

Choices
Week 10: Josiah

Josiah is the **hero you never heard about** in Sunday school. He's not Moses or Abraham. He's not Elijah, Isaiah or even Jeremiah. Come to think of it, he's a lot like a guy you've heard of, King David, only not as well known. **After you hear this story, you'll understand why we named our son after him.**

He made some **amazingly brave choices** and he was just a kid when he began as king. Listen to this...**Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. His mother was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah from Bozkath.**² **He did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight and followed the example of his ancestor David. He did not turn away from doing what was right.**

As we will see, Josiah didn't turn away when confronted with what was right. When what was right was revealed to him, he did it. **And, as we will see, being confronted with what God wants to do in this world always presents some challenging choices.**

Here's the **back-story**. The kingdom of Israel that was at its peak under David and Solomon, has been split into two. One is **Israel to the north**. They have been very bad and have followed other gods and done wicked things. They have not kept their side of the covenant with God to obey the law that God gave Moses. Because of this, God has allowed them to be **taken into captivity by the Assyrians**, which were the superpower of that time.

The other half, to the **south, is Judah**. They remained faithful a little longer, but **eventually went down the same path** as their northern relatives. The advantage they had was that **Jerusalem**, where the temple of God was located, was part Judah. Their slower decline into completely turning their back on God came to a **climax before king Josiah with Manasseh**. He and other evil kings led the people down the path of worshipping any and all of the local god's, some of which led to things like **human sacrifice** and **shrine prostitutes**.

By the time Josiah comes along, the temple is a cosmopolitan **mix of all these different religious practices**, rejecting the heart of their relationship with God which was 'I will be your God and you will be my people.' **You will have no other god's or objects of worship.** This is an **exclusive relationship**. I am yours and you are mine.

This young king had it within his heart to clean up the temple and return it to its former glory and importance. **Keep in mind, he doesn't even remember a time when they were only teaching about Yahweh.** All he

knows is that there are a lot of god's to worship and you can do it all in the temple.

³ In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah sent Shaphan son of Azaliah and grandson of Meshullam, the court secretary, to the Temple of the LORD. He told him, ⁴ "Go to Hilkiah the high priest and have him count the money the gatekeepers have collected from the people at the LORD's Temple. ⁵ Entrust this money to the men assigned to supervise the restoration of the LORD's Temple. Then they can use it to pay workers to repair the Temple. ⁶ They will need to hire carpenters, builders, and masons. Also have them buy the timber and the finished stone needed to repair the Temple. ⁷ But don't require the construction supervisors to keep account of the money they receive, for they are honest and trustworthy men." ⁸ Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the court secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the LORD's Temple!" Then Hilkiah gave the scroll to Shaphan, and he read it. ⁹ Shaphan went to the king and reported, "Your officials have turned over the money collected at the Temple of the LORD to the workers and supervisors at the Temple." ¹⁰ Shaphan also told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a scroll." So Shaphan read it to the king. ¹¹ When the king heard what was written in the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes in despair. ¹² Then he gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Acbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the court secretary, and Asaiah the king's personal adviser: ¹³ **"Go to the Temple and speak to the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah. Inquire about the words written in this scroll that has been found. For the LORD's great anger is burning against us because our ancestors have not obeyed the words in this scroll. We have not been doing everything it says we must do."** 2 Kings 22:1-13

You see, it was supposed to be a place where **the one and only true God**, creator of the universe, was to be worshipped. The temple was **the place where heaven met earth**. God's presence was found there. His power was on display there. Something tells me that **Josiah had not seen the power or sensed the presence at the temple**. But at least he knew where to start for answers. Primarily because of three wicked kings, **Manasseh, Amon and Ahaz**. What these kings did to the temple and, therefore, the people of Judah's ability to worship God, was equal to us reading a **Karan, practicing voodoo, reading palms, and handing out scientology tracts during worship this morning**. Manasseh and Amon were responsible for the many images of pagan gods all over the outer courts of the temple. **Ahaz** renovated an exterior entrance and some features of the exterior in order **to create a sundial** for the worship of the Gods of the starry heavens. Manasseh built **fire pits** that were used in the ritual burial of children. This is a direct association with the worship of Canaanite gods to whom children were sacrificed. **In other words, the temple and Israel's ability to worship Yahweh, the one true God, was almost unrecognizable.**

Josiah chose to...when confronted by the truth...**Take responsibility and give proof of repentance.**

Saying "I'm sorry" is not repentance. Repentance **demands proof** that you really are heading in a different direction. It's the difference between **sorry for getting caught** or **sorry for the consequence** and sorry for what you did that was wrong. **It's not a feeling.** I feel sorry. **It is a choice that demands a decision, followed by an action.** If I'm really sorry and I want to be different, I will do _____.

As human beings, it is in our nature to **deflect**. To deflect is to **take the focus off of my behavior and me and onto something or someone else.** The problem is over there, not here with me.

