

Restoration: The Concept

2 Kings 22

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It is good to be together as God's people this morning! If you are visiting with us today, we are glad to have you with us this morning, and we would invite you to fill out an online visitor card by using the QR code on the front of the bulletin or by going to our website at fourlakescoc.org/visitor.

One of the big reasons for coming together each week is both to hear and to share the good news, and the best news of all is that God loves us. He sent his only Son Jesus as a sacrifice for sin, to die in our place. He was buried, but he was raised up on the first day of the week. We obey this good news by turning to him in faith, by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith in Jesus as being the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins.

And we do have several examples today, starting with another update from the church in Honolulu, Hawaii. They posted last Lord's Day, and they say, "After our morning worship today, Khristian came asking to be baptized into Christ. We praise God for Khristian's decision to put on Christ in baptism. Pray for our new brother in Christ and rejoice in the Lord!" And I do love how they have a picture of these two studying the Bible together.

We also have another update from Pedro Luis Acosto, who preaches in Cuba (this is the church we looked at last week, I believe, the one that had the painting of the waterfall across the whole front of their building, ending in the baptistry). Brother Acosto says, "Today the windows of heaven are opened again, to receive Felix and Rosalia as part of the army of the Lord Jesus. God bless them along the way (Matthew 28:19-20)." Once again, great news out of Cuba this week!

The next one comes to us from the Central congregation in Paducah, Kentucky, where Josh Yancy's parents are members. They say that "Another congregation in our area needed use of a baptistry and called Central. We were blessed to see Spencer Wilford baptized into Christ this afternoon. What a joy!"

And this last one comes to us from Edmund Borfay, who says that "Albert obeys our Lord into the watery grave. The gospel...works in Kumasi, Ghana where I am visiting." They seem to have quite the elaborate baptistry here, very beautiful with the tile and all. It's an interesting outfit worn by the man doing the baptizing, but great news from Ghana this week. And we share these by way of encouragement. What these people have done – from Hawaii to Cuba and from Kentucky to Ghana – you can do this morning, right here in this building. If you would like to learn more, please pull me aside after the service today.

This morning, I'd like to start a brief series of lessons where we look at a good question that came from one of our young adults who wants to know: How do we as Christians answer this question a friend asked me, "How do you know that your version of Christianity is the right one?" And it is a great question, a question that all of us really do need to be prepared to answer. And I should congratulate the one who is asking this question in that if your friends are asking you "How do you know that your version of Christianity is the right one?", this means that they must know that you are a Christian! So, I should say here at the beginning: It is good to be talking about these things! In fact, this is one of the most important conversations we can have with the people around us. So, great question!

In terms of the question itself, as I have been asked this question through the years, it usually comes from somebody who already believes in God, the person usually has some respect for Scripture as being the word of God, they probably already believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and so the short answer might be something like this: By taking the Bible as our only authority, we are doing the best we can to restore simple, New Testament Christianity. That's the short answer. Jesus established his church back in the First Century, but over the past 2,000 years, people have really done a terrible job messing it up by adding and changing things, so we are trying to bypass all of that by taking the Bible as our only guide and using it to restore the simplicity of the early church. And it really is that simple. Christianity was never intended to be the grotesque, splintered mess that we see in the world all around us, where we have literally thousands of religious groups all teaching something different. Our answer is to use the New Testament pattern to do the best we can to restore what we had at the beginning – similar to how we might restore an old motorcycle, or similar to how we might go back and recreate an old recipe from our grandmother, or similar to how we might restore an old toolbox. Over the next few weeks, then, I'd like to elaborate on this by looking at a familiar example from back during the times of the Kings. This morning we will look at the danger of losing the word of God and the joy of rediscovering it. Next week we hope to look at what restoration actually looked like back in those days (we'll be applying the concept of restoration). In two weeks, we'll plan on looking at the New Testament warnings concerning leaving the divine pattern, and we'll note the remedy for when that happens. And then, I'm hoping we can start the new year (on January 1), by noticing what a restored church should look like.

