

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 27 November 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Pride, Prosperity, and Perfidy

Matthew 1:8-9

If you have known Christ as your Saviour for very long, you can testify that there have been times in your Christian life when you were reading your Bible every day; when you were spending time with God in prayer daily; when you were attending church faithfully; when you were tithing, and giving to missions; when you were helping with evangelistic outreaches fairly regularly; and when you were doing a fair amount of service to the Lord. During these times, God was blessing you materially, and things were going well; and you were happy, content, and comfortable. You were walking through “the Plain of Ease.” However, not all was truly well with your soul, because you were *too* comfortable. You weren’t committing any terrible secret sins; but you weren’t filled with zealous, loving passion for God, either. You became complacent; and before long, things of this world began to come before God. Without realising it, you erected another “god” in your heart. Thus, God had to chasten you in some way to jar you out of your complacency, and to draw you back to close fellowship with Himself.

Several years ago, Pastor McKinley told me a story of something that happened when he was still a member of his home church back in New Mexico. There was a family in his church who had been serving the Lord for many years, and who had attended church faithfully; and they were a very hard-working family. After years of saving and scrimping, they were able to purchase a large, expensive fishing boat; and they invited their pastor over to their house for dinner, just to show him their boat. The pastor was genuinely happy for them; however, he was concerned that this boat had the potential to become a spiritual snare to them. Before he left their home that evening, he patted the side of their new boat and said, “Now, don’t let this boat become your god!” They assured their pastor that they wouldn’t let this happen; and, for a while, they were true to their word. They went to the lake on Saturdays to fish; and they were also sure to make it to church on Sunday. However, after a while, they started to come late to Sunday School. After all, Saturday was their only day to “get away,” and they were tired after a long day at the lake. Before long, they began to be absent from Sunday School altogether; then from Worship Hour; then from Sunday evening. Then, they began to miss even Wednesday evenings, because they had become “comfortable” with missing church; and before long, they were out of church altogether, except for an occasional drop-in. And what was the outcome of all this? Before this message ends, you will find out! In the meantime, let’s turn to this morning’s passage of Scripture.

Read Matthew 1:1-9.

As we’ve been studying through the genealogy of the Lord, we’ve learned about some people in Jesus’ royal lineage who were saved, and who loved the Lord, yet who made some big errors in their lives. This morning, we will learn about two more such men in Jesus’ ancestry—men who were righteous, but far from perfect. As we study their lives, we will learn about the insidious danger of **pride and prosperity** in a believer’s life, and how Christians can overcome it. We will also learn about another man in Jesus’ lineage who did not know the Lord. From this man’s life, we will learn what keeps most people from receiving eternal life. We will also see, once again, how God mercifully protected the royal line of David from destruction, so that the Saviour of the world might be born into our race at the right time, and save us from our sins! The title of this message is ***Pride, Prosperity, and Perfidy***.

I. Uzziah, and the peril of pride

The next man in the royal lineage of Jesus is **King Uzziah** (or, “*Ozias*,” as he is called in the New Testament). Uzziah was a righteous king, who “*sought the Lord*.” We don’t know what influences surrounded him during his formative years; but there must have been at least a few godly family or friends who influenced him to place his faith in Jehovah. Without a doubt, his faith in the Lord was genuine. He did not to follow the terrible example of his father Amaziah, who had turned aside to idol worship. Uzziah worshipped the true God all his days: and because he was faithful to the Lord, the Lord blessed him abundantly, and gave him a very long and prosperous reign of 52 years. Let’s examine Uzziah’s reign.

Read 2 Chronicles 26:1-15.

