

The Last Good King of Judah

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[0 : 0 0] Now, the chapter that we read, or part of which we read, in chapter 23 of 2 Kings, we come to the last good king of Judah, we could say, King Josiah.

And after his brief spark, as it were, his brief lighting up of the land with his reformation that he undertook there, in the 18th year, his reigns were told, and we see at the beginning of chapter 22, that he reigned 31 years in Jerusalem, which means there were 13 years left of his reign when he undertook this great reformation, when all Judah gathered for this Passover, 13 years of God honouring, reformed again, faith in the Lord, and the pure worship of God in the temple, and the land being turned again to worship the Lord God of Israel.

But after that, of course, his sons then became just bad kings again, two reigns of 11 years each, and two reigns of three months each.

So 22 and a half years after his death, Judah was finished. Jerusalem was destroyed, and the people were taken off into captivity. It wasn't that far away.

And if you add in the 13 years that remained of his reign, then that only makes it 35 and a half years. You might think, well, 35 years, that's a good long time.

[1 : 2 6] It's not that long, 35 years. It may seem it when you're a teenager or when you're a child, when you're young. 35 years stretches into the distance.

But when you look backwards, 35 years, what is that? 1982. It's not that far away. It's not that long ago, 1982.

We still think of it, yes, a while ago, but still well within living memory. And from that year, the 18th year of his reign, to the complete destruction of Jerusalem, 35 years.

There wasn't that much time, and there was even less time of the good king's reign in which the Lord was truly sought. But what he did was, he used such power and influence as he had to cleanse the land of its idols, of its evil, of its occult practices, and all that was there.

In fact, it's quite alarming when you consider that all the way through his reign, he's still considered a good king. In the 18th year, he gives reign, chapter 22, at verse 3, that the king sent Shaphan, the son of Azariah, the son of Mishal, and the scribe, to the house of the Lord, saying, Go up to Hilkiah, the high priest, and he may send the cell which is brought into the house of the Lord, with the keepers of the door that have gathered of the people, and let them deliver it into the hands of the doers of the work that have the oversight of the house of the Lord.

[2 : 5 5] Let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the Lord, to repair the breaches of the house. The carpenters and builders and masons, to buy timber and huge stone, to repair the house.

So, initially, what he wants to do is just repair the house of God, just to build the temple back up again, which had fallen into disrepair. A reflection, no doubt, in practical terms, of the spiritual state of Judah at the time.

But what he ends up doing as they go into the temple, and the priests go in, is that one of them discovers the scroll, the book of the law. And when he reads in it, he discovers afresh just what the big divergence is between what Judah, even at its best, is seeking to do, and what God actually requires in his written word.

And when he reads it to the king, if we have read through chapter 22, we find this, that he was horrified when he read it. He thought, this can't surely be true. Go and inquire about the prophet Eshubah, and find out if this is actually going to come upon us.

And she said, she confirmed, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, tell the man that sent you to me. This is verse 15 in chapter 22. Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read.

[4 : 15] Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.

So far, so bad. But then there's this little ray of hope here. But to the king of Judah, which sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, As touch in the words which thou hast heard, Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, When thou heardest what I speak against this place, And against the inhabitants thereof, That they should become a desolation and a curse, And hast rent thy clothes and wet before me, I also have heard thee, saith the Lord.

Behold, therefore I will gather thee unto thy fathers, And thou shalt be gathered in thy grave in peace, And thy eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

So despite all his efforts, And despite his trying to be a good king and so on, He's still discovering that God's word is still going to be fulfilled, It's still going to be true, The kingdom is still going to be destroyed, Because they have just stacked up way too much evil, That has to be punished.

One shudders to think, What might be such a judgment against the kingdom of Scotland, If such a measure is to be applied to us, Which eventually, of course, It will be in a foolish time.

[5 : 46] And we may think, Oh yes, but it says about the sins of Manasseh, That's the reason for it, That he shed blood in Jerusalem, So that it ran like rivers in Jerusalem. Oh yes, he did.

But again, if we think even in terms of, Not only the level of fatal crime and murders in our land, Leave that aside, Think of the sanctioned killing, Think of the slaughter of the unborn in our land, Which since the passing of that act in the 60s, Has cost 8 million infant lives in the UK.

