

Royal Lessons from Judah - 2 Chronicles 26:21-27:6

Jotham: Walk steadfastly before the Lord – Grow in Power!

The setting for our reading today follows on from the story of the king of Judah, Uzziah from 750 to 735 BC. During which time the northern kingdom of Israel was beginning to be conquered by the Assyrians. Out of all the Kings from both Kingdoms from Saul down, it was only Jotham whom God has nothing negative to say. This king's character was in complete harmony with his name which meant, "**Yahweh-perfect.**"

Today we stand to learn a lot from Jotham, Yahweh-Perfect as one who lived his Royal life doing what was right in the eyes of Yahweh the LORD. As a result of his righteous living he *grew powerful because he walked steadfastly before the LORD his God.*

The Challenge for us then is to learn to walk his path just as he did as followers of Christ so that we might do right and like him, grow in God's power.

Little is said and known of Jotham in scripture. There are only these few verses about him along with the parallel in 2 Kings 15:32-38 in the Old Testament. In the New Testament his name appears in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:9). The strong sentiment from his brief mention in scripture is that firstly, Jotham was a good king v.2; and secondly, God rewarded his righteousness v.6. Jotham was 25 years old at the time his father was struck with leprosy. He became king in all but name. Yet, Jotham was careful to honour his father as the 5th commandment of the Law prescribed. Our reading tells us it was Jotham who conquered the Ammonites and that for three successive years he compelled them to pay an annual tribute of a hundred talents [3.5 tonnes] of silver, ten thousand cors (1600 tons) of wheat, and ten thousand cors of barley (v.5). Yet, one chapter earlier it is reported that the Ammonites brought their tribute to Uzziah. By forcing the Ammonites to do this, Jotham continued to recognize his father as king. It does not surprise us, then, to read that Jotham "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" (v.2) and grew in power (v.6). Jotham was a godly king, just like his father Uzziah. "But unlike him he did not enter the temple of the Lord" (27:2). That is, he did not offer unauthorized fire. He did not presume to do the duties of the priests. By continuing his father's building projects and by conquering the Ammonites he showed himself to be just as successful as his father; yet, he did not allow pride to take over.

In Jotham, Judah had a godly king.

However, the Bible tells us Judah did not have a godly people: "The people, however, continued their corrupt practices" (v.2). What is Scripture talking about? The great prophets Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah exercised their ministries in Jotham's days, and in their writings we have graphic pictures of the moral condition of the time. What was happening? The increasing corruption of the northern kingdom was filtering down, permeating Judah. For instance, the people were offering sacrifices and burning incense on high places (2 Kings 15:35); that is, they were practicing idolatry. The order of the day included unjust laws, oppressive decrees, the poor were deprived of their rights, widows were preyed upon, the fatherless were robbed (Isaiah 10:1-2). They looked to Egypt and Pharaoh for protection rather than to the Lord (Isaiah 30:2-3). There is faithlessness, cursing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery, and bloodshed (Hosea 4:1-2).

It must have been a struggle, but Jotham was a righteous man in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

In spite of the sinful living of those around him he continued to progress rather than digress in his walk with the LORD. And develop a closer relationship with God, in the midst of the storm of evil raging around him where it could have been so easy to fold and join in with the majority of the people of Judah in their sinful decay and deteriorating relationship with God.

Around Drury we have some long established Oak Trees that have survived many a storm, including those down at the school where the Oak growing from an acorn has become the symbol of the school which for us makes a good illustration:

On a tour through a great furniture factory, the guide told the visitors, "Notice the incredible waving grain in this wood. It is the finest oak in the world. Do you know what caused its intricately woven fibers to be so beautiful?" "It's cut from trees growing on mountainsides most exposed to constant conflict with storms! The storm-tossed tree develops the closest and finest wood grains and is most prized by cabinet makers."

So it is with the human life.

The person who withstands the greatest adversity and and sin gains the deepest and most beautiful character. Character isn't developed in isolation but in testing and conflict. When overcome, it gives a life its greatest beauty.

Such was the case in Jotham's life for...

"Jotham walked steadfastly before the Lord. V.6.

This means Jotham followed a road or path.

A road or path speaks of two things. It speaks of the journey itself.

And, it speaks of the destination. First of all, the journey-

By the grace of God, he chose to walk the path of righteousness.

By the grace of God he chose not to walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

But his delight was in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditated day and night (Psalm 1:1-2). He did not move to the left or to the right but kept his life and his feet on the path of the Lord. He was unwavering in his commitment.

Secondly, the goal. By the grace of God, he sought first the Kingdom and its righteousness. He set his heart on things above, not on earthly things. Jotham had a choice, of course.

