

## God's Law For Today - 2

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Date: 16 May 2018

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, for a short time, let's seek the Lord's help, and if we turn again to 2 Chronicles, where we read in chapter 34. I'm going to read some more verses just from verse 30.

That's 2 Chronicles chapter 34, and at verse 30. You can read from verse 29. The king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem, and the king went up to the house of the Lord with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests and the Levites, all the people, both great and small.

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 in his place 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 soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book.

Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin stand to it, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did, according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers.

Now, it was nearly a month ago since we began a series on God's law for today, was the title we gave it, looking at the relevance of God's law, by which we mean the moral law particularly, as found in the Ten Commandments.

[ 1 : 30 ] But last time we had an introductory study from 1 Timothy, looking at why we're doing this, looking at, first of all, the uncertainty among Christians themselves today as to the relevance of God's law, and even as to how it should be applied, and to what extent it applies, and what place does it have in the Christian life.

And then we saw, secondly, the need for it in regard to something we heard mentioned tonight in prayer and always do, and that is the state of our society, our nation, our people, and how far away from God's standard we have all come as a people, and therefore need to be brought back to the law of God, to the law of God, to the standard of God himself, to be that which, once again, we would pray would be found and followed by our people.

Now, tonight we're looking at God's law again as an introductory study once again, this time looking at how it's foundational to society, and how that comes across here in the days of Josiah, how the law of God, this book that was found in the temple as they were repairing it, came to be so instrumental in the rededication of Josiah and his people again to the Lord.

Our nation, as we heard, is in a mess. Many nations in the world are in a mess, but we in the Western world have had so many advantages down through the generations.

We've known blessing from God, we know many great privileges from God, even right up to the present time. But the Bible is a lost book to many people and for many of our communities.

[ 3 : 15 ] And as the Bible becomes a lost book, so people's lives show the consequences of that as they live godless, secular, unbelieving, ungodly lives.

And in Josiah's day, the situation that he faced coming to the throne as a young boy was one very similar, at least in respect to the way that the people had lost sight of and lost the practice of this book of the law, which was found here in the temple.

Manasseh, he reigned for 55 years. That was Josiah's grandfather, and he was followed for two years by Manasseh's son Ammon.

So for 57 years, though we do read in Chronicles of the conversion of Manasseh while he was in Babylon and how he found the Lord and sought the Lord and found the Lord.

So that at least in his own life personally, he changed and introduced changes then also in his own reign. But by the time his son Ammon had finished reigning, things were obviously in very bad shape.

[ 4 : 32 ] And the next king, and of course that's a great incentive to us to pray as well. Just like Hezekiah previously, we mentioned it recently, that he's given more space in the books of the Chronicles, in 2 Chronicles, than any other king apart from David and Solomon.

The reason for that, of course, is that he was a great reforming king. And this book of Chronicles, these books of the Chronicles, as we said then, they were instrumental in encouraging those who had come back from the exile.

This was written after the exile to encourage those who had come back from these 70 years in Babylon to build up again the community of faith of God in Jerusalem and to repair the temple and to reestablish that temple worship.

And so when Josiah came to the throne, he set about reforming the worship of God and repairing the temple as well.

And they made a crucial discovery. For some reason, this book of the law, it looks like it would have been the book of Deuteronomy. It had been left or lost sight of and disused, lying disused somewhere in the temple.

[ 5 : 52 ] And while they were carrying out these repairs and dealing with the money, they found it. It was found by the leaders at that time in the temple. And it was given to the king.

So when it came to the king's reading of the law, he discovered how badly short of God's standard the life of the people had been.

And how much they had sinned against the Lord. Now it's something of a mystery as to why the book of the law was not actually kept up or why it had to be rediscovered, how it had become lost. It probably hadn't been deliberately thrown aside or left abandoned. And in Deuteronomy chapter 31, we read that this book of Deuteronomy, it seems it means there, was to be read publicly every seven years during the Feast of Tabernacles.

Whether that had been something that had gone out of use, probably during the reign of Manasseh and Ammon, these practices would have not been kept up.

[ 7 : 01 ] And therefore, you can imagine how easily the book of the law itself would have gone into disuse and then lost altogether. But it was discovered here in the repairing of the temple.

And it had a huge impact on what Josiah had begun to do. And that book really was so instrumental in bringing the people together to seek the Lord and to actually reestablish themselves and rededicate themselves as a people to the Lord.

