

REFORMATION ENDURANCE - (SUNDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2021)

Scripture reading – **2 Chronicles 34; Matthew 22:34-40**

INTRODUCTION

God has been very gracious to our small church in allowing us to be part of a larger movement of reformation, especially focused on education.

The Christian school movement and homeschooling have greatly expanded in the past 50 years.

Along with this, there has been a resurgence in interest in sound, solid theology.

And in a small but very real way, this church and its families have had the privilege of being used by the Lord in various ways.

We should have nothing to do with boasting or thinking of ourselves as special.

All the glory and praise belong to the Lord.

And at the same time remembering what has been done should be an incentive that we work even more diligently as God gives us time and ability, for reformations that last only one generation generally accomplish little.

The reason why the Protestant Reformation had the impact that it did, was that it had an effect that lasted for more than one generation.

It had an effect in not just one nation, but across nations.

It didn't just affect one small area of life, but it had an effect on all of life beginning with the gospel.

This morning we will briefly examine the Reformation that took place in the life of King Josiah to consider encouragement for this church in particular as we labor for the spread of the gospel and the expansion of Christ's Kingdom.

We must have endurance in the work of Reformation.

We must bear with the sorrow that comes in service.

We keep our focus not on ourselves but on the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is His work that lasts even as we see our own work and lives often filled with disappointments and sorrow!

As we look at the life of King Josiah, I would like to emphasize three main points.

1. Josiah's Tender Heart
2. Josiah's Tenacious Work
3. Josiah's Terrible Legacy

Press on in service to the Lord! It is the work of Christ that endures to all eternity.

II CHRONICLES 34

1. JOSIAH'S TENDER HEART FOR THE LORD

Josiah or Yo-shee-yaw means "Let or may Yahweh give."

There were two Josiahs in the OT, King Josiah, and an Israelite who had not been exiled to Babylon, at whose house took place the solemn and symbolic crowning of **Joshua the High Priest**, in the time of Zechariah the prophet.¹

King Josiah reigned for 31 years from 640 – 609 B.C.

His reign was **the last of 5 reformations** that took place in the nation of Judah.

We note our first point here in verses 1-3 of II Chronicles 34.

Josiah was only 8 years old when he became king.

The general character of his life is shown in verse 2, and in verse 3 we note that while he was still young, in the eighth year of his reign, when he was about 15 years old, that he began to seek the **God of his father David**.

What a most beautiful testimony.

Now, as I will share later, Josiah was married very early. He had children while a teenager.

But while young, the Lord showed His grace to Josiah and gave him a heart to seek the Lord.

Josiah's **great grandfather was Hezekiah** who also brought about great reforms.

Hezekiah's son was Manasseh, the most wicked king of Judah. And yet at the end of his life, Manasseh repented.

Manasseh's son was Amon, a wicked king who was assassinated two years after taking office.

He refused to humble himself before the Lord. But not so godly Josiah.

While a teenager, he sought after the Lord.

¹ NBD, s.v. "Josiah," 615.

The idea is not that he just simply believed himself to be a follower of the true God, but he actively sought after the Lord.

The heart of Josiah is further shown in following verses. In verse 19, we read that the Law of God, which had been lost for many years, was found in the temple.

Josiah was now about 25 years old.

And when the Law was read to Josiah he tore his beautiful royal robes.

The judgment of the Law brought about an immediate response.

Verse 27 further describes his heart.

His heart was tender before the Lord.

Before the Lord his heart was not hardened, but rather soft and yielding.

What is a tender heart?

It is a heart that is sensitive to sin and temptation.

It is a heart that has not been hardened by long standing disobedience.

It is a heart that reacts quickly to the word of God.

It is a heart that commands the will into action.

If this church will continue to prosper and serve the Lord, what we pray for most of all is that God would give us hearts tender before the Lord; hearts that respond with conviction to God's Word and Spirit.

Is this the attitude of your heart?

It is unfortunate that Christianity in some cases has been perverted into something feminine or weak.

A tender heart does not mean one is wimpy, weak, or like a willow branch. That was certainly not Josiah.

A tender heart does not mean weakness before men, but rather humility before God.

How does one develop or receive a tender heart?

First of all, it is God's gift. It is God's grace.

We are called, however, to humble ourselves daily before God's Word and in prayer.

We are to pray, let your will be done, not mine.

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness!

Do you recognize how almost our entire culture is set against the hearing and meditating on God's Word?

If you know this morning that your heart is not tender before God, then you confess that to our gracious God and pray for a tender your heart.

David prayed in Psalm 51, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart - these, O God, You will not despise."

May all of us in this church so humble ourselves before God.

This must characterize this church if we will continue to be useful to the Lord in any significant way.

