

Title: The Last Good King
Date: August 19, 2018
Subject: Expressing and extending the influence of our faith in Christ
Scripture: 2 Chronicles 34 & 35

Kids and youth have set some amazing world records. A 13 year old solved the Rubik's Cube – 3 of them -- while juggling them -- 5 minutes and 6.61 seconds. 9 year old Seven Wade set the record for clapping hands in a minute – 1080 times. He had to take breaks during his practices because of blisters. A team of jump ropers consisting of 2 spinners and 12 jumpers made the mark of 230 jumps in a minute. And the largest stretch of homemade Slime without breaking within 30 seconds was accomplished by a 5th grader – 7 feet 4 inches.

Children and youth can accomplish great things, not just world records, and teach us. This morning we'll use illustrations from kids since our focus is going to be on another kid who became king. Josiah assumed the throne at age 8, second youngest to do so. Josiah was born after his grandfather, King Manasseh, repented of his idolatrous wickedness. Grandpa got rid of the foreign gods and told the people to serve the Lord. They didn't listen to him. His son, Josiah's dad, reverted back to idol worship but was only king for two years as he was assassinated by his officials. The people killed the plotters and put the boy on the throne. The stage is set 80 years after the northern kingdom is gone and the southern kingdom is following in big sister's footsteps.

READ 2 Chronicles 34:1-2.

This was the summary of his life before any details are given. He did right in the eyes of the Lord. He didn't turn to the right or to the left. He walked in the ways of David. A concluding summary says, "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" (2 Kings 23:25). Pretty lofty air.

Ever notice how kids put their whole heart into things? They discover an ant hill. They don't just stand at full height and comment about what a nice ant hill that is way down there. They squat down low to get a better look. They linger to watch the ants go and come out.

Caleb was that focused when he got his first cars. Not sure if they were Hot Wheels or a precursor. He'd lay down on the floor and move the cars with his eyes glued to the wheels.

That's the picture of Josiah following the Lord. He kept his eyes glued on the Lord so that he didn't turn to the right or the left. Let's see what insights we can gain.

I. personalization of faith v. 3

The first indication came at age 16. READ v. 3a. He began to seek the Lord while he was still young. We aren't told much about the seeking. From experience and reading we can make a good guess that he was trying to discover who God is, what he is like, what he does, what he offers, what he expects. He began to make

his relationship with the Lord personal. It wasn't enough that past generations had followed the Lord or his father failed to do so. He realized that it was up to him.

There were some extenuating circumstances. It appears he became a father about that time just as his father before him had become a father at age 16. The king of Assyria died. That's important as Assyria had kept Judah under its thumb. The pressure may have come off and the young king may have felt that he could more freely explore following the Lord.

Each person has to come to the Lord for themselves. Gramma can't do it for us and we can't do it for someone else. Oftentimes a person may have been relying on the faith of others but comes to the place where they have to see if what they believe is what they really believe. Is Jesus really my Savior? Do I trust him and not just because my parents or the preacher says it's a good thing to do?

And there are often extenuating circumstances. People frequently get more serious about spiritual matters during moments of crisis. They begin searching for answers and meaning and truth in times of pain, trial, and/or uncertainty.

II. Outward expression of faith v. 3 - 7

Josiah turns 20. No longer a teen. In western minds it signals a time to grow up. No longer a kid. Can't get away with using youth as an excuse. Better start making something of your life. As we've seen, Josiah had done some growing up while in his teens. The expression of his personal trust in the Lord shows as he begins to purge the land of all the anti-god paraphernalia. Out with the Asherah poles. Out with the idols and images. Out with the altars to foreign gods. He was showing he was depending on the Lord.

It's been almost a year since I had my appendix removed, just before Gabey's 4th birthday. Tiff told us that he prayed about the surgery and included the line "Help Papa not die." He remembered that a few months prior great-grandpa Don had gone to the hospital and then died. He was expressing the simplicity of his faith.

Sometimes there's the temptation to make faith complicated. It doesn't have to be and isn't intended to be. Remember how Jesus talked about having child-like faith? It's taking what God says as true and acting on it.

III. Striving for purity vv. 8 - 28

READ v. 8. 18th year. Now 26. Purifying the land by reinstating that which is pure and right. He began to repair the temple. It's amazing how often the kings had to do that. It fell into disrepair from lack of use. Just as our spiritual lives and talents can do the same if not used.

