

“Pass in Review”

2 Kings 15:1-7 ¹

Taking everything together, I’ve lived in Newport, Rhode Island, for about a year—perhaps a little bit more—on a lovely peninsula jutting out into Narragansett Bay. I was there for two summers in Naval Officer Candidate School (OCS), again for several months of shipboard engineering training, and finally for two stints at the Navy Chaplains’ School. For a while, I was even the Minister of Music for a little Baptist church in Middletown, Rhode Island. It’s a lovely place to live . . . in the summer time.

One of the regular weekly events at OCS was what we called “PIR,” an acronym for “Pass in Review.” Every Friday afternoon, all four battalions of us put on freshly-pressed uniforms with freshly-polished brass and freshly-spit-shined shoes, cleaned our weapons, marched smartly in formation around the drill field, and then stood for a good while in that same formation so the Commandant could review his troops. There were many good military reasons for conducting weekly PIR, but we who benefited from those good reasons didn’t appreciate them at the time.

The most anxious part of PIR was the moment when the Commandant stood directly in front of me, looking me over literally from head to toe and front to back, making sure that my “gig line” was straight, that my hair was regulation-cut, that I knew how to properly wear the uniform, and so on. If deficiencies were noted, these were written down in “the book,” and we knew with sinking stomachs that a reckoning would come—and that right quickly.

We come this morning to the book of 2 Kings, and parts of 2 Kings have always struck me as sort of a “Pass in Review.” We’ve read on example already, and I’ll read several more in a moment. I’m reminded of these brief “inspection reports” when I prepare for funeral services, because every funeral service is a “Pass in Review” for the lives of our sisters and brothers who have finished the course.

In a funeral service, I have about ten minutes to summarize an entire human life. The accounts in 2 Kings aren’t even that long. Here are seven examples:

1. ¹ *Ahab’s son Joram began to rule over Israel in the eighteenth year of King Jehoshaphat’s reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria twelve years. ² He did what was evil in the Lord’s sight, but not to the same extent as his father and mother. He at least tore down the sacred pillar of Baal that his father had set up. ³ Nevertheless, he continued in the sins that Jeroboam son of Nebat had committed and led the people of Israel to commit (2 Kings 3:1-3).*
2. ¹ *Joash began to rule over Judah in the seventh year of King Jehu’s reign in Israel. He reigned in Jerusalem forty years. His mother was Zibiah from Beersheba. ² All his life Joash did what was pleasing in the Lord’s sight because Jehoiada the priest instructed him. ³ Yet even so, he did not destroy the pagan shrines, and the people still offered sacrifices and burned incense there (2 Kings 12:1-3).*
3. ¹⁰ *Jehoash son of Jehoahaz began to rule over Israel in the thirty-seventh year of King Joash’s reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria sixteen years. ¹¹ But he did what was evil in the Lord’s sight. He refused to turn from the sins that Jeroboam son of Nebat had led Israel to commit. ¹² The rest of the events in Jehoash’s reign and everything he did, including the extent of his power and his war with King Amaziah of Judah, are recorded in The Book of the History of the Kings of Israel. ¹³ When Jehoash died, he was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. Then his son Jeroboam II became the next king (2 Kings 13:10-13).*

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on September 15, 2019.

4. ¹ Amaziah son of Joash began to rule over Judah in the second year of the reign of King Jehoash of Israel. ² Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother was Jehoaddin from Jerusalem. ³ Amaziah did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight, but not like his ancestor David. Instead, he followed the example of his father, Joash. ⁴ Amaziah did not destroy the pagan shrines, and the people still offered sacrifices and burned incense there (2 Kings 14:1-4).
5. ¹ Uzziah son of Amaziah began to rule over Judah in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel. ² He was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-two years. His mother was Jecoliah from Jerusalem. ³ He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight, just as his father, Amaziah, had done. ⁴ But he did not destroy the pagan shrines, and the people still offered sacrifices and burned incense there. ⁵ The Lord struck the king with leprosy, which lasted until the day he died. He lived in isolation in a separate house. The king's son Jotham was put in charge of the royal palace, and he governed the people of the land (2 Kings 15:1-4).
6. ³² Jotham son of Uzziah began to rule over Judah in the second year of King Pekah's reign in Israel. ³³ He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. His mother was Jerusha, the daughter of Zadok. ³⁴ Jotham did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight. He did everything his father, Uzziah, had done. ³⁵ But he did not destroy the pagan shrines, and the people still offered sacrifices and burned incense there (2 Kings 15:32-35).
7. ⁵ Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after his time. ⁶ He remained faithful to the Lord in everything, and he carefully obeyed all the commands the Lord had given Moses. ⁷ So the Lord was with him, and Hezekiah was successful in everything he did (2 Kings 18:5-7).