Now that's before you begin to take in all the cost in other countries, 8 million young lives destroyed, By that particular activity, With the killing of the unborn, And even aside from all our idolatry, Our paganism, This fact alone, Would put us under judgment, Across the UK, The slaughter of the unborn, Leaving aside our godlessness, Leaving aside, The state in which our country has come, No wonder we need, A national day of prayer, No wonder we have cause for thanksgiving, That the Lord has spared us for there too.

And this is what Josiah does, He doesn't just say, Oh well it's fine, It's not going to happen in my day, I can take my ease, I can eat and drink and be merry, But rather what he understands from it is, As long as I am alive, This curse is not going to come, As long as I am still here, Then we're all right.

Now he was 8 years old when he began to reign, And this is in his 18th year, So he's at 26, Still a young man, Okay he ends up dying prematurely, Because of a foolish battle, That he enters into in due course, But he is still a young man, He would have reason to hope, That there are years yet, In which Judah can be turned back to the Lord, Maybe he will have mercy, Maybe he will spare us, How many souls may have been brought into the world, And lived under the good reign, Of the God-honoring regime of King Josiah, How many may have been gathered into eternity, Having been reconciled to the Lord, During those 13 years, Of his reign and his influence, Only the Lord knows the answer to that, But it will probably number in the thousands, If not the tens of thousands, Who will be reconciled to the Lord, Before they die, Because a good king, Ruled over them, And rooted out the evil, And set up the true worship of the Lord,

[8 : 20] And the instruction of the people, In the word of God, There was a great need, For the nation to gather, There was a great need for them, To come before the Lord together, And the word says, That there was never such a Passover, As we read from verse 21, As it was held in the 18th year, Of King Josiah's reign, And there was never a king like him, Turned to the Lord with all his heart, And we have to think, Oh wait a minute, What about David?

What about Solomon? What about those who were good kings before, Hezekiah and others? Well, I think we should probably understand it, In terms of this word, Turned, David was already beloved of the Lord, A man after God's own heart, Solomon was reared up, With that love and respect for the Lord, If anything he subsequently fell away of it, But as a king who turned to the Lord, Having been in a state of ignorance, And darkness, As Josiah obviously was, And it wasn't that he hated the Lord, He sought to do good, He sought to repair the house of the Lord, Worship the true God, As far as he was able, But he didn't know God's revealed will, Because the word on the scroll, And the book had not been found, Until it was, And then he saw the great gulf, Between what he understood, As his own righteousness, And what the Lord required, By way of righteousness, And there was just no comparison, Between the two,

He knew the country, Was eventually doomed, But he also knew, That while he lived, He could make a difference, While he lived, He could exert an influence, Now, We are not kings, We are not rulers, Of kingdoms, Or lands, We don't have anything like the power, Or influence, Or authority, That Josiah would have had, When hopefully, Nor are we as far gone, As Judah was, I mean if you read through this, Chapter 23, Including all the bits we missed out, And so on, You see, The extent to which, The occult, And black magic, And paganism, Was obviously, Saturating the land, The amount that he had, To get rid of, The amount he had to root out, Including even from the temple itself, Is just vast, The extent of paganism, Mustard, And just everywhere, The land was rotten with it, So to effect, Any kind of reformation, To begin again, To bring the country,

Back to the Lord, God of their fathers, Was a massive undertaking, And only somebody, Anointed by the Lord, For this purpose, Would have been able to do it, But he used, What influence he had, To do such good, As he was able, As I said, We are not kings, We are not in great power, We are not in authority, We may have influence, Over very few people, What influence do we have, What power do we have, What will pass, For a kingdom, With us well, We may live alone, Or we may live, As part of our family, Or whatever the case may be, Wherever our domestic situation is, We can have influence, Within that whole sphere, We can dictate, That evil will be, Rooted out as far as possible, That the bad habits, And sins in our own hearts, Our own minds, Our own thoughts, Our own practices, Need to be addressed, That we need to turn back again, To the word of God, That we need to be reading it,

Day by day, That we may be instructed, And have that measuring line, That plumb line, As it were, Showing us, Not simply, Oh how far we fall short, Oh how depressing it is, But rather, Showing us, The righteousness of God, Over against, The sinfulness of our own hearts, And our great need, Of a saviour, A saviour who can help us, And direct us, In our lives here, And prepare us, Through the sanctifying grace, Of his once and for all, Sacrifice upon the cross, Prepare us, For the true kingdom of heaven, That is yet to come, Now, If we are able, To take, Such influences, We can have, Such years, As the Lord has given us, Josiah only has, 13 years left of his reign, In which to effect this, Maybe we only have, 13 years left of our lives, Maybe we have a lot less, None of us can know, How many days, We have been given,

