



This week at Magdalen Road church we continued our series in Chronicles, reaching chapter 24. As with a fortnight ago one of the key themes from this Sunday's passage was the importance of listening to the right voices, voices that shape and direct us. It's also an account about finishing well and that sometimes those who make good starts do not finish as they set out. As with all of scripture, this passage also has much to point us ahead towards in Christ.

We started by noting that this is an anti-Hollywood passage: that is rather than solving a problem and ending happily ever after, the alternative happened with it beginning well and then turning from bad to worse. It is a chapter of 2 halves with v1-16 being us ascending the mountain and then in the final 10 verses falling down the other side with a big bump!

v1-16: ascending the 'mountain'...

Interestingly there is a tiny clue that there will be a sting in the tail to the story if you read v2 carefully. "Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord... all the years of Jehoiada the priest". As we will see the second half of this verse really matters!

The problem at the start of the chapter is that the temple needs to be repaired (v7). We noted the tentacles and influence of Athaliah in the previous chapters. For example we looked at chapter 22v2 to 4 and v10 as well as 23v11 to 15 seeing the way that she had sought to destroy the monarchy and turn them away from God. It seems like she and her influence had gone, but as we'll see it turns out that's not the case...

Joash begins his reign well remarkably well seeking to restore the temple by means of a public door to door collection - justifying it from Exodus 30 as Moses took a collection in the wilderness for the tabernacle. Rather than a door-to-door collection however the chest is placed outside the temple and a proclamation issued leading to the people bringing their contributions gladly. In fact more money is collected and is needed! Just as with the final chapter in 1 Chronicles we sense something of this being a time of unity and excitement as the people are able to give to the temple and so reveals the heart for the Lord and for worship. The collection box outside the temple seems to have continued of course as Jesus will tell a story about a widow who will just put a couple of small coins into the box...

Things start off well but then there is a concerning and almost ominous sentence in v14: as long as Jehoida lived. The section ends with his death and honouring both by the people and by the Lord. He is buried among the kings, despite being a priest.

v17-27: ...Falling down the other side

It just takes a verse as by v18 Joash has forgotten it all, abandoning the temple of the Lord and worshipping Ashera poles and idols. Again we asked which voices influence and shape us for good or bad – whether particular people or things that we watch or read, or even voices from within or our past. Because, after they pay him homage very quickly Joash crumples under the Baal party. Athaliah's influence remains.

The point is God is clearly not silent and although he sends prophets to speak to the king, still he will not listen. In v20. We read of a particular named prophet, Zechariah, who meets a sticky end. Even though he is the son of Jehoida he is stoned to death in the temple courtyard. This episode shows the depths to which the king has fallen, murdering the son of his long-term mentor, stoning him to death (ironically usually this happened for blasphemy) and even in the temple forecourts meaning the place of worship is now unclean. The passage started with the temple being restored, it ends with the temple being desecrated.

Jesus explicitly retells the story of Zechariah in Luke 11 verse 47-51 and implicitly refers to it in his parable of the tenants in the vineyard (Mark 12v1-12). Just as Joash murders Zechariah because he doesn't want to hear the words of God, so the Pharisees will murder Jesus.

The final words of Zechariah are an appropriate call for justice and vengeance towards Joash - that the Lord hears. There is an irony because the words "call you to account" can also be translated to seek you. Joash did not seek God, but God will seek him by means of the Aramean army and eventually his own leadership.

We noted two reflections as we finished from this story:

1. The importance of finishing well

Sometimes we can consider that the older we get the easier it gets to be a Christian, and yet passages like this remind us that we need to continue to trust 'as long as it is called today'. Joash started well and yet then began to listen to other voices that meant he did not finish in a good place. There are voices that will speak to us in our latter years that will not be helpful. We must be aware of the challenges that are there, or that will come.

Demas is an example in the new Testament of one who goes off track (for eg see Colossians 4v14, Philemon v 24 and 2 Timothy 4v9)

2. The importance of a priest and king combination

The chronicler in a number of places in the latter part of the book highlights a king and priests combination. Here again we see the palace and the temple combined, one who loves the Lord and one who leads for the Lord. In the mind of the chronicler that seems to be the sweet-spot, how it's meant to be.

This culminates in Jesus being one who is both powerful and knows the Lord. Which means the start of Joash's reign shows us what it should have and could have been like, whilst the end of Joash's reign shows us how much we need King Jesus for when it all goes wrong. We need to listen to his voice!

Here are a few questions to start the ball rolling

- The chronicler is very keen on the state of the worship of Gods people (as revealed through their commitment to the temple)-what is the state of your worship and your heart? What is your evidence for this? What is our 'temple'?
- Are you surprised by the speed with which Joash turned his back on God? Why or why not?
- What unhelpful voices do you have in your life? In what way are they unhelpful? What helpful voices do you have?
- How can we make sure that we finish well? What voices might drag us away?
- How does the story point us to Jesus?