

SERMON NOTES  
Simon van Bruchem

**WHAT MATTERS MOST, ACCORDING TO GOD**  
**1 Kings 22:39-53, 2 Peter 3:1-14**

For All Nations Presbyterian Church, 4 July 2021

**Introduction: eulogies and tombstones**

- How do you sum up someone's life in only a few sentences?
  - It's a hard thing to do.
  - All of our lives have different parts to them, different achievements and different stages.
  - At a funeral, often a family member is asked to give a eulogy, which is a short speech delivering some highlights of the deceased person's life.
  - In a eulogy, you usually get some funny stories, the basic information about their family situation and significant things like when they moved countries.
  - And then you get some kind of comment about how much they meant to the person giving the eulogy.
  - In a few emotional minutes, someone's life can be summed up by someone close to them.
  - The aim is to give those who are there a better idea of who the person was.
- If you want to do it in an even briefer way, you can write a summary on a gravestone.
  - Usually, gravestones include birth and death dates, names of key family members, and maybe a short phrase.
  - Something generic like 'rest in peace' or perhaps something a little more descriptive like 'a loving husband and father' or 'a loyal friend and hard worker'.
  - It can never say everything; the hard part is choosing which bit to say at all.
  - What matters the most?
- If you had 5 minutes, enough time to recount some key stories and decisions that sum you up as a person, what would they say?
  - Think about that.
  - What is essential for others to know to really understand you, and what is of greatest importance to you as a person?
  - That's what we are exploring together today.
- Today we're thinking about death. I know that sounds depressing.
  - Actually, that's not quite right.
  - We're thinking about how you assess a life.
  - We have a few examples before us, by God's grace.
  - Instead of skipping this bit with names and summaries to get to the next fire coming down from heaven bit, I assure you this is worth slowing down and thinking about.

**Context: wrapping up 1 Kings**

- We're at the end of 1 Kings now, so it's a good opportunity to have an overall recap of the book.
- 1 Kings started with King David's death.
  - After some squabbling over who would succeed him, Solomon became king.
  - And what a king he was!
  - Solomon's reign was the high point of the kingdom of Israel.
  - The temple was built, neighbouring countries were defeated, there was trade worldwide that generated massive wealth.

- Solomon was given great wisdom to rule and was faithful overall, even if he was not perfect and fell away later in life.
  - Since Solomon's death, it has gone from bad to worse.
  - Israel divided into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south.
  - We have been focusing on the north for a long time, especially King Ahab in the past seven chapters.
  - And Ahab has just died, so we sum up his life, and we return to Judah to sum up the life of King Jehoshaphat too.
- It's the end of 1 Kings, but not the end of the book.
    - It is a little confusing.
    - 1 and 2 Kings are not sequels; they are actually the same book, the book of Kings.
    - The division here is likely because of how much you could fit on a scroll; this is the end of the first scroll of Kings, then we start the second scroll of Kings.
    - This means that what we have in our passage is not the final conclusion; it is like an interim report.
    - And we have a great deal of cause for concern at where this is heading.

