

A Tale of Tender Hope: The Boy King

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 August 2014

Preacher: Rupert Hunt-Taylor

[0 : 0 0] Our Bible reading is 2 Chronicles 24, and you'll find that on page 375. We're going to read 24, 1 to 16, but we'll break into the story in the previous chapter at verse 20.

2 Chronicles 23, verse 20. And Jehoiada took the captains, the nobles, the governors of the people, and all the people of the land, and they brought the king down from the house of the Lord, marching through the upper gate to the king's house.

And they set the king on the royal throne. So all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet after Athaliah had been put to death with the sword.

The queen Athaliah is now out of the way, and the reign of Joash begins. And that's our main reading, 24, verse 1. Joash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 40 years in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba. And Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.

[1 : 2 0] Jehoiada got for him two wives, and he had sons and daughters. After this, Joash decided to restore the house of the Lord. And he gathered the priests and the Levites and said to them, Go out to the cities of Judah and gather from all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that you act quickly.

But the Levites did not act quickly. So the king summoned Jehoiada the chief priest and said to him, Why have you not required the Levites to bring in from Judah and Jerusalem the tax levied by Moses, the servant of the Lord, and the congregation of Israel for the tent of testimony?

For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken into the house of God and had used all the dedicated things of the house of God for the Baals. So the king commanded, and they made a chest and set it outside the gate of the house of the Lord.

And proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to bring in for the Lord the tax that Moses, the servant of God, laid on Israel in the wilderness.

And all the princes and all the people rejoiced and brought their tax and dropped it into the chest until they had finished. And whenever the chest was brought to the king's officers by the Levites, when they saw there was much money in it, the king's secretary and the officer of the chief priest would come and empty the chest and take it and return it to its place.

[2 : 5 3] Thus they did day after day and collected money in abundance. And the king and Jehoiada gave it to those who had charge of the work of the house of the Lord. And they hired masons and carpenters to restore the house of the Lord, and also workers in iron and bronze to repair the house of the Lord.

So those who were engaged in the work labored, and the repairing went forward in their hands, and they restored the house of God to its proper condition and strengthened it. And when they had finished, they brought the rest of the money to before the king and Jehoiada, and with it were made utensils for the house of the Lord, both for the service and the burnt offerings, and dishes for incense and vessels of gold and silver.

And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the Lord regularly all the days of Jehoiada. But Jehoiada grew old and full of days and died.

He was 130 years old at his death. And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good to Israel and towards God and his house.

Amen. That is the word of the Lord. Well, friends, do turn back to 2 Chronicles, chapter 24. That's page 375.

[4 : 19] And let's ask for our Father's help. Father God, we thank you again for the wonderful depth and color and variety of your word.

And we pray that as you speak to us now, we would listen. Please, Lord, make us more and more into the gospel-minded people of your Son, the Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Well, every once in a while, history hands one generation of God's people a snap moment of opportunity to do something extraordinary for the kingdom.

In January of 1547, England's Henry VIII died, leaving the throne to a nine-year-old boy who loved the Lord Jesus.

His name was Edward. And what nobody knew at the time was that he'd only live to the age of 15. It turned out to be the shortest, most fleeting of opportunities.

[5 : 24] But in those few years on the throne, gospel men would do more for the church in England than ever before or since. And the key to seizing that short opportunity was a pastor named Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop who nurtured and guided the young king.

And you see, that's how it's been right through human history. Those big leaps forward for the kingdom take place in short bursts of reform. When gifted men and women grab at the opportunities God gives them.

And when the kingdom of Judah woke up on the morning of Joash's coronation, they could see exactly that sort of opportunity lying ahead of them.

And as young Joash, the true king, was crowned last week, right rule and right relationship, true worship, was at last being restored to the kingdom.

So chapter 24 opens with a huge burst of joy and hope and optimism. Will now be the time when all the wrongs done by Athaliah will at last be put right?

[6 : 49] Will the temple of God, which she'd perverted through idolatry, verse 7, at last be restored so that God's people can be the intimate people he called them to be?

Perhaps this doesn't read like the most exciting act in this drama. Until now, you could easily imagine this story on the big screen, couldn't you? Act 1 was the thriller as the kingdom fell into the forces of evil and baby Joash alone was plucked from the massacre of royal sons.

Act 2 was the action adventure. As our hero, now a 90-something-year-old priest turned resistance fighter and kingmaker.

