

REVIVAL OF GOD'S WORD

2 Chronicles 34.8-21

I. REVIEW

- A. We live in a time of history where the people of God are in need of a significant renewal. All around us we are experiencing an ever-increasing full-frontal assault on the things of God and his natural order for creation.
- B. At the same time, we are experiencing one of the fastest and most comprehensive transitions within the church as people are leaving, deconstructing, and walking away from Jesus, while the church is experiencing significant aspects of discipline and chastening. Over the next decade, the church will only experience an increase to the difficulties we face and the need to understand how to live as faithful witnesses to Christ in the midst of the new world we live in.
- C. As we have preached through 2 Chronicles, we have seen and emphasized the reality that God has given his people a pattern for pursuing renewal as we walk through seasons of hardship, opposition, and even chastening.

¹⁴if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land (2 Chr 7.14)

- D. Several weeks ago, we highlighted the story of Jehoshaphat as a portrait of the necessity to pursue God's means to see God's renewing power, with a specific focus on the weapons of warfare that God has given to his people. The two specific areas we looked at last week were *worship* and the *word of God*.
- E. The revivals under King Hezekiah (2 Chr 29-32) and King Josiah (2 Chr 34-35) come in the darkest time of Judah's history and are demonstrations of God's desire to bring revival and refreshing among his people and demonstrate the need for revivals of *worship* (Hezekiah) and devotion to *God's word* (Josiah).

II. MANASSEH AND AMON: THE PERVERSION OF IDOLATRY (2 CHR 33)

- A. After the death of king Hezekiah, his son Manasseh ascended to the throne of Judah. Manasseh quickly became the most wicked king in Judah's history and introduced a program of idolatry and demon-worship that surpassed even the idolatry and demon-worship of the Canaanites who had dwelt in the land prior to Israel.

²And [Manasseh] did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. ³For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had broken down, and he erected altars to the Baals, and made Asheroth, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. ⁴And he built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, "In Jerusalem shall my name be forever." ⁵And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. ⁶And he burned his sons as an offering in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. ⁷And the carved image of the idol that he had made he set in the house of God... ⁹Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel. (2 Chr 33.2-7)

- B. After a season of refusing to pay attention to God's word through his prophets, Manasseh is taken into captivity by the king of Assyria. This leads to Manasseh humbling himself and entreating the Lord, which leads to his return to Jerusalem. However, although Manasseh grows to know that Yahweh is truly God and restores the sacrifices and offerings in the temple, his reign brought Judah into great evil.
- C. Manasseh's son Amon quickly returns God's people to all the idolatry practiced by his father and reigns for only two years before he is assassinated by his own servants.

- D. The reigns of Manasseh and Amon demonstrate the reality of how persistently the people of God were tempted to fall into idolatry.
- E. Although we are not tempted to embrace external forms of idolatrous worship (we have come to believe many forms of this as nothing more than superstition), we are still tempted toward idolatry today. Idolatry exists whenever we place something at the top of our “hierarchy of values” other than the one, true, living God.
- F. Idolatries of our contemporary world: humanity, autonomy, mammon (money), therapeutic, scientism.

III. JOSIAH'S EARLY REFORMS (2 CHR 34.1-7)

- A. Josiah ascends to the throne after the death of his father Amon at the age of eight. After eight years as king, Josiah is apprehended by the Lord and sets his heart to seek after the Lord. Yet, it is not until the twelfth year of his reign that Josiah begins to purge the land of idolatry.

¹Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign... ²and he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father... ³For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the carved and the metal images. ⁴And they chopped down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and he cut down the incense altars that stood above them. And he broke in pieces the Asherim and the carved and metal images, and he made dust of them... ⁷he broke down the altars and beat down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem (2 Chr 34.1-7)

- B. This passage shows Josiah setting his heart to seek after the Lord and turning from the wickedness of his fathers. There is a call for us to set our face to seek the Lord and turn from the idols we have made and worship.

IV. FINDING THE BOOK OF THE LAW (2 CHR 34.8-21)

- A. It is another six years after Josiah begins to reform Judah that Hilkiah the high priest discovers the book of the Law in the temple.

⁸Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had cleansed the land and the house... ¹⁴Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord given through Moses. ¹⁵Then Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.” And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan. ¹⁶Shaphan brought the book to the king (2 Chr 34.8, 14-16)

- B. Shaphan the secretary reads the Book of the Law to Josiah. Upon hearing the words of God, Josiah is cut to the heart and responds with a heart of humble repentance.

¹⁸Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read from it before the king. ¹⁹And when the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes. (2 Chr 34.18-19)

- C. In the hearing and responding (with humble repentance) to the word, Josiah then charges Shaphan to inquire of the Lord on behalf of God’s people concerning the things that were read.

