

# Are You Ready To Die?

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[ 0 : 00 ] I honestly don't like today's story very much. I don't like it for the same reason I don't like seeing bald eight-year-old little girls at Riley's Children's Hospital.

I love Riley's Children's Hospital. If I could get a job pulling one of those wagons, I think I would probably have one of the best jobs around.

But it is hard seeing sick and even dying children. And a sick, dying child is right at the middle of today's story.

And that's why I say I don't like it very much, at least for that reason. You're going to meet him in a little bit. But I just wanted to give you a warning of that's what's coming.

His name is Abijah, and he's the crown prince of the northern country of Israel. His dad is Jeroboam, and his mom we don't know.

[ 1 : 04 ] Some people think she was an Egyptian princess. We're not sure about that. So he's the crown prince. Would you like to be the crown prince or the crown princess of a nation?

Well, he was. And that meant he pretty much got anything and everything he wanted. Well, let's meet him. Where do you meet him at?

Well, we have to go up some big, wide stairs, steps, up to some palace doors. And we go through those palace doors. And right away, what meets us is a nurse rushing past us, not giving us a glance.

She's on a mission. And you can tell her face is furrowed. She is worried. She's in a hurry. And so let's follow her. We get behind her. And back she goes.

Back from the front part of the palace, where everyone else was, to the back part, where the family lives. And she's going past one door and down one hallway and another hallway and past one door and after another.

[ 2 : 13 ] And finally, we follow our worried nurse into the room. Maybe you have been in a room like this.

A worried dad at the side of a bed. And a worried mom right next to him. And in the bed is a dark-haired, dark-complected little boy.

And his skin is cold and clammy and breathing slow, hardly awake if he's awake at all. And if you look close, that's Abijah.

So you've met him. The crown prince of Israel. So kids, do you want to be a crown prince now? It's not looking so good.

So what do you do, mom? What do you do, dad? There's no x-rays. There's no C-scans. There's no MRIs. There's no antibiotics. There aren't any doctors like today.

[ 3 : 18 ] And so the same questions, though. You have the same questions that these parents had. Is he going to live? What do we do? What can we do to help him?

He looks so weak. Is God here? Is God here? And is he going to live? It's a story that's being played out probably at Riley's Children's Hospital this morning.

Maybe at Memorial. Maybe at St. Joe's. And so we're here. We're here in this room. And they are there. And I think our hearts go out to them.

So that's why I don't like today's story. It's a sad story. But it is hopeful. It's not a tragedy. It's not altogether bad. It's hopeful because... And it's not hopeful because this little boy lives.

In a week or so, the little boy dies. And in a week or so, they're going to wrap up his body in burial cloths and take him out of the city and bury him.

[ 4 : 28 ] So it's not hopeful because the little boy lives. It's hopeful because we've made mention of all the characters except for one. And there's one character that he's going to make all the difference.

And he's going to make all the difference for Abijah. And he can make all the difference for you. And so you'll find this story in 1 Kings 14. So take your Bibles, 1 Kings 14.

And this is where in the Bible we meet Abijah. So you can find 1 and 2 Samuel.

Then you'll find 1 Kings right after that. 1 Kings 14. And this is what it says. At that time, Abijah, son of Jeroboam, became ill.

And Jeroboam said to his wife... This is very odd. Go disguise yourself so you won't be recognized as the wife of Jeroboam. Then go to Shiloh.

[ 5 : 32 ] Ahijah, the prophet, is there. The one who told me I would be king over this people. Take 10 loaves of bread with you, some cakes, and a jar of honey, and go to him. He will tell you what will happen to the boy.

So Jeroboam's wife did what he said. And he went to Ahijah's house in Shiloh. So go disguise yourself.