[12 : 53] And numbered, We know it will be, A finite number, But we don't know, What that number is, So for whatever, Number of days, We have, To devote ourselves, Afresh to the Lord, I mean, Well, Josiah was already doing that, But when he discovers, The word of God, And its contents, And its requirements, He sees, This, Vast gulf, Between God's righteousness, And his own feeble attempts, As we measure ourselves, Against the word of God, Against God's perfection, We see, We see, Our need of the saviour, But we see, That God has, Readily provided, For us, He has shown us, That Jesus, Fulfilled, All this for us, Jesus enables us, To overcome, Our sinful, Inclinations, And temptation, Jesus enables us, To have hope, For our land, That such an occasion, As this, Of thanksgiving, For what the Lord,

Has done for us, That he has never, Withdrawn his hand, Of blessing from us, He has never, Failed to provide for us, He has never, Failed to get after us, And even if, For some, Perhaps this past year, May have been a year, Of painfulness, Or suffering, Or sorrow, Either for themselves, Or others, Yet the Lord, Has brought them through it, And with the Lord, Nothing will be wasted, For the sound of 56, Put thou my tears, Into thy bottle, Are they not in thy book, The Lord preserves, And keeps, Every sigh, Every experience, With the Lord, Nothing is lost, Without him, All is in vain, See how half the kings, Of Judah, Describe this, You know, Kings who did evil, In the sight of the Lord, And it may or may not be, That there were especially, Bad men, It's just that, They didn't turn to the Lord,

They didn't have the Lord, To guide, Protect, And atone for their sins, They had, They had put distance, Between themselves and the Lord, They turned away from the Lord, But here is one, Who began in ignorance, Began not knowing the Lord, And yet we read, There was never one like him, That turned to the Lord, With all his heart, And with all his soul, And with all his might, According to the law of Moses, Night after, Nor rose there any like him, It doesn't matter, What condition we may be in, To begin with, There is the opportunity, Whilst time is left to us, To turn to the Lord, With all our heart, And we may perhaps, Be in a state, Where we think, Oh yeah, Well you know, But the Lord, Yeah, He's already go to church, And already, Some reasonably God fearing, That's what Josiah was like, He thought he was God fearing, He thought, The nation wasn't in too bad, A state, As long as there was, A God honouring king, Who had come to the throne, As a child, Who would be trained up, In the way that he should go, But then when you see,

All that he had to get rid of, All the things, He had to root out, In the land, You think, How could he have grown up, With all this going on, All this paganism around him, And not think, Wait a minute, Something's wrong here, People, Well I would suggest to you, Look back in subsequent generations, At us, And the kind of things, That we allowed in our society, And think, How could they call themselves, Civilised, How could they call themselves, Advanced, Look at the depravity, That was enshrined in law, Look at the extent, To which the nation, Hadn't fallen, And turned away from the Lord, We have much, To be thankful for, Hitherto, We have much to be anxious about, For our nation, But I would suggest to you, That it is, Providential, That in this calendar year, The National Day of Prayer, And fasting, And appointed by, The General Assembly,

Has coincided, With our Thanksgiving Day, It is right, That we look back, Through the year, And give thanks to the Lord, For his provision for us, It is right, That we bemoan, The state of the nation, But it is right, Also, That we have hope, That the Lord, Has placed, His people, Just as he placed, Josiah, On the throne of Judah, He has placed, His people, Within this, United land, And whilst, Yes, We might say, Well, Isn't it good, That our own denomination, Is growing?

