

## **Fifth Sunday in Lent–The Parable of the Talents:**

Matthew 25:24–25, 30 *Then he who had received the one talent came and said, “Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.” ... [His lord said], “cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

It is not enough to simply sit on your faith and never live it out in your life. This is most certainly true, but it doesn't necessarily tell us more about the Kingdom of God and the Kingship of Jesus Christ. But looking at this parable while studying that, I saw something that I haven't ever seen before. The wicked servant isn't just wicked because he's lazy. I'm not saying that being lazy is a good thing, but there is more to what makes him wicked than just laziness. He doesn't even know his Lord and master.

Sure, he claims to know the master, but how does he describe him? He claims the master is one who reaped where he did not sow and gathered where he has not scattered seed. He is a hard man, and one to be feared for his impossible expectations. Yet the other servants did not find him so. They found in him a kind and generous master who not only gave them the money to start with but allowed them to keep the original investment and all their profits. This doesn't sound like the hard master that the unfaithful servant is describing.

That's because he doesn't know him, just as the unbeliever doesn't truly know our Lord Jesus. They claim that he sets for us an impossible standard, when He simply shows us the standard that He kept for us. He has sown seed all over, scattered it to the four corners of the world. Recklessly sowing seed even where it cannot grow, all out of love for His servants. The same servants that He came to save by giving His life for them. So, do you truly know your Lord? I pray that you know Him and His kingdom better as we journey through this Lenten season. Amen.

## **Monday, April 4<sup>th</sup>–Amon: King of Judah**

2 Kings 21:19–26

2 Chronicles 33:21–25

2 Kings 21:23–24 *Then the servants of Amon conspired against him, and killed the king in his own house. But the people of the land executed all those who had conspired against King Amon. Then the people of the land made his son Josiah king in his place.*

Whether for good or bad, Judah largely avoided the short reigns and dynastic turmoil that plagued the Northern Kingdom of Israel, although there were plenty of assassinations. Like Ahaziah who only lived for two years, Amon's reign was cut short by an assassination at the hands of his servants. The people then turned on those assassins, striking them down and making Josiah king in his place.

We see God's providence in this turmoil. The Northern Kingdom's assassinations resulted in several dynasties being completely annihilated—sons, grandsons, women, children, everyone. Although there were plenty of regicides in Judah, they never resulted in complete dynastic ruin. God remained faithful in his promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Solomon. Out of this kingly line would, one way or another, come the Messiah. No sin or plot of the devil could stop God from keeping these promises.

Even through the Babylonian captivity and the many years afterwards, God remained faithful to his promise to send a Messiah from the stump of Jesse. That Savior likewise remained faithful to his mission, never sinning yet bearing your sin the whole way, dying and rising to forgive and save. He remains faithful in his promises to you. Baptism now saves you. His Word forgives. He works faith in your hearts by the Holy Spirit. The Lord's Supper unites you with the divine flesh of the God-man.

## Tuesday, April 5<sup>th</sup>—Shallum: King of Israel

2 Kings 15:10–15

2 Kings 15: 13–15 *Shallum the son of Jabesh became king in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah king of Judah; and he reigned a full month in Samaria. For Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, came to Samaria, and struck Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria and killed him; and he reigned in his place. Now the rest of the acts of Shallum, and the conspiracy which he led, indeed they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.*

We know in our minds that God is in control of the course of history, but we seldom think of that practically. In other words, we say that we know that this is true without actually stopping to consider and realize that this is actually true. God proves it time and time again, and even points it out to us time and time again. Remember when Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, and then God turned around and used it to save the entire world?

It's not just the serendipitous good that God brings to the faithful; God uses the same power to punish the wicked. Shallum is a perfect example of this. Zechariah was a wicked king who did not fear the Lord. God used the wicked ambition of Shallum to achieve his goal of punishing the wicked family of Jehu by ending his dynasty. Shallum himself was no saint, so God will later punish him with the ambition of another wicked man, Menahem. If this sounds familiar, it's because this same pattern has already played itself out in the history of the Northern Kingdom. Zimri killed Elah, executing God's justice on the house of Jeroboam, and was himself killed shortly after by Omri. At least for Shallum, he got to reign for three more weeks than Zimri did.

