



Preparing Your Heart to Put Sin to Death

Reformation Prelude: What God Did Through Josiah – Part 2

2 Chronicles 34

David Sunday

September 17, 2017

It's hard to believe that yesterday marks one year since our brother Ross has been with Jesus in heaven. He modeled for us what it means to put your hope in the Lord. It's good for us to remember those who've gone before us, who've run the race with endurance, so that we might imitate their example and follow their faith.

Another person who went home to be with the Lord yesterday is a man name Nabeel Qureshi. He was born in 1983, so he's a young man who died of stomach cancer. I want to urge everyone to go on to Justin Taylor's blog on The Gospel Coalition website. He wrote an obituary for Nabeel Qureshi yesterday that I think every single person in our church should read. It's very moving to me to read about this young man who grew up a Muslim in California, whom God brought to faith in Jesus Christ, and who followed Jesus at great cost to himself. He cut ties with his mother and father, but he was a passionate believer in Jesus. He proclaimed the gospel powerfully in the last third of his life.

There are a couple video clips you can watch. He's the one who wrote the book [Seeking Allah; Finding Jesus](#). I'd encourage you to watch what Justin posted on his blog and be inspired by Nabeel's example to count the cost of discipleship and follow Jesus no matter what. Before we turn to the Word, I'd like to pray for Nabeel's wife Michelle, for their young daughter and for his family and his witness.

Lord, thank You for those who've gone before us and for the example of faith they leave. They help us as we remember to imitate their faith and follow their example to run the race with endurance, to count the cost of discipleship, and to say, "Jesus, You are the pearl of great price. You're worth leaving everything else behind to follow."

We pray now for Nabeel Qureshi's wife Michelle and for their young daughter, that you would comfort them. We also pray for his mom and dad, who as of yet have not come to faith in Jesus Christ. We pray that through their son's testimony, and even through his death and the

confidence with which he died in Christ, that they too would be brought to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Lord, we pray now as we turn to Your Word, that You would create in us the kind of affections that this Word calls forth. Lord, I pray for the anointing of Your Holy Spirit upon my preaching and upon all of our hearing. May we be illuminated in our minds and hearts, being compelled to act in obedience that comes from faith in Your Son Jesus Christ. And we ask this in His name. Amen.

Please turn in your Bible to 2 Chronicles 34. Last week we started looking at what God did through a young king named Josiah, whose father was Amon and whose grandfather was Manasseh. Manasseh was one of the most wicked kings Judah ever had; he was also the king who reigned the longest—55 years. However, Josiah’s father Amon only lasted two years. He was so bad that the servants in his household put him to death.

But as we saw last week, Josiah was not like his father or grandfather. We read in verse two, *“He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.”* He began seeking the God of his father David when he was only 16 years old, verse three tells us, and he sought God earnestly. He was occupied with seeking God. As a result of this, in the 12th year of his reign, when he was 20 years old, Josiah began purging Judah and Jerusalem, then even the northern kingdom, of all their high places of idolatry.

Then in the 18th year of his reign, when he was 26 years old, he began to repair the house of the Lord that hadn’t been repaired for 250 years. While they were repairing the Lord’s house, they found a hidden, long-lost copy of the Book of the Law. When they brought the Book of the Law to Josiah, and he heard the words of Scripture, it pierced his heart. We saw his reaction in verse 19: *“When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes.”*

He commanded his servants to go and inquire of the Lord, finding one of the Lord’s prophets who would interpret how these words of God should be applied to the people who were left in Israel and Judah. We see in verse 21 that Josiah was concerned that the great wrath of the Lord was about to be poured out on the people, *“because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book.”* He was deeply concerned about God’s wrath coming upon the people.

So they went to inquire of the Lord—and it’s interesting to me that they went to a prophetess named Huldah. She is one of four prophetesses mentioned in the Old Testament. There were other prophets active at this time, including Jeremiah, but God used a woman to

proclaim His word to King Josiah. She spoke the word of the Lord faithfully and with penetrating power.

As I've been reading about Huldah and her ministry over the last couple weeks, I've had an opportunity to do a training session with the women of our church who teach and proclaim the Word in the Women's Bible Study. And in the process of preparing to train the women, I was able to read through a sample manuscript of messages that each of them had previously delivered in Women's Bible Study. As I read through those messages, my heart was penetrated with the power of God's Word, and I was so thankful for the clarity and depth of the exposition that these women are doing in Women's Bible Study. We should be thankful for the gifts that God has given to the women of our church to teach and proclaim the Word of God. If you have not yet signed up for the John study, get in there, because I'm hearing it is really, really good, and I know you will be rewarded by it.

