

## **“Make It All about Power”**

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It is good to be here with you guys! All right. If you've been with us for the past couple of weeks, we've been in this series on idolatry called...*How to Wreck Your Life*. We've been basing this series on a book by Tim Keller called *Counterfeit Gods*. If you haven't picked it up, you just absolutely have to go get it because it will go deeper into the topics that we're talking about.

The basic premise of this book and one of the major themes of the Bible is that idols aren't just small wooden statues or big stone monuments of the ancient cultures. Idols are the functional saviors of our lives. They're the gods of our culture. They're the gods of our lives. They're the things we look to to give us a sense of value and duty, significance and worth. It's what we look to for what Ernest Becker says, "Nothing less than justification and redemption."

In other words, we look to idols and we say, "If I have this, then I'll have value. If I have this, then my life has meaning. If I have this, then I'll feel significant and secure." You see anything...*anything* can become an idol. Money, sex, relationships, power, these are wonderful things, but the problem is that once these things take mythic proportions in our lives, once we deify them, once we make them ultimate in our hearts, once we look to these things to give us only what God can give us, we have an idol and they'll wreck our lives.

So for the past couple of weeks, we've been walking through some of the typical idols of our culture and today we're going to look at the idol of power. We're going to examine the idol of power through an account of a king whose life was wrecked by it. The king that we're looking at is King Uzziah, and we're going to learn three things about power as we look into King Uzziah's life.

We're going to learn about the universality of power and the gift of a kingdom, the power of power and the gift of leprosy, and the healing of power and the gift of a name. The universality of power and the gift of a kingdom, the power of power and the gift of leprosy, and the healing of power and the gift of our name. So the text is 2 Chronicles 26:1-22, and I know you're thinking, *That's a long passage*. So what I'm going to do, is I'm just going to bookend it. We're just going to throw it up there, and you can read along with me.

***"Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in place of his father Amaziah. He was the one who rebuilt Elath and restored it to Judah after Amaziah rested with his ancestors. Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-two years. His mother's name was Jekoliah; she was from Jerusalem. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success."***

Now we're going to fast forward down to verse 16, *"He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the Lord followed him in. They confronted King Uzziah 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.'*

*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. 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.*

*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. The other events of Uzziah's reign, from beginning to end, are recorded by the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. Uzziah rested with his ancestors and was buried near them in a cemetery that belonged to the kings, for people said, 'He had leprosy.' And Jotham his son succeeded him as king."* This is God's Word.

The first thing we look at, the first thing we see as we look at Uzziah's life is the universality of power and the gift of a kingdom. The text opens up, *"Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in place of his father Amaziah."* Verse 4, *"He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done."* Now the introduction to Uzziah's life is fraught with foreshadowing and tension because we're met with almost an immediate problem and question.

Here's the question, *What type of king would Uzziah be?* Because in 2 Chronicles, Uzziah is tagged number three in a succession of four kings that are introduced in the exact same manner. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Uzziah's grandfather, Joash was introduced like that. Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

Uzziah's father Amaziah was introduced like that. Amaziah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Now we have Uzziah. Uzziah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Sounds great, but here's the problem, Uzziah comes from a family of kings that started off strong, faithful to God in their early years, but as they grew in power and influence, they became unfaithful, corrupted, and evil. Uzziah's grandfather, Joash, who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, stones a prophet of God for telling him the truth.

Amaziah, who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, threatens to kill a prophet of God. They, because of their exploits are murdered, and that leads to Uzziah coming into power at the ripe young age of 16, tagged with this ominous blessing, *"He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord just as his father Amaziah had done."*

So the text forces us to confront this question, what type of king and leader would he be? Would he be a good king? Would he follow the stipulations that were laid out in Deuteronomy 17 that God laid out for kings that he should follow and serve God that he should obey God and that he should not consider himself better than his brothers, that he should be a humble king? Or would he be like his father Amaziah? Uzziah has just been given this gift of the kingdom through no merit of his own, and the question is, *How*

*will he use his power and influence? What type of legacy would he leave?* These are the questions of the text, and these are questions that are applicable to all of us because every single one of us has been given the gift of a kingdom.

