

The Story - Chapter 17 "The Kingdom's Fall"

In April 1912, Cyril Evans was working as the telegraph operator on board the SS Californian on a voyage across the Atlantic. On the night of April 14, 1912, the Captain of the Californian, Stanley Lord, brought the ship to a halt as it had entered a wide ice field with many large icebergs. Lord came into the wireless operator's room and ordered Evans to warn other ships in the area of the ice. Evans proceeded to do just that, sending out wireless warnings to other ships in the area that they were approaching ice.

The radio operators on a ship called "Titanic" received the message that they were headed toward the dangerous ice field. These operators were busy sending messages from Titanic's passengers to loved ones back home, reporting on the great time they were having aboard the world's most luxurious passenger ship.

"Titanic's radio operator's received the warning. They set the warning aside. One Titanic operator got mad at Evans because the warning blasted into his headset. Evans had his set turned to full power trying to let all ships know about the danger. It said that one of the radio operators from the Titanic sent a message back to Evans on the Californian, saying "Shut up; shut up. I am busy."

We have been going through this series called "When Life Falls Apart". We have highlighted the period where Israel is now split into two kingdoms, a northern kingdom called Israel and a southern kingdom called Judah. About 350 years span this time. Between the two nations, they had 38 kings and only 5 honored God.

One of the interesting transitions in The Story has been people's inability to remain faithful to God. We saw it at the beginning of the story with Adam and Eve. There were some bright spots: Abraham, Moses, Samuel, but the people of Israel, this nation that God chose, could not be faithful. But at least the leaders walked with God. Well now, not even the leaders are walking with God. In fact, they are about as far from God as one can be.

In this series, "When Life Falls Apart", we have said that sometimes life is hard because of the choices of others. Last week, we looked at one of the good kings, Hezekiah, who tried to do everything right. He inherited a lot of bad stuff. Doc has used some interesting metaphors, "puke rolls down hill", "God is like bacon"; this week someone brought in bacon scented dryer sheets. If you don't know what I'm talking about, you need to listen to the previous sermons. But today is different. What if we are the problem? What if it has nothing to do with anyone else? What if it is just about you?

Chapter 17 of *The Story* introduces us to a new king. "Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years." Remember his dad was Hezekiah, who tore down all the pagan altars and shrines. He is the one who prays and God sends an angel and kills 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. He did the right thing no matter how hard things got.

Look what Manasseh does. Remember, Manasseh is Hezekiah's son. Manasseh rebuilt all the pagan places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole. It says he did as Ahab king of Israel had done. I don't know if you remember King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. King Ahab was described as a king, who did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. He did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the Kings of Israel before him. Manasseh seems to be modeling his life after Ahab, not his father Hezekiah. Manasseh built pagan altars in the temple of the Lord. He sacrificed his *own son* in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. This is the guy leading the southern part of God's people. You can *only* imagine what the nation was like with a leader as *evil* as this.

God raised up prophets. We have already talked about Elijah, Elisha and Isaiah. This is what I really like about *The Story*. We are dealing with a lot of the books of the Bible. 1st and 2nd Kings, 1st and 2nd Chronicles, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Jeremiah. It puts God's Word in chronological order, so you can see historically how it all fits together. Today, there are 2 new

names we want to highlight. One is Jeremiah; the other is Ezekiel. These prophets tell Judah:

"I am about to bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your high places. Your altars will be demolished and your incense altars will be smashed; and I will slay your people in front of your idols. I will lay the dead bodies of Me Israelites in front of their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars. Where ever you live, the towns will be laid waste...your people will fall slain among you, and you will know that I am the Lord."

This is the hard message of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. You must stop sinning or you will be destroyed. They didn't stop.

This week I read about a woman who followed her GPS 900 miles in the wrong direction. She ended up Croatia. She was from Belgium. She was trying to go 90 miles to an airport in her own country. She listened to that voice on her dashboard. She got gas twice. She slept on the side of the road. She was involved in a minor accident, but she kept going. Here is what she said, "I was distracted so I kept driving. I saw all kind of traffic signs, first in French, then in German and finally in Croatian. I kept driving because I was distracted and suddenly I appeared in Zegrid, Croatia. I realized I wasn't in Belgium any more.

