

Set Apart to Study Scripture
2 Chronicles 34:1-33

Well brothers and sisters, it's been a fun and engaging "Club-service" so far - I always get a kick out of that "motorcycle" demonstration.

Now I know that a lot of guys start to get into motorcycles as they get older and retire, but I have to tell you that you won't find me looking to buy a motorcycle when I'm in my fifties. This Gunnink's Harley Davidson shirt is about as close as I'm going to get.

Because when I was sixteen years old, one summer afternoon in late August I was getting a ride home from work on the back of a friend's motorbike, and he wasn't paying close attention to the traffic ahead of us so he didn't notice a Jeep that had stopped to make a left hand turn.

When he did notice – it was too late.

Now my recollection of the events at that point is hazy – I don't know if we dropped the bike and slid into the bumper of the Jeep or if we just drove right into it.

Now we were only going about 40 km per hour, but it was still fast enough to throw me about 20 feet upon impact. I remember hearing the sound of glass breaking and seeing the horizon bouncing around like you see when a video camera gets dropped.

Now I have to be honest and tell you that the first thing that went through my mind while I was spinning around on the pavement was *"dang –this is probably going to give me some really bad road rash which is going to keep me from going skateboarding and maybe cut into the start of my snowboarding season!"*

I had no idea at that point how badly I had injured my knee and my leg which had hit the Jeep as I was flying through the air. I would find out later on in the hospital that I had split

open the skin on my knee requiring 82 stiches to close it up – in two layers, and that I had broken my lower leg.

Now – I know this all sounds really dramatic and you can probably understand why I’m not planning to go out and buy myself a motorbike when I’m 55 – but there’s another reason why I’m telling you about my motorbike accident.

You see I was raised in a Christian home, brought up in the church, taught to read the bible and obey God’s laws – but as a 16 year old teenager I was struggling to accept all this.

I wasn’t sure if God really existed, and I wasn’t really having much fun or experiencing any joy in my life in being obedient to His laws, while my non-Christian friends who were sleeping with their girlfriends, doing drugs, getting drunk and partying it up seemed to have a whole lot of fun and joy in their life.

And I really resented my parents making me attend youth group and do bible study – I would much rather be out skateboarding or snowboarding with my cool friends instead.

So I remember going for a walk by myself one evening and putting a challenge out to God – that if He really existed that He was going to have to prove Himself to me because otherwise following all these laws was a big waste of my time and I was missing out on a lot of fun.

And the other thing you need to know is that the week before my motorbike accident I had just broken up with a girlfriend – and this had left me feeling so frustrated and upset that I said *“to heck with it, I’m throwing caution and God’s laws out the window”* and I had made plans for the week-end to pick up some booze and go camping and see what kind of trouble I could get into.

That is what I was on my way home from work to do when the accident happened.

And this is why when the police officer told me that I was lucky to be alive because I should have put my head through the back window of the Jeep and died – I started to realize that this accident God was confronting me, getting my

attention and telling me that He did exist and preventing me from going off and doing something foolish – and... that it was now time for me to get serious about my relationship with Jesus Christ.

And getting serious about my relationship with Jesus Christ meant a number of things for me – one of which was reading the bible – I mean really reading the bible... not just reading a couple verses and then putting it away and not even thinking about what I had read.

But through this accident something had changed - I really wanted to read it and understand what it meant and what it was teaching me and telling me – I was hungry for the word of God as they say. Which was weird for me because I thought that was something only older people experienced – grown ups, Christian school teachers, my parents...

But here I was a young teenager and I wanted to read the bible and understand what it said to me – I'm not sure if you can relate to that or not but I'm telling you my story because

it's kind of similar to another story in the bible about a teenager who became the King of Judah and encountered the bible and how it changed his life.

So I'm going to ask Patricia to come up and read the story of King Josiah for us – from 2 Chronicles 34 – and if you have a bible with you or a bible app on your phone I want to encourage you to look this up and follow along.

(Scripture Reading)

Ok, so that is a really amazing story isn't it.

But it has me wondering why a twelve year old boy who is king would start to seek the God of His "Father – or ancestor" King David? I mean if I was King when I was twelve I would have purchased all the Lego my palace could hold and spent all my remaining time playing hockey, I wouldn't be starting off on a spiritual quest.

