

Two types of demolition

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[0 : 0 0] Well, the covering wings of God are needed because faith in Jesus Christ is always under threat. And what we read about in 2 Kings chapter 11 in such an extraordinary and unusual sense is always true in a general sense.

Faith in Jesus Christ is always under threat. But certainly, as we look at it from a human perspective, that is so. Indeed, it's only ever one generation away from being extinct.

The sociologists are continually informing us that in about 30 years hence, the rate of decline of Christianity in the UK is such that the Church will cease to exist within the next generation or two.

And I'm sure that in 1970 they were saying that the Church would no longer be in existence in the year 2011. But we're still alive and kicking. Although there's always that scope, isn't there?

Many congregations certainly would testify to the fact that faith in Jesus Christ is under threat. Many of the ancient denominations would testify to that.

[1 : 1 6] And for plenty of Church fellowships today, the only certain event in the calendar is the day coming when they will shut the doors and hand over the keys like many others.

Secular atheism and rampant materialism are rejoicing together as they lead thousands and thousands far, far away from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because faith in Christ is always under threat. That is true in our culture and in our society. But not just true here.

On a recent Sunday evening in our congregation, an Indian fellow called Suresh, who comes and visits us about once every two years, was telling us about his work in Andhra Pradesh in India, where young people who become Christian believers from Hindu homes are quite frequently physically beaten, sometimes every day, by their families, to pressurize them into renouncing their allegiance to the Christian faith and to their saviour.

And so he was saying to us that the work of the village pastors and the little churches in the villages of that part of India is very vulnerable indeed. So what he discovers is what we discover here in this chapter, that faith is always under threat.

[2 : 4 0] Perhaps more commonly and tangibly for us, in many of our Christian homes, faith in Christ, if we dare to be honest, may be under threat.

Because faith in Christ may play second or third or fourth fiddle. I don't know if you get fourth fiddles, but if you do, it happens.

Faith in Christ plays second fiddle to other good aspects of family life and certainly of our children's development and growth. And so we find, don't we, that to guard time for the development of the faith of a coming generation within our own families and within Christian families is very difficult.

I want to make sure that we're as comfortable praying together with young people and they with us as we are eating together. That's a challenge. I wonder how the Lord Jesus himself feels when he's become a source of embarrassment in the homes of his own people.

So subtly, but in this regard also, faith in Christ is always under threat. And in 2 Kings 11, the faith of the covenant people of God is hanging actually by a thread.

[3 : 53] But there is reason for hope. And that's the lesson of the chapter. There is reason for hope. Even when we stare at closing churches, violent anti-Christian extremists and the indifference of our own hearts to Christ's call upon our lives, there is still reason for hope.

What is the reason for hope this chapter gives us? What is going on? Well, quite simply this evening, two types of demolition are taking place.

And one of them is futile and one of them is holy. And the chapter enables us to see that despite the threat, the Lord God of heaven will never allow his covenant people to disappear into oblivion, however great the threat.

And you could hardly have greater than this lady, Ataliah. So let's turn to the demolition that is futile, first of all. These two simple Bible lessons.

This angry hatred of God's people arises right out of the first few verses of the chapter as we encounter Ataliah in all her violence and rage.

[5 : 16] And sometimes it is like this. Church history repeats the story that the mad and enraged fury of Christ's enemies just erupts like a volcano of burning anger and spews its stuff all over the events of history, destroying many of God's people.

It is furious demolition that we are seeing here as this woman begins to slaughter the whole royal family. Furious, but, the chapter tells us, it's quite futile.

This woman, certainly a force to be reckoned with, if ever there was one, is determined to wipe out David's line completely. And so she sets about killing the entire royal family in what must have been an appalling bloodbath.

It's not unique in Scripture, of course. We encounter similar hatred towards God's people in Daniel, in Nehemiah's day, and, in fact, in the New Testament too. Jesus himself, do you remember, saying so clearly and memorably to his disciples who were going to love the whole world in his name, Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

Hate is a strong word. Jesus, do you really mean that? And yet hate is scarcely strong enough, is it, to describe the Lady Ataliah who we encounter here in 2 Kings 11.

[6 : 47] But her hatred, such as it is, strong, determined, violent, is futile. For God has plans to undermine her.

And extermination of God's people is just never a possibility. How good it is to know that, to see it tonight so clearly in Scripture.

Many, like Ataliah, have tried these tactics and failed just as she did. Another couple who were part of our church family until a few years ago, but are very much still in touch with us, Jonathan and Zoe Norgate, they're going to be leaving for Cambodia in July of this coming year.

