

Goodness, as a Morning Cloud

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon warns that outward religious zeal without genuine, personal faith and heart commitment to God is ultimately futile and may lead to spiritual ruin.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 24:2, 2 Chronicles 24:17-18, 1 John 2:19, Proverbs 23:26

Topics: "True Religion", "Spiritual Growth", "Faith and Repentance"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the life of King Joash to illustrate the difference between outward religious observance and true, heartfelt faith in God. Spurgeon challenges listeners to examine their own spiritual state honestly and warns against relying on external influences or family heritage for salvation. He emphasizes the necessity of personal repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as the foundation for genuine godliness and enduring spiritual life.

Transcript

"And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest." 2 Chronicles 24:2.

"Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king listened to them. And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this, their trespass."

2 Chronicles 24:17,18.

THERE is a book called The Museum of Natural History and the most amazing animal in that museum is man. It would be far more easy to understand any other creature than to understand a human being. He is worthy of very great study and the more he is studied, the more will he surprise you. There are certain characters that are great curiosities. Alas, there are, also, other characters that are great monstrosities! You can never tell, from what a man is, what he will be. The case before us is a very extraordinary one because here is a man with every possible advantage who, through a number of years, exhibited the brightest form of character. And, yet, in the end, he was not thought worthy to be laid in the sepulchers of his fathers with others of the kings of Judah. Neither was he worthy of any royal interment, for the latter part of his life blackened and defiled the whole of his career and he who began his reign like the dawning of the day, ended it like the middle of the night.

I wonder whether there are any persons here who will turn out to be very sinful and wicked before life is over? I mean, those who have begun well, who are now the hope and joy of those who know them, but who will end badly, in dishonor to themselves and grief to their households? If there are such here, probably you can find them out by this one test. Those who say, "It is impossible that it should be so with us," are probably the persons. While those who are afraid lest it should be so and ask for Grace that it may not be so, are probably those who will be preserved and whose path will shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

Dear Friends, what need there is to go below the surface in the examination of moral and spiritual character! I shall have to prove this to you, tonight, for in appearance, Joash was all that we could wish. Yet, had he really been what he seemed to be, he would have continued so! If there had been that work of Grace within his soul which there appeared to be in his life, he would not have turned aside as he did, for where a work of Grace is real and true, it is known by its abiding influence throughout the whole of life. Where godly principles have been imparted and a Divine Life has been infused, these things are not taken from a man. "They went out from us, but they were not of us," said the Apostle John, "for if they had been of us, they would, no doubt, have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." So was it with Joash. He turned aside from God because he had never truly known the Lord at all! And his last end was worse than the first because his beginning was really not such as it had seemed to be.

I trust that every person here desires to have genuine religion and not to have the sham. There is a prayer that I recommend to everyone as I desire to use it myself, "Lord, let me know the very worst of my case! Do not suffer me either to deceive myself, or to be deceived by others. If I am not Yours, let me know that I am not Yours. If my repentance is but a seeming repentance and my faith but the mere shadow of faith, and not the substance of it, Lord, by Your good Spirit convince me of my dangerous delusion and let me know where I am and what I am!" I am sure many of you desire to pray like that and, perhaps while I am speaking, that petition may be answered, especially in the case of some of our young friends.

I was very happy, last Sunday night, in preaching as I believe so as to suit the case of one young man of whom I knew but very little. Yet it seems that I described him so accurately that he felt that I was speaking especially to him. At the same time there was another young man, sitting in quite another part of the Tabernacle, who came in on Thursday to tell me how pointedly and distinctly I had described him. On Saturday I received a letter from the center of England, from a father who sent me his son's letter saying that he was here and that I had looked at him, and distinctly and accurately described him. It is not always that we can hit three birds with one shot, but I have been praying that I may have still better success, tonight, and that many may feel, "The preacher is speaking of me. He is describing my character." God grant that it may be so!

My first head will be taken from the first verse of our text—"Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest." This is my first division—It is a great blessing when young people yield to godly influences. The second division will be—But this is not all that is needed. And the third will be—This yielding spirit may prove a source of mischief. Instead of being a blessing, it will be a curse if it has not something more added to it.

