Let's turn to the book of the prophet Jeremiah, which we are studying on these Sunday mornings. Prophet Jeremiah chapter 21, verse 11. Jeremiah chapter 21, verse 11; reading through to chapter 23, verse eight.

*And to the house of the king of Judah, say, "Hear the word of the Lord, oh house of David. Thus says the Lord, 'Execute justice in the morning, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed, lest my WRATH go forth like fire and burn, with none to quench it, because of your evil doings. Behold, I am against you. O inhabitant of the valley, O rock of the plains,' says the Lord. 'You who say, "Who shall come down against us, or who shall enter our habitations," I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings,' says the Lord. 'I will kindle a fire in her forest, and it shall devour all that is roundabout.' "*

*Thus says the Lord. "Go down to the house of the king of Judah and speak there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, oh king of Judah, who sits on the throne of David---you and your servants and your people who enter these gates. Thus says the Lord, "Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed; and do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place; for if you will indeed obey this word, then there shall enter this gate of this house kings who sit on the throne of David riding in chariots and on horses, they and their servants and their people. But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself," says the Lord, "that this house shall become a desolation." For thus says the Lord concerning the house of the king of Judah. "You are as Gilead to me, as the summit of Lebanon. Yet surely I will make you a desert---an uninhabited city. I will prepare destroyers against---you each with his weapons---and they shall cut down your choicest cedars and cast them into the fire; and many nations will pass by this city, and every man will say to his neighbor, 'Why has the Lord dealt thus with this great city?' And they will answer, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord their God and worshiped other gods and served them.' " ' "*

*Weep not for him who is dead, nor bemoan him; but weep bitterly for him who goes away, for he shall return no more to see his native land. For thus says the Lord concerning Shallum, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah, his father, and who went away from this place: "He shall return here no more; but in the place where they have carried him captive, there shall he die; and he shall never see this land again."*

*"Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice, who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing and does not give him his wages. Who says, 'I will build myself a great house with spacious upper rooms,' and cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar and painting it with vermilion. Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy. Then it was well. Is not THIS to know me?" says the Lord. "But you have eyes and heart only for your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence."*

*Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah. "They shall not lament for him saying, 'Ah, my brother,' or 'Ah, sister.' They shall not lament for him saying, 'Ah, Lord,' or 'Ah, his majesty.' With the burial of an ass, he shall be buried---dragged and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem."*

*Go up to Lebanon, and cry out and lift up your voice in Bashan. "Cry from Abarim, for all your lovers are destroyed. I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, 'I will not listen.' This has been your way from your youth: that you have not obeyed my voice. The wind shall shepherd all your shepherds; and your lovers shall go into captivity. Then you will be ashamed and confounded because of all your wickedness. Oh, inhabitants of Lebanon, nested among the cedars, how you will groan when pangs come upon you---pain as of a woman in travail."*

*"As I live," says the Lord, "though Coniah, the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah were the signet ring on my right hand, yet I would tear you off and give you into the hand of those who seek your life---into the hand of those of whom you are afraid, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. I will hurl you and the mother who bore you into another country where you were not born, and there you shall die. But to the land to which they will long to return, there they shall not return. Is this man Coniah a despised broken pot, a vessel no one cares for? Why are he and his children hurled and cast into a land which they do not know? Oh, land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord. 'Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days; for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah.' "*

 *"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture." says the Lord. Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel concerning the shepherds who care for my people, "You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil doing." says the Lord. "Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them; and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them; and they shall fear no more nor be dismayed; neither shall any be missing," says the Lord.*

***"Behold the days are coming," says the Lord, "when I will raise up for David a RIGHTEOUS BRANCH;*** *and he shall reign as king and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely.* ***And this is the name by which you will be called: 'THE LORD IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS'.*** *Therefore, behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "when men shall no longer say, 'As the Lord lives, who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' but, 'As the Lord lives, who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel out of the north country, and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' Then they shall dwell in their own land."*

How many of you saw the program on Christmas Day, just before the Queen spoke, entitled *'The Pilot Prince'*, about Prince Charles? How many of you saw that program?

Few. Well, I'm gonna start with that program. Either you're all very shy this morning, or...whatever. Well, I want to start with that program. It was a very moving documentary about the young man who may one day be our future King, Prince Charles. And all of us, I think, were interested to find out what kind of a person he really is--- what makes him tick, whether he's got what it takes. If he does become king, then it would certainly be the first time for some years that we had a sovereign who was a born comedian, and who has a great sense of humor. I'm glad he has, because that means he's got a sense of proportion. Also, for a sense of humor is basically a sense of **PROPORTION**. It's usually one of the marks of the saints too. But even if he does become king, and even if he has what it takes, he will ***NEVER REIGN***, for the simple fact is that royalty in this country does ***NOT REIGN***.

***The True Meaning of ‘Royalty’***

 Indeed, one of the features of our modern society is that royalty is ***DISAPPEARING*** and being replaced in country after country by Republicanism. Between World War I and World War II, twenty-four crowned heads of Europe fell and disappeared from history. In England, of course, we like to have the best of both worlds. We like to think we've ***KEPT*** something even when we've ***LOST*** it. And so, we've managed to muddle through in typical English compromise, and we say we still have a sovereign. But she has no sovereignty. That is supremely illustrated (the irony of it) by the state opening of parliament once a year, when the queen, almost as a puppet, reads a speech that has been prepared by the ***REAL*** monarch in this country, the ***PRIME MINISTER,*** who is allowed to stand just inside the door to hear it.