As you can see, God was very good to Uzziah. **Psalm 1:3** says that when a righteous man rejects the counsel of the ungodly, and delights and meditates in the Law of the LORD, he will be “*like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper*.” It is obvious that the prosperity of Uzziah’s reign was a direct result of his faithfulness to God. His unrighteous father, grandfather, great grandfather, and great-great grandfather had rejected God; and as the result, God had brought miserable judgment upon themselves, and upon the kingdom of Judah. In stark contrast, Judah was now flourishing because of Uzziah’s righteous ways. The economy was booming; the population was booming; new cities were being built; and harvests were plentiful. Judah’s enemies were subdued and under control. Judah’s army was large and powerful; their fortified cities were strong; and their munitions were vast. The Kingdom of Judah, and King Uzziah himself, were feared and respected by nations near and far.

Yet, despite all this prosperity, there were some problems afoot. Though Uzziah was honouring God, and though God was blessing Judah materially, there are some hints here in **2 Chronicles 26**, and in **2 Kings 14**, that not all was as well as it seemed. First, you’ll notice, in **verse 5**, that Uzziah “*sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper*.” This statement implies that Uzziah’s faith in God, though real, was not as strong as it should have been. As long as the godly prophet Zechariah was around, Uzziah was encouraged to seek the Lord; but when Zechariah passed off the scene, he apparently *stopped* seeking the LORD, and began to lean upon his own understanding.

Another indication that not all was well is that the high places were not broken down and destroyed. (We are told this in **2 Kings 14**.) Though idol worship was banned, the people still used the high places to sacrifice and burn incense to Jehovah. There were two huge problems with this practice. First, the *only* place where the people of Israel were to make sacrifices and burn incense to God was the Temple. God had commanded Israel that there was to be only *one* altar of sacrifice—the altar that was in His House. (This is a prophetic picture of the fact that *only Jesus’ sacrifice* can take away our sins! There is no other “altar of sacrifice” for our sin than the cross of Jesus Christ!) The other problem with Judah’s use of the high places is that the high places were linked to idolatry. The pagans had used these same high places, and these same altars, to worship their gods; and now, Israel was using them to worship the *true* God. God was not pleased with this! Yet, for whatever reason, Uzziah never dealt with this issue. Uzziah was devoted to God to a point, and was doing many things right; but just under the surface there was a casualness, and lukewarmness, in his relationship with God. He was not growing in his relationship with the Lord; and when you aren’t growing, there is only one direction you can go—*backward!* If you aren’t growing, you will *shrink!*

Now, there is one more indication that there were problems in Uzziah's heart; and, ironically, this problem is revealed more by what is *not* said, than by what *is* said. What we do *not* see Uzziah doing is calling the people to repentance, or sending out priests and Levites to teach the people the Law of the LORD, or going out of his way to keep their hearts warm toward God. We are told that Uzziah did right, and that he sought the LORD as long as Zechariah was around; but apart from this, nothing is said about anything spiritual that he did in the long 52 years of his reign. The rest of the passage is about Uzziah's *economic* and *military* policy, and about the material prosperity of Judah. Uzziah did honour God; but he seemed to place much greater emphasis on Judah's material wealth than on their spiritual wealth. That's not good, folks! When you get "comfortable" in your service to God, and you forget your "*first love*" (that passionate love that you had at the beginning of your walk with God), there is an insidious evil that will, inevitably, creep in: and that evil is **pride!**

Read 2 Chronicles 26:16-21.

In this passage, we suddenly find that Uzziah was *not* as spiritually strong as he had appeared to be. Uzziah had been spiritually strong as long as a truly strong believer (Zechariah) was around; but after Zechariah was gone, the real strength of his walk with God (or, rather, the *lack* of it) began to become apparent. He continued to honour the Lord outwardly; but inwardly, he became filled with "spiritual pride." He *thought* that he was spiritual; and he was proud of how spiritual he was. (After all, wasn't all this outward prosperity proof that he was spiritual?) In his prosperity he proudly said, "***I shall never be moved.***" Finally, he came to the point of thinking that he had the right to step into the office of priest, and to be both *king and priest* to God's people! This was absolutely forbidden by God! *Only* the priests, the descendants of Aaron, were allowed to offer sacrifices and burn incense. God had rejected Saul as king over Israel for doing this very same sort of thing! (In his impatience, Saul had offered a sacrifice to God at Gilgal, instead of waiting for the priest Samuel to come and do it; and for this, God took the kingdom from him!) *Only one* man is qualified to be both King and Priest; and that man is Jesus Christ, the God-Man. **Zechariah 6:13** says that one day, in the Kingdom age, the Messiah "***shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne.***"

