

Restoration: A Case Study

2 Kings 23

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It is good to be together as God's people this morning! If you are visiting with us today (either here in person or online), 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.

We are here today to hear and to share the good news that God loves us and that he sent his only Son Jesus 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 an update from the Bridge Avenue congregation in Weslaco, Texas. They say,

We are rejoicing today! Roy and Arleene decided to obey the gospel and put on Christ in baptism. Roy had attended church services here as a boy. A chance encounter back in May at Dairy Queen led to an invitation to our Vacation Bible School. They have five sweet kiddos! We studied... [and] we were not [even] done...when they asked if they could be baptized right now. Please pray for this young family. Roy is a truck driver and is away on the road weekly. Praise God! He is good!"

Thank God for Dairy Queen and Vacation Bible Schools! Most of you know that my wife and her family came to know the Lord through an invitation to a Vacation Bible School out in LaJunta, Colorado. I love that their kids are apparently all around the baptistery, and I'm sure the young man in the foreground here will always remember his mom obeying the gospel.

This one comes to us from the Crosstown congregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma. They say, "We are excited to announce Riley and Karina were baptized into Christ last night! The angels in heaven are rejoicing!"

And this last one comes to us from Michael Grooms, who preaches for the Lord's church in Boiling Springs, South Carolina. Michael says,

This is Chris. He is a young man 25 years old who is a resident at a local nursing home. A few weeks ago he contacted me, asking me to share the gospel with him. Since then, he and I have

been engaged in Bible studies. Chris is bound to a wheelchair, so we had to bring in a special pool and fill it with water from the sink. My son Joshua Grooms and Bob Healey provided the muscle power needed to lift Chris into the pool and set him down where I could baptize him. It took a long time to fill the pool, so we just sang hymns with some residents and nurses who came to share in this special moment. God's grace never ceases to amaze me! He provides a way for those who seek to obey!

And we share these by way of encouragement. What these people have done, 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, we are continuing in a brief series of lessons where we are looking 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?" We noted that this is a great question, and I started last week by suggesting a possible "short answer" by suggesting that "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. We're not really defending "our version of Christianity" as the right one, but we are trying to communicate that our goal is to honor scripture and to use the word of God as a pattern as we try to restore simple, New Testament Christianity, just as we might try to restore an old car or a house to its original condition – not out of arrogance, but to honor the original creator and designer. Last week, I mentioned the toolbox up here. Back when I was a kid, we would go on a walk around the block every Sunday night, and the cool thing was: Monday was trash day! We have no shame in our family when it comes to stopping by the side of the road! One Sunday night, we found a really nice Kennedy tool chest on a trash pile, but it was missing a slide on one of the drawers, so the drawer wasn't working. Well, we got home and found a \$2 bill behind that drawer. As I remember it, we then went to Sears and ordered that drawer pull for about \$2. We took the toolbox apart, cleaned it up, repaired it (we restored it, in a sense), and I have been using it for the past 40+ years. I take that as an illustration of what it means to restore something. We didn't invent anything, we didn't improve on the original design, but we restored it – back to the way it was designed.

Last week, we noted that 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. Last week, then, we started by looking at the CONCEPT of restoration by looking together at what happened back in the time of King Josiah. Josiah takes over as king at only 8 years old, he is the grandson of the most evil king to ever rule over Judah, and his dad is so evil that he is assassinated by his own people after only two years on the throne. At this point, Josiah takes over. And I didn't realize it at the time, but we had an 8-year old with us last Sunday! That's how old Josiah was when he took over as king. But, we noted in 2 Kings 22 that restoration starts with the attitude that we will follow the word of God. We also noted, though, that God's word can be both lost and found (as it was in Josiah's day – he ordered that the temple be repaired, and in the process, they found the book of God's law that had gone missing for many years). And then we closed last week's lesson by discovering that when King Josiah was unsure, he kept digging. So, this is the concept: We respect the word, knowing that it can be lost and found, and we never stop learning.

Today, I'd like for us to move into 2 Kings 23, and I'd like for us to take a look at what King Josiah actually does next. So, we might refer to 2 Kings 23 as being "a case study in restoration." Next week, I'd like for us to take a look 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 look at what King Josiah actually does.

- I. And we start with the first three verses in 2 Kings 23, as we find that King Josiah starts by making a very public COMMITMENT – he communicates this to the nation, and what he communicates is a COMMITMENT to following the word of God, no matter what.