It is so ridiculous, it's almost laughable. But that is the way we have managed to keep a semblance of royalty. A shop steward in Coventry has more power to affect this nation than Prince Charles will ever have, even if he becomes king. And in this topsy turvy world, this whole notion of where the real power lies has become a very difficult issue, especially in the complexity of modern industry. All of which is a ***PREAMBLE*** to try and help you to realize that when we talk about royalty in ***BIBLE*** days, we are talking about (true) royalty. About kings who ***REALLY REIGNED***...who had the power--- such power that their ***WORD*** was ***LAW***. And in their hands rested, for example, the leadership of the ***MILITARY***. And the king would lead his troops into battle (the last English king to do that was George the third); but the kings of those days really led their troops. They were the commander-in-chief, and they made the decisions in battle. They were also the head of the **COURTS**...and their word was law; and they had to arbitrate. And ultimately, the standard of justice rested on the ***CHARACTER*** of the king. There were many other ways in which they really had power.

Now, royalty is a ***HEREDITARY*** thing; and our modern democratic society doesn't like hereditary status opposition. That's why royalty is disappearing. But if you're going to have royalty, then it must be ***HEREDITARY***. And that is one of the reasons ***GENEALOGIES*** are so important in the Bible story, especially those of the ***ROYAL LINE***. And anybody in the royal line kept their family tree most carefully, to prove that they had royal blood in their veins. And that is why we talk ***NOT ABOUT*** individual queens and kings but about ***HOUSES***: the ***HOUSE*** of Windsor, the ***HOUSE*** of Judah, the ***HOUSE*** of Stuart, the ***HOUSE*** of David. The house of David. And that house is the most important royal house there has ever been. For It's the royal house from which the babe at Bethlehem was born. And the genealogy is complete, and it's there in the word of God. He ***INHERITED*** that position.

***Inherited Royalty: An Attitude Either of ‘Privilege’ or ‘Service’***

There's nothing wrong with inheriting a position. The important thing is the ***ATTITUDE*** of the person who inherits it. If they regard their inherited status purely in terms of ***PRIVILEGE*** for themselves instead of ***RESPONSIBILITY*** towards others, then they abuse that inheritance. And if you read through the book of Kings, you'll be startled by the way that God divides kings into ***TWO*** categories, and two alone...and there's nothing in between. He either did ***GOOD*** in the sight of the Lord, or he did ***EVIL*** in the sight of the Lord. And you alternate between good kings and bad kings. There are no middling ones in the Bible. They are either good or bad in God's sight. And the reason why this king is ***GOOD*** in the sight of the Lord, and that king is ***BAD***, is that the good king regarded his inherited position in terms of ***RESPONSIBILITY***---service to others. The bad kings regarded it in terms of ***PRIVILEGE***---status for themselves. It was mixed up with a lot of other things too. And behind this attitude to other people and to themselves, lay their attitude to ***GOD***. And the ***GOOD*** king was the one who listened to God and recognized that he was under a King himself.

When her majesty, the queen, was crowned in Westminster Abbey---and there's a bit of the coronation carpet in our waiting room just through that door...when she was sitting on that carpet and being crowned, she was handed a Bible, and she was told this is the ***ROYAL LAW***. In other words: "This is the law for ***YOU***. You are under law. If you are going to be a good sovereign, here is the royal law--- the law for kings from the King of Kings."

Well now that's the setting of the passage we've just read. We're discussing what we might refer to as 'noblesse oblige' ---the obligations of nobility. Those who have inherited the status of royalty have an ***OBLIGATION***: a responsibility to ***SERVE*** those over whom they reign. And Jeremiah is now, for the first time, in touch with kings. He now has the privilege of ***PREACHING*** to the royal family. What is he going to say? Dr. Billy Graham had that privilege, in St. George's Windsor, of preaching before her majesty, the Queen and the queen mother and to other members of the royal family. What would he decide to preach upon? He preached on *"You Must be Born Again."* And the queen and the queen mother afterwards told him, "We know what it is to be born again."

There was a vicar of Sandham who regularly preached before King George the 6th and his family. And King George the 6th once said to that vicar, "Why is it that, of all the preachers I listen to, ***YOUR*** words strike home to my heart more than any others. Why is it that you preach right into my heart?" And the vicar said, "I don't know that I want to tell you, your majesty." And he said, "You can tell me. I won't be upset. Tell me." "Well," he said, "I fix my attention on the humblest ***SERVANT GIRL*** in Sandringham House, sitting at the back of the congregation. And I preach to the servant." And King George the 6th---who certainly knew the Lord Jesus---received his words, because he saw himself as a ***SERVANT***; and the word of God struck home.

