

Josiah's Discovery

- Introduction
 - Honoring Brian, back where it started for me, etc...
 - This morning I want to talk about a man who served God faithfully for about 30 years
 - He began his ministry while still a young man
 - He served during a time of biblical ignorance
 - And his greatest accomplishment was unveiling the word of God to God's people
 - Of course, you know who I'm talking about...Josiah, king of Judah
 - Turn with me to 2Chronicles 34 and let's consider this man's important legacy

2Chr. 34:1 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem.

2Chr. 34:2 He did right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David and did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

2Chr. 34:3 For in the eighth year of his reign while he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, the carved images and the molten images.

2Chr. 34:4 They tore down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars that were high above them he chopped down; also the Asherim, the carved images and the molten images he broke in pieces and ground to powder and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them.

2Chr. 34:5 Then he burned the bones of the priests on their altars and purged Judah and Jerusalem.

2Chr. 34:6 In the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, even as far as Naphtali, in their surrounding ruins,

2Chr. 34:7 he also tore down the altars and beat the Asherim and the carved images into powder, and chopped down all the incense altars throughout the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

- Diving into an account on Israel's ancient history is a risky move for a visiting preacher

- Obviously, I don't know how familiar you are with the ancient history of Israel
 - So allow me to give you a moment of background on who Josiah was and the circumstances in which he lived
 - Josiah was a descendant of David, and he ruled the southern kingdom of Judah in the seventh century BC
 - He was one of the few good kings to rule over Judah
 - In fact, he was one of Israel's best kings
- Nearly 300 years before he was born, the Lord spoke about this king through an unnamed prophet in 1Kings
 - That prophet declared that a king named Josiah would rule Judah
 - And he said this king would end idol worship in Judah at least for a time
 - And so Josiah did
- As we read in 2Chr 34, Josiah came to power as a very young boy, and yet v.2 tells us he was upright from the start
 - He did not turn aside to the left or to the right
 - That's the Bible's way of describing a life of obedience
 - Turning aside to the left or right implies diverting away from what's right and toward evil things
 - Today we might say walking the straight and narrow path
 - So though this man was young and thrust into power before his time, still he had a heart to do what's right
- There's no indication that Josiah was taught about the Lord or even knew the Lord during those early years
 - Nevertheless, he was inclined toward righteousness
 - How do we explain this man's desire to do right from such an early age, especially in an age of such depravity?
 - Evidently, the Lord was preparing this young man for great things even from birth

- Which makes sense given the prophecy from centuries earlier
- The Lord was walking with this young man, but in the shadows as it were
 - Theologians have a word for this, when God's favor comes into a person's life prior to them knowing the Lord personally
 - They call it prevenient grace, which means grace that comes beforehand in anticipation of what will follow
- The Lord shepherded this boy in his early years so that he wouldn't be led astray while so young
 - And then the Lord brought Josiah to a knowledge of Himself at Josiah's eighth birthday
 - It's notable that Josiah's conversion comes during his eighth year
 - It's the Lord leaving us His calling card
 - In the Bible the number eight symbolizes new beginnings (e.g., the week, circumcision, the number on the Ark)
- The text says in v.3 that at age 8 Josiah began to seek the God of his father, David
 - That's a very curious statement
 - It would seem this young man is following after a God he doesn't know very well
 - It's as if Josiah doesn't even know the Lord's name
 - And he refers to the Lord as the God of David
 - David lived over 350 years earlier...why didn't he refer to the Lord as the God of Hezekiah or some more recent king?
 - It seems the Lord has become little more than a distant memory in Israel, more like a myth or folklore than reality
 - It's like someone today claiming that the Miami Dolphins used to be a winning football team
 - We've heard the rumors, but no one can remember seeing it
 - So at age 8 the king begins to hunger for a greater understanding of this God he knows only from a distance