Look at how Josiah did it.¹⁰ **Shaphan also told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a scroll." So Shaphan read it to the king.**¹¹ **When the king heard what was written in the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes in despair. 2 Kings 22:10-11**

The tearing of his clothes was a sign of **humbling himself** before God. He is convicted of the sin of Israel. He now knows that **God has every right to destroy them** and they don't have a leg to stand on. **He is the king,** therefore it is on him as leader. He didn't say, **"Well, I can't be held responsible for this because my parents' generation took us so far from God that I didn't even know this scroll and all of its commands existed."**

The King of Judah doesn't tear his robes unless he knows that what he has just heard is true. Josiah knew truth when he heard it. **Maybe those foggy memories of stories of a God who was jealous and had no peers all came flooding back.** I don't know what happened, but I know that Josiah was sure that what he had heard and read was true and it was condemning of the nation that he was in charge of leading. Commentators believe that **what was being read** was the book of **Deuteronomy**, which would have made it very clear to the king that what was happening in the temple had the one true God really angry.

He didn't ask Hilkiah to find out who was responsible for the state of affairs in the temple. He didn't ask them to **find out who put these images** in the temple so that he could go before the people and say, **"Hey, I found out some bad stuff about how we have been worshiping, but I want you to know right away that I had nothing to do with it."** In other words, **"I am not a crook."** Josiah wasn't like the high school kid back in Columbus that said, **"If they'd just sell me beer at Kroger's, I wouldn't have to steal it from the back room when my buddy props open the door."**

Friends, I don't like to say these words any more than the next guy: "I was wrong", "I'm the problem", "Yes, that was me." "No, that was sin, it wasn't just a bad choice."

Do you think that the people of Judah could have sat back and blamed those old rotten kings, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the people who introduced these false religions? Let's see what they did.

Let's read a little more of the story at the beginning of 2 Kings 23. Then the king summoned all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ² And the king went up to the Temple of the LORD with all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, along with the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. There the king read to them the entire Book of the Covenant that had been found in the LORD's Temple. ³ The king took his place of authority beside the pillar and renewed the covenant in the LORD's presence. He pledged to obey the LORD by keeping all his commands, laws, and decrees with all his heart and soul. In this way, he confirmed all the terms of the covenant that were written in the scroll, and all the people pledged themselves to the covenant. 2 Kings 23:1-3

The second courageous choice Josiah makes is to...Renew their covenant relationship.

They forgot what their existence of a people was based upon. You will be our God and we will be your people.

This was an all-inclusive recommitment. It had religious figures, political figures, and all the people.

This was powerful because it was everyone and it was public. It's like communion and baptism for us.

This was a reminder to all of the regular people in Israel who hadn't really done anything terrible or significant in this slide downward, but they had drifted from God. Maybe they hadn't sacrificed a child to Molech, or bowed to Baal, or visited a shrine prostitute, but they hadn't continued to focus on Yahweh as their God.

It had to have been like the regular citizens of Germany who toured then Nazi death camps after WW2. They weren't Nazi's and they hadn't done terrible things. Most hadn't turned a Jewish person in when they were in hiding. Most of them weren't guards at the camps or SS officers who shot innocent people. But they had still drifted from what it meant to be German and human.

Do you need to renew your commitment to being a disciple of Jesus? Maybe you've acted more like a fan of Jesus recently? Maybe the distance that COVID has created has tempted you into becoming lukewarm about your desire to serve and please God.

The third courageous decision Josiah had to make was to...**Begin cleaning from the center out.**

They couldn't just have this **emotional day of renewing the covenant** and then go back to their lives as usual. **There was a mess to clean up!**

From his own heart...We don't need to go over this again. **He started with himself, his own heart, before moving out from there.** He heard the words first. His repentance, His change of direction began before he took it to the people.

To the Center of their worship...Next he moved from his heart to the center of their worship, which was **the temple**. You don't pick up trash on **some side street before you go to the temple**, which we have already stated is in complete disarray.

I encourage you to read all of 2 Kings 22-23 and you will get the whole story of this clean up that started in the king's heart and moved outward. We will read a few of the highlights. **⁴ Then the king instructed Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second rank and the Temple gatekeepers to remove from the LORD's Temple all the articles that were used to worship Baal, Asherah, and all the powers of the heavens. The king had all these things burned outside Jerusalem on the terraces of the Kidron Valley, and he carried the ashes away to Bethel. 2 Kings 23:4**

Josiah told these men to go into the temple and look around for any dirt or clutter, stuff that doesn't belong. Stuff that doesn't match the picture that the book painted of what the center of their worship was to look like. **And when you do find this junk from these other religions, then here's what you do with them.** You take them outside the temple to the **Kidron Valley**, which is like saying take it outside town to the dump, **and burn them.** But that's not all; then take the **ashes to Bethel.** Bethel was like the border of Judah. Josiah is saying take the ashes of that Garbage that you burned at the dump to the border and dump them there. **And, hopefully, the wind will be blowing out** so that even the residue of this sin and blasphemy will float on the air back to those people who brought it. **We don't even want the ashes landing on our soil.** That's some serious cleaning!