***Jeremiah Admonishes the Unrighteous King***

Now, what would Jeremiah say to the king? You see...remember, Jeremiah was born in a humble little village, Anathoth, about eight miles northeast of Jerusalem---a ***COUNTRY LAD***. And God had thrust him into the big city and made him preach in the streets and smash jars outside the gates and even go into the Temple court. ***NOW***, in this chapter, and the last bit of last Sunday morning's study, he's got the ear of the king. Indeed, the king is now asking him, Jeremiah, *"Jeremiah is the city* ***LOST****? The Babylonians are around the gates, around the walls. They're besieging us. Is the city* ***LOST****?"* And the king sent two men, Pashhur and Zephaniah, to Jeremiah to ask him for God's opinion. Now, this was the ***FIRST*** time royalty had ever approached Jeremiah---***INDIRECTLY***, it's true... they were not yet face-to-face. It was an indirect message. But Jeremiah had the chance to send a message to the king. And he said, *"Tell the king* ***THREE*** *things:* ***FIRST****, give him an answer to the question. The answer is,* ***'NO****, the city will not survive. For God is fighting for the* ***BABYLONIANS****, not us.' "* Then (***SECOND***) he dared to go further and give him some advice. And his advice was, *"****SURENDER*** *to the enemy as quickly as you can. It's a matter of life and death. You can just snatch your life if you surrender now."* And he dared to go even further. That second piece (the advice) was interpreted as ***TREASON*** and would land him in prison. But the ***THIRD*** thing was an admonition. Not content with giving an ***ANSWER*** to the king's question and ***ADVICE*** as to what to do about it, he went further and ***ADMONISHED*** the king. It takes holy boldness to do that in a country where the king really reigns and where his word is law. And so, Jeremiah said, *"Give him this* ***ADMONITION****: 'Zedekiah, you see to justice: You see that the poor and the needy get looked after. You see that there's no innocent bloodshed. You see that violence is cut out of the city.* ***EXECUTE JUSTICE IN THE MORNING,****' "*...In other words, *"As soon as you can, as early as you can, as quickly as you can, execute* ***JUSTICE*** *and* ***RIGHTEOUSNESS****."*

And here we've got the THEME for this morning. There are ***TWO*** qualities needed in someone who's going to be a king. Whatever ***OTHER*** human qualities they possess or do not possess, whether they are pleasing to look at or not, whether they've got engaging attributes of personality or not, the two things that a king must ***ALWAYS*** have are ***JUSTICE*** and ***RIGHTEOUSNESS***.

Now those are big words. Let me put it more ***SIMPLY***. The two things a ruler must have are that he must always be ***FAIR*** and ***STRAIGHT***. Fair and straight. Why was Watergate such a trauma to the American people? The whole nation lost its morale over that. And I sensed that when I was over there. They are no longer the people with a ***SUPERIORITY COMPLEX***. Why did they lose their morale? Because their president was ***NOT*** fair or straight; and that's what happened. Why was the Stonehouse Affair something that filled our papers for days and weeks (we're not through it yet). Same reason. For when the people at the ***TOP*** are not fair or straight, then authority loses ***ALL*** respect, and you're finished. And the nation ***CRUMBLES***.

And so, Jeremiah dared to say to the king, *"****FAIR*** *and* ***STRAIGHT****. You get fair and you get straight. Execute justice in the morning. Look after those who can't defend themselves: the immigrant, the orphan, the widow, the poor, the needy, the people who can't fight in this jungle. You look after them. That's your job as king."* It has a strangely ***MODERN*** ring to it, this, doesn't it? The immigrant. The homeless. These are the people the king should be most concerned about: the people who can't fight, the people who can't defend themselves. And so, his message is, first of all, a message of ***JUSTICE*** and ***RIGHTEOUSNESS***.

The ***NEXT*** thing I noticed, as I read through what he said to the king, was that there is a key word ‘***DO’*** and ***‘DOINGS’***. And I kept underlining it. It kept coming. *"****DO*** *justice and righteousness!" "****DO*** *no wrong or violence!" "Your evil* ***DOINGS****." "The fruit of your* ***DOINGS****." "****DO****!" "****DO****!" "****DO****!"* "***DOINGS***." It's not enough to issue a manifesto. God is only interested in what we DO. And God isn't interested in the politicians' manifestos. He's interested in what they ***DO*** about those manifestos. It's not enough to say, "I stand for truth and righteousness." It's not enough to hold the scepter and the orb in the hand. God says*, "What are you* ***DOING****? What are you* ***DOING*** *Zedekiah?"* So: "***FAIR*** and ***STRAIGHT***." "***DOING***."

What ***MORE*** does God say? God says that he will ***PUNISH*** injustice and unrighteousness in the rulers. And his anger will be like a ***FOREST FIRE***. That's a vivid picture. Most of us have never seen a forest fire. If you lived in Canada, you'd see it ---millions of acres, millions of trees. Thousands of acres get destroyed every year through forest fire. They now bomb them with water from the air, to try and stop them. A forest fire ***SWEEPS*** ahead. It burns holiday homes, farms...

I remember, in our previous church at Gold Hill, there was a family. And one night, the mother had a vivid dream of her daughter in Tasmania. And she dreamt the ***DAUGHTER*** was trapped in a forest fire. And she ***PAINTED*** the scene---I've seen the oil painting. She painted the scene of the daughter at the window of a house; and around the house, a blazing forest fire! In fact, she had had that *'second sight'*, which occasionally comes to people. And her daughter was---***AT THAT MOMENT***---in that dreadful forest fire not far from Hobert, a few years ago. You may remember it.

