

Rediscovering God's Law

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the passage we read in 2nd Chronicles chapter 34. 2nd Chronicles 34, let's read the first verse or two.

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

Well, anybody who knows anything at all about the Bible's morality, or the morality taught and required by the Bible, will acknowledge that as a nation ourselves, as a people, we are in something of a mess.

It's something that comes right from the top down, through the different layers, if you like, of society, where you find what the Bible refers to as immorality and immoral practice, and lifestyles not only practiced but commended.

We are in a moral mess, and we are in a moral mess basically because we have lost the Bible. Or to a great extent, people have lost the Bible from their consciousness.

[1 : 23] We'll see today that that's really what made such a great difference in the days of Josiah, that they found a copy of the law of God in the temple after they had begun to repair it.

And that gave a huge momentum to the work that Josiah had already started in reforming the practices of the people.

That discovery of the law of God, the book of the law, gave a huge momentum to the work that they had begun. The book of the law had been lost for a long time.

And that was one of the reasons that things were in such a bad way so often in Judah and Israel. And that's how it is with ourselves.

The more we lose the Bible from the consciousness of our people, or at least perhaps not from the consciousness in the sense that they know there is such a thing as the Bible, but in the sense in which it is no longer relevant, no longer consulted, no longer seen as a thing of any particular usefulness and relevance in today's world.

[2 : 38] I found it very significant that as I was preparing the sermon today, this appeared in the mail. That's from Christian Concern and the Christian Legal Center, their sister organizations.

We sent them a donation recently, and this came along with a letter of thanks from the director thanking us for the donation. It's called Gospel Freedom.

It's one of a number of booklets they produce, and I'm intending sending for some more just so that you can have them available yourself. It's Gospel Freedom, Christian Faith, and Its Place in Public Life.

And that's one of the reasons we support them, because they are committed to standing for Christian values, Christian principles in public life, where it is seen publicly as important and foundational.

I want to read to you just a couple of things from the introduction, and also from the final conclusion of this little booklet, because it fits in very admirably with our study today of Josiah.

[3 : 42] It says, firstly, Britain has been known around the world as a bastion of democracy, tolerance, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion. Our love for freedom finds its roots in the Christian faith, which has strongly influenced the formation of our laws and society.

Yet, few will have failed to notice the almost continual stream of newspaper reports in recent years documenting the stories of ordinary Christians who have lost their jobs, been investigated by the police, or been penalized as a result of expressing their Christian faith in the public sphere.

And then the booklet goes on to give you many examples, actual factual examples, of that sort of thing happening throughout the country. This is how the booklet concludes.

It is absolutely vital that, as Christians, we continue to live out our faith in public, and continue to share the gospel with others.

We must not be deterred from continuing such a public witness, and must not be deterred from being a witness to Christ by any fear of the consequences.

[5 : 00] We are called to follow Jesus' command, go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, and whoever does not believe will be condemned.

That's from the gospel of Mark. Then it says this, In the long term, the only way to guarantee the survival of religious freedom in the UK is for the gospel to advance, and for the nation to return to Jesus.

That is exactly the kind of situation you find in the days of Josiah. And that's why the study of Josiah, and all of these portraits in the gallery of the kings, as we've been seeing, hopefully all along, are so incredibly relevant to our circumstances today.

And have so much to tell us and to speak to us about, in regard to our responsibilities in that world in which we live. Because that's where, as this booklet so clearly emphasizes, that's where our witness has to be lived out.

That's where our Christian standing has to be seen, and where it has to be made known. That is why it's so important that we take note, and learn from the Bible's teaching, of these sort of issues in the days of Josiah, as we'll see now in this particular context.

[6 : 25] Two things. First of all, Josiah's personal seeking of God, just briefly, and then more fully, Josiah's public service for God. Now, he began to reign when he was eight years of age.

And then we're told that when, in the eighth year of his reign, when he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David, his father.

And then in the twelfth reign, he began this purge of idolatry. When he was sixteen, he began seriously to seek the Lord.

And, notice it says, he began. That tells us that, seeking the Lord, a life of being serious about God, is really what seeking the Lord means.

Because sometimes we think that, seeking the Lord is just making an inquiry, as to how to go, how we go about being saved. That's part of it. But that it just ends, at the point that we begin the Christian life, that then our seeking is over.

[7 : 29] Because we have found the Lord, or come to know the Lord, and therefore the seeking part of it, it really ends there, and something else takes over. What this is telling us is that, seeking the Lord is, a lifetime's activity, for the Christian, for the believer, for everyone who follows the Lord.