But don't you think that's enough to preserve this great thing that God has done? Isn't it clean enough? No, you start from the center and move out from His heart to the center of worship and then...**To Jerusalem & surrounding areas.**

Now Josiah moves out into the city that was **David's city, the holy city of Jerusalem, that God chose as his own.** The pattern is the same; you look around for dirt, clutter, anything that doesn't. **Match the picture in that book** that we all heard read. And as you will see in this next verse, the **cleaning doesn't just mean getting rid of statues and the objects of pagan worship,** it meant some people had to go also.

He did away with the idolatrous priests, who had been appointed by the previous kings of Judah, for they had offered sacrifices at the pagan shrines throughout Judah and even in the vicinity of Jerusalem. 2 Kings 23:5a

The high places were other centers of worship other than the only one that was approved, the temple. They were also connected with these other false God's like **Baal, Asherah, and Molech.** Josiah was going to destroy these places and get rid of the people that ran them. **But there's more...Josiah brought to Jerusalem all the priests who were living in other towns of Judah. He also defiled the pagan shrines, where they had offered sacrifices—all the way from Geba to Beersheba. V. 8**

Josiah went all across the country, that's what Geba to Beersheba means, and desecrated all these disgusting places of worship. What that means is that he would **do something that would make the land in their minds unusable.** You remember hearing that part about burning bones on the places that were being cleaned up. **Burning bones** would mean that **no Hebrew would be able to use that spot** because it would be "unclean". If you were unlucky or stupid enough to own this real estate, you may as well own **swamp land or something with a fault line running through the middle of it.**

Does he stop here? Is this clean enough? He started at his heart, then moved to the **center of worship,** on to the City of **Jerusalem and the surrounding areas** and finally ...**To the border.**

Remember how I said that Bethel was the border of Judah? Back in the day, the king of **Israel, which was Judah's northern relatives,** put up some high places to mark the border of his kingdom. His name was **Jeroboam,** who became the definition of an evil king who perverted the worship of God. Listen how **Josiah's cleanup extended to these border shrines.**

The king also tore down the altar at Bethel—the pagan shrine that Jeroboam son of Nebat had made when he caused Israel to sin. He burned down the shrine and ground it to dust, and he burned the Asherah pole. V. 15

Talk about going all the way. This is an **exclamation point**. Are you picking up on the intensity and the passion for making Judah clean? **It wasn't good enough to just tear the altars down, you have to burn them.** But burning them isn't good enough, you've got to **grind them into powder**. At least you don't have far to go to get even the powder out of the land of Judah. **You're already at the border, so just let the breeze blow that garbage back to where it belongs.**

Does this moving from the temple in Jerusalem outward to the world sound familiar? This is the same path that the gospel took in the book of Acts. **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."** Acts 1:8

The difference is that the gospel goes to the ends of the earth. That is what Jesus brought. He took being in covenant with God to all people no longer an ethnic group.

King Josiah then issued this order to all the people: "You must celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God, as required in this Book of the Covenant."²² There had not been a Passover celebration like that since the time when the judges ruled in Israel, nor throughout all the years of the kings of Israel and Judah.²³ But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah's reign, this Passover was celebrated to the LORD in Jerusalem.²⁴ Josiah also got rid of the mediums and psychics, the household gods, the idols,^[i] and every other kind of detestable practice, both in Jerusalem and throughout the land of Judah. He did this in obedience to the laws written in the scroll that Hilkiah the priest had found in the LORD's Temple.²⁵ **Never before had there been a king like Josiah, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and soul and strength, obeying all the laws of Moses. And there has never been a king like him since.** 2 Kings 23:21-25

Now we celebrate! It had been **generations since** they had celebrated the most important festival that reminded them of who they were and what God had done for them.

Josiah made these choices that demanded courage and conviction. And he went all the way. **This wasn't lip service, this made who's heart was fully committed to God.**

And God was faithful to Josiah. **None of the curse came to pass** until he was dead. But what a **legacy** we hear in that **last verse**. "Never before had there been a king like Josiah, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and soul and strength, obeying all the laws of Moses. And there has never been a king like him since."

So what do we do about this? We can't just read this story and say, wow, what a hero. This story is for the church, not for our country. The church is the new Israel.

Choosing to Follow.

1. Renew our covenant together.

- There is only one **King, Jesus**.
- As his disciple, I will **follow Jesus, be changed by Jesus, and commit to Jesus' mission**.

¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations,^[b] baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

- I will love my brothers and sisters in Christ, and **pursue unity**.
- I will **Love my neighbor, wherever that takes me**.

¹⁹ For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" ²¹ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin,^[a] so that we could be made right with God through Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:19-21

- I will represent Jesus as his **ambassador**.

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:45

- I will learn to **Love even my enemies**.

"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:43

What needs to be cleaned out of my heart and life?