Don't let Uzziah's politicized kingdom detract from the truth that you and I have exactly the same thing as Uzziah...exactly the same thing because all a kingdom is, is the range of your effective will. It's the sphere of your influence and control. It's what Dallas Willard describes as, "The realm that is uniquely your own where your choice determines what happens." People's range may differ, but nonetheless, you and I have a kingdom. That's what it means to be made in the image of God.

There is a local writer and theologian, I don't know if you know him, but he put out this extensive treatise on theology of cleaning up your toys. It's a famous work entitled *When the Game Is Over, It All Goes Back in the Box*. I'm trying to get my two-year-old daughter to read that book.

He puts it like this, "I want to work. Things run my way. My projects have been completed. The tasks I have assigned have been carried out. What does it mean? It means I'm in charge. This is my kingdom. I walk into my kid's rooms. The beds are made, just as I prescribed. The chores are done, just as I commanded. What does it mean? It means I'm in charge. This is my kingdom. I walk through the door of my house at the end of the day. My slippers are laid out by the La-Z-Boy. My iced tea is ready. Dinner is on the stove. What does it mean? It means I've walked into the wrong house."

I know Nancy is in San Mateo like, "Got that straight because this is my kingdom." We have all been given the gift of a kingdom, but we've also been given the gift of power and authority to influence it, and a mission to steward it. You have a kingdom. You have power and you have a calling. You have a kingdom. You have power and you have a mission.

Now think of how amazing that is. Think of how amazing that truth is that God has given every single one of us, every single one of you purpose, calling, mission, meaning. That God has gifted us, every single one of us. God had gifted us and entrusted us with a plot of time and space. Then He has called us to make that flourish. Your home, your work, your neighborhood, your school...He has given everyone a kingdom and He has given everyone power as a tool to make it flourish.

Now this is important to grasp because often times when we speak of things that have been abused, things like power, money, or sex, what we'll do is we'll either ignore its abuse and just kind of chug along, or we'll vilify it and we'll just chew it. We'll say, "No power, no money, no sex," and the Bible calls us to do neither.

The first thing that we learn from the life of Uzziah is the universality and the goodness of power as it's rooted in creation. The second thing that we learn is the power of power and the gift of leprosy...the power of power and the gift of leprosy. What happens to the human heart when it gets around power? Vaclav Havel in 1991, and he was then president of Czechoslovakia, he gave a famous speech entitled *The Temptations of Political Power*. What he basically says is that everyone who seeks political office has two main motivations in their heart.

The first is, "I want to use power in the service of others and society." So you have this vision of how you can better society and you want to implement that vision. You go into political office. He says there is another motivation that is just as real, and it's there. It's this. "I want power for the sake of power. I want power as an end in itself." Get this, this is what he says, and this is deeply profound, and he's talking from

his own experience. He says, "We want power to fill the deep need that every human heart has for self-affirmation, and there is nothing better than political power to give you that, to tell you that you are somebody important."

So he says, "Everyone has both these motivations, but almost no one admits to the second one." In fact, they don't even know that it's there. Havel says that if you get into power, if you get around power, and you don't know that you have the second motive, the second motive will overcome the first. You will hold onto power whether you're being effective or not because you need the power. There is this inner emptiness, this inner vacuum, you need the honor, you need the glory, you need the feeling of significance and Havel says it is inevitable that the second overtakes the first unless you're absolutely vigilant for it. Almost nobody is. That's why Vaclav Havel says, "Power is always abused."

There is a place in Galatians where Paul says, "Don't be conceited and stop being contentious and envious of one another." That word contentious is a word that means *to call someone forth to challenge*. It's a power play, but the word *conceited...kenodoxos*, what that literally means in the Greek is empty of glory. Empty of glory. Paul says, "Don't be so empty of glory that you abuse power because there is a thirst for and there is an abuse of power when you are empty of glory."

Now King Uzziah starts off very well. In fact, as a leader, he is exceptional because he has inherited a mess, just a royal mess. His father Amaziah did exactly what Paul says in Galatians not to do. Amaziah experiences a small military victory because of God's help and then just swelled up with a sense of pride. He contentiously picks a fight with someone he cannot beat, and he gets annihilated in battle. He gets his butt royally kicked. His army is depleted. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down so the defenses, the national defenses have been compromised, the national treasury and the temple have been looted and emptied out and the political leader, his father, Amaziah is executed. That's what Uzziah inherits.