[17 : 29] Yes, It is, Isn't it good, There are all these, Church plants, And new congregations, Well, Yes, It is, But there are also, Congregations, That have gone down, And need redevelopment, There are places, Where the witness, Has almost, Been extinguished, The smoking flax, Has almost, Been quenched, And we have a nation, Of between, Five and six million people, And we have what, A hundred congregations, With which to, We are not the only, Branch of God's church, Of course, We are not the only ones, Who are striving, To be faithful, But there is a huge, Task in there, There is a great, Gospel, With a great need also, But we are not, Here for nothing, The Lord has placed us, Here in the midst, Of the years, In this generation, That he has given us, To enable us, To live for him, To witness for him, By our lives,

To be such influence, As we can be, Whether in our home, Which ought to be, The bare moon and home, Or in our place of work, Or amongst our circle, Of colleagues, Or friends, Or wherever we should be, That they will know, That we are a Christian, That they will know, That we give thanks to God, Before we eat a meal, That we give thanks to God, Before we partake, Of his good gifts, That we are thankful people, For what he has provided for us, And they are inclined, Of course, To shrug and say, Well what has God, Ever done for us, Everything you have, God has done for you, Everything with which, You have been blessed, God has blessed you with, They would say, Oh yes, But look at all the rotten things, That happen in my life too, Well you can't just, Blame God for the rotten things, And not give God, Thanks for the good things, If you are going to start, Acknowledging that it is all, From God, Then you start, Tawing up the arithmetic, And we'll soon find, Just how good God has been,

Not only to us, But to the unthankful, And to the unbelieving as well, We have so much reason, To thank the Lord, For the privilege, Of being his, And of having the opportunity, To live for him, In however many, Or few years, May be left to us, We should be thankful, That we can do so, But we should be thankful, Also for the opportunity, To pray together, On this national day of prayer, To pray individually, And to bring to the Lord, The needs of our nation, Now our nation has many needs, It has needs for a good government, And free from corruption, And so on, That's the case in every generation, We have need of that, It has need for wise heads, To roll over us, It has need for purity, In the workplace, It has need for the restoration,

Of the sanctity of marriage, And of family life, It has need for children, To be valued amongst us, Not just treated as commodities, Of the state, It has need above all, For the Lord Jesus Christ, To come back to us, To come back to us, As a nation, And to take his place, As king, And head of our kingdom, In this world, We have need, Yes, Of work, We have need of economic regeneration, We need for jobs, That will keep the young people, In their communities, And in their places, Where they can, They can not only benefit themselves, But be a benefit to others, We have need, So much need, At a practical level, Not just for higher standards, Of living, The Lord has blessed us, Richly in these things, But we have need, To recognise, That with all the good things, The Lord has given us, There comes responsibility, And the greatest responsibility,

Of all, Will be, What have we done, With the opportunities, Of grace, The Lord has given us, The opportunities, To receive him, Into our hearts, To be an influence, For him, In our country, In our nation, In our walks of life, The Lord Jesus Christ, Ought to be, Enthroned as king of Scotland, He ought to be the one, Who rules us, By his benign law, Of grace, It ought to be, The Lord Jesus Christ, Into conformity, With whom our laws, Are channeled, And drafted, It ought to be, The Lord Jesus Christ, Who is worshipped, Publicly in our school assemblies, And in our council chambers, It ought to be, The Lord Jesus Christ, Who with gentleness, Shows the light, And goodness, Of his love, That others, Who are in, Other religions, And false religions, Will not be,

[22 : 33] Persecuted, Or beaten out of the country, Or imprisoned, In any dark way, Like used to have been the case, Perhaps in a former age, But rather, Will see through the light, And grace of Christ, How empty and dark, Are all the things, That are man-made, In this world, Including man-made religions, And will long after that, Which alone, Will satisfy, And fulfill, Their hearts, Their homes, Their family life, Their work life, And the life of this nation, We have a need, For such, A reviving, Such, A reformation, Again, Such, A replenishment, Of our land, With the outpouring, Of God's spirit, And amongst, Amongst all the things, For which we must pray together, As a mission, On this national day of prayer, This surely, Is the greatest need,

Of our land, To be replenished, With God's spirit, To be rejuvenated, By his power, To be refreshed, With the outpourings, Of his grace, And to be restored, To that covenant, Which for centuries now, We have trampled underfoot, We have need, Of such a turning, As Josiah made, And which under him, Judah made, And it was only for a time, Let's not, You know, Fall into sort of fairy tale, Oh, They all live happily ever after, No, They were spared, For a precious few years, And the land, Feared the Lord, For a precious few years, And then, Bad kings arose, Turned them all back, To paganism, And so many, Just went with the flaw, It was not, Happily ever after, But it was happily, Spared for a time,

