

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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Matt Moberg
Character Over Kingship
2 Kings 11**

Good morning! How are you doing today? It's a great day to be alive, isn't it, folks? It's warm this weekend; the sun was almost out. I'm happy to be here. Are you happy to be here today? Amen! Good! Let me pray before we get into the message, but before I do so, let me introduce myself. My name is Matt Moberg. I've been here a time or two. There's some reason against all logic that you are letting me come back to do it again, probably because you don't have much of a say in the matter, but either way I'm grateful to be here this morning. Let me pray.

Jesus, God, we invite You into this space. We believe that Your Word is alive, that it's active and I pray that it speaks loudly to us all this morning in this time that we get to spend together as a family. Be here now. In Jesus' Name, we all pray. Amen.

If you would be so kind, turn to Acts 20, verses 7 through 9. It reads like this. You can follow along on the screen if that is helpful.

7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. **8** There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. **9** Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead.

A very strange story! Kind of a bazaar way to start a message, but here is why. I'm hoping that it gives you a little window of insight into the way my head has been this week. I was at one point terrified that I would ramble on and on about the text that we will be getting into this morning and bore one of you to death just like young Eutychus. In fact, if someone is dozing off next to you, feel free to slug them on the shoulder. If they turn to you and look like they are going to hit you back, say "I just saved your life; you can die from that sort of thing."

Part of my fear this past week has been that I just couldn't hear what God was trying to say through the text today. Although that fear is no longer with me, it was around feeling disconnected from the texts of the Kings and other places in the Old Testament. That is really why we are in this series called Hidden Gems. The New Testament is very straightforward. Beauty and good and truth are easily found. The Old Testament is often less explicit and you need to excavate a bit more. You have to stare at it a little bit and ask, "What is God saying to us in our lives today?" But when you sit in that time and watch and wait and pray over it, beautiful things emerge. My hope is that the art will surface for you in the text we will be digesting this morning and you'll see it as a Van Gogh. I hope that you will find it beautiful and

full of things to say about how we live as followers of Jesus Christ. The story in 2nd Kings, chapter 11, verses 1, 2, 3, and 4, reads like this:

1 Athaliah was the mother of Ahaziah.

Ahaziah was the king

When she saw that her son was dead, she took over. She began by massacring the entire royal family. 2 But Jehosheba, daughter of King Joram and sister of Ahaziah,

and daughter of Athaliah

took Ahaziah's son Joash and kidnapped him from among the king's sons slated for slaughter. She hid him and his nurse in a private room away from Athaliah. He didn't get killed. 3 He was there with her, hidden away for six years in The Temple of God. Athaliah, oblivious to his existence, ruled the country.

Now let's pause there really quickly. What is happening is this lady had a son who was the king and he was killed. But instead of entering into a time of peace and maybe some prayerful mourning, she ends up seeing this as an opportunity for power. Being that she was sick and twisted, although I did not know her personally, she took over by slaughtering everyone who threatened her rule as queen, including her own grandkids and family. She grabbed the throne and she held onto it for six years.

There is an important side note here as we look at Jehosheba, the daughter of this lady. She ends up saving the young prince by hiding him away in the church. There is a message here that says that your future is not dictated by your DNA. You are fearfully and wonderfully made and you are not doomed to repeat the follies of your folks. I've met a lot of people who were terrified of turning into their parents or somebody else in their family, but Jehosheba does a heroic thing despite her mom being this terrible dictator. Your future is not dictated by your DNA. The text goes on and says,

4 In the seventh year Jehoiada

that's the priest

sent for the captains of the bodyguards and the Palace Security Force. They met him in The Temple of God. He made a covenant with them, swore them to secrecy, and only then showed them the young prince.

So you have these two heroes in the story right here: Jehosheba, the daughter of Athaliah, and Jehoiada, the priest. Both of them oppose the queen's evil rule. I kind of like to imagine them as Lucy and Mr. Tumnus in C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*. Despite living under the cold winter of the evil white witch, they risk their lives for the hope of spring, the hope of hope. That's what Jehoiada is doing here. He calls in the military, Queen Athaliah's military, that is. The troops trust Jehoiada and are willing to put their lives on the line so this seven-year-old boy can be their king. They rally under the dark of the night and protect the boy with spears drawn as Jehoiada crowns young Joash king in the temple. 2nd Kings, verse 12, says this:

12 Then the priest brought the prince into view, crowned him, handed him the scroll of God's covenant, and made him king. As they anointed him, everyone applauded and shouted, "Long live the king!"

