

The year was 1525, and William Tyndale had completed translating the New Testament into the common language. Convinced that every person needed to read the Bible in their own tongue, Tyndale had set out to bring change by putting the Bible in the hands of every faithful believer. But Tyndale's influence was a threat to Church authorities, and he was barred from continuing his work in England. So, in Germany, Tyndale continued his work on the Old Testament until he was captured in Antwerp in 1536. For Tyndale, he saw that the Bible was the key to changing church governance and the source of the Church's faith.

Tyndale was a part of a movement called "The Reformation." This movement was more than a theological movement. It shook all of Europe, changing the political, social, and economic landscape of the continent. While it would create a stir, it would not be enough to stop the continent from sliding and drifting away from the message of the Bible.

The same is true of King Josiah. At the age of 8, Josiah became king. His father had only reigned two years, but his grandfather, Manasseh, had been the most wicked of all of the kings of Israel and Judah. Manasseh was the son of Hezekiah, the most faithful king since the days of David, and yet his son was incredibly evil. He had set up idols in the temple, right under the very nose of Yahweh, the God of Israel. He instituted child sacrifice to the god Molech. He killed the prophets of God. And because of his terror, the Lord had said that the nation of Judah would go into exile.

But when Josiah came along, the southern kingdom's drive towards exile was halted. What halted it? And what does God see that delights his heart to show mercy?

Rediscover the Bible

What we know about Josiah is that he was not like his father or grandfather, but like his great-grandfather Hezekiah. In 2 Chronicles 34:3, we are told that he began to seek the Lord in his 8th year. In other words, he was 16 years old when he got serious about God. He had no Bible training to draw on. He had no model in a father or grandfather. He grew up in a spiritually and biblically illiterate culture. Yet God put it in his heart to know and love him.

Josiah knew that God was to be worshipped at the temple, so he began to set about to fix up the temple. In his 18th year as king, at age 26, the renovations began. Shaphan, the king's secretary, went to Hilkiah, the high priest, with the orders. When Hilkiah went into the temple to get the money, we presume, he found the scroll that would change the direction of the nation (READ 2 Kings 22:8). What was this scroll?

We have to believe, based off of Josiah's response, that what was found was the book of Deuteronomy. Many scholars believe that it was during Josiah's time that the book of Deuteronomy was written. Yet what we see is that Josiah heard the reading of the book of the

law and responded to it. He heard about the blessings for obeying the covenant and the curses for disobeying it.

Three times we are told that the book of the law was read (22:8, 10; 23:2). How is it possible that the Bible had been forgotten? First, Manasseh's name means "Forgetful." Under Manasseh's reign, there had been 55 years of cultural elimination of the Bible. Biblical practices were replaced with idols. Worship had been changed. And the morals of the day had been eroded to the point where sacrificing children was okay.

Second, the priests in the temple were operating and doing temple worship without the Bible! They were doing all of their temple duties but had long forgotten what those temple duties were.

But when Josiah heard the Word of the Lord read to him, he had it read to all the people (23:2) and he called them to commit themselves to the covenant that God had called them to – the covenant that God had given at Mount Sinai. It would mean a modern reformation – the reformation of morals, of life, and of worship.

Reading the Bible is one of the most dangerous things we can do. Reading the Bible is dangerous. And yet, so many people have never read this book. Even among professing Christians, we can go all week and not pick it up. We are to be governed by this book. This book is not something that we are to forget. And how might we forget it? By not picking it up. By being afraid when people mock this book, mock those to believe what it says. Read it. It's a powerful book. It's a book that has turned the world upside down. Josiah longed to know God. But when he read the word of the covenant, it put a holy fear in his heart that kept disaster from coming upon the land during his lifetime.

Rediscover Right and Wrong

Upon reading the book of Deuteronomy, Josiah heard of the blessings for obeying and the curses for disobeying. He heard how when they would enter the land, they would be tempted to foreign gods, and how the result would be destruction. So when Josiah sent word to the prophetess Huldah about these things, she confirmed that disaster was coming (22:15-17), but that the Lord would respond to the heart of Josiah's desire for obedience with mercy (22:18-19).

So what did Josiah do? Did he fall into resigned fate? No! He resolved himself to honour the Lord from his heart. He tore down the altars to the foreign gods not only in the southern kingdom, but also in the north. He resolved to read the Word in the hearing of the people (23:2). He read the Bible and he took it seriously. He was gripped with a radical obedience to the Word.