Uzziah's reign started out well, when his heart was tender toward God; but when he began to glory in the prosperity that God had given him, pride came; and with pride came shame. For the remainder of his reign, he suffered the dreaded disease of leprosy. Christian, don't make Uzziah's mistake! Don't glory in things of this earth. Don't ever forget that whatever talent you have, or whatever knowledge you have, or whatever career or position you have, or whatever material wealth you have, is a gift from God. **First Corinthians 4:7** says, "***For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?***"

At the beginning of the message, I told you about the couple in Bro. McKinley's old home church who had once served God faithfully, but who began to drop out of church after they bought their big, shiny boat. As this couple drifted further from the Lord, their pastor finally decided that it was time to go to their home, to talk with them about this. While he was there, he felt led of the Lord to say something that he had never said to anyone before. He said, "Don't keep robbing God of His day! He will burn your god to the ground!" Now, apparently, this warning did make an impression on them, because they began to attend church faithfully. However, before long, they were out of church again; and after a few more months of this, the Lord intervened. One Sunday morning, this family showed up bright and early for

Sunday School; and the man told the pastor, “Well, Pastor, you were right about the boat. Our god did get burned to the ground!” As it turned out, a fire had suddenly and inexplicably broken out in the engine of their boat while they were driving to the lake that weekend. Their truck wasn’t harmed; but their boat was burned up so completely, that the only thing left was the metal frame underneath their boat. *That* got their attention! They finally listened to God, and got back in church; and they’ve been faithful to God’s house ever since then. Brethren, don’t make God have to chastise you. Don’t be lukewarm; and don’t be fooled by pride!

II. Jotham, and the peril of prosperity

(Read Matthew 1:9 again.) The next man in the lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ is **King Jotham**, the son of Uzziah. What was Jotham’s reign like? Like his father’s reign, his reign was prosperous. Jotham reigned for 16 years; and during those 16 years, he honoured God, and God blessed him.

Read 2 Chronicles 27:1-9.

In many ways, this description of Jotham sounds much like the description of his father—except that it is even better. Jotham took heed to the punishment that God had brought upon his father for intruding into the office of priest; and he did *not* repeat his father’s mistake. However, you’ll notice, once again, that little to nothing is said about what Jotham did to advance the *spiritual* condition of the nation of Judah. Instead, there is a great emphasis on what he did to advance the *material* prosperity of Judah. It seems that during the decades of luxury between Uzziah’s reign and Jotham’s reign, there came a creeping sense of self-security, and spiritual laxness. The people of Judah were worshipping Jehovah; but it appears that their love for the LORD was shallow. Also, we are told, once again, that Jotham did *not* destroy the high places. In contrast, his grandson, Hezekiah, *did* destroy the high places. Hezekiah recognised this failure in his great-grandfather Uzziah, and in his grandfather Jotham, in this regard; and he did something about it; and God blessed him abundantly for it—not only materially, but spiritually. What a difference might it have made in Jotham’s reign if he had destroyed that last link to the memory of idol worship! Yet, unfortunately, he didn’t. He was like Christians today, who allow a *little* bit of worldliness into their lives—nothing terribly bad, or destructive, but a “little” worldly, nonetheless. For example, they say, “Let’s shorten the church service, so that we can get home and watch the World Cup. Or, better yet, let’s have a quick service, then watch the World Cup right here at church!” Believe it or not, there are many churches that do this sort of thing. I know of churches in my hometown area that *never* cancelled services years ago, but which now cancel the evening service, and have a “fellowship night” at a church member’s house instead, so that they can watch the American Super Bowl together. (Of course, they have a short prayer time, to “sanctify” it.) Of course, the halftime shows are now completely satanic; yet, this doesn’t seem to bother them.

