

The Greatest Treasure (The reforms of Josiah)

Sunday 18th September
2 Kings 22:1-10;23:1-3 (2 Chronicles 34&35)

What is your greatest treasure?

Now, some of you may say your superannuation; others may think about some valuable family heirloom; yet others may say your children or grandchildren.

In Matthew 13:52 Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is like treasure. 2 Corinthians 4:7 says, *'the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'* is treasure; while Colossians 2:3 says that wisdom and knowledge are treasure.

Whatever you may think your treasure is we cannot forget what Jesus said in Matthew 6:21; *'For where YOUR treasure is, there your heart will be also.'* Isn't this the truth! Whatever we consider to be our greatest treasure, that will determine both our priorities and actions in life.

Today's story is about a young man called Josiah who discovered his treasure, and it changed a nation.

Read: 2 Kings 22:1-10;23:1-3

Josiah lived from c.649-609 BC.

He became the King of Judah when he was only 8 years of age and reigned for 31 years (vs.1).

Josiah's background, however, was not very good. His grandfather was King Manasseh, and he had been a real disappointment to God. Josiah's father, Amon, was also an evil king and he only lasted for 2 years before he was assassinated.

One of the interesting pieces of history is that Josiah was born when his father, Amon, was only 16 years old: so we possibly get the picture of Amon being a wilful young man who chose to go his own way in his short life, and suffered the consequences.

He died at the hands of his own officials when he was only 24 years of age.

This was why Josiah was anointed king at such an early age. Not a very nice thing to do to a young lad who never really had a normal childhood. It would seem he had a bad start to life and not much else going for him. A common theme even today.

As an aside, the story of Manasseh and Amon is recorded for us in 2 Kings 21:19-20 & 2 Chronicles 33:21-22.

Another valuable piece of information is that Josiah was one of the kings mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:10-11. It was this family heritage link to King David that rightfully earned Jesus the titles King of the Jews and Son of God (a kingly title).

From vs.2 (and Chronicles 34) we discover that, from an early age, Josiah had a heart for God.

When he was 20 years of age he set about instituting some social reforms to cleanse the land of many of the evil religious practices of the Baals, Asherahs and Molech. It was these naturalist cults/religions that practiced things like idolatry, immorality, divination, ritual prostitution, and child sacrifice.

Then, when Josiah was 26 years of age, he set about restoring the temple in Jerusalem, which had fallen into disrepair, and this is where the real story of his life began.

As part of his plan of restoration, Josiah ordered that the money, held in the temple treasury, be used to commence vital repairs to the Temple. It was then that Hilkiyah, the High Priest, discovered the Book of the Law hidden in the treasury room.

This phrase, 'the book of the Law' (vs.8) is the same as that used to describe the sacred writings Moses gave to Joshua in Joshua 1:8 & 8:34, so it was a very old scroll or parchment.

'Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.' (Joshua 1:8)

When the words of the book were read out, Josiah was devastated. He realised that, for decades, even generations, the people had neglected and forgotten the very foundations of who they were.

They had forgotten their own history, where they had come from, and the essential place God had played in making them HIS special people, as well as the place God should have had in their lives, even at that time.

Josiah wept and tore his robes, as a man in despair, grief and mourning. He realised how far his nation had drifted from the commands, requirements, expectations and will of God.

Vs.13 also tells us so much when Josiah said; *'Great is the Lord's anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; ..'*

Josiah immediately called on the priests to pray to God, to re-establish that vital prayer connection with God, in the hope that God would once more look kindly on the people. Judgment is never a pleasant prospect for anyone who is unrepentant. The lives of his grandfather and father had taught Josiah that valuable lesson.

Isn't it so true, even today, that the generations of children experience all manner of difficulties and even suffering, because of the sins of their fathers. Poor teaching, poor disciplines and general neglect all have their consequences for future generations.

Somehow, somewhere, the world waits for people like Josiah to break the cycle of poverty, selfishness and despair to lay a foundation for a new beginning.

Josiah then exercised his bold and brave leadership before all the people. He called them together to hear the words of the Book (2 Chron.34:29-30). He called upon the people to put aside all their cultic fetishes and practices and return to worshipping and serving God alone (2 Chron.35:3).

This was a radical call to social and national renewal. It was a call for the people to break free from those things that had led them to neglect and reject God, and instead to seek their own pleasures and gratifications. It was a call for the people to step back from the brink of national and spiritual destruction. Do we again need to hear a call like this in the world today; a call to repentance and renewal?

Josiah then cleansed the Temple and returned to it the Ark of the Covenant. He reinstated the celebration of the Passover (23:21-22) to again teach and remind the people of what God had done for them in the past.

These were just some of the major reforms instituted by Josiah that led to national and spiritual revival.

It can safely be said that the Book of the Law became part of Josiah's treasure, because it signalled a defining signpost for him, pointing to his relationship with God. Because of the reforms of Josiah, the nation of Judah was also restored to God.

When Josiah died in 609 BC, at 39 years of age, the whole nation of Judah went into a prolonged period of mourning, because he was greatly loved by all the people he had both led and served.

Josiah's epitaph is found in 2 Kings 23:25

*'Neither before or after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did - with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with **all** the Law of Moses.'*

These words were obviously a quote from the Book of the Law found in Deuteronomy 6:5.

Where else do we read these words in Scripture?

In Matt.22:37 & Mark 12:30 Jesus used these words to answer a Pharisee's question of which is the greatest commandment. It was a trick question to trap Jesus, but Jesus very artfully disarmed it with these words of scripture.

Every educated Jew, hearing the Lord's answer, would immediately have been reminded of King Josiah and the Book of the Law.

In Jewish life and practice, the example and witness of King Josiah was unchallenged, especially when it came to his faithful and loving service of God, because he had made God, and His word, his greatest treasure.

And so, we return to the question for today.
What is your greatest treasure?

Let's look at what the Lord says to those who think our greatest treasure is found in money, material possessions, and the things that give us financial security. *'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.'* (Matt.6:19)

Let's face it, as Jesus said, these things have no ultimate consequence or importance.

What does the Lord say to those who think our greatest treasure is found in life experiences that bring pleasure and excitement.

Eccles.2:10-11 has something interesting to say; *'Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure. ... Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and ... indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. ...'*

Also, in the parable of the sower and the seed in Lk.8:14, Jesus said these words; *'the seeds that fell among thorns are those who ... go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.'* That seems to be a rather damning judgment doesn't it - a fruitless life.

Next, what does the Lord say to those who think our greatest treasure is found in special relationships, especially family. On numerous occasions the Lord expressed the same sentiment as found in Matt. 19:29, *'.. everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.'*
(cf. Mark 3:35; 10:29-30; Luke 14:26)

Ultimately, if we have not yet taken seriously the wonder of God, spoken of in the Holy Scriptures, revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus, and present with us today in the person of the Holy Spirit, then we are robbing ourselves of the greatest treasure ever discovered.

King Josiah discovered his treasure, and made his decision for God. It transformed not only his life but also the life of his nation.
What is your treasure? What is your decision?