

10. Not safe, but good

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[0 : 00] Now, it would be very helpful if we could have our Bibles open, please, at page 315. But let's pray. Come then, with prayer and contemplation, see how in Scripture Christ is known.

And Father, we pray that just as the risen Christ took the Old Testament Scriptures, the words of Moses and the prophets, and caused his disciples' hearts to burn, caused their eyes to be opened, and sent them into the world with the message of his risen life and his coming kingdom.

That may be our experience this evening, and we ask it in his name. Amen. Let me begin with some words which I'm sure many of you will have heard before.

They've certainly often enough been read or quoted from this full fit, and not just by me. They're from The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, when the name of Aslan first rings through that land.

And Lucy says, Is he a man? Aslan a man, said Mr. Beaver sternly. Certainly not. I tell you, he is the king of the wood and the son of the great emperor beyond the sea.

[1 : 27] Don't you know who is the king of the beasts? Aslan is a lion, the lion, the great lion. Who, said Susan, I thought he was a man. Is he quite safe?

I shall feel very nervous about meeting a lion. And she will, dear, he said Mrs. Beaver. If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly.

And he isn't safe, said Lucy. Safe? Said Mr. Beaver. Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe?

Of course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you. He's not safe, but he's good. He's the king, I tell you.

That's my title for this evening. Not safe, but good. Because that's the kind of God this chapter shows us. I've said to you several times in this series, we must begin these stories of saying, what are these stories saying about God?

[2 : 32] The God who created the heaven and earth. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And above all, the God who keeps his word. Now this passage is once again all about the word of God.

Back in 1 Kings 19, the Lord had said, God had said to Elijah, three things are going to happen. You're going to anoint Elisha as the new prophet.

But you're going to, you're going as it were, to oversee the coming of Hazael in power in Damascus. And you're going to anoint Jehu as king over Israel.

He'll bring the dynasty of Ahab to an end. And as I've said before, many people misunderstand this and say, Elijah only did one of these things. But that's not the point.

The word of God did all of these things. And here, as you see, Elisha himself sends one of the sons of the prophets to carry out the word of God. Because if these stories show anything, one thing they do show very, very powerfully is that it is the word of God, not the individual who brings it, who matters.

[3 : 38] It is the message, not the messenger. The prophecy, not the prophet. And that's something you really need to keep on remembering. This is the word of the Lord. And now the final act and the ending of the rotten house of Ahab is to take place.

And so much of the time, God's judgments have been in the background. And that happens so much of the time in our own day and throughout history. God's judgments are often invisible.

It's not often very easy to see exactly what God is doing in the world. But this is one of the chapters where God's judgment comes out into the open. The lion pounces and he is certainly not safe.

He is certainly not tame. But he is good because he is bringing on his eternal purposes and looking towards the kingdom where justice reigns.

This is a roller coaster of a chapter as this idolatrous and murderous regime comes to its end. Three things. First of all, God is slow to anger.

[4 : 43] But wait a minute. Slow to anger. This chapter unfolds with atrocity after atrocity. Murder after murder. Culminating with the horrifying end of Jezebel.

Look at the facts. Back in chapter 8, we learn that Joram or Jehoram, same name, had been in power for 12 years. For two years before that, his older brother Ahaziah, don't mix up your Ahaziahs by the way, this is not the guy mentioned here, who's Ahaziah of Judah.

Don't get mixed up. And don't get too worried if you do. Anyway, Ahaziah had reigned for two years. Ahab himself had reigned for 22.

So we're talking about a whole generation of 30 or more years where the prophetic words had come over and over again to this family, where the prophetic ministry had been shown powerfully to this dynasty of Ahab.

It's not entirely clear how early in the reign of Ahab, Elijah began his ministry, but it must have been fairly early on. So you see what's happening. 30 and more years, an entire generation, this house had heard the word of God from Elijah and Elijah, and not just them.

[6 : 01] Back in 1 Kings 22, a brave prophet, Micaiah, confronts Ahab, and other nameless figures, men of God, speak to Ahab and speak to his descendants.

So God is giving a chance to repent. Exodus 34, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God who is slow to anger.

God does not blot out Ahab in 1 Kings 16 when Baal worship is unleashed on the land. No. He gives him 22 years and he gives his family another 14 years in order to repent.