Today, though, let's take a quick look at the CONCEPT of restoration by turning back to an interesting chapter in the history of God's people, back in 2 Kings 22 (p. 634). We studied this chapter back in 2014, but it's been a while. So, this may be a bit of review for some of us, but there's a value to it, because what happens in 2 Kings 22-23 is one of the greatest examples of apostasy followed by restoration anywhere in Scripture, and it happens during the reign of King Josiah. To put this in context, we think back to God's kingdom being united under Saul, David, and Solomon. When Solomon dies, his son Rehoboam takes over, he makes some very unwise decisions from the beginning, and the kingdom divides. The northern ten tribes follow Jeroboam, who is evil from the beginning. Jeroboam changes the place of worship, the object of worship, he changes those who serve in worship – Jeroboam changes everything, and those northern ten tribes never recover from that. They are taken off into Assyrian Captivity in 722 BC, never to be seen again. The two tribes remaining in the south have some good times and some bad times. Back when we studied 1-2 Kings a few years ago, we used the chart up here as a guide. If a king was generally good, he got a "+," if he was generally evil, he got a "-", and if he was sometimes good and sometimes bad, he got both. Notice: In the north (on the right up here), all bad. But in the south (on the left up here), some were good and others were evil.

But I want us to focus in on Josiah, the 16th king, who rules from 640-608 BC. Josiah is good. But let's notice that Josiah's grandfather was Manasseh, one of the most evil kings to ever rule. The asterisks indicate some overlap – we have a out ten years of co-regency at the beginning of his reign – but Manasseh rules for 55 years, and Manasseh was an evil, evil man. Manasseh sets up altars to Baal, he sets up altars for worshiping the stars, he brings in wizards and magicians, and he eventually oversees child sacrifice in Jerusalem, where parents would offer their children as burnt offerings to the pagan god Molech. The Bible tells us in fact (in 2 Kings 21:16) that Manasseh ***"shed very much innocent blood."*** Well, Manasseh's son (Josiah's father) is Amon, and Amon is just as bad. He's so evil, in fact, that he is murdered by his own servants at the age of 22. Well, the Bible tells us that the throne then passes to Amon's 8-year old son Josiah.

- I. And this is where we start today. Before we even get to any actual restoration, I want us to notice (as we study the CONCEPT of restoration) that it starts with an ATTITUDE, the attitude King Josiah has in 2 Kings 22:1-7,

1 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. 2 He did right in the sight of the Lord and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left. 3 Now in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan, the son of Azaliah the son of Meshullam the scribe, to the house of the Lord saying, 4 "Go up to Hilkiah the high priest that he may count the money brought in to the house of the Lord which the doorkeepers have gathered from the people. 5 "Let them deliver it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the Lord, and let them give it to the workmen who are in the house of the Lord to repair the damages of the house, 6 to the carpenters and the builders and the masons and for buying timber and hewn stone to repair the house. 7 "Only no accounting shall be made with them for the money delivered into their hands, for they deal faithfully."

So again, I want us to start by noticing the ATTITUDE in this situation as King Josiah starts with A HEART INTENT ON PLEASING GOD, an HONEST and SEARCHING HEART. He's not out to make a name for himself, he's not trying to out-do his father, he's not looking primarily for fame or riches. But even as a very young man, King Josiah decides in his heart to do right and to follow in the footsteps of his father David. How interesting! David is not his actual father. His real father and his grandfather were both evil. King Josiah, then, wants to bypass his immediate predecessors (even his own immediate family), and he wants to go back and to rule like the last truly great king, King David, a man after God's own heart.