So, let's look at two things. First of all, Josiah's own personal seeking of the Lord. And we didn't read the beginning of the chapter, but at the beginning of the chapter, we read there that Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign.

And he reigned for 31 years in Jerusalem. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. In the eighth year of his reign, while yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father.

And in the twelfth year, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem. So, he came to the throne when he was eight. And then when he was 16, he began to seek the God of David his father.

[ 8 : 12 ] And then following that, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem, still as a young man. And that's so interesting and so important and so encouraging to ourselves that after such a long period of godlessness, of darkness, of abandoning the ways of the Lord, of the import of idolatry, and of all the things that had been excesses in the times of Manasseh and of Ammon, here is a new king and a new beginning and a new approach to the way of worship and of the service of the people to God.

And you see what it says there, that he began to seek the Lord. When he was in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father.

That's reminding us of something that's very important. We use this idea, this description of seeking the Lord, very often for those that we think are maybe not yet converted, or at least have not come to assurance or evidence that they are converted.

And we speak about people seeking the Lord in that sort of category. And there's probably nothing wrong at all with that. But seeking the Lord in the Bible is actually mainly about the people of God and their relationship to God.

He began to seek the Lord. In other words, this was something that began here and he carried on throughout the rest of his life. That's why we're here tonight. We're not here because we've ceased to seek the Lord, because we sought the Lord when we came to faith in Christ.

[ 9 : 54 ] And that's the end of our seeking. This is what we're doing in studying the Bible and praying to God. We are seeking the Lord. It's an active, ongoing activity and experience of God's people that they seek the Lord.

They have a daily seeking after him. They seek him, whether it's to pray about specific matters, whether it's to be together here for worship, whether it's on your own before the Lord.

It's all to do with seeking the Lord. Reading your Bible, you're seeking the Lord. Praying to God, you're seeking the Lord. Gathered for worship, you're seeking the Lord. So here's this young man, this boy.

He began to seek the God of David, his father. Now, many teenagers in Josiah's day would be no different to those of our own day, who would actually want to cram as much as possible into life and live life to the full.

Well, Josiah did that, but he did it in a way that distinguished him as a godly young man, as a man who sought the Lord, who actually put the Lord first in his life.

[ 11 : 05 ] And one of the encouraging things that we can see in the congregation is the number of young people that have already begun seeking the Lord, but also the number of young people that attend church services on the Lord's day, some of them still very, very young.

But that's what we're praying for, and that's what we ourselves are asking God to bring into their lives, this activity of seeking him. And we're praying that they will come to be themselves a generation that will be known as a God-seeking generation, a generation that seeks the Lord so that, as many of them will undoubtedly leave us to go to the mainland to study or to work or wherever it takes them away from the island, we pray that they will be seekers of the Lord before they leave, that they will carry that seeking of the Lord into however their career or life develops. And it's hugely encouraging for us to see them in church, but that's what we pray for. That's what we pray for them, that they will come to be themselves seekers of the Lord.

With all that that means, in all the breadth of Christian experience that that takes in, that they will come like Josiah in their youngest days to seek the Lord because he began then and he carried this through into the great work that he did for God.

And you'll find that so very often. That doesn't mean that people who begin seeking the Lord further on in life don't actually turn out to be exemplary Christians.

[ 12 : 41 ] But very often you'll find that the most notable Christians, the most notable missionaries, the most notable in terms of living a life that God truly blessed successfully began to seek him in their youth, in their young days, and were already God-seekers when they entered into adult life and set themselves to serve him, taking all of that young experience with them.

And that's what we seek for our young folks tonight. So when you're praying for them, pray above all else that they will be God-seekers because that will give them both positively to have a proper outlook on life, but also in terms of their defense and their being equipped against all that's in the world to distract them and to harm them.

As they are seeking the Lord, as they're God-seekers, that's what brings his truth into the core of their lives. So Josiah's personal seeking of God is such an important feature as it goes on to speak about his reign.

That's one of the reasons you read about it there, that you can say, well, this young man really started life so well. And after all of these years of darkness and ungodliness, here's this wonderful light that God has lit in the life of this one boy.

And that came to be so instrumental in leading the people back to God. That's Josiah's personal seeking of God. But then we read as the chapter develops of Josiah's public service for God.

[ 14 : 22 ] Now from verse 3, you can see that he set about purging Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the asherim and the carved and the metal images.