Let's notice 2 Kings 23:1-3,

1 Then the king sent, and they gathered to him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. 2 The king went up to the house of the LORD and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. 3 The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people entered into the covenant.

Josiah, then, starts with a commitment, a covenant, an agreement: We may not have all the details worked out, but whatever happens next, we (as a nation) will keep God's commandments! And remember: In Josiah's case, this means making a break with his father and grandfather. This is a change, a commitment to honor God, no matter what. And I also hope we notice that King Josiah personally reads the entire Law out loud, to all the people. I'm thinking: Surely, he could have summarized it. Surely, he could have hit the highlights. Surely, he could have put a few bullet points on the PowerPoint. But no, King Josiah reads the entire Law out loud in this sacred assembly, and he makes an agreement: All of us together will keep God's commandments and his statutes, and we will do this with all of our heart and soul. It starts with a commitment.

I'm thinking of what happened with a group of Presbyterian ministers back in the early 1800's here in the United States. They started finding some differences between the Bible and their religious heritage, so they formed their own association of ministers, known as the Springfield Presbytery. It wasn't long, though, until they realized that even an association like that couldn't be found in scripture. So, they came together and drafted a document known as "the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery." I would encourage you to look this up on your own if you'd like to read the whole thing, but they make some introductory comments, and then they say,

The Presbytery of Springfield sitting at Caneridge, in the county of Bourbon, being, through a gracious Providence, in more than ordinary bodily health, growing in strength and size daily; and in perfect soundness and composure of mind; but knowing that it is appointed for all delegated bodies once to die; and considering that the life of every such body is very uncertain, do make and ordain this our last Will and Testament, in manner and form following...:

Imprimis. We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.

I love that! As a denominational body, we we are of sound mind and body (like you might say in a will), but then, "we will that this body die." They continue, "We will that our name of distinction, with its Reverend title, be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God's heritage, and his name one." The next item, "We will, that our power of making laws for the government of the church, and executing them by delegated authority, forever cease; that the people may have free course to the Bible, and adopt the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." And on and on. They didn't have all the answers, but they knew that they were part of a church organization without God's authority, and so they killed it! Being of sound mind and spirit, we will that this body die and that we only follow the scriptures from this point forward. I love the last item up here, "Finally, we will that all our sister bodies read their Bibles carefully, that they may see their fate there determined and prepare for death before it is too late." These people were not forming

a new denominational body, but they were killing the one they were a part of. And that is our mission, even today. As with King Josiah, restoration starts with a commitment to follow and obey the word of God, no matter what.

II. **This commitment then leads us, first of all, to STOP DOING WHAT GOD HAS FORBIDDEN, TO PUT AN END TO WHAT GOD HAS NOT AUTHORIZED.**

We don't have time to read the whole chapter, but we get a taste of it starting in verse 4,

Then the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the doorkeepers, to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel.

So, he tells his people to burn every container, every utensil, that was used to worship Baal and the Asherah and the stars. He carries their ashes to Bethel. If you were in our class this past Wednesday, you know the background to this. Bethel is where God appeared to Jacob. That place had a history, so the people had apparently twisted it. King Josiah, then, made a point of defiling it. And this is just the first in a long series of corrections. King Josiah basically goes on a rampage against any worship that God has not authorized. In the following verses, he gets rid of the pagan priests, he burns the Asherah that had been brought into the temple, he tears down the houses of the male prostitutes who were doing their thing as an act of worship, he tears down the high places where people were burning incense to the pagan gods, he defiles Topheth (where the people were burning their children in the fire as an act of worship to Molech), he gets rid of the horses that were dedicated to the worship of the sun, he burns the chariots with fire, he breaks down the pagan altars and throws their dust in the Kidron, he destroys the pagan altars that were built by King Solomon to honor his foreign wives. And I don't know whether we realize this, but these altars were 300 years old at this point. This is stuff that King David let slide! This is part of their history. This is like us electing a new president who decides to get rid of the Statue of Liberty. This is huge! But this is how dedicated King Josiah is to getting rid of anything in worship that God had not commanded. He tears down the sacred pillars. Like I said, this man is on a rampage. Nothing is off limits. If we don't have book, chapter, and verse, it's gotta go! And it doesn't matter how long we've done this or who started it.