And next week, Act 4 is the tragedy, full of pathos and horror. But as for today, well, isn't this the bit of the story that, in Hollywood at least, might well get left on the cutting room floor?

A building project, well, it's not nearly so exciting, is it? And yet, for our chronicler, in many ways, Act 3 is the climax of this story.

[8 : 06] Restoring the temple and restoring right worship is where it's all been heading. So how would this generation use the new dawn of opportunity God gave them?

Tonight's tale is a tale of tender hope. It's the story of the boy king. And just as England's young King Edward had his Thomas Cranmer, there is one faithful priest whose hopes for this young king are the tenderest of them all.

The man who rescued him from death and sheltered him in the temple as a baby, nurtured him in the faith, and masterminded his restoration to the throne.

We've called this series The Chronicles of a Forgotten Hero. And tonight's tale is where Jehoiada, our hero, takes his final turn on the stage. You'll see that Jehoiada's life begins and ends the passage.

All the days of Jehoiada the priest, verse 2, Joash's reformation flourished. And all the days of Jehoiada, verse 14, the people worshipped God in truth.

[9 : 17] But those verses are already beginning to ring warning bells, aren't they? They just plant that little seed of worry in our minds that perhaps when Jehoiada is gone, things might not go so well.

Even he can't guarantee the future of this child he's loved and cared for. And in fact, the way our chronicler will tell this story, Joash's life is a tale of two very different halves.

Tonight are the golden years, but Jehoiada's death will mark the end. So for just the briefest of windows, God's people will have a king and a priest working side by side to rebuild the kingdom.

But time is short and the opportunity is rapidly ticking away. Well, we'll spend lots of our time tonight learning some practical lessons from Joash's early years.

But first, let's take a quick look at how the nation used their time. And then ask what the big message of this story is. And it all starts full of hope, doesn't it?

[10 : 28] Just where we left the kingdom last week. In fact, verses 1 to 3 paint a picture of the nation just as it's meant to be. God's people are shepherded.

But the two people we learned last week, they need most of all a faithful king and a faithful priest, hand in hand. The priest's role is to do battle for right worship.

And with him at his side, Jehoiada does right in the Lord's eyes, verse 2. You get the sense that Jehoiada's there to guide the young king, patiently and faithfully instructing him in the gospel life.

He even picks out wives for Joash to make sure the mistakes of the last generation aren't repeated. So much of Judah's pain, remember, came because of the bad counsel and rotten marriages of her leaders.

So at last, here's a king who is guided by God. And to drive home how important that is, our writer adds a note to show God's blessing on young Joash.

[11 : 36] That's why he mentions his sons and daughters. Those of us who are married might well think two wives were a sign of curse. But in this book, lots and lots of kids is always a sign of God's approval on a king's life.

So I guess Joash just got busy making up for all those royal children killed off by his grandmother. Well, next, verse 4.

Well-taught Joash decides that it's time to get cracking with gospel work. And so the temple, which Athaliah neglected and corrupted, has to be restored. Remember, the temple is key to the people's relationship with God.

It's where they meet with him and where they stay right with him through sacrifice. So a good king who cares about his people standing before the Lord, he knows that it has to be repaired, however costly that might be.

Well, Jehoiada ought to be thrilled by that. But somehow, when it comes to collecting the money, things don't quite go according to plan. The king's instructions in verse 5 are very clear, aren't they?

[12 : 43] It's been years since the annual funds were collected, and the king is in a hurry to put that right. The land had been rejoicing at his coronation, and it was time to let the people do their part.

So Joash gathers together the priests and the Levites, and he sends them out to get on with it, with his final words ringing in their ears, See that you act quickly.

But somehow the pledge week becomes a pledge month, and then a pledge year. And we don't know why. All the writer tells us is that Jehoiada's men didn't do as the king asked.

Thus 5, the Levites did not act quickly. In fact, those seven words are the understatement of this book. Our writer's been so keen to show how important the priesthood is that he tries to spare their blushes a little.

It's only when you look at 2 Kings that you discover how much time was wasted. 23 years pass between verses 5 and 6.

[13 : 50] The best years, as it turns out, of Joash's life. Wasted because the Levites didn't get their act together. I suppose in fairness to Jehoiada, he's in his 90s now, and managing his men is not an easy task.

And as for the Levites, while organizing that big collection would be an expensive job and a pretty awkward job. Handling money is delicate, isn't it?

