



# Righteousness

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Scripture: [2 Kings 22-23](#)

Series: [Open \(18/50\)](#)

By: [Colin Smith](#)

## 2 Kings 22-23

Happy Mothers' Day! Please open your Bible at 2 Kings 22.

We are following the story of how the blessing of God will come to the world. God said to Abraham, "I will bless you and in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed," (Genesis 12:2-3). So, we are following the story of the line of Abraham.

Then, a thousand years later God said that he would raise up an offspring of David, and that his throne and his kingdom would be established forever (2 Sam 7:12-16). So, now we are following the line of David.

We saw last week that after the reign of Solomon, God's people divided. Ten of the twelve tribes in the north broke away from the line of David. They declared independence. They broke away from the promises of God.

The northern kingdom continued for 200 miserable years through the reigns of 19 kings. I say miserable because out of the 19 kings, none of them was godly. They all did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

The last of these kings was Hoshea. We looked at his story last week and saw how the northern kingdom collapsed completely. The entire population was deported.

Today, we follow the story of the southern kingdom, usually referred to as Judah. Just two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, continued under the reign of kings from the line of David. These people also sinned greatly, and great disaster came on them as well.

As we will see next week, the southern kingdom also collapsed. God's people became exiles in Babylon. But God was faithful to his promise. And after 70 years in exile, he brought his people back to the Promised Land.

The story we are looking at today comes after the collapse of the northern kingdom, but before the collapse of the southern kingdom and the exile. We are about 600 years before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are looking today at the story of Josiah.

### Josiah's Family Background

Josiah's background was broken, dysfunctional and abusive. His grandfather was a king by the name of Manasseh.

Listen to what God says about him:

*...Manasseh king of Judah has committed these abominations and has done things **more evil** than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and **has made Judah also to sin** with his idols. (2 Kings 21:11)*

So, Josiah's grandfather, Manasseh, was not only more evil than other kings, but more evil than the Amorites, who God had driven out from the land in the time of Joshua. If God judged the Amorites for their sins, how could he restrain judgment when his own people were doing things that were worse?

What were these abominations?

First, "he built altars for the host of heaven in the two courts of the temple," (2 Kings 21:5). Other kings had set up idols, but Manasseh set up idols in the temple of the Lord!

Second, "he burned his son as an offering," (2 Kings 21:6). Josiah's grandfather was an abuser, a man of unspeakable cruelty and evil.

Manasseh reigned for 55 miserable years, and after him came Josiah's father, a man by the name of Amon.

*Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. (2 Kings 21:19)*

Why did he reign just two years?

The answer is in verse 23:

*And the servants of Amon conspired against him and put the king to death in his house. (2 Kings 21:23)*

So, Josiah's father Amon died a violent death at the age of 24. Josiah was just 8 years old when his father died. Therefore, he was left with his mother, a remarkable woman named Jedidah (2 Kings 22:1).

So here we have a single mother bringing up a little boy. His father died in a brutal murder. His grandfather was a notorious abuser.

Put yourself in Jedidah's shoes. What hope would you have for your little boy? What chance does he have if his father dies in a brutal murder when he is just 8 years old? What kind of man will this boy become?

Today, we are looking at a story that is especially appropriate for Mothers' Day. Out of this dysfunctional abusive family came a godly son, who was raised by a single mother.

*His mother's name was Jedidah...And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left. (2 Kings 22:1-2)*

I hope that this story will be an encouragement to all of us today and especially to every mother. You never know what God will do in the life of a child.

Some of you have come from families that are deeply scarred—drugs, violence, alcoholism, neglect. You worry that what was in others in your family line might also be in you. The more you find out about your family line the less you wish you knew.

Let Josiah be an encouragement to you. God is able to take a person from the worst background and to transform that boy, girl, man or woman by his marvelous grace.

I have chosen the word 'Righteousness' for our title today, because Josiah gives us a model of a righteous life. Josiah shows us what it looks like to live a good life that is pleasing to the Lord.

I want to give you three encouragements from his story:

### **1. Seek the Lord Early**

*For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father. (2 Chronicles 34:3)*

Here we have a timeline of Josiah's life. Josiah's father died when he was just 8 years old. That was when Josiah became king, although clearly, the royal house would have run the country on his behalf.

In the eighth year—that is at the age of 16—Josiah began to seek the Lord. It is never too early to seek the Lord. Josiah got serious about seeking the Lord when he was a teenager.

We are not told why he sought the Lord. Perhaps he learned how sin had destroyed lives of his father and his grandfather. But whatever the reason, Josiah wanted to be different, and he knew that he needed the help of God.

And so, he began to pray. He looked for people who walked with God, and that shaped the entire direction of his life.

