

Please turn with me in your copies of God’s Word to 2 Kings chapter 22. We will be considering from verse 14 to chapter 23 verse 4 today. As many of you may know, the story of the Israelites is somewhat cyclical. There are these cycles of faithfulness and apostasy. The Israelites will be faithful to the law of the Lord but over time they would become hardened to it and ultimately take on themselves the idols of the surrounding pagans. Then after a period of time the Lord would raise up a faithful man to call Israel unto repentance, and the cycle would continue. Our text comes to us today towards the end of the nation of Judah just a short time before they would be taken into exile. The cycle had just hit a low point during the 55 year reign of King Manasseh. This man was truly wicked; he was an idolator, a sorcerer, a blasphemer, an evil man. He built altars to false gods in the courts of the temple, placed idols within the house of God, and rebuilt all of the old altars and high places throughout the land that Hezekiah had torn down. And following his death, his son Amon took the throne and “walked in all the way that his father walked in.” At 8 years old Josiah took the throne following the death of Amon, and our text comes to us 10 years into Josiah’s reign. This is where our reading today will pick up. This is the Word of the living and true God, so please lend it your ear.

Read 2 Kings 22:14-23:4

Pray

We live in a world today that seems to revel in sin and debauchery. I’m sure that statement comes as no surprise to any of you here today. The world seems to have fully embraced a debased lifestyle. Drunkenness is no longer looked down upon but embraced as simply having fun and enjoying life. Television and movies have become bastions for all sorts of vile actions and language and images, all in the name of entertainment. Sexual immorality has become the norm with the majority of people engaging in pre-marital sex or extra-marital affairs. Homosexuality and

transgenderism have taken over the western world and become commonplace within society. The blood of babes have painted our streets crimson through the slaughter of millions in abortion mills. Recent polls have shown that only 65% of Americans claim Christianity as their religion, but only about 30-35% would be considered evangelical Christians. World leaders openly mock and defy the precepts for ruling nations laid out by God in the Scriptures. It can truly be said that we live in a world and a society where sin is running rampant and unchecked. This ought to cause us great concern. And when we consider that our society is not much better off than that which King Josiah inherited from his father, that should cause us to fear. We hear talk of the need for revival, of the desire for repentance, for the need to return to our Christian roots, and all of these things things are right and true. But I will tell you now, friends, if you want to see these things come about then you must realize that it begins with you. All of us here today have sin in our hearts. We all have the inward sin nature which leads us to fall into acts of grievous sin, and we all have the need for continued repentance in our own lives and the responsibility to call those around us unto repentance as well. Just as in the days of King Josiah, true repentance across the land must begin with the people of God. And so, dear brothers and sisters, the exhortation to you today is to renew your covenant with Jehovah and stand to it. And we will consider this exhortation by looking at three headings: first, the need for covenant renewal; next, the act of covenant renewal; and finally, the effect of covenant renewal.

Let us first consider the need for covenant renewal. As I mentioned earlier, the kingdom of Judah was in an incredibly bad place when Josiah took the throne. The sin that had defiled the land and permeated throughout the people was grievous and could not continue unpunished. If God would destroy the pagan lands of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone for their sin, if He would turn Lot's wife into a pillar of salt for simply disobeying the command of the Lord and looking back upon those burning cities, how much more deserving of absolute destruction were the people of

God who had turned their back on their redeemer and turned to idols, defiling even the very house of God with their blasphemous worship. Jehovah will not be mocked. He will punish the wicked according to their iniquities. And we see in chapter 22 verses 16 and 17 that this punishment was at hand, “Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.” We know that in these days the inspired Word of God was altogether lost, and the Temple of Jehovah had been suffered to fall into decay. When Josiah ordered the temple to be repaired, the book of God was found. Upon reading the book of the law it became apparent that the nation was in danger of receiving the judgements laid out in the Scriptures. And to compound the warnings of the Lord in the book, God sent forth Huldah the prophetess to pronounce God’s imminent judgement. And when Josiah saw what judgements were pronounced against his nation, he sought to avert them by turning to the Lord his God. Because he saw the great plagues of God that were threatened, he knew no more speedy way to avoid them, than to turn to God by repentance which cannot come but from faith, and faith by hearing the word of God.

