

Living By the Book

Preached: 2/07/2021; 5th Sunday after Epiphany – Germantown;

Opening Scripture

Revelation 21:1-7

Scripture

2 Chronicles 34:1- 11

Is your life making a difference? Will the world be a better place because you were in it? I would guess that many people hope that their lives will make a positive difference on the world and the people in the world.

For the past few weeks we have been looking at the story of King Josiah. His story is recorded for us in the books of 2 Kings, and 2 Chronicles. The book of Kings is more of a historical record of the kings of Israel and Judah. We mostly get just the historical facts. The book of Chronicles is written with the intent to tell us more about the Spiritual life of the people of God. It tells us about the impact of the kings on the spiritual life of the people of God. We have seen that King Josiah lived his life in such a way that he had an impact on the world and the people around him – at least while he was alive. Josiah became king of Judah when he was 8 years old. Judah was in bad shape morally and spiritually when he became king. Josiah made 3 significant decisions as the leader of Judah. 1. When he was 16 years old, he made a commitment to Seek God. 2. When he was 20 years old he took action to purge the land from idols and false worship. And when he was 26 years old, he took steps to restore the worship of the true God of Israel. He gave orders to repair the temple which had fallen into disrepair. He grandfather, and father were both faithless, and encouraged the practice of idolatry, even bringing idols into the Temple which was set apart solely for the worship of God. The Temple had been neglected and misused and was in need of repair. Along with the decline in the spiritual life of the nation, immorality, dishonesty, corruption, injustice were widespread. A question that we must ask is, **How did things get so bad for God's people?** The answer is found in the story that we are looking at today. (We will conclude this study today).

Read Scripture: 2 Chronicles 34:14-33 (Set it up)

While the repair work was going on in the Temple, an unexpected discovery was made. As they were cleaning up the Temple, removing trash and idolatrous junk, the workers came across a book. It was given to the priest Hilkiah. He identifies the book as the Book of the Law. Hilkiah took the book and gave it to Shaphan, a secretary to King Josiah. He in turn brought the book to the king and read it. To understand the significance of this discovery, we must talk about the kind of relationship that God had with the people of Israel. In the Ancient near East, Powerful kings would often enter into a relationship with a group or nation of people. The nation may have been oppressed by another king or nation. When things got so bad, the oppressed people would cry out for help and deliverance from their oppressors. A "benevolent" king would respond to the cries for help and come and rescue the oppressed people from their enemy. They would then enter into a relationship with their deliverer. These relationships were known as Covenants. The Covenant would review all that the benevolent King had done for the people. He then would promise to be their king (or ruler). The people in turn would declare their allegiance to their new king and would promise to live according to the desires of their new king. The terms of the agreement would be written down in a document. This became known as the Book of Law, or book of the Covenant. The book was intended to remind the people on a permanent basis of how they were to live their lives as subject of the new King. It would be read periodically so the people would not forget. This ancient near eastern covenant becomes the pattern for God's relationship with Israel. The people of Israel were descendants of Abraham. God had made some promises to Abraham about his descendants. Later, after Abraham, Israel is enslaved in Egypt. They are oppressed greatly. They began to cry out for relief and deliverance. God responds to their cries and delivers them from the Egyptians. He then enters into a covenant relationship with them. God then promises to be their God. He will care for them, protect them and provide for them. It is His expectation that the people will be His people and will obey Him. The terms of the covenant are written down by Moses. **Exodus 24:3: "When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice, Everything the Lord has said, we will do. Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said."** The books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy comprise the book of the Law which was to guide the people of Israel. These books contain promises of blessing if they will obey and promises of severe judgment if they disobey the Lord and turn their backs on Him. This was the book of

the Law, or the book of the Covenant that was to guide the behavior and worship of the people. This was the book that was found during the renovations of the Temple. We can say that the book of the Law that was lost was the Bible. They lost their Bible! How could such a thing happen. We have already learned about the grave sinfulness of kings like Manasseh and Amon. They preferred to worship the gods of the nations surrounding them. They neglected and ignored the words of the Book of the Law. Eventually the book got put aside and no longer guided the lives of the people.

When the workers found the book, they brought it to King Josiah and read it to him. When Josiah hears the words of the book, his response is immediate. His response is dramatic and sincere. His first response was to **tear his clothes**. This was a response of remorse. He now understands the Lord's anger with His people. He **recognizes the authority** of the Book. The book was intended to be taken seriously as a guide for living, and the people have ignored it. **Great is the LORD's anger that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book."** He seeks wisdom. He instructs his advisors to find prophet who can instruct him about this book and how he should respond. They find a prophet named Huldah (a woman) who informs him that God is going to carry out the judgments contained in the book, but will spare the nation as long as Josiah is ruler. She commends Josiah for His response to the words of the book. **He humbled Himself**. He repented on behalf of the nation for their sinfulness and for turning away from their God. And finally He **Renews his commitment to obey the book. (vs. 29 – 32) and he encouraged all the people to do the same.**

The written book of the Law, or book of the Covenant was foundational to Israel's relationship with God. When it was neglected and ignored, the people of God were easily led into sin by corrupt leaders. As they rebelled against God's written law, they brought judgment on themselves. Josiah recognized that Judah was in danger because of their choice to reject the teachings of the Bible. He recognized that the only way God's people could experience his hand of blessing and favor was to repent and renew their promise to the Lord, to be obedient to His teachings.

As we have been doing throughout this series, we ask the "So What" question. What does this have to do with us. I suspect that some of you have already made the connection between this story and our life as the people of God. We must not miss the significance of this story. For us, our book of the Law, or Book of the Covenant is the Bible. Just as Israel was to be a "People of the Book", so we who call ourselves Christians must be "People of the Book." Our story and experience is similar to that of Israel. The Bible talks about our life **before Christ as a life of slavery to sin and evil**. God has seen the agony of our souls and has come into the world to rescue and **delivers us through the work of Jesus on the cross**. Jesus died on the cross to cancel the debt of sin and to break the power of sin over us. When we put our faith in Jesus God makes us His own people. In Romans 8 we learn that when we become a believer in Jesus, God adopts us into His family, **He makes us His own**. Just as in the case of Israel, **God becomes Our God, and we become His people**. And once we enter into that covenant with God, our lives are to be guided by Him. The **terms of our relationship with Him are spelled out in the book of the Covenant** – the Bible.

Sadly in my opinion, many people – even those who identify themselves as Christians – do not have a proper understanding of the Bible and its importance in our lives. For many people the Bible is only a book of stories. For many people the teachings of the bible are optional. People would still rather choose what they believe to be right and wrong, rather than follow the clear teachings of Scripture. **"I want what I want, when I want it."** They understand that the teachings of the Bible are old fashioned and out dated. But listen to this description of the Bible: ¹⁶ **All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,** ¹⁷ **so that the servant of God^[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17).** God's people must once again **accept the Authority of the Bible**, must understand that it is intended to be a guide for our lives, must understand that if we follow the teachings of the Bible we will be blessed, but if we neglect the teachings of the Bible, that we do so at our own peril.

Where is your Bible? Have you lost the Bible? You probably know where to find your Bible. You may own several copies. But has the Bible been lost in that it now longer impacts the way you live, the choices you make, the things you believe about God, and salvation.

Josiah made a commitment to understand the words of Scripture and to live by them. I encourage you to follow his example and make such a Commitment.

There is a song we used to sing as Children:

The B – I – B – L – E, yes that's the book for me
I'll stand alone on the word of God
The B – I – B – L – E!