And I suppose that it was one responsibility they didn't much fancy. But for whatever reason, suddenly the king and the priesthood are no longer on quite the same page.

And all that hope and optimism of God's people begins to slip through their fingers. Well, in verse 6, the king takes charge.

By now he's grown into manhood, and he summons the old priest to what must have been an incredibly embarrassing meeting. And he turns on Jehoiada the tactic which that godly priest probably used on him right the way through his childhood.

[14 : 55] He teaches him a bit of Bible. Remember what Moses wrote to Uncle Jehoiada. I'm doing this on his authority, not mine. So why haven't your Levites gathered the money?

You see the point he's making? It wasn't some nasty burden the king was laying on his people, was it? As their king, he's obeying the responsibility God gave all of his people for keeping upright worship.

And by ducking that responsibility, what the Levites had really done was deprive Israel of their chance to stand up and be counted.

Do you notice that? It was the congregation, verse 6, not just Moses, who insisted on paying that tax. George Osborne must dream of hearing words like that.

While Uncle Jehoiada is soundly rebuked by his young protégé, and embarrassing that that must have been, my guess is that deep down he's rather proud. Because although we don't overhear any more of their conversation, it's safe to assume that king and priest kiss and make up.

[16 : 03] And from now on, the chronicler is desperate to emphasize their cooperation. The king takes charge of the collection from verse 8, and he sets up a special building fund.

Sound familiar? So now everybody giving will know exactly where their money's going, straight to the temple project. And all of the bureaucracy is bypassed.

And that's when a remarkable thing happens. All the kingdom is summoned and reminded of their duty. But instead of grumbling and begrudging, verse 10, all the princes and all the people rejoiced.

And the chest is filled and refilled and filled again until, verse 11, the money is collected in abundance. No need for a big fundraising thermometer outside the temple.

No need to browbeat the congregation. No need to send charity muggers out onto Buchanan Street with clipboards and big false smiles. The people get their chance to give to kingdom work, and they delight to do it.

[17 : 12] And they turn what might have looked like a tax into an excuse to open their hearts and show their thankfulness. And notice the little detail the chronicler slips in to exonerate his hero.

Whenever the money needs to be counted, verse 11, they get one of the king's men and one of the priest's men to do it together. And when the time comes to hand it over to the tradesmen, verse 12, it's the king and Jehoiada side by side who sign the check.

And then same again in verse 14, king and priest. And so the story ends just the way it started, with God's king and priest working side by side to build the kingdom.

And all the days of Jehoiada, verse 14, Judah keeps the faith. We began with a sign of God's blessing on Jehoash.

And the story ends with God's blessing being lavished on that courageous priest. He dies old and full of years. In fact, he lives longer than anyone since the great patriarchs, the heroes of Israel's past.

[18 : 25] And then Jehoiada, who faithfully led their people back to their true king, gets what no king in this story ever receives.

King Jehoram, if you can remember back to him, died with nobody's regret and was dumped in a common grave. Ahaziah died like a coward in Samaria and was buried there.

Athaliah isn't even given the burial notice of a true queen. And Jehoash, when the time comes, is done away with by his people and refused royal burial.

But Jehoiada, the priest, who never fought for his own power, but only for his king, is given a grave in David's own tombs. An honor absolutely unprecedented for a priest.

And that is where tonight's tale ends. So what did our storyteller want his readers to make of it all? It's pretty obvious, isn't it, that he cares an awful lot about temple building.

[19 : 33] And so he's been hammering home to his generation how important right worship is. They need a king and they need a faithful priesthood, but they need a place to meet with God.

But when they came home from exile, they found Solomon's temple lying in ruins. So our storyteller's not exactly subtle, is he, about what he thinks they ought to do.

Just listen from verse 12. They hired carpenters to restore the house of the Lord, to repair the house of the Lord. And the repairing went forward and they restored the house of the Lord to its proper condition.

Get the message, hear the repetition. He wants his readers who lost their temple during the exile to get off their backsides and start restoring it.

It's the word he started the story with in verse 4. And it's the word he ends with now. And that word restore means much more than just rebuild. It normally meant deep down, personal renewal.

[20 : 40] The temple stands for the kingdom's whole relationship with God, doesn't it? And if they dilly-dally in renewing the building, well, that doesn't say much about their renewal and repentance as God's special people.

It's as if he's trying to knock his readers' heads together, isn't it? There's a kingdom out there to renew. And if only they would pull their fingers out and get on with it, they'd discover that it's the most joyful task in the world.

