

Introduction

- A. II Chronicles 34:1-7.
 - 1. I guess we all have favorite Bible stories. This is one of mine. I cannot read this passage without the age of this young king just jumping off the page. The idea of an eight-year-old boy becoming king of a nation is enough to grab our attention.
 - 2. But Josiah's youth is just the beginning of his remarkable story. To fully grasp how amazing this is, we need to go back almost sixty years before this moment, to the time when Josiah's grandfather became king. Josiah's grandfather (Manasseh) reigned longer than any other king over Judah (55 years). This was unfortunate since he was arguably the most wicked king Judah ever had (II Chronicles 33:1-2,9). Although he later repented, Manasseh was never able to undo the enormous damage he had done to the nation. After he died, Manasseh's son (Amon) became king. Rather than continuing in his father's penitent path, Amon returned to his sins. He did not last long. His own servants conspired and assassinated him. This move angered the people of the land. So, they killed the conspirators and took Amon's son, Josiah, and made him king. It was during this time of great wickedness and political upheaval that this eight-year-old boy (Josiah) becomes king.
 - 1. I suspect that from a spiritual perspective, expectations could not have been lower. What could this kid, coming to the throne at a time like this, ever accomplish?
- B. But Josiah defied the odds and proved to be an amazing king.
 - 1. He wasn't simply a strong leader, he was also a deeply righteous man who led one of the greatest spiritual revivals recorded in scripture. He took a people immersed in idolatry and he brought them back to God.
 - 2. This morning I want us to consider how he did it and some things all of us can learn from this remarkable story.
 - 3. There are five elements of this great revival we need to consider.

Josiah's Revival

- A. Josiah's revival began with his efforts to help the nation find the right path again.
 - 1. His father and grandfather led the nation away from God and plunged them deep into idolatry. It was a path quickly taking the nation toward destruction.
 - 2. When Josiah became king, he made a decision early on to take a different path (34:2-3a).
 - 3. It's too easy to read those words without appreciating the tremendous challenge Josiah faced.
 - a. For more than a half century there had been no clear leadership on who the nation would serve.
 - b. His grandfather took the nation so deep into idolatry that they even offered child sacrifices (33:6). Manasseh tried to clean it all up, but then his son, Amon, takes the throne and turns the nation back to idolatry again.

- c. Now Josiah is going to change directions again and seek the Lord. Certainly this would be an unpopular decision for some in the nation; certainly there would be resistance. It was a decision that carried risks for this young ruler. But he was determined to take on the challenge.
- B. His first task was obvious. If he was to turn the nation back to God, he must first remove the idols. This work began during his twelfth year of his reign, when Josiah was just 20 years old (33:4-7).
- 1. It quickly becomes obvious that this revival was no half-hearted effort. True revival could not really take place as long as any vestiges of idol worship remained. It would mean that the people's hearts were not truly devoted to God; that their loyalties were divided! The idols had to go.
 - 2. It's like when someone decides to marry; all the pictures of the other guys/girls in the wallet have to go.
 - 3. Josiah had decided that the nation would serve God, so the idols had to go.
- C. But removing the idols was only half of the process. True worship of the one true God had to be restored.
- 1. This began with Josiah's efforts to restore the house of God. During all those years of idol worship the temple had been neglected and allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. The temple was the center of Jewish worship. If revival was to take place in the nation, then God's house would have to be repaired and restored.
 - 2. In the eighteenth year of his reign (26 years old), Josiah turns to this task (34:8-11).
- D. As they begin restoring the house of God, an important discovery is made.
- 1. They find a book (34:14-21). They find "the book of the law of the Lord given by Moses." Evidently this was some scroll that contained at least a portion of the law of Moses.
 - 2. That this book had been lost and the king was ignorant of its teaching tells us something about the spiritual decay the nation had undergone.
 - 3. But what is equally important is the role this book would play in Josiah's revival. This book becomes very important to the story for two reasons.
 - a. First, it enlightens Josiah as to the true spiritual condition of the nation. Josiah is stunned as the book is read (34:19). The king realizes that not only has the nation been disobedient, but he realizes the terrible consequences that will result from this rebellion (34:21).
 - b. But there is a second reason the book is important. From this point forward, Josiah returns to the book to guide him in his revival. Later in the story the nation observes the Passover. But as they seek to do this, they follow the instructions found in the book (II Kings 23:21).
- E. But Josiah did something else with this book (34:29-33). He calls the nation together, reads this book in their hearing, and leads the nation in renewing their covenant with God.
- 1. They promise to make a break with their past and live according to the words of the law.
 - 2. Throughout Josiah's lifetime, the people did not turn back from the commitment they made on this day.

Summary: Not too shabby for an eight year old kid (II Kings 23:25). But what is the point? What lessons do we carry away from his story?