If you read the beginning of Uzziah's account, what he accomplishes is nothing short of miraculous. In fact, verse 15 says it was miraculous. His fame spread far and wide for he was now, the NIV says *greatly* and NIV here pulling punches, hate that, you know. One commentator translated it as *miraculously*. That's closer. He was miraculously helped. In other words, God brought about these victories. God brought about these successes.

Now granted, Uzziah was strong. He was gifted. He was a visionary leader. In fact, 2 Chronicles 26, two-thirds of the passage describe the positive impact of his leadership. In fact, if you read verse 2, it gives us one accomplishment that is set off from the rest of his accomplishments, and it clues us into something. Before anything else is mentioned, it says he was the one who rebuilt Elath and restored it to Judah.

What is Elath, you ask? I'm glad you asked me. Elath was a port city controlled by the Edomites that gave access to sea trade to Arabia, Africa, and India. It's mentioned for two reasons. Number one, by controlling Elath, obviously he not only revived and restored Judah's economy, but he took it to new levels. The second reason why it's mentioned, and this is more important is that it ties King Uzziah to King Solomon, for he too controlled Elath. It was a signal to the reader of the kind of reign that Uzziah was going to have.

For the sake of time, I can't go into details, but from verses 6-15, you see the kind of unparalleled success that is signaled in verse 2. It really was the golden age of Judah in their arena of national security, military defense, commercial development, agricultural creativity, technological advance and every aspect of government, domestic and foreign. Uzziah had the Midas touch. No matter where he turned his hand, he

was successful in all respects. Uzziah was the man. Uzziah was the man.

Then in verse 15, the story shifts and it recapitulates the ominous blessing of verse 4. *"His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful. After Uzziah became powerful,"* (KJV), *"his heart was lifted up to his destruction for he transgressed against the Lord his God and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense."* Azariah the priest with 80 priests with him, go in after him. They try to stop Uzziah and warn him, *"Uzziah, it is not right for you to burn incense unto the Lord."*

Uzziah, with a censer in his hand, ready to burn incense, the Hebrew says, "he became enraged." He became enraged, and while he was raging at the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead. God gave him leprosy and the priests hurried him out. Now listen. Listen to the legacy of Uzziah. Despite all that he had accomplished, despite all his victories, despite all his success, this...this is his epitaph.

Verse 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. Uzziah rested with his ancestors and was buried near them..."* Not with the kings, but apart from the kings. *"He was buried near them in a cemetery that belonged to the kings, for people said, 'He had leprosy.'"*

Is this the Uzziah who restored Elath to Judah? Is this the Uzziah who defeated the Philistines in battle? Is that how he would be? No, this is Uzziah, the king who had leprosy. It takes a lifetime to build a kingdom. Sin only needs a moment to tear it all down. What happened to Uzziah? What happened to the golden boy? This is what happened. In the midst of all the success that he was enjoying, Uzziah forgot his name. Uzziah forgot his name, for Uzziah's name means *YHWH is my strength*. YHWH is my strength.

Yeah, I got incredible obstacles and challenges, but I'm not afraid because YHWH is my strength. Yeah, I've enjoyed some successes in my life, but the only reason why I can do these things is because YHWH is my strength. I am not afraid to give away power. I'm not afraid to be weak in front of others. I'm not afraid to be wrong because YHWH and YHWH alone is my strength.

But somewhere along the way, Uzziah forgot his name. What Vaclav Havel said, what happened to an unchecked human heart, happened in Uzziah's heart. He began to form his identity around success and power. YHWH was no longer his strength. Power was his strength. His fame was his strength. His accomplishments were his strengths. His successes were his strength; and therefore, power was no longer a tool to empower others. It was a shield to guard his own insecurity and weakness. We see this evidence from three things in Uzziah's life.

Number one...his incredible sense of entitlement...his incredible sense of entitlement. What's the big deal? He just wanted to burn a little incense, right? The sin of Uzziah is that he goes into the temple to take on rights and privileges that are not his to enjoy. See the normal rules of society do not apply to him.

Entitlement is a pernicious sin, and it's a sin of our American culture. It comes out of a sense of superiority, out of touch with reality sense of superiority that comes as a function of pride. C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* says, "Pride is a comparative sin. Pride tells you that it's not enough to be rich. You have to be richer. Pride tells you it's not enough to be pretty. You have to be prettier. Pride tells you it's not enough to be strong. You have to be stronger. It's not enough to be successful. You have to be more. You have to see yourself as better and more deserving than others."