And this is still true. 2 Peter takes up these words. God is slow to anger, not willing that any should perish. So you see, what we've got here in this story is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Anxious, longing, calling people to repent. Calling people from their idolatry, as Ewan was pointing out to us this morning. His anger is great, but his grace is greater.

[7 : 13] And all those years, this had happened. No family surely could have had more chances, except one. I was powerfully reminded of the Herod family in the New Testament.

At the door of Herod after Herod, from Herod the Great, who massacred the babies in Bethlehem, to Herod Antipas and Agrippa, that succession of tyrants and despots who tread across the pages of the Gospels and of Acts.

Grace had knocked at their doors. Grace had come to them. Christ and his apostles had presented them with the Gospel. Remember Herod and John the Baptist.

Herod wanted to hear John the Baptist. He heard him, but as far as we know, he never repented. And think of our own land. For centuries, grace has been offered to this country and to the West, hasn't it?

And all the benefits that flow from grace, all the benefits that come when the Gospel is honoured in a land, education, health, civilised living, all of these things which are now seen as products of human achievement are actually products of the grace of God, the common grace of God.

[8 : 27] So God gives a chance to repent. He is slow to anger. But grace has been rejected. And here we learn, particularly in the last part of the chapter, the sinister figure of Jezebel has been casting her shadow over everything that's happened in the last years.

She hasn't been in the forefront. But notice verse 7 there, I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants, the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord.

The murder of the prophets. The day of grace is running out. The wisdom, the wisdom writings say because, and the reason I'm saying the wisdom writing is because I can't remember whether there's verses in Proverbs or Ecclesiastes, and no doubt someone will tell me later.

Because judgment is not executed quickly against an evil work. The heart of men are set to do evil. That's what's happening here. God is slow to anger, anxious that people should repent.

That's still true. God is still holding out his arms of love and of grace to every person who will respond. But the second thing is that God is swift to judge.

[9 : 51] Now, that's not a contradiction of slow to anger. It means that the judgment day has now come. The time for repentance has passed. The line of, the line beyond which no return can be made has been crossed.

And you'll notice that this is seen as the fulfillment of the prophetic word. It's the, in verse, in verse 7, thus says, thus says the, sorry, verse, yes, verse 8, the whole house of Ahab shall perish, shall cut off from me of every male, and so on.

Commentators are awfully hard on this young guy. They say he had added to his master's words. Nothing of the sort. His master had taught him so well that he knew what Elijah's words were.

And he is passing on the words of Elijah, which had been spoken before. Thus says the Lord. And what we have in, what we have in verse 3 is a summary.

Thus says the Lord, I anoint you, king over Israel, knowing very well that the young man had been well enough taught by Elisha, possibly by Elijah before him. So he knew what the full message was.

[11 : 03] So it's the fulfillment of the word. Over and over again, thus says the Lord. Verse 12, Jehu repeats it. Verse 3, thus says the Lord.

And later on in the chapter, in accordance with the word of the Lord, verse 26, and then at the very end again, verse 36, this is the word of the Lord.

He spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite. The word of God is doing its work. The word which had called and called and called and called in grace is now unleashed in judgment.

The line is roaring. The Lord roars from Zion as Amos and Joel say in their prophecies. It's also a very intense human drama.

As soon as we've read the story, you're caught by something of its excitement. This lad apparently is crazy. Verse 6, the young man poured the oil and said, I anoint you king over the people of the Lord over Israel.

[12 : 04] Now, if that was all the young man had said, it would have been crazy. You can't just go, you can't just rush into a group of top military brass and say, I anoint you king. But notice, that's not all the young man says.

Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel. That's what makes the difference. And clearly, providence is working. Notice how quickly these commanders recognize realities.

Verse 13, every man of him took his gun, put it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, Jehu is king, Jehu, it reigns. They are ready to accept Jehu.

Now, very obviously, it seems to me, that Joram or Jehoram, among his other many ineptitudes, had probably been pretty useless as a military commander. And these guys were accustomed to things getting done, recognized strength and a new authority when they came across it.

And they were ready to accept Jehu. Certainly, he hadn't been particularly effective at dealing with the Syrian threat, and he certainly doesn't have a clue of what's going on.

[13 : 12] As he sends out these messengers, is it peace now? You would have thought the penny would have dropped. I'm not sure that Joram was the sharpest knife in the drawer, among other things.

