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A Tender-Hearted King II Kings 22:1-20

Intro: We're getting near to the conclusion of the record of the kings of Israel and Judah. There are only 3 more chapters left after today's study. Although the record of the kings of Israel was just one sad story of failure after another; the record of the kings of Judah has been a spiritual rollercoaster. Just going back to the beginning of **II Kings**, Jehoshaphat was a good king who expressed a high level of belief in and faithful obedience to Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel. He was also known to make some bonehead decisions but overall: a good king. The 2 kings that followed him (Jehoram and Ahaziah) were not good at all and Athaliah (Queen mother & daughter of Ahab) was just evil. Jehoash, Amaziah and Uzziah were all considered good kings except Uzziah got a little full of himself in his old age and contracted leprosy. His son Jotham was a good king but his grandson Ahaz was bad. Then along come Hezekiah who enacted sweeping spiritual reforms that peeled back layers of disobedience that had been in Judah since the reign of Solomon. Then Manasseh arrived on the scene.

If there had been a prize for being the worst king to ever reign over Judah, Manasseh would win hands-down. This king was so bent on evil that he wasted no time in opposing and removing all the reforms that his father Hezekiah had established. And not content with that, he busied himself in bringing Judah back into terrible idolatry. He even went out of his way to bring in new idolatry that they had never had before – the latest and greatest! Sure, Manasseh would later be taken prisoner by the Assyrians and he would experience a moment of clarity in which he would repent and turn back to the God of his father but it would be too little, too late. There wasn't enough time for him to undo all the evil he had done, not just in the kingdom but in the culture of Judah and in his own family. His son Amon succeeded him on the throne and turned the country right back into wicked idolatry. What a waste!

There is an important truth hidden in all of this spiritual back and forth. What is clear in this record and what should always be remembered by God's people today is that repentance, reform and revival are not permanent standing conditions. We would wish that they were and we often act as

though they are but they're not. Don't get me wrong, these are wonderful things to experience and they are the goal of all gospel ministries. But we go for so long struggling to see these things achieved that when they actually begin to happen, we feel like we've accomplished something and have a tendency to kick back and rest on our laurels. But that can't happen because repentance and revival are not permanent conditions. It's wonderful to see someone repent and turn to the Lord but that's not the end of the work - it's only the beginning. The real work comes in helping them maintain that attitude of brokenness to the things of the Lord. As II Kings has shown us – what is accomplished for the Lord at one time can be opposed and turned back at another time. The key is learning how to have a tender heart to the things of God on a daily basis.

This may sound like a tall order but we have the perfect example of this attitude in the king we're about to study.

1-2 – Josiah's early ascension to the throne was due to his father's assassination. Amon turned out to be as rotten as his father Manasseh (**before** his conversion) and his royal tenure was cut short (2 yrs). Now this might just seem like just another necessary coronation in the kingdom of Judah but Josiah is unique out of all the kings we have seen so far. He is unique for at least 2 reasons: 1) He was the only king of Judah who was prophesied to reign by name. We have to look all the way back in **I Kings 13:2** to see this prophecy but there it is, in black and white. Of course, the prophecy states that Josiah will come and right the wrongs of Jeroboam by destroying, once and for all, the idolatrous alter and worship system he has established in Israel.

This leads us to the 2nd reason Josiah was unique: 2) He was unrivaled in his obedience to Yahweh. Yes, **v2** says he was righteous in the eyes of Yahweh but we have seen this in other kings as well. The clincher is found in **23:25** – No king, before or after, turned to the Lord with all his heart, soul, and mind. That's saying a lot! This puts him above Hezekiah, Solomon and even David! You may question the veracity of **v2** – “How could they know this, he's only 8 years old?” But, the statement of **v2** was really more intended as a general description of his entire 31 year reign and not a character assessment of him at 8 yrs old. His reforms will be listed in detail in **ch23** and they are many and far reaching but the heart behind the reforms is revealed to us in our text.

Now, as per usual, the author arranges his information concerning Josiah in a certain way to make a major point. That point will be revealed in an astonishing way in [ch23](#) but for our study today, we can glean some companion information from the 2nd Book of the [Chronicles 34:3](#). This passage tells us that at the tender age of 16, Josiah committed himself to seek Yahweh – dedicated his life to discovering and following Yahweh’s will for his life and for his kingdom. After a 4 year search, he came to realize that his kingdom and its capitol (Jerusalem) were in a terrible spiritual position and, since he was the only one with both the authority and the desire to do anything about it, set about purging all the vestiges of idolatry from his kingdom. And he didn’t stop there – a few verses down say he went to cities in the now defunct kingdom of Israel and purged them of pagan idolatry as well. Everything rises and falls with leadership and young King Josiah provided aggressive spiritual leadership for the people of Judah.

