
2 Chronicles 26:16-23. ¹⁶ But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. ¹⁷ Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the LORD followed him in. ¹⁸ They confronted him and said, "It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the LORD God." ¹⁹ Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the LORD's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. ²⁰ When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave, because the LORD had afflicted him. ²¹ King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house—leprous, and excluded from the temple of the LORD. Jotham his son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land. ²² The other events of Uzziah's reign, from beginning to end, are recorded by the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. ²³ Uzziah rested with his fathers and was buried near them in a field for burial that belonged to the kings, for people said, "He had leprosy." And Jotham his son succeeded him as king.

Be a Servant....

1. Using the gifts God has given.
2. Acknowledging the LORD and his will
3. For the good of the kingdom of God.

A powerful head of state had been caught red handed. Ensnared in this scandal this king had caused quite a commotion and this all resulted in a memorable confrontation. Today such scandalous stories are splashed over the front pages and reported as breaking news. Such reports of wrongdoing are glanced at by millions and then passed over as just another example of leaders being corrupted by influence and power. But today's lesson is one that is placed before us not so that we have one more reason to shake our heads and wring our hands at those who misuse their power and authority. Rather in this lesson we hear our God call out to his people to watch out for that sin of pride that lurks within each one of us, and our LORD reminds us in this powerful way that he calls his people, he calls you and me, to be a servant.

And so this Scripture reading, even though it is about a king we barely know from a long time ago, presents us with some very specific, practical, and memorable encouragements of how we are to be a servant in our lives today. Yes, you and I are encouraged to ***be a servant: Using the gifts God has given. Acknowledging the LORD and his will. For the good of the Kingdom of God.***

I'm guessing that the name King Uzziah is not one that you are entirely familiar with, most likely you are more familiar with kings like David and Solomon. David and Solomon are easily recognized because of the power that they held, the extensiveness of their kingdom, and their great accomplishments. David defeated Goliath and after being made king David extended the kingdom to newfound heights. Solomon cemented his legacy with his renowned wisdom and his accomplishment of building the temple. Well, if the era in which David and Solomon reigned is known as the Golden Age, the time that Uzziah reigned could surely have

been consider the silver age in Judah. And Uzziah himself was no slouch as a leader. His resume was one that included impressive military prowess and victories, extensive power and significant accomplishments.

In fact, the first half of 2 Chronicles 26 describes a dynamic leader that was gifted in many ways. Uzziah was 16 years old when he became king. He reigned for 52 years. He went to war against the Philistines and other rival nations and had great success to the point where other nations brought him tribute and his fame spread as far as the border of Egypt. Uzziah made sure that his large army was well-trained, well organized, and well equipped so that they might be ready to do battle at any time. In Jerusalem, Uzziah saw to it that the walls of Jerusalem were fortified and towers were constructed for the protection of the city. And Uzziah even gathered up skillful men to make war machines that were used on these large towers to shoot arrows and hurl large stones. On top of all of this, Uzziah, earned the title of “lover of the soil” for he used his spare time as a farmer. He built towers in the desert and built cisterns, and he made sure that his fields and vineyards and flocks were watched over and tended to. This was a man blessed by God with many different interests, many different talents, and it showed, as God gave him success in all his ventures and helped him as he ruled.

From an early age Uzziah was instructed in the fear of God and we are told that as long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success. But that was the thing most crucial, most vital for Uzziah, wasn't it? That he would seek the LORD first. It was crucial that Uzziah would recognize that God was the one who blessed him with his interests and intelligence. It was the LORD who had given him the abilities to take that intelligence and turn it into projects and labor that was blessed by God's hand

As I look out over the congregation today I see a group of people blessed by God's hand. I see individuals blessed with all sorts of interests and abilities. And God calls us to use these talents, these gifts, and abilities in service to our LORD and to our fellowman. He calls us to use our gifts to benefit of his kingdom. However, there are more than a few times that we have failed to utilize our gifts and abilities at all. It is easy for any one of us to fall into habits of laziness when we consider our own comfort our own convenience. Instead God calls us to use the gifts that God has given us and put these gifts to good use as we live to serve our God and serve in his kingdom of grace. With thankfulness for our skilled hands and our practical minds and our creativity that comes from the heart we will seek to serve our God within his Church and within our everyday lives, for the LORD is the one who is the giver of all good things.

Think about the gifts, the talents, the interests, the abilities that God has blessed you with and how you can use them to serve your LORD and his kingdom. A Christian congregation, like ours, provides unique opportunities to use those gifts that God has given you. Volunteer when needed. Contribute when able. Give of your time and intellect, your skill and ability to serve on boards and committees, to teach the young, to keep in touch with the shut-in and to encourage and serve in many other ways. But, remember that service to God does not simply begin and end in the church. Use the gifts that God has given you to be kind to your neighbor. Use the gifts that God has given you to help a friend in need, even if that is as simple as fixing a sink or fixing a meal. Use your God-given gifts to serve in the roles that God has placed you in as employers or employees, as husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, friends and neighbors and co-workers. We are to use the gifts that God has given us to serve others and to use them in accordance to God's will.