Let me say this especially to younger people today: What you pursue now will shape the person you will become. If you go on pursuing what your pursuing now, what kind of person will you become? So, seek the Lord early!

## 2. Receive God's Word

Here is the obvious question that arises at this point. If you are seeking God, how are you going to find him? Maybe you say, 'I want to be different. I don't want to continue the things that have been passed down the line in my family. I want to change, and I know I need the help of God, but how do I find him?'

If you would pursue life that is pleasing to God, receive God's word.

But how was Josiah to do this?

He has no Bible training to draw on. His father and grandfather had certainly not taken him to Sunday school! He was growing up in a spiritually confused, idol saturated, biblically illiterate culture, and yet deep within his heart he had this longing to know God. 'I want to know God but how do I find him?' That is the question that Josiah faces in his teenage years.

What follows is a wonderful story of how God broke into Josiah's life.

Josiah knew that God was to be worshipped at the temple in Jerusalem, he decided to repair the house of God (2 Kings 22:5). That would take money, and he raised funds through taxes that were collected at the temple (2 Kings 22:4)

Verse 3 tells us that in Josiah's eighteenth year (age 26), he sent his secretary, to visit the high priest in the temple:

*Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may count the money that has been brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people. (2 Kings 22:4)*

The money would have been held in some kind of vault in the temple, and when Hilkiah went into the vault to count it, he discovered a dusty old book!

*And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD." (2 Kings 22:8)*

What a surprise! The high priest has found the Bible in the temple.

The book of the law that he discovered was the book of Deuteronomy. The first thing a king among God's people was to do was to write out a personal copy of this book.

*And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them. (Deuteronomy 17:18-19)*

Instead of being on the king's nightstand, it was lost in a vault in the temple.

How did the Bible get lost?

It's not hard to imagine. The book of Deuteronomy roundly condemned the things that Manasseh was doing in his 55-year reign. If the priests had preached from the Bible, they would have found themselves on a collision course with the king. So, they put the Bible away in the vault, and got on with the job of running the temple without it.

Think about this: For years, Hilkiah was able to run the entire program of the temple without ever needing to open the Bible. Good administration, attractive programs, and tell a few stories that make them feel good about themselves: They will go home happy and be back at the temple for worship next week.

You don't need the Bible to do that. A ministry that is calculated to affirm you won't pierce your conscience humble your pride or challenge your lifestyle.

But after a generation, you have kids like Josiah growing up who want to know God, and they don't know where to find him! Even in the temple the Bible had been lost.

Maybe that was your experience. You were seeking God and you went to church, but the Bible was rarely opened. If it was read it was never explained, and you were left with a great hunger in your soul.

That's where Josiah was. He was seeking God, but he did not know where to find him. But then the secretary turned up with the long-lost Book of the Law!

Here is what we find today: If you have a heart to seek the Lord, you will find Him through His Word. The Bible is the Word of God. When God's Word is opened, God's voice is heard.

*Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king. When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. (2 Kings 22:10-11)*

Josiah is hearing the Word of God for the very first time. Don't be surprised if the first effect of God's Word in your life is to make you feel like tearing your clothes. When you see the life to which God calls you, you will see how far you are from it, and how far you are from Him. You will begin to say, 'Why did I not know this? Nothing in my life conforms to what God requires of me!'

The Word of God lit a fire in Josiah's life, and he determined that he would put what God had said into practice. This vision gripped his mind and soul: By God's grace, I will live a life that honors Him.

When DL Moody came to England. An evangelist there said to him “the world is yet to see what God will do with a man who is wholeheartedly given to him.” Moody said, “By the grace of God, I want to be that man.”<sup>1</sup>

Josiah wanted to be that man. So, he calls the people to meet with him at the temple, (2 Kings 23:2).

*And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. And the king stood by the 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 his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant. (2 Kg 23:2-3)*

*“...As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15)*

The best thing you can do for your children is to lovingly give them the Word of God. I know that many parents operate on the idea that we just want our kids to be happy and then they will make up their own minds about religion and all of that. They can’t make up their own minds on what they don’t know.

Without the Bible, Josiah was seeking God, but he didn’t know how to find him! He believed in the God of the Bible, but he did not know Him. But when he found the Bible, he came to know the God he was seeking.

If you want to live a fruitful life, immerse yourself in the Word of God. The Word of God is living seed; it will bring new life to you. It is milk and meat; it will sustain new life in you. The Word of God will teach you, guide you, lead you. It will give you strength, hope, peace and joy.

If you want to live a life like Josiah, a righteous life that was fruitful and so different from what came before, seek the Lord early and receive the Word of God into your life.

