

JOSIAH: REAL REFORMATION , 2KINGS 22-23

The Return of the Kings #4

◆ Call to worship: Ps.118

◆ **Intro:** Today is Palm Sunday. You are likely aware that it commemorates the day Jesus rode in procession into Jerusalem as the King of the Jews, to the thrill and praise of the crowds. Bear in mind that all of Israel was occupied by the Roman Army at the time, of which Caesar was king. Palm branches served as flags and banners to announce the procession. People saw him riding a donkey just as the prophet Zechariah has foretold. The people sang one of the ancient psalms of honor: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord (Ps.118). And yet a week later this King of the Jews was to be rejected and killed by the same society. This "Triumphal Entry" was in fact an announcement of heaven that Jesus is the true King. And that he indeed had come to reform the world of men. And exactly like the great reforming Kings of Judah that we have recently studied (Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah), Jesus too did business in the temple, cleaning it out and altering the degenerate practices that had become the routine there. It was like history repeating itself! No wonder the people were excited. However, the people of Israel turned out not to want this king. They're hope for the long-awaited Messiah, had shriveled into a hope for a long-awaited Monarch. What are some of the reasons that they didn't know their true King when they met him? We can pick up some clues from the reign of King Josiah, around 600BC.

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◆ Josiah was the youngest to become Judah's king (8yo).
And Josiah was the godliest of all the Kings of Judah. And
Josiah was the last of the kings that brought reformation to
God's people.

◆ 2 Kings 23:25 (NIV 1984) 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.

◆ The Kings of Israel, in so much as they obeyed the true
King, God himself, were models to teach us.

◆ **1. To experience God, my true king, I must set my heart on perfection.** One of the main things that marks the life of King Josiah is the finding of the Book of the Covenant in some dusty back corner of the temple. Clearly no one had been looking at the library of God's prophets for some time. You might say, they had Bibles on the shelves but just never actually read them. In fact, God's words were just so much fixtures, and decoration that they didn't even notice what they had. But during some remodeling the priest picked it up, read it and went straight to the king! We don't know for sure but more than likely it was a copy of Deuteronomy, written by Moses. Deuteronomy means "second law". It was the second time God told Israel through Moses how they ought to behave so as to inherit the Promised Land and God's blessing on their lives. Most all the reforms we

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read about Josiah making have exactly parallel instructions in the Book of Deuteronomy.

◆A. Now there's something you should know and notice about Josiah: a true follower of God doesn't just hope to get by. This is what we see in Josiah. What marks him is that when he heard all the things God had said, and he realized "Hey, we don't do those! We're not obeying him!" -he determined to obey completely! He set about to comprehensively reform his nation.

◆This is in striking contrast to many of us who say we believe in the true God. Are we not most often guilty of not aiming for the perfect holiness of God through obedience, but rather something quite a bit less, we hope might be good enough?

◆God's writings say to always speak the truth. And we think, "Oh that's a really nice idea. I should do that sometime." But certainly not all the time. Not when it's gonna make me look bad. Not when it will get me in trouble.

◆God's Word tells us...

◆*Ephesians 5:3-4 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving*

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- ◆ Sheesh, really? Tell you what. I'll not have sex until I'm married. I'll just fantasize about all the hot girls in class. Isn't that a better choice? That's not damaging is it?(Actually it very much is. You are creating mental habits that will endanger you, and open you to compromise your whole life. Which is why Jesus said thinking about it is just like the sin of doing it. Ie. *God wants a heart that wants to do the right thing.* All the right things!
- ◆ Trouble is, we aren't after straight up obedience. We're often after "enough to get by." For example, are you teaching a bible study, but also cheating your employees?
- ◆ This is what King Josiah shows us. Our dad in heaven does not hope we'll might try a little of what he says. He expects us to obey EVERYTHING he says. Is that what you want? Because that's the path to blessing. Josiah didn't stop the impending judgment on Israel. It was coming. But God pushed back judgement because Josiah was humble enough to admit God deserved perfection from his life, whether he could be it or not.
- ◆ **2. To follow my true king, I must set my aim on my whole world.** Here's another characteristic Josiah demonstrated that aligns with God's kingdom. First of all, once Josiah heard the Word of God and was convicted, he acted on it, didn't he. He admitted they hadn't obeyed (v13). He was repentant (v19). He inquired of the Lord about it (through Huldah the prophetess, v14-15). And then he made sure everyone else in Judah found

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out the same things. He read it to them himself (23:2)! Then they cleaned out the temple of everything that didn't fit with following God. (Anything in your bedroom that doesn't fit with saying you follow Christ?) If that were not enough, Josiah headed north, out of Judah into the territory of Israel, who had since been overrun by Assyria.