2. JOSIAH'S TENACIOUS WORK

Josiah did not merely content himself with private religious devotion as important as this is.

Verse 3 notes, in his twelfth year, when he was 19 or 20 years old, he began his work.

His work can be divided into three main areas: **destruction, construction, and restoration.**

His first work of reformation was **destruction.**

He began by purging Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images.

We might ask the question, why did it take about 11 years for him to start this work?

Perhaps by the time he was 19 or 20 years old he was able to take charge in the kingdom.

One commentator named Dillard wrote:

Though his personal piety may have begun to stir at that time, he did not initiate acts of reform until his twelfth year at age twenty; **this would be the age of his majority** (Num 1:3; 26:2; 1 Chr 27:23; 25:5) and presumably then also the first year of his sole reign no longer under the authority of a regent.²

Whatever the details, once Josiah had the opportunity, he launched his reforms.

² Raymond B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, vol. 15 of Word Biblical Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 278.

His actions were detailed and extensive as verses 4-7 show.

His attack of idolatry extended even into the northern kingdom of Israel, which by that time was under the control of Assyria.

II Kings also notes that Josiah took action against the perverted sodomite priests and others.

Josiah did not believe in religious pluralism.

He removed the idolatrous horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord.

He also had to destroy the chariots of the sun and break down and pulverize the altars that were on the roof of the temple.

Isn't this so amazing that Solomon's beautiful temple became a center for totally pagan worship?

However, we look around at some so-called churches and I think we can understand.

Verse 8 notes in his 18th year, when he was now about 25, after 6 years of destruction, he now turned to **construction**.

The glorious temple that Solomon had built 330 years earlier was in a filthy, trashed, and ruined state. Structurally it needed significant repairs.

And so, money was taken and faithful men were given charge of repairing and restoring the glory of this most beautiful building.

In verse 14, we note that Book of the Law of the LORD was recovered through the efforts of repairing the temple.

Hilkiah the High Priest announced to Shaphan the Scribe that the Book of the Law given by Moses had been found.

The Book of the Law is either a reference to the **book of Deuteronomy** or perhaps even **Pentateuch**, the first five books.

As soon as Josiah heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes.

He then commanded that Hilkiah along with his other trusted men seek what this meant for him and for God's people.

Interestingly they went to a **Huldah the prophetess**.

She is a great and godly women, but if you look up the meaning of her name, you will understand why Christian parents generally do not name their daughters after her; **her name means "weasel."**³

Huldah brought a message of both judgment and mercy. Calamity would come on Judah and all the people, but because Josiah's heart was tender, he would die before the judgment would finally come.

Josiah did not take a pessimistic attitude.

³ Kohlenberger/Mounce *Concise Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. "ח," paragraph 5506.

Verse 30 then notes his third work of reformation - that of **restoring and renewing** the covenant that God had made with Israel.

In verse 30, he called for all the people, great and small, to hear the reading of the Book of the Covenant.

According to one website I found at a reading speed of 100 words per minute, Deuteronomy would take about 4 hours to read. The entire Pentateuch would take about 21 hours to read at this speed.⁴

Supposedly President John Kennedy slowed down his inaugural speech to about 100 wpm, well below his usual speed of speech.⁵

This was an extended service even if the Book of the Covenant is a shorter portion of Scripture.

In verse 31, we note that Josiah took a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD, to keep His testimonies, and to perform all the words of the covenant.

And he called for all of Jerusalem and Benjamin to take a stand and affirm the same covenant.

This work of covenant renewal also included the proper celebration of the Passover.

This Passover is described in greater detail in chapter 35.

The Passover that Josiah celebrated in his 18th year, was unlike any Passover that Israel had celebrated since the days of Samuel the prophet.

⁴ This coming from <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-long-does-it-really-take-to-read-the-bible/> which compiled these stats based on 100 words per minute. See also Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History of the Old Testament*, p. 952. Here he notes a commentator named Kautzch who made such an estimate of 10 hours.

⁵ <https://virtualspeech.com/blog/average-speaking-rate-words-per-minute>

It must have been a thrilling and glorious celebration for Josiah and those who joined him sincerely.

This second aspect of Josiah's life presents also a great challenge for this church.

God desires that you have a tender and humble heart. But God also desires that you practically serve Him and seek His will.

We are called first to remove all hindrances;

Get rid of all the idols and irrelevant things that would keep us from serving Him as we should.

This is the work of destruction.

What is keeping you from serving God as you should?

Is it entertainment, laziness, spiritual sloth?

You must be willing to get rid of anything that would keep you from serving God as you should.

There can be no compromise with sin and service for God.

Second, consider then the opportunities that God is placing before you.

All of us have a calling - the work that God gives us to do.

And as we faithfully perform this work, we know that we are pleasing the Lord.

