

As we continue in our sermon series on minor Biblical characters, this morning we are up to the story of Josiah in 2 Kings 22-23. The books of 1 and 2 Kings are historical books that detail the time in Israel's history, beginning with the death of King David.

By 2 Kings 22, the northern kingdom of Israel has already fallen, and the southern kingdom of Judah is on its way. Prior to Josiah are two awful kings, Manasseh and Amon. Manasseh did some terrible things: erecting idols, mass murders, child sacrifice, sorcery and divination. And Amon is so bad that he is assassinated by his own officials, and then those officials are killed by the people of the land, and the people put Amon's son in place as king, a boy named Josiah. Problem is, the son is only 8 years old. I have an 8 year-old and I wouldn't put him in charge of taking care of the cats, let alone an entire nation. But Josiah defies the odds and becomes one of the best kings Israel ever had. Let's read his story in 2 Kings 22:

*2 Kings 22:1 - 23:30 - Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah; she was from Bozkath. <sup>2</sup> He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left. <sup>3</sup> In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah sent the secretary, Shaphan son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, to the temple of the LORD. He said: <sup>4</sup> "Go up to Hilkiyah the high priest and have him get ready the money that has been brought into the temple of the LORD, which the doorkeepers have collected from the people. <sup>5</sup> Have them entrust it to the men appointed to supervise the work on the temple. And have these men pay the workers who repair the temple of the LORD-- <sup>6</sup> the carpenters, the builders and the masons. Also have them purchase timber and dressed stone to repair the temple. <sup>7</sup> But they need not account for the money entrusted to them, because they are acting faithfully." <sup>8</sup> Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD." He gave it to Shaphan, who read it.*

Josiah is about 26, and his people are working on the temple and they find the book of the law. What is the book of the law? Probably Deuteronomy. It contains the covenant made between God and Moses and God's people at Mt. Sinai after the exodus from Egypt. **There are laws to be followed, and blessings and curses that accompany obedience and disobedience to those laws.** What a picture of how far they had fallen, that the very words of God were stashed somewhere in the temple.

<sup>9</sup> *Then Shaphan the secretary went to the king and reported to him: "Your officials have paid out the money that was in the temple of the LORD and have entrusted it*

to the workers and supervisors at the temple." <sup>10</sup> Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king. <sup>11</sup> When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. <sup>12</sup> He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Acbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: <sup>13</sup> "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD's anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us." <sup>14</sup> Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to speak to the prophetess Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the Second District. <sup>15</sup> She said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, <sup>16</sup> 'This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read. <sup>17</sup> Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.' <sup>18</sup> Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: <sup>19</sup> **Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD.** <sup>20</sup> Therefore I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.'" So they took her answer back to the king.

Josiah realizes that they have been living in violation to God's law, and he tears his robes as a sign of grief and anguish he feels. They seek out a prophet, and find that God is going to bring judgment on Judah because of their sin. But Josiah, because of his repentant heart, will die before Judah is destroyed. But this is not good enough for Josiah.

<sup>NIV</sup> **2 Kings 23:1-** Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> He went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets-- all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. <sup>3</sup> The king stood by the pillar and **renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD**-- to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul,

*thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.*

Josiah is serious about the nation getting right with God, so he leads a re-covenanting service. They all pledge themselves to the covenant. The next 17 verses describe how Josiah led the way in removing all idolatry and pagan priests from the land. And then they celebrate Passover:

*<sup>21</sup> The king gave this order to all the people: "Celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant." <sup>22</sup> Not since the days of the judges who led Israel, nor throughout the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah, had any such Passover been observed. <sup>23</sup> But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was celebrated to the LORD in Jerusalem. <sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had discovered in the temple of the LORD. <sup>25</sup> Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did-- with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses. <sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the LORD did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to provoke him to anger. <sup>27</sup> So the LORD said, "I will remove Judah also from my presence as I removed Israel, and I will reject Jerusalem, the city I chose, and this temple, about which I said, 'There shall my Name be.'" <sup>28</sup> As for the other events of Josiah's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? .*

Josiah will not see the destruction of Judah, but it will still come, despite Josiah's efforts at repentance (621 is Josiah's repentance, 586 the fall of Jerusalem).

In a nutshell, this is a story of a king and a people who are living as they feel is best, and then they find out that there is a God who has requirements of them. What do we learn from the life of Josiah, this story of God's law and repentance?

First of all, we see that God's law has two main purposes:

1) One purpose of God's law is to show us how life works best (what is good)

After the Exodus, God gives His people the law at Mt. Sinai. This is what it means to live in community as the people of God. This is what is good.

So what? Why should that matter?

Imagine using a tool and then discovering that there is actually a user's manual. That there was a creator who created the tool for a purpose and that there were instructions on how to use it.

Or, imagine trying to find where you are supposed to go and then learning that there is a map.

That is God's law. Millions of people trying to live as they see fit, and the world in a mess as a result. But God sits here with the instructions, with the map. This is how life works best. Don't kill, don't steal, don't lie, etc.

How do you know what is good unless you know the purpose for which something is created?

Is this a good hammer? Depends upon its purpose.

