

Sunday June 21, 2020
 Lesson 3: Lost and Found
 Scripture: 2 Kings 22: 8-20

Context:

Our next lesson jumps to the Book of Second Kings. Much like First Kings, Second Kings narrates the story of the kings of Israel and Judah. While the names occasionally blend together due to their spelling, some do stand out. Most of the kings also blend together because they were consistently bad. Reign after reign ended poorly with the kings making poor decisions, affecting future generations.

The background of today's text looks at Josiah, one of the more respected kings of the whole royal line. The book of Kings has two ideological themes in tension with one another; on one hand Josiah is the most righteous king Judah has ever had and on the other hand, God is going to destroy Judah anyways.¹ God's ways are more complex than the concept of good behavior and reform leading to reward instead of punishment.² Yet the narrative tells this very principle as despite Josiah's attempts to reform the land, destruction will still come to Judah.

Josiah has asked for the Temple to be restored and for things to be put in proper order. A result of cleaning the Temple leads to a discovery of a scroll containing the words of "instruction," the words of Deuteronomy.³ The high priest Hilkiah takes the scroll to Shaphan, the royal secretary who has been instructed to account to King Josiah about the administration of the king's decrees. During a testimony about all the things being done, Shaphan reads aloud the scroll.

King Josiah realizes the importance of this scroll and proceeding in mourning rituals, tears his clothes. He realizes the people have strayed from the instruction and thus will face their own destruction. He orders a royal entourage to make their way to appeal to the Lord to ask for forgiveness for the people of Israel.

When the royal entourage arrives at the house of the prophetess Huldah, they come to someone who has the ear of the Lord. Her identification with a specific family with royal connections and the name of her neighborhood highlight this is a prophetess with clout.⁴ Her two-piece oracle points to the grim future of Judah and Josiah's exemption from the catastrophe.⁵ Even though Josiah will try to reform the land, the wrath of God will come and Judah will be destroyed. Fortunately, Josiah will die in peace before he watches the land he loves be obliterated.

¹ Nelson, Richard D. "First and Second Kings," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for First and Second Kings*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 252.

² *Ibid.*, 252.

³ See Deut. 31:9, 24-26.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 256.

Application

At first glance this passage might seem like nothing but doom and gloom. Despite Josiah making the reforms and the royal entourage coming together to plead before the Lord, the nation of Judah will still fall and the people will be forced to atone for their sins. The only consolation, if you can call it a consolation, is the peaceful death of Josiah. He will not witness the country fall or potentially die a bloody, violent end at the hands of the Assyrians.

Yet in this passage there is also hope of Judah learning a lesson from a disobedient past and being redeemed after being conquered and exiled. For Josiah, there is hope as he leads the nation by helping the people try to reform even with catastrophe looming on the horizon. The damage has been done and yet the Lord will not abandon the people despite their adulterous relationships with other gods. There will be a learning curve for all parties.

There is a daily application in the midst of all this in several ways, the first dealing with current events. Only two weeks ago did the horrendous death of George Floyd happen in Minneapolis. The country immediately reacted as protests begun to break out and the Black Lives Matter movement took center stage.

One of the initial responses was a cry for Confederate memorials to be taken down. In my own state there was a pushback from various segments of the population. Many people have been upset by vandalism and disrespect for property, valid legal concerns.

Yet in the midst of it I wonder how a distant ancestor of mine, General Robert E. Lee, would react to the movements of today. In Lee's memoirs, one of his pleas was not to build statues or memorials glorifying Confederate leaders as this was not a proud moment in our nation's history. Scores of young men died, families were divided, and all of it centered on who got the right to own people of a different color. People had been turned into objects and were being used to justify the death of thousands of people.

Lee did not want public monuments of him everywhere as made clear in his memoirs. He thought it would be divisive and cause people to glorify the Confederacy to immortalize the "Lost Cause." He thought statues in particular would glorify the Old South and cause harm in the New South after the Civil War. And you see how that went down. The minute he died in peace, like Josiah, the southern landscape became dotted with Lee statues. Statues which were meant to honor him and yet would be a better model in places like museums or parks dedicated to explaining American history.

Perhaps where we find ourselves like those in ancient Judah is where we have the choice to deal with our sins of the past and look towards a better future. Nothing about it is easy and nothing about it is fun. Yet God's Word reminds us there is a covenant by which God calls for us to respond with a love for God and a love for our neighbor. When we worship other gods in forms of gold, silver, iron, or marble, we are not following the crucified Christ. When we know something might be hurting our neighbor and we continue to push it nonetheless, we are not following the God who created all humanity in God's image.

Like the people of Judah we are to strive for reform even knowing that the path ahead of us may be messy, complicated, and even call for us to change. God is calling for us to look in the mirrors of our hearts and to ask who we truly follow and who we truly claim as the Lord of our lives. God is calling for us to turn and look at our neighbors, not

just feeling sympathy for others, instead deeply listening to them. The Lord has called us to repent and to draw near to the one who has called us by name.

Why do you think Josiah continued to work for reform even when he knew what would happen to Judah? How can individual sin contribute to community sin? Why is it important to reflect on how our sins affect others? What does it mean to you to love God and to love neighbor? How do we actively participate in God's call to love God and love our neighbor?

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