But it wasn't quite so simple, was it? Because if there's one thing that this story demonstrates, it's that kingdom work only goes well when God's king and priest work together.

When they're united, working side by side to shepherd God's people, his blessings pour out and the works are joy. But when king and priest are divided, nothing gets done.

So what Israel badly needed were leaders who would work together for the sake of God's precious people.

[21 : 52] Only with a king and priest closer even than Jehoiada and Joash would the gospel really move forwards. So what about us?

I think at its deepest level, this story should get us massively excited about the age of opportunity. We live in. We have a king and a great high priest who couldn't possibly get any closer.

And they couldn't possibly work more faithfully for their people. Their aims are absolutely inseparable. And they will be for all eternity.

Because Christ our king and Christ our priest are one and the same. So there's never been a better time for building God's temple.

Not with bricks and mortar. But with living stones. The place where God meets human beings now is in his people, his church.

[22 : 55] It's our bodies which are joined to the Lord Jesus by his spirit. So building his temple today means joining others to his church.

Restoring his temple today means cleaning up our fallen, half-hearted churches. That's our job, isn't it? It's his kingdom of priests.

Gathering more and more right worshippers into his living temple. So our building projects can happen in schools. When people lead scripture union groups.

Or high fives. Or when we finance missionaries. Or invite our colleagues around for a meal. Or yes, sometimes, when we knock down walls and put in lift shafts.

To equip ourselves for disciple making. So surely if our chronicler could sit us down today, he would be beside himself with the privilege of our task.

[23 : 55] He'd tell us just what he told his readers. To get our acts together and make kingdom hay while the sun shines. Because it is a wonderful, joyful, urgent task.

But there are practical lessons for us here too, aren't there? We may not have an earthly king or a hierarchy of priests. But all of us have responsibilities within the church. And especially our leaders.

And if the people who care for God's church aren't working arm in arm. Fixated on gospel work. Well then we too could fritter away our opportunities.

So before we close, let's make a few practical observations from this text. In fact, I reckon there are seven lessons we can learn about gospel building projects.

Which gives me about 20 seconds on each one. If you like, these are seven keys to a good reformation. And because so far I've given you one long diatribe with no headings. I've overcompensated now.

[24 : 59] By squeezing all of these into something starting with the letter R. So number one, the number one key to a successful reformation is rearing gospel servants.

Hasn't the chronicler rearranged the whole story of Joash's life to make that point? It was Jehoiada's influence which gave him a heart for gospel work. And it was only under Jehoiada's instruction that he flourished.

Even kings need good pastors. So if we want a church full of temple builders, we need to nurture and rear gospel-hearted men and women.

The planning for our next project doesn't start with a church session meeting. It starts in Sunday school. So key number one, rearing gospel servants.

Even kings need pastors. But secondly, pastors need kings too, don't they? And so number two is responsibility. Somebody had to take initiative for the project, didn't they, verse 4?

[26 : 09] And eventually, verse 6, somebody had to take charge of the finances. So we ought to be praying for leaders with vision and wisdom and the humility to build Christ's kingdom rather than their own.

And if we found leaders like that, well, we better support and encourage them. Number three, risk-taking. We just don't know, do we, why those Levites took so long to get their acts together.

But at the end of the day, I guess they just weren't up for the risk of taking on the job. Nobody likes to ask for money, do they? Especially if you think it might backfire.

For years, God's people had seen their money fritted away on idolatry. And I suppose the Levites just couldn't face starting something new. I wonder how many good evangelistic ideas get choked just because we're too cautious when it comes to planning and personnel and cost.

Or because we've seen it fail in the past. So let's make it easy for our leaders to have a godly sense of adventure. Let's encourage them to keep trying new things.

[27 : 29] And let's remind them that it's okay when things don't go well. Or even when they fail. Somebody has to take the risk. Or the job will never get done.

Number four, fourth key to a successful building project. Verse eight, restricted funds. Perhaps I should add a little disclaimer here. Any resemblance these points of application bear to building projects, past or present, are entirely coincidental.

Although perhaps not quite entirely. Because I suppose when any gospel project goes well, there's been a good deal of godly wisdom behind it.

And Joash knew that if the work was going to get off the ground, well, the money needed to be kept safe and transparent. It had to be obvious that every penny people gave went right where it was meant to go.