And that nation is a case in point, I often think of them. And who would ever have thought in the mid-1980s that it would even be possible for a Christian couple to go and be part of a Christian church movement in Cambodia, where Pol Pot was so determined, with all the determination that anybody could ever muster, through the Khmer Rouge to destroy every lasting remnant of Christian faith.

Furious hatred against the gospel, thousands slaughtered, furious but futile. And today, a growing church of Christian believers in Cambodia is beginning and continuing to emerge.

[8 : 17] The same kind of story can be told, can't it? We are the benefit, we have the benefit of years of church history, don't we? Russia, China, Indonesia, Romania, Zaire, why?

The list is now so long of instances where people have decided that Christianity should be eradicated. There was a time, if you go back far enough in our own country, when a massive and ferocious attempt was made to prevent people having their own Bible and to stop the ordinary man in the street from understanding God's word for himself.

So many, so varied, perhaps on a different scale, but there are young Christians, sometimes quite young children indeed, who come under extreme pressure from their parents or from a hostile spouse or even disapproving children, people who are pressurized within their own families to give up this silly business of following Jesus.

But all such attempts at demolition are ultimately futile. for God has a way, as we see wonderfully here in 2 Kings, of just tucking his covenant family away into a place of safety.

We don't quite know how it happened, but somehow, miraculously, by God's grace, one child is spared. See it in verse 2, Joash, the son of Ahaziah, stole him away from among the king's sons who were being put to death.

[9 : 58] And she put him and his nurse in a bedroom, presumably tucked up in a turret somewhere in the royal household, out of sight and out of mind, and the key turned, the child told to be quiet.

And there, for six years, the boy grew up in the back room of the temple, whilst Adaliah lived on, reigning, imagining that she had indeed succeeded in getting rid of the entire royal family and exterminating the line of David.

What we find is that a wise priest, Jehoiada by name, soon comes to the fore. And a wise priest and his decisions and leadership in verses four following soon lead, because he knows it's not going to be easy, soon leads to a coronation of this new king in verse 12.

And it's great cheering and rejoicing. This new king who has grown up in secret is suddenly enthroned. And we can see that God has preserved the royal line and strengthened his kingdom.

And that's always a great joy. It's like the New Testament coming to life here in the Old as this king is crowned. Here is a king literally coming back from the dead.

[11 : 25] Here the impossible is happening before the enemy's eyes. It's lovely to be with Ataliah as she hears all the commotion outside and wonders what on earth is going on and goes out to discover that the coronation has already happened.

And this is our perspective on history and on our personal lives. No one can prevent God from sheltering his covenant people and crowning his anointed king.

Let them try as they did. Let Judas and Pilate and Herod and Caiaphas and poor old weak-willed Simon Peter and the crowd of onlookers let them all be implicated in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus and see in the boldest way in the New Testament that their demolition of God's king is nothing other than futile.

Three days later he rises again and is enthroned as the eternal king at the right hand of God. And here in the Old Testament exactly the same pattern is going on.

It's very important that we allow our Bibles whether Old Testament or New to place the secularists the antichrists of every generation the gospel haters the church persecutors to place the furious enemies of God exactly where they do belong.

[12 : 56] The Bible places them in a category of furious frightening determined but futile always futile what God has determined to build they cannot destroy the king whom God has appointed to reign they cannot dethrone what God has determined to protect they cannot dispose of and so this futile demolition goes on and on rolling its way through history but there is another kind of demolition secondly a holy demolition a demolition carried out by God and his people as this chapter reminds us quite simply that what was true in the days of terrible Ataliah will always and one day ultimately be true forever the establishing of God's kingdom always goes hand in hand with God's holy dismantling of the reign of evil

Ataliah herself we see it going on in the chapter in verse 16 is put to death and then there is this follow up course of action the demolition continues the covenant is re-established between the Lord and the king and the people in verse 17 and of course if we are going to swear ourselves in allegiance to the living God that means that there must be an accompanying certainty that God's people will deliberately and resolutely get rid of Baal it wasn't enough for Ataliah to be put to death the temple of Baal must be destroyed and Matan the priest of Baal is killed right there before the altars verse 18 and as the seven year old king begins his reign the holy demolition of every enemy in sight takes place there isn't room for two kings there is not the possibility of a divided heart following Christ means by very definition that we will not follow Baal that we will not tolerate what is evil and wicked in the eyes of God to have a place in our hearts and so there is this lifelong commitment on the part of the people of God with all the ups and downs of our fickle frail hearts there is a lifelong commitment to demolish what is evil and what is wicked and there's grace promised for the battle so here's a question that we need to ask if we're thinking straight why is it right and proper that we equate this holy destruction of the temple of