Seeking the Lord is not just what you do, when you're coming first of all, seriously to think about Him, and to get to know Him. You are seeking the Lord, if you're living as a Christian, that's your daily business, seeking Him.

You seek Him in His Word, you seek Him in prayer, you seek Him in worship, everything you do, you could say, can be summarized, as a life that is God-seeking. And therefore, every single aspect, of life for us today, has to be, a context, in which we fit, into which we fit, the seeking of the Lord, for ourselves.

You cannot detach, what you're doing, publicly or privately, if you really want to be, serious about God, and about living as a Christian. You can't detach that, from what the Bible here calls, seeking of the Lord.

That's what, for Josiah, began at a very early stage. He began, seriously seeking the Lord, at age 16. And that's something, which itself makes, a very important point for us.

[8 : 57] There are many people, I'm sure in Josiah's day, there were many, teenagers of your life, that he was then, at 16 or even younger, who were seeking, other things than the Lord.

There have been many people, in Judah, of Josiah's own age group, that were just living, to have a good time, to enjoy life to the full, without God, without being serious, about God.

And you'll find that, very commonly, of course today, not every 16 year old, by any means, today is in church. Not every teenager, is serious about God.

Most probably, in our country are not. There are serious about, having a good time, about getting drunk, every weekend, about that sort of activity, which seems to them, to really be, what life is about.

And Josiah gives us, an alternative to that, and it's not just, an alternative, it's the only, acceptable alternative, really, if we are, serious about life, and what life is about, then we seek the Lord.

[10 : 03] We go on seeking him, throughout our adult life. Some people, you know, think that, it's, it's, it's, um, better to have something, like a, Saul of Tarsus experience, on the way to Damascus, where the Lord, dramatically appeared to him, and where there was, a dramatic experience, of him turning to the Lord, and coming to know the Lord.

And some people have the idea, that actually, that's a better thing, than beginning to follow the Lord, slowly, quietly, deliberately, when you're young, and just gradually, moving on from there.

It's not. It's just as remarkable and just as much praise to God for a young person, even younger than Josiah to begin seeking the Lord and to follow on from there to live for him it is just as commendable, just as noteworthy just as much a praise to the grace of God as a dramatic conversion in later life and that's why it's so encouraging to be part of a congregation that has so many young people in it and so many young people serious about God and so many people in their young days turning to follow the Lord giving their lives to Christ, following him that is hugely encouraging it's not just encouraging for me as a preacher of the gospel it's encouraging because we want to find signs of hope for our society we want to find signs of hope that some of our things will change and by the grace of God they will be changed and that's one of the things that gives us a glimmer of hope that there are young people not just here but in other parts of our nation that have turned to the Lord that are not afraid or are not ashamed of the gospel of their relationship with Christ that are open about that that are witnessing to their own age group and to older ones as well that are taking responsibilities even in the church and in the activities of the church wonderful praiseworthy praiseworthy to God that is and it's something that we hope to see increasingly it's a thing that fills us with encouragement and I want to just encourage you young people who are here today and all the other young people who are following the Lord that may not be here today to continue to seek the Lord to continue to be serious about God to continue what you have begun to follow the path that you're now on because increasingly as you grow up and you're aware of it already you're going to come across alternatives you're going to come across temptations to go away from that path of obedience to turn to alternative lifestyles or to change as we'll see in a minute your understanding of the Bible itself to fit in things which the world says are acceptable or which other Christians might say are acceptable

I'll counsel to you is don't give in to that don't actually yield to that temptation you know what the Bible is you know it's the word of God you know it's not open to adjustments just to fit in people's thinking of what life should be like so don't be deterred as we read from that booklet in the last part of it let me just read it again and make the point for the young folks too it's not just for them but it says here that we must not be deterred not be put off from continuing such a public witness we must not be deterred from being a witness to Christ by any fear of the consequences so whatever comes to your mind from Satan from the world from whoever that says to you well you know if you become a Christian fully if you become a Christian openly there will be consequences yes the Lord tells you that you don't need Satan to tell you that and some of the consequences are that there will be difficulties but there are a lot more difficulties in your life without Christ than a life with Him never forget that because whatever difficulties you have with Christ in your life you have Him to take the weight of it without Him you have to carry it yourself and that's what we have to keep on understanding and accepting and believing in that that is what Christ is for