**TRANSITION** *The big idea here that shines through all the assessments of kings is:*

<b>1. God looks to our faithfulness, not our achievements</b>
---

- We know a lot about King Ahab by now; much of this section of 1 Kings has focussed on him.
  - The emphasis has been on his disobeying the word of God; it is a constant theme.
    - Not just with Elijah, but Micaiah and several unnamed prophets as well.
  - But here, in v28, we get a hint of how powerful a man Ahab was.
  - He built an ivory house.
    - Ivory is from elephants, which were not native to Israel.
    - It needed to be purchased at great cost from merchants; ivory was a status symbol, proof of great wealth.
    - Interestingly, archaeologists have located the ancient city of Samaria and the palace.
    - And they found many ivory pieces, mainly inserts for furniture.
    - To build a house like this shows wealth and power.
  - We know Ahab built the capital city of Samaria; v39 points out that this was not the only city he built.
  - We know he had at least two palaces, for there was one in Samaria and one in Jezreel.
  - We know from the records of the Assyrians that he was known to that superpower and was part of a force that repelled them once.
  - If we were studying a purely secular history of Israel, Ahab would need to be listed as one of the greatest and most influential kings.
  - Yet look at God's assessment in v39: he brushes these accomplishments away.
  - It is as if the writer is saying, do you want to know more about building projects and palaces, are they the kind of thing you like?
    - Go read about them somewhere else. Go to the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.
    - Do you want records of how wealthy and powerful Ahab was? In the end, that is not God's primary concern at all.
    - These things are either mentioned in passing here or not mentioned at all.
  - What matters about King Ahab is what we have already been told back in 16:30 and illustrated ever since that time.
    - He did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him.
    - Ahab is assessed as evil. The rest of his achievements don't matter in the end.
- Then the camera scans towards the south, to the kingdom of Judah.

- And here, we learn a little more about King Jehoshaphat.
  - That's a great baby name, by the way; if you are considering names in the future, keep Jehoshaphat in mind!
- We've been introduced to him before, especially earlier in the chapter when he went to war with Syria alongside Ahab.
- Jehoshaphat was the son of good King Asa, the longest-serving and most godly king since David and Solomon.
- Jehoshaphat himself reigned for a long time, 25 years.
- In contrast to Ahab, Jehoshaphat gets a good assessment from God; v43 says that he did what was right in the sight of the LORD.
- We'll look at the other details later on; the most important thing to note is that Jehoshaphat received a tick from God and not a cross.
- V45 is a verse like we saw with Ahab's assessment.
  - There are hints of his might, a brief reference to battles he took part in, but in the end, those things don't matter to God.
  - Go read of them in the king's official records.
  - They are not of greatest significance when summing up his life.
  - They wouldn't make it into God's eulogy for Jehoshaphat.
- Notice that most of the things Jehoshaphat did in his life, the major achievements and decisions, don't get mentioned here at all.
  - Over 25 years, only a few things are actually mentioned in this summary.
  - God cares for his general attitude to God.
  - And to show this, a few key events are mentioned.
  - Jehoshaphat didn't remove the high places, according to v43, but he did exterminate the male cult prostitutes in v46.
  - He stopped one of the worst aspects of pagan worship by removing prostitution as a form of worship.
  - That is something even his good father didn't do.
  - It is included as an example of what Jehoshaphat was like.
- The final king mentioned here is Ahaziah.
  - We'll see more of him in 2 Kings, but we know what we are going to see.
  - Ahaziah was Ahab and Jezebel's son in more than just genetics.
  - He was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to v52.
  - The way he walked, which means the way he lived, was against the true God.
  - And he is said to walk in the ways of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat; any time a king is compared to Jeroboam, you know that they are terrible.
    - This means he worshipped the golden calves that Jeroboam set up, and he maintained the rival priesthood and festivals.
  - Baal was a personal god to him too, as v53 points out.
  - His whole life provoked the LORD to anger.
- The way God assesses these three kings in this passage reveals a lot about what matters most.
- We measure a good life in quite different ways.
  - If we achieve some measure of wealth and material success, many would say that we have made it.
  - If we have achievements we can point to, these are the things that make us and our parents proud of us.
    - Things like graduation from university, career advancement, and awards won.
  - The things we put on gravestones include if we are married and have children.
  - Perhaps a good life is one that is remembered, where what we did has left a legacy for others in some way.
  - Maybe a good life is one your parents approve of or one that is acceptable by the wider society.