²⁰And the king commanded Hilkiah... Shaphan the secretary, and Asiah the king’s servant, saying, ²¹“Go, inquire of the Lord for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in the book.” (2 Chr 34.20-21)

- D. This passage narrates for us a glorious progression in relating to God’s word. Here we see Josiah *hear* the word of the Lord, *receive* the word of the Lord, *respond* to the word of the Lord, and *inquire* of the Lord concerning his word.

1. *Hear*: to hear God's word requires that we put ourselves in the place of engaging it again and again. This can come through listening to and reading God's word.
 2. *Receive*: hearing must be wed to a posture of receiving God's word as God's word. To receive his word requires that we orient ourselves with a posture of absolute submission, recognizing that in the Scriptures we hear God's authoritative and perfect word to us.
 3. *Respond*: the word of God is living and active and is powerful to bring conviction in our lives against the places that we prop up false beliefs, practices, and desires. We must allow the word of God to cut against the grain of our lives and respond accordingly.
 4. *Inquire*: the word is not intended to be a set of data points for us to simply learn. Rather, it is the revelation of the living God who invites us to come to him in response to his word and inquire (seek, ask, dialogue with, etc.) of him that we might be filled with the knowledge of his character and his will.
- E. The revival under Josiah demonstrates that a true seeking of the Lord and turning from our wicked ways must be completed by a revival of God's word among God's people.
- F. Although we have an abundant access to God's word in our day, we are in desperate need of a revival of God's word among the people of God. We must cast aside the idols of our day — specifically the ones that exalt our own experiences and opinions as the arbiters of reality — and seek to receive afresh the gift of God's word as our only source of revelation, authority, and truth.

V. THE GLORY OF THE SCRIPTURES

- A. The need for God's word rests upon the truth that God is holy, and that we cannot know him unless he reveals himself to us.
- ¹For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. (1 Cor 2.11-12)
- B. The word teaches us that God has given a sufficient witness to his goodness, wisdom, and power through the light of nature and the works of creation to reveal his existence and sovereign power (cf. Ps 19.1-6; Rom 1.19-20). Yet, these means of revelation are not sufficient to give the specific knowledge of God and of his will that is necessary for salvation.
- C. Because these means were insufficient, it pleased the Lord in different times and different ways to reveal himself and declare his will to his people — and then after this the Lord inspired men by his Spirit to commit that revelation wholly unto writing in order that his truth might be better preserved and propagated.
- ¹Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Heb 1.1-2)
- D. We need the word in order that we might receive revelation of:
1. *God's character*: the Scriptures reveal to us the character and nature of God. He has put on display that he abounds in steadfast mercy and is perfectly just in all things. In order to know God, we must receive his revelation of himself in his word.

⁶The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation. (Exod 34.6)

2. *God's purposes*: in order to know the goal (or 'end') for which God created the world (i.e., what is creation's purpose, why do you exist, what does it mean to be ordered toward that purpose?) we must receive his revealed will in his word.

⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph 1.9-10)

3. *God's judgments (evaluation)*: to know what God evaluates/judges as good and evil requires that he reveal his standard for evaluating our lives. He does this in and through his word, and we must be conformed to see things according to his evaluations.

⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa 55.8-9)

VI. PURSUING A REVIVAL OF GOD'S WORD

- A. *Fill your mind with God's word*: we must spend time hearing and receiving God's word. We have been given a glorious gift in an abundant access to God's word — do we steward this gift with a corresponding commitment to engage in hearing his word?

¹¹I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. (Ps 119.11)

⁴⁸Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. (Luke 12.48)

- B. *Meditate on God's word*: Biblical meditation is the practice of prayerfully "chewing" on the truth of God's word in a posture of receptive humility. It is taking smaller portions of God's word (a verse, a sentence, a phrase) and thinking deeply upon the truth, its implications, its applications, and asking God to reveal himself and his will to you through his word. Biblical meditation requires that we slow ourselves down, limit distractions, and ruminate long in God's presence around his word.

¹Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ²but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Ps 1.1-2)

⁴One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple (Ps 27.4)

- C. *Be instructed in God's word*: we must receive what the word speaks to us. Yet, to do this requires that we are instructed in God's word. This happens as we familiarize ourselves with the whole of God's word, as the Spirit bears witness in our hearts to the truth of God's word, and as we submit ourselves to the instruction of the church that has faithfully stewarded the faith passed down to us throughout the generations.

²⁷his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie — just as it has taught you, abide in him (1 John 2.27)

³Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3)

- D. *Be judged by God's word*: we must ask God to let his word cut against the grain of our own idolatrous ways of thinking in order that we might be transformed in our own ways of believing, evaluating, and living.

¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Heb 4.12-13)

²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom 12.2)