I. First, then, IT IS A GREAT BLESSING WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE YIELD TO GODLY INFLUENCES.

Although Joash came of a bad family, yet he had a good aunt who was married to the High Priest, and the aunt and the uncle took care of young Joash. When he was but an infant, they stole him away so that Athaliah might not kill him with the rest of the royal seed. And thus Joash had this remarkable privilege that for six years he lived in the Temple—"He was, with them, hidden in the house of God six years." That is a splendid beginning for any life, to be hidden in the house of God six years! I do not think we ever value enough those first six years of a child's life. Impressions then made have a remarkable influence over the rest of life. Joash was where God's praise was sung from day to day and where holy prayer was perpetually offered. He was seldom beyond the fragrance of the perfumed incense, or away from the sight of the white-robed priests. He heard nothing that could defile him, but everything that could instruct and purify him. He was hidden in the house of the Lord so as not even to go out of it—concealed with godly people for the first six years of his life.

Perhaps, no, I am sure, some of you present had similar happiness. The first thing that you can remember is your mother taking you to a place of worship. You can never forget the time when Father, also, led you there, and did not seem to be happy unless his boy was trotting by his side when he went to hear the Gospel. Among our earliest recollections are the memories of holy hymns and the sayings of gracious people, in whom, as children, we took an interest when they came to our father's house. It is a grand thing that the first days of one's life should bear the impress of the Divine finger. It is well when the vessel begins to revolve upon the wheel and the clay is soft and plastic, that the first fingers that should touch and shape it should be the fingers of God's servants. God grant that they may be as the very finger of God upon our souls! Thus Joash began his career by being hidden in the house of the Lord six years.

After he was seven years of age, he was started on his life's business in a very admirable way. He was to be the king, but there had to be great care taken to sweep away the usurper from the throne and to put the little king upon it. Je-hoiada managed the whole affair with great skill. He also drew up a Covenant for the king to sign, a Covenant with God that he would be obedient to Jehovah as the supreme King, and a Covenant with the people that he would rule according to equity and right, and not tyrannize over them. It was all done so well that no objection was ever taken to it and Joash reigned with great prosperity and happiness over a people who were blessed by his rule. Jehoiada, all the while, being his faithful prime minister and guide.

It is a grand thing to be started in life aright. It is half the battle, you know, to begin well. Some young men and some young women, too, are launched in life wrongly. It seems almost a matter of course that they should be too strongly tempted and, in all probability, yield to the temptation. But many of you were not started so—you began with a father's blessing and with a mother's prayers. You recollect your first going out into life. Some of us remember the ride on the coach when, early in the morning, we had to leave our father's house for the first time. Perhaps it was a cold and bitter frosty morning when we started in those old days to go across the country. We remember it well and how God cared for us and blessed us—and we desire to praise Him that He has preserved us even unto this day! I am showing you the bright side of Joash's career, first. After the six years in the house of God, he had a grand start in life with everything to his advantage. Alas, alas, alas, that, with such a bright beginning, he should come to such a sad end!

Notice, also, that being thus well started, "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest." While that good man lived, the king was under his influence. He consulted him in every matter of importance. He even seems to have been guided by him, to some extent, in the matter of his marriage. He was plastic under his uncle's hands and he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. Mark you, not only that which was right in the sight of good people, but that which was right in

the sight of the Lord! His life seems to have been at least outwardly obedient to the Law of Jehovah and he yielded himself up, apparently, at any rate, to be a loyal servant of the great King. And that he did, not for a short time, only, but all the days in which Jehoiada lived. Well, now, have we not known men and women whose lives have been under the benign influence of some kind elderly person—uncle or aunt, father or mother—and they have done what was right, year after year, as long as their godly relatives lived? They have been diligent in going up to God's house, apparently devout in Bible reading and prayer, willing to assist in holy work in the Sunday school and all sorts of service for the Lord and, leading outwardly most useful, admirable lives all the time that these higher influences were over them, even as "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest"?

