first King Saul and then for many in the line of David, including David himself and his son Solomon, many Kings had to suffer the consequence of their sins or have their family, kingdom and or successor suffer the effects of them later because the consequences of their disobedience in not seeking and following God's Word of Command could not be undone.

To help us further apply the lessons from Uzziah's let's recognise-
Uzziah didn't understand 3 important things about God:

1. **God desires obedience, not just sacrifice** (1 Samuel 15:22)

In fact, our worship is worthless if we don't use and be obedient to what we know. Obedience is our first act of worship.

2. That **God hates a prideful heart.**

God doesn't require for us to think of ourselves as nothing, but he wants us to think of ourselves in proper relationship to Him.

Pride elevates self to a place of importance not meant for us.

Pride indicates self-reliance instead of reliance upon God

C.S. Lewis said of Pride, *"There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others. The vice I am talking about is Pride or self-conceit."*

It is the essential vice, the utmost evil. For Pride leads to every other vice- it is the complete anti-God state of heart and mind.

Proverbs 26:12 says that there is more hope for a fool than someone wise in their own eyes.

It reminds me of a man who once went to the doctor he said:

"Doctor, I don't know what to do," said this new patient.

"People shun me because I have delusions of grandeur."

"We'll figure this out," the doctor said. "Let's start at the beginning."

"Okay," the patient replied,

"In the beginning I created the heavens and the earth. . . ."

3. **God gives his grace to the humble.** (James 4:6; Micah 6:8).

Humility isn't self-loathing or negative talk. It's thinking correctly of ones abilities and value. Jesus warned us against exalting self.

He says this in **Luke 14:7-11** where he was speaking against the obvious pride and self-centeredness of the Pharisees, v.11

*"For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled
and he would humbles himself shall be exalted."*

In Conclusion:

Let's not think that we are beyond becoming an Uzziah or a King Mohammed Zahir Shah. Anyone of us is capable of this Sin of Pride, first made known in heaven, just as Satan was.

But we have a choice to make in such moments of life:

Will we humble ourselves and repent or will we cling to our pride?

For anyone to consider themselves incapable of such a sin, beware, that is Pride Speaking, and once you believe it then you can quote me –

Pride Will Be The Reason for My Downfall!