But consider also the work that you can be doing perhaps in a more specific way through this local church or other aspects of witness and service to the Lord.

Pray that God would give you a burden for serving Him in practical, tangible ways.

It is encouraging to see what is already being done, but let us look for even greater opportunities.

This is a matter for prayer together as a church and in our own private and family times of prayer.

Third, we must be concerned that we grow in our relationship with God through worship and the sacraments.

No doubt that there is a danger in just going through the motions – show up, check it off, and check out.

God takes no delight in worship or service driven just to satisfy ourselves.

We also know that neglecting public worship or neglecting family and private times of worship is very dangerous!

We consider how those at the center of the work of Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries gave their lives for the true and faithful worship!

3. JOSIAH'S TERRIBLE LEGACY

If you look at the chronology and timing that we find for his sons and grandsons, we can estimate that Josiah was probably married at the age of 13.

He had at least two wives and was a father at least by the time he was 14 or 15.

Scripture speaks of three of his sons and one of his grandsons.

There are two great aspects of sadness in his life:

1] His early death at just the age of 39.

2] The total failure of those who came after him to serve the Lord in anyway.

At 39 years of age, **about 13 years after the restoration of the Passover**, he was killed in battle because he did not listen to the words of God as spoken by Necho, king of Egypt.

For some reason, Josiah went to war against Necho, and Necho sent a message to Josiah, telling him to not interfere for Necho was carrying out a mission commanded by God.

In 2 Chron. 35:23, we note that archers shot Josiah mortally wounding him.

He was brought to Jerusalem where he died.

As sad as this is, what follows in chapter 36, the last chapter of the Hebrew Old Testament as it was arranged, is even more disheartening.

All the work of Josiah was undone by his three younger sons and one grandson in less than 25 years.

Twenty-three years after his death, Jerusalem was overthrown, the temple was burned and many in Judah were carried off into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar.

We read the grim words in 2 Chron. 36:15-16.

2Chr. 36:15 And the LORD God of their fathers sent *warnings* to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending *them*, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. **16** But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till *there was* no remedy.

What is most disheartening is how close this event is to the great reforms led by Josiah.

The following account is not identical but similar.

John Calvin started the Geneva Academy in 1559 and it would soon become a school where over 1500 students were being trained as missionaries, ministers, and leaders.

Nearly 100 years later, the great theologian **Francis Turretin** became the principal teacher. His father and grandfather had been faithful men, but his son **Jean Alphonse** led the downfall of the school into liberalism and apostasy.

Sadly, this story of generational failure is not unique in the history of the Reformation.

Now we sometimes see stories of long-term faithfulness – the example of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, which for over 370 years has enjoyed a witness of faithful preaching and service, though at times it has gone through great trials.

About 50 years ago, the Lord raised up a faithful minister, Peter Masters, to preach God's Word.

What happened to Josiah's children and grandchildren?

We don't have any of the details.

Likely they were given the best of education possible. But something terrible went wrong.

When they assumed positions of leadership, they rebelled.

Certainly, all of this was part of God's Sovereign plan, yet Josiah's legacy did not last in terms of preparing his children for the future.

Ultimately, the blame must be placed on Josiah's sons and grandson.

They had God's Word. They had the godly example of Josiah. They turned away from God's truth.

As a church we continue in a period of transition in a number of ways.

The fifth point of the covenantal model, **succession**, is always a challenge for families and local churches.

Not only does our church now enter into the second and third generation work, but so do the larger movements of homeschooling and Christian education.

This is where we as a church must always humble ourselves before the Lord and seek His direction and correction.

We need endurance to continue in the work of the Lord.

We need His work in our hearts and in the lives of our children and grandchildren.

CONCLUSION

The end of Josiah's reign was in some sense the beginning of the captivity of Judah. Josiah died in 609 B.C.

The first return of the captives to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple under the decree of Cyrus was in 539 B.C., a period of 70 years.

Though Jeremiah and all of Judah greatly mourned the passing of Josiah, we of course realize that the destruction of the temple and the captivity all pointed to the failure of God's people and the necessity of Christ and His Work.

As great as King Josiah was, he could not bring about the restoration that God's people truly needed.

And so this grim history helps us see in even greater ways the necessity of Christ's coming.

The great celebration of the Passover by Josiah was perhaps the last great celebration in the OT, but it pointed the way to the even greater celebration by Jesus and his disciples.

As we close this service, let me read again from II Chronicles 34:31-32.

“Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all

his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. And he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin take a stand. So the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers.”

May through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ according to the power of the Holy Spirit, this be true also for all us. AMEN.

Press on in service to the Lord! It is the work of Christ that endures to all eternity.

CLOSING HYMN: 271

BENEDICTION – II CORINTHIANS 13:11, 14

Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen.