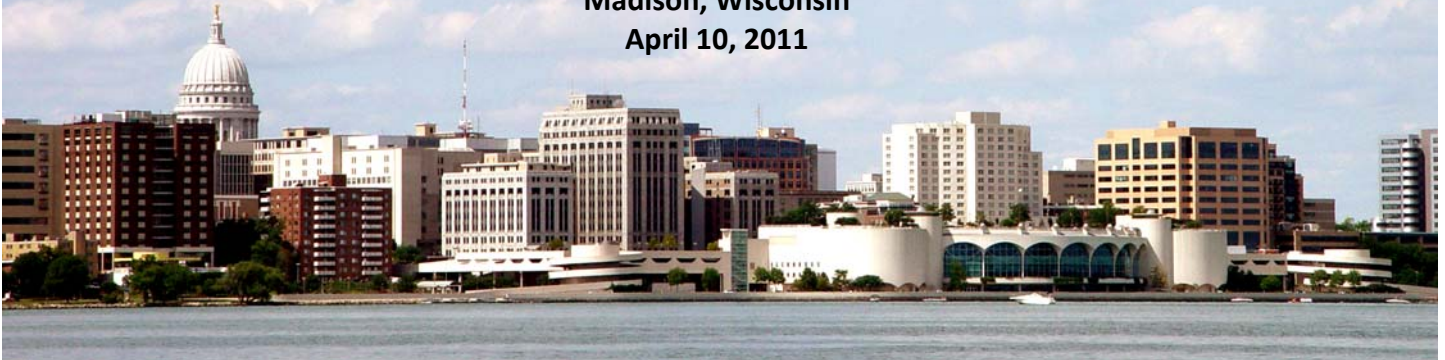


“King Uzziah”

2 CHRONICLES 26

Baxter T. Exum (#1110)
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This morning I would like for us to study a sin that (according to God’s word) has the power to deceive the heart, a sin that can harden the mind, a sin that can cause stumbling and destruction, a sin that stirs up strife, and a sin that is an abomination to God. It is common in our world today, and it is a constant struggle for most of us. I am referring to the sin of PRIDE, and for a rock-solid example of what not to do, I would invite you to look very carefully with me this morning at the life of King Uzziah as his life is summarized for us in 2 Chronicles 26 (p. 728). King Uzziah was actually one of the most successful kings in the Old Testament. You might remember that after Saul, David, and Solomon, the kingdom split, with the ten northern tribes generally known as the Kingdom of Israel and the two southern tribes generally known as the Kingdom of Judah. The northern tribes left God almost from the very beginning and never really came back. They were destroyed and carried away by the Assyrians in 722 BC. On the other hand, the southern tribes did a little better. There were ups and downs, there were good kings and bad kings, but among the kings who were generally better and more successful, we come across King Uzziah. Uzziah reigned for 52 years, from 792-740 BC.

I. **I would like for us to start, this morning, by looking together at UZZIAH’S AMAZING SUCCESS AS A RULER OF GOD’S PEOPLE.**

And I would like for us to consider Uzziah’s success by looking together at 2 Chronicles 26:1-15...

¹ And all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the place of his father Amaziah. ² He built Elath and restored it to Judah after the king slept with his fathers. ³ Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem; and his mother’s name was Jechiliah of Jerusalem. ⁴ He did right in the sight of the LORD according to all that his father Amaziah had done. ⁵ He continued to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding through the vision of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God prospered him. ⁶ Now he went out and warred against the Philistines, and broke down the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod; and he built cities in the area of Ashdod and among the Philistines. ⁷ God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians who lived in Gur-baal, and the Meunites. ⁸ The Ammonites also gave tribute to Uzziah, and his fame extended to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong. ⁹ Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate and at

the Valley Gate and at the corner buttress and fortified them. ¹⁰ He built towers in the wilderness and hewed many cisterns, for he had much livestock, both in the lowland and in the plain. He also had plowmen and vinedressers in the hill country and the fertile fields, for he loved the soil. ¹¹ Moreover, Uzziah had an army ready for battle, which entered combat by divisions according to the number of their muster, prepared by Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the official, under the direction of Hananiah, one of the king's officers. ¹² The total number of the heads of the households, of valiant warriors, was 2,600. ¹³ Under their direction was an elite army of 307,500, who could wage war with great power, to help the king against the enemy. ¹⁴ Moreover, Uzziah prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, body armor, bows and sling stones. ¹⁵ In Jerusalem he made engines of war invented by skillful men to be on the towers and on the corners for the purpose of shooting arrows and great stones. Hence his fame spread afar, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong.

As we look back at these verses, there are a few things I should point out. First of all, let's just think about how Uzziah must have felt as a young man, taking over as king when he was only 16 years old. Imagine the pressure! Imagine what that must have felt like. And yet according to verse 4, he ***"did right,"*** he followed the example of his father. Not only that, but three times in this paragraph, we find that Uzziah went to the Lord for guidance. The Bible says that he ***"sought the Lord."*** That is, he wanted to know what God was thinking. He wanted to know what God would have him do in various situations. He ***"sought the Lord."*** And here we have Uzziah as a great example. I wish all 16-year olds would seek the Lord! And then in verse 5 we find that he ***"continued to seek God."*** He went looking for God's view on things in the days of Zechariah. There are several men by the name Zechariah in the Bible. We don't know much about this particular Zechariah, but we do know that this Zechariah ***"had understanding through the vision of God."*** Apparently, this Zechariah was a prophet. And so we find that Uzziah kept on going to God for advice. And the Bible points out (at the end of verse 5), that ***"as long as he sought the Lord, God prospered him."*** In other words, for as long as King Uzziah followed God, God blessed him. And we find in the rest of this section that God blessed him incredibly!

In verses 6-7, Uzziah went after the Philistines and made some amazing progress. He basically moved in to their territory. He expanded the kingdom in several directions—out toward the Arabians, and down south even as far as Egypt. According to verse 8, his ***"fame extended"*** and he was ***"very strong."*** He built towers in strategic locations and strengthened the kingdom. He had some amazing military power, and he used it! The Bible tells us (in verse 8) that the Ammonites paid him tribute. In other words, the powerful Ammonites were so scared they basically said, "Hey, how about if we give you some money! Please, let us give you money!" They were terrified.

And yet not only was Uzziah strong militarily, but we also find that he was interested in agriculture. He built cisterns, he had a lot of livestock, he had vineyards and fields, he loved the soil.

And then in verse 11, we get back to the military thing, and we find that Uzziah also had an army ***"ready for battle."*** This army was roughly the size of the United States Air Force (307,500 in Uzziah's army vs. c.320,000 in the Air Force), and these were warriors who could ***"wage war with great power."*** They were well-equipped: shields, spears, helmets, body armor, bows, and sling stones. But on top of this, Uzziah developed and deployed ***"engines of war invented by skillful men,"*** machines that were used for shooting arrows and great stones. These were machines that could rapidly and repeatedly fire missiles from towers—large arrows or javelins—almost like a giant crossbow mounted on a cart. Historians tell us that a catapult from that time could launch a 30-pound stone for a distance of up to 500 yards. The Bible tells us that he was famous, and again, the Bible also tells us that he was able to do these things because God was with him. According to verse

15, ***“...he was marvelously helped until he was strong.”*** By the way, I didn’t tell you this earlier, but the name Uzziah means, “Yahweh is My Strength.” It would be so nice if this chapter ended with verse 15; and yet unfortunately for King Uzziah, the story continues.

II. **If you will, then, please continue with me by looking at verses 16-23 as we consider the rest of the story, the account of KING UZZIAH BEING DEVASTATED BY THE SIN OF PRIDE.**

The rest of the chapter, starting with verse 16,

¹⁶ But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. ¹⁷ Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the LORD, valiant men. ¹⁸ They opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the LORD God." ¹⁹ But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense. ²⁰ Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the LORD had smitten him. ²¹ King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king's house judging the people of the land. ²² Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first to last, the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, has written. ²³ So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the grave which belonged to the kings, for they said, "He is a leper." And Jotham his son became king in his place.

Uzziah could have been one of the greatest kings in Israel’s history. He served for 52 years, more than half a century; that’s longer than David or Solomon. He was a great military leader; he led the nation into a period of economic growth and security. He could have truly been the greatest king, and yet the Bible tells us in verse 16 that ***“...when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the Lord his God.”*** He had military and economic power, but that wasn’t enough! All of that power went to his head, and he wanted more. He wanted the ability to serve in the temple. That was the one thing he could not do.

And so the Bible tells us that he ***“entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.”*** The king knew he shouldn’t be doing this. Everybody knew that only the priests were allowed in the temple. Not only that, but the king was specifically warned. In fact, the Bible tells us that Azariah the priest followed him into the temple along with eighty other priests, valiant men, and these priests had the courage to stand up to this king. They basically said, “The word of God does not allow this!” They told the king to ***“get out.”*** “This is not for you,” they said. They warned the king that to do this would make him ***“unfaithful”*** in the eyes of God and would cause him to have ***“no honor”*** from the Lord. The word ***“honor”*** here refers to glory or abundance. The root word refers to “weight.” In other words, the priests were saying, “If you do this, God will cut you off! If you do this, God can take it all away! If you do this, you will no longer have any weight or position before God.” And yet we find that Uzziah already had the censer in his hand. He was already holding the tool for offering incense, and as the priests were making their arguments, the Bible says that Uzziah became ***“enraged.”*** The word ***“enraged”*** is only found five times in the Bible, and two of them are right here in this

verse. The word refers to “boiling up.” In other words, he was incredibly angry. In his own mind, he was too powerful for this. As king, he should have had the right to offer incense in the temple, “Surely God wouldn’t mind! After all, it’s ME we’re talking about here! How dare you people oppose me like this! I’m the king! I’m strong! God has blessed me! All I want to do is have a little worship service. I mean, what could possibly be wrong with that?” And so we have Uzziah the king trying to light this incense, thinking that he could please God by this act of worship...but God was not pleased!

God struck him with leprosy on the forehead. As far as I can tell, Uzziah became the first king of God’s people to ever be struck with leprosy. The Bible tells us that King Uzziah was rushed out of the temple. Smitten by the Lord, King Uzziah lived the rest of his life in a separate house, completely cut off from the temple, and his son took over the daily responsibilities of the king. This one act of rebellion ruined his reputation as a good king, and he lived the rest of his life in quarantine, alone.

Why would King Uzziah do such a thing? Why would he insist on doing something he knew was wrong? The Bible tells us in verse 16 that he did this because his heart was **“proud.”** He forgot where all of that power and success came from. He forgot that he had been blessed by the Lord. He was too good to honor God’s plan for his life. He was special. He was the exception to the rule.

The really sad part of this is that God had given a very specific warning all the way back in Deuteronomy 8. Remember: The kings were supposed to make a copy of God’s law by hand. This is something that King Uzziah should have known. This was something he should have had in his own handwriting. Back in Deuteronomy 8:10-14,

¹⁰ "When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. ¹¹ "Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; ¹² otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, ¹³ and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

If we ever forget that God is the source of every blessing, the Bible warns that we can become proud and that we can eventually forget about God altogether.

Back in 1931, an archaeologist affiliated with Hebrew University in Jerusalem discovered a stone tablet in a Russian church on the Mount of Olives. The stone is dated to around the time of Christ, and the inscription on it says this, “Hither were brought the bones of Uzziah King of Judah. Do not open.” Very interesting! Not that Uzziah was buried in the First Century AD, but apparently his bones were moved. Some have speculated that Uzziah’s original burial spot was needed for some kind of construction project, and so his bones were moved a little bit further outside the city, roughly 800 years after his death. The point is: Uzziah was a real person, and King Uzziah, even though blessed by God, was brought down by the sin of pride.

At this point, we ask ourselves the question: So what? Who really cares about this king who lived and died nearly 2,800 years ago? To begin with, I would suggest that our nation needs a dose of humility. We may be the only superpower in the world right now, but aren’t we seeing the need for national humility? Over the past week or so, we have seen some contentious debate on the national level over what is really just a

microscopic percentage of the financial crisis being faced by all of us. I am reminded of a statement made by President Lincoln during the Civil War,

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!

What a contrast between Lincoln and King Uzziah! In fact, what a contrast between this statement and so much of what we hear coming out of Washington today. Let's not think we're beyond needing God in this country. The Bible teaches that many nations have fallen specifically because of their arrogance—the Moabites (Isaiah 16:6), the Amorites (Amos 2:9), the Edomites (Obadiah 3), the Egyptians (Ezekiel 32:12), the Philistines (Zechariah 9:6), the Assyrians (Zechariah 10:11), and the Babylonians (Jeremiah 50:31-32). National pride and arrogance can bring a nation down.

But then we also learn something from King Uzziah on more of a personal level. This morning we have looked at a successful life that was ruined by one arrogant mistake. All of the good that King Uzziah did during the 52 years of his reign has now been overshadowed. He is now remembered in history as “King Uzziah the Leper.” And it all boils down to the sin of pride. As King Solomon knew so well from his own experience, **“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling”** (Proverbs 16:18). Pride makes us think that we know better than God. Proverbs 26:12 tells us that there is **“more hope for a fool”** than for a man who is **“wise in his own eyes.”** You see, pride makes us think that we are the exception to God's rules, and for that reason, pride is so dangerous.

And what is really ironic with King Uzziah is that God's blessings caused him to be so arrogant! The military might, the financial strength, the crops, the vineyards, the possessions, the armaments, all of these things made him think that he was pretty good! All of those blessings caused him to ignore God's law, and yet we remember what James said in James 4:6, **“GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”** When he was a humble teenager looking to God for advice, God blessed the young man, but as he got older, he got too smart for God, and God took it all away.

Conclusion:

As we close our lesson, then, we have a powerful reminder from the Old Testament. It must have been embarrassing for King Uzziah, it must have been an embarrassment for the Kingdom of Judah, and yet we understand that God allows some bad things to happen to others so that we can learn. As we think about King Uzziah, then, let us learn from his mistake. Let us see our successes and blessings as gifts from God, and let us worship God as we should. Let us not arrogantly think that God's rules do not apply to us.

Nearly 3,000 years later, God is still looking for people with open and honest hearts, people who are willing to lean on God, people who are willing to let Him have His way in their lives, willing to go to Him for advice. For those of us who are already a part of this congregation, we need to rethink our priorities. Are we putting the

Lord first in how we spend our time? Are we putting the Lord first in our finances? Are we putting the Lord first with our families? Are we putting the Lord first in our relationships? Or are we holding something back?

And for those who are not yet Christians, God wants you to know that He sent His only Son as a perfect sacrifice. We deserve to die for our sins. We are on “death row,” but the Lord stepped in and took our place. We respond to that sacrifice with humble, faithful obedience. We turn away from all sin. We make a decision that sin will no longer rule in our lives. And then we make an appeal to God for a good conscience by allowing ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. At that point, we are born into the family of God, and the adventure begins. If you have any questions, please ask. If you have something we need to pray about as a congregation, write it down and bring it to the front. But if you are ready to obey the gospel, you can let us know about your decision as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com