Friends, the time of judgement is upon us. The sins that pervade our land are the very same sins that had taken hold of the kingdom of Judah. The perversity and idolatry of our nation has done nothing but incur the wrath of God, and I can tell you now we are feeling it in a small degree, but if we continue I can assure you it will be felt in a much greater degree. And we as a church are not immune to this. In fact, we as the people of God are the first ones who will face the judgement of the Lord for the sins that remain among us. 1 Peter 4:17 tells us, “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God.” But why does judgement begin at the house of God? Because we, like the Israelites, are the ones who

are supposed to know God's law. We are the ones that ought to be seeking His face. We are the ones that ought to be worshipping Him in Spirit and in Truth. But that's not what we see in the Church. There is corruption. There is error. Our small denomination has felt this greatly in recent times. I stumbled across a staggering statistic: in the last five years the RPCNA has lost five pastors due to disciplinary cases. This ought to cause us to shudder. We ought to tremble at the sifting that Christ Jesus is doing among the Church right now. So many professing believers don't love the law of the Lord. So many within the Church don't seek God's face. Numerous churches instead of worshipping God in Spirit and Truth offer strange fire unto the Lord just as Nadab and Abihu did. It is no wonder judgement begins at the house of God, for it is the house of God where some of the worst perversions of the faith occur.

But the judgement doesn't end there. It begins at the house of God but extends to all people. The judgement that begins at the house of the Lord is but a precursor of what will take place to the nation which dishonors the Lord. We have seen this time and time again throughout history: the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction of Israel, the destruction of Judah, the destruction of Babylon, the destruction of Assyria, the destruction of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Roman Empire; what is next, the destruction of America? Brothers and sisters, the need for covenant renewal lies in the fact that, unless we see repentance both within individuals and on a national scale, Jehovah will judge us with a righteous judgement and bring about the destruction of the wickedness that has infected our land. All peoples of the earth, all nations of the earth, all kings of the earth will one day fall down before Christ Jesus the King and Head over all peoples and nations either in humble repentance and service to Him as their master or in being numbered among the slain as He with His right hand strikes through kings in the day of His wrath as Psalm 110 tells us. The need for covenant renewal is plain to see in our society around us, but do not neglect the need for covenant renewal within yourselves. Examine yourselves, pray to the Lord to reveal to you the hidden

sins of your heart, see the vile sinfulness which still remains within you, and you will quickly see the need for covenant renewal.

And once we see the need for covenant renewal we must also heed the call to action. So let us now turn our attention to consider the act of covenant renewal. We see this in 23:1-3, “And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord. And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.” I want us first to see that the act of covenant renewal is a responsibility that lies within the civil magistrate. I know that this is not a popular position to hold today, especially in America where the notion of religious liberty is so enshrined in our national identity. But we must not look to the United States Constitution for guidance in how to live, but instead to the Word of God. Romans 13:1-4 makes clear to us the duty of the civil magistrate, and it is one which is vastly different than what the modern notion of the magistrate is, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”

The civil magistrate is to be a minister of God in being a terror to evildoers and a rewarder of those who do good. Where do we find what is good and what is evil? That can only be found in the moral law of God which is summarized in the 10 commandments. Matthew Henry writes, “It is really the interest of princes to promote the knowledge of the scriptures in their dominions. If the people be but as stedfastly resolved to obey by law as he is to govern by law, the kingdom will be happy. All people are concerned to know the scripture, and all in authority to spread the knowledge of it.” King Josiah understood this, and that is why not only did he renew his covenant with the Jehovah himself, but he also renewed the covenant as the representative of the nation of Judah. This is the pattern which we ought to be calling upon our own civil magistrates to emulate. Christian, you have the duty and responsibility to be that prophetic voice to the magistrate to show them the wickedness of their sin and their need for the Savior. You have the duty and responsibility to call the magistrate unto repentance, to call them to kiss the Son as Psalm 2 states, and to govern according to the precepts of the Lord. We cannot expect to continue as a country so long as the magistrate fails to recognize Jehovah as God and Christ Jesus as the King over this nation. The religious liberty that is enshrined in the Constitution is antithetical to the foundation of the moral law of God. You cannot have the first amendment and the first commandment at the same time. If you want to know why we are living under the just judgement of a holy God as a people, that is why. You must be a people that is praying for and calling for the magistrate to bend the knee to King Jesus and renew the covenant “to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book.”

