

When the Mighty Fall

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles now and to our reading. And once again, we're reading in the Old Testament in the second book of the Chronicles of Israel.
- You'll find that, I think, on page 387, if you have a church Bible. Otherwise, it's Samuel, Kings, and then Chronicles. And we're very near the end, chapter 35, and picking up the story of Josiah, the great good king of Israel.
- We've read about the beginning of his reign, how he found the book of the law in the temple, how he instituted great reforms all through the land, bringing the people back to the word of God, bringing the people back to true worship of God.
- We read last time of the extraordinary reinstitution of the Passover. Never had there been such a great Passover in Israel. And all of these great things of Josiah's reign.
- But we come now to the final chapter of his reign, and we begin reading at verse 20 of chapter 35. After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho, king of Egypt, went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates.
- [1 : 1 4] And Josiah went out to meet him. But he sent envoys to him, saying, What have we to do with each other, king of Judah? I'm not coming against you this day, but against the house with which I'm at war.
- And God commanded me to hurry, cease opposing God who is with me, lest he destroy you. Nevertheless, Josiah did not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to fight with him.
- He did not listen to the words of Necho from the mouth of God. But he came to fight at the plain of Megiddo. And the archers shot king Josiah.
- And the king said to his servants, Take me away, for I'm badly wounded. So his servants took him out of the chariot and carried him in his second chariot and brought him to Jerusalem. And he died there and was buried in the tombs of his fathers.
- All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. Jeremiah also uttered a lament for Josiah. And all the singing men and the singing women have spoken of Josiah and their laments to this day.
- [2 : 2 7] They made these a rule in Israel. Behold, they're written in the laments. Now the rest of the acts of Josiah and his good deeds according to what is written in the law of the Lord and his acts first and last.
- Behold, they're written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. Amen. And may God bless to us his word.
- Do please turn your Bibles again to 2 Chronicles chapter 35. Complacency sets in when things are at their best.
- It's often the way. Whether it be in sport, when a team reaches the top and then expects that they'll keep on winning. That's often the path to their downfall.
- Or businesses, institutions. When it's taken for granted that they are the leading company or facility or institution, then it can very often lead to their demise. Prosperity, blessing, success can very easily be followed by decline.

[3 : 47] And that's the pattern in Chronicles. It's worth noting that all the good kings who follow after David and Solomon in Chronicles have all of their successes laid out first, but there's always a turning point.

And very often it was their prospering that led to their complacency. And then their reigns are rounded off with what went wrong. Now we knew from the testimony of the Bible, and if we're honest, we know from our own hearts, that even God's people at their best still do things that are not right and still struggle to remain faithful.

And the Bible doesn't hide that from us. Even in those who it presents to us as great examples. Because being a righteous believer, being a truly faithful believer, doesn't mean being perfect.

Because as we knew, it is faith. It is God's word at work in his people that makes them righteous. And here in Chronicles, the chronicler wants to show God's people how to avoid another exile.

But more than just avoiding exile, he wants to show God's people how to prosper. And so he lays before them and us the path, the road map to blessing.

[5 : 05] And the road map takes its shape from the successes and feelings of various kings that make up their history. So he sets before us lots of examples both of what to do and what not to do.

And very often, both things come from the same people. And Josiah is no different. There is much to learn from how Josiah did things, as we saw the past two weeks.

But we must also be careful to not fall into the same trap that led to his demise. And that trap is one that recurred and recurred for the kings of Judah. It was a trap of, firstly, seeking the solutions of this world.

Verses 20 and 21. Seeking the solutions of this world. As we live and work in this world, it is so easy to be shaped by the concerns of it. And so to lose sight of eternity.

To lose sight of what God controls and what God is doing. What Josiah does here might seem all a bit innocuous to us. It looks like someone has come to invade his land and he's simply going out to find out what on earth is going on.

[6 : 15] Like any reasonable leader, we'd want them to have a mind on military threats to his people. I'm sure any of us would want Boris to be on the ball with our defense if a foreign threat was lining up against us.

But whilst that might be the first impression that we get here in verse 20, there's a lot more going on. You see, verse 21. Necu, the king of Egypt, was out for war.