God is in control of our world. This doesn't mean that we're robots, but it does mean that we can trust in Him to give us what we need most. And sometimes that's suffering. Other times, it's happiness. But always it's joy in what He's done for us on the cross. For the wicked will not escape God's wrath. The only way to escape it is to have that wrath pour out on Jesus own head. Trust in our Lord to deliver and keep you. Amen.

## Saturday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>—Zechariah: King of Israel

2 Kings 14:29–15:12

2 Kings 15:8–10 *In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his fathers had done; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. Then Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and struck and killed him in front of the people; and he reigned in his place.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is all we have recorded in the Scriptures for us regarding Zechariah, son of Jeroboam II. It is likely that, due to the length of his father's reign, he was not a child like some of the other kings were. It's also likely that he was not thrust suddenly into his role as king but was prepared to take on this role. So why is his reign so short and ends so violently? Perhaps it's because Shallum was evil and saw an opportunity to seize control of Israel, much like Zimri had earlier. Perhaps it's because Jeroboam II was a brutal dictator to his people (2 Kings 14:23–25), and his son wasn't any better.

Ultimately, it was because God had promised that since Jehu would not abandon the twisting of God's Word brought about by Jeroboam, his descendants would only remain on the throne to the fourth generation. "This was the word of the Lord which He spoke to Jehu, saying, 'Your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.' And so it was" (2 Kings 15:12).

In many ways, Western Christianity has been resting on the faithfulness of our forefathers for a long time now. Sure, we had the "Battle for the Bible" in the 60s–70s, but despite claiming to have "won" that battle, did we really? For our claims to love God's Word so much that we fought to keep it, how many in our congregations have more than just a passing familiarity with it? How many of you, right now, without looking at your table of contents or any tabs on the side of your Bible could easily find the book of Hebrews? Would you have any clue where to look, what other books might be nearby? God's patience with the apathy and apostasy of Western Christianity is not infinite, and we may be headed towards a time of violence like Zechariah's reign. May God preserve our faith and keep us secure in His hands during these increasingly hostile days.

## **Friday, April 1<sup>st</sup>—Manasseh: King of Judah**

2 Kings 21:1–18

2 Chronicles 33:1–20

Manasseh reigned the longest of any of the kings of Israel or Judah: fifty-five years. Not only were his deeds evil, but his reign of an entire generation so altered Judah that there would be no coming back from the idolatry that had set deeply into the culture of the nation. “Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel” (2 Chronicles 33:9).

Manasseh rebuilt all the high places that his forefathers had torn down. He erected altars to Baal, Asherah, and set idols in the house of the Lord. He brought back fortune-telling, sorcery, mediums, and necromancy. He even sacrificed his sons on altars to Molech.

And yet, he repented. The Assyrians captured him and brought him to Babylon, where he called upon the Lord, who heard his plea and brought him back to Jerusalem. He even worked to destroy the very altars he had built and restore the altar of the Lord to its proper use.

What are we to make of this man? He is certainly a prefigurement of Saul-turned-Paul, someone who did unspeakable crimes yet repented and became a strong believer. On the other hand, Manasseh could not completely undo all the evil he had accomplished in his long reign. While we praise God for every sinner who repents, we also lament the great evil done by leaders that infect the culture of those who follow them—evils that are far harder to remove. In the end, Babylon would come and take the people into captivity. Such it is with repentance: God removes our sin from before his face as far as the east is from the west because of Jesus’s blood, but we may still suffer the earthly consequences for our actions. We pray even in those consequences that our Lord will be merciful. For the sake of Christ, he was merciful for the line of David, not snuffing it out, and his mercy extends to you through Christ.

## **Wednesday, April 6<sup>th</sup>—Josiah (or Josias): King of Judah**

2 Kings 22:1–23:30

2 Chronicles 34:1–35:27

Josiah is an inspiring figure in the history of Judah. After the turmoil of Manasseh and Amon, Josiah is crowned at only 8 years of age. He shows more dedication to religious and cultural renewal than any other king in Judah’s history.