Now why is that? Philosopher and theologian Ronald Niebuhr says, "It's humanity's way of justifying itself apart from God." We all need someone to justify our existence, and if it's not God, you'll look to something other than God to justify you. Niebuhr says, "Power and strength are fig leaves that cover our sense of insecurity, fragility, and powerlessness." If this is true, we're going to see two things arise in our life, and we see this arise in Uzziah's life.

Number one, we see a lack of accountability. If power and strength are your idols, if that's the way you get your sense of being, you will do everything to cover your weaknesses, as opposed to Paul who says, "I rejoice in my weaknesses because then the power of Christ may rest on me." If power is your idol, you'll cover your weaknesses. When things go wrong, you'll shift blame. You'll cover your mistakes. You'll be so afraid of failure that you'll set things up in your life so you cannot fail. You'll hate repentance. You will not be open and honest about your shortcomings. You'll not examine your own heart for fear of what you'll see, and surely not allow others to examine it.

See Uzziah starts off with great accountability, as we're told in verse 5 that he was instructed in the fear of the Lord by a man named Zechariah, but Zechariah falls off the scene, and what the text wants you to realize is that Uzziah's sin did not happen in one day. Uzziah's sin did not happen in one day. He didn't just wake up one morning and say, "Man, I just feel like transgressing against God. Man, today, I just want to royally blow it with God." It's not what happened. There was a deviation in his heart that went unchecked, unaccounted for. There was no one in his life to say, "Hey, Uzziah, what's that?"

As he increased in power, as he increased in authority what's typical happened in Uzziah's life. He increased in isolation, and then he shed accountability. Slowly he became strong in his own eyes, and he pushed everything that told him otherwise away. The sin grew in his heart. The text wants you to know that before he ever had the sin of leprosy in his body, he had leprosy in his soul.

The second thing that raises a red flag to tell us that something had gone terribly wrong in Uzziah's heart was his refusal to take rebuke...his refusal to take rebuke. One of the sure signs that the cancer of pride has invaded your heart, one of the sure signs that you have built your identity on power and strength is your inability to take correction and rebuke. We saw it first in his grandfather, Joash. When a prophet of God comes to tell him the truth, he has him stoned.

We also saw it in his father, Amaziah. When a prophet of God comes to tell him the truth, he threatens to kill him. He says, "Why should you be struck down today? Depart from me." Eighty-one priests...81 priests in one accord tell Uzziah that he is doing wrong. Instead of owning the sin and repenting and changing his behavior, the text says what? He raged against the priests. He raged against the truth-tellers in his life.

If you want to know what your idol is, just follow your most uncontrollable emotions and if power and strength are your idols, you will rage against the truth-tellers in your life. No one can tell you you're doing wrong. We see the incredible power of power in an unchecked human heart.

Finally we see the healing of power in the gift of a name. If Uzziah's pride and addiction to power came from forgetting his name, then the healing of power and the freedom from pride comes from remembering ours. Uzziah was a leader who was strong, but proud and he used his power to be served. Now contrast him with another leader that is described as the humblest man who walked the face of the earth. Who am I talking about? Yeah, of course Jesus, but Moses actually. I'm talking about Moses from the book of

Numbers described as the humblest man who walked on the face of the earth. It's not fair to compare him to Jesus.

Moses got his humility, Moses got his freedom from having to be in control, Moses got his freedom from having to be the man, Moses got his freedom from the power of power in an encounter with the Living God where he received the gift of God's name, and in turn, the gift of his own name. This is in Exodus, chapter 3.

One of my favorite expositions on this passage comes from a writer and a speaker named Louie Giglio, and this is all in his book. This is what Louie says. He says, "God calls Moses to do a pretty big thing. He says, 'Moses, I want you to free My people, free Israel from the hands of the most powerful man on the planet.'" Then the text says that Moses, with his heart, filled with compassion and mercy, jumps at this opportunity to serve God and others, right? That's what the text says. No, that's not what it says.