There are several things I want you to notice here, the first of which is that these vignettes summarize the life of a king of either Israel or Judah in about five sentences. The odds are extremely high that someday some pastor somewhere is going to try to summarize your life. If he or she had only five sentences in which to do it, I wonder what would be said. In fact, if you were to summarize your own life this afternoon in five absolutely honest sentences, I wonder what you'd write down. If you're really brave, you might ask your spouse, your children, or your best friend to describe your life in five sentences. Are you nervous yet?

In the year 1867, a Swedish chemist named Alfred Nobel invented a new high explosive, which he called "dynamite," from the Greek word for "power." Nobel was convinced that his invention would make war so terribly horrible that nations would no longer make war against each other. To the contrary, he found that there was huge interest in using dynamite in warfare, from which he amassed an enormous fortune. The money notwithstanding, Nobel was horrified by the suffering he had now unleashed upon the world.

Toward the end of the 19th century, Alfred awoke one morning to read his own obituary in the paper: "Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, who died yesterday, devised a way for more people to be killed in war than ever before, and died a very rich man." It was actually Alfred's older brother who had died, but the account had a profound effect on Alfred.

Alfred Nobel decided that he wanted to be remembered for something better than making a fortune from making it possible to kill people more effectively, and so he established what we know as the Nobel Prizes, awards for scientists and others who foster peace. Nobel is reputed to have said that "Every [person] ought to have the chance to correct [their] epitaph in midstream and write a new one."² That's the first thing I'm thinking about in this morning's "Pass in Review"—about considering our own current epitaphs with the opportunity to write new ones.

² Doug Murren & Barb Sharin, *Is It Real When It Doesn't Work?* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990).

The second thing I want you to see in these biblical accounts is that with one exception, even the kings whose lives were generally pleasing to God obeyed God's commands in a very partial way. Did you catch that refrain? "*Joash did what was pleasing . . . yet even so . . .*"; "*Amaziah did what was pleasing . . . [but he] did not . . .*"; "*Uzziah did what was pleasing . . . but he did not . . .*"; "*Jotham did what was pleasing . . . but he did not . . .*" Since you and I are sitting here this morning, we have at least a little more time to work on things, and I wonder where we, too, might be choosing to hold back from complete and total obedience to God's commands.

When we hold back, of course, we do so because we think the plans we have for our lives are better, more attractive, and more rewarding than what God seems to have in mind. But in order to come to the conclusion that it's better to go our own way, we have to completely ignore a whole bunch of Bible verses. Here are some of them:

- *The Lord shatters the plans of the nations and thwarts all their schemes. But the Lord's plans stand firm forever; his intentions can never be shaken* (Psalm 33:10-11).
- *We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps* (Proverbs 16:9).³

We need to remember those verses to keep ourselves appropriately humble and keep things in proper perspective. But there are other verses, too, that sound pretty good to me:

- *Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths* (Proverbs 3:6).
- *"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"* (Jeremiah 29:11).
- *For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago* (Ephesians 2:10).
- *God is working in you to give you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him* (Philippians 2:13).

