

Message:

Jeroboam is the reigning king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Israelites have fractured their nation into two kingdoms: Israel, which was comprised of ten northern tribes, and Judah, which was comprised of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Even though the Lord had handed Jeroboam the reigns of the Northern kingdom, Jeroboam soon installs a complete system of false worship. Our passage takes us to Bethel, one of the two locations where Jeroboam built an altar for false worship. Jeroboam is at the altar where he is in the middle of worship. He is about to be interrupted-by a merciful Word from the Lord.

As our chapter opens, we told that Jeroboam has a visitor in the service: *“a man of God came out of Judah by the Word of the Lord.”* It seems as though this visitor is not polite; he interrupts the service with a stunning pronouncement, *“O altar, altar, thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who make offerings on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.’”* (1 Kings 13:2). This man of God prophesizes that the very altar that Jeroboam is offering sacrifices will be destroyed by a Judean King by the name of Josiah. It will be another 300 years before this occurs, but the prophet couples his distant prophecy with immediate proof that the Lord is serious: *“Behold, the altar shall be torn down, and the ashes that are on it shall be poured out”* (1 Kings 13:3).

This prophet’s rude intrusion is met with the full force and fury of Jeroboam. The king issues a cease and desist order that he attempts to personally implement. However, God ceases and desists Jeroboam rendering him unable to grab the man of God. While Jeroboam is being detained by the Lord demonstrated that He was serious about His far-off prophecy, *“The altar also was torn down, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign that the man of God had given by the word of the LORD”* (1 Kings 13:5).

Jeroboam immediately crumbles under the grip that God has on him and he calls for an intercessory prayer meeting: *“Entreat now the favor of the LORD your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me”* (1 Kings 13:6). And even though the man of God was the object of Jeroboam’s attempted seizure, he, nevertheless, *“entreated the LORD, and the king's hand was restored to him and became as it was before”* (1 Kings 13:6).

With a restored hand, Jeroboam extends the right hand of fellowship to the man of God saying, *“Come home with me, and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward”* (1 Kings 13:7). Without being antisocial, the man of God refuses and explains his refusal: *“If you give me half your house, I will not go in with you. And I will not eat bread or drink water in this place, for so was it commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, ‘You shall neither eat bread nor drink water nor return by the way that you came’”* (1 Kings 13:8-9). The Lord had given the man of God very clear instructions and he intends to follow them.

And with that, the man of God starts off back home to Judah. We will forego the details of the man of God’s trip back home, which are developed in verses 11-32 of our chapter; instead, for now, we jump ahead to end our the chapter to see what lasting effect Jeroboam’s encounter with the man of God had: *“After this thing Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but made priests for the high places again from among all the people. Any who would, he ordained to be priests of the high places. And this thing became sin to the house of Jeroboam, so as to cut it off and to destroy it from the face of the earth.”* (1 Kings 13:33-34). Jeroboam’s interactions with the man of God, as well as the ensuing odd and tragic events that the man of God experiences in verses 11-32, seem to have little redeeming effect upon Jeroboam. He returns to his defiance against God ensuring his and his dynasty’s destruction.

Having briefly covered this episode, I want to take us back to Jeroboam’s prayer request in verse 6; notice the pronoun: *“Entreat now the favor of the LORD your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me.”* Under the extreme pressure of being in the grip of God, Jeroboam acknowledges the Lord as the man of God’s God. This admission centers this whole account. Jeroboam, under stress, seems to be admitting that his god is not the one true God-the God who has granted Jeroboam the privilege reigning over the Northern kingdom. I suppose we should not be caught off guard by Jeroboam’s admission; Jeroboam has constructed two false altars committed to false worship. Remember Jeroboam’s actions and words back in chapter 12, *“So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, ‘You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.’”* (1 Kings 12:28).

Jeroboam is doing more than getting history wrong; he is getting God wrong. In getting God wrong, Jeroboam is completely missing the point of the man of God interrupting his religious services. God is not in the business of interrupting false worship simply because He likes to pitch fits; God is interrupting Jeroboam's disobedience because God is merciful. All the events of this day as they are being directed to warn Jeroboam as well as display the power of God, are for the purpose of showing Jeroboam that God is merciful. Sadly, Jeroboam is so involved in his religious activity that he has little time to grasp either the bondage that he has placed himself in or the immense mercy of God.

For Jeroboam, message of warning and the mercy of God that undergirds it is problematic. I would suggest Jeroboam sees it as problematic for three reasons. First, for Jeroboam, the mercy of God is not an opportunity for rescue from the bondage of false religion but an interruption to the carrying out of his own personalized religion. Jeroboam does not really want to be rescued; he has assembled quite an elaborate religious system. The thought of being rescued from his religion only invokes the most intense response of anger.