◆Verse 15: Bethel was where the first king over the northern tribes had set up an alternate altar to the one in Jerusalem. So while Josiah was in the Promised Land still, he's actually beyond the borders of his southern kingdom.

◆A. Now here's something to ponder. I saw an interview with Mark Wallburg the other day. He is a seriously practicing Catholic. He says he doesn't miss prayer. He says he doesn't miss Mass. But, he says, he doesn't make his kids go, or do it because he doesn't want to influence their choice! He wants them to chose it on their own. Now, Mark is a talented actor, and impressive individual, and cool in so many ways. But pardon me, that reasoning is utter dweebness. Yet so many regard that as oh-so-noble a position! Do you know what that says to your kids? Not pursuing faith in God for other people is like saying it's only optional . But it's not optional. They must have it to live. We don't consider playing in the street optional. Taking drugs; not optional son. But following God; your choice? Is it right and true or is it not? If it is, then it is for everyone. Josiah knew that God's way was God's way for the whole country, the whole world

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for that matter. He wasn't about to not say so. So he heads to the north and destroys the false altar at Bethel.

◆[btw: v17 was predicted in approximately 909BC, down to the name of the king! That's 300 years earlier! Longer than the history of the United States!]

◆*1 Kings 13:1-2 By the word of the LORD a man of God came from Judah to Bethel, as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering. He cried out against the altar by the word of the LORD: "O altar, altar! This is what the LORD says: 'A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.'*

◆**B.** Now how about you? Are you one that doesn't think the truth about the true King is something anyone else you know needs to know? Are you sliding through the world, keeping to yourself as though what you claim to believe is actually not necessarily true? Fact is folks, the truth about the King of all Kings is not an option. Jesus said he was the only way to God the Father and eternal life. Jesus said to make followers of every nation in all the world, and teach everyone to obey everything he taught. So it's not really a mere preference. Josiah could see that. Can you?

◆**3. To know my true king, I must know my true need.**

◆Josiah's reign, as reforming as he was, did not end successfully, or have lasting affect. Just like Hezekiah, Josiah reinstated the

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Passover celebration. Remember what that is? It's when the Jewish people, even to this day, recall the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and Pharaoh. Everyone who believed God, and in obedience trusted the blood of a lamb on their door frame to be enough, were "passed over" by the Angel of Death. Everyone else had their firstborn die all over the land of Egypt. But sadly, though this deliverance from Egypt was celebrated by Josiah and Judah, Egypt would soon capture the people of Israel again. Pharaoh Neco would beat Josiah in battle. Josiah would die, and Josiah's son's become pawn-kings, vassals of Pharaoh (23:29f). Right back where they started!

◆ On top of that, Josiah was the last of the godly kings. None of the reforming kings ever did cure the Israelites. They were all indications that a Truer King was needed. There would be four more kings after Josiah that amounted to just a whole lot more evil, and then Judah was carried off into exile for their failure to take God seriously. The era of Jewish monarchy was over. Never again would they have their own free, national leader or king. Never again would the Children of Israel be out from under foreign domination. The Babylonians would beat the Assyrians, and the Persian's would beat the Babylonians, and the Greeks would conquer the Persians, and the Romans would conquer the Greeks. And it was the Roman Empire in charge when Jesus rode in as king on Palm Sunday. So, for all the reform that Josiah brought, it didn't save Israel. Asa's reform didn't save Israel.

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Hezekiah's reform didn't fix Israel. Manasseh's reform didn't get Israel back on the straight and narrow. Josiah's godliness wasn't enough to change the sinful hearts of Abraham's kids. The monarchy never worked.

◆ You see, the deepest human need isn't to be told what is right and what is wrong, godly or ungodly. It is to have a heart that only want's what is right and godly. No human king can make that happen. Our deepest need is a heavenly king, not an earthly king. Jeremiah the prophet during Josiah's rule spoke of this.

◆ Jeremiah 31:31-34 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

◆ **Conclusion:** Jesus did not come as a king to fight the Romans. He came to kill our sinfulness. He did not cleanse the temple to find the word of God. He was the word of God. Jesus did not ride into Jerusalem to be the monarch, but to be the Messiah. Isaiah

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said the Messiah would heal us by getting wounded; he would die to give us life; that his punishment would be our peace; that he would be the slaughtered lamb who's blood would make death "pass over" us. King Jesus was the heavenly transaction that bought for us new hearts; hearts that truly want God's holy perfection for themselves and everyone else. Follow that king.

◆ *2 Corinthians 5:16-19 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*