

13. Not good finishes

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In the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, Ben Johnson of Canada won the 100 meter dash, setting a new Olympic record and a new world record – 9.79 seconds. An American contender, Carl Lewis, came in second, and most were shocked that he hadn't won the gold.

After the race, the judges learned that Johnson had had an illegal substance in his body. He ran the race illegally, so the judges took away his medal. Though he ran faster and made an unforgettable impression, he didn't deserve the reward.

All that effort and preparation for last four years for this short race went down the drain because he didn't finish well.

Many of you may remember what I've said before, "A good start does not guarantee a good finish."

This morning we are going to learn about a couple of good and godly kings who started well, yet these father and son didn't finish well in their spiritual races.

A. THE EXAMPLE NO. 1 – AMAZIAH

2 Kings 14:1-14 In the second year of Joash the son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel, Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, became king. 2 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. 3 And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like his father David; he did everything as his father Joash had done. 4 However the high places were not taken away, and the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. 5 Now it happened, as soon as the kingdom was established in his hand, that he executed his servants who had murdered his father the king. 6 But the children of the murderers he did not execute, according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, in which the Lord commanded, saying, "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; but a person shall be put to death for his own sin." 7 He killed ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt, and took Sela by war, and called its name Joktheel to this day. 8 Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, "Come, let us face one another in battle." 9 And Jehoash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, "The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son as wife'; and a wild beast that was in Lebanon passed by and trampled the thistle. 10 You have indeed defeated Edom, and your heart has lifted you up. Glory in that, and stay at home; for why should you meddle with trouble so that you fall--you and Judah with you?" 11 But Amaziah would not heed. Therefore Jehoash king of Israel went out; so he and Amaziah king of Judah faced one another at Beth Shemesh, which belongs to Judah. 12 And Judah was defeated by Israel, and every man fled to his tent. 13 Then Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash, the son of Ahaziah, at Beth Shemesh; and he went to Jerusalem, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Gate of Ephraim to the Corner Gate--four hundred cubits. 14 And he took all the gold and silver, all the articles that were found in the

house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house, and hostages, and returned to Samaria.

As I mentioned to you before, there were a handful of godly kings in the southern kingdom Judah, while there was none in the northern kingdom Israel. With the exception of Hezekiah and Josiah among those godly kings of Judah, no king was bold enough to remove the high places around their kingdom.

According to Moses' laws, the Jews were commanded to go to the temple to offer their sacrifices to the Lord. But for the sake of convenience, they started to offer sacrifices to the Lord from their local high hill tops. You may think, "Why is it wrong for them to have some convenience in worship?" It is a matter of obedience. Besides, these high places turned out to be idol worship central throughout the land.

We are to worship our God in spirit and truth, not just anyway we want. If we get to have our own way to worship, it would turn out to be idol worship every time. Our life itself should be worship to the Lord as it is mentioned in Romans 12:1.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

B. AMAZIAH'S IDOLATRY

What did it happen to king Amaziah that he lost a war against king Jehoash of Israel? The Books of 1 and 2 Kings must be studied with the references of 1 and 2 Chronicles to get the full picture. Let's go to 2 Chronicles 25.

2 Chronicles 25:14-17 Now it was so, after Amaziah came from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the people of Seir, set them up to be his gods, and bowed down before them and burned incense to them. 15 Therefore the anger of the Lord was aroused against Amaziah, and He sent him a prophet who said to him, "Why have you sought the gods of the people, which could not rescue their own people from your hand?" 16 So it was, as he talked with him, that the king said to him, "Have we made you the king's counselor? Cease! Why should you be killed?" Then the prophet ceased, and said, "I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not heeded my advice." 17 Now Amaziah king of Judah asked advice and sent to Joash the son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, "Come, let us face one another in battle."

The Lord blessed Amaziah with a decisive victory over the Edomites. Then what did he do after the victory? He brought the Edomites idols and started to worship their gods over the one true God.

We must be extraordinarily careful after the victory in our lives as before the battle. Actually, there are more temptations and more traps after the victory due to the feeling of euphoria and pride.

Worshiping idols was a direct violation of the Law of Moses which was given by the Lord and still is because we ought to love and serve our God only, none else.

I like the advice of king Jehoash to Amaziah in v10 of 2 Kings 14:

why should you meddle with trouble so that you fall

We must learn not to meddle with any unnecessary things that cause us to fall. The definition of 'meddle' from the dictionary is "To handle something idly or ignorantly". When we don't know what we are getting into, it is the best for us not to get involved.

Let me put this in practical terms: Don't meddle with fortune telling, palm reading, horoscope, Ouija board, or 1-900 Psychic hot line. If they really know the future as they claim, why would they not be the next billionaire through stock market or Power Ball Jackpot? These things are nothing more than deceptions and gateways to satanic path. Stay faraway. You want to know the future, stay close to God who knows all things.

