

# Righteousness

2 Kings 22

***The Northern Kingdom of Israel was carried off into exile*** in Assyria because of their sin, idolatry and hard-hearted rebellion against God. One evil king followed another in the northern kingdom until God's anger could no longer be contained against them. The southern kingdom of Judah was more faithful to God with many kings that read and obeyed God's Law. But still idolatry crept in, especially during the long reign of Manasseh. And as He had with the northern kingdom, God pronounced coming judgment on Judah as well.

But before judgment came, there was **one last good king** who came to the throne at the age of eight. His name was Josiah:

***“He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.”*** (2 Kings 22:2)

***Josiah was a great reformer.*** At the age of 26 he set in motion a dramatic clean-up operation throughout the kingdom of Judah. Idols and shrines dating back to Solomon – 300 years before – and the golden calves of Jeroboam – Josiah finally removed and destroyed. These were things that other good kings had for some reason chosen to tolerate. Their obedience was partial. They left some idolatry out in the villages. But look how God describes Josiah:

***“Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him.”*** 2 Kings 23:25

Brothers and sisters, ***may this description be applied to each of us!*** May we study God's Word and devote ourselves to seeking FIRST God's Kingdom and His righteousness! May we turn to the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength! And may we lead others along this path of righteousness. Josiah shows us:

## **How to live in and lead others to Righteousness**

1. Study God's Word
2. Share God's Word

First, if we are to live in righteousness and lead others to righteousness in the eyes of the Lord ***we have to see the truth.*** And knowledge of the truth can only come from God's Word. The catalyst for this whole reformation under Josiah was the discovery of God's Word. Somehow the book of the Law had gotten lost!

Still a young man at the age of 26, Josiah set out to ensure that repairs were being done in the temple.

### Study God's Word

"The king sent Shaphan... to the house of the Lord... And Hilkiah the high priest said... 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.' ... **and he read it.**" 2 Kings 22:3,8

Amazingly, in the Temple of the Lord **the Word of the Lord had been hidden away**. In the days of Manasseh Scripture was not tolerated so the priests abandoned it to save their own skins. The generation that grew up after them, therefore, was completely unfamiliar with the Law of God.

Aren't we seeing this very thing today? **God's Law has become unpopular** – especially as it is annoyingly invasive into things like your sexual orientation and lifestyle. The nerve of God to think He has the right to speak into such areas of our lives! But because God's Law is unpopular, many churches abandoned it two or three generations ago **with the result that young people are growing up with no awareness of who God is or what He requires**.

There was **a liberal church** across the street from our church in Chicago and a leader from that church scheduled to meet with me to see what we were doing to keep our church growing. I was the outreach pastor so he thought I might have some ideas they could borrow. I told him candidly that the problem in the liberal church is that **they have punched a hole in their own boat**. By rejecting the authority of God's Word they have basically said, "We have NO MESSAGE to believe in – there is no reason for you to come to our church because we have NOTHING TO SAY."

**God's Word is the foundation for our lives and ministries**. Everything we believe and all we do is based on the truth revealed in Scripture. **Taking away the Bible is like taking away LIGHT**. You cannot see in the darkness of a Bible-less life or a Bible-less church or a Bible-less kingdom.

**Josiah grew up without the Bible**. Even the priests were surprised to find the scroll in the Temple. They were like – "Huh, I wonder what this is..." **Finding this scroll was like turning on a light switch**. This is the first step toward a life and ministry of righteousness. We must study God's Word to see the truth.

### Study God's Word to See the Truth

"And Shaphan read it before the king. When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes... 'Great is **the wrath of the Lord** that is kindled against us, because our fathers **have not obeyed** the words of this book.'" 2 Kings 22:10-11,13

Hearing God's Law – the book of Deuteronomy – King Josiah immediately understood things that had previously been unclear. With one reading of this book of the Law, Josiah tore his clothes – a sign of distress, humility and repentance. He did this because he suddenly saw the truth about God and the nation. He saw that God's wrath was kindled and that their fathers had not obeyed. **Basically he perceived the holiness of God and the sinfulness of God's people**.

We cannot know the truth apart from God's Word. We can learn certain things from creation and our conscience – general revelation. But only through God's special revelation in His Word **can we know the truth about God and ourselves**. Apart from Scripture people are walking around blindly, crashing into each other and tripping over God's laws, injuring themselves.