- And for four more years the young king seeks and waits until age 12
- Once again we see God's calling card
- The number 12 in scripture symbolizes God ruling through men (e.g., 12 tribes, 12 apostles)
- So now the Lord begins to rule over His people Israel through this young king to cleanse Israel of idolatry
- At age 12, the young king, moved by the Spirit of God, begins to fulfill the prophecy spoken about him hundreds of years earlier
 - He sees his countrymen engaged in systematic idolatry and he resolves to do something about it
 - He carries out reforms as far as Simeon to Naphtali which means from South to North
 - He orders that the nation's high places of idol worship be torn down
 - He has altars removed, carved and molten images ground to a powder
 - Moreover, he made an example of apostate Jews
 - He put to death those who worshipped these false gods
 - And he dusted their bodies with their powdered idols
 - The Jews who became priests for these false religions were killed and their bodies burned on the altars where they once served
 - And everyone got the point...seeing dead worshippers scattered around their false gods proved these gods could not be trusted
 - These false gods couldn't save their worshippers from death
 - They couldn't save the priests who represented them
 - They couldn't even save themselves
 - A young teenager was able to conquer them all, so just how powerful could these so-called gods be?
- We know idols are always impotent...they are no gods at all

- Idols are just the products of human imagination
 - Countless prayers have been offered to mute and blind idols, and none of those prayers went anywhere or amounted to anything
 - A carved or molten image only possess the power their worshippers assign to them
- So of course, we should know better than to grant make-believe power to impotent idols...yet we do it all the time
 - But in our modern world, idols rarely take the form of carved images sitting on a mantel
 - To understand an idol, it helps to know the Hebrew word for idol
 - The word is *gillulim* which can be translated literally as "dung god"
- And that's how you should think of idols in your life
 - They are generally the waste products of our consumption
 - Our lustful appetites drive us into worshipping the things we consume, so they become our masters, our gods, our idols
 - But the output of these pursuits always comes to nothing in the end
 - The irony is we serve these dung gods with our time and treasure even though we tell ourselves they serve our needs
- We credit our dung gods with powers they don't actually possess
 - Powers to make us healthy, happy and complete
 - Like the guy who pursues his career at the expense of pursuing his walk with Christ because he tells himself that wealth and power will bring him fulfillment
 - Or the woman who pursues an extramarital affair she believes it will make her feel loved
 - These things are idols because they replace a reliance on Christ
- The word of God in the letter of James tells us that every good thing and every perfect gift is from above (James 1:17)

- And when the James says “every good thing” he’s not talking about your car or your house
- Though certainly the things we own can be gifts from God
- But in many cases, the things we believe are good for us are actually our high places, idols that draw us away from the Lord
- James was talking primarily (if not exclusively) about eternal, heavenly good things
 - About the spiritual blessings we obtain through time spent with Christ by His Spirit, in His word and in the fellowship of believers
 - As well as the material blessings we’ll receive as our inheritance in the kingdom that follows our resurrection
- The Lord loves us too much to leave us enslaved by high places, caught up in idolatry, so in His mercy the Lord has ways of grinding our idols to powder
 - It all begins with the Father sending His Son, Jesus, to free us from the penalty of sin by dying on the cross as a divine payment for us
 - Even more, the Spirit living inside every believer is working to free us from the *presence* of sin in our lives, to break the spell that idols have over us
 - He convicts us of our sin so that we might rise up against these high places in our life, tearing them down so we can walk in peace
 - Here we see God’s showing that kind of mercy for Israel, raising up Josiah to free His people from idolatry
 - And after their false gods have been removed, what comes next for the people God? Who will they worship?
 - Josiah knew he needed to reintroduce Israel to their true God
 - And so he began to repair the temple

2Chr. 34:8 Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah an official of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God.

2Chr. 34:9 They came to Hilkiah the high priest and delivered the money that was brought into the house of God, which the Levites, the doorkeepers, had collected from Manasseh and

Ephraim, and from all the remnant of Israel, and from all Judah and Benjamin and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

2Chr. 34:10 Then they gave it into the hands of the workmen who had the oversight of the house of the Lord, and the workmen who were working in the house of the Lord used it to restore and repair the house.