We are not going to cover all of chapter 14 and 15 since you guys read them ahead. These two chapters mention about nine kings in the period of 50 some years. Out of nine kings, five of them got assassinated. One of them lasted only one month. I guess he was the king of the month.

C. THE DOWNFALL OF KING AZARIAH – a.k.a. KING UZZIAH

2 Kings 15:1-5 In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amaziah, king of Judah, became king. 2 He was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jeholiah of Jerusalem. 3 And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done, 4 except that the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. 5 Then the Lord struck the king, so that he was a leper until the day of his death; so he dwelt in an isolated house. And Jotham the king's son was over the royal house, judging the people of the land.

Azariah, a.k.a. Uzziah was a very popular and godly king when he started. At the very beginning of his reign, Uzziah showed himself to be a faithful worshiper of God. V5 makes us to wonder what Uzziah did to cause such a harsh punishment from God. To understand this, again, we must refer 2 Chronicles 26:

2 Chronicles 26:16-21 But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. 17 So Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him were eighty priests of the Lord--valiant men. 18 And they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from the Lord God." 19 Then Uzziah became furious; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the Lord, beside the incense altar. 20 And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there, on his forehead, he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the Lord had struck him.

The bottom line was that Uzziah became haughty and prideful. He conscientiously ignored one of God's principles: No king should also be a priest or prophet. The offices of priest and king should not be combined in one man – until the Messiah, who fulfilled all three offices.

Uzziah came to the temple as an arrogant king, and he left as a humiliated leper. Until he died, he remained in isolation.

D. THE COMMON DENOMINATOR OF THESE TWO KINGS

Amaziah and Uzziah both committed acts of arrogant ambition that brought judgment from God.

The truly humble person sees things as God sees them and doesn't live on illusions. Pride blinds the mind, distorts the vision and so inflates the ego that the person cannot tell the truth from fiction because he starts to live in his own make-believe life and expects others to believe it as well.

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.

Pride comes in many different shapes and forms. It comes to us just about anytime and any stage, especially when we are doing well. When God uses His people to do great things, those times can be very vulnerable and dangerous times for them.

Let's say, you were talking about Jesus to your friend in a restaurant. Not only your friend got saved, the waiter, the bus boy, the restaurant manager, the chef and all the people in the restaurant got saved. Then you start to think, "Wow, I am so spiritual and God is using me greatly. I am gonna take over what Billy Graham used to do." Instead of giving the credit to whom it is due, you take the credit for it. Why would we do this? Pride.

Remember the second stanza of the song we sang "O Lord You are beautiful":
"And when I'm doing well, help me to never seek a crown. For my reward is giving glory to You"

Oh, how important for us to remember and do it every moment of our lives! We must admit that we have a tendency to blame our God when the situation is bad due to our own faults, and take the credit when the things go well.

We have to be men and women of God enough to admit our own faults for our own sins, and give glory to the Lord for all the good things that happen in our lives. Pride never gives a good finish. Actually, it ruins every one of them.

I've read, seen and met many great godly people in my Christian walk. Many of them had finished their races well and will finish well. At the same time, many of them fell off the path and disgraced themselves and gave opportunities for the enemies of God to blaspheme His precious name.

I do not have fear for my death, nor sickness, nor anything else. But because of my sinful nature, I can be one of those disgraceful status quo if I don't keep my spiritual guard up all the time. This is my greatest fear – giving a chance for the enemies to blaspheme my God's name because of my stupidity.

It is important for us to start right, but it is imperative to end well.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

I am going to finish this study with an illustration:

During the Medieval time, a group of theatrical actors and actresses was traveling around the country to perform their play.

The crowd was getting thinner and thinner because winter was approaching. One of them said to the group before the play, "Why don't we give money back to those few

people in the audience seats and head home?" The discouraged actors and actresses nodded their heads in agreement except one old actor.

He spoke, "If you must, let this be our finest performance in our lifetime." They did. They performed the play like they've never done before. It was the zenith of their performance. The audience was deeply touched .

After the handful of last group of audience left their tent, the same old actor returned to his group with a small note in his hands visually shaken. When they inquired the old actor, he read out loud the content of the note:

"That was the best performance I've ever seen in all my life. Thank you, your king." Their king was visiting the near by town and came to their play in disguise and they didn't know it.

We live this life for our King Jesus – not for ourselves, not for others, certainly not for fame or entertainment. We must finish well.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) We must remember that pride is the ground where all the other sins grow.

2) We must be extraordinarily careful after the victory in our lives as before the battle. Actually, there are more temptations and more traps after the victory due to the feeling of euphoria and pride.

3) We must learn not to meddle with any unnecessary things that cause us to fall.

4) We must not waste anytime to hide, ignore, excuse or rationalize the reason why we get into sins. Rather we need to go to the Lord directly and immediately to confess our sins and repent from it.