Yes, and more than this, he was zealous for the externals of religion—"It came to pass after this, that Joash was minded to repair the house of the Lord." He actually chided Jehoiada, his uncle, because of the slowness of the Levites! "The king called for Jehoiada, the chief, and said to him, Why have you not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection?" Yes, and there are some whose hearts are not right towards God who, nevertheless, are very zealous about the externals of Divine worship. It is a much easier thing to build a temple for God than it is to be a temple for God. And it is a much more common thing for persons to show zeal in repairing temples than in reforming their own manners!

So this young man, you see, went even beyond his uncle in intense zeal for the cause of God, just as there are many, now, who, trained up in the ways of the Lord, are indefatigable in rendering some external service to the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. They would give to the building of a Church. They would work hard to promote the paying for it and so forth, but, alas, you may give and you may work and you may attend to all the externals of religion, and yet have no part nor lot in the matter! Mr. Bunyan says that when he was an ungodly man, he yet had such a reverence for the outwards of religion that he would gladly have kissed the ground that the clergyman walked on—and every nail in the door of the Church seemed holy to him! That is all very fine, but unless there is a great deal more than that in us, we shall fall far short of the requirements of God!

All this while, Joash influenced other people for good. As king, he kept back the nation from the worship of idols. As king, he threw the cloak of his patronage over those who worshipped Jehovah—and things seemed to go well for years—"all the days of Jehoiada the priest." As long as Jehoiada lived, Joash seemed to be all that he should be.

II. Now I am going to turn, for a few minutes, to the second point to show you that, good as all this is, IT IS NOT ALL THAT IS NEEDED.

For, mark you, this is not yielding the heart to God. "My son, give Me your heart," says God. All that Joash had done was to give his heart to Jehoiada, not to Jehovah! It is very easy to be outwardly religious by giving your heart to your mother, or your father, or your aunt, or your uncle, or some good person who helps you to do what is right. You are doing all this out of love to them, which is, at best, but a very secondary motive. God says, "My son, give Me your heart." If your religion is taken up to please any creature, it is not the religion which pleases the Creator. Your homage is due, not to anyone here below, but to Him who sits in the heavens, whose Kingdom rules over all. Dear Christian friends, as you think yourselves to be because of the Christianity of your parents, I do beg you to remember that true religion must be a matter of your own heart and of your own soul. If you merely attend to it out of respect to the dearest and most precious person under Heaven, you do not reach the standard that the Lord has set up!

Note next, that this yielding to godly influence may exist without any personal, vital godliness whatever. You may meet with God's people and yet not be one of God's people! You may give attention to God's servant and yet not be, yourself, God's servant. A young man may yield to his mother's advice and yet never be really repentant on account of sin. He may listen to his father's words and pay respect to the externals of his father's religion, but never have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. You must, yourselves, repent, and yourselves believe in Christ, or else all the rest will aggravate your sin by increasing your responsibility—and it will not go even a hair's breadth towards your salvation! I would have every per-

son here, whether young or old, examine himself to see whether his religion is vital to his own soul. Have you been born again? I enquire not now about your mother, or father, or friends! Have you been born again? Are you now condemned under sin, or are you justified by faith in Jesus Christ? There can be no proxies and no sponsors, here—every man must give account for himself to God—and each man, each woman, must come to the Savior, personally, and accept Him and be saved by Him, or else eternal ruin is certain!

I believe, also, dear Friends, that a character like that of Joash, a yielding character, an externally pious character may even prevent men from being saved at all. I mean you may take it for granted that you are saved, but you must not take anything for granted between God and your soul! I charge you to make sure work, here—take your wealth for granted if you like; take the title deeds of your estate for granted if you please—but between God and your soul, let everything be settled, straight, clear, sure and have no mistakes about this matter! It is so easy to have been under religious influence from our youth up and then to go on, year after year, never having raised the question whether we are Christians or not, saying to ourselves, "Of course it is all right." You will be much nearer the Truth of God if you say, "Of course it is all wrong." You will be much more likely to come to an honest conclusion if you rather suspect yourself too much than believe in yourself too much! I am sure that, in speaking thus, I am giving you sound teaching.