- You know what? In the end, all of those things are insignificant.
  - God didn't rate these kings on their children, their wealth, their military achievement, or whether they ran a strong economy or had an effective foreign policy.
  - And God doesn't place your earthly achievements as being of greatest importance.
  - Whether you are single or married in the end doesn't change how God views you; whether you own a house or not, have a permanent visa or not, or have money in the bank or not do not really matter that much.
  - God values faithfulness. God is looking to see how we respond to Jesus.
- To use the 1 Kings term, God looks at the way you walk, the way you live.
    - Whatever your success in earthly terms, or lack of it, how you follow God matters far more.
    - If we know that Jesus has saved us and how great and kind God is, and we live well in response, that is what God looks for.
    - It's not just in Kings; we saw it in 2 Peter 3 as well.
    - In light of what Jesus has done, and in light of the fact that Jesus is coming back, what kind of life should we lead?
    - A life that is diligent to be found by God without spot or blemish.
    - We seek to please and worship God. That matters more than any achievement you might make.
- Well, how do you measure faithfulness? In this passage, there are key decisions that are pointed to.
    - For Jehoshaphat, it was his removal of the male prostitutes that illustrated what kind of person he was.
      - That would have had public opposition, but he did it anyway.
      - He also had a complicated relationship with the kingdom of Israel, which was mentioned several times.
    - For Ahaziah, his worship of Baal is singled out.
      - This was a decision that summed up his stance towards the true God.
    - Even in these brief summaries, there are key decisions and actions that illustrated what kind of person these kings were.
- What is the evidence of your faithfulness to God?
    - It is easy to say you put Jesus first. It is easy to sing about it too.
    - But what is the evidence?
    - What would an outside observer, looking at your life, use as proof that you really believe in Jesus with all your heart?
    - Attending church is not enough, though it is a good thing.
    - Would people see your commitment to God if they were to examine your bank account, where you spend your money and how generous you are?
    - Would they notice that you have made different life decisions because of your faith?
      - Some choose to remain single, even though it is difficult, because they have refused to marry someone who is not a believer.
      - Some have chosen significant service in church or mission when they could have chosen something more selfish.
    - Spend time thinking about that today.
      - What major life decisions have you made that show you love Jesus?
      - Because surely, if Jesus does come first, that should be easy to prove.

**TRANSITION** *There is another theme bubbling through this summary passage:*

<b>2. Parenting has a massive impact on the next generation</b>
---

- When we look at the many different kings in the northern kingdom of Israel, many of them were due to military coups or assassinations.

- In contrast, Ahab was part of a dynasty.
  - It started with his father Omri, a very powerful man but a terribly ungodly one.
  - After he died, Ahab became king.
  - He followed in the way he learnt from his father Omri, evil in the eyes of the LORD.
  - And after Ahab died, Ahaziah followed in his footsteps.
  - We are told that in v52.
  - He walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother.
  - Ahaziah was the son of Ahab and Jezebel, and he did the same things; he lived the same way they did.
- The south has a different story.
    - The kings of the south were all of one family; they were all descendants of King David.
    - Good King Asa ruled well, mostly, and gets a tick from God.
    - Jehoshaphat walked as his father had walked, faithfully, concerned to follow God well.
    - He even improved on his father's work in some ways, as we have seen.
- There is something this particular passage doesn't mention, but we should know.
    - These two families, these dynasties, were linked by marriage.
    - Jehoshaphat's son married Ahab's daughter.
    - What happens, do you think, when a child from this godly family marries into the family of Ahab and Jezebel?
    - Even if you don't know, I reckon you can guess.
    - They turned from God, and dramatically.
    - Jehoshaphat's son was named Jehoram, and we read this a few chapters later on:

*And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. (2 Ki. 8:18 ESV)*

- In fact, it even got worse.
  - After Jehoram died, his wife outlived him, and she went on to seize power and try to kill the entire family of her husband.
  - We could have seen this coming, but Jehoshaphat married his son into that family anyway for political reasons.
- I don't have the statistics on hand, but we can observe this to be true: children growing up in a godly home are much more likely to end up with their own faith.
    - Of course, we don't control that; only God changes the heart.
    - Yet the influence of parents on their children is immense, and often you can trace faithful Christians back several generations.
- It goes the other way, too, of course.
    - Negative traits of parents are often passed on to the next generation as well.
    - Domestic violence among someone's parents is one of the major indications they might themselves be people who take part in domestic violence.
      - It is the way that arguments are resolved, in their experience.
    - Drunkenness also runs in families, as does criminal behaviour.
    - For good or bad, our parents influence us to a large extent.
- If you are a parent, I need to say something important to you.
    - You have a massive influence on your children.
    - I know you already know that, but don't underestimate your influence.
    - If we know this is true, we need to be intentional in our parenting.
    - Use your influence for the gospel.