And they've chopped down the altars of the bales in his presence and he cut down the incense altars that stood above them and he broke in pieces the asherim and carved, the carved and the metal images and so on.

He really set about thoroughly reforming the nation and leading them back to the ways of God. But you notice he did that. He had begun to do that before the book of the law was discovered.

And as you take it that that's a summary which doesn't seem to be the case. It looks as if even there in his young days, he had said about this in the twelfth year, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem.

And as later on, you found in the 18th year of his reign, when he had cleansed the land and the house, that's when he began work on the temple.

[15:23] That's when the book was discovered. So there's, he set about destroying idolatry with one of the most thoroughgoing reformations in the whole history of the people of Israel or Judah.

And what he's doing in that, as he breaks down all of these idolatrous images that the people had over the course of these years grown so accustomed to using in their worship.

And you know that it appears that they were not just throwing away all ideas of Yahweh or Jehovah or their God and saying we don't want him anymore, we want the Baals, we want the God of the Canaanites.

What they thought they were doing and what they were, of the view themselves they were doing, was actually worshipping God, but through these images and these practices of the Canaanites. In other words, this was really a time of, you could almost say a multi-faith society in Judah, when all of the Canaanite gods and practices associated, some of them very horrible, deviant sexuality, that was all part of the way that they were, as far as they were concerned, serving the Lord.

[16:39] In other words, the more they brought in of these practices, the richer they thought they were actually, the richer their worship, their practice, was becoming.

And in fact, in reality, it's the other way about. It always is. Now that's why we would value ourselves the freedom of worship, the freedom of religion, that we ourselves value, not just for other groups, but particularly for ourselves, the freedom to evangelize.

What is it that changes a society? It's the conversion of individuals. It's the conversion of people so that they will come again back to the Lord.

And so that in God blessing that movement of His Spirit, we will change the culture of the times when it's an ungodly one. That's what we pray for.

That's what revival is about. That's what the rediscovery of the word of God, of the law of the Lord, is what we pray for. And that's the result of it.

[17:46] So He said about destroying idolatry. And then He said about repairing the temple.

That's, of course, connected to the purging of idolatry too. Because the temple had been neglected.

The house of the Lord was in need of repair. The kings of Judah, verse 11, had let it go to ruin.

They weren't really concerned to look after what was associated so much with the worship of God.

And that itself is a telling matter, isn't it? So He said about repairing this and in doing so, the book of the law was discovered. Now that's a really pivotal moment.

A huge moment in the history of the people and in the history of, and the reign of this King, Josiah. And as we said, it appears that the book was the book of Deuteronomy.

Because the book of Deuteronomy would fit very much what happened here after it was discovered. When Josiah rent, tore his clothes, and set about further reforms and applying the teachings of the book.

[18:53] It fits. Because Deuteronomy is very much about God reminding the people on the borders of the land of Canaan of their history, of the redemption by Him, of the laws that He had given them, of their distinctness as a people.

And then in chapter 28, you find a whole list there of what are normally called the blessings and the cursings in the book of Deuteronomy. And God's promises of blessing are attached to obedience to Himself.

If they are obedient to Him, they'll be blessed. They'll be blessed in their homes. They'll be blessed in their family lives. They'll be blessed individually. They'll be blessed in their work. They'll be blessed in their agriculture.

They'll be blessed in the animals that they have. They'll be blessed in the whole rich variety of blessings that God in covenant will actually provide for them. But on the other hand, as that chapter goes on, if you disobey the Lord, He says to them, then you will be cursed in your homes and cursed in your families and cursed in your work and cursed in the land and cursed in the produce of the land.

See, all of that for these people was all bound up with their relationship to God. We're not a theocracy today in our kingdom, in our land. We're not exactly like it was for Israel and Judah where everything was together politically and religiously was bundled up together in relationship with the Lord.

[ 20 : 22 ] We're not a theocracy in that way. But the principles of this actually have not gone away and are not in any way outdated. Because obedience to the Lord, whatever culture, whatever country, whatever generation, is something to which the promises of God are still attached.

And the promises of God are not just for individuals. the promises of God are for human society and for those who come as a people to follow him and to worship him and to look to his word.

So he gave, that gave a huge impetus to the reforms they were carrying about. And when you go back in your mind in history, for example, to the Reformation itself in Scotland in 1560 onwards, where you find such a great reformation in worship and religion and bringing people back to a reformed view of God and of his ways and of salvation, you'll find that it's a rediscovery of the Bible, basically, that caused that.