Last week, we learned that Assyria exiled the northern kingdom. This week, we learn about another harsh nation called Babylon, ruled by a king called Nebuchadnezzar. There are kind of 2 parts to the Babylonian take over. First, the Babylonians take 10,000 of the best and brightest. King Jehoiachin and the royal family, 7,000 soldiers and other influential people. Ezekiel the prophet is taken with this group and continues to be God's voice even in exile.

Jeremiah, known as the weeping prophet, is left with the poorest of poor. He is left in a place of anarchy, famine and violence. Not only does he continue to convey God's message of "stop sinning", he also conveys God's heart that is broken. He continues to speak on God's behalf, "but

they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy." What does it look like when there is no remedy with God? It is not saying God doesn't have options. It is saying that God only has one option ... the destruction of his chosen people. In 586 BC, the army of Babylon breaks through the walls of Jerusalem. They find King Zedekiah, King of Judah and pronounce sentence on him. They kill his 3 sons in front of him; they put out his eyes and took him prisoner to Babylon. All the people were deported to Babylon except the poorest of poor to work the fields and vineyards. They set fire to the temple of the Lord and burnt every important building. The Babylonian army broke down the walls surrounding Jerusalem.

The people have been deported; Jerusalem, God's holy city, has been destroyed. But there is hope. In a land that is devastated, Jeremiah writes,

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Ezekiel says, "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God."

All of this is pointing to God doing something new and different. Something we could not do for ourselves, which we have seen over the last 17 chapters. It points to John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." This would be the remedy when there was no remedy. God wants to be with us and He is going to provide a way for us to live with Him forever.

Since everything is pointing to Jesus, we thought we would too. We have stations around this room that have some bread and juice. Jesus made it real simple.. ."remember me". Why don't you thank him today for making a way when you couldn't?

After hearing this story today and maybe even going back over the last several weeks, looking at all these kings and all the years, maybe you have the same question that I do.. ."How could they live in their sin for so long?" This isn't the first time I have asked a question like this? Do you remember Joshua, the guy who took over after Moses? It said that after Joshua died, Ma generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel." How does that happen?

Jeremiah gives us a glimpse of what is going on when he tells Judah this:
"Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.)
But my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols.
Be appalled at this, you heavens, and shudder with great horror,"
declares the Lord. "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

The first sin Jeremiah highlights. They have exchanged God for idols. God seems to encapsulate all of their sin and all of their rebellion into one category and put it under one umbrella, the umbrella of idolatry. Maybe today, you would say, "I don't struggle with idolatry. I'm not worshipping Baal. I don't have any pagan poles in my backyard." But maybe you struggle with lust. What is lust? It is worshipping sexual pleasure and sometimes you're choosing to be pulled away from God by being distracted

by who or what you look at. Maybe you would say, "I don't have struggle with idols, but I do have a hard time with materialism. It is hard to be content and sometimes you get jealous, so stuff and money are what you live for. Maybe today, you would just say, "I worry a lot. I am anxious most of the time." Maybe, instead of trusting God to be in control, you have to jump in there and get on the throne.

Notice the phrase, 'They exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols.' Think about what they are exchanging. They are exchanging the "in the beginning God". They are letting go of the God who said, "I am." Last week, they are trading in the God heard Hezekiah's prayer and sent one angel, who destroyed all 185,000 soldiers. That is the God they are trading in.

The second sin Jeremiah highlights is he says they have dug their own cisterns. Digging a cistern is something that the Israelites had to do. They live in land of limestone and sand. Their environment is one where water is not plentiful. They would go out and dig holes in the ground to catch the water when it would rain. Think about it. Digging a hole is very hard. A hole doesn't hold water very well. Then if it does catch water and hold it, the water sits there. ..stagnant. It gets nasty and stinky. Jeremiah contrasts that with what God offers. God calls himself a spring of living water. God says, You are putting all this effort into something broken and something nasty, when you have a spring of water that is fresh, it has life and you don't have to do anything to get it."