How long do you think it has been in that land since people have shouted and celebrated and been happy? The text says this about Athaliah:

14 Astonished, she saw the king standing beside the throne, flanked by the captains and heralds, with everybody beside themselves with joy, trumpets blaring. Athaliah ripped her robes in dismay and shouted, "Treason! Treason!"

The military kills Athaliah and proceeds to tear down all the temples of Baal she had established. Jehoiada is a man of character, who led from the inside out, obedient to the God of Israel. He was willing to risk his life for the sake of extinguishing evil and bringing forth the end of winter. The question that lingered in the air was, would young Joash take on the character of Jehoiada, the priest who crowned him, or would he end up like his grandmother and turn his back on peace and pursue power instead?

This is a story of great hope that ends in heartbreak, a story that I think that is familiar to a lot of human experience. Israel was on the cusp of revival, primed for the spring to melt away the ice of winter and for people to live safely and undisturbed once more. But that doesn't happen. Joash received the crown but not the character. 2nd Chronicles teaches us about this.

2 Taught and trained by Jehoiada the priest, Joash did what pleased God throughout Jehoiada's lifetime. **3** Jehoiada picked out two wives for him; he had a family of both sons and daughters [2nd Chronicles 24:2-3.]

Highlight, underscore, do what you need to do, but take note of that line right there where it says that Joash did what pleased God throughout Jehoiada's lifetime. Now what does that imply? The implication is that when Jehoiada was no more, Joash's faith was no longer pleasing to God. Joash didn't really have faith; he had a faith inside of Jehoiada's faith. It was always outside in. Decoration. It was never being lived inside out. The text tells us all about this and goes on to say,

17 But after the death of Jehoiada things fell apart. The leaders of Judah made a formal presentation to the king and he went along with them. **18** Things went from bad to worse; they deserted The Temple of God and took up with the cult of sex goddesses. An angry cloud hovered over Judah and Jerusalem because of this sin. **19** God sent prophets

to speak truth

to straighten them out, warning of judgment. But nobody paid attention [2nd Chronicles 24:17-19].

That's what sin does, doesn't it? When we get wrapped up in sin and deceit, we are blind. We stop paying attention to the voices of truth. When we are locked up in patterns of habitual sin, of addictions, we might hear voices speaking loudly into our ears, but we pay no mind to them. Joash was taught and trained by the priest Jehoiada. He sat in the front row in all the rabbi's classes and even gave Jehoiada the green light on finding him a wife. Jehoiada was a father to

Joash who had lost his father at a young age. The text makes clear, however, that no matter how many notes the young king took on his laptop while Jehoiada spoke, he never let the words sink from his head to his heart. He knew all about integrity, but he had no idea how to integrate it into his life. Character is about integration. Character is about taking what we know and applying it in our daily lives, in small ways and in big ways, not only the ways we live when other people are watching, but the ways we live when nobody is paying attention. That is how character is defined. This is a familiar story in the human experience. As Isaiah 53:6 tells us,

⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way

We all wander away from wisdom, from what is right, from what is good. In many ways, outside of perhaps running off with a local sex cult, I am not that different from Joash. I don't always live according to what I know. It often stays in the head and doesn't leak down into my heart. I only show glimpses of character when I know God is calling me to much more.

This has been a chaotic week for me. My wife and I and our eldest and only son Wyatt moved from New Brighton, Minnesota to the Kenny neighborhood in south Minneapolis. Are there any Kennytites out there? One. Thank you. You are our new babysitter. We'll talk afterwards. I'll get you the proper paperwork and we'll make it happen. Moving is one of the worst things in the world if I can be dramatic about it. In the process of the planning of the move, the packing of the boxes, the preparing, the perspiring and everything, I have spent about 90 percent of my time, thinking about the colors of the rooms and the right decor to give the house the vibe that I'm going for. I haven't been thinking about the plumbing or the fact that we should probably get a new water heater at some point soon. I haven't so much as started to establish a budget so that we can pay for the house. That would be a nice thing, but on that issue, I couldn't tell you much about it. Don't know.

I don't know about you but for me, I can easily slip into that place where my faith in Christ is like the new home I just bought, outside in. I want to make sure the paint colors and the pictures all look good. I want to go to church because that would make me look good. I tithe, I don't curse, smoke or chew or hang with girls who do. I grew up Baptist. But I rarely keep my eyes on the plumbing of the house or the bricks that lay the foundation. The truth is, you can have a gorgeous house and the floor might still cave in on you.