- If your only basis for morality is the people around you and you're in **a large secular college** – what's to keep you from cheating on tests and living the party lifestyle?
- If all you know of right and wrong is what you learned from your parents and community and you live in a small **Muslim village in Afghanistan** – do you see how you would be blind to the truth about God and people?
- If you live in a **city in southeast Asia** where everyone prays to their ancestors how can you know that this is both useless and displeasing to God?
- If you **live in Tampa** but were raised not attending church and never even hearing John 3:16 how can you know that God loves you and that you need Jesus?

**Apart from God's Word people CANNOT know the truth about God or themselves.** They are in the dark. This is why we must be a people on mission to bring the light of Scripture into the dark places of our city and the world. Look at what God's Word reveals – first:

**Study God's Word to See the Truth of:**

- The Righteousness of God

**“Thus says the Lord, Behold I will bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, *all the words of the book* that the king of Judah has read... my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched.” 2 Kings 22:16-17**

This is **Deuteronomy** that they found – Moses' one book summary of the Law of God. It concludes with a detailed description of the blessings that come from obeying God's Law and the curses that will come on those who disobey God's Law. This pronouncement is the fulfillment of those curses. Israel rebelled against God and brought the wrath of God upon themselves. Moses said,

**Study God's Word to See the Truth of:**

- The Righteousness of God

**“I have set before you today life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.” Deut. 30:19**

**God is perfectly just and righteous.** This is good news for all who know and believe in and follow Him, for we will experience the life and blessing that come from a relationship with Him. But this is very bad news for all who do not know and believe in and follow Him. They are stumbling around in the dark, crashing into things throughout this life and on their way to an eternity of curses and condemnation.

God's Word reveals both the righteousness of God and the wretched sinfulness of people:

**Study God's Word to See the Truth of:**

- The Righteousness of God & the Wretchedness of People

**“I will bring disaster upon this place... because *they have forsaken me* and have made offerings to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger...” 2 Kings 22:16**

Josiah tore his robes because in the same moment that he saw the righteousness of God he also saw the sinfulness of God's people. Whenever we see God in all of His glory we immediately perceive how far we fall short of that glory. We can slip into a complacency with our own sin when we lower our eyes from God and grow distant from His Word. ***If all we do is compare ourselves to other people*** we can begin to believe that we're not so bad. "I'm certainly better than that guy. I don't gossip like that woman. I don't cheat on my taxes like my friend at work. I don't drink and swear like that couple..."

But when we see God as He truly is – which only Scripture can reveal – **we have an Isaiah type experience** and we fall on our faces before God's throne acknowledging that we are a sinful people with unclean lips and unclean lives. Isaiah had a vision of God exalted in His temple, glorious beyond imagination. This anointed prophet of the Lord, in the light of God's unapproachable holiness, fell on his face in deep conviction of his sin and the sin of his people.

***This is what God's Word does for everyone.*** It reveals the truth of who God is and what God rightly demands. Scripture shows us what is RIGHT and what is WRONG. It makes clear what God's desires are and how He will treat those who do not obey His Law. In simplest form God wants all people to love Him and love each other. Whenever we forsake God to worship other gods it provokes God to anger. Whenever we fail to love each other and instead abuse each other or neglect each other, it provokes God to anger – it invites His just wrath.

**Because God is RIGHTEOUS.** This is the essence of His character – central to His nature. And it is central to the GOSPEL itself. Here is how Paul expresses the gospel in Romans 3:

#### **God's Word Reveals God's Righteousness**

***"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe."***  
Romans 3:20-21

***The Gospel of Jesus Christ reveals once and for all the glorious, holy, just character of God.*** The gospel can be summarized as THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD. Jesus embodied that righteousness in His perfect human life. He carried the righteousness of God to its ultimate conclusion in his death on the cross – satisfying the justice of God while at the same time demonstrating the immeasurable fulness of God's love.

But God's Word at the same time reveals the wretched sinfulness of people:

#### **God's Word Reveals Our Wretchedness**

***"For there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."*** Romans 3:22-24

To know God's holiness is to know your own sinfulness. If you don't realize how sinful you are then you have not yet really seen how glorious and holy God is. **Job was the most righteous man on earth** and God used him as a case study. God allowed Satan to take everything from Job but his life – and this

tested Job to the limit. For the whole book of Job this righteous man protests his innocence and demands a day in court with God.

And then, at the end of the book – he gets that day in court. And when this man – the most upright and godly man on earth – finally sees God as He truly is – Job falls on his face, shuts his mouth and repents in dust and ashes.