It's not that the Bible had disappeared altogether, but it was usually chained up and people didn't have access to it in their own homes or in their lives individually. And they were depending on priests to tell them the meaning of it.

And they were discouraged from finding it out for themselves. And all of the rituals that had come to be heaped one and another over these generations of spiritual darkness, all of a sudden, when the Bible is let loose, when the Bible is discovered, when its teachings are actually brought out and realized, and when the nature of salvation by grace is then, of course, realized by the reformers and by the people as they followed them, what a huge impact that had throughout Europe and in our country and across to America.

[ 22 : 18 ] And it's all about, really, at the end of the day, rediscovering the Bible, rediscovering the book of God, not just the book of the law, of course, but the whole of Scripture.

And in God's kindness and providence, that, of course, was accompanied by the inventions of printing and the printing press so that a person like Martin Luther in his day could churn out, or those who helped him churn out, so many leaflets and books which previous generations simply couldn't do in such a short time.

And all of that was to really bring the Bible and the teachings of the Bible to the people. They were doing virtually the same as happened in the days of Josiah in a different way, a rediscovery of God's book.

And that was the impact. That's the result. Now, that's, in many ways, what we ourselves require. Because the Bible has become a lost book for so many people in our society.

And the Bible is a book that's neglected even by people who attend church. And even certain sections of the church will tell you, you don't actually believe everything in the Bible.

[ 23 : 34 ] Nowadays, surely, a lot of that belongs to previous generations and the way they thought about things. And it's no longer relevant for the present generation. So, what Paul thought of marriage is no longer relevant.

You have to really adapt all of these things in the light of advances in human knowledge and so on. That's the kind of thing that's gone on for so long. So, the Bible has been set aside bit by bit, year by year, generation by generation, generation.

We need a rediscovery of it. And that's what we ourselves have a mandate to do, to go out as God's people and live out the Scriptures and live in such a way that draws people to realize, actually, this Bible is not what we once thought it was.

It's something that lives in the lives of these people. people. And the Bible should not be a relic in any society, but it is, sadly, for many people in our own.

And it's possible, of course, without just thinking, making people think that we're just fine ourselves and all we're doing is just applying this sort of thing to those around us.

[ 24 : 51 ] I can lose the Bible very easily. So can you. Because you lose the Bible when you lose your appetite for it, when you set it aside, and when other things begin to take place in your life, that replaces reading the Bible regularly and praying over it and studying it.

It's all too easy to actually lose the Bible and its impact. and you need to rediscover it. Thankfully, God, when we come back to Him, will bring it back home with power to us.

And so, in your life and in my life, don't lose the Bible, don't lose the Scriptures through just bit by bit, losing the practice of using them prayerfully and meaningfully.

Keep it up so that you don't actually set it aside and lose it in its impact from your life. Nothing's more important for you than that this word remains absolutely foundational in your daily life.

And if it is, then you're seeking the Lord through it and you come to know more and more of the benefit of that and of the promises that God fulfills. So he repaired the temple and in doing so, he discovered, or this book was discovered by the workers there and brought back to Josiah and it's very interesting and significant, his response.

[ 26 : 18 ] Because verses, from verse 19 there, we can see, when the king heard the words of the law, he tore his clothes. Now that was a sign, of course, in those days of hearing something that really struck your conscience and it was especially applicable either at a time of great grief in the providence of God or when something like this happened and God brought home to them the seriousness of sin.

That is really what struck Josiah. That is really what the law of the Lord, when it strikes home, brings to light. Consciousness of sin. We heard in David's prayer that we say so much about our society and the things that are wrong and they are wrong but the foundational problem is the problem of our sin and the problem of our sin is attached to our neglect of the Bible and to our need to rediscover the scriptures and the law of God because when God brings his law to bear upon our lives, it was so with your own life to some degree or other.

What was it that he brought to light? How did you feel then? What did you think then? Well, you know the answer to that. You felt dirty and you felt guilty in the presence of God. Why was that? Because God's law brings sin to light and it doesn't just bring sin to light it or God through it convicts us of sin. That's something we need never to be afraid of for our people.

You know, it's very difficult certainly to think about people being convicted of sin because it's not easy to live with conviction but it's necessary. I'm not saying everybody needs to have a tremendously deep sense of sin or conviction of sin but to some degree or other God's law will do that and for any society that does not know what sin is and what conviction of sin is well that tells you how far away they are from God and how much we need to rediscover this book of the law of God.