Jehoiada, the priest, lived in covenant with the God he knew, not merely knew about. Character is formed by our desire to know God above all else and live in accordance with His will. Character is manifested in who we are when no one else is watching. What are we doing in our lives to integrate the things we know about God and truth and beauty so that our foundation is strong and so we are women and men of character? Charles Spurgeon said, "It's easier to build temples for God than it is to *be* a temple of God." There's a lot of truth in that.

The Bible says something subtle but remarkable in talking about the deaths of Jehoiada the priest and Joash the king. It says when Joash died,

²⁵⁻²⁷ . . . they buried him in the City of David, but he was not honored with a grave in the royal cemetery [2nd Chronicles 24:25-27].

Joash lived with his priorities on the outside *where people were watching*. He lived as a king but lost his crown. He didn't get to die with the kings. But when Jehoiada the priest died, it says,

¹⁴⁻¹⁶ They buried him in the royal cemetery because he had such a distinguished life of service to Israel and God and God's Temple [2nd Chronicles 24:14-16].

Jehoiada the priest lived in covenant with the God he knew, not merely knew about. Character is formed by our desire to know God above all else and live in accordance with His will. Character is manifested by who we are *when no one else is watching*. Jehoiada lived as a priest but died as a king and that's what character does. Unlike Joash who lost his crown, Jehoiada earned one through his death. Character is what defines our lives. You can live as a priest, a politician, a mom, a teacher, a bartender or a bus driver, but if you live with a commitment to character, then you will die as a king or a queen.

I want to end here with three Biblical truths that have helped me and I think will help you live like men and women of God so that we can die like kings and queens. The first one is this. **Public opinion is overrated.**

- Pursue God, not popular opinion.

1 My dear friends, don't let public opinion influence how you live out our glorious, Christ-originated faith [James 2:1].

- Now, if we are followers of Christ, if that is what we profess, then our vision for our life, our main goal, is to love the Lord our God above all else and love our neighbors as ourselves.

30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 'Love your neighbor as yourself' [Mark 12:30-31].

- If we structure our lives around that vision, if that is what it is all about, then daily we have to be thinking, what am I seeking? Where are my thoughts? What are my actions? Are they actually moving toward that vision? Am I getting closer or am I not even paying mind to the vision that is out there? What the masses say and what is true are rarely the same thing. There is usually a huge schism, a wide gap, between the truths and the trends. Which voices are you listening to? When you dwell upon what people think about you, you lose your grasp of everything that God says about you.

God says that you are justified and redeemed.

24 . . . all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus [Romans 3:24].

God says that you are valuable and have a purpose.

10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do [Ephesians 2:10].

God says that you are set free from the lies of sin.

2 . . . through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death [Romans 8:2].

God says that you are forgiven and blameless before God.

4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight [Ephesians 1:4].

And most importantly, God loves us and really likes us.

4 Brothers and sisters, you are loved by God, and we know that he has chosen you [Thessalonians 1:4].

- Your identity needs to be wrapped up in who God says you are, not who everyone else says you are. Plus the only time people won't criticize you and judge you and size you up is if you are doing nothing but staying quiet and sitting on your hands.
- Character, though, often isn't quiet. Jehoiada wasn't. Jesus wasn't. Walk the narrow road for God did not give us a spirit of fear but of power, love, and self-discipline.

7 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline [2nd Timothy 1:7].

- My prayer for this church is that we would live lives that cause people to talk about us, that there would be people who don't understand why we live the way that we do. We would be judged from time to time because we are choosing a world that is not on the beaten path. It is the narrow road. It is God's way. When we are faithful to that road and we're not listening to popular opinion, we are listening to Christ and what Christ calls us to in our lives. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."

The second truth is that in order to know from the inside out that God is for you, you need to be a person of practice. **Create habits that are healthy, not hell-thy**, a cute play on words there. My wife helped with that one and I think it's pretty clever.

- Chart your course. Take note on how you live. Are the practices of your life consistent with your desire to love the Lord and love others? Do your habits match your vision? The poet John Dryden said this. "We first make our habits, and then our habits make us." Duke University had a research project that just came out that said that more than 40 percent of our actions are unconscious habits. We are creatures of habit. This is the way we do things. For some of us, the only reason we come to church on Sunday is out of habit.
- Organize around the vision of the Lord. If we organize around anything less, we are just moving around chairs on the Titanic. We're wasting time. The structure of your life should always follow the vision of your life, not the other way around.