And God says to the rulers who are ***NOT*** fair and straight, *"I am a* ***FOREST FIRE****!"* And there's no defense against a forest fire. Well now, that was the ***ADMONITION***. And after (that), Jeremiah had sent it to a king who was weak and crooked---the last king of all Judah---a man called ***'ZEDEKIAH'*** (a man whose name meant ***'RIGHTEOUSNESS'***). Do you realize that? *'Zedekiah'* means ***'THE LORD IS MY RIGHTEOUSNESS'***. And his very name comes from the word *'righteousness'*. But he was ***WEAK***, and he was ***NOT FAIR***. And he was ***NOT STRAIGHT***. And Jeremiah says, *"Unless you listen to this word, and put it* ***RIGHT*** *and get* ***STRAIGHT****, then there's a* ***FOREST FIRE*** *on its way."*

And having sent that message to the king ***INDIRECTLY***, Jeremiah then is told by the Lord, *"Jeremiah,* ***YOU*** *go down to the house of the king, and tell him* ***YOURSELF*** *the same thing. Don't just be content to send a message indirectly. Go and tell him."* Can you imagine? A countryman from Hemel Hempstead, being told to go and visit Buckingham Palace and tell the queen himself! Tell her himself! Or the equivalent today would be to go to ***10 DOWNING STREET***. "Tell the prime minister himself, ***'YOU*** bring justice! ***YOU*** be fair to the immigrant and to those who haven't got a home. There are thousands of them.' "

***The People Had Left God After Josiah’s Reign***

That's what Jeremiah was told to do. So, he went. And he said it to the king's face! And he said, *"Zedekiah, a day will come when people will go past this very city, and they'll say, 'What on earth happened?* ***WHY*** *is it like this?* ***WHY*** *did God allow such a great capital city to fall to pieces?* ***WHY*** *did it crumble?' And they will answer ‘****BECAUSE THEY LEFT GOD****.' "*

Notice that ---not, *"Because the king was* ***UNJUST*** *or* ***UNFAIR****,"* but *"Because* ***THEY LEFT GOD****. They got away from God."* You see, the injustice and the unrighteousness, is the ***SYMPTOM***. It's not the ***DISEASE***. Loss of respect for authority is a ***SYMPTOM***. It's not the ***DISEASE***. Increasing figures of violence and crime are not the ***DISEASE***. They're the ***SYMPTOMS***. The ***DISEASE*** is: ***WE’VE GOT AWAY FROM GOD***. The ***SYMPTOMS***---we know them only too well; and our newspapers are crammed with ***SYMPTOMS***. But our newspapers never tell us the ***DISEASE***! They just keep on throwing the ***SYMPTOMS*** at us! They don't diagnose. They only describe. And the diagnosis is: when a nation gets away from God, ***INJUSTICE*** and ***UNRIGHTEOUSNESS*** abound. And the ***POOR*** and the ***NEEDY*** are the worst affected, and the most exploited.

Well now, added to his personal ***REPETITION*** of the message he sent by the two emissaries of the king, Jeremiah now went on to ***WARN*** Zedekiah, who was to be the ***LAST*** king of all. And they were within ***EIGHT YEARS*** of the fall of the capital, when Jeremiah said this. Only eight more years to go, and Jerusalem was ***FINISHED***, and Zedekiah was ***GONE***. Eight years. It's a last-ditch appeal from Jeremiah. He reinforces the appeal by reminding Zedekiah of the dreadful end of his three predecessors---two of whom were Zedekiah's brothers, and one of whom was his nephew.

I'd almost like a blackboard now, to draw you one of these royal family trees; but I think I can do it in your mind quite simply. The ***LAST GOOD KING*** of Judah was ***JOSIAH***. There he is up at the TOP of the tree: Josiah. He came to the throne when he was eight, and was killed in battle at 39. I'll tell you more about that in a moment. He had at least three sons. So, at the next line down, we've got ***THREE SONS***. We've got Shallum. Sorry, let's take them in order of age. We've got ***JEHOIAKIM*** (the eldest), ***SHALLUM***, and ***ZEDEKIAH***--- all three sons of Josiah. But the middle one, ***JEHOIAKIM***, also had a son called ***CONIAH***. So, the ***FAMILY TREE*** is Josiah, Jehoiakim, Shallum, Zedekiah, and Coniah from Jehoiakim. Put Coniah back over there. Got it? One -- Three -- and One down there.

And the order of the ***LAST FIVE KINGS OF JUDAH*** was this: (1) ***JOSIAH***. Now notice who comes second, not the eldest, but (2) ***SHALLUM***, otherwise known as Jehoahaz (that just confuses you!). Shallum. After Shallum, (3) ***JEHOIAKIM***. After Jehoiakim, it should have been Zedekiah, the next brother. But it wasn't. It was (4) ***CONIAH***. And then finally it came over to (6) ***ZEDEKIAH***. What a mix up! Can you see? There were two of those, who shouldn't have been king at all, because they weren't the eldest. Did you see that? ***SHALLUM*** shouldn't have been king, because he was second. And ***CONIAH*** shouldn't have been king, because Zedekiah was nearest. And the interesting thing is that God ---God got rid of those two within three months! They had the shortest reigns of any kings of Judah. So (1) ***JOSIAH*** reigned from the age of eight to the age of 39 -- 31 years. Then came (2) ***SHALLUM***, three months...then gone. Then came (3) ***JEHOIAKIM***, 11 years...but not a good one. Then came his son, (4) ***CONIAH***, three months...then gone. Now comes (5) ***ZEDEKIAH***, and he's the ***LAST***. And it's to Zedekiah that Jeremiah is now speaking. Now, sorry about the history, but Oliver Cromwell used to say about his son: "I would have him learn a little history," and a ***LITTLE*** history isn't a bad thing.

