

The Purge from Idolatry

Preached: 1/17/2021; 2nd Sunday after Epiphany – Germantown;

Scripture

2 Chronicles 34:1-8

Message

The Purge

We have recently started a new year. At the beginning of a new year, many people will make New Year's Resolutions. They commit themselves to develop a new habit, or make a life style change. Lose weight. Watch less TV. Read more books. Learn a new skill. It is a good practice. Sadly for many people, New Year's Resolutions do not last long. In order for us to keep a New Year's resolution, we may have to do some things that will contribute to success. We may have to **purge our lives** of somethings. If you want to eat less chocolate, then you have to get rid of the chocolate (give it to your grand kids, or the neighbors kids). If you want to stop smoking, get rid of the ash trays and stop buying cigarettes. If you want to drink less alcohol, then get rid of your stash. If you want to lose weight, get rid of the twinkies. If you want to stop cussing, then..... well I don't know what you have to get rid of to do that. Maybe avoid other people or stop watching the news. Making positive changes **may require getting rid of the bad things that will trip you up and cause you to fail.**

Last week we started a study from the Old Testament of the life of Josiah. At the age of 8, Josiah was made the King of the kingdom of Judah. Judah was the southern portion of what had at one time been the nation of Israel – God's people whom He had rescued and delivered from slavery in Egypt. In spite of God's goodness and mercy toward them, the nation of Israel was rebellious and sinful. So God caused the nation to be divided into two nations. The northern nation was called Israel. The southern nation was called Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel was governed by evil kings who led the people into sin and idolatry. God warned them to repent but they did not. So God allowed them to be captured and carried off into captivity by the nation of Assyria. The southern kingdom of Judah was governed by descendants of King David. David was a good king. He loved God and worshiped him. He led the people in living according to God's commandments. However some of the kings who followed him were not as faithful. They followed after the ways of the northern kingdom of Israel. They were rebellious and sinful. They served other gods and images. But some of their kings were good kings and tried to influence the people to abandon their sinful ways and idolatrous practices. Josiah was one of those good kings. As a matter of fact he was the best king of God's people after David.

When Josiah became king, God's people were **far from God**. His grandfather, King Manasseh had filled the country with sin and evil. He promoted the worship of false gods and idols. Later in his life he had a spiritual turnaround. He repented of his sin and turned back to God. He tried to undo the evil he had done. He tore down altars that had been used to worship idols. But the sin of idolatry was so deeply ingrained in the hearts of the people, that they did not go along with his reforms. They continued to worship idols. When Manasseh died he was replaced by his son Amon. Amon took the country back into sin and idolatry. He only reigned for 2 years. When he died he was replaced by his son Josiah, the 8 year old boy king. Last week, as we introduced Josiah, we learned that he was a good king. As good as his ancestor David. He stayed on the straight and narrow, "**...not turning to the right or the left.**" As the writer, the Chronicler, tells us about Josiah's life, he tells us about **3 decisions** that Josiah made. They serve as **mileposts** along the way of Josiah's spiritual journey. The first milepost comes when he is 16 years old. "**In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David.**" We don't really know anything about Josiah in those first 8 years of his reign. As I said his father, Amon was an evil, idolatrous king. Josiah may have been influenced by his father's example. But as we saw last week, at the age of 16 years old, he experienced a spiritual awakening. He made a decision to seek God, to live his life in relationship with God, guided by the teachings of God's commandments.

The second milepost comes when Josiah is 20 years old. (Verse 3 b) "**In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem**" He began a "clean up mission". It appears that Josiah desired that the spiritual breakthrough that he had experienced when he was 16 years old would be felt throughout his kingdom. Josiah knew that if he and the nation of Judah were going to follow the example of King David and serve God, they would need to break free from the ways of his father Amon. In order for that to happen he would have to get

rid of things that the people used in their idolatrous lifestyle. The writer mentions 3 steps Josiah took to Purge the nation. He ***began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles and idols.*** He refers to “**High Places**”. For some reason people have a tendency to associate the heavens or skies as the abode of the gods. So they would erect altars and places to worship the gods on mountains and hill tops where they would be closer to the gods.. You would find these places of worship scattered throughout the country side. Many of the gods that the people worshiped were gods of fertility. If you appeased the gods, they would cause the land and the women to be fertile and productive. These high places would become locations for orgies, and prostitution. And as children were produced through these sinful practices they would be offered to the gods as sacrifices. Josiah knew these places were evil and sinful. So he destroyed them. He tore down the altars and burned them.