- With the new school and ministry year coming up here next month, now is a great time to take into account the way we do things. Grab a stool and a chocolate shake and sit in front of the mirror and ask yourself:

Who am I becoming? How am I becoming that person? What are my daily habits and what habits could I put in place that would lead me closer to the vision? Could I be getting up every morning in the Word? Could I be praying for my friends? Could I be serving my neighbors more? How do I love further and how do I live into actions that would make that happen? That calls into that question, maybe our habits aren't the healthiest. Every night I like to have a tray of Oreos and a glass of milk. Is that the healthiest thing? I don't think it is, so maybe I need to revise some things.

We need to be spiritually disciplined daily in the Word, in prayer, in service, in community. Sometimes I think one of our biggest problems is that we don't allow our spiritual hunger to linger long enough to turn into a spiritual metabolism. Habits are formed out of disciplines. What are the disciplines in your life that are forming a spiritual metabolism in you?

At the close of the day, do you say, "What did I do today? How did that bring me closer to loving the Lord and loving my neighbor better?"

- Here's the other piece of this truth: You don't need to fix all of your habits at the same time. Take them bit by bit. Embrace character transformation not as a quick fix but as a slow crawl. Your favorite and my favorite doctor, Dr. Leo Marvin, reminded Bob and us many years ago, "You have to take baby steps." These are small steps. They are small pieces of your life that you can tweak to be closer to God.

The third Biblical truth that I think will help us live like men and women of God is this. **Persist in the pursuit.**

- We need to be people who do not quit. If the door is closed, we start looking for the window to climb in.

¹² Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him [James 1:12].

- All over the Scriptures you read, do not give up. Do not lose heart. Hold fast. The defining characteristics of a woman or man of character is that we are consistent and persist in trying to integrate our faith in our daily lives. It might feel hard at times, but we need to be the people who find a window to crawl through. I was talking earlier this week with that big, hairy, scary pastor Rich Phenow's son, Josh Phenow. We were looking at the world right now, talking about how hard it is to live integrated lives. The world feels like it is falling apart everywhere you look - Russia, Iraq, the Middle East, here, Ferguson, Missouri. We believe that Christ calls us to be peacemakers, to be people who are sowing seeds of hope and goodness and reconciliation and mercy and compassion. It is

a challenging thing, but we don't give up because it is challenging. Well, how do we do that?

- We persist in our pursuit and stay the course. Character is about showing up over and over again and saying, "I may not have done it perfectly yesterday, but today is a new day and I'm going to go for it. I'm going to try to live for Christ this morning, this afternoon." Admittedly, following God in this world can be ambiguous and frustrating and feel empty of hope, but don't lose the pursuit; persevere in it. Be devoted and disciplined in your faith, committed to the hard work of character transformation. It is in our persistence in being people of character that we get our crowns.

I think about that Eutychus story about the guy dying, that bizarre Acts story right at the beginning. Everybody still with me? I didn't lose anyone? I think there is another way you can die. You can lose your life if you let go of your life. Christ tells us that. You let go of your life when you give up control, when you give up the daily patterns, when you give up to your addictions. Let Christ intervene. The one who knows you best loves you the most. You say, "I can't do this on my own. I've tried to; it doesn't work." Don't give up your crown and lean upon someone else's understanding. Lean on Christ alone in your lives so that you can die a king.

I want to be a part of this family, this church that I believe in. I believe in the mission of this church. I see God doing major things inside of our church and I can't wait to see what He will do when we start living in a more integrated way from the inside out. I think He is going to do even more remarkable things. Amen. Let me pray.

Jesus, God, we thank You for this time together this morning. You are faithful, God, and we are stumbling toward You, trying to be people of character following Your Word and Your Spirit. Lord, in this moment right now, we hand over our lives. We ask that You would lead us, God, that You would take our baggage, that You take us and would speak in a very real way into our hearts. Stir in us, Lord, from the inside out and show us how we can live integrated lives as people of integrity. We love You, Lord, and we do not take this time for granted that You give to us when we can gather and worship here. It is a gift, Lord. So many people do not have this luxury. In Jesus' Name, all God's children said, "Amen."

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.