Our Revival

- A. Today is January 1, New Years Day, a time when many pause to take inventory of their lives.
 1. Have you been doing that; thinking about the last year and what's happened in your life; pondering the New Year and think about some things you need to do?
 2. This is not always an easy thing to do. Sometimes when we take inventory of our lives we don't like what we find (family life without a spiritual dimension; schedules consumed with many earthly things and little room for spiritual things; a relationship with God that gets little attention). Taking inventory sometimes causes us to realize that, like the people of Josiah's day, we are in need of some revival in our own lives.
 3. But if that's to be more than just talk, if we are really going to turn things around this year and become a more dedicated servant of God, we'll have to do the same things Josiah did to revive the nation. Let's think about that. If I am to experience a spiritual revival in my life in 2012, then I must...

- B. Find the right path.
 1. Jesus made very clear that there are only two ways a person can travel in life (Matthew 7:13-14). Every one of us, right now, is traveling one road or the other. I suspect that most of us have some sense of which road that is.
 2. We just need to be honest with ourselves about it. We must stop glossing over secret sins and half-hearted service to God. If I'm not on the path that goes to heaven, then I need to find that path again.
 3. But make no mistake, that decision will not be easy.
 - a. It will call for some tough changes that may be unpopular with some of the people in my life. It may involve changes that I'm reluctant to make.
 - b. But if it means... getting on the right road, being confident about where I stand with God, avoiding the mistakes that make my life miserable, avoiding the guilt and doubt that comes with doing the wrong thing...then it's well worth the sacrifice.
 4. So be honest – what path are you on? If I realize my life is not headed in the right direction, then it's likely that I will have to...

- C. Remove the idols.
 1. I don't mean to suggest that some of you might be slipping off to some secret pagan temple and bowing down to a statue. But that's not the only kind of idol we can have in our lives. Maybe I've been bowing to the god of career and in the process neglecting my family and my relationship with God. Maybe I've been bowing to the God of entertainment and in the process corrupting my mind. Maybe I've been bowing to the god of money and things and in the process failing to value what really matters.

2. Whatever it is that keeps me from enthroning God and becoming the person He wants us to be – I need to deal with it (Hebrews 12:1). Remember, true revival cannot take place until I root out the idols from my heart.
3. Be honest with yourself for a moment: what do I need to give up, change, spend less time with, care for less...so I can be what God wants me to be?

D. Restore the spiritual house.

1. While the people of Judah pursued their idols, the house of God was neglected. It's amazing how easily the same thing can happen in our lives. As we go after our idols, often our spiritual house suffers. We are too busy to study the Bible, so we lack the knowledge we need to resist temptation and become the person God wants us to be. We rarely pray, which leaves us feeling distant and disconnected from our heavenly Father. Worship becomes a ritual, void of any emotion or meaning and easily missed if something else comes up.
2. I wonder, if our physical houses were doing about as well as our spiritual house, would we want to live there? Maybe the most important home improvement we need to do in the coming year is on our spiritual houses.
3. The repairs to be done are not complicated. I suspect most of us already know the things we should do. We need to carve for prayer (Colossians 4:2). We need to take part in all of these assemblies (the Bible classes, the preaching, the singing, the conversation with each other (Hebrews 10:23-25). And we need to...

E. Get back to the book.

1. The book of the Law of Moses was critical to Josiah and the revival he brought to the nation. God's book will be equally important as we strive to bring revival to our lives. True spiritual revival isn't just about getting a warm feeling back in our hearts about God. It's not even simply about serving Him with a renewed sense of passion. At its most fundamental level, the revival we're talking about is all about being right with Him.
2. God's book helps us to do that.
 - a. It reveals our true condition before God. We need that. Sometimes we fool ourselves about where we really stand with God. We can rationalize our sins and excuse our neglect. We need the honest appraisal supplied by the word. We don't always like that; Josiah found himself deeply troubled as the words of scripture were read to him and he realized how far the nation had wandered from God's will. But they needed to hear it, as do we.
 - b. But the Bible serves another purpose; it guides us in what is right. We know how to come to God, how to live a life that will please Him, and how to go to Heaven when we die by following the instructions in this book. It is our complete guide, containing everything we need to know about this life and to prepare us for what is to come. Being right with God is not about how we feel, but about what the word says (Matthew 7:21). We need to spend time with this book, not just learning what it says, but allowing that to change who we are (James 1:22-25).

Conclusion: Renew the covenant.

- A. As we stop and take inventory at this passing of another year, we realize there is a need for a spiritual revival in our lives. Perhaps some of us who once made a commitment to follow the Lord - need to renew that commitment. I can't think of a better way to begin a new year. Or perhaps some of us have never made a commitment to serve God. The issue with us is not one of revival, but of beginning my walk with Him. Today is that day I need to make a covenant with my God and be saved from my sins.

- B. Our hearts will determine what we do today. Josiah was able to lead this great revival because he was a man with a tender, humble heart (34:27). His heart was touched by God's word. He was humble, able to see and accept his failings. Many will never experience true revival because their hearts are too hard and proud to see or admit the need. What is the condition of our hearts today?

- David A. Banning