Second, Jeroboam sees the mercy of God as problematic. Jeroboam comes to understand that the mercy of God cannot be bought or controlled. It seems that Jeroboam learns that mercy is powerful and uncontrollable. Those qualities are huge negatives to Jeroboam, who has come to learn the arresting power of God when it seized him during his attempt to grab the man of God. Jeroboam, who seems to be looking for a religion he can control, also came to learn something about the uncontrollable nature of mercy. Once the man of God interceded for Jeroboam and he was healed, he sought to neutralize the advantage of mercy by seeking to pay back the man of God. "*Come home with me, and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward*" (1 Kings 13:7). Jeroboam did not want to be obligated to the man of God, but somehow get the man of God in a position where he would be obligated to Jeroboam.

Finally, Jeroboam sees the mercy of God as problematic because it would require a turning away from his false religion—that which he truly loves and embraces. Walking away from his false religion would mean that Jeroboam would have to walk away from all that he loves and all that he has amassed. He will not give up his first love. Tragically, he

will not and cannot; it has a grip on him and he has a grip on it. The end of the chapter summarizes the tragic state of Jeroboam who, *“did not turn from his evil way, but made priests for the high places again from among all the people. Any who would, he ordained to be priests of the high places. And this thing became sin to the house of Jeroboam, so as to cut it off and to destroy it from the face of the earth.”* (1 Kings 13:33-34). With the rejection of mercy, Jeroboam has sealed his future with judgment-the very thing that God mercifully warned him against.

Implications:

Grasping and embracing the mercy of God is not natural to the human condition. Mercy is counter-intuitive; we naturally conclude that good people get good stuff and bad people get bad stuff. Furthermore, by nature, we are all addicted to salvation by works. What this means is that if we are to understand God’s mercy, we must not operate by our own reasoning capabilities, but from the Scripture’s revelation of God. For far too many of us church-going people, we understand Christianity simply as a series of religious duties consisting of some kind of dos and don’ts list. Christianity becomes reduced down to the definition of a set of moral and religious behaviors. If the studies of our teenager’s view of Christianity if correct, Christianity has very little to do with the mercy of God as displayed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and everything to do with the kind of moral life they live. Too many who would identify themselves as Christians do not understand much about Jesus and what He has done.

The research suggests that far too many of our children who grow up in our churches believe that God accepts them on the basis of their good behavior. Is the reason they hold to such view is that we have conveyed to them a moral and behavioristic religion? Is this to say that Christianity immoral and irreligious? Not at all (the man of God models careful obedience)! But moral resolutions and religious practices are not the core of Biblical Christianity. Jesus Christ is the core of Biblical Christianity. The problem is that grasping the mercy of God through Jesus Christ is not something we naturally grasp. We must center our message as a church upon Christ. We must center the instruction in our homes upon Christ. Only as Christ is accurately taught and properly understood, will the meaning of God’s mercy come into hearts and minds and then radically alter our steps. Paul

stressed to Titus: *“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life”* (Titus 3:4-7).

From our passage this morning, we can see a beautiful picture of God’s mercy. We are told Jeroboam’s fate in verse 34, *“And this thing became sin to the house of Jeroboam, so as to cut it off and to destroy it from the face of the earth.”* Jeroboam and his house will be cut off and destroyed. This is simply the outcome of human’s penchant for false religion and independence from God. God is just. But God would one day display the beauty of mercy in the backdrop of His justice.

The mercy of God and the justice of God meet at the Cross. God’s mercy toward sinners comes not by doing an end run around justice, but by fulfilling justice. God sends His own Son to be a substitute who would receive the strokes of justice absorbing all the curses due upon His people and thereby diverting the justice of God from us to His son. God’s mercy was brilliantly displayed at the Cross. Christ was cut off and destroyed, not for His sin (for He had none), but for our sin. However, since Christ was a perfect sacrifice, God accepted His payment and raised Him from the dead. Now Christ continues, at the right hand of God, interceding and applying His redemptive benefits to His children.

For all who come to Christ and receive Him, God receives them with the same love and approval as He does His own Son for we receive the erasure of our sinful record and the establishment of a record of righteousness through trusting in Christ. Ephesians explains: *“In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved”* (Ephesians 1:5). Only this Gospel produces in us a true love for God that will express itself through obedience.

We cannot have a Christianity where Christ is vaguely known and we are simply morally religious people. Christ must be known, received, treasured, and lived for.