Let's read now 2 Chronicles 34:23-33 to see the message that Huldah the prophetess delivered and how Josiah, and then all the people, responded to the word that came through her:

²³ And she said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: 'Tell the man who sent you to me, ²⁴ Thus says the Lord, behold, I will bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book that was read before the king of Judah. ²⁵ Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands, therefore my wrath will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched.

²⁶ But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, ²⁷ because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard his words against this place and its inhabitants, and you have humbled yourself before me and have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the Lord. ²⁸ Behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place and its inhabitants.'" And they brought back word to the king.

²⁹ Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ³⁰ And the king went up to the house of the Lord, with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites, all the people both great and small. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord. ³¹ And the

king stood in his place 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 perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book.

³² Then he made all who were present in Jerusalem and in Benjamin stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. ³³ And Josiah took away all the abominations from all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel and made all who were present in Israel serve the Lord their God. All his days they did not turn away from following the Lord, the God of their fathers.

Eleven times, I believe, the word “all” is mentioned, telling us there was a comprehensive, widespread work of revival and reformation going on, all due to the humble and tender heart of the king who humbled himself before the Lord and wept before Him. Last week we saw this tender heart that Josiah had (verse 27) and something that each of us need. A tender-hearted man or woman is a person who prizes being pierced by the Word of God.

That’s the way Josiah was. It wasn’t because he was born that way. It was because God gave him the gift of a tender heart. He took away the heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh, a tender heart that was sensitive to God’s words, pliable in God’s hands and yielded to God’s direction and leadership in his life. Josiah is an Old Testament king who received a new covenant promise.

The Actions of a Man Whose Heart Was Tender

Today I want to look at how Josiah demonstrated his tenderness of heart. After his heart was pierced by the words from the Book of the Law, you see how he responded in verse 27. There are two actions of a tender heart that stand out here.

- 1) He humbled himself before the Lord, both outwardly and inwardly.
- 2) He wept before the Lord.

Verse 27 says, *“Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself...and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the Lord.”*

Because Josiah heard God when God spoke in His Word, and because he responded with self-humbling and weeping over his sin, because Josiah heard God, God heard Josiah and was gracious in answering his prayer. Judgment from God was delayed, a revival of God’s people took place, and there was peace in the land for the remainder of Josiah’s reign—13 more years. I

want to commend to you today these two actions: self-humbling that's both inward and outward, and weeping over sin.

Even as I say that, I realize this is not the kind of advice we're used to hearing in our world today. I was listening to an interview this week with a man who is a Christian leader in California, who recently published a book about how we all need to live with an awareness of the fact that we're dying. Little did he know as he was writing this book that he was carrying a cancer in his body that had gone undetected for eight years or so. The cancer was discovered on the very day he finished editing the manuscript of the book.

The reason the cancer went undetected was that he was seeing a number of doctors who didn't want to do the old-fashioned, invasive tests and biopsies. But he kept failing applications for life insurance, because he didn't get the right results on his PSA exams. So finally he found a very elderly doctor who was old-school and who did old-fashioned invasive tests. He was the one who discovered that the cancer was not only present, but that it had spread.

This got me thinking. Are the spiritual leaders of today—the “soul physicians” of the 21st century—missing some of the old-fashioned invasive practices that used to be powerful in putting sin to death? What does it really take to put the cancer of sin to death? When you find in yourself some powerful, indwelling sin, it's taking you captive. It's consuming your heart with trouble. It's weakening your soul and your communion with God. It's disrupting your peace and defiling your conscience. What does it take to put sin to death?

What I want to exhort us to now is the old-fashioned, spiritually invasive practices that King Josiah did in his own life when God's Word penetrated his heart and convicted him of sin. First, humble yourself before the Lord. Second, weep over your sin. I'll bet you could binge on Netflix all week and never hear that message. Humble yourself. Weep over sin.

Sadly, even in the church, I don't think we pay enough attention to humbling ourselves before the Lord and weeping over our sin. Even here, I don't think we give it due weight. We don't know how this fits with the gospel, with the commands in Scripture to rejoice always. It sounds so stern and strict. It feels unnatural to us. But I believe God would commend to us these two practices today as a means of grace by which we prepare our hearts to put indwelling sin to death—which is a gospel duty.