We're going to just stop there for a second. Why does she need to disguise herself? Well, because very simply and very briefly, Jeroboam was a bad king. And Ahijah had been a good prophet. And Ahijah had been the good prophet that brought good news to Jeroboam and told Jeroboam that he was going to be the king. And Ahijah had said, If you do what God says, God will make your family, your dynasty, last as long as David's.

In other words, forever. Forever. And so Ahijah had been this good prophet with good news for Jeroboam and a good word. And Jeroboam, in turn, did everything in exactly what he wasn't supposed to do, what he shouldn't have done.

[ 6 : 46 ] He made idols. He kept people from worshiping in Jerusalem at the temple. He put his kingdom over God's kingdom. He put his way over God's way.

He despised and ignored God. He put himself in front of God. And so, why disguise yourself? Because Jeroboam felt guilty. And he was going to, he knew that Ahijah wasn't going to answer him if he knew it was coming from Jeroboam.

So, go disguise yourself. Now we're going to pick up the reading. Now Ahijah could not see. His sight was gone because of his age. But the Lord had told Ahijah, Jeroboam's wife is coming to ask you about her son, for he is ill, and you are to give her such and such an answer.

And when she arrives, she will pretend to be someone else. So when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps at the door, he said, Come in, wife of Jeroboam.

Why this pretense? I have been sent to you with bad news. Go, tell Jeroboam that this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says.

[ 7 : 57 ] I raised you up from among the people and made you a leader over my people Israel. I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you. But you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes.

You've done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal. You have provoked me to anger and thrust me behind your back.

Because of this, I am going to bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every last male in Israel, slave or free. I will burn up the house of Jeroboam as one burns dung until it's all gone.

Dogs will eat those belonging to Jeroboam who die in the city. And the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country. The Lord has spoken.

As for you, go back home. When you set your foot in your city, the boy will die. All Israel will mourn for him and bury him.

[ 9 : 10 ] He is the only one belonging to Jeroboam who will be buried because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the Lord, the God of Israel, has found anything good.

The Lord will raise up for himself a king over Israel who will cut off the family of Jeroboam. This is the day. What? Yes. Even now.

And the Lord will strike Israel so that it will be like a reed swaying in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land that he gave to their forefathers and scatter them beyond the river because they provoked the Lord to anger by making Asherah poles.

And he will give Israel up because of the sins Jeroboam has committed and has caused Israel to commit. Then Jeroboam's wife got up and left and went to Terza.

And as soon as she stepped over the threshold of the house, the boy died. They buried him and all Israel mourned for him as the Lord had said through his servant, the prophet Ahijah.

[10:16] Now I told you that the story is a sad story. But it is a story of God's grace and I hope you saw that.

I hope you saw it. It was in verse 13 there. Out of this dark and cloudy sky with everything bad, the little boy dies as the only one in the whole family in whom the Lord, the God of Israel, has found something good.

So God came looking to Jeroboam's family, looking over, coming in judgment, examining Jeroboam's family and it was nothing, nothing, nothing.

And finally they came to this little boy and he was good toward God. Death was coming for all of them. None escaped, but only one was ready.

None escaped, but only one. A little Abijah was ready. So Abijah was young. Now children, I want you to just, I want you to hear me and listen to me.

[11:25] Abijah was young. But young people, young children, can be saved. That's what we see. They can be saved and they can be good with God.

Abijah came from a bad family, but God can even save people from bad families. So if you're a young sinner or an old sinner from a good family or from a bad family, you can be saved.

And so that's where we're going. That's what we're going to see. But let's learn a few lessons along the way about Abijah. So what does the story teach us?

What does the story show us? Well, first it shows us that children can get sick and die. Now, we don't need to read 1 Kings 14 to find that out, but it does show us that again.

It does show us that again. And we all need to take it to heart. Peyton Chester, 13.

[12:36] Alyssa Altabelli, 13. Gianna Bryant, 13. Died together in that Kobe Bryant helicopter crash a week ago today.

And they went from looking forward to playing in a basketball game together, and they went to eternity. Young people, children, there's no guarantee.