Baal in 2nd Kings 11 with our personal and resolute destruction of our own idols and sins in our own lives why is that the right line to draw from the Old Testament to the New Testament I take it that 2 Kings 11 is not calling us this evening to arise here in the church and walk down the street and pull out of the mosque the sacred items and the priests and all the rest of it is it why not if not what's the difference how do we read this chapter aright well we are called by Jesus aren't we to love our enemies but the same Jesus tells us that if our right hand causes us to sin we should cut it off we're called by the New Testament to lay our lives down for the world that we want to serve with the light of the gospel so how do we jump from this physical assault on God's enemies in the

Old Testament to a spiritual assault on our own sins in the New Testament well it's because when Jesus came and when the apostles began to preach the gospel of the risen Christ the kingdom of God changed didn't it in the Old Testament the kingdom of God is a nation state living under the reign of the Davidic kings but in the New Testament the coming of the gospel the kingdom of God becomes an international family of believers living under the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ who rules his kingdom through his word and by his spirit the same God with the same covenant promises for human beings but the formation of that kingdom is different so in the Old Testament the nation state of God what the kingdom needs protection from is anything that will come into that nation to dilute the love of God that the people have to compromise the worship of God in the Old

Testament what must be destroyed are intruders who will corrupt the worship of God's people people but in the New Testament the people of God are not sheltered from the world as a nation to be protected they are sent into the world as missionaries and servants to lay down their lives so that has changed but something else has changed as well and what happened when Jesus died and rose again was that God himself as Christ became the enthroned king of the kingdom God himself therefore provided a time in history when he would largely withhold his judgment from the world and from the church so that the nations could hear the news of the gospel there is a period of time in which we live between the resurrection and ascension of Christ until the return of the Lord

[19:37] Jesus Christ when God does not in his mercy normally intervene and step right into history day by day to destroy the enemies of the gospel sometimes that causes enormous pain and great grief grief when it seems for all the world as if the wicked are prospering and the righteous the children of God are being trampled under foot but the Lord is being patient in his world the day will come when the trumpet shall sound as here and the sifting out of hearts of men before his judgment seat will no longer be a future hope but it will be a very visible and tangible reality but in the meantime we are called to carry on demolishing what we are called to demolish our sins and our idols and we wait for

God to destroy what he has promised he will destroy sometimes of course God does still give us extraordinary glimpses of how seriously his word should be taken it's not an absolute division it is not to say that God never acts in swift judgment today the terrifying reality of what God will do with those who seek to destroy his family sometimes comes right across our field of vision one of the images I most vividly remember from the extraordinary uprising of eastern Europe was Nicolai Ceaușescu of Romania being ousted and publicly executed for all the world to see scenes like that should help us to remember that the God of 2nd Kings 11 has not changed he is merely being merciful in a world where his enemies are still hard at work with their futile business but to us

God says remember the covenant the love in which you have been established between me and the king and my people remember the promise that exists between us remember that whatever winding path your life takes you on and whatever provision you need to honour the Lord Jesus Christ and whatever radical action you are called to take against the enemies of the gospel in your heart take it take it this God is to be feared is he not this chapter demands of God's people get up covenant people of God and go to the temple of Baal and ruthlessly dismantle that altar and take that priest and slaughter him right there the things that you know threaten faith in Christ do not wait says this chapter for sign or signal do not wait for better time or fairer weather or convenient days the king is on his throne

Athaliah has been slain so go now people of promise and get rid of Baal before you end up worshipping the wrong God and drift right away from the Lord that's what 2nd Kings 11 says to us isn't it it is the most precious thing in all the world to be bound to the Lord in a lifetime of promise he has promised himself to us he has sheltered his people always under the wings of his covenant love he has promised himself to us and that is all we need it's always incredible enough to discover that other people love us as they do to discover that other people forgive us as they have to and do in God's family to cherish one another as we do that's an amazing thing but to know the love of this God feeding us sheltering us helping us for that love it is surely worth getting rid of every potential rival lover isn't it holy demolition is required one day holy demolition will no longer be required but today it is required and if we belong to

God and are part of his family we have a great high priest one even wiser than good old Jehoiada who says to us keep your worship of me pure let's pray for a moment dear heavenly father help us to respond to your word in genuine practical realistic and decisive ways thank you for the grace of Jesus Christ that enables us to do so thank you for the work of your holy spirit giving us new deep hunger for our savior a love for him that will outlast all the battles of life and so enable us from this chapter to take in the broad canvas the big picture of your sovereign reign over the whole of history and help us to praise you as we do in Jesus name amen