

Josiah's New Beginning

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Introduction.

- A. As anyone who has talked to either one of us for very long knows, both my wife and I, as much as we want any earthly thing, we want to get a house. However, no matter how much home ownership may look like the Promised Land from the perspective of the renter, I know there are difficulties involved with it too. Perhaps first and foremost is the problem of maintenance. Houses, sadly, do not eternally remain as nice and shiny and new as they were when they were first built. Instead, they break down with dizzying speed. The roof starts leaking, the water heater goes bust, and all sorts of unwanted critters try to move in. All of this requires constant vigilance and maintenance to deal with. Without it, the house becomes a ruin.
- B. This same matter of maintenance is a problem for our spiritual houses too. From the moment we first profess our faith in Christ, there are forces that seek to tear us down and render us a spiritual ruin, and if we do not counteract them, those destructive forces will triumph. Hell is not a hard destination to find; all we have to do is nothing. All of us, then, need to be engaged in a program of spiritual maintenance.
- C. We find some guidance in what this program might look like in the story of Josiah in 2 Chronicles 34-35. When Josiah ascended to the throne of Judah, he found himself in charge of an entire kingdom that had gone to spiritual ruin. The steps that he took to restore his nation are steps that we also can take to restore our lives. For help in our battle against spiritual entropy, then, let's turn our attention to Josiah's new beginning.

I. Tear Down the Obstacles.

- A. In our quest to repair our relationship with God, the first thing that we need to do is to tear down the obstacles. We see Josiah beginning with this in 1 Chronicles 34:1-5. Here's what the problem was: Josiah's grandfather Manasseh was the longest-reigning king in the history of Judah. He ruled for 55 years, but for most of that reign, his heart was wholly set on doing evil. Before his repentance in the last years of his life, he couldn't have done more damage to the cause of God if he'd tried. His son and Josiah's father, Amon, wasn't any better. Indeed, the only saving grace that Amon had, from our perspective, at least, was that he was so obnoxious that his own servants murdered him after he had reigned for only two years.
- B. So, when Josiah ascends to the throne, it has been 57 years since the last king who was wholly committed to serving God. All sorts of corrupt practices have flourished in the land, and Josiah immediately roots these out. He destroys the idols, the pagan temples, and even burns the bones of pagan priests on the altars they served.
- C. Friends, if our lives have passed through a similar period of spiritual neglect, it is certain that sin is flourishing somewhere in us too. The sin could be anything. There are as many sin problems as there are people. No matter what the temptation, though, the answer is the same, and we see the apostle Peter give us this answer in 1 Peter 4:1-3. We need to decide that we've already wasted enough time on evil, and we need to quit.
- D. As part of this quitting process, we have to resolve not only to hate the sin itself, but to avoid the situations that lure us into it. I know a sister back in Texas whose spiritual life was and almost certainly is a wreck. She drinks, and she knows she shouldn't; she wears immodest clothing, and she knows she shouldn't; she goes out partying with her friends, and she knows she shouldn't, and so on. You get the picture. Whenever somebody tries to talk to this sister about her spiritual life, you've never seen a more receptive listener. She will immediately admit that the Bible condemns her life, and she will promise to change—this time for real!—and I'm sure that in the moment she makes that promise, she is committed to doing what's right. The problem is that this sister spends her free time with friends who are ungodly and evil, and a week or two after she's promised to change, she's right back under their evil influence and doing the same evil stuff.
- E. Folks, that's the way sin is! If we make a commitment to change our lives to please God, but that's the only thing we actually change, Satan has 90% of the battle won already. We can't just remove the sin; we have to remove the things that tempt us. If it's ungodly friends that encourage us to do evil, they have to go. If it's a job that entices us to sin in some way, it has to go. Even if it's just a route home from work that takes us by the casino and tempts us to gamble, it has to go. We must change, because our souls are always worth more.

II. Repair What Is Good.

- A. In addition to this tearing-down process, though, we also need to learn to repair what is good. Consider Josiah's experience with this in 2 Chronicles 34:8-10. The problem was that during the evil days that preceded his reign, no one had been taking care of the temple in Jerusalem. The traditional temple worship had been discontinued entirely; indeed, Manasseh had even installed false gods in the temple itself. Just like any building does when it's neglected, the house of God was crumbling into oblivion.
- B. Josiah reverses the process. He hires workmen who come into the temple, repair it, and faithfully do whatever they can to restore it to its former glory. That way, the temple can fulfill its spiritual function.