He's for us He's for us as we live in this world and look forward to the next He's for us as He was for Josiah someone to seek someone to keep on following throughout all life's context and I hope that that's one of the things that our Christianity Explored course will fit into that people who in their heart even if they haven't made it yet known to anybody else really want to be serious about God and want to really follow the Lord properly and fully that that course will help towards that that's why we're commending it that's what it's designed to do and to be a help towards all of us coming to a greater level of understanding and of commitment about what it means to seek the Lord to be serious about God and to have a life that He is pleased with so Josiah and his personal seeking of God that's the first point that's made and it's really on that that everything else that follows was a consequence of that it's because

[16 : 13] Josiah from his young days put the Lord first and was serious about God it's from that that his reforms then developed it's from that that he saw the need to change things in the country and the nation and that's why he said about his public service for God which we'll see more fully first of all he said about destroying idolatry verses 3 to 7 from the end of verse 3 there through to verse 7 now you look through these details you can see this was the most thorough attempt to remove idolatry from the people of Judah ever Josiah is one of the great kings in the history of Israel and Judah that's why Chronicles and 2nd Kings gives them such a lot of emphasis and one of the reasons for that is this amazing program of reform and change that he set about in the country and the nation and you can see that what he was doing was very public indeed and to the extent that even the Asherim which were kind of statues or poles that were used in pagan worship that the people had of course as we saw taken in and even after

Manasseh had changed in the latter part of his reign yet his son Ammon who was Josiah's father he reversed all that again back to paganism back to that style of life and worship well Josiah he didn't just destroy them he didn't just dismantle them he ground them to powder he went to the extent of just grinding all of these things down to the finest dust and then he scattered that dust over the graves of people from a previous generation who had died and had been serving these images in other words he was publicly it seems from this that what he was really saying from that is I as the king I'm repudiating I'm absolutely rejecting publicly all that our ancestors did by way of idolatry I'm scattering this on their grave to show that I dissociate myself entirely from that form of worship from that lifestyle this is not going to be for me and for you as my people anymore how we live that's what it showed he was determined that he would show publicly that that had to be put into the past and left in the past and a new life begun and that really is that really is what you do when you come to know the

Lord when the Lord changes your life he doesn't just take certain aspects of it and change them but leave some others the way they were he makes you a new creation the old life is ground to powder it's past you've got your back to it it's no more to feature in the way you live I know we're not perfect of course everybody sees and those of us who are Christian things which ought not to be there we all know ourselves privately that we sin against God that we need his forgiveness every day but the fact is the past lifestyle with that sin so dominant as the ruling principle of life that's gone that's been ground to powder by the grace of God by the power of God and the spirit of God has taken over the energy of our lives to fight against sin to go on seeking the Lord but you know that's why this is one of the reasons as you look at the details there of how thoroughly

Josiah set about this changing things from the way they were to how they should be in relation to God that's why it's important as this booklet reminds us that freedom is important in terms of our evangelism as much as anything else what is said there is perfectly true the only way we're going to see the nation change is for people to be changed and for people to be changed it means that there is a liberty given to those who live for the gospel to preach the gospel to witness to the gospel and to seek to convert people or have people converted by the grace of God because there is a huge momentum gaining at least momentum against what's called proselytizing that really means that you shouldn't as a Christian want a Jew to become a Christian or a Muslim to become a

Christian or a secular to become a Christian in a nation where everybody is equal where equality by the government in Westminster and Scotland are so is such a prominent thing on their agenda equality equality equality it means that all religions are equal and you're not really allowed to think of converting or the conversion of people from another religion to the one you follow you cannot be a Christian without witnessing to Christ and witnessing to Christ means you want others of other beliefs or none at all to come to know him that's conversion and the freedom to evangelize is being itself clamped or if you like it's being hampered people are being arrested at times for actually mentioning that the

[22 : 14] Bible teaches homosexuality is wrong just to actually pick on one issue that's current at the moment that's what the Bible clearly teaches and people have been arrested for saying publicly that this is what the Bible teaches that's not liberty that's not liberty of speech nor is it liberty of religion because the Christian religion while we're tolerant of other religions in the sense that we allow people a right to believe what they want to believe but it doesn't mean you leave them alone or that you want them to stay as they are unconverted unsaved following false gods your freedom of religion is certainly important but the freedom to evangelize within our religion is vitally important and as that booklet says and as it's based on the Bible's own emphasis that is something that