First, he brought back true worship of God. He tasked workmen with repairing the temple and did not even nickel-and-dime them with the costs (2 Kings 22:7). While they were cleaning out the temple, they found the Book of the Law, likely containing the Pentateuch. While a scribe began to read it, Josiah tore his clothes in repentance, realizing how far from God’s law the people had wandered. Because of his repentance, God chose to delay his punishment upon Judah until after Josiah’s reign.

Hearing this, Josiah then began cleansing the land of all idols. He was so thorough that the writer of Kings says, “Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him” (23:25).

In the end, Judah was still doomed to fall under God’s wrath. Do we not live under similar circumstances? We live in an idolatrous land. Who knows when and how God’s wrath will fall? But we are given to do what Josiah did: repent, worship God rightly, recognize idols, and strive against our sinful nature, the world, and the devil. We do what we can with the time that is given to us and entrust the future to His hands. May God be mercy on us.

## **Thursday, April 7<sup>th</sup>—Menahem: King of Israel**

2 Kings 15:14–22

2 Kings 15:19–20 *Pul king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to strengthen the kingdom under his control. And Menahem exacted the money from Israel, from all the very wealthy, from each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and did not stay there in the land.*

Menahem was not a legitimate king, at least not in the way that the kings of Israel were typically chosen. They were either a direct descendant of the king before them, or they were anointed by a prophet of the Lord to slay the current king and to assume his throne. Menahem was none of the above. He was simply a wicked man who had slain the previous wicked man who had slain his wicked king. So he most likely felt the lack of any sort of authority other than “I have the power to kill you because of my army.” But when Pul (aka Tiglath Pileser) came knocking on the door of Samaria, Menahem saw a way forward. He couldn’t possibly meet Pul in battle; Assyria was the dominant world power at the time, and Israel’s armies had been decimated. But, if he could convince Pul to leave without a fight, then he would be a hero and show the people that he legitimately deserved to rule. So he did, by paying him the exorbitant sum of 1,000 talents of silver (about \$26 million in current US dollars). That was how much being a legitimate king was worth to him.

But we struggle with that same thing; we struggle with the world seeing us as legitimate. We don’t want to be called crazy or schismatic or fundamentalist or any other derogatory buzzword. So we assure everyone that “we’re a Christian, but we’re not like ‘those’ Christians,” followed by us typically denying some point of Christian doctrine. Was it worth it? Menahem’s bribe bought Israel a few years, but Assyria came back and eventually wiped out the entire kingdom. It’ll be worse for us. Denying what Jesus taught is denying Him, and that’s never worth it. We are to deny ourselves, not Him. Let us take up our crosses, denying ourselves and this world’s “legitimacy” and be legitimately following Christ this Lenten season. Amen.

## **Thursday, March 31<sup>st</sup>—Jeroboam II: King of Israel**

2 Kings 14:23–29

Amos 5:14–15 *Seek good and not evil, That you may live; So the Lord God of hosts will be with you, As you have spoken. Hate evil, love good; Establish justice in the gate.*

*It may be that the Lord God of hosts Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.*

Jeroboam II continued after the fashion of his namesake and made nearly two centuries of generational wickedness come to bitter fruition. Amos presents the vivid picture: the elite prospered at the gross exploitation of all those beneath them, wanton debauchery was rampant, the land was bereft of justice, and worship was spiritually bankrupt as the people followed the temple cultus at Bethel.

Under this king, the aristocracy made it their special priority to falsely acquire land and then buy those who had dwelt on it as slaves for mere pittance. This land was not a simple matter of real estate. In a sacramental way it was each family’s stake in the eternal Promised Land. The elites were regularly engaging in a spiritual ravaging of families as well as the “living” Land for their own profit. Meanwhile, they would go to Bethel to offer the obligatory sacrifices and prayers—even as they were looking to their idols.

Those who desired in their hearts to do the right thing were compelled to silence because evil dominated.

Through Amos, God revealed that He has reached His limit. The Day of the Lord they sought would be their undoing. Jeroboam would die. The elite would suffer tenfold the very shame and death that had inflicted on the people. A famine of the Word would come upon Israel, a more terrible judgment than natural calamities. God would tear down the temple at Bethel Himself. He would hunt down the arrogant deniers with prejudice from the depths of Sheol to the heights of Carmel.