After all, to be under godly influences year after year, without any great trial or temptation, may leave the personal character altogether undeveloped. Some continually put children under restraint, never suffering them to have any sort of temptation. It is so with children, sometimes, in large institutions—they have not any money and they cannot steal any because there is nobody else who has any—they are kept out of the world altogether! They live only among their own company and there is very much of prayer and everything that is good and often, when they go out into the world, those who have trained them are altogether disappointed with them, yet they need not very much wonder! If a person on dry land thinks he can swim, it is not certain that he will swim when he gets into the sea. We must have some kind of test, or else we cannot be sure of the character! We cannot know whether a child is honest or not if it never has any chance to take that which is not its own. You cannot be sure about principle being in any young man if he has been kept under a glass case—and if his principles have never been tried.

That was the condition of Joash—the real character of the man had never come out at all because Jehoiada, as it were, covered him. He was guided and influenced by the High Priest, but his own disposition only needed an opportunity of developing itself. I have heard of an officer in India who had brought up a young leopard. It was completely tamed. Apparently it was as tame as a cat and the officer had no fear of his leopard. It went up and down the stairs and entered into every room of his house. He never suspected, for a single moment, that it would be guilty of blood-shedding. Well, while he was asleep one afternoon, in his chair, the leopard licked his hand in all tenderness as a cat might have done. But after licking for a while, it licked too hard and a little blood began to flow. It no sooner tasted blood than the old leopard's spirit was up and his master was his master no more! So does it happen to many that, by

being shut in and tamed, as it were, but not changed—subdued but not renewed, kept in check but not converted—there has come a time when the taste of blood has called out the old nature and away the man has gone! You would never have thought that he could act as he did, but he did so because he had not a new nature! It was human nature held in check for a while, not the Spirit of God creating a new life and infusing a new character into the soul!

Do you see where I am coming to, dear Friends? I am speaking to those of you who have not passed from death unto life—to you who have never been renewed in the spirit of your mind. I pray you, do not imagine that natural religion is spiritual religion. Do not mistake the lessons learned at your mother's knee for the teachings of the Holy Spirit! Do not confuse a change with the change—and do not think that anything that can come to you by your first birth can serve your turn without a second birth! "Fou must be born again," or else, though you spent the first six years of your life in the house of God and though you were taught under the most hallowed influences, you only need an opportunity, a temptation, a peculiar stress laid upon you and you will go off where the old nature carries you—and you will find out for yourself and to the horror of others that all your early training had effected nothing because it stopped short of the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

III. Now, in the third place, I wish to show you that THIS YIELDING CHARACTER MAY EVEN PROVE A SOURCE OF MISCHIEF.

We like young people to be obedient. We are very glad to have to do with those plastic characters that are readily shaped, but, at the same time, we ought never to be too sure about them. A person with grit in his character, if really affected by the Grace of God, may turn out a far better man than your too plastic, pliable character. Oh, dear, how many we know who are very good, but there is nothing in them at all! We have known some others who were dreadfully difficult to manage and to get at, but when, at last, a change has been worked by Divine Grace, that very obstinacy and willfulness of theirs, when sanctified, has given a strength to their character and, instead of being a drawback, it has been a

help!

This young Joash was exceedingly supple in the hand of Jehoiada, but alas, Jehoiada died. Other counselors came and flattered Joash. "Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah and made obeisance to the king." Do you not see those gentlemen coming, bowing and scraping a hundred times before they get up to him? They "made obeisance to the king." Jehoiada had not often made much obeisance to him. He had treated him with due respect as his king, but he had also spoken to him honestly and faithfully. Joash had somebody to look up to while Jehoiada lived, but now he found himself a great man with everybody looking up to him! And the princes of Judah, the fashionable part of the realm, the respectable people who never had been worshippers of Jehovah, but who had always preferred the more recondite, ritualistic and sensuous service of Baal, the philosophical god, came and bowed, and made obeisance to the king.