Now let's look at those three last kings, Shallum, Jehoiakim, Coniah. And remember that Jeremiah is speaking to ***ZEDEKIAH*** about those three: two of his brothers and his nephew. Have you got the picture now? (No exam at the end, so you can forget it now.) But, let's now look at these three kings. Let's ask ***FIRST*** how ***JOSIAH*** came to die. He was a ***GOOD*** king, even though he was very young---age of eight when he was crowned. And, it was in his reign they found the Law book in the Temple; and they reformed the nation and they tried to put things straight; and he was a good king, until he made one mistake and it was a ***BIG*** one.

The little country of ***JUDAH***---tiny though it was ...less than the size of Surrey---was trapped on the main route around the Fertile Crescent, between the Nile, and the Tigress and the Euphrates---the two centers of power, the two centers of civilization. The threats to little Judah always came from the ***SOUTH*** or the ***NORTH***---either when Egypt was on the move or when a nation over here was on the move. And they had been under threat from ***ASSYRIA*** (up here) for a long time. But now ***ASSYRIA*** was crumbling. Who would step into the vacuum? Who would take over the power of the Fertile Crescent? Egypt decided to try; and it's Pharaoh---a man called Necho---decided to march north to take advantage of the weakening empire of ***ASSYRIA*** and its crumbling capital, ***NINEVEH***. So, he marched north; and to do so, he had to pass through the little end of Israel (not the part of it where the king lived).

Now just further north, he had to pass through a famous pass called ***MEGIDDO***...the pass of Megiddo---a sight of many a famous battle, and the sight of the last battle in history---where there's a little hill called Megiddo (or Har-mageddon), a little hill from which the pass is controlled. And Josiah said, *"I'm not gonna have Pharaoh coming through that pass."* And he went up and he stationed his troops on the hill of Megiddo; and he attacked Necho. And the next thing they knew, they were carrying the body of Josiah back to Jerusalem. He had no word from God to go. It was a foolhardy expedition. It was a tragic blunder. It threw away his life. And from then on, they ***NEVER*** had another good king.

***Shallum***

Now the next in line should have been ***JEHOIAKIM***. But there were reasons why the people didn't want him.... the eldest son. We'll see, what they were in a moment. And so, they democratically elected ***SHALLUM****.* The people voted and they said, *"Shallum, he's a young handsome man. He's the sort of person we want."* And they had Shallum. And God said, *"He has* ***NO*** *right to this throne."* And within three months the Egyptians had taken Shallum and taken him down to Egypt; and he never came back home.

So, Jeremiah says, *"Weep! But* ***DON'T*** *weep for Josiah, who died in battle. Weep rather for him who was gone away to a land from which he will never return!"* And he didn't. And Shallum spent the rest of his days as a prisoner of Pharaoh in Egypt. *"Zedekiah, remember what happened to your brother Shallum."*

***Jehoiakim***

*“And now Zedekiah...who was he followed by?”* He was followed by the one who should have had it all the time. And the Egyptians decided to put ***JEHOIAKIM*** on the throne, provided he paid ***TAX*** to them. So, that was the arrangement. He was a ***PUPPET***. And this man was a ***LITTLE MAN***... a little man. And therefore, he tried to be big, and he said, *"I'm going to build the biggest* ***PALACE*** *there's ever been."* And he built this magnificent house. It had upper stories---it was a skyscraper---and he paneled it with cedar, and he painted it with vermilion. It was a magnificent structure. This paltry little king, in a tiny little kingdom, was trying to be as big as Pharaoh and as big as the Nebuchadnezzar. He was wanting to say, *"I'm a great power."* And there are a few things more ***PATHETIC*** than seeing a shrinking nation trying to kid itself that it's still a great power. And he did it with forced labor, with heavy taxes. He did it with oppression, injustice. Now I know why the people didn't want him. He was a man who saw his position, not to serve the people, but that they might serve him for ***NOTHING***. And Jeremiah says, *"He wouldn't pay his neighbors for what they did."*

And Jehoiakim built up this magnificent imposing status symbol of a palace. And God said, *"Jehoiakim, at your funeral there won't even be any mourners. You'll be dragged through the city gates like a dead donkey and left. You won't even be buried."* And of course, the final status symbol is a ***BIG FUNERAL***. That's the last status symbol you can have. If you've lived in a big house, then a big funeral follows. And God said, *"No, Jehoiakim."*

One of the other things that God said to Jehoiakim, I think, is very relevant to us today. He said, *"Jehoiakim when you were prosperous, you wouldn't listen to me."* This, of course, is the ***TRAGEDY***! In adversity, most people will try and get in touch with God. In ***PROSPERITY***, they don't. As long as they can build a bigger house for themselves, they forget God. As long as they can build up status symbols and are in a position to do so, and can get the wealth however they get it, that's fine. And God doesn't get a look in. And this is the tragedy: that when we try and contact God in ***ADVERSITY***, we can't get through...because we didn't listen in ***PROSPERITY***. It's like trying to put the anchor down ***AFTER*** the storm has begun. And God says*, "Jehoiakim, you did not listen to me in prosperity."* That's the warning that was given to the people of God in the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy said, *"While you're in the* ***WILDERNESS*** *and you're dependent on me for manna and water from the rock, you think of me. But when you get into the land flowing with milk and honey, and when you've got wealth and built for yourselves fine houses,* ***THEN*** *beware. Then beware that you* ***FORGET*** *the Lord your God and* ***DON'T LISTEN*** *to him anymore."* And it is our tragedy, that during the sixties and the first few seventies in this country, our very ***AFFLUENCE*** meant that we could do without God. We didn't listen to him in prosperity. That's why things go wrong ***LATER***. And that's why, in ***ADVERSITY***, we find ***CONFUSION***, and we can't get a word from God, and we can't get through.