2Chr. 34:11 They in turn gave it to the carpenters and to the builders to buy quarried stone and timber for couplings and to make beams for the houses which the kings of Judah had let go to ruin.

2Chr. 34:12 The men did the work faithfully with foremen over them to supervise: Jahath and Obadiah, the Levites of the sons of Merari, Zechariah and Meshullam of the sons of the Kohathites, and the Levites, all who were skillful with musical instruments.

2Chr. 34:13 They were also over the burden bearers, and supervised all the workmen from job to job; and some of the Levites were scribes and officials and gatekeepers.

- In the years since Solomon built the temple, the evil kings of Judah had allowed the building to fall into disrepair and ruin
 - They neglected the building because they had abandoned worship of Yahweh in favor of other gods
 - Even so, the priests continued to operate the temple...like a dying church going through the motions
 - And of course one thing never stops...the collecting of tithes
 - Notice in v.9 the priests had continued collecting money from "all the remnant of Israel" it says
 - The Bible uses the word remnant to mean the believers within Israel
 - Despite the widespread apostasy of Israel during the years of the kings, the Lord preserved a group of faithful, believing Jews
 - These few remaining believers continued to worship at the temple
 - They would dutifully return to the dilapidated temple building to praise the Lord
 - And they faithfully brought their tithes and offerings
 - They gave these things into the hands of the priests and the Lord commanded
- Sadly, those priests were not always faithful themselves

- And as we see here, the money was collected but it was not properly stewarded for the upkeep of the temple
 - The Lord had provided for this income stream in part to fund the upkeep the temple
 - But the priesthood had failed to use that money in that way
- Instead, they stored up the money for who knows what purpose
 - But now Josiah directs the high priest to use that money to pay the workmen who will repair the temple
 - Notice the scriptures testify that the work was done faithfully
 - All the subcontractors showed up on time, did the work skillfully, and were paid properly
 - And the general contractor ensured that everything ran on time and according to plan
 - Truly, we're looking at a supernatural miracle here!
- So Josiah has progressed from ignorance to knowledge to obedience, and now to rediscovering true worship of Yahweh
 - These were important steps for restoring the nation of Israel
 - But ultimately true worship of the Lord isn't merely about a building
 - True worship is about knowing and living the word of God
- And that's what's missing here...
 - Josiah was moved to know and follow the living God
 - But he doesn't seem to know this God very well
 - The people worshipped the wrong gods
 - And even the priests who remained at their posts in the temple allowed the building to fall into disrepair
 - Israel's religious life is dominated by ignorance
 - So as Josiah prepares to repair Israel's place of sacrifice, the question becomes what will guide the nation into true worship of the God they seem to have forgotten?

- Samuel the prophet told King Saul that the Lord delights more in obedience than in sacrifices
 - An animal sacrifice was only necessary in the first place *because* of sin
 - How much better would it be to obey the Lord in the first place and thereby avoid the need for sacrifice?
 - Or as we might say, if you truly want to please the Lord, you can't sin on Saturday knowing you're headed to church on Sunday
- The Lord desires obedience, and obedience requires an understanding of His commandments, so He now moves to reveal Himself to Josiah and the people

2Chr. 34:14 When they were bringing out the money which had been brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the Lord given by Moses.

2Chr. 34:15 Hilkiah responded and said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan.

2Chr. 34:16 Then Shaphan brought the book to the king and reported further word to the king, saying, "Everything that was entrusted to your servants they are doing.

2Chr. 34:17 "They have also emptied out the money which was found in the house of the Lord, and have delivered it into the hands of the supervisors and the workmen."

2Chr. 34:18 Moreover, Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, "Hilkiah the priest gave me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

2Chr. 34:19 When the king heard the words of the law, he tore his clothes.