I think I can hear what they said—"Royal Sir, we congratulate you upon being released from leading strings. Now you can think for yourself! It is a fine thing for a young man to be delivered from the power of his old uncle—he was, no doubt, a very excellent person. We were present at his funeral and we paid him all due respect, still, he was a regular old fossil, one who never had made any progress at all. He clung to the worship of Jehovah and served the God of his fathers. Royal Sir, we congratulate you upon the liberty to which you have attained. Besides that, we fear that you have been considerably priest ridden. This

Jehoiada was a priest and, of course, you respected and venerated his character, but you could not indulge yourself as long as he lived. We have always had high thoughts of you, Royal Sir. We always believed that you would break out, one of these days, and now that the good man is laid asleep, we are sure that you will not let his dead hands rest upon you, but you will wake up and be abreast of the age, and keep up with the spirit of the times!"

You know how they do it! It is always being done, this pouring of drops of poison into the ears—these soft, subtle flatteries. Even when a man has reached Joash's age, he is not beyond the power of flattery. I wonder how old a man would be when he would be too old to love flattery. Of course, he always likes to be told, "Ah, dear Sir, I know that you could not bear flattery," being, at that moment, more highly flattered than at any other time in his life! So these princes of Judah did and poor Joash, good Joash, Joash who repaired the Temple, Joash who was even more intensely earnest than Jehoiada, himself, was led astray by the soft words of the deceivers and we find him burying his religion with his uncle! In Jehoiada's grave he buried all his piety. Some whom I have known, and over whom I have wept, have acted in the same way.

After that, he went off to sin. The images which he had broken down were set up, again. The groves which he had cut down were planted, again, and he who seemed so zealous a servant of Jehovah had now become a worshipper of the foul Ashtaroth and bowed before the accursed Baalim! Oh, sad, sad, sad mischief this! There was a lack of principle in Joash, and it is of that I want to warn all our friends. Do not, I pray you, be satisfied with the practice of piety without the principles of piety! It is not enough to have a correct creed—you must have a renewed heart! It is not sufficient to have an ornate ritual—you must have a holy life—and to be holy you must be renewed by the Holy Spirit! If this change is not worked in you by the Holy Spirit, you who yield so readily to good, will yield just as quickly to evil.

What happened next? Joash refused reproof. God sent Prophets to the people and they came and warned them, testifying against the idolaters—"But they would not give ear." This Joash, who had spent his first six years in the Temple, now would not give ear to the Lord's Prophets! He was always ready to listen to Jehoiada, but now he would not give ear. He was a tremendous zealot for repairing the Temple with most costly architecture and gold and silver without limit—but now he will not give heed to God's servants at all! They may speak with all their heart and soul, but he is as the deaf adder that will not hear the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so wisely. Yet he was once your good young man, your pious young man! Oh, what a sifter London has been to many like Joash! Many do I remember whose story was like this. They had been to the house of God always—they were brought up where there was a family altar in the house! Everybody reckoned them to be Christians when they came to London.

At first, they went where their father exhorted them to go, to some humble place where the Gospel was preached, but after a time they thought it was not wrong to go on Sunday to see one of the more showy religious places. That done, they went to some showy place that was not religious. They worked so hard all the week that they must go out a little into the fresh air on the Sunday and, by degrees, they found companions who led them, little by little, from the path of integrity and chastity till, "the good young man," was as vile as any on the streets of London! And he who seemed to be a saint became not only a sinner, but the maker of sinners!

What did Joash do next? He slew his friend's son. Old Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, one of those who had helped to put the crown upon young Joash's head, was, at last, moved to come out and speak in the midst of the Temple service to the people, as he had a right to do. And he began to upbraid them for turning

aside from Jehovah to the worship of the foul idol gods. Now, look—the tiger's blood is up! Joash bids them kill him! How dare he testify against his king? True, he is the son of his best friend—he is his own cousin, he is one who helped him to ascend the throne—but what matters all that to this once good young man? The milk of human kindness is now soured. The oil that was so soft burns fiercely when it once takes fire. "Let Zechariah die. Kill him in the Temple. Splatter the sacred altar with his blood! Stone him! He has dared to speak against me."

