

Josiah and the Finding of the Word

Our recent Old Testament readings present Josiah as being a King of Reformation. From the time when his reign began, we are told that “he did that which was right in the sight of Yahweh, and walked in all the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand or to the left” (2 Chron. 34:2). Seeking after the welfare of Yahweh's kingdom of Israel, he also sought to implement His Righteousness in purging out idolatry, and causing the people to draw near to their Maker. He began a work that impacted upon not only the Israel of his day, but which is also an “ensample” to believers of all ages, that they themselves might continue the work begun. His very name signifies “Yahweh Heals,” and his life was devoted to the healing of sinners, that turning aside from the idolatry of his fathers, he might cause those with ears to hear to hearken to the spiritual principles of The Law.

Beginning his reign at the tender age of 8, it is probably that the influence of Hilkiyah the High Priest shaped his mind during his formative years. Eight years later, “he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images” (2 Chron. 34:3). At 16 years of age, he was sufficiently persuaded in the Holy things of Yahweh to begin the work of clearing away the rubble and pollution that had accumulated in the Temple, during many long years of deep apostasy. He therefore gave the command to repair the House of Yahweh, and so the work of Reform began in earnest.

But whilst the rubble of the apostasy was being cleared away, the High Priest made a remarkable discovery:

“... and when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of Yahweh, Hilkiyah the priest found a book of the Law of Yahweh given by Moses.” (2 Chron. 34:14)

This was a most significant development, for prior to this discovery it would appear that there were no available copies of the Law extant in the nation. Most probably Josiah had, until this point, been influenced by the testimony of others, in the development of his zeal for Truth, for he had no way of verifying these things for himself. But once the Law had been found, he could receive it - and teach it – directly, something which would have given authority and foundation for his actions.

It is a matter of great interest that the Law was found “in The House”. It has been thought that this was the very copy that was penned by the hand of Moses himself (see 2 Chronicles 34:14, margin). If so, it would have been that which was placed in the side of the Ark of Yahweh, the meeting place between Israel and their Maker (Deut. 31:26). Maybe one reason for it being placed there, was so that the Law would not perish altogether from within Israel, but would be found and resurrected in due time. Certainly that is what happened, in circumstances reflective of our own. Through years of apostasy in doctrine and practice, the scroll remained hidden, unknown and unrecognized within the very sanctuary itself. The situation thus described brings to mind one of the parables of Messiah:

“what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a lamp and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the Angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:8-9).

Notice here, the tenth piece of silver was not lost outside, or due to outside influences – it was lost

within the very house itself, just like the Law in Josiah's day. What a terrible indictment against those who had the responsibility of maintaining the house and its contents - what an awful thing indeed to lose the treasure of the Truth. It is written that "the words of Yahweh are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" - yet it had been regarded as nothing, a thing of no value. But the Psalmist continues concerning the Words: "thou shalt keep them, O Yahweh, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever" (Psa. 12:7). Even so, Yahweh preserved his word from an untoward generation, that it might remain to be discovered by Josiah, the King of Reformation.

There is a warning here for ourselves. Being buried under the tokens of apostasy, the Word could not be seen. Is it not so, that in our day the Word and its power can be hidden within the very house itself? Buried amongst the commentaries and theorizations of men that seem to become increasingly common - lost in the multitude of erroneous translations and philosophies, is it possible for the real impact of the Word to be lost? The ecclesia is the "House of God", the Pillar and Foundation of the Truth" (1 Tim. 3:15), and the Lord Jesus Christ is its head (Heb. 3:6). We can be assured that our Master will not permit the Truth to be extinguished altogether, for in each generation there have arisen contenders for the faith: men who wield the sword of the spirit to cut down the high things that exalt themselves against a knowledge of the Truth. These are the salt of the earth - a preserving influence that keeps men from being given over to total destruction. These men are amongst "the children of light," who cause their light to shine before men. But consider the words of Messiah in this regard:

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under a bushel, but on a lampstand; and it giveth light unto *all that are in the house*" (Mat. 5:14-15).

Notice this - their light shines to "all that are in the house", not to those outside only. Here is the work which we must each take to ourselves - for if the house be enlightened there is no danger of the Word being lost and mislaid because of the darkness of apostasy. And if the Ecclesial House is found shining with the brilliance of the Truth received, believed and acted upon, it will constitute a Lampstand amongst which the Master is pleased to walk (cp Rev. 1:13; 2:1).

Having had the book of the Law read to him, Josiah became a man of action, driven by a passion to obey that which he had heard:

"it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes" (2 Chron. 34:19).