- When the priests entered the temple treasury to retrieve the money for Josiah, they noticed a dusty scroll tossed in the corner
 - The scroll was the book of the Law, which refers to first five books of the Bible, also called the Torah
 - The reaction of the high priest tells us he had no idea it was there
 - How ironic? A man whose very position was established by this document didn't know where it was
 - And if the high priest didn't know where the Law was, then we can be sure no one had read the Law in a very long time
 - It's hard to believe, but Israel forgot the Law, the scriptures
 - It's been barely two generations since Israel last worshipped in the temple and observed the Law

- In just two generations the people of God had drifted so far away from His word that they were surprised to see it again
- But how could this even happen?
 - Practically speaking, it wasn't that difficult
 - First, written copies of the word of God were expensive and relatively rare, so people didn't have easy access to it
 - And at this point in Israel's history, synagogues weren't common
 - So by and large, the only copies of the scriptures would have been those kept at the temple
 - As Israel moved into idol worship and away from temple worship, people stopped hearing the word on Sabbath
 - Eventually, the priests stopped ministering the word to the people since no one wanted to hear it
- Knowing that Israel had forgotten its Law makes the rest of this story a little easier to understand
 - When you don't know the word of God, you will inevitably drift away into false understandings of God, false forms of worship
 - The people of Israel were adrift, so their evil hearts began directing their steps
 - Before long, the entire nation is in idol worship
 - It was so bad that even when God did raise up a man like Josiah to lead the people, he didn't know enough himself to direct them
 - It's frightening to think that only one generation separated a faithful Israel from an apostate Israel
 - One generation failed to safeguard the word of God
 - So the next generation became ignorant of God's word
 - One generation didn't not teach the word of God
 - So the next generation embraced idolatry
 - One generation...

- I think we're facing a similar danger in the church today
 - Over the past generation, the church has moved radically away from the word of God
 - In many places today, the church doesn't know the word, doesn't preach the word, and therefore won't live according to the word
 - This apostasy is the direct result of a prior generation neglecting the word and failing to teach it properly
 - Like the priests of Josiah's day, the pastors of our churches have been entrusted with guarding the word of God
 - But many of today's pastors don't know what's in it
 - Many make no priority of teaching it
 - And if our pastors forget the word of God, then soon so will God's people
 - It took Israel just one generation to move so far away from God that they couldn't remember His name
 - How long will it take us and how far will we move?
- But don't feel sorry for God or for His word
 - The Lord declares that even after our heavens and earth have passed away, the word of God will still exist
 - It will never pass away
 - The word of God isn't in danger of disappearing even when it's forgotten
 - Like that scroll of the Law that sat patiently in the corner of the temple treasury
 - It's always waiting to be rediscovered
 - Instead, we should worry for future generations of the church
 - Because those who are ignorant of God's word are destined to be judged by it
 - Notice the king's reaction to hearing the word of God read aloud for the first time in a generation

- He tears his clothes, which was a cultural way of demonstrating conviction and mourning
- Why do you think the king reacted with such distress to hearing the word of God for the first time?
- As the rest of this chapter describes, what caught Josiah's attention were God's promises in Deuteronomy
 - The Lord promises to bring judgment against Israel should they ever forsake Him
 - Josiah knew Israel's track record of apostasy, and the young king realized that God would be faithful to His word
- Therefore he realized that his nation would soon be judged
 - The Lord was gracious to Josiah and didn't bring judgment to Israel until after Josiah's death
 - But in due time, the nation received the penalty of their sins at the hands of the Babylonians
 - A generation of Israel forgot the word of God dooming a future generation to ignorance and disobedience
- Today we live in a generation when many believers are biblically illiterate
 - Many of our brothers and sisters do not read or even open their Bibles
 - Many Christians I meet outside Bible-teaching churches know virtually nothing about what it contains
 - So is it any surprise that the church is struggling with so much of the same sin that marks the world?
 - We are here because past generations forgot the word of God
 - And now we're at risk of losing an entire generation of believers
 - Because they are not grounded in the word, we will lose them to high places, to idolatry in one form or another
 - To worldliness, to materialism, to lust, to infidelity, to apathy, to distraction, to discouragement...ultimately to ignorance
 - But our Lord is a God of mercy, and He has not forgotten His people