Through the prophet Amos, the LORD once warned the people of Israel, “***Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.***” Being “at ease” is a dangerous thing, brethren! Let’s take a look at a prophecy that God gave to Isaiah only a few years after Jotham’s death.

Read Isaiah 9:3.

This prophecy was written by the prophet Isaiah, shortly after Jotham had died, and his son, Ahaz, had come to the throne. Ahaz inherited a kingdom that had enjoyed 68 long years of prosperity and luxury. Yet, how did *Isaiah* size up Judah’s condition as he conversed with God? He said, “***Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before***

thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil."

There is a huge difference between the carnal "joy" that comes with *material* prosperity, and true, spiritual joy. God had "**multiplied**" Israel and Judah time and time again. He had increased their population at astonishing rates. He had given them great material prosperity, and had expanded their national borders, even during times of great apostasy, when He had every right to chastise them. Yet, despite all this outward prosperity, God had *not* increased their joy. Why? Because they had not made *Him* their Joy!

By the way, most modern scholars tell us that the word "not" shouldn't be in the text.

However, it *is* in there! The Hebrew word *lo* is not spelled *lamed, vav*. If it *were* spelled this way, it would be translated "for it." However, that is *not* how it is spelled. It is spelled *lamed, aleph*—which means "not." God's word stands perfectly preserved, as uncorrected; and God says that He *had* increased the nation, but had *not* increased their joy. Judah did have a certain "joy"; but it was the kind of "joy" that a conquering nation has when it swoops down on the spoils of war. Judah's joy was a *phony* joy. It was a false sense of happiness, which was based upon prosperity. It was *not* the kind of joy that comes from sweet fellowship with God.

In contrast, Christ came to give us *true* joy. Jesus said, "***These things have I spoken unto you, that your joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.***" True joy is part of the "***fruit of the Spirit.***" It is a "***joy unspeakable, and full of glory.***" Christians are the only ones who are able to have this kind of joy, because we have the Spirit of God living within us. Yet, we too often buy into the world's idea that "If I only had more nice stuff, I would be happier." God, in His mercy, often does "multiply" and "increase" us materially, in spite of our unfaithfulness to Him; but we cannot have true, full joy if we are not continually submitting to Him and loving Him, instead of loving the things of this world. Christian, allow Christ to give you the joy that only He can give, by trusting, obeying, and loving Him!

III. Ahaz, and the peril of perfidy

(Read Matthew 1:9 again.) The next man in the lineage of Jesus Christ is **King Ahaz**, the son of Jotham; and, unlike his father, he was very wicked. We don't know what went wrong in Jotham's house; but somehow, Jotham's faith in Jehovah was *not* passed down to his son!

Read 2 Kings 16:1-5.

Of all the kings of Judah, Ahaz was particularly wicked. In fact, he was one of the worst. For starters, he re-introduced Baal worship into Judah. (The worship of Baal was particularly hideous, because it involved the burnt sacrifice of infant children.) In fact, we are told that Ahaz slew his *own* children, and offered them to Baal. "Passing through the fire" *can* refer to the pagan ritual of running through burning coals: however, **2 Chronicles 28:3** specifically states that Ahaz "***burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen.***" No king of Judah had done such a vile thing before! Ahaz also built altars and high places to pagan gods everywhere. He built a pagan-style altar, like the altar in Damascus, and put it in the courtyard of God's House. Eventually, he shut the doors to the Temple, and ended the worship of Jehovah altogether. Ahaz was the poster-boy for perfidy ("unfaithfulness")!