The other thing that Jeremiah says to Jehoiakim is this, "Didn't your father live well? He ate and drank. He lived well; but he judged the cause of the poor and needy. Then it was well. He did justice and righteousness: then it was, well!" Who was Jehoiakim's father? ***JOSIAH***!! There's nothing wrong with living well, provided you live well in ***EVERY*** respect. And Josiah lived well ***MATERIALLY***; but he lived well ***MORALLY***. The two went together. Josiah ate and drank ***WELL***; and he practiced justice and righteousness ***WELL***. And then, Jeremiah says this: "Is this, not to ***KNOW*** the Lord." In other words, to know the Lord means to live well...to live well.

God wants us to live well in ***EVERY*** way. That's his intention. And when we get to heaven, we shall live ***WELL***. First thing we'll do is have a ***FEAST***. There's nothing wrong with eating and drinking. It's a ***PERVERTED*** Christianity that thinks that austerity and aestheticism is what Christ commanded. While they criticized Christ himself because he ate well, they called him a glutton and a wine bibber. But Christ lived ***WELL*** because he did ***JUSTICE*** and ***RIGHTEOUSNESS***. He cared for the poor and the needy. "Live ***WELL***, Jehoiakim! Your father lived ***WELL***. It was ***WELL*** with him. He knew the Lord. He lived ***WELL***." And oh, how much meaning there is in that, "It was ***WELL***." It is well with my ***SOUL***. But it was well with his ***BODY*** too. "But Jehoiakim, you have eyes and heart only for your dishonest gain." And so, he was ***FINISHED*** too.

***Coniah***

The ***THIRD*** king that Jeremiah reminds Zedekiah about is ***CONIAH***. Now Coniah was Jehoiakim's son. When Jehoiakim died (and there's no record of any funeral in the Bible for Jehoiakim. With others it says they died, and they were laid with their fathers---or they were buried---but not with Jehoiakim. He was never buried) ...when he died, the next in line was Zedekiah. He inherited the throne. But instead ***CONIAH*** was chosen. For, by this time, ***BABYLON*** had defeated Egypt, and now Babylon was power number one; and Jehoiakim had switched sides, and he was now trying to make friends with Babylon. So, when he (Jehoiakim) died, Babylon put Coniah on the throne, and Coniah was not there. And God said, "Coniah, if you were the signet ring on My hand," ...that's a man's most personal possession, he never takes it off to sleep, to bathe or anything else, ..."If you were the signet ring on My hand---if you were My closest personal possession---I would throw you out. You shouldn't be there, and you don't have what it takes to be there".

And Coniah hadn't, when you read the story. His ***MOTHER*** was the power behind the throne. And God says, "You and your mother will go to a country where you are were not born. You will be homesick, but you will not return." And then comes a ***CURSE*** on Coniah...a curse which is fascinating. "Write this man down as ***CHILDLESS***," (i.e., Coniah) ..."Write this man down as childless; for ***NONE*** of his offspring will ever inherit the throne." Now Coniah had seven sons and his family tree went down and down and down. And here's the ***SHOCK***: Coniah's name is in Matthew chapter one. And it is in the ***GENEOLOGY*** of our Lord Jesus Christ. First page of the New Testament: there is his name, *'Coniah'*, right in the middle. Here then...is there a contradiction in God's word? This young man taken away after only three months into ***BABYLON***, where he was 37 years in prison and died there a ***HOMESICK*** man. This man, Coniah, was told, *"God says, 'You shall be childless. No offspring of yours will ever inherit the throne of David.' "* And yet in Matthew 1:11, there's his name...there's his name. How do we account for it? Very simply, if you study ***MATTHEW*** chapter one very carefully, you'll find that the genealogy is that of ***JOSEPH***...of Joseph!! And if Joseph had been the real father of Jesus, Jesus could NOT have inherited the throne of David, and could ***NEVER*** have been king. Isn't it amazing how the Bible holds together? And there you have the ***LEGAL*** genealogy of Jesus, but not the ***PHYSICAL*** genealogy of Jesus in Matthew chapter one. ***LEGALLY***, he was ***JOSEPH'S*** ***son***; but Joseph was ***NOT*** his ***father***. And our Lord Jesus did ***NOT*** have the blood of Coniah in his veins. But when you turn to ***LUKE*** chapter three where we find the genealogy of Mary, you find that the family tree still contains King David---the royal house of David was on ***MARY'S*** side too. But what you find is this, that ***CONIAH*** is ***not*** there. He's not there. And the royal blood of David came into the veins of Jesus via ***ANOTHER ROUTE***. Isn't it amazing how God works things out and keeps his word? It's a little point, but it's the sort of ***LITTLE DETAIL*** that just hits you when you get into the Bible in depth. So, Coniah had seven sons. Not one of them would ever sit on the throne of David. There were many other descendants. One of them was the ***ZERUBBABEL***. He became a governor in Jerusalem, but never the king. And not one of ***CONIAH'S*** sons ever became king.