But notice, it's not war with Judah. And the location of where Necu was heading is important. Look at verse 20. He was going to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates.

Now to understand what was going on here, we need to understand the political climate that surrounded Judah at this time. For a long time before this, the Assyrian Empire had been the big players in the region.

Ahaz, Hezekiah's father, had looked around at his setting and he saw that Israel in the north had formed a close alliance with Syria because of the threat of Assyria.

[7 : 22] But he refused to join them. And instead, what he did was subjugate Judah to Assyria for help. He came under their reign to protect themselves against Israel and Syria.

And then because of that, Hezekiah suffered in his reign because of what Ahaz had done. And then later on, Manasseh, just before Josiah, he also was taken away by Assyria.

Lots of problems for Judah because of this behemoth of a superpower. In short, for between 100 and 200 years, Assyria were the dominant force.

They were the powerful threat to any nation in their vicinity. And so there would have been the kind of feeling with Assyria that various countries in Europe might have had when Hitler and his forces were marching through, sweeping through country after country.

That's what Assyria were like. But whilst this had been the case, Josiah was reigning now at a time that saw the Assyrian Empire decline. And it was beginning to fracture.

[8 : 31] And Babylonia saw an opportunity to bring it down. And so here, Necho, the king of Egypt, was heading for war. Verse 21. He was heading to assist Assyria against Babylon.

As the fear of a new empire rising up was a bit too much for the Egyptians. So Josiah, unprompted, acts for his own benefit. Here before him was an empire on its knees.

One that they'd been subjugated to. One that they'd suffered under. And he had the opportunity to shape his own future. To take things into his own hands. But notice in stark contrast to all that Josiah had done before.

Josiah here goes out to battle with no mention of God. From his earliest days, we read that he began seeking God. He placed God at the center of all that he was doing in his kingdom.

As he restored the temple. As he got rid of foreign worship. He even rediscovered the book. He celebrated the greatest Passover in their history.

[9 : 39] God at the center of absolutely everything. So doesn't this just stick out like a sore thumb? Notice verse 20. It says, After all of this, when the temple had been put in order.

After all his wonderful reforms. Then Josiah did this. And that phrase, after all of this, comes up again and again in Chronicles. And it's always at the junctures of kings.

Where the king's lives. Where things take a turn for the worse. It's what separates all that they've done that's good. From what they're about to do that's bad. And so it usually means that there has been prospering.

And because of it, things take a turn for the worse. It's also worth noting that in Chronicles, anytime there's war, that's a bad sign. And so these warning signs coincide for us in this event.

Because this is the only time we read about Josiah doing something where God hasn't directed him. Where God isn't shaping it. Where God isn't being prioritized.

[10 : 43] This was Josiah putting his hope in the wrong place. It was looking around at how things looked in this world. And trying to do something about it on this world's terms. And in this world's ways.

Here's a struggling empire. Someone's going up to help them. I'm going to stop it. And this is always a temptation for God's people. It would certainly have been present for the remnant who the chronicler was writing to.

As they looked around at their situation, it would have been easy to despair. Things were well short of what they should be. They were a weak, small shadow of what they once were.

But doesn't that also sound a little bit like the church in the West? In our country? Even in our own city? The rise of the rabid agenda of the progressives. The secularization of all that we knew.

The increasing marginalizing of Christians in the media. In workplaces even. It's so easy to look around at these threats. That can seem as monumental as the control of ancient empires over the land of God's people.

[11 : 50] And to be afraid. To want to find ways of countering them. But the chronicler wants us to learn from Josiah's mistake here.

God controls the rise and fall of nations. He sets up leaders and brings them down. There is only one place that our hope, our confidence in the face of these can be put.

God. He's the only one who can be trusted. It would be easy to look around at our own church and think that we've done a great thing like Josiah and his great Passover. We've overcome plenty of obstacles in the last few years to be faithful.

We've grown to have multiple locations. We've got numerous congregations. And we conclude that we know what we're doing. We've got it together. We've got it sussed.

But there's always a danger that that thinking develops into making ourselves so important to what God is doing in the world. In Glasgow, maybe even in particular. That we can do things that we shouldn't.