Part of me wishes there was. There's no set timetable that says you go to high school and then you go to college and then you find someone and fall in love and then you get married and you work your job and you raise your family and then you grow old and when you grow old, then you die.

That's how it works a lot of the time, but that's not how it works all of the time. There's no guarantee. Let me put it like this. I grew up driving on country roads.

And you know what happens when you're driving along on country roads? Animals run out in front of you. And I've driven on a lot of country roads over the years and old animals have ran out in front of me and I've hit them and I've killed them and young animals have ran out in front of my car and I've hit them and I've killed them.

[14:02] I've hit young squirrels and old squirrels and young birds and old birds. Do you want to hear a very short little story? A young fish saw a worm.

That young fish swallowed that worm whole. Mmm, that young fish was good. Death is a trap without an age requirement.

It never says you have to be this old. It never says you have to be this high to ride the ride. My daughter came home from school last week telling me that the students were all collecting pennies for a competition at the school.

And I said, what for? What are you doing? What's this about? Well, an eighth grade boy has a brain tumor. They just found it. Is it cancer? I don't know.

Well, I hope he gets better. I don't know. Death is at work. The wages of sin is death.

[15:13] There is a curse at work in our world because of sin and we can't escape it and we can't avoid it. We don't know when it will come and my question for you and really the only important question is are you ready?

Are you ready? Abijah, Peyton, Alyssa, Gianna, they're asking you are you ready?

Are you ready? Now, if you are older, the young may die. the old will die. So that's the first thing we learn.

Here's the second thing I want you to see. Grace did a very, very strange thing. Sometimes grace doesn't come in packages that we expect. Sometimes grace doesn't look like what we think it should look like.

Sometimes we look at it with our own eyes and by our own sight and by our own reasoning and we say I don't know about that. I don't see God's grace in this but I want you to see that in Abijah's case God in grace did a very strange thing.

[ 16 : 30 ] It came to Abijah and it comes to us sometimes wrapped in some very strange frightening packaging. God in mercy and in kindness and grace let Abijah die.

there was no sudden healing. There was no wonderful miracle. The queen went home.

She went up those same steps that we went up and as soon as she crossed the threshold to her door through the doors Abijah let out his last breath and that is strange grace.

But it was grace. It was salvation. It was surprising. It doesn't look like what we would like it to look like or think it should look like but it was God saving Abijah.

What did God save him from? Well, we read it. His whole family is going to be ruined and it's not even normal common everyday sort of death.

[ 17 : 43 ] God and Ahijah goes to great lengths to say this is going to be disgraceful it's going to be frightening it's going to be thorough it's going to be it's going to ruin your whole family.

So what happened? Well, exactly what the prophet said his dad Jeroboam reigned for the rest of his life and then he died and Abijah's brother ruled for two years and he was visiting a Philistine town and another Israelite came and an Israelite assassin came and cut him down.

They did not bury him they threw him out in the street like garbage and the dogs fought over his body and that was the signal that was the signal the hunt was now on.

Abijah's brothers Abijah's servants Abijah's minister or Jeroboam's servants Abijah's brothers probably sisters everyone in Jeroboam's family they scattered they ran for their life because now they were hunted and some were caught in the cities cornered in houses and in in alleys and they were cut down and they were left for the dogs to eat and some made it outside out into the country and they're running through fields and in forests and they were caught and they were killed and birds picked their bones clean so God's judgment he says it's it's it's sweat through Jeroboam's family like a fire and it burned them root and trunk and branch none were spared none were saved none survived they all got caught they all got killed and they were all flung out like garbage and it should be with some lump in our throat we say your sin will find you out