He obviously didn't have a clue what was going on here, and he was certainly no match for this ruthless military commander, Jehu. And the particularly important thing, though, is look at what happens in verse 21.

Joram said, make ready, and they made ready his chariot. Then Joram, king of Israel, and Ahaziah, king of Judah, set out and met Jehu at the property of Naboth, the Jezreelite.

Now, you may remember back in 1 Kings 19, Naboth, who had a vineyard which Ahab wanted, Naboth refused to give it because he saw it as a sacred inheritance, and Jezebel orchestrated Naboth's murder.

Now, you see, the chickens are coming home to roost, and we learn in verse 26 something we didn't learn in 1 Kings 19. It wasn't just Naboth, it was his sons who were killed.

[14 : 19] I will repay the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons on this plot of ground, the punishment fitting the crime. And Ahaziah of Judah is caught up in all this.

Now, Ahaziah, of course, was already compromised. He'd already married Ahab's daughter, and the royal house of Judah gets caught up with the royal house of Israel in their idolatry.

Chapter 8, verse 26, says of this man, Ahaziah was 22 years old. He reigned one year. His mother's name was Athali, a granddaughter of Omri, that's Ahab's father.

He also walked in the way of the house of Ahab and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as the house of Ahab had done, for he was son-in-law to the house of Ahab.

Ahaziah was the kind of guy who, if the establishment told him to do something, would do it. Now, as we know very well, we see in our own day, sin does not become holy if the establishment decrees it is holy.

[15 : 25] And that's what's happening here. And then we have the grisly end of Jezebel in verses 30 and following. Now, there is a certain horrific grandeur about Jezebel.

She knows she's in mortal danger, but she still dolls herself up. She's not going to meet her executioner looking drab and so on. And she paints her eyes and adorned her head and looked out of the window.

One of these little details you get throughout Old Testament and the New Testament narrative, which show we are dealing with realistic stories with real people. Her end is grisly.

Ralph Davis says, the grossness of the judgment fits the wickedness of the offender. One of the things the Bible teaches is the rejoicing over the fall of evil and the defiance of God.

The prophet Nahum in a later century talking about the fall of the great Assyrian Empire says this, all who hear the news of your fall will clap their hands because of you.

[16 : 33] For whom has your wickedness not afflicted continually? A similar thing happens at the end of the book of Revelation, the final judgment, the fall of Babylon. This represents all the anti-God power throughout history.

We realize it's as a result of that that the only time in the New Testament the word hallelujah appears, and it appears twice. Hallelujah, for the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

And why are they saying hallelujah is judged the great prostitute who filled the earth with sorceries, with cruelty, and with bloodshed. And this looks to the final overthrow of evil.

What's happening in this chapter tells us that God's enemies will be defeated. And if you want to read further on in chapter 10 you'll read how Jesus, with great ruthlessness and relish, pursued his task getting rid of Ahab's dynasty, getting rid of the prophets of Baal and tearing down the temple of Baal that was in Samaria.

Could you glance ahead please at chapter 10 verse 28. Thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel.

[17 : 51] Fine. But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat which he made Israel to sin. That is the golden calf that were in Bethel and Dan.

You see, Jeroboam the son of Nebat actually was one of those pick and mix people. Syncretism is the kind of fancy word that people use about oh we'll worship Yahweh but we'll cut him down to size we'll represent him as a golden calf like what Aaron had done in the desert.

You see, most people don't get involved in gross idolatry and of course by idolatry I mean simply the worship of possessions the worship of materialism but what many people do is they have a part in their hearts for the Lord but another part for other gods and that is the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

That's a contemporary sin. It's not just an ancient sin, isn't it? It's when we place Yahweh on a throne but not on the throne. It's when he has to share with wealth, with position, with prestige, with all kinds of other gods.

Jehu is not wholehearted. He's a compromiser. He's very, very ready to carry out the ruthlessness of the... and he rather likes it.

[19 : 16] And that's why this seems rather puzzling at the first sight. Hosea is going to say in chapter 1 verse 4 of his prophecy the Lord says I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel.

In other words he will punish Jehu for actually what Jehu had been commended to do. As I said before God is... God does not look complacently and with approval on bloodshed.