[ 28 : 27 ] So he tore his clothes because the law brought the words of God to him with power and conviction of sin.

And then he inquired. He sent in verse 22 he sent words well he said verse 21 go and inquired of the Lord for me and for those who are left in Israel and Judah concerning the words of the book that has been found for great is the wrath of the Lord that has poured out on us because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord.

So Hilkiah and those to whom the king had sent went to Huldah the prophetess. You're listening ladies. It's not a man that they sent to.

It wasn't Jeremiah whose ministry coincided with that prophetess. He sent this message to Huldah the prophetess.

She was probably one of the court prophets of the king that were of a more minor sort if you like compared to the likes of Jeremiah and Isaiah or the national prophets for the nation that God had sent.

[ 29 : 44 ] But in any case he went to this woman Huldah the prophetess. She actually spoke to the effect that God had I think against them as a people.

He was going to bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants because they had forsaken the Lord and made offerings to other gods. And you can read through all that in that second part of the chapter.

And that's after that that the king arranged this meeting for all the people, for himself, the elders of Judah, and he brought them all out together, all the people both great and small.

And he read in their hearing these words of the book of the covenant. And the king stood in his place 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 soul to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book.

Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers.

[ 30 : 57 ] Can you imagine the impact it would make if the government of the day suddenly came out with this decree, we have found the book of the Lord.

We counsel our people to give themselves to follow the teachings of this book. Sounds impossible, doesn't it? It's a far cry from where we are.

But we pray for our leaders. We pray for our leaders tonight. Why do we pray for our leaders? Well, we pray for them that they will rule wisely and justly.

We pray for every aspect of our society and those who are in authority, whether it be the royal house, whether it be the government itself or the advisors to government, the judiciary, the forces of law and order, those who have important positions in our land.

But we pray for governments so that they will come by God's grace. Don't think of it as impossible. By God's grace, to reign according to God's word and to use the law of God as a basis for the laws that need to be enacted in our society.

[ 32 : 20 ] You know, everything pretty much that we have as to what undergirds our society at the moment, though it's so badly away from God, but when you look at the principles that are enshrined in our legal system and in many other systems, they're actually Christian.

And they go back to the Bible, they go back to the principles of God's word. And sometimes people don't realize that. And when they want to get rid of the Bible, they don't realize the Bible still, at least in its, in a formal sense, undergirds our structures of society.

And we want people to come back and realize that and see the positive nature of the Bible's contribution. to our life as a people, to our nation.

And so this public dedication, and we read then in the next chapter what followed on from that was a massive ceremony involving the Passover, the greatest Passover, it says, that had ever been held in Judah or Jerusalem because they thought of this rededication as so important.

It was a great occasion because it was a new beginning and they were going to be following the Lord as a people from that time. Well, it didn't sadly work because as we know, other kings came and did the good work that was done.

[ 33 : 51 ] That's how it is in every society, isn't it? Revivals don't last forever. The impact of the gospel wanes means, and we need a rediscovery all over again.

But we pray for that. We pray for our leaders, and even if they never come to be professing Christians, we pray that they will honor the words of Scripture, the law of God, the principles enshrined in our own legislature, and the interests of justice, and of goodness, of all these things, because a society that loses the Bible, loses its moorings, and loses sight of things like justice, and goodness, and truth.

That's why we need to rediscover it. That's why we're praying that that will be so even in our day, but if not, in the generation to come.

May God bless these thoughts on his word this evening. We're going to conclude now by singing in Psalm 119 on page 167, and singing verses 161 to 168, page 167 of the psalm book, from verse 161, that section, section 21.

Though rulers hound me without cause, my heart fears nothing but your word, for in your promise I rejoice, like one who finds great spoil, O Lord.

[ 35 : 30 ] That's section 21, to God's praise. Lord, the ruler, shout me with a cause, my heart fears nothing but your word, for in your promise I rejoice, voice, like one who finds great spoil, O Lord.

All falsehood I abhor and hate, with all my heart I love your love.

love. I praise you seven times a day, for your commands I hold in awe.

great peace of those who love your love, they will not stumble in the way.

I wait for your salvation, Lord, and your commands I will obey.

[ 37 : 10 ] I will observe your statutes, Lord, my love for them is great and true, your laws and precepts I obey, for all my ways are known to you.