

Brethren divided

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[0 : 0 0] Let us turn together now to 2nd Chronicles and chapter 28. 2nd book of Chronicles chapter 28 reading again at verse 10 of this chapter.

Now ye purpose to keep unto the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bond women unto you. But are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?

I'm not going to focus simply on that one verse but take this passage from verse 9 down to the end of verse 15 for a little time this evening while verse 10 is certainly the central message of the sermon here that Oded was giving to the people of Israel. That would be a great spiritual calamity and loss to us if we regarded these books in the Bible such as 2nd Chronicles, 1st Chronicles, the books of the Kings, if we regarded them as nothing more than a history of Israel. If they were simply a set of statistics setting out the development of the nation in terms of its growth from early times right up to the end of the fall of

Jerusalem, it would be a great mistake to see them as nothing other than a dry recording of history. Sadly that is how these books are for many people, even for some Christians. The books of Kings and Chronicles are in the Bible not really to be studied but they are there, they are taken as divinely inspired words but yet they're really just history lessons. They are indeed a recorded history of the people of Israel but it is a recording that is done theologically and the wonderful thing about them is that while they go through the list of Kings and so on and the events that surrounded their lives and while they tell us what these Kings were like, it is really God's assessment of the situation that we're reading when we come to read about these things in such books as 2nd Chronicles. So when we come to read them what we're really reading is God's verdict on the history of these people. It doesn't just tell us the things that came to pass as one event unfolds and then gives way to another event so that there is a series of events down through the years. He tells us why they happened. He tells us something of what was involved in these events. He tells us something of the reasons behind them. He tells us why he sent various messages to Israel alongside of these events. In other words there is a divine interpretation along with the events as they are recorded it is a theological history. A theological history that bears relevance for our day. That is why we study them. Because of the fact that they are God's verdict. That they are God's assessment. That they are God-given reasons as well as events.

They are always relevant to his church. And we should use them in such a way as will help us hopefully avoid the pitfalls that we find spoken of. That they will help us in seeking to live as we should live for the church in our generation. For we who are the church of this generation. To learn from God's assessment and verdict and pronouncement of the history of these people so that we will not be found in the same mistakes, misunderstandings, sins that they were embraced. The psalmist, as we sang together in Psalm 81, was conscious of how these things recorded in history were themselves to be used in this way. Recording the Lord's own desire for these people of Israel, O that Israel had me heard, that they had chosen my ways, then I should have warded off their enemies. They should have been fed with the finest of the wheat.

[5 : 18] And it's with that in mind that we turn for a little time this evening to this event in 2nd Kings chapter 16 and Chronicles 28. Now in order to understand this we would really have to read another couple of passages in the Old Testament as well. You can read them when you get home so that you can put them alongside of this and get something of a more complete picture. We really need to read 2nd Kings chapter 16 and also the opening chapters of the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah chapters 1 to 8 especially though it falls into chapter 9 as well but especially Isaiah chapters 1 to 8.

Because that gives us something of the setting of this event that's recorded in 2nd Chronicles 28. It was under the kingship of Ahaz in Judah under the kingship of Pekah the son of Ramaliah in the northern kingdom of Israel.

What had happened by this time was that Assyria which was becoming a great empire and very soon would overwhelm the nations round about here including Israel. Israel's fear of Assyria led them into a coalition with Syria. And instead of joining with them Ahaz in Judah refused to join that coalition and instead he would a little time after this go to Assyria and bargain with them.

And so we find that in the process of these things this attack took place by the northern kingdom of Israel accompanied by the forces of Syria against the kingdom of Judah. And it's in that whole setting that we find this one incident. That was the situation on the broadest front but this is one isolated incident or not isolated but taken from that this one incident. A great defeat had been inflicted by Israel over Judah and this was the result of it. They had carried away many of these people captive as well as killing 200,000 of them.

And as we read through it one of the things that strikes us or maybe it doesn't strike us it didn't strike me reading through it perhaps once or twice but then it comes sometimes like that to strike you when you read the Bible something hits you that you've never noticed before or not noticed with such force. And what is really something we want to concentrate on this evening is this matter that's taking place among or between brethren.