Humble Yourself Before the Lord

Can you be a Christian without humility? No. Every child of God has a measure of humility. You cannot acknowledge, “I'm a sinner and I need a Savior,” putting your trust in

Christ, without some humility. I like how Charles Spurgeon helps us understand the workings of humility in the children of God:

Just as in every well-formed child there is every muscle and sinew, and nerve and bone, although all are far from being developed, yet they are there; so in each Christian there exists humility, with all the kindred graces, though it is as yet in some scarcely perceptible, and in others is far removed from perfection.

So Spurgeon is looking out over his congregation, saying, “If you are a child of God, you have humility in you. But I’m having a hard time seeing it in some of you. It’s not very well developed in you.” Spurgeon says Josiah certainly possessed the grace of humility: “There was blended in the life of Josiah, like the blending of the drops of rain with the gleams of sunlight, a fair rainbow of many virtues.” What a great way to describe this king: “a fair rainbow of many virtues.”

Now, why did Josiah need to humble himself? He was already one of the most humble men in Judah. There were many people in Judah who were far more offensive to God, far more sinful in their practices, far more prideful in their actions than Josiah was. He, the king of Judah, was doing all within his power to rid the land of idolatry and purify the house of the Lord, preparing it to be a holy sanctuary where God’s people could worship Him. Josiah was seeking the Lord. Josiah was obedient to the Lord.

Yet when Josiah hears the words of the Law of God, he is so stricken in his heart that he tears his clothes, humbles himself and weeps. He confesses his role in the sins which God condemns in His Law. He acknowledges God’s justice in threatening punishment. He strips himself of his royal robes. But notice what he doesn’t say. He doesn’t say, “But look at how hard I’m working for You, God. Consider all that I’ve done to restore Your temple. Have You noticed how generous I’ve been with the offering plate recently, Lord; how much money I’ve been putting in from my own treasury so that Your temple can be rebuilt?”

No. He’s like the tax collector who will not even lift his eyes to heaven, beating his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Josiah comes before God as a poor and needy, tender-hearted penitent, pleading before the throne of grace for mercy in his time of need. That’s Josiah’s attitude—a very righteous king. Why does a godly king like Josiah need to act so humbly and mourn over sin? I believe Josiah would ask us, “How could I not humble myself before so great a God as the One Who speaks in this Book?” I think Josiah would turn to us and say, “How could you not humble yourselves before Him?”

Have you, like Job, considered the greatness of God? If so, you understand what Job meant at the end of the story, when he said, *“I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted... I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes”* (Job 42:2, 5-6). Job humbled himself before the Lord.

Consider your origin and your end, how from dust you came and that to dust you shall return. How God sweeps us away as with the flood and we’re like a dream, like grass that’s renewed in the morning—in the morning it flourishes and is renewed, and in the evening it fades and withers. Consider how weak and frail you were when you came into this world as a helpless little baby, and how you will die a weak and helpless man or woman. As a result we should think, *“My only hope is in the mercy of God Who made me and Who carries and redeems me.”* Does that not have a humbling effect on you? When you consider the deadness of your sinful nature—like Paul did in Romans 7:18, when he says, *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh”*—does that not have a humbling effect?

The Puritans were so good at getting us to think this way. Look at what Richard Sibbes says:

Let us have before our eyes the picture of old Adam, our sinful nature: how we are drawn away by every object; how ready to be proud of anything. How unable to resist the least sin; how ready to be cast down under every affliction; that we cannot rejoice in any blessing; that we have no strength of ourselves to perform any good or suffer ill; in a word, how that we carry a nature about us indisposed to good, and prone to all evil.

As he describes this, I say, *“This is me. This is the way I am by nature.”* Isn’t that just human nature? We get so proud of things that are so inappropriate. What do we have that we did not receive?

Friends, that will be true of us until the day we see Jesus face to face. And should it not cause us to cry out with Paul in Romans 7:24, *“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* Consider the heinousness of sin and the punishment it deserves. I’m not just talking about the sins you committed before you were saved. I’m talking especially of how you’ve experienced the love of Jesus and tasted of the sweetness of being forgiven, and then you turn around and spit in His face, the One Who loves you so. The ones who love you are the ones who hurt you the most, right? When it’s your own husband or wife, or your own son or daughter, those are the sins that pierce the heart. And when we, the children of God, sin against the Lord Who loves us so, oh who it should humble us and cause us to humble ourselves before Him.