So, let's come to our closing passage. Jeremiah has said to Zedekiah, *"Consider your three predecessors. All of them were useless. Two of them were taken away after only three months, one into Egypt, one into Babylon. The one that had 11 years was a corrupt man full of oppression and ostentation. Zedekiah, you take warning. You can't get away with bad kingship."*

***God Looks for Leaders Who are ‘Shepherd-Kings’***

And so, finally we have the lovely passage in the first eight verses of chapter 23: Jeremiah's ***FINAL COMMENT*** on the royal line of his day. And here I want you to notice that, in an amazing way, Jeremiah puts together ***TWO CALLINGS***: ***KINGS*** and ***SHEPHERDS***. You don't realize what a shock that is until I tell you that the KING was at the very TOP of the social ladder, and the ***SHEPHERD*** was someone at the very ***BOTTOM***...the very bottom. The man sent out to look after sheep was the lowest man of all. That's why Jesse had said, when Samuel was looking for a king among his family...Samuel said, *"Well, are these all your boys?" "Well," he (Jesse) said, "there's just the lad looking after the sheep, David."* ***BUT GOD LIKES A SHEPHERD FOR A KING***!! That's why he sent ***MOSES*** into the wilderness to look after sheep before he made him the leader to bring out his people. God needs ***SHEPHERD-KINGS***, shepherd-kings.

And in the ancient world, it was an ***OFFENSE*** for a shepherd to become a king---for someone at the very bottom of the ladder to come to the top. But in God's thinking, a shepherd at the ***BOTTOM*** of the social ladder knows how to be a king at the ***TOP***. And a king at the ***TOP*** should know how to be a shepherd at the ***BOTTOM***. It's got the whole feeling of a ***KING*** who's willing to ***HUMBLE HIMSELF*** to serve the sheep. A ***KING*** that's willing to regard himself at the ***BOTTOM*** of the nation of which he's top. It's a remarkable concept...a very humbling one. That's why Jesus, when he came, saw the crowds as, "***SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD***." And they tried to make him king. See, there was a ***SHEPHERD HEART*** there. And shepherds and kings belong together. That's why the birth of the king was announced to shepherds---the people at the bottom of the social scale---***FIRST***. And the shepherds came to see the babe. Can you see God's lovely picture unfolding there? And so, Jeremiah says to Zedekiah, *"God deals with* ***BAD*** *shepherds."* If the flock gets scattered instead of gathered, if they're not cared for, if they're destroyed and scattered, then God will deal with ***EVIL*** shepherds. He will attend to ***THEM*** (the evil shepherds) because they haven't attended to the sheep. *"But,"* he says*, "one day God is going to bring all the scattered sheep* ***BACK****--- the* ***SURVIVORS*** *that there are."*

You know, in 1947, I was working on a farm in Northumberland; and it was a dreadful winter. Do you remember the snow? We were cut off for approximately six weeks. I'll never forget what happened the night before the snow came. It was a beautiful, clear night--- beautiful sky, perfect winter's day; the sort of day you just want to be out of doors and breathing the pure wine of the air. And that afternoon, the shepherd on that farm said to the farmer, "We must get all the sheep down near the buildings---down into the meadows--- from up in the hills. And so, we were all kept overtime that night; and we brought the sheep down---brought all the sheep down. Perfect weather; but we had a ***GOOD SHEPHERD***. And in his bones, he knew. And we lost not one sheep. On the next farm, they lost hundreds. They were going out digging them out of the drifts. There were helicopters from Acklington Airport---which was just at the edge of the farm---dropping hay on the snow, trying to save some. We had a ***GOOD SHEPHERD*** who kept the sheep safe, and he knew.

But you know, even those who lost most of their sheep, as long as they'd got a few...when the snow went, they began to breed; and they built up and built up again. They built a ***NEW FLOCK***. And God says, *"I'm gonna do that with the* ***REMNANT OF MY FLOCK****. Just a remnant. I'm gonna bring them back from the countries where they've been scattered. One day I'll bring them back, and I'll give them* ***GOOD SHEPHERDS*** *who care for the sheep. And they'll be* ***SAFE*** *in their own pasture."*