If it is the transcultural rule of God, it will offend every culture at some point

Notice that ignorance is no excuse. They did not have the book of the Law, but they were still going to be punished. Ignorance is no excuse before God. As Paul puts it:

**Romans 1:18-23** - *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,* <sup>19</sup> *since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.* <sup>20</sup> *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.* <sup>21</sup> *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.* <sup>22</sup> *Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools* <sup>23</sup> *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*

Popular question – what about those who have never heard? I don't know, although I know that a just God will do what is right. But I do know that Romans 1 tells us that ignorance will not be a defense against God. And as for you, who have heard of God and Jesus, you have no excuse. You have the Bible. You can read it

and know what his will is. To claim that you didn't know is no excuse before God. If you don't know, then get to know the law.

God has a law with requirements as to how we are to live. It shows us how life works best. **How are you reading it? Are you submitting to it?**

There is a problem, though. As Josiah is hearing the law read, the anxiety is mounting. When the law is held up to Josiah, he tears his robes, a visible sign of repentance and sorrow. He realizes that he and the people have fallen short.

**2) Second purpose of the law is to confront us with our sin and show us our need for a Savior.**

***Romans 3:19-20** - Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*

***Romans 6:23** - For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Three ways to respond to God's law:

You can reject it as not authoritative. You can accept it, but try to justify yourself. Or you can accept it and admit that you are guilty before it.

### **Reject it**

You can reject it. Maybe you say "I like some things the Bible says, but I don't see it as my authority. I do what feels right to me." Certainly this is what many people do. But if the Bible transcends culture, then every culture will be offended at some point.

### **Accept it and justify yourself**

We are more likely to justify ourselves. We're not so bad. We're better than most. We try hard. Surely God would not expect us to be perfect, right? To which Jesus said:

***Matthew 5:48** - **Be perfect**, therefore, as your heavenly Father is **perfect**.*

Think of Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount – ever looked lustfully? Ever been angry? You are guilty. You are guilty before a holy God, and the punishment is eternal separation.

The second purpose of the law is to confront us with our sin and show us our need for a Savior

***Galatians 3:21-24*** - *Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. <sup>22</sup> But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. <sup>23</sup> Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.*

### Accept it and repent

Josiah is forgiven when he repents.

The law confronts you with your sin and your need for a Savior. The good news is that Jesus lived the perfect life we could not live and died a sacrificial death on the cross in our place, so that we might have forgiveness and eternal life. If you don't know this, you will justify yourself or reject God's authority. But if you know He died for you and that there is a righteousness unconnected to your performance, than you can let God's law convict you of your sin, repent, and trust in Jesus for your forgiveness.

***1 John 1:8-9*** - *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

All who repent and trust in Jesus will be forgiven. That is the main message of Jesus and the apostles – repent and believe in Jesus, and you will be forgiven.

***Luke 24:46-47*** - *He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

**Acts 2:37-38** - *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"* <sup>38</sup> Peter replied, *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

If repentance is so critical to our salvation and faith, we had better understand what it is.

How does Josiah respond? Emotional anguish over their sin. Commits himself and the people to the covenant. And tears down the idols. And celebrates Passover. We see what true repentance looks like in this passage.

**Emotional element** – In Greek **Metamelomai**, in Hebrew **nacham** – have concern or regret – expresses the emotional aspect of repentance. Emotionally, I regret what I have done. There is a godly sorrow when you realize how you have hurt the one who died for you, or hurt others through your sin.

**Intellectual element** - **Metanoeo** – change one's mind. I realize that this is sin, that it leads to death, and that God's way is the way to life. I believe that God created me, that He is good, that He knows what is best for me. I agree that what He calls sin is bad for me and for the world.

**Volitional element** – Hebrew word **shubh** - Conscious, moral separation. Personal decision to forsake sin and to enter into fellowship with God. Both sides of the same coin – turn from sin to faith in God.

**Matthew 3:8** - **Produce fruit** in keeping with repentance.

His good works follow his faith and prove his repentance is genuine.

As Josiah repents, his life is spared. **The nation, however, is not spared**. Why? I would guess because it was not true repentance. After all, the next four kings after Josiah went back to idolatry, and the nation goes along with them.

Consider false repentance:

- 1) **Saying the words, but never changing your mind or behavior**. Maybe even just offer a generic confession for sins. Not the same.

- 2) **Change your behavior without changing your mind or heart.** You've been caught, or you're afraid of getting in trouble, or you realize you need to change, but your heart still wants it, and you're not convinced that God's way is better.
- 3) **Experiencing the emotion or believing it intellectually, but not change your behavior.** You feel the sorrow, you hate what you have done, but you don't receive God's forgiveness and truly commit to him. Even Judas had remorse, but he went and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5).

God's law, when taken seriously, reveals that we are all sinners in need of a Savior. Thankfully, God has provided a Savior, and forgiveness to all who repent and trust in Jesus for their salvation. True repentance includes emotional, intellectual, and volitional elements. Have you repented? Are you repenting? Does your life show evidence of a life changed by the gospel?

How can God forgive? Josiah ends by leading the people to celebrate Passover. Passover is an annual reminder that God rescued them. God saved them, freeing them from slavery, even though they had don't nothing to deserve it. He saved them, and then they were given the law. The law did not come first.

Josiah is forgiven before he does anything, simply because of His repentance. And then comes the obedience.

That points us to Jesus. On a Passover night, Jesus did, the lamb slain so that the people could go free. His love saves us, and then comes the law. It is not there to earn God's favor, as if we could live it perfectly. It shows us how life works best. When you get married, you adopt new laws, but they are done from the heart to love and please the other person. God's law becomes our delight, as we trust Him and want to bring Him honor.

**Romans 5:6-8** - *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*