

## Sermon 68, A Reformation Wasted?, 2 Kings 22, 23:25-30

**Proposition:** God will judge His people for their sin, but it is right to trust Him faithfully nonetheless.

### Outline

- I. Josiah, the Obedient King, 22:1-2
- II. Josiah, the Repairer of the Temple, 22:3-9
- III. Josiah and the Word of God, 22:10-20
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### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, why do you serve God? Our passage this evening demands that we ask ourselves that question. It can be an uncomfortable question, for tonight's text exposes the inadequacy of some of our favorite answers. Do you serve God because you'll be better off if you do? Because your family will be better off? Because your church will flourish? Because you'll get the benefits of living in a more moral society? Obviously, all of those are good benefits, and it is not at all wrong to seek them. But our text tonight, in the most brutal and blunt way possible, informs us that our good works do not begin to obligate God to bless us. It asks us the question, "Would you personally serve God even if you knew that it wouldn't do any good, corporately speaking?" Because Josiah did. Josiah heard that God was certainly going to destroy Judah. He heard up front that God's wrath against His people's sin was unquenchable. And yet he devoted his life to serving God anyway. He knew that judgment would fall on God's people regardless of what he did. Yet he gave God 110% (as they say) anyway.

Did Jesus know that God's judgment was going to fall on Him no matter what He did? Of course He knew that! He knew that He would be punished for the sin of the world whether He personally was righteous or not. So what did He do? He obeyed perfectly, of course. In this, He was the greater Josiah.

Our text tonight reveals that God will judge His people, and that we ought to respond to that truth by manifesting even greater obedience and zeal. But wait a second! How is that realistic? How can the news that God will judge His people be a motive to the work of reformation? There are two answers here. One is personal, the other corporate. Personally, you can certainly be motivated to the work of reformation by realizing that even though you may be part of a dying church, a church whose judgment is inevitable, God shows that He loves to spare individuals who turn back to Him. The corporate body may be judged, but you may be spared.

Corporately, the answer is that God's ultimate corporate judgment has already fallen . . . on an individual. The news that Christ has suffered all the penalty that the church deserves should motivate us to the work of reformation! Yes, Christ still had to suffer and die. Yes, He bore plenty of sin. But that is no reason to make Him bear more.

Ultimately, though, what our text highlights is that it is always right to be sold out for God, even if it won't do any good. We don't serve God because of the rewards it brings; we serve God because He deserves it. What I hope to show you tonight is that God will judge His people, but that it is right and proper to serve Him devotedly anyway. God loves it when we serve Him just because.

### **I. Josiah, the Obedient King, 22:1-2**

After suffering through 57 long years of daily abominations under Amon and Manasseh, Josiah must have been an even bigger relief to his subjects than he is to us. He alone, of all the kings of Judah, did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. He followed God, right down the center of the path, walking in God's way and not deviating from it.

This is more like it! This is what we expected to read about every king of God's people, right? "He was a really good king who obeyed God in everything from day one onward." We intuitively sense how right such a thing is!

By the way, could this be your epitaph? Would those who know you best, and have known you the longest, say that you do not turn aside to the right or to the left?

### **II. Josiah, the Repairer of the Temple, 22:3-9**

Josiah, whether as part of his normal duties or motivated by special piety, set some officials to repairing the Temple. It's obvious from this chapter that the system Joash set up in ch. 12 is still working, still bringing in money for capital expenditures. Josiah commands that the temple's grounds crew hire some skilled artificers to do more challenging repairs on God's house.

Remember, of course, that building the temple is the work of Messiah. Being concerned about God's dwelling place is preeminently the task of God's servant the Branch, otherwise known as the Lord Jesus. But there are two things to notice here.

First, God loves it when we take thought for His temple. This text certainly implies that it was a good thing that Josiah was taking the lead on temple repairs. We see the implication that God delights to dwell among His people, and that He wants us to take thought and action for the good order and good structure of His dwelling place. So that, in turn, prompts the question: Do you seek the good of the church? Do you do your best, according to your place and calling, to bless this body? From the highly mundane, like picking up the trash in your row after worship and signing up to bring the snack occasionally, to the highly difficult, like maintaining a relationship with someone in the body who's going through a terrible time (getting a divorce, experiencing domestic violence, walking through the death of a child or spouse, etc.), are you committed to doing what God loves and seeking the edification of the body of Christ? Brothers and sisters, *we* are the temple of God today. We are Christians, little Christs, meaning that just as it is supremely Christ's task to build up the church which is His temple, so it is also, in our own

ways, our task. What have you done this week to build the church? Don't think that preaching sermons publicly is the only way you can build the church. Confessing your own sin and turning from it is a way of building the church. Inviting a church family over for a meal is a way of building the church. Coming to prayer meeting is a way of building the church. Giving money is a way of building the church. Training your children is a way of building the church. And on and on it goes. Josiah sought to build God's dwellingplace, and the text clearly reveals how much God delighted in that! And since God hasn't changed, He still delights in it when you seek to build His dwellingplace today.

Second, our text shows that it's when you're serving God that more opportunities for serving God will present themselves. Josiah was doing what God loved, and as he did it, this book showed up. Hilkiah found a copy somewhere, presumably while the repairs were being done, and shared it with Shaphan, who brought it back to the king. First, of course, he read it to make sure that it was worth sharing and wasn't just a junk scroll that had been forgotten inside some wall or something. But when he saw what was in it, he hastened to bring it to the king.

Faithfulness in temple repair, a basic part of Josiah's job as king, presented him with the further opportunity of faithfulness in responding to this copy of the Bible, or of some piece of it.

Where has obedience given you the opportunity for more obedience? One obvious place is in marriage. Obeying God with respect to your spouse generally results in children, giving you the opportunity to train them and thus obey God further. And the older they grow, the more opportunities to obey God they have. The cycle continues generation after generation.

So obey God in your finances, in your marriage, in your participation in church, in your workplace, in your entertainment choices, and you will be rewarded with further opportunities to obey Him.

Josiah reminds us of Christ the temple-builder, and he shows us the reward for faithfulness.

### **III. Josiah and the Word of God, 22:10-20**

Well, I won't say a great deal on this point because it's the subject of a whole sermon next Sunday. But for now, notice that the king listened intently to the word of God and responded in repentance. He applied the word he heard to the situation he saw all around him, and realized instantly that the word promised judgment on his nation. He could tell that Judah was experiencing God's wrath. So he sent to inquire of a prophetess, and she repeated the bad news. Once again, the word of God confirmed itself. Because of Judah's idolatry, the Judaeans would undoubtedly be punished. God said that His wrath would not be turned away, would not be quenched.

Remember that. It's important.

Yet at the same time, God promised mercy for Josiah personally because he repented when he heard the bad news. Josiah would not live to see the destruction.

Already, then, we have seen judgment promised and postponed in the life of Hezekiah. Now we see it promised and postponed again in the life of Josiah. What does that tell us about

our God? That He is perfectly just, but also perfectly merciful! Our God must and will punish sin. Brothers and sisters, how desperately we Americans need to get that truth through our thick skulls. It's not God's job to forgive you! It's not true that God is so loving that He could never punish anyone! Far from it. He visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations. He punishes sin, and the greatest proof of that is the truth that He punished sin in His own Son! If God will punish His Son like that, do you think He's likely to spare someone like you?

Yet though He does ultimately punish all sin exactly as it deserves, He is not a vengeful or petty deity. He is slow to anger and abounding in mercy, and He proves it by repeatedly postponing punishment. Remember how God even postponed punishment in the case of wicked King Ahab? Remember how thrilled God was, how He pulled Elijah aside and pointed out Ahab's repentance to him? Well, that is only the smallest echo of the joy heard in Heaven over one sinner who repents. Brothers and sisters, if you can't see the goodness and severity of God in this text, you need to go home and pray for two hours for the Holy Spirit to illumine your understanding. God is righteous, and will give sin its just deserts every time. But He is merciful, and will often postpone punishment at the slightest sign of repentance and turning from sin.

How did Josiah respond to this news? He set himself to serve God as faithfully as possible. He obliterated the physical paraphernalia of idolatry from all over Judah and from parts of northern Israel too. Under him, the nation came as close as it had been in Solomon's time to being united under one leader and serving God with one mind. Josiah was moved to action by this picture of a God who delights in mercy and who is nonetheless perfectly just.