The Story of Everything – Reformation: 2 Kings 22-23

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And the Bible has been the source of people discovering and rediscovering right and wrong throughout the ages. William Wilberforce spent his life as a Christian and a politician ending the practice of slavery across the British empire. William Carey, the pioneer missionary to India, spent his life there fighting against the practice of burning a widow alive on her husband's funeral pyre. One of my pastors moved to Bolivia where he taught the Bible and sought to end the practice of church leaders selling their children into the sex trade to survive.

Reading the Bible is dangerous. It doesn't stop when you close it up and head into work. Being biblical is more than just having a few verses shape you. It's being profoundly affected by the entire word of God so that all of life is governed by it. Reading a verse or two in the morning or evening is good, but this type of Biblicism has not been radically dangerous to the world. It is when people have taken in the Scriptures in large doses that obedience becomes radical. It is having the word of God move your heart – just as it did Josiah – and it causes you to be relentlessly biblical. It is what reformed the Church – that the Church during Tyndale's day would be biblically governed so that it would lead to Biblical practices. It was Luther's preaching and writing that would end the abuse of indulgences – money taken from poor Germans who were preyed upon thinking that they needed to pay money to get a loved one out of purgatory sooner so that the Church could build St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. It is the word that causes Christians to set up hospitals to help out the needy and the poor. It is the word that is needed today so that people would discover the holiness of God, the terror of sin, and the blessing of obedience. It is not just reading it, but as Josiah did – a call for radical commitment to covenant yourself to obey all that God has written.

We need the Bible. It is our lifeblood. It is the source of our strength and joy. When we rediscover the Bible, we will rediscover right and wrong. But we will also...

Rediscover Worship

But not only does Josiah hear the word, respond to the word, and reshape society, he also reinstitutes the Passover celebration (23:21-25). Passover was the festival that remembered the night when God brought his people out of Egypt, when death passed over them and they were saved. In 2 Chronicles, it makes it a greater focus on how Josiah reformed the worship, reinstituting proper worship by eliminating the priests who were godless, getting rid of the idol worship, removing the child sacrifice practices, and getting rid of the places that dishonoured the Lord. Yet Josiah knew that all of this would not avert the anger of the Lord (23:26-27). So why go through all of this trouble if disaster is still going to come? Why obey the Word? Why reinstitute covenant obedience? Why restore worship if all of these things are going to be undone?

For one simple reason: The Lord is worthy of our devotion, no matter what is to come. The Lord is worthy to be obeyed, adored, worshipped, and followed. The Lord is worthy. Twice we are told that Josiah turned to the Lord from his heart (22:19, 23:25). He loved God. And because he

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loved the Lord his God with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength, he made worship his priority.

Reading the Bible has practical benefits. Obeying the Word has practical benefits. But if we only obey and worship for what we can get, then when times get tough we will quit. We will give up. We will walk away. But because the Lord is worthy, worship becomes the predominant focus of our lives. We will obey because God is worthy!

And just as always, these accounts help us to...

See the Glory of Christ

No, Josiah would not stop the people from going into exile. The sins of Manasseh were too great. The people would return again and again to their wickedness. He could get them to conform outwardly. But inwardly, their hearts were not with Josiah.

But during Josiah's day, there was a prophet – the son of Hilkiah the high priest. His name was Jeremiah. We will look at the entire book of Jeremiah next week. But Jeremiah saw the problem of reformation – or the lack thereof. It was due to the problem of a heart that was not renewed. The people could outwardly confess their loyalty to the covenant, but what they needed was a heart like David and Josiah.

And Jeremiah, seeing this problem, would prophesy that they days were coming when the Lord would write his law not on tablets of stone, but upon their hearts (Jer. 31:31-34). He would give them a heart for him, just as David and Josiah had.

Judah would go into exile, just like Israel had. But this death was not to be the end. It was to make possible a resurrection of the people of God – people who would have a heart for God. And while Josiah couldn't turn the people's hearts to the Lord, and Hilkiah couldn't either, along came another High Priest who would. Hebrews 8 tells us that this High Priest comes along with the word of the Lord and does not write it on stone, but he gives his Spirit who writes the commands of God upon the people's hearts. And by doing so, he will make the old covenant obsolete.

But this doesn't mean that there is a guarantee for a renewed world in our day. Paul warned about this in 2 Timothy 4:3 – that there will be those who do not value the word above all else – they'll value other things because they have itching ears. And they'll hire pastors who will tickle their ears.

But when the Word comes, it will do its work. It will reform the hearts and minds of people. Not by reading a verse or two, or having a token quiet time. But by changing their hearts so that they are devoted to the Lord.

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LUKE 24:27

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