

## “KINGS DESCENDING INTO DARKNESS”

### 2 KINGS 15

Over Easter Kath and I were looking for an easy movie to watch and we ended up watching a 1990's Barbara Streisand rom com called “The Mirror Has Two Faces”

Can you believe it last week, Andre started with, “Days of our Lives” and now a rom com seriously, we both need to think about the TV we're watching.

Anyway, the movie is about Rose, a middle-aged English literature professor who sees, reflected back to her, when she looks into the metaphoric mirror, a sensitive, intelligent academic who is physically unattractive, who's been overlooked by men and has made the decision to remain single.

Gregory also a professor, decides to place a personal ad that reads, "University professor (male) seeks woman interested in common goals and companionship. Must have Ph.D. and be over thirty-five. Physical appearance *not* important!"

It's reasonably easy to guess where the movie ends.

But along the way Rose decides feeling beautiful is what she wants, so she does a complete makeover – she changes her diet, exercise, hair, starts wearing figure-favouring clothing, and wearing make-up.

Rose now looks into the mirror and sees, something very different – she sees a beautiful woman, worthy of being noticed and desired.

It's a rom com.

**And so, the question for us:** What mirror are we looking into to know and define ourselves?

Is it a mirror that that brings clarity, accuracy and shows us the truth about ourselves and the world we live in?

Are we daily, humbly and dependently coming before the one mirror we can trust – the mirror of God’s word?

2 Kings 15 is deliberately historic, but it’s dark - very dark.

When I cornered Kath to listen to the passage and give me her first impressions, she found it difficult to stay focused to the end.

I suspect many of us, would say the same.

But 2 Kings 15 is not a relic – it’s part of the mirror, that God, to teach us, to warn us and to reveal himself to us.

To help us make choices to shape our lives so that:

- We’re able to: **call sin “sin”**.
- Able to: **Keep the signs of God’s justice in view**.
- And also, I hope able to: **have confidence in the certainty of God’s promises**.

2 Kings 15 is a little like history on steroids it’s as if we get to press fast forward or double the speed of the person speaking.

It’s complicated – complicated by unusual names, complicated by the succession and number of kings.

Complicated by where these kings are from, not only Kings of Israel and Judah but also a king from Assyria and a king from Aram (Aram is modern day Syria).

One king even has two names, he’s introduced in verse 1 as – Azariah king of Judah but when we get to – verse 29 - he’s had a name change to Uzziah.

And then, also added to the tedium, is the repeated fast succession of deception, conspiracy and assassination.

And I suspect you didn’t miss the barbaric atrocities, of Menahem in verse 16.

Whilst 2 Kings 15 is confusing and at times difficult to stomach, my suggestion is to also spend some time in 2 Chronicles 26 and 27 and make sure you keep referring to Isaiah, Hosea and Amos, who all speak at a similar time in history.

For example, if we were to turn to 2 Chronicles 26 and 27, the 2 kings of Judah that bookend chapter 15 each have their own chapter. We’d learn:

## **Read 2 Chronicles 26:16**

And that's why in verse 5 of our passage.

### **Read verse 5.**

It was a time in the life of Judah and Israel that we could describe, at best indifference but at worst, outright rebellion towards God.

Israel and Judah have fallen into the habit of looking into the wrong mirror. It's like one of those funny carnival mirrors that give them a distorted image. But they can't see the distortion, the way they've chosen to live, has become their new normal and they can't, won't or don't want to see their sin. They're incapable of calling sin, what it really is, Sin.

### **1. Calling sin "sin"**

For me growing up was all about sport, but it was also about music and music meant, my record collection.

Neil Young - **Harvest**, Elton John – **Don't Shoot Me I'm only the Piano Player**,

**Slade Alive**, Billy Joel- **Piano Man**, **Hot August Night**, **Crime of the Century**, **Silk Degrees**, **Tapestry** (and I could go on and on)

My first record player wasn't that impressive – it was plastic, very, very mono – it didn't matter if the record was dirty or if there were a few minor scratches – they all sounded the same.

On the other hand, Mum and Dad had this amazing stereo system – a diamond needle, great speakers, wonderful clarity – it picked up all the imperfections.

It's a bit like our sin.

When we compare ourselves to the people around us – it's like playing records on my little old record player.

We don't look too bad – our bumps and scratches and imperfections just blend in with the crowd - were pretty good really – many of us might even say we're better than most.

But apply the sensitive needle of God's perfect holiness, to our lives and it picks up every scratch, every imperfection, every little warped bend and bump.

Sin isn't a very popular subject – we cringe at it, tend to avoid it.

But this morning, there's no walking away from it, "sin" hits us smack, bang, in the face.

Seven kings one after the other, contaminated with a malignancy, not just metastasising in their own mind, bodies and souls but in epidemic proportions, infecting generation after generation.

For, Zechariah, **verse 9**, Menahem, **verse 18**, Pekahiah, **verse 24** and Pekah, **verse 28**

This would be their defining characteristic: ***"He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat"***.

Whilst the repetition is exhausting, it is vivid, and it is tragic. After 200 years, the poison of Jotham son of Nebat's sin, remains lethal and crippling.

But what about Azariah and Jotham the 2 kings of Judah?

### ***Read Verse 3-4***

They continue to settle for mediocrity, they lacked wholeheartedness and just like Amaziah, last week, they too, were a long way off, being, "great kings".

Gerry Bridges in his book "Respectable Sins - Confronting the Sins we Tolerate" Describes sin like this:

***"Sin is a spiritual and moral malignancy. Left unchecked it can spread throughout our entire inner being and contaminate every area of our lives. Even worse, it often will "metastasize" from us into the lives of others around us. Our attitudes, words and actions and often times even our private unspoken thoughts tend to have an effect on those around us."***

Sin is sin.

