



Josiah: Holy Zeal

Lesson 20

And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:13

Of all the kings who were in Judah, few have the zeal and the passion to follow God to rival Josiah. His tenacity and the extremes he went to in order to remove idolatry and corruption are shocking. We have seen revivals before Josiah. Asa led a revival. Jehoshaphat did what was right in God's eyes. Hezekiah led the nation in following God. But what happens here with Josiah is different. The magnitude of his reforms and the zeal with which he returned to God is unparalleled. In this lesson we see an example of a man sold out to do what is right and willing to match that with a zeal for holiness that should cause all of us to examine our own lives.

There are many people who want to follow God, but only to a certain extent. They will do many good things, genuinely good things, things that God is willing to commend them for, but they fall short of total, sold out obedience. All of us, if we were honest, can probably pinpoint areas in our lives where we could be more zealous in our pursuit of God. The story of Josiah is a sobering reminder that our obedience to God ought to be foremost on our mind and on our heart.

Why do you think previous, godly kings had failed to go to the same extremes Josiah does?

What holds people back from being willing to zealously follow God?

I. Josiah begins his reign (2 Kings 22:1-2; 2 Chronicles 34:1-7).

A. An overview of Josiah's Reign (2 Kin 22:1-2; 2 Chr 34:1-2).

As with other kings, we are giving important basic details and an overview of Josiah's reign. What we find is impressive: Josiah walked in ***all*** of the ways of David his father. This statement comes with no qualification, as is all too common when we study the kings.

B. Josiah seeks the Lord (2 Chr 34:3a).

We read that in the eight year of his reign, when he was sixteen, Josiah sought the Lord. People often give all kinds of reasons why they are not able to follow God, or follow God now, or follow God yet. Josiah shows us that even at a relatively young age people can follow the Lord and do what is right.

C. Josiah removes idols in Judah and Israel (2 Chr 34:3b-7).

Josiah begins his reign by seeking to remove all the idols in Judah and also in the cities in northern Israel. He went on a rampage, tearing down idols, burning altars, getting rid of the various types of pagan worship. Although there would be a more thorough purging later (2 Kings 23:4-20, 24-25; 2 Chr 34:33), this sets the tone for Josiah's reign and demonstrates his zeal for the Lord.

Why do you think Josiah began his reign by first eliminating idolatry? What does this teach us about our own lives?

What does idolatry look like for Christians today, and how should they seek to eradicate idols?

II. Josiah humbles himself before God's Word (2 Kings 22:3-20; 2 Chronicles 34:8-28).

After going on a godly purge, Josiah is crushed to find out that the reforms he has undertaken barely scratch the surface of what is wrong in Jerusalem and Judah. His response to the prophetess is the exact response that James calls for: he responds with meekness to the word (James 1:21).

A. Josiah orders the temple be restored (2 Kings 22:3-7; 2 Chr 34:8-13).

Josiah begins by attacking wrong worship, but then turns his attention to establishing the right kind of worship. It is important that we have zeal against what is wrong, but that is not enough. We must have a zeal to do what is right as well. Sadly, many Christians are all too zealous about the evils they see in the world, but don't make personal worship of God and service to him a major part of their lives.

Why is it that some Christians focus so strongly on what is wrong and fail to properly worship God? How can we avoid this trap?

B. Hilkiah the high priest found the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:8-10; 2 Chr 34:14-21).

Discovered among the rubble is a copy of God's Word. Likely this was the Pentateuch, or perhaps an important section of the Pentateuch. It's not surprising after the reign of

Manasseh that copies of Scripture were hard to find. Those who persecute God's people often try to stamp out God's Word, and they always ultimately fail. God has preserved His Word and while cleaning up the temple the priest finds a copy that was missed in the likely purge. Josiah and the people are horrified to learn how far off they had gotten and go to seek God's forgiveness and favor.

How else might Josiah and the people have responded? Why might a proud response have been easy for Josiah?

C. The king responds in humility and sends for Huldah the prophetess (2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chr 34:22-28).

God informs the nation that because of their great wickedness, judgment is coming. Nevertheless, because Josiah responded so well, God will hold off a little longer before bringing His judgment. There will be exile, but exile will be later.