[12 : 52] That we do things that others shouldn't do and we think it's okay. And then we justify it by saying, look at what we've achieved already. Or it would be easy for us to slip into that as individuals.

We begin to think that we're so important to any ministry in the church that we think we can plow on and do as we please. Do our own thing. But if we want to win Glasgow to the Lord.

If we want to persevere to the end as a people still rejoicing at the prospect of reigning forever with Jesus. Then there's only one place to look. Only one person to put confidence in.

And it is most certainly not the ways of this world. It is God and his word. However mighty the world looks and how it does things.

Ahaz tried their methods. He put Judah underneath his superpower and it was disastrous. And now Josiah is trying to get them out of it.

[13 : 55] In the same way. And it's equally as bad an idea. This kind of complacency. This kind of putting hope in the wrong place. Very often leads to what happens next.

We see secondly verses 21 to 22. Sidelining God's word. That's what Josiah does next. He sidelines God's word. When God's people have as their sole horizon this world.

And with it all of its concerns. Then it won't be long until God's word is minimized. Marginalized. And muted. That's what happens here with Josiah.

Look at verse 21. Necho sends envoys to meet Josiah. And look at the very clear message that they bring. What have we to do with each other? What on earth have you to do with me?

What on earth does my movements have to do with you? Look I'm not coming against you this day. But against the house with which I'm at war. Josiah is clearly jumping into something that he shouldn't have.

[15 : 02] And for confirmation of that. Look at the astonishing thing that happens at the end of verse 21. Necho says. God has commanded me to hurry.

Cease opposing God, Josiah. He's with me. Cease opposing him lest he destroy you. Here's a foreign king speaking with authority from God.

Here's a foreign king who's under God's command. To achieve his purposes in the world. Here's a king who in this instance is listening to God. And then the king of God's people who stopped listening.

The contrast is so obvious between what we've seen of Josiah previously and now. Josiah has set out on this affair on his own steam.

He hasn't sought the Lord's word on this. Where was the summons to his prophet Jeremiah to get a word on what the approaching enemy meant? Nothing. Nothing. When he found the book.

[16 : 05] As we looked at two weeks ago. He sent immediately for a prophetic word. What did this book mean for the kingdom? But where's Huldah? And the prophetic word now?

Silence. Nowhere to be seen. Where does the prophetic word come from? It comes from Necu. And look at how emphatic the word is.

I'm not coming against you. It's not your business. God has commanded me. Cease opposing God who's with me. Lest he destroy you.

That is as clear a word as anyone could want. And then look at verse 22. Did Josiah listen? Did he respond in the same way as he did the last time God's word confronted him?

Not at all. Josiah did not turn away. But instead he disguises himself in order to fight with Necu. And in case we were in any doubt.

[17 : 05] We're told again that Josiah didn't listen to the words of Necu. From the mouth of God. Now the chronicler is wanting to leave his readers in new doubt. That Josiah is going rogue here.

Look how many times in these two verses we're told that this is God's word. From his mouth. That it's his plan. That he's the one that's going to be opposed if he's not listened to. It's emphatic.

But the chronicler doesn't stop there to make his point. The details about Josiah disguising himself for battle. And then the nature of what happens to him next. Are all intended to bring to mind a similar act from a previous king.

By the time readers come to Josiah doing this. They will have already read something very similar that's happened earlier in chronicles. And the chronicler is wanting us to draw obvious parallels.

Back in chapter 18. King Ahab disguised himself for battle. After hearing a prophetic word. That told him all the other prophets had deceived him.

[18 : 10] And that he should not go to battle. The prophet Micaiah had said that there was a deceiving spirit at work in all the prophets. And he said that going to battle would see Israel scattered.

And without a king. What does Ahab do? He goes to battle. And he disguises himself. It's possible that the chronicler is wanting us to see the disguises as a way of trying to bypass in some way the prophecies.

Ways of trying to sidestep the consequences of ignoring God's words. Trying to outsmart God as it were. But it's a disastrous thing for the leader of God's people to abandon God's word.