[8 : 18] here is something that the chapter itself emphasizes. More than once we find that it's his brethren that we find spoken of. Israel the brethren of Judah they are the same people. Judah the brethren of Israel the same people.

the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren. 200,000 women. They slew of their brethren in one day to 20,000. 120,000.

So the first thing we notice is that here is an account of brethren divided by war. Brethren divided by war. Now ever since the death of Solomon and when the under Rehoboam when the kingdom continued under Rehoboam but Jeroboam in the northern kingdom took most of the tribes away with him and that formed the division between Israel and Judah you remember in the south. The southern kingdom became known as Judah with its capital Jerusalem. The northern kingdom was known as Israel with its capital Samaria. And ever since then down to this time right down to the time that Israel was in fact no more in 721 BC when Samaria fell there was there was always squabbling between them. Sometimes they lived at peace. Other times they were at war. Sometimes they were helping each other. Other times they were at each other's throats.

Here is one of these occasions when they were at each other's throats. The two nations of brethren and they are fighting each other in this instance. Now the first thing that you see here in brethren divided by war is that there is a squandering of their energies. Remember we're trying to look upon it as an interpretation of the events so that we can draw lessons from it for ourselves. There is a squandering of their enemies. Here is a remarkable thing. Here is a huge ominous dark shadow already falling upon both Judah and Israel. The huge ominous pagan shadow of Assyria.

This great nation that knows not God that is threatening the very existence of both Judah and Israel. And yet what are they doing? Are they putting their resources together? Are they calling upon their God in a unity of energy?

[11 : 11] Are they expending their energy? Are they expending their energy in seeking to meet the threat of Assyria? No. They are at each other's throats. They are squandering their energy. They are wasting their energy.

They are dissipating their energy. They are seeking to outdo each other. Brethren, the same covenant people. They are still. And the Assyrians are at their door. And yet they are at each other's throats.

They are brethren divided. But their division is such a tragic waste of their energies. The energy that ought to have been directed against Assyria is directed against each other.

And it's always a sad sight to see the church of God, whatever generation it's in, to see the church of God with various divisions within itself, given to expend its energy as much in those directions as away from itself against their common enemy.

The enemy of Israel and Judah was the same enemy as Syria. But they had made such enemies of one another that all their energy or the greatest part of it was against each other.

[12 : 49] And it is always the case that when you find divisions within any church, within the church of God in this world, when you find energy directed in promoting one side or the other of any dispute or disputes, it will always mean that our eyes are increasingly taken off what is our common enemy.

There will always be a squandering, a leakage of energy. And so the lesson from this so far is this, and this is our second point.

Not only is it a squandering of energy, but it takes us to see what our primary conflict must be with. Our common enemy is not other believers.

Now I'm not minimizing for one moment the differences that we may have with others who would claim to be themselves also in the engagement of the gospel, seeking to present the gospel to them.

I'm not minimizing in any way fundamental difference. Differences in fundamental doctrine. I'm not at all suggesting that there is no such thing as another gospel in distinction from the gospel that we ourselves seek to hold and to preach.

[14 : 17] But that itself of course is within the ranks of our enemy, what we must face. A gospel that does not present the fundamental facts of salvation is not a gospel at all.

But our common enemy we can say is this. It is unbelief. In every form of it our common enemy is unbelief, not differences with other true beliefs.

Our common enemy is unbelief in all the various forms in which you find it. Just as it was in the days of Ahaz, so it is the case in our day.

There is a great shadow upon our land that has been on our land for many generations. But that shadow has been creeping steadily forwards. The shadow of unbelief in the various forms of it.

Our common enemy today is unbelief. The shadow of it that seeks to take over whenever it has crept up upon any people. The shadow of humanism and atheism.

[15 : 31] The shadow of liberalism. Of every single example of unbelief of other than the gospel of Christ and its principles and its biblical teaching and its precepts.

That is the common enemy that we face without minimizing any necessary differences with other believers. But that is the common enemy. And you find it in so many places today.

In so many places in our land. Just like Assyria, it seeks to establish its own system in the place of the reformed heritage that you and I have handed down to us many years ago by the reformers.

Assyria, when you consider the principles that John Knox held. The reformed faith.

A church and a school in every parish in the land. That was his principle. A church and a school in every parish.

[16 : 38] Not just any kind of school. But a school that would be schooling children along Christian lines. So that every subject that was taught them was based upon the principles of the Bible.