***A ‘Righteous Branch’ Will Arise Out of David’s House***

Now comes the ***CLIMAX***, like a burst of light. The ***ONLY*** mention of the ***MESSIAH*** in the whole book of Jeremiah*. "Behold, the days are coming, when I will raise up for the house of David, a* ***'RIGHTEOUS BRANCH'*** *(or 'shoot')."* Now on Boxing Day, our family went for a Boxing Day walk. We went to Pitch Hill, we walked among the trees on that hill. It's a lovely place to walk. And my daughter drew my attention to a most unusual oak tree. It had a most unusual shape; and the trunk almost looked as if it had been stuck together from bits that had been picked off the ground. Most unusual. And she was pointing me to this unusual shape. But I looked down at the bottom of it, and there I saw something even more unusual. It was not an original oak tree. There was the great stump of an oak about this wide, a great, round, flat bit that had been sliced off with a saw. And it had been there...obviously been cut down many years ago, because it was rotting already. And here was this great, flat stump that must have been a great oak tree at one stage. And the tree that we were looking at was growing from the ***SIDE*** of that flat piece. It was a ***SHOOT*** that had come out---just a little shoot. And now it was growing to be ***ANOTHER*** great tree and would be as great (if not greater) than the original. It was just a shoot growing out of the side. That's the meaning of the Hebrew word here: *'a righteous shoot'*. The tree will be cut down---and with Zedekiah, it was cut down; and 300 years of a royal house was finished...Or so they thought; until just over 500 years later, a little ***SHOOT*** came from the ***ROOT***, a little ***BABY***. A baby lying in a manger grew up; and that baby was to ***RULE*** the land as ***KING***---wisely, righteously. And Judah would be ***SAVED***. And Israel would dwell, ***SECURE***. And the ***NAME*** of this baby would be *'the Lord is Our Righteousness'*. Almost the same word as ***ZEDEKIAH***. And if you turn to the New Testament, you'll find that ***JESUS*** is to us, our ***WISDOM***, our ***RIGHTEOUSNESS***. He's the ***SHOOT***. *"Oh, unto to us a* ***CHILD*** *is born. Unto us a* ***SON*** *is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And he shall be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. And of the increase of his government there shall be no end...no end!"* That's the bright spark that comes through this dark prophecy to King ***ZEDEKIAH***. Jeremiah finishes with this blaze of ***HOPE***. "***Oh ZEDEKIAH***, you're gonna be cut down---the royal tree of three centuries will be cut down to a ***STUMP***. But from the stump there will come a new ***SHEPHERD-KING;*** and he will ***REIGN***...he will reign."

So, the prophecy finishes with Jeremiah saying this, *"Whereas up till now, the children of Israel have always looked* ***BACK*** *to the exodus from the south as the greatest example of greatest proof of a living God, as the Lord lives---who brought us out of Egypt---from now on, they will say, 'As the Lord lives, who brought us* ***BACK FROM BABYLON****. As the Lord lives, who gave us a NEW KING. As the Lord lives, who put us* ***BACK IN OUR LAND****.' "* And the ***FINAL*** sentence I read to this morning is perhaps the ***SWEETEST*** to any Jewish ears. "***AND THEY SHALL DWELL IN THEIR OWN LAND."***

Well, what has all this got to do with ***YOU***? Do you find it boring, bit of history, something that we can just sit through another Sunday? *"So, that's what's needed in a* ***KING****, Zedekiah.* *But what about* ***ME****?”*

***A Righteous KING and His Royal FAMILY Will Reign***

 There's an unresolved ***CONTRADICTION*** in chapter 23, verses one to eight, that I must finally point you to. It's ***UNRESOLVED***. It says*, "I will give you* ***SHEPHERDS*** *(plural) to care for you."* And then it says, *"I will raise up one* ***KING*** *(singular), a righteous man. A righteous* ***MAN*** *of righteous reign."* Which does God mean? Is he going to bring them back and give them ***MANY*** kings, or ***ONE*** (king)? That's the unresolved question. It's another apparent contradiction in scripture, which is only resolved by the most incredible truth. When Jesus called the 12 disciples--- simple, humble men: a clerk, a few fishermen---he said to them, *"You will sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel."* And if that is not wonderful enough, here's something more. Paul says, writing to the Christians, *"If* ***WE******ENDURE****, we shall also* ***REIGN WITH HIM****."* And the book of Revelation four times---four times---says that Christ's faithful disciples will ***REIGN WITH HIM***.

And therefore, I count it a holy privilege this morning to be preaching to the ***'ROYAL FAMILY'***. I'm preaching to the royal family this morning: to princes and princesses who are preparing for a much more ***IMPORTANT*** and more ***PERMANENT*** reign than Prince Charles is preparing for. You are preparing in this world, to ***REIGN WITH CHRIST***...to sit on thrones with Christ. *"And the saints were brought to life and reigned with him a thousand years."* (Revelation 20, verse four) Do you find that exciting? Do you feel the royal blood in your veins? It's a ***HEREDITARY*** position. You inherit it because you are joint heirs with Christ. You inherit a ***THRONE***. You can wear a ***CROWN***. And therefore, as we looked at that program of Prince Charles preparing to be a king, I asked one question in my heart, "What does he have to learn to be a king?" There was ONE answer came into my mind...and it's a very simple one. And it's this thought that I want to leave with you this morning: ***HE'S GOT TO LEARN TO REIGN OVER HIMSELF BEFORE HE CAN REIGN OVER OTHERS!*** That's all. He's got to learn to control ***HIMSELF*** before he can control ***OTHERS***. And all the things he has been made to do---the schools he's been sent to, learning to fly, learning to sail, learning to ride---he's been learning to ***CONTORL HIMSELF*** (even how to walk slowly at public ceremonies) ...learning to reign over ***HIMSELF*** in preparation for the day when he reigns over ***OTHERS***.

That is precisely the message of the New Testament to the saints of God: learn to ***REIGN*** over ***YOURSELF***; and in that way, prepare to ***REIGN*** with ***CHRIST***. So, you see, it wasn't irrelevant to discuss what the Bible says is necessary in kings, was it? It is necessary for ***EVERY BELIEVER*** to learn what it takes to be born into a royal family and to inherit a ***THRONE***.

*"Our heavenly Father, we stand before you as your royal children. Grant us to prepare for our destiny. Grant us to be fit to be kings. Lord, may your word go deep into our hearts today on this last day of the year. For your name's sake."* Amen.