It was a previous generation of leaders now, wasn't it, who set up the Epaphras Trust? But I guess they saw the way the wind was blowing. And they knew that we'd need to steward our money well if we were going to survive.

[28 : 39] And thank God they did. Number five is directly related. Maybe it's the most unnatural of them all. Rejoicing. Who'd have thought, verse 10, that when the leadership finally tapped them for money, Judah would have rejoiced so much to give it.

You'd expect them to grumble, wouldn't you? Isn't that what the Levites were worried about? Except that when you really care about gospel work, it's just not like that, is it?

Haven't we learned that so powerfully as a church? What a joyful thing it was. And what an encouragement to see our building fund box fill up so quickly.

Those things, which can so easily be the biggest reasons to grumble, often turn out to be the biggest sources of joy, don't they? This morning, there were about seven children and three teachers all crammed into my teeny little office upstairs, leading a Sunday school class.

And to make it worse, what I hoped desperately they didn't notice is that hanging behind the door were all the wet, smelly clothes I cycled to work in. Didn't they have every reason to grumble?

[29 : 53] Grumble? And yet they do it rejoicing. Because they're busy rearing gospel servants, aren't they? They know it's temple building they're doing up there.

Rejoicing. And number six, reconciliation. When big gospel projects get going, people's noses very often get put out of joint.

Sometimes people have to give up responsibilities they've cherished, like Jehoiada. Sometimes people have to give way for the sake of peace. Because it's more important that the temple gets built than it's done my way.

So look how much our storyteller emphasizes the king and Jehoiada pulling together. In fact, temple building here was a three-way partnership, wasn't it?

The king, the priest, and all the people. They gave generously. They encouraged Joash with their joyful attitudes. And verse 13, the ones who no doubt had less money, worked hard with their hands, laboring in the temple and using the gifts God had given them.

[31 : 06] So the nation pulled together and they got the job done. Isn't that a good example for us right now? Let's pray our leaders work well together.

And let's do what we can to encourage them by our attitudes. Let's pray for the relationships in our church, especially in the teams leading our home groups or English classes or wherever it might be.

And let's pray that the kingdom getting built would matter more than getting it done my way. Well, we're nearly there. But perhaps there's one last thing we can learn from Jehoiada.

And that is that making the most of the opportunities God gives means retirement eventually. They offered burnt offerings all the days of Jehoiada, but Jehoiada grew old and full of days and he died.

He was 130 years at his death and they buried him in the city of David. From what I can see, Jehoiada's retirement from the great love of his life, building a faithful, worshipping people, took place the day he went to be with his Lord.

[32 : 17] Now I'm sure his ministry had to adapt an awful lot with age, but he kept going to the end, didn't he? Just think how many more building projects we could squeeze out of poor George McElvain before he hits 130.

And isn't it true that the hardest and most hardest working and most energetic people in church are often the saints who've been going the longest? It's just how it is.

Keep going to the end and we'll get it built. Well, I wonder if we're as excited as we should be about the opportunities ahead of us as a church family. We have a king and priest in heaven calling us to a glorious task.

And right now we have leaders with energy and vision and a drive to get on with kingdom building. But none of us knows how long that will last, do we?

What if in God's providence, our season of blessing and faithfulness comes to an end? What if in 10 years' time our minister went under a bus and a new generation of elders began to grow lukewarm?

[33 : 28] How will we look back on these last few decades? Will we know we'd made the most of our time? Or would we regret just being a little bit too cautious when our leaders were worn out and exhausted from their fifth or sixth building project?

Would we regret not exciting them about starting a seventh one? Would we regret leaving somebody else to cook the meals?

Or host the small group? Or talk to the neighbor? Would we regret missing out on the joy of seeing more children grow up in the Lord?

Or asylum seekers studying at Cornhill? Or colleagues coming along to carol services and coming to faith? Friends, I hope that as a church our opportunities keep on growing.

And our faithfulness keeps on growing. And our leadership keeps on growing. But let's enjoy what we have together now. There's never been a better time or opportunity to build God's temple.

[34 : 43] And there's never been more reason to dilly-dally and grumble and fritter away the joy set before us.

Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for the thrilling truth that we've learned from this story.

That we have a real part to play in building your precious holy temple. Thank you that we have a king and a high priest who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.

And is seated now at the right hand of your heavenly throne. And thank you that joined to him, we too, have our place in your everlasting house.

So help us, Lord, as your children united in him to work together with joy and urgency. As we run the race set before us.

[35 : 45] To the glory of your name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.