### **3. Stay Faithful Whatever the Outcome**

Josiah went throughout the country on a kind of “reformation tour.” Wherever he found idols, he destroyed them completely. It was the greatest onslaught against idolatry in the entire history of God’s people.

When he had gone through the south, Josiah even went to the north, much of which was desolate since God’s people had been deported. Josiah destroyed altars built in the time of Solomon, 300 years earlier (2 Kings 23:13). He found the golden calf that Jeroboam had set

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<sup>1</sup> Dorsett, Lyle W. *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D.L. Moody*. pg. 389

up in Bethel and destroyed it as well (2 King 23:14). There had been reforms before the time of Josiah, but none as radical as this.

Then we come to something surprising in this story.

Josiah sent a delegation to a prophetess; whose name was Huldah. You might expect that the prophetess—and she was a true prophetess—would be wildly enthusiastic about the destruction of all these idols, but the word she speaks is remarkably cool:

Speaking for the Lord, she says that judgment will still come:

*...behold I will bring disaster upon this place... (2 Kings 22:16)*

*But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall you say to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel...I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place." (2 Kings 22:18, 20)*

That is hardly a word of encouragement! Imagine a pastor who has served his church faithfully for 31 years. When he retires the church gives him a plaque to mark his lifetime of service.

'Thank you for all you have done,' the church chairman says, 'Obviously this church is going to die, but you kept it alive a little longer.' So, we have chosen a verse that we think is appropriate, "You shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place."

Why did disaster come after Josiah's reformation? They got rid of all the idols. Why didn't the judgement go away? If you look at the story carefully, you will see that the change came as a result of Josiah's personal intervention.

Notice the prominence of the word 'he' in chapter 23

**He** brought out the Asherah from the house of the Lord. (2 Kings 23:6)

**He** broke down the houses of the prostitutes. (2 Kings 23:7)

**He** removed the horses that the kings had dedicated to the sun...**He** burned the chariots of the sun with fire. (2 Kings 23:11)

**Josiah** took away all the abominations from all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel and **made** all who were present in Israel serve the LORD their God. All his days they did not turn away from following the LORD, the God of their fathers. (2 Chronicles 34:32-33)

Josiah made them serve the Lord! All his (Josiah's) days they did not turn from following the Lord. But what happened when Josiah died? The people returned to the ways they had followed before.

You cannot coerce faith. It is a work of the Spirit of God. A mom or a dad can lean on a child to try to get it to conform, but as Jesus said, “Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” (John 3:3)

Jeremiah, who spoke the Word of God during the reign of Josiah, says, “Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but **in pretense**, declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 3:10).

These people professed faith so long as Josiah was around, but when he was gone, they chose a completely different path.

Is that you? A life of pretending. Pretend one thing with parents another with friends? One thing at work another at home, another at church? If all you do is conform to the expectations of others, when you are with a different crowd you will be a different person. And in the end, you won't know who you are.

True righteousness can only come from a heart that has been changed by God, and that is why God promised a new covenant:

*Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:31, 33)*

What do you know about that? What do you know of having a love for God in your heart that produces a desire to walk in a way that is pleasing to him? God is promising to do what no parent, church, program or state can ever do: Get His law into your mind and heart so that you want to do what he has commanded. When you want to do what you are called to do, then you will be truly free!

If you will come to Jesus Christ in faith and repentance today, he gives you more than his law. He will put a desire for righteousness in you. He will give you his Spirit so that you will desire to follow after all of his ways.

That is the promise of the new covenant. God has more to give you than His law. He gives you Himself. His Holy Spirit will create new desires and capacities in you.

When the Spirit of God gets hold of you, you will love God, and you will long for righteousness. You will pray, you will worship, and you will feed on God's Word. When you sin, you will soon feel a desire to draw near to Christ in confession and be forgiven



## **Conclusion: Josiah and Jesus**

Josiah is a model of what it means to live a life that is pleasing to God. He seeks God early. He receives the word of God, even when it hurts him. He stays faithful whatever the outcome.

But for all his zeal, he is not able to bring lasting change in the lives of the people he loves. The people give up the idols, but only for as long as he is around. Josiah could change the culture, but he couldn't change the people! He could take away the idols, but he couldn't change the heart that craved them. So, when he died, it was peace for him, but judgment lay ahead for his people.

I have been moved by the difference between Josiah and Jesus. Josiah, died in peace, but his people lived under the judgment of God. Jesus died under the judgment of God, and his people live in peace!

Only Jesus can take away the judgment of God from His people. Only Jesus can give you a new heart. Seek Him early. Receive His Word. Stay faithful to Him whatever the outcome, and you will be blessed.

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