It's such a contrast isn't it? The book is found. The word is rediscovered and at work in his people. And what was the result? We saw last week the greatest Passover in the history of all the kings.

Great rejoicing. Great pouring out and sacrifice to God. Glory, blessing, rejoicing. That's what comes from discovering the word and receiving it gladly.

[19 : 21] But isn't it a sad reality of what happens when God's word isn't in the picture? We move from great detail about the Passover and the celebration. Intricate details about the greatest of occasions.

To grim defiance. And a pitiful scene. As if a disguise. As if the might of human invention can usurp right to God's word.

It is as silly as that. But I'll put on a cloak. I'll wear some sunglasses. And a fake beard. Then I can do what I want.

But how often is that exactly what we do? If no one sees. If I do it in private. Then it will be fine. Josiah ended up here ignoring the very voice of God.

Because he started to look around at things with the eyes of this world. He'd started on a path that he shouldn't. And God had spoken to give him the opportunity to turn around. But it was too late.

[20 : 24] By this point Josiah was prepared to ignore God himself. And when we look at things with the eyes of this world. The chariots look that bit bigger.

The enemy looks that bit stronger. It looks a lot more like we need to take things into our own hands. To find a solution here and now. And as we look at the menace of what we face in this way.

We lose confidence in what God has said. And how we're to do things. Maybe we're not seeing our friends. Who we love dearly and pray for faithfully come to faith.

And so we might in subtle ways begin to overlook God's word. Seeking power for this and other things. Maybe if we can just come across as a little bit more credible. If I can show that being a Christian is thoroughly reasonable in every way.

Then that might be more effective than allowing God's word to do its work. Offering to read a gospel with someone. It might work with some people. But my brother or my colleague.

[21 : 32] They're intimidatingly smart. I need something that will engage with them. Maybe we'll begin to think that we need someone like Jordan Peterson. To bring ballast to our faith.

To our world view. Looking to the world's solutions. Instead of to God and his word. The only words that are truly living and active.

And able to pierce through soul and spirit. Are God's words. Look at what his word achieved last week. It was at work in a king and his officials.

To empty their wallets. To the Lord. What kings in history have done that? To serve their people and to worship their God.

What else could possibly prompt someone to do that? That's what God's word can do. Or maybe we'll sideline God's word in more obvious ways.

[22 : 34] There is temptation as the rhetoric builds. That we should leave behind some of what the Bible says. That we should give in to the thinking of the world around us. When it gets uncomfortable to be in such disagreement with all of our colleagues and all of our friends.

About the issues of the day. Human sexuality or whatever it will be next. Tempting to think maybe they're right. Maybe some parts of God's word can be ignored.

Well it's clear here that it is a grave thing for God's people to sideline God's word. Because ignoring God's word. Leads to thirdly. Suffering woe.

Verses 23 to 24. Ignoring God's word leads to suffering woe. It is a very dangerous thing to walk away from God's word and to ignore him.

Josiah's disguise is completely helpless in the face of God. Look at verse 23. The archer shot Josiah. That was it. He's wounded and he needs to be taken away.

[23 : 41] Just like Ahab. In his disguise that didn't save him either. He ignored God's word. Disguised himself.

And with Ahab a random arrow hits him. Of course the arrow was random from the perspective of the archer. But the prophecy that was spoken about Ahab made clear that there was nothing random about the arrow at all.

It hits its target. God was ignored. Ahab wanted to go to battle. And choose to ignore what God had said. Choose to ignore what God had said.

God poured out his displeasure in the form of an arrow. And likewise Josiah is wheeled away in a chariot. Both kings ignore God's word. Both disguise themselves.

Both are shot by an arrow. And both are wheeled out of battle in a chariot. There's no mistaking the consequences of ignoring God's word. Here are two examples.

[24 : 40] Both thought that cunning could see them through. I can outsmart God. I can get away with it. My disguise will do the job.

That's the kind of thinking that leads to a disastrous end. Ignoring God's word only brings woe. Make no mistake.

God was behind this arrow. Listen to God's word spoken to Josiah. He said, Cease opposing God who's with me. Lest he destroy you.