A few notes on this, starting with the fact that this guy is only 8 years old! And I know, King Josiah is held up as something of a hero (and he is), but did you catch the real hero in verse 1? How does the 8-year old son and grandson of two of the most evil kings ever, end up doing right in the sight of the Lord and walking in the footsteps of King David? How does that happen? We have her name, don't we? The inspired author tells us that his mother's name is Jedidah. Jedidah married into an evil family, she's married to an evil king who is assassinated by his own servants only two years into his rule, but somehow she brings up her son (by the age of 8) to know that King David needs to be your role model. Under no circumstances are you to follow in the footsteps of your father and grandfather. That's a mom right there!

And this is the king's attitude. This is his mission. This is where it starts. And early on, this young king takes steps, doesn't he? He does right in the sight of the Lord, he walks in the way of his father David, and he does not turn aside to the right or to the left. I think of canoeing or kayaking down a river. As the river turns, there are dangers on both sides. On the outside of a curve, the water might be deep and swift, and it's easy to get caught up in low-hanging trees and pulled under. On the inside of a curve, we might have a sandbar where the water is shallow and we may get dragged to a stop. But somewhere between the right and the left there is a sweet spot where we paddle right on through! Josiah, in a sense, was navigating a river. There were dangers on both sides, but King Josiah ruled with the heart of David, not turning aside to the right or to the left – he's focused on pleasing God!

And notice what this attitude leads to. In the second half of this first paragraph, King Josiah makes the decision that they need to restore the temple. The temple is in tough shape. It's been abused and abandoned for many years. And like a house that's been abandoned, it's a big job, and it may be expensive. Our first house had been a rental, and to say that house had been abused would be an understatement. But notice what Josiah does. He pretty much sends his chief of staff and has him tell the high priest to count the money. And then he tells him to use that money to pay the workmen, and then he says: Fix it! I'm just paraphrasing here, but, "Fix it!" In fact, he tells them to do whatever needs

to be done, and don't bother keeping track of any expenses. Can we imagine calling a contractor and saying, "I need you to fix my house. Do it right. Money is no issue. Just fix it." And yet, this is what Josiah does. As a nation, we will be fixing God's house, and nothing else matters. And what I hope we notice here is that restoration starts with an attitude. Before we act, we think. And in terms of the question, "How do we know that your version of Christianity is the right one?," we have to start with the attitude that we will follow God, whatever the cost. Whatever we find, we must be determined to honor God from the heart, even if it means making a break with our parents and our grandparents, as Josiah did.

II. Let's continue in 2 Kings 22 by noticing the fact that GOD'S WORD CAN BE LOST AND THEN FOUND.

And we see how this happens in verses 8-13, as they are clearing out the debris from the temple – 2 Kings 22:8-13,

8 Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan who read it. 9 Shaphan the scribe came to the king and brought back word to the king and said, "Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD." 10 Moreover, Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it in the presence of the king. 11 When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. 12 Then the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Micaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant saying, 13 "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the LORD that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

Now, I know this paragraph explains how the Law is found, but as we think about this, we need to back up and just briefly note here that somehow God's Law was lost. And notice where they find it: They find it as they are cleaning out the temple! The temple had been neglected. I'm reminded of when we first moved to Janesville. The church building down there had been terribly neglected for many years. The church was in such tough shape that they had actually put the building on the market at one point. They had basically disbanded. So, we move there, and the building is full of what I would describe as debris – piles upon piles of old stuff all piled in together – old class material, Bibles, cassette tapes, furniture, all kinds of stuff. The roof was leaking, downspouts were missing so that water was eroding under the foundation, some rooms had never been painted, the furnaces were barely working, the baptistry was a rusted hunk of metal with water so green you couldn't even see down to the first step. We show up, and we get to work. I'm thinking this is what happened here in 2 Kings 22, only instead of just a few years of neglect, this had gone on for decades. And in that period of time, God's word had gone missing. The priests were responsible for protecting that document, but they had lost it. Today, we might hear somebody say, "You had one job!" Their one job was to preserve the word of God, but they had lost it in the temple. So, first of all, we have the reminder that it's possible to lose the Law of God in the house of God.