But the responsibility of covenant renewal does not simply lie within the civil magistrate, it lies within the people as well. You and I and all peoples on this earth bear the responsibility of covenant renewal before the Lord. King Josiah, when he made the public declaration of covenant renewal, did not do it in secret but instead

did it in the plain sight of all the people. Josiah stood before the people and read to them the book of the law so that there was no excuse among the people for not knowing what was required of them as individuals and as a nation. And then following the reading of the law we see that covenant renewal ceremony where the obligations of the covenant were made known clearly and concisely, “And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.” All the people stood to the covenant, meaning that they all took it upon themselves as their own. Friends we must do them same. We must stand to the covenant with Jehovah and make it our own. This is the responsibility of all of us, elders and member alike. Charles Simeon writes, “Ministers should labour by all possible means to bring their people to God: and every parent, or master of a family, should study to advance the eternal interest of those, who, by the providence of God, are committed to his care.”

But you may be thinking to yourself that this covenant is so strict and limiting, and you would be correct, but it is rightly so. It must be strict, because the law of God that you are commanded to obey is strict. The covenant which Josiah proposed was incredibly strict; they were to ‘keep God’s commandments, and testimonies, and statutes, yes, to keep them with all their heart, and with all their soul:’ but they did not object to the terms; instead, we are told ‘they stood to the covenant.’ Thus it should be with us also: the most self-denying commandment should not appear grievous, but ‘holy, and just, and good:’ and we should humbly submit to it without any limitations or reserves. And we shouldn’t be concerned or discouraged to do this by the degeneracy of the times: for the state of religion cannot be any lower than it was in the days of Josiah: and, even if it were, that would only be a reason for our more earnest efforts in the cause of God. Friends, you must see the need for covenant renewal arising from the sinful wickedness within our

land and within your own hearts, and that must drive you to the only one who can provide the remedy. It is good to oblige ourselves to our duty with all seriousness, and this is especially right after times of backslidings to sin and decays in that which is good. Cry out to the Lord in humble repentance, plead with the Spirit to remove every iniquity, and commit yourselves to stand upon the law of the Lord for this is the act of covenant renewal.

So after considering the need for covenant renewal and the act of covenant renewal, let's turn our focus to consider the effect of covenant renewal. Covenant renewal is an act of public repentance, and therefore necessitates bearing out the fruit of that repentance. Covenant renewal is not simply a recognition of sin and a verbal commitment to obey the law of the Lord, but it is an act that carries with it certain effects. And we see one of those effects in verse 4, "And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the Lord all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel." The act of covenant renewal would have meant nothing if it was simply a mere ceremony. The act of covenant renewal would have meant nothing if Josiah would have allowed the altars to false gods to remain. The act of covenant renewal would have meant nothing if the idols that had defile the temple of God had been left standing. King Josiah, being the righteous man that he was, would not stand for Jehovah to continue to be mocked by the blasphemies that had become common practice in Judah. And so the effect of covenant renewal seen in this text is that the monuments of idolatry, the high places dedicated to pagan gods, the altars upon which blasphemous sacrifices were made were utterly destroyed. The righteous magistrate must promote righteousness within his domain and seek out every effort to eradicate the land of wickedness, and that is precisely what Josiah does here. And it's interesting that not only did he command that the idolatrous artifacts be destroyed, but he then ordered that the ashes be brought

to Bethel. What a slap in the face to the practitioners of idolatry. He did this partly to show his abhorrency of them, and that he would not give the ashes of them a place in his kingdom; but also partly to pollute and disgrace that place which had been the chief seat and throne of idolatry.