Josiah sent some of his trusted officers to go to the high priest with the money to facilitate the repairs. The money was given to those who were doing the job. They were so trustworthy that they didn't have to account for the way they spent the money. The repairs proceeded without a hitch.

But that wasn't the most important thing about purifying the land. READ vv. 14, 15. A. Anchored in the Word. They found God's Word. It raises the question curious minds want answered – why had it been missing? And what did they do without it? Okay, so that's a couple questions. How is God's Word lost when

it comes to Christ followers? One of the biggest culprits is busyness. There's so much to do that the Bible becomes an option...if there's time. Or hope that being bottle fed or spoon fed or force fed will be enough.

The priest gave God's Word to Josiah's right hand man. He brought it to the king. It wasn't quite that simple. A companion passage says that first he took the time to read it. When he went to the king he reported on the temple progress and the financial picture and then in a kind of "oh, by the way" moment, he casually mentions that the priest gave him a book. Then he reads to the king from the book.

Daughter Tiffani was going to feed baby Sophie. She told Caleb he could look at books. He said with a twinkle in his eye, "I think I'll look at the holy book." There are times when Caleb and Gabey will sit on the couch and read/look at their Bible story books. Other times they'll play Star Wars, Legos, football, etc. This past week when we were there it was time to get ready for bed which includes reading Bible stories. Caleb picked one and Gabey was feeling a little sad cuz he didn't get to pick one. So he did and it was read as well. This time he varied from David and Goliath, his favorite story with his favorite part the cutting off of Goliath's head. They seem to have a hunger for God's Word.

B. Responsive to the word. The king is immediately impacted. V. 19 he tears his royal robes in a sign of sorrow over his and the nation's sin. His response is referenced later. READ vv. 27 & 28. He had a receptive heart to God's Word. He wept that it hadn't been kept. He humbled himself before the Lord.

He wasn't like so many of the people as shown by this footnote from a few years in the future when Jerusalem is completely destroyed and the nation is carted off to Babylon. "The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy" (2 Chronicles 36:5, 6). Which is worse – that kind of attitude or one that's ho-hum? I think it's a toss-up.

We need to have soft hearts. Someone said, "When a child can be brought to tears, not from fear of punishment, but from repentance for his offense, he needs no chastisement. When the tears begin to flow from grief at one's own conduct, be sure there is an angel nestling in the bosom" (p. 55, I Quote)

On Wednesday Jean and Chloe were playing a game that's become a favorite of our granddaughter. Jean sits in the recliner with Chloe sitting on her knees. Jean counts "3, 2, 1" and then moves her knees so that Chloe would "fall" to the chair. Giggles all around. Multiple repetitions. Except Chloe got a little too rambunctious and as she was scrambling back into position she kicked Jean in the nose and knocked her glasses crooked. There was a pause, broken by a 26 month old's voice, "Nana. I'm sorry I kicked you and hurt you. Will you forgive me?"

That's the kind of soft heart we need toward the Lord and people.

C. Desire for more. Josiah wants to know more so he sends a delegation to a prophetess named Huldah with instructions. READ v. 21. He was upset because the word of the Lord hadn't been kept. It wasn't listened to. He was actively seeking the Lord by seeking spiritual insight from a follower of the Lord.

Her message is one of doom and gloom. Disaster will come on the southern kingdom for living their lives without any regard for the Lord and his ways. They've repeatedly and routinely turned their back on him. They followed the pattern of the northern kingdom. Josiah's grandpa Manasseh played a humongous role in the punishment. "The Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to arouse his anger" (2 Kings 23:26). "Surely these things happened to Judah according to the Lord's command, in order to remove them from his presence because of the sins of Manasseh and all he had done, including the shedding of innocent blood. For he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the Lord was not willing to forgive" (2 Kings 24:3, 4). Manasseh did more evil than the kings of the Canaanites which is saying a lot (2 Kings 21:11). Commentator H.H. Halley said Manasseh "just about obliterated God from their thinking" (Halley's Bible Handbook, p. 227). The Lord said he would bring such disaster on Judah and Jerusalem that it would make peoples' ears tingle (2 Kings 21:12).

In the middle of the doom and gloom, there was hope. At least for Josiah. The disaster wouldn't happen during his lifetime. He would be buried in peace and gathered to his fathers. The reason given was his responsive heart.