Yet, despite Ahaz's perfidy, God was merciful to him, for the sake of his ancestor David. Early in his reign, King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Northern Israel made an alliance with each other, and attacked Judah, and King Ahaz; yet (as we saw in **verse 5**), "***they could not overcome him.***" Now, when God says that they "***could not overcome them,***" He doesn't mean that Israel and Syria were badly beaten, and had to go back home in defeat. Quite the

contrary! In **2 Chronicles 28**, we are told that Pekah and Rezin wreaked *tremendous* destruction upon Judah. They slew a staggering 120,000 men of Judah in one day! They also slew Ahaz's son, **Maaseiah**, and **Azrikam**, the governor of his house, and took away 200,000 captives from the cities of Judah! Furthermore, Rezin went down to the port of **Elath**, on the northern tip of the Red Sea (the modern Gulf of Aqaba), and took this port away from Judah's control. All these battles appear to have taken place over a period of about a year. This was a stunning blow to Judah! In what sense, then, did Pekah and Rezin *not* overcome Ahaz?

Well, for one thing, as the soldiers of Northern Israel were taking away captives, God sent a prophet named **Oded** to warn them that, although God had allowed them to defeat Judah, *they* were in big trouble with God, too, because of *their* apostasy and idol worship. Therefore, God commanded them to release all their captives, and to let them go back to Judah: and amazingly, they did it! As the result of Oded's bold message, the fear of God came upon these soldiers; and they clothed and fed their captives, and sent them back to their homes.

Now, how else could it be said that Rezin and Pekah did *not* overcome Ahaz? Because they didn't succeed in slaying Ahaz himself! In **Isaiah 7**, we are told that that was their ultimate intention. Their plan was to kill Ahaz and all his sons, and to put a puppet king named **Tabeal** on the throne, so that they could have complete control over Judah, and over the seaport of Elath. With this in mind, let's read on, and see how Ahaz dealt with this dire situation.

Read 2 Kings 16:7-18.

Ahaz was a man who had no faith in God. Rather than repenting of his sin, and asking *God* for help, he took the silver and gold from *God's House*, and sent it to King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, and pleaded with him to go to war against Rezin and Pekah, and deliver him from their invasion. Now, it appears, at first glance, that Ahaz's tactic worked. Tiglath-pileser *did* break his alliance with Syria, and *did* attack Syria, and waste it. Rezin and Syria *were* destroyed, and *did* retreat from Judah. Yet, it was a hollow victory. In **2 Chronicles 28**, we are told that when Tiglath-pileser came down to Judah, he "***distressed him, but helped him not.***" In other words, Judah became a vassal to Assyria. Now that Ahaz had forsaken God, and had gone to Assyria for help, God allowed Judah to be harassed, robbed, and threatened by Assyria from that point onward. Yet, Ahaz didn't learn his lesson. After Tiglath-pileser had conquered Damascus, Ahaz went to Damascus to meet him; and there, he saw a pagan altar that he liked, and sent the pattern back to Jerusalem, and commanded the high priest to make one just like it, so that he could use it for his own personal sacrifice! (Ahaz didn't mind "worshipping" Jehovah, as long as he could mix in his *own* self-styled pagan worship.)

Now, you'd think that during such a dark spiritual time as the reign of Ahaz, God would not even be on "speaking terms" with the people of Judah, much less with King Ahaz. Yet, the opposite was true. During this time, God used the prophet Isaiah to deliver loads of revelations. In fact, some of the most wonderful prophecies of the Messiah were delivered by Isaiah during this time. One of the most profound prophecies of all—the virgin birth of Jesus Christ—was delivered to Ahaz himself.

Read Isaiah 7:1-14.