- Your children are the primary ministry God has given to you; actively pray for them, be a godly example to them, and directly teach them the Bible.
  - I have been a pastor now for quite a long time, and I have had the privilege of counselling many people and seeing many different families close up.
  - Let me be blunt.
  - Many Christian parents are not actively discipling their children; they don't think hard about it or make it a first priority.
  - It is easy in our busyness to help our children to play musical instruments, to be strong academically, to have sporting achievements, and that is all positive.
  - Yet, as we have seen, according to God's assessment, those things don't matter much at all.
  - We need to teach our children the Bible.
  - We need to talk to them about why we believe what we do; we need to have them see us read our Bibles and place Jesus first in our decision making.
  - Kids know if you really live what you believe.
  - Are you actively discipling your children? Don't subcontract that to Sunday School or church; the key place this happens is at home.
  - You have a responsibility and a privilege; use your parenting for the gospel.
- If you grew up in a Christian home, thank God for that!
    - There are few things used more strongly for the kingdom of God than a faithful Christian home.
- It's not only parental influence, though, that makes a difference.
    - We see that Ahaziah also walked in the way of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, in v52.
    - What does this mean? Jeroboam was dead for many generations by then.
    - It means that the culture Jeroboam set up, with golden calves to worship and special priests and festivals, that all still existed.
    - Ahaziah joined in with all of this. He did what the wider culture of Israel did.
    - The culture around us also has a discipleship program on our children; do you realise this?
    - The music they listen to, the movies they watch, the worldview of their friends, all of this is moulding and shaping their thinking and priorities.
    - The families we come from with their expectations also play a part, with a focus on success and achievement and respect from others.
    - It is hard to resist this influence.
    - Ahaziah didn't resist it; he joined in with all his heart, in a family that encouraged it and didn't present a godly alternative.
- Parents need intentional discipleship, else we will lose.
    - The discipleship of the world is professional and influential; we need to actively present a better picture of how to live and who God is.
    - Christians know the truth, and we can model contentment and joy and community in a way that is not found elsewhere.
    - Let's make sure we're doing that.
    - Whether we influence our children or the children of others, we need to strive to present a better vision of what life can be.

**TRANSITION** *The message of this passage is not just to try harder to be better:*

<h3><b>3. Our best is mixed with imperfection, so thank God for Jesus</b></h3>
--

- Jehoshaphat was a good and godly king.
  - One of the best Judah ever had.
  - There is a lot to commend him.
  - Yet, he was far from perfect.