Then we think of the life and death of our Savior—how He came from the heights of heaven so low, to be a baby in the manger in Bethlehem, how He was despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering (Isaiah 53). He stooped so low as to be a servant, washing His disciples' feet (John 13). Then He submitted to the scourgings of a Roman whip and had His back torn to shreds. Then He let the crown of thorns be embedded in His skull. Then He was lifted up on that cross of wood with His hands nailed to the cross and His feet nailed there, to writhe in suffocating agony (John 19). Then the drops of blood that poured forth from Him were atoning for your sins and for mine, as He cried out, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Matthew 27:46).

When we consider the love of our Savior and His mercy toward us, and the greatness of our God and the holiness of His Law, and the frailty of our frame and the folly of our sin—surely this makes us want to bow down low and humble ourselves under God’s mighty hand honoring Him for Who He is.

Then this inward humility gets expressed in outward actions. For Josiah, it was the tearing of his royal robes, as he was saying in his sorrow, “I’m not worthy to wear these robes.” As he rejected the comforts and privileges of life, thinking about his sin and the sins of God’s people, he had to express it openly. Josiah didn’t wait for God to humble him—he humbled himself. He didn’t just talk about it—he did it. And he wept.

Once we have rent our hearts before the Lord, then outwardly we express it by repenting publicly if necessary—by making retribution where possible, by letting go of worldly goods that are weighing us down, by fasting.

Weep Before the Lord Over Your Sins and the Sins of Others

This brings us to the second old-fashioned invasive practice by which God’s people put sin to death. We weep over our sins and the sins of others. One of the Puritans said that you know God’s grace is working in your heart “when it dissolves and liquefies your soul.” What an image! When it dissolves and liquefies your soul. Grace causes a spiritual thaw, and the sorrow of your heart over sin will run out of your eyes through tears. Have you experienced God’s grace dissolving and liquefying your soul? Has it ever thawed your heart and run out of your eyes with tears?

On Saturday, October 28, 1740 the young pioneer missionary to the American Indians, David Brainerd, wrote this in his diary: “In my morning devotions, my soul was exceedingly melted and bitterly mourned over my exceeding sinfulness and vileness. I never before had felt so pungent and deep a sense of the odious nature of sin as at this time.” You might think, “Oh,

how miserable. Get a life, David Brainerd. Laugh a little. Live a little. Lighten up.” That’s the way we think, right? “I never before had felt so pungent and deep a sense of the odious nature of sin as at this time.”

But then look at what happened, as he’s bowed low, mourning over his sin: “My soul was then unusually carried forth in love to God and had a lively sense of God’s love to me. This love and hope, at that time, cast out fear.” So something good is happening in the midst of this mourning over sin. The old Book of Common Prayer got this right. It was a book for mourners. If we were Anglicans, we’d pray words like this pretty often. I know it’s possible to just say the words but not having our hearts in it. It’s also possible never to even think this way. So I want us to say this prayer together, praying that this would be reality in our hearts:

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men
We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness
The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable
Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father

Does that kind of bewailing factor into your rhythms of grace? Is there something of this in your Christian life? If it’s totally absent, I can’t really believe that you have life in Christ yet, because this is what He plants in the hearts of those who trust in Him. Why do we weep? We weep over the fact that we carry within us everything that is at enmity with God. We weep because, as Thomas Watson says, “Our hearts are like wide seas in which there are innumerable creeping things—vain, sinful thoughts.” And we have more evil hidden within our hearts than we even know. That’s why we weep.

We weep over the corruption that clings to us like a viper that we cannot shake off. Even when we forsake sin, we find that sin has not yet forsaken us, and we’re going to be dealing with this viper until the day we meet Jesus face to face. We’ll wage war against our souls, and while we live, we’re going to have to fight it. We weep over the defectiveness of our love, and how prevalent pride and lust are in our hearts. We weep over a sense of God’s love and mercy toward us, over how unkind our hearts have been in sinning against the God Who has loved us so dearly.

I love this quote from Thomas Watson: “Gold is the finest and most solid of all the metals, yet it is the soonest melted in the fire. Gracious hearts, which are golden hearts, are the soonest melted into tears by the fire of God’s love.” That’s what we’re hoping will happen at the communion table, that the golden hearts of grace that God has planted in us will be melted into tears by the fire of God’s love toward us. And in weeping, we experience the washing. Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse us, but the tears we weep, can free us from the bondage that we still sometimes allow to captivate us.