It doesn't matter how good and generous and holy you are – **when you begin to know God you become increasingly aware of the depths of your selfishness**, pride and idolatry. It's true of all of us. It's true of me. And it's true of you. You are more sinful than you realize. But God is more gracious, more glorious than you so far appreciate.

**God's Word reveals God's righteousness.** This was what opened King Josiah's eyes to his sin and the sin of the people – finding the scroll of Deuteronomy. Scripture was a catalyst for nationwide reformation. The same thing happened in Germany in 1517 with a monk named **Martin Luther**. Luther taught through the Psalms and began to see the glory of the God he worshiped. But the young monk trembled to think of the righteousness of God that could only mean his certain condemnation. He said:

***"I hated the phrase, 'The righteousness of God.'* Although I lived an irreproachable life as a monk, I felt that I was a sinner with an uneasy conscience before God. ... I did not love – nay, in fact, I hated this righteous God who punished sinners."** Martin Luther

But then he began to study and teach the book of Romans. He studied and hammered on the text of Scripture, working to understand what Saint Paul was saying. And one day the light of God's Word broke through in his heart. Suddenly he realized that the righteousness of God made manifest in **the gospel was not there to CONDEMN him for his sin but to SAVE HIM from his sin**. It was not a righteousness OUTSIDE of him that he could never attain. It was a righteousness God wanted to implant INSIDE him and inside all believers. He said it was like the doorway to paradise was suddenly opened before him!

We saw this with **the Ten Commandments** a few weeks ago. Everyone will experience God's law as impossible demands hanging over them – You shall not steal, you shall not covet... - like huge tablets of stone that express God's holiness and righteous demands. You see them and immediately realize you cannot fulfill them so God in His justice must crush you with them in the final judgment. But that is not the only option. For the believer in Jesus God's law does not hang over us waiting to condemn us – God has given us CREDIT for the righteousness of Jesus as a gift of His grace. This is what it means to be JUSTIFIED – to be declared righteous before God – not because of what you have done but because of what Jesus has done.

So for the believer, **God's Law is not hanging over us, it is a firm foundation UNDER US**. We stand firm IN CHRIST – confident before the holy God of heaven because the perfect righteousness of Jesus has been transferred from His account to ours. On our own we would be doomed. But in Christ we are secure. On our own we would be condemned. But in Christ there is NO CONDEMNATION. On our own God's law would crush us. But in Christ God's Law has been fulfilled on our behalf.

Listen to the good news in Romans 8:3

### God's Word Reveals God's Grace to Forgive Sinful People

*"God has done what the Law... could not do by sending His Son... as a sin offering, in order **that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us.**"* Romans 8:3-4 NIV

**The light of truth turned on for Martin Luther** as he studied God's Word in the book of Romans. He was just like King Josiah hearing the Law from Deuteronomy for the first time. First he was overwhelmed with the glory of God's righteousness. Then he discovered the glory of God's grace to forgive and justify sinners who believe in Jesus. Then, like Josiah, he set out to reform the church.

**Have you seen the righteousness of God revealed in Scripture?** Do you experience that truth regularly as you open God's Word? This is why we need the Bible every day – to lift our eyes from ourselves and our distractions to remember the truth – that God is glorious beyond our imagination. His holiness cannot be comprehended. His righteousness stretches beyond the most distant galaxy.

**Have you seen yourself accurately in the light of God's Word** and in the radiance of His glory? Maybe you need a fresh encounter with God like Job. Let me challenge all of us to keep reading Scripture. We are nearly halfway in our Open the Bible journey. Don't stop. Don't give up. Even if you just read a few verses every day – be sure to pause long enough to read and think and pray. Let God's Word be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you more of God's glory, more of your sin and thereby more of God's grace.

Study God's Word to see the truth. And then live and lead in light of that truth. That's what Josiah did. Having been changed by God's Word himself, he called the people together:

### Share God's Word with Others

#### 1. Open the Bible

*"And the king went up to the house of the Lord, and with him all the men of Judah... **And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant.**"* 2 Kings 23:2

Josiah set out to live a different life – a life in light of God's glory and grace. And an important part of that life was **leading others INTO the light of truth**. So he called a meeting to read God's Word. Of course we do this every Sunday and our small groups are all about opening, studying and applying God's Word. But we will also do this on **Friday, May 31**. Please set that time aside for worship and prayer as we open God's Word together and call on the Lord to show us more of His glory and more of our sin that we might more fully experience His grace.