3-7 – The author zeros in on Josiah’s 18th year as king, when he is 26 yrs old and the premier event that makes that year so notable. As part of Josiah’s reforms, not only did he have to purge the idolatry from the temple compound but he also needed to restore the temple back to its former state after decades of abuse and neglect during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon. His motivation to rebuild the temple came from a desire to honor Yahweh and his approach was much like what King Jehoshaphat had done many years before, after the sad reign of some evil monarchs ([ch12](#)).

Josiah understood that the work of repairing and rebuilding the temple required both organization and funding. He was careful to pay attention to both of these needs as he commanded Hilkiah to begin the work on the temple. The people had been contributing money for the upkeep of the temple so the king ordered Hilkiah to distribute the funds to the workers to facilitate the repairs. It wasn’t enough to just destroy the idol worship in the land; the temple had to be ready and available for the worship of the true and living God. As was the case with the temple repairs under King Jehoshaphat ([ch12](#)), these workers were also faithful men and there was no need to keep elaborate records. Leadership is stewardship - godly leaders must see to it that the work is done with integrity and that God’s money is used wisely. But, it wasn’t the restoration that made this year remarkable, it’s what they found in the temple that caused a stir!

8-10 – It seems that Hilkiah happened upon a scroll that contained the Law of God that was recorded by Moses. It seems unthinkable to us that something as special and important as the Book of the Law could be misplaced at all, let alone for so long a time but here it is. **Duet 31:24-27** says there was to be a copy of the Law beside the ark of the covenant beginning as far back as the days of Moses. So, Judah had God’s Word but it was greatly neglected in those days and this neglect could only happen because of Judah’s prolonged disobedience to God.

Hilkiah, to his credit, was familiar enough with the Law to recognize it for what it was but the fact that it had been missing at all is astounding to us. That would be like losing the only copy of the Bible in a church building and not missing it for years! Wait, I guess it’s not that impossible. Countless churches around the country have been going along quite well for some time now without any significant input from God’s Word. It’s not that they don’t have access to it – they just don’t avail themselves of that access. They have the unchanging, life-giving, powerful Word of God at their fingertips and yet, they have determined to go forward under their own wisdom and strength. Our text shows us exactly where such neglect of the truth will lead you to and we’re seeing it for ourselves in our contemporary society.

Though the narrative appears to be bland at the discovery of the Book, it actually captures the author’s focus here. Hilkiah finds it and gives it to Shaphan the scribe who reads it for himself. He then carries it with him as he brings the king an update on the temple repairs and only seems to mention it as an afterthought. He then reads it to the king. But, as we’ll see, it wasn’t the discovery of the Book of the Law that made this year so remarkable, it wasn’t even the reading of it. What makes this a seminal point in Judah’s history is King Josiah’s reaction to the reading of the Book of the Law of God.

11-14 – It’s to Josiah’s credit that he desired to hear what the book had to say, being that it was the Word of God and all. But, when he heard what the Word of God actually had to say, he was smitten with fear and grief! How people respond to God’s Word is a good indication of their spiritual appetite and the strength of their desire to please the Lord. This doesn’t mean we should be weeping and wailing in agony every time the word is opened and presented but we should always be receptive of the truth it contains and the

instructions (and warnings) it provides. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom then God's Word is the only source of information we have that instructs us on the character, mind and purposes of the God we are to fear. We must be open and tender to what it has to say.

The scroll likely contained all 5 books of Moses but I doubt Josiah could sit for a full reading of the scroll. It's possible that Shaphan read selected passages from the Book of Deuteronomy. If that's where Shaphan read from then what Josiah heard from ch4-13 would convict him concerning the wicked things the nation had already done. Ch14-18 would have disturbed him because of the things the people had not done, and the covenant spelled out in ch27-30 would warn him of what God would do if the nation didn't repent. In the terms of His covenant, Yahweh made it clear that the nation would be punished severely if they disobeyed His law – which they had done in spades!

The hearing of God's Word did a spiritual work in King Josiah's heart. This was way more than just the transmission of information; the Word of God had an impact of spiritual power on Josiah. So deeply moved was the king by what he heard that he tore his robes. The tearing of clothing was the traditional expression of horror and astonishment. In the strongest possible manner, Josiah showed his shocking grief on his own account and the account of the nation. This was an expression of a deep conviction of sin and it was a good thing!

This conviction of sin is a special work of the Holy Spirit. So, unlike many of his royal predecessors, Josiah was **not** unrepentant towards the threats contained in the book of the Law. He was only 26 yrs old and had been seeking the Lord for only about 10 years, yet his response to the Word of God was that of a mature believer. To his credit, he received a critical word with genuine meekness. He doesn't throw Hilkiah in the slammer for passing on such a disturbing book. He doesn't bawl out Shaphan for reading him such horrific threats. No, his heart is tender towards God's Word so he tears his clothes and weeps. And, he does something else – he seeks some clarification.