Most of us know that one of the big hang-ups people have with making a break from their past religion is that they don't want to dishonor their parents, "If I step away from Church-X, if I don't have my baby baptized, if I admit that what I grew up with was wrong, I'll be condemning my parents." Josiah didn't think like that, did he? He didn't think like that, because he started with that commitment to follow God, no matter what. Notice: Josiah did not use his father and grandfather as an excuse, but instead, he fixes the problem. He restores God's vision for the nation by doing away with these altars and idols. Nothing "sacred" is truly "sacred."

We have an amazing footnote down in verse 17. As they scour the land looking for stuff to destroy, they come to a monument near Bethel, a monument dedicated to the man of God who had come up from Judah to prophesy against Jeroboam many years earlier. And the locals explain (in verse 17), ***"[This] is the grave of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel."*** And indeed, we go back to 1 Kings 13, and the young prophet had predicted that a descendant of David, a man by the name of Josiah, would someday come and burn the bones of false priests on this altar. When Josiah hears this, Josiah basically says, "Okay, let's not destroy this grave, this monument," and then he honors the prophet who predicted this by killing the priests and burning their bones on the altar. Like I said, he's on a rampage. He cleanses the land. Josiah cleans house, both literally and symbolically.

III. I hope we understand, though, that restoration is more than just whacking all the bad stuff, so let's not miss what happens in verses 21-23 as well as the summary in verse 25, because King Josiah also USES GOD'S LAW TO RE-INSTITUTE WHAT GOD ACTUALLY COMMANDED.

Starting in verse 21, *"Then the king commanded all the people saying, 'Celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God as it is written in this book of the covenant.' Surely such a Passover had not been celebrated from the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was observed to the LORD in Jerusalem."* And in verse 25, the text says that, *"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."* So, not only did he get rid of what God had not authorized, but he also brought back what God had originally commanded. He brought back the Passover, the feast where the people remembered God bringing them up out of the land of Egypt. And according to the author of 2 Kings, the Passover hadn't been celebrated like this since the days of the judges, a period of roughly 750 years. Even David didn't celebrate a Passover like this one. Oh, they celebrated under David, but not like these people. King Josiah gets it right. He restores worship to the way it was originally intended.

So, if we were to ask King Josiah, "How do you know that your version of Judaism is the right one?" How do we think he might answer? In all humility, I think King Josiah would open the Law of God and he would invite us to make a comparison: This is what God has commanded, and this is what we are doing – How does it look to you?

Conclusion:

As we come to the end of this chapter, and as we conclude, let's note again (as we did last week) that restoration is an ongoing process. There's never a time when we can say that our work is truly done. And I say this because of what happens next. After the Bible tells us that *"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 the Law of Moses; nor did any arise after him,"* the text continues (in verses 26-27) by saying, *"However, the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. The LORD said, 'I will remove Judah also from My sight, as I have removed Israel. And I will cast off Jerusalem, this city which I have chosen, and the temple of which I said, "My name shall be there."'"* Then, in the following verses, Egypt comes north to assist Assyria in battle, and Josiah (apparently without consulting God) steps in to try to keep Egypt from passing through, he is killed in battle (at the age of only 38 or 39). His evil son takes his place until he is imprisoned by the Egyptians a few months later, and then Pharaoh installs another of Josiah's sons (also evil), and he is eventually taken away to Egypt where he dies. And it isn't long before the nation itself is attacked and taken away into Babylonian captivity. We knew the restoration would be short-lived going into this. It's almost as if the nation itself had committed the sin against the Holy Spirit – they had sinned so long that they were to the point of not caring, they had gone past the point of no return. But, Josiah did the best he could with what he had. And this reminds us that restoration itself is an ongoing challenge. We are always tempted to add to and take away from God's plan. Restoration, then, is ongoing. The process of restoration never ends. And I'm hoping this keeps us humble. And I'm also hoping that this serves as a reminder to keep us in the Word. Restoration is an ongoing process.

This brings us to the end of today's study. I am looking forward to continuing next week with a summary of some of the warnings against apostasy in the New Testament as well as the solution God provides. And then, on January 1 I'm hoping we can try to give a summary of what restoration looks like under the New Covenant.

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

Our Father in Heaven,

We praise you this morning as the creator and designer of your kingdom, the church. You have called us out of a world of sin, and you purchased our freedom with the blood of your only Son. We know from scripture that the church was planned from eternity, from before the creation itself. We are in awe of your creative power. 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