Here are four ways to lead others to righteousness:

### Share God's Word with Others

1. Open the Bible
2. Help them apply it

“And the king... made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments... with all his heart and soul, **to perform the words of this covenant.**” 2 Kings 23:3

One of the goals of this Open the Bible series is to **encourage OTHERS to open the Bible with us**. Let’s remember that it is not our wise and persuasive words that can change a life – it is God’s Word that has the power to transform a cold, dead heart and bring it to life. It is the gospel that transforms.

Once God begins working in you, once the seed of faith takes root in your heart, you grow in faith through OBEDIENCE. The point of the covenant Josiah made was not just to make a public commitment but **to lead the nation into a new LIFESTYLE**. God has no interest in empty promises. What He wants to see are changed lives.

Jesus did not say **the wise man built his house on the rock** by making lots of commitments. He said the wise man is the one who hears these words of mine and DOES THEM. Obedience is the sign of true faith. If you do not obey God’s Word do not deceive yourself into thinking you believe in Jesus. The proof of saving faith in Jesus is a lifestyle devoted to obeying His commands. “We are saved by faith alone but the faith that saves is never alone.” Saving faith always produces good works, just as a healthy tree produces good fruit. If you don’t see fruit you know the tree is sick. ***The fruit of true faith in Jesus is obedience.***

For Josiah, the first step was to keep the Passover – something the nation had not done for years and years.

### **Share God’s Word with Others**

#### **3. Focus on the Gospel**

“And the king commanded all the people, **‘Keep the Passover to the Lord your God as it is written in the book of the Covenant.’**” 2 Kings 23:20-21

The center of the Jewish calendar was supposed to be **the Passover celebration**. This festival celebrated the key moment in their history when God saved them from slavery in Egypt through mighty acts of power, culminating in the slaying of all first born sons whose homes were not marked by the blood of a sacrificial lamb. Israelites saved their oldest sons by killing lambs – one for each home – and applying the blood of the lamb to their doorposts. When the destroying angel saw the blood, he passed over that house. No blood – death. Blood – life.

***Have you been marked by the blood of the Lamb?*** The ultimate Passover Lamb has been sacrificed – that’s what the death of Jesus was all about. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

If an Israelite had killed a lamb but then didn’t apply the blood to his door, the lamb’s death would have had no value to him and his family. **Only the blood APPLIED makes a difference.** Jesus has shed his blood to save you. Have you applied that blood to YOUR HEART? Have you called on Jesus to save you? Have you come into a covenant relationship with God through Jesus?

As we share God's Word with others we need to focus on the gospel and then help people see their idolatry so they can fight against it. Josiah made a clean sweep in Judah:

### **Share God's Word with Others**

#### **4. Fight against Idolatry**

**"He deposed the priests... he broke down the houses... he defiled the high places... he burned the chariots of the sun with fire... the altars... he pulled down and broke in pieces..." 2 Kings 23:4-20**

Hebrew in the Bible is a funny language. ***There is only one word in the Bible for FISH.*** With the thousands of species of fish in the world God didn't care to tell us what swallowed Jonah – it was a BIG FISH. But in the Bible there are 15-20 phrases for destruction as it applies to idolatry. Josiah uses all of them in these 16 verses. Destroy, burn up, break down, grind into dust, pull down, knock over, defile, put away, remove... Do you see the point?

***When it comes to sin and idolatry it's not just, "be careful."*** God's will for us with idols is that we do battle with them – that we completely root idolatry from our lives, our families, our churches and communities.

In other parts of the world people are bowing down and ***praying to literal idols*** – little statues some guy down the street made for them out of wood or clay or stone – and they are so lost in darkness that they think these little statues can help them. Apart from the light of God's Word these people are lost in darkness, praying to useless, powerless idols.

The same thing is true for **our friends and neighbors** who are worshiping money or sex or themselves or someone else. They are slaves to their idolatry and the worst thing is they don't even realize it. They are lost in the darkness. Only the light of Scripture can open the eyes of the blind. We have this light. Let's not hide it under a bushel. Let's let our little lights shine. And let's remember this light (of the Bible) is not little. It is the blinding revelation of the glorious righteousness of God. We know that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

### **Study & Share God's Word**

**"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" Romans 10:14**

***It was one book of the Bible that awakened Josiah*** and brought reformation to Judah. It was one book of the Bible that awakened Martin Luther and brought reformation to Europe. Our only hope for revival today is that the Word of God would awaken us to His glory and our sin that we might be so overwhelmed by His limitless grace that we can't help but bring this life changing message to everyone around us and to the ends of the earth!

Let's pray to that end now!