We also weep over the plight of sinners. That's what Josiah was doing. He was practicing what Psalm 119:136 says: "*My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.*" As we look around us at our neighbors, at our culture, it's one thing to get angry; it's another thing to weep. It's one thing to say, "Amen," when Jesus says woes upon the Pharisees. It's another thing to walk with Jesus, and look out over Jerusalem, weeping with Him as His heart yearns for the people who will not be gathered into His arms.

How do self-humbling and weeping fit with the gospel?

God tells us, "Rejoice in the Lord always." He says when we trust in Christ our sins are removed from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:8-12), we are justified by faith and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5). That's good news! Lots to rejoice and lots to be happy about as Christians. God does not want us walking around morose and depressed. There should be joy in us over what we've experienced through Christ.

If you're not yet trusting in Jesus, I want you to hear this. I am not calling you to self-humbling and weeping over your sin. If that's how God brings you to Jesus, great. But I am not calling you be more and more sorrowful for your sins and to cry more tears. I'm calling you to something very simple. I'm calling you to believe in Jesus. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you don't know the joy of having your sins forgiven, please know that you're not going to be saved by the sorrow you have for your sin. You're saved by the blood that Jesus shed for you on the cross. All the tears in the world cannot wash away the guilt of your sin; only Jesus' blood can do that.

So don't look within yourself for the right kind of heart. You'll never find it there. Look outside of yourself to the holy heart of Jesus. See Him lifted up on a cross for you, taking all the wrath your sins deserve and paying your penalty in full. Pray, "Oh, Lord Jesus, I put my trust in You." Believe in Him. And when you do, then you will find that He starts working in you by His Spirit. As He works in you by His Spirit, He's teaching you how to become like Him, and some of the ways He uses are self-humbling, weeping and mourning over the sin that still dwells in you.

Jesus Himself commends these practices to us. "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted,*" Jesus says in Matthew 5:4. There is comfort to be found in mourning over our fallen condition. Jesus also said in Luke 6:21 and 25, "*Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh... Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.*" This is something that concerns me about myself and about each of us. We have so much access now through our technology and entertainment that leads to levity. Sometimes all we want to do is sit and laugh. The world will provide plenty of that for you. The world can keep you laughing and

chuckling for the rest of your days, and you'll never weep over the things you ought to weep over. If you only laugh now, there's only going to be weeping later. But if you learn to weep now over the things that break the heart of God and over the things that separate you from God, then there's going to be laughter. There's going to be everlasting joy that will crown the heads of those who have learned to mourn over their sins.

Let's look once more at that passage in James 4 that will help us look at how we should be approaching the Lord's Table together. James is writing to Christians who are struggling with the love of this world and who are committing spiritual adultery through their love of this world. He's telling us that friendship with the world is enmity with God. If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. It tells us that He's yearning jealously for us. Then look at how verse six starts: *"But he gives more grace."* God gives more grace. James is now going to tell us how God gives that grace, the means by which God pours out His grace in the hearts of His people. How do you do that? Look at James 4:

- Verse six: *"But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'"* Humble yourself.
- Verse seven: *"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."*
- Verse 8b: *"Cleanse your hands, you sinners..."* This is one of the few places in the New Testament that the Bible calls Christians "sinners." *"Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep."* Maybe that's what I should have called this sermon: "Be wretched." In our natural condition, that's what we are.

"O wretched man that I am," Paul says in Romans 7. "Own it," James is saying. "Own your wretched condition; mourn and weep over it." Stop saying, "I'm struggling with this sin," if you're not really struggling with it. If you're tolerating it, if you're toying with it, if you're playing with it, if you're entertaining it—stop saying you're struggling. You're not. Be wretched over it. Mourn over it. Weep over it. That's how you prepare your heart to put sin to death.

"Let your laughter be turned to mourning." Turn off that TV for a week. Stop looking at iTunes and your phone and your entertainment, if that's what it takes, and get into God's Word, letting it penetrate your heart with the reality of God Who is holy. And you who are letting sin take control of your life, be wretched, mourn and weep. Stop laughing. Start weeping. Let your joy be turned to gloom. *"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."*

He won't leave you there in your wretchedness, gloom and misery. He will give you the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit. But it comes through self-humbling and weeping. An old man I know who goes by "Dr. K" says it like this,

“Joy in God spells sorrow over sin. Sorrow over sin spells joy in God.” You can’t fake it, but you can ask for it. And this Communion Table is a great place to do that. If you’re trusting in Jesus alone as your Savior from sin, He invites you to come to His Table.

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