And this is what amazes me: Even without the word of God as their guide, these people continued worshiping. They continued their religious rituals. So my question is: How did they make decisions? Without the word of God as their authority, how did they decide what to do? We know, don't we? Because we see it all around us. In the realm of religion, sometimes "the show goes on" even without ever truly considering or consulting what God would prefer with this or that. Perhaps the high priest just made decisions. We see that today, don't we? There are many religious groups where some kind of pastor calls the shots. Or maybe the king made decisions (as happened with Jeroboam). Or maybe they had a meeting or a conference where they would vote on what to do next. This also is a common way of making religious decisions these days. I'm just saying that the word of God was lost, but they still continued doing religious type things, apparently without consulting the word of God as their authority. That's dangerous. And we see the consequences under Manasseh. How did Josiah's grandfather Manasseh get away with setting up altars to Baal

and the stars? How did he get away with offering child sacrifices? How did he get away with bringing in male prostitutes? The answer is: When we lose the word of God as our authority, anything might happen! And it did. A few tweaks, a few upgrades to worship here and there, and we end up with a king like Manasseh. And apparently, many of the people never knew any better. They did all these things, thinking they were honoring God.

So, let's take this as a reminder that the word of God can be lost, even in a place of worship. It wasn't taken in battle. It wasn't burned as some kind of protest. No, it was lost in the temple. And really, it's lost whenever any other standard of authority takes its place. So, when we have these discussions with our friends, we really need to establish what we are using as a guide. Are we looking to some religious leader as our authority? Are we leaning on some kind of creed or statement of faith? Do we just do what our relatives have done? Are we looking to the church or tradition itself as being able to overrule scripture? We need to be very careful how we talk about this. Sometimes, we might hear somebody refer to what the "church of Christ teaches." No, the church of Christ doesn't have it's own teaching – we are to teach whatever the Bible teaches. Years ago, I clipped a letter to the editor from the Janesville paper, where somebody was writing in about why they wouldn't be supporting the Clinton's healthcare plan. This tells you how old this is (April 25, 1994). But here is the rationale behind her decision. She says, "I am Roman Catholic and obey the divine moral and natural law as well as his holiness, Pope John Paul II, and the archbishops and bishops in communion with him." I look at that statement, and it's clear that her authority is not the word of God alone, but the pope and the church itself.

Years ago, we sat down to study the book of Mark with a visitor to our services, and when we sat down and opened our Bibles together, she cried. She wept on the couch and said, "All my life I have attended private religious schools, and this is the first time I have actually studied the Bible. Up until now, I have only studied religion books, but never the Bible itself." And with tears in our eyes, we jumped into Mark 1, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." What a joy to find the word of God after it had been lost! On another occasion, we studied with a woman coming out of the Salvation Army church (it is a church, by the way). When we got to baptism, she also wept, because those people had never mentioned baptism. Yes, they had helped with some physical needs, but they convinced her she was saved when she was actually lost. And she was mad. That's why I'll never support the Salvation Army – not because people aren't deserving of help, but because I would much rather help them personally than to have the Lord's money go to church that has lost the word of God (and, in fact, is helping others not to find it). By the way, I mentioned this maybe 15 or 20 years ago, and somebody started spreading division by saying, "Baxter thinks certain people aren't worthy of our help unless they agree with us religiously." No! That's not it at all. I hope you see the difference. We need to be helping people, and we do; I just want to cut out the middle-man, especially when the middle-man is using my donation to help people misunderstand the word of God. I've just seen that with my own eyes. But that's how we lose the word of God, by using something other than the word as our authority.

I would also remind us that if we lose the word of God, it won't be because the Mayor of Madison pries it from my cold, dead fingers; no, if we lose the word of God, it will be because we have forsaken it in the church, because we as God's priests today have forsaken it in our own lives. And I say this, because some people may get all uptight about what the government may or may not be doing. And sure, I think it's a shame that an elementary school won't allow a Bible on the shelves, even under a giant poster of Abraham Lincoln (who taught himself to read by using the Bible – I've had a conversation with our elementary school librarian about this). What a shame. But, I'm just saying that the real threat to the Bible is losing it in the house of God, losing it in our personal lives. So, I would take this as an opportunity to encourage all of us to start thinking about some kind of plan for reading the Bible this coming year.