III. Josiah Continues to Reform the Land

Josiah begins by purging idolatry, then by clearing the temple and seeking to return to biblical worship. But he doesn't stop there. Kings and Chronicles outlines for us three more steps that Josiah takes in seeking to lead the nation in following God. First, he renews the covenant. Then, he seeks once again uproot pagan worship practices in the land. Finally, he holds a Passover feast of magnificent proportions.

A. Josiah renews the covenant (2 Kings 23:1-3; 2 Chr 34:29-32).

Josiah solemnly reestablishes the covenant that Israel and Judah had broken over and over again since accepting God's covenant terms at Sinai (see Exodus 19-24). He leads the nation in doing this and brings along the leadership of the people who stand with him.

B. Josiah destroys idols (2 Kings 23:4-20, 24-25; 2 Chr 34:33).

This was the second purge, but by the sounds of it you would think the first one had never happened! Things had gotten so bad, and people had become so desensitized, that most of the wicked idolatry still needed to be uprooted!

Christians can also make things right with God, only to find out later that there is much more painful brokenness that needs to happen. How can we respond like Josiah when God's Word confronts us and tells us we are not doing enough?

The depth of the nation's depravity seems to know no end. Things had become very, very bad under Manasseh and Amon.

Read through 2 Kings 23:4-20 and give several examples of the corruption of the land.

One especially egregious offense that seems hard to even fathom is that they removed “the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the Lord” (2 Kings 23:7). The Hebrew term here is related to the Hebrew word for holy, the qedeshim or “holy ones.” These were male prostitutes who engaged in immorality in “sacred” worship acts.

We also read that “he brought out the grove from the house of the Lord.” The Hebrew word here is *Asherah*, and is likely the name of the pagan deity who was the consort of Baal. An image representing her was apparently set up in the temple.

How is it possible that such wicked acts could take place in the temple itself? What warning does this give modern believers?

Part of this purge included the fulfillment of a 300-year-old prophecy (2 Kings 23:15-16; cf 1 Kings 13). Once again, we are reminded that God’s Word will stand, and it will be fulfilled. When God says something will happen, we can be sure it will happen. Even if it takes 300 years to happen.

C. Josiah kept the Passover (2 Kings 23:21-23; 2 Chr 35:1-19).

The process began with the return of the Ark of the Covenant, which apparently had been hidden away (2 Chr 35:3)! Almost an entire chapter is given to the retelling of this important feast that is being carried out with such gusto that it goes down as the greatest Passover since the time of Samuel (2 Chronicles 35:18)! This means that Josiah’s zeal to keep the Passover exceeded even that of David and Solomon!

How is it that the people are able to go from Manasseh and Amon, who wickedly rebelled against God, to Josiah, who kept the greatest Passover since Samuel, to the kings that followed him who didn’t follow the Lord? What does this teach us about human nature and about ourselves?

IV. Josiah Dies

Josiah has been a very impressive king up until this point. You could even call his reign flawless. Which is why this final chapter of his life is so disappointing. Josiah

A. Josiah becomes involved in affairs that don’t concern him (2 Chr 35:20-21).

Egypt was on its way to help Assyria fight an up and coming world power: Babylon. If you know where this story is going, you know where all of this is eventually headed. We don’t

know all the details, but for whatever reason, Josiah felt compelled to stop them. We read that Pharaoh Necho actually tried to talk Josiah out of it, and the author of Chronicles lets us know that this was God's way of warning Josiah to back off.

How is it that the author can say that the speech of a pagan ruler came "from the mouth of God"? What does that mean for our lives today?

B. Josiah's attempt to save himself failed (2 Chr 34:22-27; 2 Kings 23:28-30).

In this story we see Josiah acting like Ahab (1 Kings 22). Here as well as there we see a king fighting in a war that God had warned him to avoid, and seeking to save himself by dressing up as a civilian only to be hit with an arrow and have him die later in his chariot. Despite all the good that Josiah did, we are left with a disappointing end that sounds an awful lot like the end of the worst king of Israel.

Obedience to God is hard and costly. Wholehearted obedience is very hard and very costly. Josiah was willing to do what was right and pursued God with a zeal that had not been seen before in the lives of other kings. May we too follow our God with all our heart, soul, and might!

How can a believer today learn from Josiah's example of radical obedience? What are ways in which we serve God, but only half-heartedly?

What are some of the things that kept other kings from wholeheartedly serving God? What things keep us from wholeheartedly serving God?