

King of the Jungle  
*Facing the untamed challenges of life*

"The Priest & the Lions: staying true to God and relevant to the culture"  
2 Kings 17

In all of history, it has happened only once. A life fully devoted to God while simultaneously, fully engaged with the world. We call it the incarnation. It is the life of Jesus Christ; fully God, yet fully human. He was a Jew immersed in the culture of the first century world yet uncompromisingly holy. He did not live a retreated life but a righteous one. He did not live an isolated life but an influential one. Jesus Christ balanced relevance and righteousness in a way no one ever had. And He called his followers to do the same. It is not an easy calling: to be in the world but not of it; to be distinct from the world but engaged with it; to be real and relevant and at the same time, revolutionary and transformational.

God . . . the lost . . . eternity . . . heaven . . . the world . . . culture . . . the gospel . . . evangelism . . . contextualization . . .  
conversion . . . discipleship . . .  
compromise . . . influence . . . corruption . . . holiness.

Jesus charged his disciples to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. In an age of darkness and decay, our mandate is clear, but our success rate is sparse. We need insight and empowerment if we are to fulfill our purpose.

Our story this morning captures the challenge of living for God in a world that doesn't know Him. It is a story of culture and worship and of course lions!

Our story is told in the book of Second Kings, chapter 17. It unfolds in the year 722 B.C., 2,739 years ago. It marks the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel and their deportation into exile. But it also provides a great picture for us of the clash between worldly culture and the kingdom of God. We pick up the story in 1 Kings 17:5

The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years.<sup>6</sup> In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. . . .<sup>7</sup> All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God . . . They worshiped other gods<sup>8</sup> and followed the practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before them . . .<sup>13</sup> The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: "Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your ancestors to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets."<sup>14</sup> But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their ancestors, who did not trust in the LORD their God.<sup>15</sup> They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors and the statutes he had warned them to keep. They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. They imitated the nations around them although the LORD had ordered them, "Do not do as they do." . . .<sup>18</sup> So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence.<sup>23</sup> . . . So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria, and they are still there.

The second part of the story is about the foreign people that replace the Israelites. So there is a lake turn of population that brings the world to the doorstep of the Promised Land. And it is in this repopulating of the country that lions take the leading role. Our story continues in verse 24

<sup>24</sup> The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Kuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites. They took over Samaria and lived in its towns.<sup>25</sup> When they first lived there, they did not worship the LORD; so he sent lions among them and they killed some of the people.<sup>26</sup> It was reported to the king of Assyria: "The people you deported and resettled in the towns of Samaria do not know what

the god of that country requires. He has sent lions among them, which are killing them off, because the people do not know what he requires."

The last part of the story is quite interesting. It involves a surprising missionary mandate for an exiled priest of Israel. He is commissioned by the king to return to his homeland to preach the word and to make converts of the internationals who had been transplanted into Samaria. The final episode of the story continues in verse 27

<sup>27</sup> Then the king of Assyria gave this order: "Have one of the priests you took captive from Samaria go back to live there and teach the people what the god of the land requires." <sup>28</sup> So one of the priests who had been exiled from Samaria came to live in Bethel and taught them how to worship the LORD. <sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, each national group made its own gods in the several towns where they settled, and set them up in the shrines the people of Samaria had made at the high places. . . . <sup>33</sup> They worshiped the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought. <sup>41</sup> Even while these people were worshiping the LORD, they were serving their idols. To this day their children and grandchildren continue to do as their ancestors did.

2 Kings 17

What can we learn about this tale of kings and culture, corruption and conversion? I believe we find some timeless principles to help us fulfill our calling from Christ to be in the world but not of it and to be passionately committed to his kingdom call to reveal Christ to a world who does not know Him. Here are four take-away truths from this Scripture story.

1. The corruption of worship starts in the heart not in the culture.
  - Culture is not the culprit
  - The assimilation of the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:24)
  - The origin of the disparaging view of the Samaritans (Matthew 10:5; John 4:9)
  - The heart of the matter (Matthew 15:19-20; Proverbs 4:23)
2. Respect for the Word of God is essential to biblical, God-honoring worship.
  - "Observe my commands . . . decrees . . . entire Law" (2 Kings 17:13)
  - The effect of Scripture (Psalm 119:9,11,105)
3. The core mission of the Gospel is transformation not merely information.
  - Motivated worship participation: the roar for more (2 Kings 17:24-28)
  - Wasted worship (2 Kings 17:29,33,41)
  - The missing ingredient (James 1:22; Micah 6:8; Psalm 51:17)
4. The effective engagement of the lost is an integral part of faithfulness to God.
  - You are that Israelite Priest (Revelation 1:6)
  - Influence with integrity (Colossians 4:5-6)
  - Sold out Samaritans
    - The Grateful Samaritan (Luke 17:11-19)
    - The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37)
    - The Gathering Samaritan (John 4:1-42)