IV. Extending his influence vv. 29 - 33

Josiah heard the message. He didn't just sit back and think, "Well all's well that ends well, at least for me." He cared about people around him. As king he assembled the nation. He had the right to do that. He read the Word to the people. He renewed the covenant with the Lord pledging himself to the Lord. READ. 31-33.

Josiah acted first. Then he sought to enlist others to follow the Lord. This included the removal of items related to the worship of anyone/anything other than the Lord. He extended beyond Jerusalem and Judah all the way up to Galilee so that the reform included the area covered by the previous northern kingdom. One of the amazing notes is that the purging of idols included stuff that was made by Solomon 300 years earlier (2 Kings 23:13). What was that stuff still doing around? There had been lots of good kings. Shows how hard it can be to root stuff out of our lives that has taken a stronghold or that we simply let stuff slide if it's been with us for a while.

He continued his influence by celebrating the most important feast of worship -- Passover. Most of chapter 35 is devoted to telling the story. READ v. 35:18. It was the Passover that outdid all other Passovers. It surpassed anything by David, Solomon or other king. Josiah provided 30,000 sheep and goats, 3000 cattle for the offerings and to feed the multitude. He encouraged the priests to fulfill their duties to serve the Lord.

The importance of praise and worship. Jean and I were at Aldi to get some groceries. We heard a young child's voice. He sounded like he was maybe two years old. He wasn't crying and demanding a treat. He was singing, loudly, somewhat indistinctly, the same dozen or so notes over and over and over. His voice carried throughout the store. There was a cuteness factor to it. The tune sounded familiar but had some childlike variations. Finally, I think I got it. He was singing "Oh the overwhelming, never ending, reckless love of God." Cuteness factor a billion times over. Praise from the heart.

But as was often the case from the time of Moses and Joshua 750 years earlier, the people followed the Lord as long as the leader was alive. The sad “tradition” continues with Josiah as people quickly abandon their commitment to the Lord and revert to placing God on the back burner, if not out of the kitchen. The revival was on the surface.

Unfortunately, even his family didn’t follow in his footsteps. Three of the final four kings were his sons. All of them were evil. Sadly, a godly influence doesn’t automatically transfer from one person to another. The good news is that an ungodly heritage doesn’t have to carry over either.

The greatest determiners of our attitudes, actions, reactions and direction of life is what’s between our two ears and residing in our heart. Others in the body of Christ can help us in our spiritual growth. Those outside the faith can seek to draw us down. Ultimately each of us is the one who is responsible for our spiritual health and welfare.

Some people are super down on the state of Christianity in the US. One man talked about “the popular brand of Christianity these days that has divided loyalties; that operates on mild enthusiasm, partial obedience, and convenience-driven service.” Then he quotes another (D. A. Carson) as defining the Christianity of our times. “We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.” (Quoted in "Reflections," Christianity Today, 7-31-00)

Another man reviewed books (*No Place for Truth* and *God in the Wasteland* by David Wells) where the author shows “how worldly the American church has become because we’ve abandoned God’s truth and God-centered living and have replaced it with a human-centered, therapeutic approach in which human needs become sovereign. Wells argues that the church is in the business of truth, not of marketing its “feel-good” product to religious consumers. He states, “A business is in the market simply to sell its products; it doesn’t ask consumers to surrender themselves to the product. The church, on the other hand, does call for such a surrender. It is not merely marketing a product; it is declaring Christ’s sovereignty over all of life and declaring the necessity of obedient submission to him and to the truth of his Word”” (*God in the Wasteland*, p. 76).

Two short stories. A little girl saw a sign in a church that caused her to cry. It read, “The zeal of your house has consumed me.” An elder asked why she was crying. “I’m afraid of the zeal.” He answered, “Don’t worry little girl; there’s no zeal in this place.” I hope he didn’t know what he was saying and it wasn’t the truth.

When Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Treasure Island*, was 12 he was looking out into the dark from his upstairs window watching a man light the street lanterns. His governess came into the room and asked what he was doing. He replied, “I am watching a man cut holes in the darkness.” How perceptive! He went beyond simply saying that he was lighting a light. He’s an example for us. We are to be lights to cut holes in the spiritual and moral darkness.

Time for some Josiahs, whether young or old, to show up and change their world.