May the Lord show us mercy by raising up a magistrate which will tear down the idols of our nation in acts of public repentance and covenant renewal. This is their duty, to be a terror to evil doers, and what is more evil than for the magistrate to allow blasphemous pagan worship to continue within their land. God requires the eradication and destruction of idolatry from the land. It is the duty of the magistrate to purify and cleanse the land from all forms of idolatry. Our Confession of Faith states that it is the magistrate's duty "to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed; and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed." This is why we must continue our efforts to see the United States Constitution amended to recognize King Jesus as Sovereign over this nation and to see the blasphemous first amendment which allows all sorts of perversions and idolatrous religions to be freely exercised under the guise of religious liberty. The fact that the Satanic Temple is allowed to even operate in this nation, much less the fact that they are permitted to erect their statues and moments across the land, ought to sicken us. The fact that mosques are being built in nearly every metropolitan area throughout the country ought to sadden us. The fact that synagogues can be found nearly everywhere ought to disgust us. And the fact that our civil magistrate promotes and protects these false religions, these synagogues of Satan, these bastions of blasphemy ought to anger us with a righteous anger. If Jehovah were to see fit to bring about this nation to repentance, to bring about a covenant renewal in our land, then the effect we would see should be the absolute destruction of

the idolatry that has plagued our land. Friends, without this our covenant renewal would mean nothing.

And dear brothers and sisters, the effect of covenant renewal must be present in your lives as well. It is not enough to simply profess with your lips that you will keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, but you must carry it out in your lives as well. The idolatries that plague our land are not simply the idolatries of the unbelieving world, but the idolatries of our own hearts as well. What is an idol in your life which you have been hesitant to tear down? Has money and wealth and success become an idol in your life? Do you elevate it to a place of honor which it does not deserve? Then tear it down. Repent of your greed and idolatry and turn to Jehovah who is far greater than anything riches could provide. You cannot serve God and mammon. Has fame or notoriety or status become an idol in your life? Do you care more about what others think of you than what the Lord of all Creation does? Then tear it down. Repent of your self-centeredness and vanity and turn to Christ Jesus who humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant. Proverbs 16:18-19 says, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud." Has your notion of having the ideal family become an idol in your life? Does the desire for perfection prevent you from loving your wife as Christ loved the Church or from submitting to your husband out of love and respect for his God-appointed authority? Does your desire to have your children perfectly obedient cause you to provoke them to anger? Then tear it down. Repent of your sin and turn to the Heavenly Father who has adopted you into His family and commands you to love your family as He loves you. Your covenant renewal must not be mere formalism, it must not be just for show. If your covenant renewal does not lead to the destruction of idolatry in your life in an effort to truly live out the obligations of the covenant, then it is in vain. Tearing down idolatry is the effect of covenant renewal.

Brothers and sisters, the time for covenant renewal is now. We as a nation are on the cusp of absolute destruction by a holy and just God who will not hold back in the day of wrath. Call upon the civil magistrate to repent of their sins and turn to Christ Jesus. Petition them to recognize the crown rights of King Jesus over this nation. Carry forth the example that was set by those Covenanter pastors who stood before President Lincoln and called for him and the United States to bend the knee to Christ. We must be willing to do the same. We must bear testimony against the wickedness of this world, against the magistrates that are upholding and promoting evils in our land, against the heathen among us who is seeking the destruction of Christ's Church. But do not forget that you are in need of covenant renewal as well. As you prepare to come to the Lord's Table next week, pray to the Lord to reveal to you those hidden sins which have continued for so long in your life and repent of them. You are called to examine yourselves, to prepare yourselves to come and partake of the sacrament of communion in a worthy manner. You cannot partake worthily while unchecked, unrepentant, sin remains within you. Tear down the idols and high places in your life which have taken the place which only the Triune God of the universe deserves. Renew your covenant with Jehovah and stand to it.