Yet the Day of the Lord for the faithful who are plowed under or silenced will be a glorious day. Indeed, it has already come in Christ, the Tabernacle of David who has been raised up from the ruin (Amos 9:11ff).

## **Wednesday, March 30<sup>th</sup>—Hezekiah: King of Judah**

2 Kings 18:1–20:21

2 Chronicles 29:1–32:33

2 Kings 19:34 *For I will defend this city, to save it For My own sake and for My servant David's sake.*

God uses the princes of this world to call us to repentance. That is what happened when Assyria appeared before the gates of Jerusalem, openly mocking God and laying bare the idolatry and foolish alliances that Judah had made, particularly with Egypt.

Repeatedly, God had instructed the leaders of His people to trust Him alone for their defense. Yet, out of persisting weakness and failure to remain engaged in God's Word and His promises, Hezekiah made forbidden treaties and capitulated to Assyria's relentless conquering.

Recognizing the dire situation of Jerusalem and the futility of trusting in the ways of men, Hezekiah immediately fell to his knees in repentance and prayer, seeking mercy and help from the living God.

When God uses the rulers of darkness to call us to repentance, it is often because we have allowed our constitutional freedoms to be used to overturn God's created order, or to sacrifice those weaker than ourselves on the altars of convenience and covetousness. Even if we don't directly support those that do these evils, we find ourselves apathetic in our knowledge, faithless in our prayers, and lacking in our conversation. In this way, too, we become complicit in alliances with Babel-Redux's princes.

Thus, we should be little surprised when God finally gives us over to those who, in league with their demon masters, fashion themselves after the blood-lusting, power-mad gods of the ancient world. They would again make us slaves of the fallen dragon-prince, as they are. They would make us fearful of his overlord, Death, as they are. When these dark days come, may God's Holy Spirit grant us wisdom like Hezekiah to repent, and boldly trust in the one true King of Creation who has, for those justified in Him, ordered all things for a blessed life in His eternal Kingdom.

## **Friday, April 8<sup>th</sup>—Jehoahaz(Joahaz/Shallum):King of Judah**

2 Kings 23:31–33

2 Chronicles 36:1–4

Jeremiah 22:10–12 *Weep not for the dead, nor bemoan him; Weep bitterly for him who goes away, For he shall return no more, Nor see his native country. For thus says the Lord concerning Shallum [Jehoahaz] the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, who went from this place: "He shall not return here anymore, but he shall die in the place where they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more."*

Judah is on the decline, she has had her last king who followed the Lord. Now until her time of exile only wicked men remain who try to manipulate the people and God himself. We start with Jehoahaz, also known as Shallum and Joahaz. The book of 2 Kings tells us that he did evil (23:32) but not what evil he did. But we do know that he is on the receiving end of his father's folly. In opposing Pharaoh Necho, Josiah had provoked Egypt's anger. So Egypt comes in and deposes Jehoahaz after he was king for a short three months. Necho then makes Eliakim, Jehoahaz's brother, king. Jehoahaz then becomes the first of the kings to be taken away from Judah to die in captivity, never to see the promised land again.

And even though Jehoahaz deserved it, it's hard not to feel a bit of pity for him. Caught up in a war that he didn't start, and because of his father he will never again see the land of his birth but will die in captivity. Yet, how many of us have chosen to voluntarily do just that? To leave behind home and congregation and strike out across the state, or nation, or even across the world. And how often do we do that without even thinking about where we might find the real promised land? The land where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed faithfully. Where the people are washed in the waters of Baptism? Where the Body and Blood of Jesus are given to you regularly? Instead our thoughts are about the job prospects, the school system, the college degree, the property values, the crime rate, and any other host of concerns. Let's take an honest look at our lives, repent of our own evils that we have done, and return to the Lord. Amen.

## **Saturday, April 9<sup>th</sup>—Pekahiah: King of Israel**

2 Kings 15:22–26

2 Kings 15:23–25 *In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem became king over Israel in Samaria, and reigned two years. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. Then Pekah the son of Remaliah, an officer of his, conspired against him and killed him in Samaria, in the citadel of the king's house, along with Argob and Arieah; and with him were fifty men of Gilead. He killed him and reigned in his place.*

Pekahiah is the last king of Israel to succeed his father. Death and destruction have come home to roost in the halls of Samaria. We don't know much about the specific sins of Pekahiah, but he did continue in the sins of the kings of Israel. This sin had been plaguing the kings of Israel since Jeroboam received the kingdom from the Lord: the sin of twisting God's Word and making the two golden calves. This sin had increased over the time due to the constant addition of false gods to worship. It spiraled so out of control that even human sacrifice became such a common practice. The prophet Hosea tells us about it in Hosea 13:2, "And now they sin more and more, and make for themselves metal images, idols skillfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of them, 'Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!'" (ESV).

Pekahiah's evil is so utterly unremarkable compared to the rest of his nation that is barely worth mentioning. Evil wasn't just commonplace, it was "how it's supposed to be" and "how it's always been" in Israel. We sit here in 2022 and think to ourselves, "how could they let this happen?" But we already know. The devil has mastered the slow slide into wickedness. Abortion and transgenderism didn't just spring out of the ground as evils that our Western culture embraced out of nowhere. You can see their roots in the sexual revolution, birth control, and no-fault divorce. And I'm sure if we sat down, we could see the roots going even further back than that. And yes, it seems to be accelerating the pace at which a new evil is revealed and accepted as good by our culture. Just like Israel was rapidly accelerating before they were destroyed. Pray for our hearts and the hearts of those around us to be filled with repentance this Lenten season, that we might turn to Him in these days of destruction. Amen.

## **Tuesday, March 29<sup>th</sup>—Jehoash (or Joash): King of Israel**

2 Kings 13:10–14:16

2 Chronicles 25:17–24

2 Kings 13:17b *And [Elisha] said, "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance and the arrow of deliverance from [Aram]; for you must strike the [Arameans] at Aphek till you have destroyed them."*

Jehoash wasn't particularly bad, especially as compared to other kings of Israel. But he was still judged as evil for two reasons.

First, like the kings before, Jehoash didn't tear down the golden calves set up by Jeroboam I at Bethel and Dan when the kingdom first divided. He may not have endorsed idolatry, but he tolerated it. Later he rebuked his counterpart, King Amaziah of Judah, not because Amaziah had fallen into idolatry, but rather for getting too big for his britches.

Second, he demonstrated faithlessness unbecoming of one serving in the office of Christ's kingship. In 2 Kings 13:14ff, Elisha, in the waning hours of life, instructed Jehoash to shoot an arrow. This represented God's promise to destroy the threat of the Arameans. Then Elisha told the king to grab more arrows and let fly. Not trusting God's spoken fidelity, or perhaps seeking his own glory, he let loose only a few instead of a whole handful. Elisha chastised him for not grasping in boldness the full promise of God. Because of this, the Arameans would now endure. They would form part of the Babylonian Empire, who would conquer God's people and take them into exile.

Jehoash is a warning account to be bold in faith, grasping Christ firmly as the divine grace-bearer when the Lord makes promises to His people. For, as Luther says, "It is a great reproach and dishonor to God if we, to whom He offers and pledges so many unspeakable treasures, despise the same, or have not the confidence to receive them, but scarcely venture to pray for a piece of bread" (LC III, 57).

## Monday, March 28<sup>th</sup>—Ahaz: King of Judah

2 Kings 16:1–20

2 Chronicles 28:1–27

Isaiah 7:9b “If you will not believe, Surely you shall not be established.”

There are rulers who seek to do a little good in return for a plethora of evil, though they do not see it at the time. Ahaz neutralized threats to his rule, but it came at the complete expense of his soul and the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Judah. Even before appealing to Assyria, Ahaz was sealing his intended villainy with the blood of his own sons in the wicked acts of sacrificing to Moloch.

And yet, God sees an opportunity to demonstrate His unsearchable capacity for mercy, that He truly is the King over all kings, no matter the vile machinations they concoct in the dark corners of their hearts. With war at his doorstep, God sends Isaiah to Ahaz with the promise of a sign testifying to a greater promise that the kingdoms rising against Judah will not prevail. Remarkably, Ahaz will not ask for one; perhaps because he knows that God’s word is true, and it would not give him justification to align with the glory of Assyria, nor support from those who also witness the sign.

The homage Ahaz went on to pay to Assyria’s pagan rule was a deliberate affront to God’s long-established, spoken will against such treaties, placing the kingdom into a vassal state. This nefarious king gleefully traded regular tributes from Judah’s wealth for worldly honor, unclean sacrifices to a demonic nation.

Satan cannot overcome the Church. So, when a ruler like Ahaz positions himself against God after the fashion of the fallen prince, there will be strife for the Christian community within those borders. Ahaz means to work for evil. But God works good for His people. Thus, God gives Ahaz a sign nonetheless, a prophecy that points to the coming of the Christ by a virgin.

## Palm Sunday—Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 18:23–35

Matthew 18:26–27 *The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.*

This parable hits home every time I read it. I’m bad at letting go of those times when I’ve been hurt or wronged. And then the weight of my sins comes crashing down on me as I read this parable, and all I can do is cry out to Jesus for mercy.

But as I was reading this parable in light of these kings of Israel and Judah, something struck me that I usually just gloss over. The servant asks not for mercy, he asks for patience. He wants simply for more time to repay this debt. This is an impossible debt for the common man, \$20.9 billion in today’s US dollars. It is staggering that this master would even give out this much money to his servant.

However, that’s not the biggest thing in this parable. It’s the master’s reaction. The master doesn’t lament the loss and despair of ever recovering it. He simply sees the plight of his servant in front of him and has compassion on him. Then without thinking about it, he writes that debt off. He cancels it. It’s as if he never had that money to begin with. To put it in a modern perspective, if Jeff Bezos, the richest man in the world in 2021 according to Forbes, just chalked it off at a loss, he would lose 11% of his net worth, not just his money on hand, but net worth. That’s not a small loss. But this master is so rich and cares so much for his servant that he doesn’t hesitate. He doesn’t ask for a written promise or a vow or anything. He just forgives.

Which is why He is our master. This is who Jesus is. He is rich in grace and mercy, and just gives it away. Sure, it cost Him His life, but He’s not stingy with it. He gives and forgives. So, when you come to this king bowed down with your sins this Lenten season, remember that He is gracious and merciful, forgiving far beyond our capability to understand. Amen.

## **Monday, April 11<sup>th</sup>—Jehoiakim: King of Judah**

2 Kings 23:34–24:5

2 Chronicles 36:5–7

Jeremiah 36:30–31 Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: “He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. I will punish him, his family, and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring on them, on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and on the men of Judah all the doom that I have pronounced against them; but they did not heed.”

Jehoiakim, formerly known as Eliakim, was the brother of the previous king Jehoahaz and the son of the king Josiah. He was the first of the puppet kings installed by a foreign power. He was not a good king—or even a good man. Or, for that matter, a good vassal. He was corrupt and switched sides whenever he saw a chance to be on the “winning” side—and even then he couldn’t really pick the winning side. He definitely couldn’t stand it when God called him to repentance through the prophet Jeremiah. He heard of Jeremiah reading a scroll calling all Judah, including himself, to repentance. He acquired a copy of the scroll and had a member of his council, Jehudi, read the scroll to him. He proceeded to cut it to pieces as it was read and toss it into the fire. It was in rebuke to this that God spoke the words of Jeremiah 36:30–31. We aren’t sure when this promise of God was fulfilled, as it wasn’t recorded. But it likely happened during the upcoming siege of Jerusalem, that Jehoiakim is taken outside the walls and killed there, his body unceremoniously dumped to the ground by Babylon.

There was another King of the Jews who was taken outside of Jerusalem and killed for treason against his emperor. Only instead of the emperor of Babylon, this was the emperor of Rome. This man was killed for crimes that weren’t his own, but for the good of His people. This man didn’t treat God’s Word with contempt, rather He was that very Word of God made flesh. Yes, I am talking about Jesus Christ, the king of kings. He is everything that Jehoiakim isn’t. He is selfless instead of selfish. He is just and righteous instead of wicked and unjust. And He is our king. This Holy Week, keep your eyes on our king as He ascends to His cross outside Jerusalem, where He takes on all our punishment on Himself. Amen.

## **Fourth Sunday in Lent—Parable of the Vineyard Workers**

Matthew 20:1–16

Matthew 20:13b–16 *“Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good? So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”*

The human desire for justice is strong. This is especially the case with regards to justice for ourselves. We want what is due to us when it is in our favor. Thankfully, God does not work this way. He does not give us the punishment we deserve. But even his mercy and forgiveness are not given according to what we deserve: they are given freely by grace.

This is grating to many. Jesus tells a parable that highlights this. A master of a house hires laborers at different times of the day. He promises the first ones a denarius, typical wages for a day’s work. But to all the others he promises “whatever is right”—and they trust him enough to work the rest of the day. He gives a denarius to each, regardless of whether they worked a full day or only an hour.

Those who worked the whole day are angry. They had been doing the math. Surely they deserve far more for their work! But God’s math is not man’s math. He gives his mercy to all because all have deserved damnation equally. The mercy shown to them is far greater than any small increase that they are complaining over. God’s justice was focused on Jesus Christ as he died on the cross, and God’s mercy is found in the crucifixion and in the gifts that God now gives to you free of charge and free from works.

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A Note from Rev. Franson (Nythrirus):

You will need your Bible! This devotional is a study on the kings of Israel & Judah, but we cannot possibly fit the entire reign of each king in this booklet. Some of the entries will have a selection from the Scripture reading printed, but others will not. With every devotional, there will be a selection from the books of Kings and Chronicles listed that contains the record of their rule. Please read those passages to get a full understanding of what the devotional writer is saying.

Come quickly, O Jesus Christ, King of Kings. Amen.

The Sons of Solomon Discipline:

The Sons of Solomon is an ecumenical prayer habitus of catholic Christian men worldwide focused on the Psalms and Proverbs. We agree on what we all confess: The Three Ecumenical Creeds. We pray the prayers God gave us to pray, and seek together the wisdom that is from above.

How?

1. Carry a bible, prayer book, and crucifix with you.  
What is a prayer book?

Anything that points you back to the scriptures in your daily life: a hymnal, catechism, theological book...Anything by which you find inspiration to open, read and ponder the scriptures

Is this required at all times?

We are not practitioners of Judaism.

"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."

Do not abandon prudence, practice wisdom and discipline.  
Let the image of the perfect man be your spiritual focus.

2. Meditate on a Proverb every day.  
How might one do that?

Translate the Proverb into your own words. Carry that thought with you on a piece of paper for a day. Pray that you might use the thought in a conversation. Leave the note alone for a week, then read it again and repeat the process. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the wisdom of the Holy Scriptures. Let the author teach you wisdom, that you may be thoroughly equipped.

3. Read the Psalms of the Diaspora each day:  
Morning: Psalms 123, 1257, 127  
Mid-day: Psalms 124, 129  
Vespers: Psalms 126, 128  
Evening: Psalms 130, 131

The Daughters of Wisdom Discipline:  
Mothers, Sisters, Daughters, pray for the Patriarchy. Pray for the blessings God has promised. Pray for God's will to be done.

Morning: Psalm 133, 1 Samuel 2: 1–10

Meditate on how joyous it is when brothers dwell together in unity! For additional morning encouragement, add the Song of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, as she gives thanks to God.

Midday: Proverbs 31

The Wisdom of the mother of King Lemuel. Meditate on the promises God gives to the wife that trust his words. Meditate on the blessings you are given. Consider the life presented therein, and rejoice in it.

Vespers: Psalm 135 (optional)

Remember the mighty works of the LORD Jesus, and remember the folly of those who trust in idols of silver and gold (and plastic).

Compline: Psalm 134, Magnificat

Bless the LORD Jesus at the end of the day, and add in the Song of Mary, the mother of our LORD, as she gives thanks to God.

Learn more about this discipline at <https://sonsofsolomon.net/dow>

Lenten devotional for Christians who wait for the King of Kings