Christ has given us a mandate for and the mandate means we must have a liberty to evangelize evangelizing in the sense of bringing people from whatever belief they have into believing in Christ go into all the world said Jesus it didn't just go to those who are already in the church or go to those who believe already go into all the world go to all kinds of people to all kinds of beliefs to all kinds of philosophies to all kinds of false religions go to all the world and preach the gospel and tell them about me is what he means and baptize them in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit teaching them all things whatsoever that I have commanded you you cannot do that without evangelizing and whoever tells you you must not evangelize you have the right and you have the mandate from the king of kings from the

God of gods he has given it to you as a Christian don't let him down don't capitulate don't be deterred by the consequences because unless things change the fight for the gospel in our land has only just begun Josiah set about destroying idolatry and as part of that he then came to repair the temple which of course follows on from his purging of idolatry now we're not going to go into all these details but the singularly important thing is that they found the book of the law while they were bringing out the money verse 14 Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the Lord given through Moses now this was probably the book of Deuteronomy or some part of Deuteronomy because as we find the reaction of the king and his subsequent actions in the following chapters you can find quotations there or certainly references that appear to be from that book of

Deuteronomy and the book of Deuteronomy you remember is not the only place where the laws of God or regulations were given through Moses but it's the book especially where God just before the people went into the land of Canaan where he said to them if you are obedient to me I will bless you and I will bless the ground and I will bless your flocks I will bless you as a people you will have blessings abundantly if you disobey me then you will have curses instead of blessings they will be cursed in your homes in your families in your fields in your crops in your animals the lives they live will be blighted by God in judgment if they departed from him and when Josiah read this book or had this book read to him he realized this is what has happened he realized that for all of these years they had been disobedient as a people to God that's why he tore his clothes he was actually in anguish of spirit he realized this book of the law brought up a great guilt on their part against

God and therefore God had followed with his judgment these times of darkness these times of ideology they weren't just times when the people had gone away from God they were themselves part of the judgment of God that God had left them to this for such a long time that gave a huge impetus to his reformation it's important that we realized that his reformations had begun before they discovered the book of the law Josiah didn't turn around and say I can't really do much about this if our revival comes from the Lord then we will do something about it then and that's a lesson to ourselves until revival comes what do you do until you see an obvious change in our nation and in our people what do you do well you just go on serving the Lord seeking the Lord the way Josiah did you don't wait until you see a lot more evidence that things are changing you set about trying to make your contribution towards change here and now that's what

[27 : 53] Josiah did but it gave a huge impetus to what he had set in motion and it always will be the case it's when people come back to rediscover the Bible if you like that their whole outlook on life changes and for a people or for a nation or for any group of people that have come to realize what the Bible is after it having been lost for generations it's a huge impetus to change it builds in a massive amount of momentum towards things being changed not just for individuals but for a nation think of what happened at the reformation which came to Scotland in 1560 or was established certainly in 1560 for over a thousand years the church in the middle ages had been in darkness they'd lost the Bible people didn't have a Bible to refer to they depended on the priests to tell them what the Bible taught and the priests very often taught what the Bible didn't teach at all then came the reformation the movement by the

Spirit of God that brought the Bible back to the people and that was the emphasis that people like William Tyndale in translating the Bible actually gave to their work that's what they emphasized that they had in fact this as their aim as Tyndale put it that the plow boy in the field would have a better knowledge of the Bible than the priest in the sanctuary if you take the Bible away from people you get decline and decay and moral and spiritual darkness as people rediscover the Bible not just that it's there but discover it in terms of wanting to live by its teachings then that changes a society that's why this booklet emphasized that the only hope that things will change is that if people are changed if the nation returns to Jesus and if the nation is to return to the

Lord then first and foremost they have to discover the book of the Lord first God's great volume of teaching in the Bible you know that's why it's important or one of the reasons it's important why we keep hold in our conviction of the fact that this Bible is the word of God therefore it has an unmatched authority it has a supremacy over every other word over every other teaching I know people will see that as very arrogant to state such a thing and you'll find in today's world that secularism and even aspects of the church sections of the church and sections of people that call themselves Christian will say that's just not acceptable in today's society of equality with other religions that's where you find people who are confessedly Christian at least cutting out bits of the

Bible or adjusting bits of the Bible so that they can fit in things like a change in the definition of marriage the only way you see you can fit it into the Bible is to adapt or change what's in the Bible already or your understanding of what the Bible is or what it's about because people will say to us well yes I accept it's in the Bible literally but the Bible was written all of these centuries and millennia ago it can't possibly have the same relevance to us today that's true if the Bible is a human product only but if the Bible is God's word inspired by God breathed out by God for human benefit it doesn't matter what generation you belong to it's going to be relevant it contains the only rule to direct us the scriptures they are the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy it don't ever lose your conviction that the