That the method of their teaching was based upon the principles of the Bible. The dark shadow of unbelief has eaten away largely at that today.

You can see it in the philosophies of education. Of medical ethics. Of almost every field you care to think about.

And there are people tonight. And I want you to remember them. Comes up at our assembly every time. Christian teachers.

Christian teachers especially teaching religious education. seeking as far as possible to be true to the truth that they value in their Bibles.

[17 : 47] And yet what are they told? Under some education authorities in Scotland. They are being told that they must not mention the name of Jesus. The name of the true God.

Over and above other gods. Other beliefs. Other systems of religion. Must be given at least equal place. That is the reality of it. God.

That is our common enemy. And that is the threat that we face.

And our energies must be directed against these issues. Where tonight are our energies directed? What do we see in this Bible?

What do we see in this passage? We see a squandering. A dissipation. A weakening of things. From within. Because there are so many here against each other. That ought to be collectively against the might of Assyria.

[18 : 49] What is Paul saying to the Corinthian church? How does he begin his first epistle to them? He tells them. Did you learn Christ's way? That you should say.

I am of Paul. I am of Apollos. I am of Capas. I am of Christ. Is Christ divided? No, this is where our energy must be directed.

Not in differences with one another or with fellow believers. But in engaging together our minds against unbelief in all its forms.

I am not suggesting for a moment that divisions in the church whether it is free church or the wider evangelical church. I am not suggesting that divisions are over immaterial things.

Sometimes they are not. And not suggesting divisions are easy to heal. I am not. But as I see this Bible it tells me. That we have got to deal with all these things that dissipate our energies.

[19 : 50] In things that ought to collectively be used. And that in the interests of Christ's cause. We must have a warfare that crosses all sectarian and all denominational boundaries.

It is the enemy we face. The situation we are in, is far too critical, for us to be nitpicking with fellow believers about this and that when we can stand together with others of other churches, in the interests of Christ's gospel.

Thomas Chalmers, when he was setting about the work in the West Port in Edinburgh, he was well aware of the fact that some people would suggest and would state in fact that what he was really interested in was extending the free church and extending the influence of the free church and that the whole point of his exercise there was primarily was first and foremost sectarian was in other words that his main purpose was to advance the free church and because of that this is what he wrote it can be misunderstood I don't want you to misunderstand what he says he's not going to say anything about the features being unimportant or what the free church stands for being unimportant he's not saying anything against the free church or the propriety of the free church seeking that it itself increase but what he is going to say from these words I'm going to read in a minute is that the free church itself and every individual within it is always smaller than the overall good of the cause of

Christ who cares he wrote or he spoke this in a speech actually who cares about the free church compared with the Christian good of the people of Scotland who cares about any church but as an instrument of Christian good for be assured that the moral and religious well-being of the population is of infinitely higher importance than the advancement of any sect by which he meant any denomination or group so he's not saying for a moment the free church isn't really important or the things we will always stand for are important he's not saying for a moment we shouldn't really seek for the free church to grow and to spread its influence but he is telling us this he's left this legacy for us behind this man who was behind the very establishing of the church that you and I belong to today he's saying who cares about it compared with the Christian good of all of Scotland or go to somebody like Spurgeon who faced controversies and difficulties and divisions in his own experience especially with what's known as the downgrade controversy and if you read his books you'll find that in many of his sermons he points out the things that were happening to the extent that he brings this kind of teaching to bear upon them and on one occasion he was lamenting the fact that Baptists themselves were seeking to place Baptist causes over and above the general good of the gospel this is what he said Christian people he said you ought to have a clannish feeling another Scottish expression that so we put Christian people you ought to have a clannish feeling oh say somebody you mean that