#### **IV. Josiah, the Servant of God, 23:25**

Again, we will look more carefully next week at how Josiah kept the word of God. But v. 25 of ch. 23 summarizes it for us. He was unique in his repentance, in his turning to God with heart, soul, and might, just like Moses said to do. He is commemorated as a good king because he was so devoted to following God.

Isn't this a noble picture? Isn't this a wonderful example? If we weren't so depraved and stubborn, surely good news like this would set us dancing. Josiah served God! Finally, after all the compromisers and outright sinners, we have someone who is everything a king of Judah ought to be. Wouldn't you love to be able to say that about your child? About your pastor? About your spouse? Even about yourself? "This child/pastor/spouse does what is right on God's eyes, and there is no one else who serves God this well!"

#### **V. Josiah and the Judgment of God, 23:26-27**

And so that's why vv. 26-27 hit us so hard. Despite everything good that Josiah did, despite how outstandingly faithful he was, God was still angry and was still committed to exiling Judah and moving out of Jerusalem. All Josiah's good deeds were not sufficient to change God's mind or to outweigh the bad deeds of Manasseh.

What does this tell about God? It tells us that He is just. He delights in mercy, but He will discipline His people and punish those who don't listen to Him. This is particularly true on the

corporate level. Good individuals like Josiah, even in positions of leadership, may not change the fate of the church as a whole.

I don't know for sure, of course, but it seems that there's a good chance that the American church has reached the point of no return, such that no matter how good certain leaders are, the church as a whole is destined for judgment. Let's say for a moment that that's the case. Will you still serve God faithfully? Will you still do what God loves to see, and seek to build His temple?

The temple was destroyed less than 25 years after the death of Josiah. Was it pointless for him to spend so much time and effort repairing it? Not at all. Let's say that the American church perishes in the 2030s. Will that render our worship tonight pointless? Will that make everything we've done meaningless? Of course not.

Brothers and sisters, it is quite possible that our faithfulness, such as it is, will not "do any good," as we say. But whether it does good or not, it *is* good. It is good because it is what God loves, what He delights in. Even if judgment is coming, indeed, even if judgment is inevitable, it is still good to worship God and seek the reformation and edification of the church to the utmost of our ability.

I've already mentioned how the greatest example of this truth is Jesus Christ Himself. He knew that no matter how He lived, He was going to suffer the punishment for the sins of the world. Yet knowing that, He chose to live the best life ever, to follow God perfectly with all His heart, mind, soul, and strength. He knew judgment was coming, was unavoidable — and He served God faithfully anyway. So did Josiah. And if you could somehow know that judgment was coming and that you were going to feel its full weight, would you keep serving God too?

#### **VI. Josiah and the Death of Judah, 23:28-30**

Josiah's end presages Judah's. He gets into a ridiculous fight with Pharaoh, even though God tells him not to, and ends up getting killed. In the same way, a few decades later God tells the leadership of Judah to simply surrender to Babylon. "Don't fight; let them have their way with you," God says. But no; Judah would not submit to God and thus was beaten into submission by Babylon.

Josiah's reformation was good. His life was pleasing to God. But his end was senseless and tragic. Brothers and sisters, the situation that faced this king may face you. How will you respond? Our God hasn't changed. His determination to punish sin, and His commitment to show mercy to His people, have not changed.

Josiah had to deal with the trauma of God's announcement that His promise to live in Jerusalem permanently didn't mean quite what Judeans had always thought it meant. It really meant life in Heaven with God. That's a better promise, but the word from Huldah, and the announcement of vv. 26-27, made it seem like God wasn't going to keep His promise at all, in any form. "Yes, I know that I said I would never abandon Jerusalem. Guess what. I'm abandoning Jerusalem." What? God, are you going back on your word?

He wasn't, of course. But how did Josiah know that? He didn't. He could only trust that God was going to do the right thing and keep His promise, somehow, somewhere, sometime. In

Christ, of course, God has kept that promise and all His other ones. But in the moment, centuries before the promise was kept, that must have been difficult to see.

Can you trust the promises of God? Can you trust the God who promises? Brothers and sisters, you must. Our God still rewards those who trust Him. Josiah believed Him, and He counted it to Him for righteousness. When you see judgment falling, when you see what looks an awful lot like a broken promise, when you see God doing things you were sure He'd never do, how will you respond? Jesus trusted in that moment. Josiah trusted in that moment. And you too need to trust in that moment. God will keep His promise. Trust Him. Amen.