The record continues to tell us how Josiah, though king, was "poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my [Yahweh's] word" (cp 2 Kings 22:19 with Isa. 66:2). He commanded for all of the people to be gathered:

"and the king went up into the house of Yahweh, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of Yahweh" (2 Chron. 34:30).

So, the consequence of receiving the Word, was the desire to share it with others, and cause them to seek Yahweh. Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah spoke of this, and the way in which he received the Word that his father found:

“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart ...” (Jer. 15:16).

Here is a man of faithful spirit – as soon as the Word was found, Jeremiah sought to consume it – and with enjoyment, for it was the Joy and Rejoicing of his heart. Again, we must consider whether we also share that spirit – is the Word a Joy and Rejoicing of our hearts? Do we eagerly seek to consume the word – that is, do we have a good spiritual appetite? Doubtless this discovery would have been great encouragement for Jeremiah, and the work that he had to do - and so it should be for us also.

As well as to physically remove the elements of Apostasy, and the idols which Israel worshipped, it was necessary for Josiah to instruct the people of the Law. So we read that:

“the king went up into the house of Yahweh, 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 ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of Yahweh” (2 Kings 23:2).

Moreover, verse 3 of this same chapter recounts how the king “made a covenant before Yahweh”, and how that “all the people stood to the covenant.” The command was given to finish purging the House, so that acceptable worship could commence there.

The removal of the idols and all that appertained to them, was essential for the work that was to follow. Josiah had read in the book of the covenant that the Passover was to be kept (2 Kings 23:21-22), and such actions were necessary as part of the preparation for the Passover. Only when the idolatry was removed could the worship of Yahweh begin with acceptability before Him.

This might seem an obvious point to make, when looked at in the context of times gone by – but it is one that is not at all appreciated by many in our day. There is a time to break down before a time to build (Eccl. 3:3), yet this work of breaking down of the edifice of human philosophy is seldom done, and when it is, the doers of the work can be assured of experiencing the most bitter responses that Human nature is capable of bringing. “We ought to show love, and not destroy”, say they! But how can a man love those whose ways are in willful and direct conflict with the commandments of Christ? Surely the best way to show love to those individuals is to warn them of the destination of their chosen path, that it can only lead to the destruction and the grave? To urge them to repent, and heed the commandments of God, that they might be saved? Those who urge love for the false worshippers, will have great difficulty in the day when the “holy apostles and prophets” “rejoice over” the destruction of the great Romish Harlot (Rev. 17:3)! We need to decide where our true feelings and allegiances lie – with those who remain in the congregation of the dead, or those who believe and obey the Gospel that saves.

Josiah purged the nation from its Idolatry in order that he could then keep the passover according to the commandment. Even so we, in the symbolic partaking of Christ, our Passover, must do likewise:

“purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:7-8).

Notice the connection being made here between the memorial feast, and the Passover: the breaking of bread is spoken of in terms of partaking of “Christ our Passover”. This is very significant, for

when the Master inaugurated the breaking of bread for the disciples, it was during a Passover feast – when Judas the betrayer removed himself from among them. He was, as it were, the leaven of wickedness – but the difference of course, is that he chose to leave, and depart into the darkness of Gentile night, whereas the believers are exhorted by Paul to withdraw themselves from such men. But be that as it may, we must “purge out the old leaven” prior to partaking of this feast.

This theme is continued in 1 Corinthians 11:

“whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup” (1 Cor. 11:27-28).

Notice the point here: a man is to examine *himself* at such a time. This follows the pattern of the Apostles at the Master's Passover:

“as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, Is it I?” (Mat. 26:21-22)

Notice this: the disciples did not say, “Is it him” referring to another! Their examination was inward, within themselves. It is much easier to see the faults and weaknesses of our brethren, than it is to recognize and accept personal failings. Yet that is what we must do, to find forgiveness before the Great High Priest of Yahweh's appointing.

As we come together each Sunday as “living stones” comprising the House of God, we must take heed to the example of Josiah, who instigated Reform and True Worship. Seeking to remove the leaven of wickedness from the House – whether it be in ourselves or others – we must devote ourselves to seeking Yahweh's Kingdom and the implementation of His Righteousness. Hearing the Word, we must give heed to it, and search out from it's pages an understanding of what Yahweh would have us do. But also, like Josiah and Jeremiah, we must seek to teach that word to others: to fill the House with the light of Divine Glory, that any lost silver may be found more easily. Then, may we be found members of a blameless Ecclesia, ready and waiting for the appearance of our Messiah.

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