- And the writer of 1 Kings is keen to show that to us.
- The first criticism is at the end of v43.
  - The people were supposed to worship in the temple in Jerusalem, yet they still maintained the high places.
  - These were ancient places of worship.
  - People believed you were closer to God up a hill or on a mountain; you still see that with the positioning of shrines and temples around the world.
  - Jehoshaphat did a lot to reform the worship of Israel, but he didn't remove those high places.
- He was also too close to Ahab, the king of Israel, as v44 points out.
  - I think, in context, this is supposed to be a criticism. It follows on from the high places comment.
  - The book of 1 Chronicles expands on this, saying that much of what went wrong in Judah was due to the association with Ahab and his family.
- And then, in v48, we get a mention of Jehoshaphat's trade plans.
  - Jehoshaphat could plan to trade with ships because his neighbour, Edom, was weak and didn't have a king to stop him.
  - It is odd that this is mentioned, as nothing else economically is mentioned in this summary.
  - The reason it is here, I think, is because Solomon traded using ships of Tarshish, and he brought back gold from Ophir as well.
  - These place names should make us think of Solomon.
  - And perhaps we might think that Jehoshaphat, the good king, might be the promised son of David who would rule forever.
  - There are hints he might be; maybe this is the return of glory to the kingdom of Judah?
  - Yet the trading ships are wrecked, and he has to continually negotiate how close to be with Ahab's family, too, as v49 points out.
  - He is good, but he is flawed.
  - He is not Solomon, and he is not the promised son of David to usher in a new age.
- Our passage is an interim report card for both houses of Israel, both kingdoms.
  - The north is clearly a fail. In every way.
  - The south shows promise, but in the end, it is nowhere near good enough.
  - And unfortunately, to give some spoilers, it soon gets far worse.
  - This is no story of human progress.
    - It is a story of human sin and disaster.
  - We are often told that humanity is getting better, learning from mistakes, and society is moving in a positive direction.
    - If we just educate people better, if we only get better technology, if only we co-operate better, the world will become some kind of utopia, some kind of perfection.
    - It sounds hopeful, but it is not true.
    - We are sinners. The problem is too deep.
    - Every time a good leader comes along, we get our hopes up, but they never live up to the promise. They cannot.
    - We are sinners heading for disaster if left to ourselves.
- Jehoshaphat was flawed, and so are we.
  - We also have problems, even the best of us.
  - Even when we do the best, selfless things, we have mixed motives.
  - And we are guilty of so much, so deeply.
  - The good news we preach is not that we need to be just a little better than we are now.
  - It is that we cannot be good enough, whatever we do.
  - By God's standard, Jehoshaphat was better than Ahab, sure.

- But he was a long way off perfect.
  - What we need is not a leader like Jehoshaphat or even a little bit better.
  - What we need is a substitution, a Saviour.
  - That's the good news of the gospel, right?
  - The true son of David that fulfilled the promises did arrive about 850 years after Ahab and Jehoshaphat.
  - Jesus came and lived a perfect life, was the perfect king these men could never be.
  - And he did in our place for our sins.
  - We could not do it, but Jesus could, and Jesus did.
  - And now we look to the future with confidence, for Jesus did not remain dead.
  - We have confidence because we have an eternal king who is better than any human king, even the best ones.
  - And he will usher in a perfect world, unlike these kings.
  - That's the good news. And that is someone worth trusting.
- No doubt that it would be easier and better to live under Jehoshaphat than under Ahab.
    - But neither could save you.
    - And in the end, neither was good enough.
    - The good news is that Jesus is.

<b>Conclusion: thinking about our own funerals</b>
--

- One day you and I will die, if Jesus doesn't come back first.
  - And someone will come to the front at the funeral to say a few words.
  - What will that person say, do you think?
  - What is it that sums up your life, that is of greatest importance to you?
  - What evidence is there in your life of what matters most?
- If that person just listed off your achievements, it might sound impressive, sure.
  - Maybe they could list a successful career, a good family situation, that you owned a house, that you lived life to the full.
  - But it's not a CV; at that point, you are not trying to impress someone or apply for a job.
  - No, what matters in the end is what God thinks of you.
  - And the only thing that matters when God sums up your life is whether you trusted in Jesus or not.
  - If you were faithful in your pain and hardship, that matters far more than if you were successful and greedy.
  - If you were someone who used your gifts consistently to build others up, that is worth volumes more than handing over a hefty inheritance to your children.
- By God's grace, we still have time to change what that person will say at our funerals.
  - We have time to make decisions, to choose which way to walk.
  - If you need to change your life, have that hard conversation with a trusted friend or God today. Don't ignore it.
    - Repent and commit to serving Jesus from here on in.
  - If you are trying hard to follow Jesus, even in your own flawed way, and you are tempted to give it up, keep on going.
    - Don't be swayed by what your family wants of you, or what you think society expects.
    - Serve Jesus with your heart, soul, mind and strength.
    - And one day, your Father will welcome you with "well done, good and faithful servant. Come and share your master's happiness."
    - Come, Lord Jesus.