God's goodness is great and his kindness is wonderful he gave Jeroboam this kingdom he gave Jeroboam's family the highest place in a whole kingdom he was merciful he gave them his word and direction he was kind to them but he will not spare the wicked did you hear what Jeroboam did he thrust him behind his back you're good to me I'll take that you want me to do something behind my back I'll do what I want to do so he will not spare those who ignore him who disrespect him who thrust him behind their backs now Abijah's family tree it was cut down it was dug up it was burned out every branch on that whole family tree ended in disgrace except for one except for one and

[ 20 : 54 ] Abijah little Abijah's branch grew and it was crowned with honor because alone of all of his family he did find his way to his father's house he did find a place to rest Abijah means the Lord is my father I don't know why Jeroboam gave him that name but the Lord is my father Jeroboam was his earthly father and he was a man under a curse but Abijah had a better father Abijah had a better home and God didn't let this ripe fruit rot in this rotten family and so when he was ripe he was picked and little Abijah woke up to find himself in a better family and a better home not the crown prince of a cursed kingdom but the crown prince of

God's kingdom Isaiah 57 1 the righteous perish perish that's a hard thing to see the righteous perish and no one takes it to heart the wicked don't take it to heart the devout are taken away and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil they're taken away to be spared from evil you see if you are ready to die if you are good toward God it's not it's not death to die it's not death to die there's a song that goes like this to leave this weary road and join the saints who dwell on high who found their home with God it's not death to fling aside this earthly dust and rise with strong and noble wing to live among the just it's not death to hear the key unlock the door that sets us free from mortal years to praise you forever more strange wonderful grace abijah said goodbye to all of his worst things and he said hello to all of his best things and so yes young people can get sick and they can die but can

I tell you young or old it doesn't matter so much when you die but are you ready but are you ready and really that's all I care about that's what I care about for you are you ready to get sick I hope it doesn't happen I don't know if it will happen but it might it might and I are you ready to die because I don't know when but I know it will so it's not about when it's are you ready and you can you can be

ready you can be ready you can be ready Abijah was ready and you can be confident and you can be hopeful and you can be expectant you can you can be ready now how how well first I want to talk about two ways that is not going to get you ready first let me tell you some things that just won't help you aren't ready and you won't be ready if you think everyone dies and goes to heaven if you think just that's the only option and that's what a lot of people think but the good news is not yay you were born the gospel is not here you have a birth certificate good news you're a human and all humans like all dogs go to heaven maybe that's true of all dogs but that's certainly not true of humans the bible is very clear there is a heaven and there is a hell and it doesn't say that to and I don't say that to depress you the bible doesn't say that to depress you or to control you or to manipulate you or to ruin your life now God tells you that I tell you that the Lord Jesus tells you that so you won't go there so you won't go there to save you from everlasting never ending misery Jesus said broad is the road that leads to destruction there's a road and it leads to destruction and it's broad and he says there are many on it there are many on it have you ever been to one of those really big airports like maybe O'Hare or Atlanta maybe there are even smaller ones now but those moving sidewalks and you get on there and you can walk and it's moving the whole time and you don't have to walk well that's the broad road that leads to destruction we're all born on this sidewalk that's moving and it's moving to destruction now some people walk on those things really fast you've seen them they're in a hurry they're glad that that thing is there and they're making their way to the end as quickly as they can that's how some people run down the broad road of destruction it's like they can't get there fast enough and some people just stand there they don't really do anything they just ride the ride but either way you end up in the same place if you get on that sidewalk the beginning you get off at the end and it's a broad road this is better than those sidewalks in the airport because you know what it can fit all of us in all of our different ways of walking on it [ 27 : 26 ] I can stand there you can jog you can walk we'll just move along there's plenty of room for all of us to stand and to walk and jog and all the ways that we want to but the point is however you travel on that sidewalk you end up in the same place now you're not ready to die if you haven't left that road and got on another road if there hasn't been a change of direction a change of way of walking you're off the broad road and onto a different road Jesus says broad is the road that leads to destruction but narrow is the road that leads to life and only a few find it so have you found it have you made a change of roads have you got off exited one sidewalk and got on another one that's the question if you've never left the broad road and you're not on the narrow road then you're not ready to die it's that simple so what won't work doing nothing won't work what else won't work doing a bunch of good things to sort of outweigh your bad things be a generally pretty good person that won't work good things don't cover up bad things good things don't outweigh bad things and if you think that and if you're acting like that you're not ready to die because and the reason