King Josiah has had a law word so now he seeks a prophetic word (13). It wasn't that the king didn't know about God or how to seek him but he was under such conviction of sin (national) that he just didn't know what to do

next. Josiah knew the kingdom of Judah deserved judgment from God. He couldn't receptively hear the word of God and honestly respond to the Spirit of God without confronting the sin of his kingdom. So he sends out a committee to collect a prophetic word from the Lord. Maybe he's trying to discover how soon God's judgment will fall and if there is any hope in averting it.

Interestingly, the royal commission goes straight to Huldah the prophetess. This is only interesting to me not because she was a woman, but Hilkiah's own son was none other than the prophet Jeremiah and Zephaniah also prophesied during Josiah's reign. But these 2 prophetic powerhouses were passed over for Huldah and she more than delivers the goods. Clearly, God is no respecter of persons even though we have that tendency or bad habit our selves. The committee consulted Huldah for spiritual guidance, not because of her own fame, wisdom or spirituality but simply because she was recognized as a prophetess and could reveal the heart and mind of God.

15-20 – Huldah's message was in 2 parts. The 1st part was addressed to the man who sent you, meaning Josiah as just a common man before the law of God. No one, no matter their rank or position, was above the requirements of obedience to the Law and consequences of disobedience. The 2nd part was addressed to the king of Judah, that is, to Josiah as an individual with spiritual needs and concerns. The 2 parts of the prophetic word makes 2 specific points: 1st) No, there is no hope! God's anger has been provoked by the gross and ongoing sin of Judah and his judgment will not be revoked and cannot be averted.

2nd) Even though there is no hope, there is still mercy! Since Josiah's heart was soft when he heard the threats of the Law and since he humbled himself, repented and wept in Yahweh's presence, God would bring Josiah to the grave in peace and not allow him to see the disaster that is going to wash over Judah. So God's judgment is certain, but that judgment is delayed. Disaster is on the way but disaster is not yet – all thanks to the repentance of 1 man!

Josiah's grief and tears did not go unnoticed by God. Yahweh didn't ignore Josiah's soft heart, torn clothes and honest tears as too little – too late. His honest, tender-hearted response to hearing God's Word is what caused

God to hear (take notice of, accept) Josiah's repentance (19b). Why did God take notice? Because, here is a man doing exactly what God wants – trembling over His word!

Isa 66:1-2 teaches us this. Here, the Lord puts things into proper perspective. We can never understand much of anything until we understand that the Lord is enthroned in heaven and that the earth is under His command – in fact, it's His footstool. And, of course, we may want to serve God but we tend to only want to serve Him our way. We may want to do something for God – to build something for God but what could we do or build that is worthy of God? God is not interested in what we think we can do for Him. What catches God's attention, what He desires to see in us, what he wants from us is a poor and contrite spirit, a people who tremble with respect and fear over His word.

Contrite is literally lamed or disabled. Used here with spiritual significance: one who is aware of the damage done by sin, of personal inability to stand upright before God. Are you one who trembles over the word of God? do you see it as a mirror that exposes your sin so that it can be dealt with effectively or do you shrug off its instructions as being too old-fashion or too inconvenient? "Well, I show up and give and serve and take part in God's work. That should be enough." Sorry to bust your spiritual bubble but Ps 51:16-17 shoots that argument down. Any service or ministry that is performed with a wrong attitude or from a wrong motivation will not stand up under the scrutiny of Christ's Bema Seat judgment. If it's wood, hay or stubble, or if it's gold, silver or precious stones, the fire of judgment will reveal it. But, the one thing God won't ignore or ever reject is a broken and contrite heart – a heart that is tender to His word!

So, Yahweh's forbearance in the face of Josiah's repentance gives the appearance of flexibility in His ways: He will not alter the fact of his judgment but is willing to adjust the timing of His judgment. This flexibility of God's will is not God bending the rules – it's actually all part of God's standard character. Peter tells us the God is longsuffering towards us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3:9). Some may want to play the "what if" game – what if Josiah was followed by a string of Josiah's instead of bad kings? Would God go on forbearing and putting off His judgment? What would He have done then? The answer is: of course He would! Wouldn't Yahweh think this a wonderful

problem to have? How could this scenario ever be a major difficulty for Him who delights in extending mercy to the repentant and obedient?

If He was willing to do it then, He is willing to do it today. He is the same God and He still desires to respond in mercy to our tender response to His word. How about your heart? Does it delight God or displease Him? 😊