Baptists ought to get together I do not mean anything of the kind I mean that the seed of Christ should be of one heart and we ought to recognize that wherever the life and love of Jesus are to be found there our love goes out tonight is a denomination we have to seek to put our energies into facing the enemy that threatens the very existence of the gospel in our land we mustn't for a moment think that the gospel will inevitably continue in the land of Scotland we have tonight and always as far as possible in the privileges and duties given to us put our energies into the cause of Christ as a denomination our focus must not be upon the things within ourselves that cause us to differ over which much of our energy may be expended but against the dark shadow of unbelief that has crept over us so imperceptibly but so certainly as a congregation it must be the same principle I'm thankful to God that we're a united congregation that there are no disputes that there are no divisions that there is no wrangling at each other's throats we praise the Lord for this it doesn't give us any self satisfaction I hope any sense of pride but it does tell us that we are in a position to be envied by others perhaps tonight and it gives us the advantage as we would seek to present the gospel to the world in which we live that we can do it putting all our energy behind it my friends it is impossible it is impossible even for a united church on its own or a united congregation on its own to bring the gospel effectively to the world outside we need the spirit of God every one of us knows that and not suggesting anything against that but if it is true that an undivided united church without the spirit of God is impotent how much is it true of a divided church how much more is it true when our energy is dissipated by being at each other's goals here then is the first thing a brethren divided the very words should grate upon our spirits brethren divided the second is the opposite of the first the second thing a brethren that they are brethren together in a way that they don't understand or see but in a way that God is the opposite of the first thing a means to their energies to their energies being channeled in their own direction while the enemy that they both must face is steadily advancing then the second thing we notice is that they are brethren together and they are brethren together in a way that they don't understand or see but in a way that God makes clear through his own recording of the events in this way they are divided by war they are divided by war they are very jealous roads but they are together united in sin that is their dreadful condition that is why things are the way they are because they have this common failure that they have sinned against the Lord and while each is saying the whole problem is on the other side the Lord is saying you are both equally guilty

[28 : 08] guilty now this man Oded we know nothing about except this sermon and what a sermon it was and what effect it had because what these people of Israel had planned to do with their brethren of Judah whom they had taken captive was to keep them in Samaria and in the Norman kingdom as their slaves they were going to make them bond men and bond women and this man Oded came out and he started preaching to them and it is so significant what he said to them he said to them not only that they must not do this but he first of all said to them this is why you were victorious it wasn't that you were any better than these people of Judah but because they have come under the wrath of God by their sin the Lord has delivered them into your hands it doesn't give you the right to think of them to think of them as your slaves or to think of them as superior to these brethren of Judah the reason you have gained this victory is because God is angry with them but he didn't leave it at that he went further he said not only did they have they been brought into your hand by God's anger against them but are there not with you even with you sins against the Lord your God you see what he's saying to them here you are he says gloating in the victory this is really the essence of what he's saying here you are gloating in your victory over the other side when you should be mourning over your sins your victory has not in any way lessened your own sins against God this nation of Israel was characterized from the very foundation of it under Jeroboam by an idolatrous worship by the importation of all kinds of worship in the name of Jehovah look at its history record for us that is consistently what Kings and Chronicles tells us all the kings of Israel are characterized by an apostate spirit and here they are thinking haven't we done well aren't we so much better than these people of Judah and here is God through Oded telling them what about your sins are there not with you he repeats it for emphasis even with you sins against the Lord your God and how effective his sermon was you can see from verses 14 and 15 they're beautiful verses because they decided then to leave the captives there and the chief people among the people of Israel then took the captives and notice they took the spoil that they would normally keep for themselves they took of that spoil and they clothed them they shod them they gave them to eat they anointed them or they dressed up their wounds is what that means they carried all the feeble of them upon Asis they brought them to Jericho the city of Panthees to their brethren there and then they themselves returned to Samaria would that every sermon was as effective but sadly even there this was short lived beautiful while it lasted but it didn't last very long but it highlights the root of the problem it highlights that in the case of Israel and of Judah the reason why things were in such a terrible state why they were at each other's throats was simply the fact that they had sinned grievously against the Lord he had delivered Judah into the hand of Israel and he had brought Israel to fight against Judah and he had brought them both under the shadow of the Assyrians because they had left the ways of the Lord it was their unfaithfulness to God that they were being pointed to take stock of Now that is the abiding lesson for us tonight of Oded's sermon the abiding lesson is that we ourselves the people that we see around us try to find reasons for their problems in things that can be seen in sources that are out with their own control don't they?