I say this is because this is always always the first thing that everybody does so I'm not ready to die I'm not ready!

to meet God I have this guilty conscience so what do I have to do to take care of that well I'm going to go to church near here I'm going to read my Bible so you do I'm going to start doing religious things whatever those things are I'm going to start being nice to people I'm going to start obeying my parents I'm going to start loving my being kind to my brothers or my sisters God will be happy with that that will take care of my sins that will wash them away that will get me ready for heaven and if that's the way you're thinking I have to tell you you're not ready I have a verse I want to read to you I hope you'll listen James chapter 2 verse 10 James 2 10 for whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it keep all of it none of us are even close to that but let's suppose you are keep all of it except for one point and you're guilty you're a law breaker for some reason we think that obeying

God's law and being right with God via that law through that law is somehow different than human law so observing the law doing all the right godly things obeying the ten commandments loving everybody that's good that is what you should do that's what you should have done that's what you should be doing now and should do in the future but the whole picture is wrong if you think the law is scales the law is not a scale with good deeds on one side and bad deeds on the you only have to break the chain one time to be a law breaker you keep it all or you break it all now now I don't know it'd be interesting to see I have no idea how big where they keep all the laws of the United States I mean we have the constitution and that fits in a very small but that's not all!

laws there's law books there's pages and pages of regulations and I imagine it's pretty big so how many laws do you need to break in order to be a law breaker just one just one how many laws do you have to break before the judge says you're guilty just one does the judge ask well what about all the other laws you're keeping or about all of your good deeds what about them can we put them on a scale the judge doesn't ask for a scale where you can put all your good deeds and then all your bad deeds together and we'll see which one weighs more there's only a chain there's only a chain and if you break it once you've broken the whole thing you're a law breaker you're not right God is not happy not justified and we've all broken the chain again and again and again there's not two pieces there's a million links shattered the law is shattered at our feet for our disobedience there's nothing for us to give to

[ 33 : 03 ] God Isaiah says all of our good deeds are filthy rags even our best things not good enough and here's the problem and here's the fantasy that we all live under or that we are born thinking that somehow God is going to lower his standard for us he's going to just lower it a bit and if he lowered!

his standard that would be what we wanted if he lowered his standard what would that be saying though if he did that well that would be God saying you know what it's okay that you don't love people and you know that's not good it's not right but that's what we want we want him to say it's okay not to love people it's okay to lie it's fine to steal it's fine it's fine to make you the sinner oh you're the sinner I guess I'll be okay with that you're the most important thing ever it's it's okay to say it's fine to say mean hurtful things it's fine to do all of that we really want God to be okay with our law breaking but he won't be he's not we want him to think just like we do but he will not we've been seen on

Sunday morning that God is good he's not so so good he's altogether good he's perfectly good he loves good with all of his heart he loves what is good with all of his being every part and piece of God is fully good and we're not and that's our problem and so how do you get ready how can you be ready to die at any time that really is the most important question it's not a matter of when although I hope all of you live very long fulfilling lives but I cannot guarantee it the Bible does not promise that so how can you get ready to die at any time ready well you can't do nothing and you can't say I'm going to really try to be good and I'll be good that boat has sailed that flight is in the air you're not getting on that flight so let me tell you the only way that you can be ready the only way that you can be ready to die today tomorrow 70 years from now believe in the Lord Jesus Christ that is the only way you can be ready believe in the Lord Jesus Christ he's the good news! that's the message of the Bible the message of the Bible is not what you do and not who you are it's about who he is he's the good news it's not about what you do it's not your life it's his life he's the gospel so God sent his son into the world God the son to become a man and he became a man!