See your soft clay—how hard and coarse, and rough it has become! I have seen this change come over men. I believe that the worst persecutors in the world are generally made of those who once were tender and soft-hearted. Nero would, at first, scarcely sign the death warrant of a criminal, and yet he lived to delight in wholesale murder! When the son of perdition was needed to betray his Lord, the raw material of the traitor was found in an Apostle! You cannot make an out-and-out bad man except from one who seems to be good. You must take the man who has been six years in the Temple, the man who has done that which is right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada, to make such a devil as Joash turned out to be when he killed the son of his benefactor in the court of the house of the Lord! Oh, I could look steadily in the face of some here, tonight, and in the spirit of prophecy I could burst out into tears to think of what they will yet be, what they will yet do and what they will yet say! Perhaps you look at me and ask, "Is your servant a dog that he should do this thing?" Oh, Sir, you are worse than a dog! There lurks within you a heart, "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?" Oh, that you did know it and would turn to God and say, "O Lord, renew me! Lord, make a new creature of me! Lord, save me, that I may never do such things as now, today, I think it impossible that I should ever do!"

This Joash, perishing, miserable, having no faith in God, robbed the Temple and gave all the gold and treasures to Hazael the Syrian. Personally, he was full of disease and, by-and-by, his own servants, disgusted with him for his conduct towards Jehoiada's son, slew him on his bed. What a death for the young man who was six years hidden away in the house of the Lord! Oh, if I could tell some of you what will become of you, you would never come to this place, again, you would be so angry with me! If I could prophesy to some good young fellow here—I mean, outwardly good as Joash was at first, but without a new heart, without the Grace of God in his soul—if I could prophesy to him what he will be, he would spit in my face in indignation that I would dare to foretell such a thing! There is not a man or woman here who is safe from the most abominable sin until they yield themselves to Christ! There is not one of you who is sure that the deepest damnation of Hell will not be your portion unless you come and commit your soul into the hands of Jesus, who is a faithful Keeper of them that put their trust in Him!

Can there be a Character Insurance Society? There can be no such Society formed by men that can insure our character, yet God has formed one! "The righteous, also, shall hold on his way; and he that has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." The Lord will keep him and preserve him from evil, for, "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day." I earnestly entreat you, by the living God, my hopeful young Friend—yield yourself to Jesus Christ and seek His guardian care lest the fair blossom of today should never bring forth fruit, but end in disappointment.

The Lord grant that we may, all of us, meet in Heaven, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: 2 Chronicles 24:1-25.

This chapter gives us the story of the reign of Joash. He was the only one of the royal seed who was preserved alive when Athaliah sought to destroy all the family of Ahaziah. He was hidden away for some

six years in the Temple by his aunt Jehoshabeath, the wife of Jehoiada the High Priest, who arranged matters so well that when the child was seven years old, Jehoiada caused him to be crowned king and he put to death the cruel she-wolf Athaliah who had destroyed the royal family. You see, therefore, how much this young king owed to his uncle, the High Priest. Now let us read the story of his reign.

Verse 1. Joash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. He might have reigned much longer had he not erred and turned aside from the right way, and so brought judgment upon himself.

1, 2. His mother's name was Bibiah of Beer-Sheba. And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest. As long as his uncle lived, that truly devout statesman, as well as priest of the Lord, "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord."

3. 4. And Jehoiada took for him two wives; and he begat sons and daughters. And it came to pass after this. Probably, some 23 years after—

4. That Joash was minded to repair the house of the LORD. Jehoiada had, with him, broken in pieces the images of Baal, and battered down the temples of the idols. And now the young king is "minded to repair the house of Jehovah."

5. And he gathered together the priests and the Levites, and said to them, go out into the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that you hasten the matter. Howbeit the Levites hastened it not. It is a great pity when those who live in the house of God have not enough interest in it to see to its repair. The fact was, the offerings presented at the Temple, like the tithes in modern times, were intended not only for the ministers, but for the maintaining of the fabric, too. But these priests and Levites would not allow anything to be deducted from their own income even for the repair of the house in which they served! So Joash ordained that special collections should be made for the purpose.