People blame unemployment people blame the government people blame this and that that they know is actually outside their own control but all the problems in the world if you believe the Bible can be traced to the root of personal sin personal sin that's the problem for Israel and for Judah even for our own generations well people don't want to face personal responsibility personal accountability it's always something else out without own control never private personal responsibility the reasons are endless but the real reason is very simple sin and in the case of all disputes there will always be a tendency not just in people but also in the history we find of the church in the Bible and in church history a tendency to score points one side against the other we can see in Isaiah 1-7 the real reason for these difficulties these tragedies where as he puts it they're their sin against God here is an account in 2nd Chronicles 28 of a people just as it is in Isaiah chapters 1-8 it's not a story of a people who have graduated from very small beginnings and evolved into a great people so that they're now what they are in the days of Ahaz the sad fact is that they were a great people they were made great by the Lord Jehovah and they have made themselves what they are there they have fallen into dreadful conditions they have declined they have declined not advanced and when we find disputes when we find our energies given to exploiting our positions to sectarianism of any kind there's always a sense of euphoria isn't there whenever points are scored against the other side or against that is as true in the church as it is in the world sadly just as it was with these people of Israel but you see the abiding lesson is this it's not to be a matter at all of euphoric victory but looking to the root of the problem we might think that victory is in one side or the other gaining the upper hand no victory for these people would be a united turning of their minds to the root of the problem to seek their God to abase themselves in his presence to realise that the divisions of the church in whatever age we find divisions of however minor we find the divisions that they are always or almost always symptoms of something much worse what can you say can be worse than divisions well the cause of divisions is same and our relation to God is what we have to look at

whenever we find divisions in the church whenever we find Paul for example facing the kind of situation that he faced in Corinth what did he tell?

did he say sort out your divisions and that's it no he said the problem is at the root of the matter that you are taking your eyes off your relation to Christ and who he is and how you must be in relation to him and therefore you have gone away into all these divisions now tonight even in our undivided relatively undivided state we have to take this with us for our lesson its abiding lesson is that we answer the question where is our eye tonight?

[38 : 15] is it more upon fellow believers and differences with them than it is upon the great threat of unbelief in its massive forms and structures in the kingdom of darkness that we face?

where are our energies? where are our concern? our concern is our concern more to in some way score points against other believers than our concern to be over the glory of Christ in the salvation of souls these are our great priorities the gospel the kingdom of Christ the energy that's needed is needed is needed in that direction and so our Lord is saying to us here is a theological history here is one event from that history that teaches us of the present day's needs and here is our Lord telling us that the message of Oded's sermon is exactly the same as the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 3 and verse 12 and 13 take heed brethren lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God but exhort one another daily while it is called today lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin the deceitfulness of sin cannot be tackled on a merely individual basis it certainly cannot on a sectarian basis it is in the exhorting of one another in a united concern for the glory of Christ and his gospel and his kingdom our gracious and eternal Lord we thank thee that thou art the same spirit the same undivided God and that thou hast revealed to us that though thou hast many different gifts gifts given to thy church yet they are to the unity and building up of the body of Christ we pray gracious one whenever we find ourselves failing these precious standards of thy word that thou would grant us the spirit of repentance and that we as a people may constantly give our minds to a united concern to face the enemy of unbelief and darkness that would seek to invade thy church and place the gospel in peril we thank thee that all things are in thy hand and yet thou hast revealed to us

O Lord that we are responsible creatures and while we cannot see where thy sovereignty and our responsibility meet yet help us to believe them both and to act accordingly we pray O Lord for thy blessing upon thine own truth to follow us now into this week we have entered upon make us to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus we ask these mercies for thy glory sake Amen Let us sing in conclusion from Psalm 133 133 The whole of that psalm Behold how good a thing it is and how becoming well together such as brethren are in unity to dwell like precious ointment on the head that down the beard did flow even Aaron's beard and to the skirts did of his garments go as Herman's Jew the Jew that doth on Sion hills descend for there the blessing God commands life that shall never end to the tune St. Thomas

Behold how good a thing it is Behold how good a thing it is live in peace He genuine life that shall one Christ Jesus Christ Jesus Jesus Christ Jesus will bewang to be procedures Behold Behold labor manager of lifeGen with hope GM exported, All the way, From the corrialled in tone of bowing And the traditional W Ren Pork

Tou, Near ban on Year's Eve The Lord is the Lord, the Lord is the Lord.

[43 : 57] The Savior's Savior, the Savior, the Savior. The Savior's Savior, the Savior, the Savior.

O Requesting Lord, your hands like thou shalt never end.

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.