Bible the entire Bible is the word of your God because if you do some way or other you're going to give in to the pressure that says ah but it's not relevant for this or it has to be changed in respect to this or that requirement today Luther in 1521 was called before the Holy Roman Emperor who was in charge if you like politically of most of Europe at the time and this was when Luther had come to public notice that he was rejecting the centuries of teaching of the church in regard to the Bible to salvation all these things and he was warned that he was challenging not just the Emperor but he was challenging the Pope he was challenging the church of the time he was challenging church councils that had taken place over the years he was also challenging a thousand years of church tradition by the views that he was setting out that's what

[33 : 31] Luther faced how did he respond what did he say to the Holy Roman Emperor to the most important man in Europe apart from the Pope he said this I do not accept the authority of Popes and councils for they have contradicted each other anyway he said my conscience my conscience is captive to the word of God my conscience is captive to the word of God that's what Josiah would have said not everybody in Judah would have been in favor of the extent to which he wanted to change things but that would have been his response I have no option because my conscience is captive to the word of God let's be careful we don't lose the Bible do I hear you saying oh well that surely won't happen with me

I'm a Christian I value the Bible I take it as God's word I believe it's teaching I want to apply to every area of my life yes so do I but you know it's possible to be as active even in church activities that you don't make enough time to seek the Lord using your Bible Bible you can lose the Bible even though you've got it in your possession even though you're using it in church even though you're reading it at home you can lose it in the sense that it doesn't have the proper effect upon your life let's be careful with that always give it the place that is due always be serious about it always use it prayerfully and regularly it is God's word to you it is God speaking to you it's God's great counsel to us so then he led finally a proper response to God's law

I'm just going to mention this briefly he showed us grief when he tore his clothes that's what the law of God does that's why we're saying part of the problem or one of the major features of the problems of our society is that people no longer know the Bible and teaching and especially the law part of it where God says this is what I require it's the law of God especially particularly that brings our sin to light and as it brings our sin to light the law then ushers us to the gospel to Christ as the answer to our need as sinners that's what's missing from our nation and what a difference it made that Josiah led this reform just think of the difference it would make if the prime minister or the first minister or their cabinets in their entirety or most of them even if they were to rediscover the Bible just imagine the difference it would make to our nation to our people to our society that it be led by people who were saying to those that they ruled over that elected them to government you know this is now our view that this

Bible that these Holy Scriptures are the rule for directing us how we should live as a people as a nation what great principles should actually govern our thinking in whatever way we want to make laws for our society what a difference that would make to the views of marriage of euthanasia of abortion of all the other horrors that you find have surfaced in our society why have they surfaced because the Bible's been lost because people don't live by it because our governments think it's an ancient relic it's okay for those who want that but leave it at that don't spread it by any means and if possible clamp down on those who would take it literally and want to evangelize in spreading its news if only we could see some grief on the part of our leadership that as a people for generations we've lost the Bible and acted accordingly and then

Josiah led this movement of reform where he wanted further inquiries and that interesting as well he didn't just leave it at the discovery of this book once he had heard its contents he wanted more information he sent to this prophetess and she gave a further insight into the teachings of the Lord it's interesting that that was his reaction he didn't think it was enough to know the book of the law and its teaching he wanted far more explanation that's what it does to you when you discover or have God come for by his blessing for you to rediscover his word even if it's been lying unused for many many years in your life when you really come to have it discovered again it's not enough for you to discover it you want to know more of it you want to get into its teachings you want to delve deeply into what it contains you want to explore further in other words you want to seek the Lord through it and he led a public rededication as you see in the final part of the chapter we didn't read that but I'll leave you to follow it through to read it for yourselves from verse 29 he gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem he went up to the house of the Lord with all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the

[39 : 44] Levites and he read in that hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord and the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the Lord publicly and you see in the end of the chapter Josiah took away all the abominations and all his days they did not turn away from following the Lord the God of their father sadly it didn't last after his days but all his days because of the thoroughness and the brilliance of his leadership under God that's the effect it had on the people pray today friends that as a people we will rediscover the Bible because rediscovering the Bible is the key to a reformation let's pray Lord we give thanks that your word is in our possession that we use it that you confirm it to be your word in so many ways we pray for our people too Lord that they might come again to rediscover your word its truth and its authority its relevance for our own age we pray this for our governments too for those who rule over us oh Lord lead them we pray to the scriptures grant that they may come to reverence them that they may come to live by them we pray in Jesus name

Amen Okay thank you