6-9. And the king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why have you not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection, according to the commandment of Moses the servant of the Lord, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witnesses? For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the honor of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD did they bestow upon Daalim. And at the king's commandment they made a chest, and set it outside at the gate of the house of the LORD. And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in to the LORD the collection that Moses, the servant of God, laid upon Israel in the wilderness. Everyone must give his half shekel by way of redemption money—and this had not been brought in.

10-14. And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end. Now it came to pass, that at what time the chest was brought unto the king's office by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, the king's scribe and the High Priest's officer came and emptied the chest, and took it, and carried it to his place again. This they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance. And the king and Jehoiada gave it to such as did the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and hired masons and carpenters to repair the house of the LORD, and, also such as worked iron and brass to mend the house of the LORD. So the workmen worked, and the work was perfected by them, and they set the house of God in his state, and strengthened it. And when they had finished it, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, of which were

made vessels for the house of the LORD, even vessels to minister, and to offer withal, and spoons, and vessels of gold and silver. And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the LORD continually all the day of Jehoiada. See the influence of one man! One man can sway a state. One man can check sin. One man can be the head of a host who shall serve God and honor His name.

15. But Jehoiada waxed old. It happened to him as it must happen to us all, for the best of men must grow old and pass away. Let us value them while we have them. Too often we give them stones while they are alive, in anticipation of giving them bigger stones to keep them in memory when they die. "Jehoiada waxed old"—

15. And was full of days when he died; an hundred and thirty years old was he when he died. An unusual age for that time. Short enough as compared with the years of the antediluvian Patriarchs, but still a great age for those days.

16. And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God and toward His house. That is the best kind of good which begins with doing good toward God and then goes on to doing

good towards God's house. The Church is to be served, but even it must be second to God's Glory. God, first, and then the very best must come next.

17. Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king listened to them. These flatterers came with all their daintiest manners and made obeisance to the king—and "the king listened to them." All the days of Jehoiada, these princes had been afraid to set up the fashionable worship—the worship of Baalim that had been introduced by the Sidonian queen, Jezebel—that wicked woman of strong and masterful spirit. This worldly and false religion had been put down by the strong hand of Jehoiada, but when its adherents thought they had a chance to get to the front, again, they came and flattered the king. And "the king listened to them."

18. And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers and served groves and idols. Or, "Asherah and idols." The word is mistakenly translated, "groves." These were certain horrible and disgusting emblems of the heathen goddess Ashtaroth, or Astarte—"They served Asherah and idols."

18, 19. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this, their trespass. Yet He sent Prophets to them, to bring them, again, unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear. "These old Puritans have come back again," they said. "We will not listen to them." The common people were still mostly worshippers of Jehovah, but the great ones of the earth had gone over to the idols. And they could not endure that one and another of the Prophets, often very humble and unlearned men, should come and bear testimony for Jehovah.

20. And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus says God, "Why transgress you the Commandments of the Lord, that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, He has also forsaken you. He spoke very temperately and affectionately. The warning was faithful, but it was delivered in the very best and kindest spirit. But now see what the wicked men did.

21. And they conspired against him and stoned him with stones at the command of the king in the court of the house of the Lord. This is probably the Prophet to whom Christ alludes when He speaks of Zachariah,

"whom you slew between the Temple and the altar." It was a crime most foul to murder the son of Jehoiada, one of those who had helped to put the crown upon the head of the king! To do this evil deed in the court of God's house, when the Prophet was engaged in his Master's business and delivering a Divine message, was to heap sin upon sin!

22. 23. Then Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada, his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it. And it came to pass at the end of the year, that the host of Syria came up against him: and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus. God delayed not long the punishment of the evildoers! When His servants are persecuted, He will speedily avenge His own elect. "They destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people." Was not that remarkable? These were the authors of the sin and they had chiefly to endure the penalty. It is not always that invaders lay hold upon the princes, alone, and slay them—but these Syrians did so.

24, 25. For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the LORD delivered a very great host into their hands because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash. And when they were departed from him, (for they left him in great diseases), his own servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada, the priest, and slew him on his bed and he died: and they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchers of the kings. When one set of executioners had gone, his own servants conspired against him and slew him! Here ends our reading. May it be profitable to us!

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