But brothers and sisters, Josiah had heard and perhaps seen some of what had happened to his actual father and grandfather, and this is why he was seeking God.

You see Josiah's grandfather was King Manasseh, he also became king at a young age – 12 years old, and He turned out to be a very wicked King. 2 Chronicles 33:6 says *“He sacrificed his children in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced divination and witchcraft, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord,*

The end result of Manasseh's wickedness as King was that the whole nation of Judah was led astray into idol worship and 2 Chronicles 33:9 says *“they did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites.”*

So the Lord sent the Assyrians to attack Judah – and they captured King Manasseh, put a hook in his nose, shackled him in chains, and led him off to Babylon as a captive. This finally

got King Manasseh's attention and He humbled himself before Yahweh and pled for mercy.

The scripture says *“he Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that Yahweh is God.”* (2 Chron 33:13)

However, even though King Manasseh had changed his ways late in life the damage had been done – He had not raised his son in the ways of the Lord when he was young. So when King Manasseh died and his son Amon became King at age 22 – the official wickedness and royal idol worship resume and continued.

So Amon did not last very long as King – after only two years he was assassinated by his officials and his son Josiah was made King instead.

So as I said – Josiah would have known about what happened to his grandfather, and to his father, and probably learned

even more about it during the first few years as a very young King and eventually he “did the math” as they say.

I’m pretty sure that Josiah began to figure out that “the God of David” who punished his grandfather Manasseh for all the things that Amon continued to do, was the God that He should pay attention to. After all when Manasseh repented this God delivered him, but his father Amon had ignored this God to his own peril.

And so when he is twelve years old Josiah comes to the realization that He needs to get serious about a relationship with God – and so he begins to seek out the God of David.

Now Josiah doesn’t say to God as I did - Hey you’ve got to prove yourself to me and show me that you exist and then I will obey your laws. Josiah didn’t really know anything about this God or his Law –that’s why at this point in the story it says “the God of David” instead of using God’s personal and covenant name “Yahweh.”

Instead Josiah figures he is going to get seek the attentions of this God of David by eliminating all the idols in the land of Judah which take people away from worshipping Him.

So Josiah destroys all the idol worship sites throughout the whole land – and then goes back to Jerusalem and says “we need to fix up the Temple where this God is worshipped!” Perhaps this God of David will be impressed with His devotion to worship Him alone and so God will give him favor and blessing and protect him from assassinations and other more powerful Kings.

Do you see how Josiah is thinking here – can you understand why he’s thinking this? Good.

But then something really significant and life changing occurs – while they are fixing up the temple, they stumble across the Book of the Law – which somehow had become lost.

Hilkiah the Priest is counting up the offerings one day, taking that money out of the vault in the temple where they keep it

to pay for the Temple renovations – and maybe out of the corner of his eye he sees a scroll sitting over on a shelf, we don't have the exact details but he stumbles across this scroll and it turns out to be the Book of the Law!

Now this is significant because while it was a good thing that King Josiah was eliminating idol worship and fixing up the temple, there was a whole lot more that He needed to know about who God was, the what kind of relationship God had set out between Himself and Israel, and how exactly being King fit into that, and how Israel was supposed to live in their day to day life.

Without the Book of the Law Josiah would end up thinking that He was earning God's favor by destroying idols and fixing up God's Temple, and worse He would not understand or know His true purpose as a King, and the Israelites would not know how to live in obedience to God.

So they bring the Book of the Law to the King, who is 18 years old at the time – still a teenager... and they read the entire thing to him.

So, that means a teenager sat and listened to the books Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, which constitute the book of the Law, being read in their entirety.

And is Josiah bored? Does he just listen politely and then go *"boy I'm glad that's over; let's go do something fun now!"*?

Does he say *"well that didn't make much sense"?*

No – he stands up and he tears his robes in dismay because he understands what the Book of the Law has revealed to him - that both he and the kingdom of Judah are in peril because they are in ignorance and have been living in disobedience to their covenant God.

Now this is where we need to start paying attention to what we can take away from this story and what it says to us about our habits of reading and studying scripture.