It is important to remember the setting in which this messianic prophecy was given. The Lord (through Isaiah) had just invited King Ahaz to ask for *any sign he liked*, to confirm that He would *not* allow King Rezin of Assyria, and King Pekah of Northern Israel, to remove him

from his throne. Yet, Ahaz, being an unbeliever, declined to respond to God's invitation. That is why the "**Lord himself**" said, "All right, then. *I will give you a sign!*"

And what was the sign that God gave? It was that one day, the Messiah would be *born of a virgin*. Now, many modern translations have replaced the word "virgin" with "young woman"; but this false translation merely shows the unbelieving bias of the translators! The Hebrew word *alma* always refers to a "virgin"—an unmarried woman who has *never* had an intimate relationship with a man. What kind of "sign" would it be for a married woman, or an unchaste woman, to have a child? (That happens all the time!) The miracle of this sign was that a *virgin* would conceive! What's more, the child's name would be "Immanuel," which means "God with us." This means that the child would be both God *and* Man!

Now, it is also important to realise to *whom* the sign was given. The Lord did not give the sign to Ahaz personally; rather, He gave the sign to the "**house of David.**" (Read Isaiah 7:13 again.) Ahaz never saw this sign of the miraculous birth of Messiah, because he lived and died centuries before Christ. Does this mean that this sign was pointless, as far as Ahaz was concerned? No--because the sign was *not given to Ahaz*. Remember, Ahaz had forfeited his right to see any miraculous sign. *He* was the one who faithlessly said, "I will not tempt the Lord." Therefore, God gave this sign not to Ahaz, but to the "house of David." Mary and Joseph were both from the house of David; and at the right time, God gave this sign to *them!* As members of the house of David, they not only saw this sign, but experienced it firsthand.

Now, this isn't the only messianic prophecy that God gave during Ahaz's reign. During these tumultuous times, while the people of Judah were distressed about the confederacy of Israel and Syria against them, God gave them the promise of a coming Saviour—someone who would be a Sanctuary for those who believe on Him, but a stumblingblock to those who reject Him. Isaiah also prophesied that from the land of Galilee there would arise a "**great light.**" He prophesied that this "**great light**" would come to them as a Man. He prophesied that a "**son**" who would be "**born**" to them, and that His name would be called "**Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.**"

Read Isaiah 8:12-15 and 9:1-7.

Why did God give these stunning prophecies about the Messiah to a man like Ahaz? Why did He not give these prophecies to a righteous king? I can't say I have a sure answer—other than to say that God is not willing that any should perish. God was not willing that even wicked Ahaz should perish. Was Ahaz a sorcerer? Check! Was he a murderer? Check! Yet, God saved a mass murderer named Saul of Tarsus, and made him into one of the greatest men of God who ever lived! God *could* have done the same with Ahaz. God was mercifully reaching out to Ahaz, and giving him every opportunity to believe on Him. Yet, he refused.

Ahaz had no one to blame for his unbelief except himself. God invited Ahaz to ask for any sign whatsoever, whether in the "**depth,**" or in the "**height above.**" That's quite an offer! Yet, what was Ahaz's reply to this gracious invitation? Ahaz responded that he would "**not ask,**" neither "**tempt the LORD.**" Now, on the surface, this answer almost sounds pious. However, this was not a case of "tempting" the LORD, because God had *invited* Ahaz to ask for a sign. The fact of the matter is that Ahaz simply did not believe that God could or would perform His word. God was "wearied" by Ahaz's unbelief; and he told him, "**If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.**" Tragically, Ahaz never *was* "established." He refused to run for sanctuary to the LORD. As the result, his life, and his reign, were filled with constant chaos; and when he departed this life, he entered into everlasting burning.

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would ask you a very important question: **“Are you saved?”** If not, don’t be like Ahaz. Please don’t allow your pride, and your stubborn unbelief, to keep you from receiving God’s gracious offer of salvation. The Son of God came down to our world, took on human flesh, and died on a cross and rose again to pay for our sins; and this same Jesus wants to be a “sanctuary” to you—a place of eternal safety. Run to *Him* for salvation! If you are saved already, I would ask: **“Is pride keeping you from seeking after God wholeheartedly?”** Have you become “comfortable” in your Christian life, and cooled off in your love for God? If so, rekindle your passion for Him today!