And that is all the influence, That we can exert, Is for a time, For the years, The Lord gets, There were thirteen years, Left to Josiah, How many years are left, For you, And what can we do, With them, To serve, Not simply, The king of Judah, But the king of kings, Who ought to be, On the throne, Of this land, And of the hearts, Of its people, And like unto him, Was there no king, Before him, That 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, Neither after him arose, Any like him, And verse 22, Surely there was not, Holden such a Passover, From the days, Of the judges, That judged Israel, Nor in all the days, Of the kings of Israel, Nor the kings of Judah, And we read these verses, And we think, Oh how wonderful, What a great king, He must have been, What a great Passover time,

That must have been, But what it actually means is, How few there were, How few such occasions, How few such passovers, How few such monarchs, How rare, And precious, A thing it is, To be the Lord's, In the midst of the years, To turn to him, With all the heart, And soul, And mind, And strength, To worship, And serve him, In the purity, Of his word, It is a rare, And precious thing, That is why, There was never, A Passover like it, Before and since, That's why, There was never, A king like Josiah, Before, All since, Who turned to the Lord, With all his heart, So it should not, Be a source, Of discouragement, To us, Oh how few, Oh how rare, Of these things, It is sad, That there are so few, It is sad, That they are so rare, But it is also,

The case, That in the darkest night, Even the littlest, Candle, Casts, A bright, Light, By contrast, Our candle, Is not given to us, To hide, A little bushel, But is set, On a lampstand, So it can give light, To all the house, Whatever we may, Define as our house, Whether a place, Where we live, The place, Where we work, A place, Where we can have, Influence in our friends, Our colleagues, By our house, Whatever it means, Is where we can shine, Where we can be used, Of the Lord, Because whilst we pray, For him to act, And whilst we pray, For the Lord, To intervene, In history, As he has done, In the past, To intervene, In our day, And in our land, And for our mission, And kingdom, We must likewise, Be prepared, To put ourselves, In his hands, And that if he is, Going to make, Vessels fit, For holy use,

[27 : 38] He may choose, To begin, With lumps of clay, Such as we are, If we are, Seious, About the Lord, Transforming, Our nation, And that's what surely, Is one of the things, One of the main things, We are praying about, Today nationally, That the Lord, Will transform, Our nation, We must be prepared, To be used by him, To this effect, This was the case, With Hilkiah the priest, And with all the servants, There of the king, And it was the case, With Josiah, Who said, It is the case, With all, Who will put their trust, In the Lord, And say like Isaiah, Of old, Here am I, Send me, So let us, Commit ourselves, Once more to the Lord, In thanksgiving, Indeed, For the rich provision, He has made, Of food, And drink, And warmth, And shelter, For each of us, The wondrous provision,

He has made, For our nation, In the past, That from which, We have turned, Into the darkness, But the Lord, Has not left himself, Without a light, In this dark world, Just as the night sky, Is not without, The pinprick twinklings, Of the stars, They may seem, Like only pinpricks, And whatever we can do, May seem like, Only a pinprick, Of light, In the darkness, But it is, By such, Twinkling, Pinpricks, Of light, That men navigate, And are guided, And are brought, Safe to the haven, That they seek, It is the Lord, And of his mercies, That we are not consumed, For those mercies, Are new, Every morning, And great is his faithfulness, And the thanksgiving, That we owe to him, We should render, Not nearly every year,

But all the days, Of our lives, That he may use us, For his service, For however many days, We may have, And the Lord bless, Do us these few thoughts, Let us pray, Almighty, And everlasting God, Lift us up, We pray, For we are cast down, As a mission, We are cast down, As a people, We see the cause, Of the Lord, Dwindling, In our land, And we see, The Lord amongst us, Conscious of our fewness, And of our weakness, That we know, Lord, That although, We are weak, Thou art strong, We may approach, O Lord, The Goliath, Of unbelief, In our land, Armed only, With a few small stones, From the brook, But as David said, To the giant, The battle is the Lord's, And it will not matter, What weapons are formed,

Against us, If we be in Christ, Then all the days, That thou hast given us, Let them be thine, Use us so Lord, And give us thankful hearts, For all thine many blessings, And for the blessing, Of this opportunity, Once again, To live for thee, To serve thee, To render thanks unto thee, For we ask, All these things, And we give thee our thanks, In Jesus name, And for this sake, Amen.

Amen.