- He is still raising up men and women who love His word and seek to proclaim it
- Pastors who preach the word, pastors who live the word
- You are blessed to have a pastor who has devoted his life to that pursuit, which we celebrated this week
- We could say you are like that remnant that continued meeting in a dilapidated and abandoned temple
- Even as the rest of God's people may languish in ignorance, you are faithfully supporting the word of God
- But friends, to whom much is given, much is expected, as Jesus declared
 - So I'm here to tell you that we who have received this blessing have an obligation to respond
 - We should bring this precious word of God to our brothers and sisters in faith, to say nothing of the unbelieving world
 - There are believers all around us who are literally starving for spiritual nourishment
 - You can be their Hilkiah
 - You can bring them to a discovery of the word of God
 - You can encourage them to get into the word in a steady and meaningful way
 - I challenge you to stand in this gap
 - As you take up this challenge, trust the Lord with the results
 - Some believers won't like what they hear, at least not at first, because it's not what their flesh wants to hear
 - Some may be so distressed they tear their clothes (or yours)
 - But some will hear and be changed and move in a new direction with Christ
- And if you're thinking I'm only talking to the person seated next to you, let me share my story
 - Around 1996, I was sitting exactly where you are today

- At the prompting of my wife, we walked into a building in Colorado Springs on a Sunday morning
- Annette had heard this interesting Bible teacher on the radio and though we should check out his church
- I was so early in my walk with Christ at the time, I didn't even know yet what it meant to be a Christian
- So I had never experienced the word of God in a meaningful way
- When I walked in on that Sunday, I see a guy preaching from the Bible
 - He was a lot shorter than he sounded on the radio
 - He still had hair then, but I knew that wouldn't last
 - Most of all, I noticed he had a passion for the word of God
- And as he preached through the word of God, through Genesis, I came to recognize two very important things
 - First, I had a personal encounter with God having heard the true Gospel for the first time in my life
 - I came to know of the God of Abraham, Moses, David
 - I came to understand Jesus as Savior
- I had grown up Catholic and so I knew about Jesus and I also knew He died on a cross, since that's the first thing Catholics think about
 - But I never knew why He died or why I should even care that He did
 - But when Brian presented the true Gospel from the word of God, it suddenly made sense and I was convicted and I was changed
 - The word of Christ did a work in my heart
 - That's the power of sharing God's word with others
 - God can use your sharing of the word to bring another soul into the Kingdom
- In the years that followed, I continued to sit under Brian's teaching
 - Year by year I grew in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ

- And as I learned more about this God Who had saved me, I began to re-evaluate my life as a father and husband and disciple of Christ
- The word of God was working in my heart to change my worldview, my goals, my attitudes, my heart, my future
- Which brings me to the second thing I understood that Sunday
 - I realized that the true power of the Church was found in the preaching and teaching of the word of God
 - And before long I felt the Lord calling me to share the word with others
 - I had always had an interest in teaching, but now I understood what I was supposed to teach
 - And I realized the essential nature of sharing the word of God
 - During the 20+ years since then, I've taken up that challenge I put before you this morning, to study and share the Bible with others
 - And over that time the Lord has moved me along a path of His design
 - From teaching Sunday schools to teaching in the pulpit to pastoring churches to leading an international Bible teaching ministry
 - But it all started when I encountered the word of God in a Bible-teaching church
 - I tell you my story so you can understand that you too have a place in God's plan
 - The church finds itself in a time similar to the times of Josiah
 - God's people need men and women to rediscover the word
 - And the Lord calls His servants from among a remnant who know Him and hear His word
 - May I suggest the Lord didn't bring you here to enjoy Brian's style of preaching
 - Nor did He bring you here to enjoy the music

- You're here to know Him by His word, so He can prepare you to serve Him in sharing that word with the world
- We need more Brians...only with hair
 - We need more men and women who will work to bring the word of God to a lost and dying world and to a biblically literate church
 - Celebrating Brian's career of serving the Lord is really a celebration of the Lord's faithfulness through His word
 - Because if the Lord can use Brian, He can use anyone
 - He can even use you