

“Motivation for Serving God”
2 Kings 23:1-25
(Preached at Trinity, December 4, 2022)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In our last section we were introduced to Josiah. After the assignation of his father Josiah was made king in his place. He was only eight years old. He reigned for 31 years.
We read in **Verse 2:**
2 Kings 22:2 NAU - "He did right in the sight of the LORD and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left."
2. His heart was turned towards God at the age of 16 and he began reforms throughout the kingdom. During the Temple renovations he sent Shaphan the scribe to Hilkiyah, the high priest to arrange the prescribed repairs. Hilkiyah gave Shaphan a book which he had found. When Shaphan read it before the king Josiah tore his robe in anguish. He was distraught because he knew this Book had been neglected. He was distraught because he knew that his nation was under the wrath of God.
3. He immediately sent for prophetic validation. Were God's curses still active and was there anything they could do to turn away God's wrath?
 - A. Huldah the prophetess returned a speedy answer.
2 Kings 22:15-17 NAU - "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Tell the man who sent you to me, ¹⁶ thus says the LORD, "Behold, I bring evil on this place and on its inhabitants, *even* all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read. ¹⁷ "Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods that they might provoke Me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore My wrath burns against this place, and it shall not be quenched."
 - B. There was also a message of hope for Josiah:
2 Kings 22:19-20 NAU - "because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you," declares the LORD. ²⁰ "Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place."

I. What was Josiah's response?

A. Josiah could have concluded that any change at this point was pointless.

1. God had declared that His wrath would not be turned away.
2 Kings 22:16-17 NAU - "thus says the LORD, "Behold, I bring evil on this place and on its inhabitants, *even* all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read. ¹⁷ "Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods that they might provoke Me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore My wrath burns against this place, and it shall not be quenched."
Jeremiah 15:1 NAU - "Then the LORD said to me, "Even though Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me, My heart would not be with this people; send them away from My presence and let them go!"
2. Josiah could have said, "What's the use? Why bother? Judgment is coming whether we repent or not."
3. Instead, Josiah began an amazing program of reformation. He went throughout the whole land purging anything that dishonored God.
 - a. He removed all of the idolatrous vessels from the Temple. They had been removed by Manasseh but apparently replaced by Amon.
 - b. He removed all of the priests practicing idolatry – V.5
 - c. He removed the Asherah and burned it – V.6
 - d. He broke down the high places – V.8
 - e. He defiled the place where human sacrifices had been offered – V.10
 - f. He did away with the horses and chariots dedicated to the sun god – V.11
 - g. He smashed the idolatrous altars erected by Manasseh – V.12
 - h. He removed the high places Solomon had built for the Ashtoreth – V.13
 - i. He broke the sacred pillars and the altar built by Jeroboam and defiled them with the bones of the priests – V. 14-16
 - j. He then called for the celebration of the Passover – V.21-23
 - k. He then went through the land removing all of the mediums and spiritists and all other abominations from the land – V.24
4. What would have motivated Josiah's reforms?
 Josiah may have had several motivations

B. First, is not God a merciful God?

Ezekiel 18:31-32 NAU - "Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? ³² "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live."

1. Who knows but God might turn from His fierce wrath?
 This was the heart of David for his child
2 Samuel 12:13-14 NAU - "Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ "However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die."

2 Samuel 12:22 NAU - "While the child was *still* alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, **Who knows**, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live."

2. This was the word of Joel. God is gracious and compassionate. Repent and call upon His mercies.

Joel 2:13-14 NAU - "And rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness And relenting of evil. ¹⁴ **Who knows** whether He will *not* turn and relent And leave a blessing behind Him, *Even* a grain offering and a drink offering For the LORD your God?"

3. This was the heart of the Ninevites after Jonah preached God's judgment upon them.

Jonah 3:6-10 NAU - "When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. ⁷ He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. ⁸ "But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. ⁹ "**Who knows**, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." ¹⁰ When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do *it*."

4. Even Jeremiah in Josiah's day offered hope.

Jeremiah 18:7-8 NAU - "At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy *it*; ⁸ if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it."

5. Who knows if the God of great mercy might show mercy upon them.

C. Second of all, did Josiah know God's prophetic Word concerning him?

1. God sent a prophet to announce His judgment upon the idolatrous practices of Jeroboam.

1 Kings 13:1-2 NAU - "Now behold, there came a man of God from Judah to Bethel by the word of the LORD, while Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. ² He cried against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, "O altar, altar, thus says the LORD, 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'"

2. The prophet declared that the counterfeit priests that Jeroboam raised up would be burned upon the very altar upon which Jeroboam was offering his counterfeit sacrifices. It would take place during the reign of Josiah.
3. Josiah would not sit on the throne until 356 years later. God's Word is timeless and infallible. God has declared the end from the beginning.