That too is where Uzziah got himself in trouble. Uzziah had sought the LORD and had

used his gifts and abilities, his intelligence and his interests to do positive things in service to God and his people. But then all this success went to his head. He took his eyes off God and became full of himself and his own accomplishments and sought even more honor for himself. His trust in God and service to the LORD had resulted in many good things, his pride and arrogance and selfishness would not. And as the wise proverb goes. ***Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18).***

Uzziah had been blessed by God in talent and in results and now it almost appeared as if he thought he could do anything he wanted. Whether he was trying to emulate the neighboring kings who made sacrifices in temples dedicated to their false gods, or perhaps he was trying to somehow raise his stock even more in the presence of his peers of his people, whatever his motives, Uzziah went and stood in God's house and did something God clearly disapproved of. However, Uzziah was so blinded by pride, by arrogance, by folly he could not see the error of his ways. He stood in God's holy place, doing something that was not permitted for him to do, and then he became angry with those who rebuked him. We are told that he even raged against those courageous priests who came to stop him.

Who would dare to do such a thing, to stand in God's house and act in such a way that contradicted God's Word and think it was fine to do? Well, unfortunately one might think of modern day examples of pastors and priests who are practicing a lifestyle that is contrary to God's Word and yet continue to serve in God's house and think it is just fine, and insist that others are ok with it too. One might think of the modern day example of the bible scholar that is a bit too learned for his own good and so he stands in God's house and makes claims that go contrary to what God's Word says as he arrogantly leans on his own understanding, his own pride, his own learning. This is clearly wrong and should not be tolerated in God's house or anywhere else and God warns of punishment for those who lead any one of his children astray.

But it is not just cocky kings, or bible scholars who are too learned for their own good, who stand in God's presence and pretend that they know better than the LORD God. Each one of us, have let our corrupted intelligence and pride and arrogance at times run roughshod over God's Word. While we might have never been caught red handed with an incense censor in our hand, there have been plenty of times when we have come into God's presence, even into God's house while doing things that he tells us clearly in his Word that he disapproves of. We might speak or act as if we could do better than those who serve. In our pride and our arrogance we may insist that we are right about a choice that we have made, a sin that we are committing, even when God's Word clearly says it is wrong. And then we get mad when God's servants, faithful Christian friends our spouses, pastors or elders tell us that this is not right. Our anger, our pride, our selfishness won't let us see the error of our ways and we rage against those who come only out of concern for God's Word and for their fellow believer. All of us have that pride - that corrupted reason - that could lead us to such a dreadful fall.

And so we need those faithful servants who are willing to step in, we give thanks to our God for such humble servants both past and present. The bible tells us that ***Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the LORD followed him in.*** Notice how the Lord calls these priests courageous. They took a stand for God's Word. Azariah and the priests of the LORD were courageous in their faith and in their humble service to God. What a blessing to have those kind of faithful servants among us. We need those fellow believers and faithful servants who stand up for God's Word, and who speaks up against those who contradict God's Word. We need those servants who humbly step in and tell those that are gossiping and

speaking cruelly about another, that it is not God pleasing to speak that way about another, especially when you are in church. We are thankful for pastors and elders who work in the congregation to correct, rebuke, and instruct using the Word of God in a variety of ways. But don't forget that each one of you are strengthened by our God, you are helped by his Word and his gift of faith, so that you too may courageously stand up for God's Word and serve in his Kingdom of grace. You are strengthened by God and helped by his Word so that you may not sit idly by, but that you say something to your niece or your nephew about how their living situation is not honoring marriage as God commands. We give thanks and pray for those faithful Christian friends, or spouses, or moms and dads, who step in and talk to their loved one and fellow believers about their sin. We give thanks and pray for those faithful servants step in and confront their spouses or their friends telling that their excessive gambling or their abuse of alcohol is not right. This is the kind of humbling but very necessary service that God is calling you to as well. For that kind of service is for the good of our fellow believers, and for the good of God's kingdom. Remember that God is with you, he has given you the intelligence, the intellect, the skills to serve in such ways. He gives you his Word and his Spirit who grants you a courageous faith to carry out this difficult service. Our LORD God will be with you and he will give you strength as you serve in this important way.

And we do all of this out love and concern for our fellow believers. We are strengthened and enabled by God not only to serve our fellow believers, and encourage them to use their gifts, but also to rebuke them when necessary. As a result of his poor choices we are told that King Uzziah suffered with leprosy for the rest of his life. He was cut off from the life that he had known and the worldly wealth and power that he had once enjoyed. But far worse than a temporal separation from worldly things, is eternal separation from God in hell. And so our LORD joins us together, makes us strong through his Word, and enables us to serve him in our different roles in his kingdom and our different stations in life with the ultimate goal that souls are saved and cared for. We live as those who serve in God's kingdom and look to support the work of the gospel with our time and our talents and our treasures. And we do so with gratitude in our hearts to God. He has given us our mind and abilities, our skills and talents, and now may we use them knowing and believing that Jesus has spared us from eternal punishment. Jesus was punished in our place. He had to suffer through this world of sin and trudge through this world of pain and disease. He lived a life of perfect service to God and to his fellow man. He used his gifts and talents perfectly doing some many good things in this life and then on the cross he was separated from God's love for us on the cross and he died the death we deserved. He was forsaken by God. He suffered that curse, he suffered that pain, as punishment for my sin and yours, and every single sin.

Out of thanks to the one who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many let us heed our LORD's call to be a servant. Let us utilize those gifts that God has given us. Let us acknowledge the LORD and his will in our lives. And let us serve for the good of the kingdom of God. Our LORD has given us our talents and gifts and abilities, and our Savior was a servant to us in every way, with hearts filled with gratitude to God which chases away selfish pride may we serve our God in his kingdom of grace until he comes again and brings us to his kingdom of glory. Amen.