He could have chosen to walk the same path and have the same goal as did the people of Judah, but he didn't.

So, we can ask ourselves,

What is the goal or destination of my life? And, what is the path I am following to achieve that goal or to reach that destination?

...I ask you. "Is it the steadfast path of righteousness you follow?"

Because Jotham walked steadfastly before this Lord v.6...

A literal translation is "before the face or eyes" of the Lord.

This suggests that as Jotham ordered his ways he was conscious of the presence of the Lord. He constantly looked to the face of the Lord to see what pleased Him, and then, he ordered his life accordingly. Think of a little child who keeps an eye on his parents to see what pleases them, and acts accordingly, sometimes by playing up mind you in order to get a reaction. Jotham we know didn't play up, for his hearts desire was the Lord God's approval. He did this his entire life. Unlike his father, Uzziah, who faltered towards the end of his life, Joatham kept his eyes on the Lord. Uzziah took his eye off the path and off the prize and for this he was struck with leprosy.

The question is: Do we walk steadfastly before the Lord?

The Lord is also our God. The covenant that He made with Israel is still in force today. It is no longer limited just to the Jews but is a covenant with Jew and Gentile alike.

So, where are your and my eyes focused?
 On the world? On your friends? On TV? On work? On the internet?
 On video games? On sports and recreation?
 On money and building wealth? On family and children?
 Or, do you consciously and deliberately keep your eyes on the
 Lord and the things of the Lord? Can this be said about you and
 me? It was said about Jotham!

By every measure, Jotham was a successful ruler. He expanded
 and strengthened the kingdom. It was a time of great prosperity.
 He had a personal relationship with the Lord.
 He practiced what he preached.
 Our text sums this all up by saying "Jotham grew powerful" v.6

The phrase "grew powerful" is used in various passages with
 various kings of Judah. It means to be confirmed or established.
 It involves gaining firm control over the reins of government and
 even gaining power over the surrounding nations. For example, for
 a time David was king only of Judah and not Israel. And, after
 David became king over all Israel, he also subdued the
 surrounding nations that had plagued Israel over several centuries.

This was also true for Jotham. For a while he ruled under the
 shadow of his father. But when his father died he took effective
 control of the reins of government. He strengthened Judah
 militarily. He conquered the Ammonites.

Now, our text says "Jotham grew powerful because he walked
 steadfastly before the LORD his God" (2 Chron 27:6).
 Don't misunderstand this to mean that Jotham earned the blessing
 of the Lord. This was not a blessing Jotham earned.
 It was a blessing of God's covenant relationship with Jotham.
 Within this covenant relationship, Jotham walked steadfastly
 before the Lord and was richly blessed.

In this, Jotham was a type of Christ. More than anyone else,
 it was Jesus Who "walked steadfastly before the LORD his God."
 He walked the way of the cross and the grave. He lived a life of
 perfect obedience. He never once took His eyes off the Father and
 His will.

Because Jesus walked steadfastly before the LORD His God,

He too grew powerful. That is, God exalted him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9-11). Unlike Jotham, this blessing on Jesus was earned. It was God's great blessing on Jesus for His perfect life and perfect sacrifice upon the cross.

Application: Within the covenant relationship we, too, are called to walk steadfastly before the Lord and we, too, will be richly blessed. Again, this is only a gift of God's grace. It is not a gift that we earn. Can we walk steadfastly before the LORD?

Well, this is only possible in, through and because of the power of Christ. By ourselves we are powerless. Due to our depravity we would never walk in the ways of the Lord and would always keep our eyes on something or someone other than God. But what has God done? By the grace of God, you and I have died with Christ and have been raised with Christ.

We are renewed in the power of the cross and the grave so we can order our paths according to God's covenant ways.

This does not happen automatically but only as we cling to the cross and the resurrection. So what happens?

We put to death whatever belongs to our earthly nature.

We put on the new self. We set our minds on things above.

We clothe ourselves with the compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and love of Christ as we relate to others.

This is what happens when we cling to the cross and the grave.

How amazing! How wonderful! So...Do right and grow powerfully as you walk steadfastly before the LORD your God.

Challenge: So let me ask again:

Do you walk steadfastly before the Lord your God?

In your life on the path you are on, are you growing closer to Jesus through a "steady and determined" life of faith and commitment? In other words...Am I progressing or digressing in my walk with God? Am I developing or deteriorating in my relationship with God?

To Conclude: Take a leaf out of Jotham's book. He had but one constant focus: to follow and please the Lord his God. How refreshing to find someone who is willing to focus on the right things and strong enough to resist tempting distractions along with sinful behaviour and attitudes. May his righteous and steadfast walk before the LORD become ours. And as it does... may we each grow before the LORD in His sustaining power. Let's Pray