But just as surely as we can lose it, let's also notice in this passage that God's word can be FOUND. They bring it to the king, and King Josiah tears his clothes. It seems that he's terrified. Some think they found the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses. Others suggest that they might have just found the book of Deuteronomy. But either way, Josiah has heard enough. He's convicted. He knows that they've sinned. But in terms of our question, I'm just saying that when the word of God is lost it must be found (as it is here). And it must be found for me, *"...for great is the wrath of the*

LORD that burns against us,” Josiah says, *“because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”* Josiah is convicted by the message.

III. This leads us to the last paragraph, where we have King Josiah making a REQUEST FOR INSTRUCTION.

Let’s notice what happens next in 2 Kings 22:14-20,

14 So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter); and they spoke to her. 15 She said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Tell the man who sent you to me, 16 thus says the LORD, “Behold, I bring evil on this place and on its inhabitants, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read. 17 Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods that they might provoke Me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore My wrath burns against this place, and it shall not be quenched.” 18 But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the LORD thus shall you say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel, “Regarding the words which you have heard, 19 because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you,” declares the LORD. 20 “Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place.”” So they brought back word to the king.

So, this is where the priest and his people go and find Huldah the prophetess. And what an honor this is! The king wants a message from God, and the high priest knows right where to go. He goes directly to the house of Huldah, and Huldah answers. And her answer is that basically, yes, God will punish the nation as promised in Deuteronomy (in the book of the Law); however, because Josiah has such a tender heart and has humbled himself before the Lord, and because Josiah tore his clothes and wept, the Lord will delay the punishment to some point beyond Josiah’s lifetime.

Here at the end, then, we have a reminder that when the way is unclear, it’s good to keep on looking, to dig even deeper, to look for clarification. We might think of Saul when he sees the Lord in Acts 9. After the initial vision, he continues on to Damascus to find Ananias. We might think of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8. When Philip asks whether he understands what he is reading, the Eunuch says, *“Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?”* (Acts 8:31). Restoration is an ongoing process where we constantly learn and go searching.

The practical lesson for us is: When we discover something shocking or seemingly against what we’ve been doing all along, we are not to turn away from that, but we dig in even further. We might compare it to being asleep and somebody turns on the overhead light in the room. We want to hide from that! I actually got a new-to-me light fixture at Habitat Restore, so that I can direct the bedroom light away from my face for those times when somebody might accidentally turn it on in the middle of the night. But the tendency is to hide from bright light. Josiah, though, stares at the sun here! He’s shocked by the word itself, which makes him go looking for a prophetess! What a great attitude! And it’s an attitude all of us need to have whenever we talk about restoration. We need more of God’s word, not less.

Conclusion:

This brings us to the end of today’s study. I am looking forward to continuing next week with what King Josiah does next in 2 Kings 23. And next week, I would really love to explain the toolbox up here. You didn’t miss that; I’m just saving it for next week. But today, we’ve been looking at the question, “How do you know that your version of Christianity is the right one?” And we’re hopefully starting to answer that question by looking at the concept of restoration. Next week, we’ll notice what restoration actually looks like. Today, we’ve emphasized the word of God. And Michael will be leading several songs hopefully focusing our thoughts on the word of God.

As we start preparing our minds for the Lord's Supper, let's pray together:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the great and awesome God, the one and only Creator and Sustainer of all life. You made us, and you have every right to rule over us. We are thankful for your Son, the Eternal Word. And we are thankful for the good news. We are completely undeserving of what you have done for us.

Thank you, Father, for saving us. And thank you for hearing our prayer.

We come to you through Jesus, who gave his life for us on the cross._AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com