The third thing I want you to notice from these accounts in 2 Kings is the reference to *The Book of the History of the Kings of Israel* (2 Kings 13:12). There is also a reference to *The Book of the History of the Kings of Judah* (2 Kings 15:6), though we didn't read about that; and there's a third book that gets mentioned a number of times in the Bible. It's called **the Book of Life**. John wrote in the Revelation, "*I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books*" (Revelation 20:12).

Now if we've placed our trust in Jesus, we don't have to sweat that accounting like I dreaded my PIR inspections, but there will be an accounting (cp. John 5:24). For believers, the question here doesn't have to do with *salvation*, but with *reward*. We'll be admitted to the Heavenly City on the strength of Jesus' Blood alone, and there is no other way; but what we'll experience in that City depends on what we've done with the days we had here.

The point I'm making isn't about fear or dread, but about wisdom. Paul wrote, *Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is* (Ephesians 5:15-17).

One of the things a "Pass in Review" such as we're doing today accomplishes is tidying up our priorities so we use our days well. And when it comes to using days well, the National Center for Health Statistics has an interesting web page that cheerfully tells you how many days, on average, you have left to live.

³ See also James 4:13-17.

According to that website, the average life expectancy for U.S. citizens in 2017 was 78.6 years.⁴ This means that, on average, if you're 10 years old, you've got 823 months left. If you're 20 years old, you've got 703 months. If you're 30, you've got 583 months. At age 40, you've got 463 months. At age 50, 343 months remain. At age 60, you're down to 223 months, and at age 70, to 103 months. And if you're older than 79, well, you're on borrowed time.

Another way to look at this is that if you're 40 years old, you've got 2,007 Saturdays left. That's it. About fifteen years ago, I decided to do what I'd heard someone else had done, namely to get some jars with which to visualize the time I have left, other things being equal. I've also reduced those numbers based on my cancer diagnoses.

This jar with the beads represents the number of weeks that remain between me and my statistically-anticipated death. I take one bead out every Sunday morning when I get to church. This jar with the marbles represents the number of months that remain, and this little bitty cup has marbles that represent my remaining birthdays. I want to be sure I don't waste my time.

But contrary to what you might think, "not wasting time" doesn't necessarily mean spending one's days in overtly religious or church-related pursuits. Far from it! Living well is not about "being religious." Living well is about being passionately alive and in love with the Creator of apples and asteroids, bamboo and beetles, grapefruit and galaxies, wildebeests and waterfalls—who just happens to have made us, too, and who loves us with an everlasting and unbelievably passionate love!

To live in such a fashion does indeed have to do with obedience to God's commands, whether those commands have to do with personal holiness or with bringing in God's Kingdom. But it also has to do with celebrating the good gift that life on earth is in itself. It helps me to remember that Jesus spent a lot of time in fishing boats and at parties, and He apparently spent a lot of time hiking and camping, too. Did not the Father look at this blue-green planet at its creation and exclaim, "That's *good!*"? (Genesis 1:25, 31).

Some of you have heard of Dr. Randy Pausch. Randy Pausch taught engineering with my brother, Dan, at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, and when he was told that he had only a few months to live, he delivered a lecture that has now been viewed on the Internet nearly twenty million times.⁵ It's called "The Last Lecture," and it has to do with pursuing your childhood dreams. Sadly, it doesn't sound as though Randy was a follower of Jesus, but he certainly got the "passionately alive" part right.

A missionary once pondered this question of life significance and concluded that "**Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at something that doesn't really matter.**"⁶ It's awfully easy to get caught up "*in the thick of thin things,*" living with the uneasy sense that what we're doing with our lives is only getting us to the wrong place faster.⁷

So where are **you** this morning? Are you *passionately* alive? Are you *joyfully* obedient? Are you *sullenly* obedient? Are you *partially* obedient? Are you caught up "*in the thick of thin things,*" or is your life counting for something that is significant both in time and in eternity?

How does your "Pass in Review" situation look today?

⁴ www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/life-expectancy.htm

⁵ www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji5_MqicxSo&vl=en

⁶ Unknown New Tribes Missionary, *Eternal Perspectives* (Fall 2003), 15.

⁷ Covey, pp. 20, 25.