Even those little imperfections are serious.

We're not meant to be satisfied or comfortable or prepared to settle for mediocrity.

And as hard as we might try, we definitely, can't hide it from God.

One of our Marks of St Marks is: "An investment in one another's holiness".

So, are we willing to stand in the mirror together and ask ourselves and each other, this question:

Are there particular areas of sin, or areas of vulnerability to sin, in our lives we're not seeing?

I wonder what's more scary - Exposing ourselves to correction, or loving someone enough to courageously correct them?

I've been catching up, at least bi-monthly, with someone for more than 10 years now. We ask each other, every time we meet:

How are you going with your eyes, your money, your Bible and your prayer, and how are you loving your wife?

We both wouldn't say, we've always wanted to answer those questions honestly and we both wouldn't say we'd want the world to know some of our answers. But we both could say, it's helped us see our sin more clearly as we've had to explain, verbalise and be vulnerable with each other. We see our need for repentance and we both know each other's vulnerabilities and we pray for each other.

I wonder, will we all, be brave enough, courageous enough to encourage each other in such a culture, of loving correction, in our own church family.

## **2. Keeping the signs of God's justice in view**

As we've already identified, Israel's Kings are leading their people deeper and deeper into darkness. As a nation, they're racing towards the edge of a cliff they can no longer see clearly, and very soon, they'll miss the edge, take one step too far and fall into oblivion.

24 verses, 20 odd years, 5 kings, 4 conspiracies, 4 assassinations

The first - Zechariah – **verse 10**:

***Read verse 10.***

Then in all too quick succession: Shallum **verse 14**, Pekahiah **verse 25**, Pekah **verse 30**, all suffer similar fates.

Never were the words: "God, you give and take away" more applicable.

It's chaos, they're confronted with and experiencing the consequences of their sin. And it's a sign of God's judgement.

But very sadly, there is more.

The dark shadow of Assyria first appears in verse 19 and 20, when king Pul turns up. Menahem basically pays him off to keep Assyria at bay.

But the silver extracted by king Pul was only a short term fix because as we read in **verse 29**:

**Read verse 29.**

The signs were there.

The arrival of Pul in Menahem's time should have unnerved them.

The warning God would give them through Hosea, should have chill them to the bone.

**Read Hosea 13:10-11**

In my anger I gave you a king – Not the King they wanted – the king of Assyria.

And in my wrath, I take a king away – the king of Israel. Hoshea (verse 30) would be the last king of the Northern kingdom of Israel.

Soon, Assyria will wipe Israel off the map, and it wasn't long after that, Babylon would eventually do the same to Judah.

God is patient, but he also warns, and he does act.

Peter writes in his second letter: ***“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.”***

The promise and the signs of judgement are not confined to Israel and Judah.

The signs are all around us, nations rising against nation, natural disasters, the evil of human atrocities, greed, deception and terrorism – 21<sup>st</sup> century chaos – all the consequences of sin.

And the promise and warning, prophets spoke of, that a day will come, when God's perfect justice prevails, is as real and as shocking for us as it was for those living at the time of 2 Kings 15.

As I prepared for today, I felt the weight and the darkness of this chapter. When I read these 36 verses, over and over again, I found it difficult to find hope.

But these verses are only a small fragment of the mirror of what God says to us and in isolation they're but a spot, that doesn't provide a full and complete reflection.

Because, whilst God is perfectly just, he also perfectly saves – and he promises both and so we need to keep searching so we can be:

### **3. Confident in the certainty of God's promises**

When God makes promises he does so with complete understanding of the past, present and future.

When God promises, he does what he commits to do. To judge, but also to reassure, rescue and restore.

By the time of Pekah – verse 27 through 31 – Assyria have invaded Israel, they've crossed the border in the north - east of the Jordan and west of the Sea of Galilee, and the first captives are taken.

The disgrace of judgement and the devastation of exile had begun.

Now fast forward around 750 years.

Jesus is beginning his ministry

***Read Matthew chapter 4:13-17.***

Jesus begins his ministry, in what was a place of many nations, but also in the very place Tiglath – Pileser first crossed those borders of Israel back at the time of 2 Kings 15.

8 centuries of darkness, 8 centuries of a shadow of death – now, the people see a great light.

God sends, King Jesus – the true descendent of King David – and not just a king – the King – his kingdom is the Kingdom of heaven.

Where is he sent? To the land of Zebulun-north west of the Sea of Galilee and Naphtali North east of the Jordan.

And what are his first words:

**Read Matthew 4:17**

Return, turn back to the God whose deepest desire is to rescue you and restore you.

God had promised, at the time of 2 Kings 15 through his prophets, darkness would not last forever, the light would come, and that light is Jesus.

John Newton, who wrote “Amazing Grace”, a former slave trader, who’d lived completely in darkness but who had also been overcome by the radiant light of Jesus. Said to a friend at the end of his life: “My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: that I’m a great sinner, and that Christ is a great saviour.”

Do we see ourselves as great sinners?

I suspect most of us can’t identify with the sins of 2 Kings 15, but have we gossiped lately, become impatient, acted selfishly, failed to trust God, given into a temptation, let another person, a child or a sporting team become an idol.

Jesus first words weren’t: “If you’re a sinner repent”. He just says: “Repent...”

2 Kings 15 is a dark and confronting chapter of the Bible, that most of us will need, to force ourselves to read. But God is speaking to us, urging us to: Call sin, sin. Reassuring us that whilst we need to keep in view his perfect justice, we can also be confident of his perfect forgiveness.

Jesus first words after 8 centuries of darkness weren’t: “If you’re a sinner repent”. He just says: “Repent...”