Secondly Josiah purged the nation of Asherah poles. Asherah was a Canaanite deity. The nations who lived in the land before God gave it to the people of Israel, worship this deity. Worshipers would erect poles at the places of worship where they would burn incense to the gods. In Josiah’s purge, he tore down these poles and burned them. They were places of evil and rebellion against the Lord who had rescued them and delivered them. **Thirdly** the writer mentions that Josiah’s purge included idols. The most prominent idol was known as Baal. Baal was the most significant god in the pantheon of Canaanite gods. He was the presiding deity in many localities. The Baals were the gods of the land, owning and controlling it. If you wanted the land to be fruitful then you must honor the Baal, worship it, offer incense and sacrifice, participate in sacred rituals again which often included sexual orgies and prostitution to please the Baal. In the text that we read, the writer tells us the steps Josiah took to purge the land from these idolatrous influences. It is interesting to note that Josiah’s reforms extended into what had been the northern kingdom of Israel. The people of Israel had been carted off into captivity. There is no more kingdom. So Josiah sought to bring the people who remained in Israel back to God through his reforms.

NOW, why do we have to learn about idolatry and purging idolatry from Judah in the time of Josiah?

We do not see these evil, idolatrous practices today do we? We are more intelligent, more advanced culturally, too sophisticated for that kind of behavior. **People in our day** would never consider the widespread misuse of sexual pleasure as it was seen in the days of Josiah in the practices of orgies, prostitution, sex trafficking. **People in our day** would never think of sacrificing children who are the products of the misuse of sex. **People in our day** would never consider compromising values of honesty and integrity in order to advance their standing in a community or in business or to pad their bank account. We wouldn’t see those things in our country, in our day? But in a recent article in CT, Bible teacher Christopher Wright stresses that ***“idolatry is alive and well, even if it often operates outside our conscious awareness.”*** He goes on to say ***“Obviously we give the idols different names. But as we analyze Baal worship in the Old Testament, comparisons aren’t hard to find....The Old Testament exposes idolatries of greed, sex, arrogance, and abuse of political and economic power.”*** All of which we see today.

What are the practices that need to be purged from our country in order to honor God as Josiah desired in his day? And what if we push this down a notch to a more personal level? Where do we see evidence of idolatry in our own lives. Whenever God is dethroned, and someone, or something else controls the choices that we make, or the lifestyle that we choose to live, we can conclude that idolatry is present. We need a Purging.

I am going to stop here for today. Next weekend, I want to come back to this study and talk about how we identify the powers that control us and how we detach ourselves from those powers. I want to encourage you to spend some time in reflection and prayer this week. Ask the Lord to open your eyes that you may see the reality of your life. Ask the Lord to begin to break down the strongholds that hold you in their grip.

Prayer.

There is an old hymn that we sing sometimes that may help us as we conclude this study today. I could not find a good recording of it to play, so I am just going to read the words. Make this your prayer this week. We do make the printed text of the sermon available on our website; www.germantowncog.org, so you will be able to find the words there if you want to review it.

Search me O God; written by J. Edwin Orr

1. Search me, O God, and know my heart today,
Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray;
See if there be some wicked way in me;
Cleanse me from every sin, and set me free.
2. I praise Thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin;
Fulfill Thy word and make me pure within;
Fill me with fire, where once I burned with shame;
Grant my desire to magnify Thy name.
3. Lord, take my life, and make it wholly Thine;
Fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine;
Take all my will, my passion, self and pride;
I now surrender, Lord, in me abide.
4. O Holy Ghost, revival comes from Thee;
Send a revival, start the work in me;
Thy Word declares Thou wilt supply our need;
For blessings now, O Lord, I humbly plead.

Amen

Benediction