just as much as a man as a human as you and God gave him the law the same law that he gave to you he gave him that law he put him under it and he said obey obey it obey it for your people obey all of it for all your people love me with all your heart every day of your life love your neighbor as much as you love yourself love your brother as do it willingly do it because you love me and you trust me and Jesus did he did because you didn't because you didn't you couldn't you haven't and after years of life and Jesus lived years of life all kinds of life and he began to publicly teach and he began to publicly preach and he said I am the light of the world everywhere else is dark it's gloomy there's despair you're under the control of the evil one he's held you captive to the fear of death [ 37 : 44 ] I am the light of the world I'm hope I'm the way to the father I am that narrow road I am that good news you have to get on me you have to believe in me and every morning he woke up full of love for God it's my food to do his will full of love for everybody he met even those Pharisees that we heard about this morning who he said those harsh words to he said it in love to wake them to their danger his chain was one solid piece of perfection and he was good as good as God good as God through and through there was one last thing his father told him to do and it was the hardest of all the most demanding of all the father said now lay down your life for your people lay down your life give up your life sacrifice yourself for these poor sinners so a perfect lamb for a sinful people die in their place die under my punishment take what they deserve be their salvation be their salvation rescue them and

Jesus did he did everything and in love and unspeakable and glorious higher than the mountains to infinity and beyond love with a burning heart for his people and for his God he laid down his life for

his own and he took our sin and he became sin and he took our punishment and he died the just for the unjust the the the good with God for the not good with God and on the third day he rose he rose work done salvation accomplished and we should be saying yay amen that's how you can be ready to die by believing in him embrace!

Jesus Christ the Savior put yourself all in his hands believe that he is enough he's enough for you that life enough for you that death enough for all of your sin him enough for you!

Now the littlest child can believe that message the oldest sinner can believe that message the youngest child can say I'm a sinner I need a Savior Jesus Christ is my Savior and the oldest sinner can believe this message and you can say I'm a sinner I'm not hiding it I can't hide it anymore I can't pretend it's not true I can't be like Jeroboam's wife and dress up anymore I can't fool God I'm an old sinner and I need a Savior Jesus Christ is my Savior it's not some great work it's not some hard thing it's putting your head on your pillow with a sigh Jesus is enough and then you know what happens all your sins are washed away all your sins are washed away gone and

God though he is omniscient and has perfect recall perfect sight of all your sins says I remember them no more I cast them behind my back into the deepest sea never to be brought up and then with a smile God says come son come daughter come to me come in your sins washed away God smile on you now what is death where oh death is your sting where oh death is your victory Jesus Christ died for me and so now you're ready you're ready you're ready to die and you're ready to live [ 42 : 54 ] I'll wait I'll wait Jesus is not going to ruin your life I could tell you stories or give you illustrations of reasons why you shouldn't wait of people who have died young those are all true but I want to tell you something else that Jesus is not going to ruin your life there is no reason to wait he loved you enough to lay down his life in order to they never ever ever say I wish I would have waited a little longer because I could have had a little more fun no the beginning of life is embracing Jesus Christ the beginning of joy the beginning of peace the beginning of comfort is embracing him so don't wait Jesus is perfect love perfect goodness no one who's ever embraced him has been!

don't go to sleep until you are ready don't leave this room until you're ready don't wait don't wait a moment longer to trust yourself to give yourself to embrace Jesus as your savior let's pray my god our god my prayer request is very simple that you would show off this morning that you would show off your grace you would show off your mercy that you would show off your power you would show off your love you would show off the greatness of

Jesus Christ and his sacrifice of who he is that you would display so perfectly before us how wonderful you are show off in saving sinners show off in raising our faith and increasing our love we want to see you we want to see your glory so show us the glory of your grace we pray this for Jesus sake amen