- C. Friends, when we're going through a period of spiritual decay, if we want to pull out of our tailspin, we have to begin our positive progress in the same place. We have to repair the things in our life that used to be good and aren't anymore. Let's look at John's admonition to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2:4-5. The first step that the Ephesians had to take to please God wasn't breaking new ground. It was going back to the things they used to do, doing those again, and then proceeding from there.
- D. The same advice applies to us, wherever we are. One of the first steps to spiritual recovery is going back to the things that we used to do right. It may be that we used to be regular three-times-a-week church attendees, and we've stopped doing that. It may be that we used to be really involved in the Bible-class program, and we've stopped doing that. Whatever it is, friends, the very fact that we've gone downhill tells us that there's something UP the hill that we've left behind. We need to figure out what that thing is—or what those things are—and go back to them. It's something we're familiar with, it's something that we're probably good at doing, and even though it's not everything that God wants us to do, it's a good start.

III. Turn to God's Word.

- A. As the next step in the process, after we've returned to the things we already knew how to do, we have to turn again, this time to God's word. We can see Josiah's experience with the law of the Lord chronicled in 2 Chronicles 34:19-21. Apparently, as part of Judah's spiritual decline, the nation had completely forgotten the Law of Moses. During the restoration of the temple, a priest named Hilkiah found a scroll that contained the law. He didn't know what was in it, the scribe to whom he gave it didn't know what was in it, and even Josiah, as much as he wanted to please God, didn't know what was in it. When Josiah hears the words of the law, he realizes just how much he and his people have departed from what God wanted His nation to be. He tears his clothes, realizes that doom is stored up for them if they don't repent, and looks for a solution.
- B. We must accomplish this same thing in our lives, and for the same reason. One of Satan's biggest weapons is complacency. It's like when a man is stuck out in the depths of winter somewhere, and he's just about to die of exposure. Just before he dies, he suddenly becomes very warm, very relaxed, and doesn't want to move, but if someone doesn't save him or he doesn't save himself, he will die within minutes. That's the way Satan wants to do us. He wants to wrap us up in a cozy little cocoon of sin, where we're dimly aware of our situation, but it just doesn't sound like that big a deal to us. Friends, the time when we get complacent about rebelling against God is the time when we're about to die spiritually. Complacency is a killer.
- C. When we're in spiritual decline, maybe even complacent about it, is when we especially need to return to study of the Bible. God's word is the best cure for spiritual complacency there is. Consider the words of the Hebrews writer in Hebrews 4:12. He compares the gospel to a sword. Now, swords are not warm, cuddly, cozy things. They have one purpose—to cut, and the purpose of the sword of the Spirit is to cut US, and not just a paper cut either. As this verse says, the word is what God uses for spiritual heart surgery.
- D. You see, when we turn to the word and study it honestly, we can't be complacent anymore. The Bible is very plain about what we need to do, what we need not to do, and what will happen to us if we disobey. It's not some warm, cozy blanket that waits for the unrepentant sinner. It's the fires of hell, and the Scripture does not mince words on the subject. There's a lot of shock value in turning to the word when we haven't been obeying it, but that shock, that pain, is necessary, because it's what saves our lives.

IV. Serve with a Whole Heart.

- A. Now that we've bared our hearts to the sword of the Spirit, there's one last thing we need to do to complete our restoration. We need to serve God henceforth with a whole heart. This is the behavior that we see in the life of Josiah in 2 Chronicles 35:16-18. You see, along with the rest of the observance of God's law, the Israelite celebration of the various religious feasts had also lapsed. Josiah, in his reading of the word, realizes that the observance of these feasts absolutely must begin again, and so he commands that it be so. The description of one of these feasts, the Passover, takes up the first 19 verses of 1 Chronicles 35. We see the spiritual significance of this feast described in 16-18. Not in four hundred years, not even in the time of David, was the feast of the Passover kept as fully as Josiah had now kept it. His restoration was complete.
- B. In finishing our spiritual repair jobs, we need to throw ourselves into the work of God as wholeheartedly as Josiah did. No matter where we are in our Christian walk, study of the word will reveal all sorts of things that we need to do, and once we recognize what they are, those are precisely the things that we must do. Indeed, sometimes it is our failure that does the best job of teaching us how to succeed. Consider the comment that Jesus makes to Peter before His crucifixion in Luke 22:31-32. Jesus knows that Peter is going to fall away, but even when Peter is restored, he's not going to be restored to the same level of spiritual usefulness. Indeed, Peter is going to be responsible for strengthening the other apostles and speaking for them, which is what we see in the early chapters of the book of Acts. Peter's failure actually taught him how better to succeed.
- C. In the same way, we need to learn from our spiritual failures. As James observes, trials make us stronger, and that strength is something we can use to bolster ourselves and encourage others.

Conclusion. If you would like to return to God's service, there's no point in delaying.