Josiah didn't listen. And the arrow hit him. We might not face the same instant consequences as Josiah did. If we don't listen to God's word.

But if we willfully go against God's word. Woe will come eventually. But the question that we're left with here.

[25 : 40] Is why would we want to? Look at Josiah's life that's put before us. Compare the first 52 verses of his life. With these five.

Why would we want to choose death? The chronicler includes this episode to put before God's people a choice. Enjoy the glory and rejoicing that comes with seeking God.

That comes from God's word at work in his people. Or be unfaithful. And face tragedy. And so the chronicler draws together the reign of Josiah.

And we see fourthly. That this is a tale of two Josiahs. Verses 24 to 27. This is a tale of two Josiahs. Even the greatest of the kings of men leave an unsatisfying legacy.

Josiah was a great king. The chronicler does not want us to doubt that. He goes to great lengths in this conclusion. To show that Josiah would be remembered in the history books as a great king.

[26 : 46] Look at the second half of verse 24. When Josiah died, look at where he's buried. He's buried in the tombs of his fathers. Now the chronicler always gives some details about the burial of the kings.

And it's often noted that even some of the bad kings were still buried in Jerusalem. Or in the city of David. But with the worst kings. With the bad kings. It spilt out that they were not buried in the inner or upper tombs.

You see the tombs were reserved for the great kings. So if you check a few chapters back later on. You'll see that Hezekiah. He was a great king. And he was buried in the tombs of the great kings.

That's where Josiah is buried too. Then notice again verse 24. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. The people mourned because of all that he'd done.

He'd turned the life of the nation around. And remember. Two weeks ago at the end of the thing. When he renewed. When he renewed covenant. We're told that they did not drift to the left or the right.

[28 : 00] Throughout his reign. He was a great king for the people. But it wasn't just the people who mourned for the loss of Josiah. Verse 25. The prophet mourned.

Even the prophet laments the passing of this king. And so much did the prophet's lament influence the people. That it became one of their songs. So that he was forever remembered.

Josiah the great king. And look at verse 27. We're told there are more things that Josiah did. That the remnant could read about in their various history books.

But then look at the final word on his reign in verse 26. His other acts. His good deeds. That were done according to the law.

That's what's recorded. That's what his life was marked by. Josiah was a great king for God's people. Remember he celebrated the greatest Passover a king ever celebrated.

[29 : 00] He restored worship. He reopened the temple. He rediscovered the book. But this honor. Is clearly coupled with a harsh reality that Josiah died.

And he died because of his feeling. And it's striking that even this great king Josiah. Who'd gone to great lengths to reform the people.

Even he failed. Look at chapter 36 verse 1. Notice that it's the people who crowned Josiah's successor.

The shock nature of his demise left the people clutching for a leader. And through his demise. And through his demise as we'll see next week. Things only spiral down and down.

They become worse and worse for Judah. Josiah was a great king but only for a time. And whilst there is much to learn from Josiah's example.

[29 : 58] And that is indeed what the chronicler wants us to see. The priority of worship. The transforming power of God's word. When it's opened and embraced. All these things. They're vital for God's people.

That's the path to true worship. And away from terrifying woe. That's the path to joy. Now and forever. And the path away from judgment. And if we embrace that.

If we take hold of the picture of perfect worship. That Josiah exemplified last week. If we submit to God's word as Josiah did. Then there is blessing promised for us.

There's a great future in store for us. But this account at the end of Josiah's life. Is the necessary negative. If we give up on God's word.

If we leave it behind. Then it will be disastrous. As it was for Josiah. The chronicler is saying to God's people.

[31 : 00] Choose life. Choose worship. Not woe. Choose the word. Not the world. So in Josiah we have a great king.

That we must follow. But we must not fall into his trap. The chronicler says. Choose life.

Choose worship. Not woe. Choose the word. Not the world. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father.

We knew. That we face. All kinds of temptations. This world wants to pull us down. And suck us in. Amen. And so Lord. We pray that you would plant your word deep within us.

That it would always be bringing forth life in us. That your word would be our guide. That it would keep us looking to you in all things.

[32 : 12] And we pray this in Jesus name. Amen.