The first point is that it doesn't take long for people to lose God's Word.

Josiah's grandfather had been raised by a godly father who was a good King and served Yahweh and knew the book of the Law. But his son neglected the Book of the Law and in less than sixty years it was forgotten to the point that the next generation didn't even know it existed.

Brothers and sisters, this is why it is so important that we develop the habit of reading and studying the bible – because then we be intentional in making sure we help the next generation develop that habit as well.

We can't just assume that our children and youth will somehow pick up the bible and just start reading it on their own – we need to make sure they are trained in this so that they do not neglect it to the point that their children won't even know the stories of the bible anymore.

The next point is why it is so important to make a habit of reading and studying God's Word – It tells us what we have done wrong, that God is offended by our sin, and instructs us in what we can do to show our repentance and ask for forgiveness.

It's only when Josiah hears the Law of God, that he learns of his true purpose as King – to lead the God's people to be faithful covenant partners with Yahweh.

It's only when He hears the Law of God that he realizes that he does not know any of it, and He and that the people of Israel are ignorant and have been living in disobedience to God, and out of line with their purpose.

It's only when he hears the Law of God that he learns that God is angry about this and that there is going to be consequences for their unfaithfulness and disobedience.

However – he also discovers that God is gracious and forgiving and when Josiah seeks to hear from the Lord about what He

should do - God tells Josiah that because he has acknowledged what God spoke through the Book of the Law – humbled himself, and grieved over their ignorance and disobedience, God would not bring the consequences upon the nation while he was King.

So You see brothers and sisters it works the same for us.

It's only through reading the scriptures that we learn about our sin and how it offends God.

In Romans 10:9-12 we read *“Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away...”*

And in many place scripture spells out exactly how our sin manifests itself and we break the 10 Commandments - like in Galatians 5:19 where Paul says the acts of our sinful nature are obvious *“sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;*

idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like”.

And it's only through reading the bible that we learn that there are consequences that we experience because of our sin.

Romans 6:23 says *“the wages of sin is death...”* and Ephesians 2:1 tells us we *“were dead in our transgressions and sins”* and if we go all the way back to Genesis 3:17 we learn that the creation itself is cursed because of our sin.

Now this is hard news to hear brothers and sisters but it's the only way that we can discover that God is really gracious and forgiving and we understand what His Love is all about.

And it is only in continuing to read and study the scriptures that we discover this good news!

John 3:16-17 we read *“that God loved His beautiful creation so much that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

And in Romans 5:8 *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

So what do we do in response to God telling us through the bible that He offers us grace and mercy and forgiveness?

Well this is the third thing we can take away from Josiah’s story. When Josiah received the message of mercy and grace back from the Prophet, he followed the instructions in the book of the Law regarding the renewal of the Covenant.

He gathered all of God’s people together at the Temple and He lead them in a covenant pledge to follow the Lord and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all their heart

and soul, and to obey the words of the covenant written the book of the Law.

So it is only through reading and studying the scriptures that we will learn that the appropriate way to respond to what God has offered to us in Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:9-10 says *“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

And in Acts 2:38 *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

And this is just the beginning brothers and sisters – there is so much more that we will gain in our understanding about what it means to receive this salvation from Jesus Christ and how we ought to live in gratitude and obedience to Jesus because of it...

And my prayer this morning is that by telling you the story of Josiah and how the hearing how the Book of the Law affected him and how he responded to it...

That the Holy Spirit would work in our hearts and convict us of how we neglect to read and study God's Word. How we resist making this a habit our lives, and that we would see the error and the danger in neglecting it.

And that the Word of God would come to us through this message this morning to tell us that in Christ, our neglect of the scriptures that make us wise for salvation in Him is forgiven.

There is no guilt or shame that you must carry or feel because our sin and shortcomings in this regard are forgiven in Christ.

And what I'm really praying for is that this truth would be driven home, deep into your hearts – so that it would create a hunger for God's Word.

That you would begin to desire to read it – to really read it and want to understand it and hear what God is saying to you when you read it.

So that you will not only grow in your faith and trust in Jesus' forgiveness – but that you will set apart for God's purposes and plan for this world, and you will develop Holy Habits.

Amen.