It's needed. It's part of his purpose to get rid of evil in the world but God does not delight in bloodshed. Jehu who ruthlessly swept through Israel is himself punished.

In the... I think it's in the Chicago Museum there is a black tablet called the Black Obelisk which was discovered in the Assyrian city of Kala in the late 19th century and it's a record of petty kings who brought tribute to Shalmaneser the Assyrian king.

And once the tablet was deciphered people read with great excitement that one of those kings was Jehu. He actually himself was subject to the Assyrians and irony upon irony Jehu is called Jehu the son of Omri.

[20 : 41] The very dynasty he got rid of because Omri impressed the Assyrians as a warlord. The world passes away and its desires but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Jehu did the bit of the will of God that pleased him that suited him. He did not walk in the way he was not careful verse 31 to walk in the law of the Lord the God of Israel with all his heart he did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam who made Israel to sin.

God is slow to anger God is swift to judge and finally God vindicates God honors his servants. See a passage like this is far more than the story of an end of a godless dynasty.

It's something much bigger. It's a trailer of the end of everything. Throughout the Bible particularly you get this in the book of Revelation you have the judgments in history.

Passage incidents like this where God intervenes and gets rid of a godless regime. But these are only trailers foreshadowings of the judgment on history when God will wind up the affairs of this world and usher in a better one.

[21 : 57] And just two things here. God honors his word. I've already pointed to the many times verse 3, 6, 12, 26, and 36 the word of the Lord which he spoke.

The word which is both judgment and blessing. Now it's the same word. It is as Paul says, it is an aroma of life on an aroma of death depending on the response.

Yes, as at the end of the last battle when all the creatures face Aslan when the judgment has come. They all face him with fear and trembling.

Some face him with fear and love. Others face him with fear and continued hatred and defiance and disappear into the dark shadow on his left hand side.

This is the promise. We're going to sing in a few moments, Jesus, you have kept your promise faithful through 2000 years. The word of God is honoured. It may appear to years pass, centuries pass.

[23 : 09] The word appears to be unfulfilled. After all, how many centuries pass? We've no idea from the time that the Lord God said the descendant of the woman will crush the head of the serpent before that happened.

How many years have passed since the word surely I am coming quickly were uttered. These words will be fulfilled. So God honours his word and God avenges his suffering people.

Evil may seem to get away with it. It seems to get away with it in many countries in this world today. We know from the Barnabas Trust of terrible things that are happening to our brothers and sisters in other countries.

One day terrible judgment will come on those who have ill treated his people. Oh, they'll have the opportunity to repent. But if they don't repent, there will be terrible judgment.

And you see, coming back to Jezebel for a moment, this is not a harmless old woman. This is a wicked monster whose hands are full of blood, whose every action has been to defy the God of heaven and persecute his servants.

[24 : 22] Because the suggestion here is that there's far, far more of Jezebel's bloodshed than is recorded in scripture. It's like the fall of tyrants, fall pot of Cambodia, Chiaikesku of Romania, tyrants like Hitler, tyrants who have blood on their hands.

You see, she has an opportunity to repent. All she can think of doing is doling herself up. That's no way to meet the judge of all the earth. Verse 31, Jesus, is it peace you Zimri, murder of your master?

If you wish to read about Zimri's ineffectual reign of seven days, you can read about it in 1 Kings 15. Zimri killed the previous king, put himself on the throne, he was actually an idiot of the very first order because he committed that most elementary mistake, don't start a coup unless you're sure of the loyalty of the army, and he wasn't.

So he himself was murdered by Omri, Jezebel's father-in-law. So you see, the point is not that this is senseless bloodshed.

This is the purpose of God in grace and judgment working itself out. I'm sure that's the point we finished with this morning, wasn't it? Grace is freely offered, but when grace is flung back in God's face, and grace is rejected, then there is nothing but judgment.

[25 : 55] But that grace still speaks tonight, and there is still time. If there's anyone here who has not yet come to the full knowledge of the grace of God in the face of Jesus Christ, there's surely never a better time than now.

Now is the day of grace. Now is the hour of salvation. Let's pray. Father, in the mysterious and perplexing world both of 2 Kings 9 and of the 21st century, we praise you that you are working your purpose out, that one day the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

And so keep us in that confidence and keep us diligent in offering that same grace, that grace which turns away no one who responds. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.