4. So in the course of his reforms he fulfilled God's Word perfectly.
2 Kings 23:14-16 NAU - "He broke in pieces the *sacred* pillars and cut down the Asherim and filled their places with human bones. ¹⁵ Furthermore, the altar that *was* at Bethel *and* the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, even that altar and the high place he broke down. Then he demolished its stones, ground them to dust, and burned the Asherah. ¹⁶ Now when Josiah turned, he saw the graves that *were* there on the mountain, and he sent and took the bones from the graves and burned *them* on the altar and defiled it according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these things."
5. It would have happened whether Josiah knew it or not.
- D. But there is a greater overarching reason Josiah set his heart on bringing reform in Judah.

II. Josiah set his heart on restoring God's Law because of his love for God.

- A. Josiah had a heart for obedience.
 1. His heart was fixed upon God.
 I've posed the question before. If you knew there was no heaven and no hell, no life after death, would you still spend your life living for the honor of God? Is God worthy of your praise without the threat of hell, or the reward of heaven?
 2. We read of his conversion
2 Chronicles 34:3 NAU - "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."
 3. After his conversion he set his heart on doing those things that honored God.
- B. This is at the heart of Christian obedience. We call it Gospel obedience or evangelical obedience.
 1. Evangelical obedience is motivated from a love for God and His honor and a desire for communion with Him.
 2. We obey and serve God because we love Him.
1 John 5:3 NAU - "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."
 3. David described his attitude towards the Law
Psalms 119:97 KJV – "O how love I thy law! it *is* my meditation all the day."
Psalms 119:165 KJV – "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

4. Samuel Bolton describes the difference in *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*

“In servile obedience the man does things in a legal spirit, either hoping to get rewards by it, or fearing punishments if he omits the duty. The godly man, on the other hand, goes about duty for the sake of obtaining communion with God, and knows it to be his reward and happiness to have that communion, while the lack of it is the greatest punishment he can endure.”

“The one kind of man looks for his satisfaction in the duty by the performance of the duty, the other looks for satisfaction in the duty as he finds Christ thereby.”¹

C. Our obedience to God should never be motivated by what we can gain from it.

1. Josiah surely wanted to see God spare Judah. He wanted to see Judah turn from their wickedness. But he wasn't instituting reforms so that he could earn God's pleasure.
2. We must not offer obedience to God because of the blessings obedience may bring. Nor should we obey because we fear God's judgment.
3. We must never take the pragmatic approach. The approach that says obedience is good because it has benefits. Rather we obey God because He is worthy of our obedience. We obey because we desire to reflect Him.
4. We cannot earn God's blessings.

Anselm said, “If a man should serve God a thousand years, he could never by that service deserve half a day, in fact not one moment of time, in eternal glory.”²

Samuel Bolton.

“The believer does not perform duty that it may go well with him here; nor does he perform duty that he may gain glory hereafter. He regards communion and nearness to God as happiness enough. He esteems it a peace of his heaven, to have communion with God.”³

¹ Bolton, Samuel, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001 – page 57.

² Ibid., Page 160.

³ Ibid., Page 140.

Conclusion:

1. Nothing pleased Josiah more than to set God's Law before the nation. Of course, he also desired for God to spare them.
2. There is a sobering message here. Josiah was a righteous king and led Judah to remarkable reformation, and yet God's wrath was not turned away.
2 Kings 23:26 NAU - "However, the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him."
 Dale Ralph Davis remarks: "There *is* such a thing as the hot heat of Yahweh's anger that no amount of repentance or reform can dampen or douse."⁴
3. This is because our heart must be changed before we turn to God. We can so harden our hearts against the Gospel that they become hard as stone. By this we simply understand that the sinner who continues to resist God, God will leave to his utter destruction. But if you desire to honor God with your life and you are grieved over your sin run to Christ. He is a gracious Savior willing to receive sinners.
4. One more point of comment. We must always conclude that God's ways are unfathomable.
Romans 11:33-34 KJV - "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! ³⁴ For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"
 - A. There were few in Judah so righteous as Josiah. No king was as careful and faithful in carrying out reforms as Josiah.
2 Kings 23:25 NAU - " Before him there was no king like him who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him."
 - B. And yet we read he was struck down in war. – **Verses 29-30**
 We find no indication that he sought God's direction in this and he bore the consequences.
 Even the best of men must guard themselves carefully against their own folly.

⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Kings: The Power and the Fury*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 322.