It says that Moses actually gives God a lot of trouble, a lot of excuses for why he's the wrong man. In fact, can you believe the audacity of Moses? He's talking to the God of the universe and says, "God, I think You're wrong. I think You're wrong." He harps on his inadequacies, which sounds like humility, but really it's another manifestation of pride because it's so self-focused, right? Now God knew it was imperative to heal Moses of his pride.

Now notice how God does it. He doesn't feed Moses' self-focus. He doesn't heal Moses' sense of insecurity by inflating him. He doesn't respond to Moses by saying, "Moses, Moses, you the man. Moses, you are the bomb. Moses, look at you. You are all that and a bag of chips. Moses! Now here's what I want you to do, Moses, I want you to go home and I want you to put a mirror on your wall, and I want you to say to yourself, 'Moses, you're a winner. You are a winner.'" That's not what God does. Instead, God tells Moses who He is. God gives Moses His name. He says to Moses, "My name, Moses, is I Am." What is your name, God? Right. Hello. *I Am*.

Here's the thing. What God was conveying to Moses when He gave him His name...I Am, God was saying that He was unchanging. He was constant. He was unending, always present, always God. God was saying, "Moses, Moses, Moses, don't look at yourself. Don't look at your problems. Don't look at Pharaoh, but look at Me. Look at Me." When God said, "My name is I Am," God was telling Moses, "I Am the center of everything, Moses. I Am running the show, Moses. I Am the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. I Am the owner of everything. I am the Creator and sustainer of life. I Am more than enough for you, Moses. I Am inexhaustible and immeasurable. I Am God."

In a heartbeat, Moses knew God's name, but something more because when Moses understood God's name, he finally understood his own. That's where the healing of pride comes, for if God's name is I Am, Moses knew his name was *I am not*. I am not the center of everything. I am not in control. I am not the solution. I am not all-powerful. I am not calling the shots. I am not the owner of anything. I am not the maker. I am not the Savior. I am not holding it all together. I am not all knowing. I am not in charge of outcomes. I am not God.

There is an incredible freedom in that! That shouldn't be a downer. In fact, it's a source of power and confidence when we are stunned with the reality that though I am not, I have been made in His image, and His likeness, and I have been invited by the great I Am to know Him personally. I am not, but He knows my name. I am not, but He has pursued me in His love. I am not, but I have been purchased and redeemed by the blood of Christ. I am not, but I have been invited to the story. I am not, but I know the Creator of

the universe. I am not, but I know I Am. I am not, but I know I Am.

When you understand God's name, and understand your name, you don't need fig leaves anymore because you are covered in the love of God and the righteousness of Christ. There is no need to posture, to front, to fake, to pose, to act, to hide. You don't need money, and you don't need a car to give you status and security so you can give it away.

You don't need to look a certain way because you are valued and loved and beautiful in the eyes of the only One who matters, and you don't need power and authority and a title to tell you you're somebody. So now you can use power to lift others up instead of lifting yourself up. See the healing of idols comes from knowing the great I Am.

Long ago, there was a Jewish rabbi who said, *"Before Abraham was, I Am."* I am the way. I am the truth. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the bread of life. I am the living water. I Am the Good Shepherd. I Am Savior. I Am Jesus. I am the solution. I am the restorer. I am the builder. I am the answer. I am the wise one. I am the coming one. I am the mighty one. I am so you don't have to be. I am the Lamb of God. I Am the Lord, and there is no other. I Am God and there is no other beside Me. I am the first and the last. I am the alpha and the omega. I am the beginning and the end. I Am the Lord, and that is my name. I will not give My glory to another or any of My praise to idols. I Am that I Am. That is My name. That is My name. And My memorial-name that will be given to all the generations.

Paul says that when you know God's name and you know your name, there is incredible power to overcome anything, to defeat any idol, to overcome any darkness, to break any bondage. For if I Am is with you, who can be against you? I am not, but because of the grace of God, I know I Am. Let's find our freedom and our joy in that truth. Amen?

Let's pray: Father, we thank You for this time You've given us. Lord, we pray right now that You would be magnified in this place. God, that You would show Yourself strong in our community and in our lives, and Your beauty and Your majesty and Your glory, Your name, the great I Am, that would rise up and it would just push the idols, the small futile powerless idols of our lives away. Be exalted in this place, and may we find freedom and joy and power and victory in the knowledge of who You are and who we are in You. Thank You, in Jesus' name, Amen.