Brennan Manning has a book called *Abba's Child*. In this book, he says that we can develop 2 sides to our lives. One self, whom he calls the imposter, is what we want people to see. It is the self we bring to church; it looks good on the outside. The other self is one we don't want anybody to see. It is a self that doesn't have it all together. It is a place where we hide things from our family, spouse, friends and especially God. We don't want anyone to see this self because it is our real self. It is where our brokenness lives. It is where we have been wounded. It is where we hide our sin.

Can I try to make sense of where we have been in this series "When Life Falls Apart"? Israel under Solomon was one nation. But because of his sin, the nation is fractured and becomes a divided nation for over 300 years. During that time only 5 kings follow God. Now in real life, we do everything we can to protect the imposter. That is the only self we want people to see. But God, because He loves us, shows just the opposite in the divided self of Israel. He highlights the lies, the deceit, the sin and the devastation when we live this way for a long time. God is not satisfied with a divided life. He is not satisfied when one of his kids feels like they have to hide.

I can trace some of this back to a guy named Jacob, whom we meet in Chapter 2 of The Story. If you have been reading The Story, you may have read the phrase "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Let me remind you of the story. Jacob was a twin, who had a brother Esau. Jacob's name meant, "one who grabs the heel of." Now that may have been descriptive of the way he came out of the womb, grasping Esau's heel. It was especially descriptive of the way he lived life. He was deceptive, he lied and he cheated. With Esau, during his junior high and high school years, Jacob tricked him out of the family birthright and he stole the family inheritance. When he stole the family inheritance, Esau wanted to kill Jacob, so Jacob had to leave town. He went to his uncle Laban's home to live. Laban is just as deceitful as Jacob. Jacob works for him, but finds a way to gain a lot of livestock. Laban tricks Jacob into marrying his oldest daughter, when he really wanted to marry the younger daughter. Laban coerces him to work 7 more years to marry the younger daughter. It is a circus.

One day, God tells Jacob to return home. Jacob still thinks Esau is going to kill him. AS he returns home, it shows the coward he is. He puts his servants and his livestock up front, the wife he didn't want and her children next, then the other wife he wanted and her kids and finally he is at the back. If Esau is going to kill him, he is going to get to Jacob last.

Right before they get to his homeland, they settle down for the night to go to sleep. Jacob goes to sleep and he is attacked by a man. Now, this man represents God. I don't know if it was *God*, an angel, but even Jacob

recognizes this is a representative of *God*. It says they wrestle all night long. Jacob had never done anything all the way. He always took the quick fix and the easy way out. When Jacob recognizes this is God, he tries to get something out of the deal, just like he always has. He tells "the man", "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

The man responds to Jacob "tell me your name." I don't think God was asking his name. I think he wanted an admission of the real self.. ."I'm a Jacob". "I'm someone grabs people's heel" and to do that you have to be doing stuff behind people's back. "I do things behind people's back." "I have lied and cheated all my life." You know those times when your life passes before your eyes. I think Jacob had to look God square in the eye and admit the person he didn't want people to see.

It says that night 2 things happened. The man touched his hip so that Jacob had a limp. I think God physically changed him. I think he limped for the rest of his life. The other thing the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel." Do you know what the name Israel means? He, who struggles with God. Are you willing to wrestle with God with this part of your life? God is not satisfied with the imposter. He doesn't even see the imposter. He wants the real you, warts, bumps, bruises and all.

I heard two stories this week. Both are from parents. One told me of their son, who was going to run away. Now, the mom prefaced it by saying, he took his pottery barn blanket with him. He tells them "by" and goes out into the garage. He says, 'Mom I love you.' She said, "I love you too." About 10 minutes pass and the garage door opens. He sticks his head in and says, "Mom, I love you." She said, "I love you too." About 10 more minutes pass and the garage door opens and again he says, Mom, I really love you." She said, "I love you too. You don't have to stay out in the garage. You can come back inside." The boy let out a big gasp of air and ran and gave her a big hug.

The other story is from a dad. who has been hiding for the last two years. He has come out of hiding and tries to restore his marriage. Well, his little

girl knows that mom and dad are trying to work things out. After coming out of church, his daughter handed him this picture. 'God can heel anything.' We believe that today. If you need to come out of the garage or if you need to make a decision today, I'll be down Front if you want to respond.