

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on 2 Kings 22:1-11; 23:1-3 at Victory of the Lamb on November 5, 2017.

**Series: Seeking Certainty**  
**Today's Focus: Here I Stand! (Reformation 500)**

**“What Will You Do with the Book That’s Been Given to You?”**

Imagine for a moment that you are the best man or maid of honor at your best friend’s wedding. The day before you are given one very important job. Take care of the rings; make sure you bring them to the wedding. But when it comes time for the exchange of rings you realize...oh no...you think you left them at the hotel. Big mistake. But it gets worse. After the ceremony when you check with the hotel, there is no sign of the missing rings. They’re gone. You lost them. How could you?

Imagine for a moment though that you lost the Bible. And I’m not talking about forgetting to bring a Bible to a wedding. I actually did that once. It was a little awkward but fortunately I was able to pull the Scripture up on my phone! That’s one blessing of living in our digital age. The Bible has never been more accessible in the history of the world. But could it still be possible to lose the Bible? Could that happen to you and your family? And what would happen if that were the case?

In our Bible lesson today we’re going to hear that it’s happened before. It happened at the time of King Josiah who lived in Jerusalem about 600 years before Jesus was born. In just a moment I’ll read the text from the Old Testament book 2 Kings. And we’re going to be introduced to Josiah when he’s just a boy. 8 years old in fact. That’s how old Josiah was when he became king. Now that doesn’t mean he was calling all the shots at 8 years old. (I’m just picturing some of the boys over in Victory Kids right now being king, yikes!) No, Josiah had advisors and mentors and so forth.

But there’s a reason Josiah became king at age 8. It’s because Josiah’s father, Amon, was assassinated in the palace by his own officials after ruling just 2 years. And as godless of a man as Amon was, his father... Josiah’s grandfather, Manasseh, was even worse. Manasseh led the way in terms of sinning. Over a long reign of 55 years Manasseh turned almost the entire nation away from the LORD. He filled the LORD’s temple with a pornographic Asherah pole and altars for sacrificing to Canaanite false gods like Baal. He set up prostitution shrines all across the land. He practiced witchcraft and consulted mediums. Manasseh was so depraved he even placed some of his own sons into the fire as sacrifices to Molech. And he launched a reign of terror upon all who were true and faithful worshippers of the LORD. He filled Jerusalem with their innocent blood. And then we hear about Josiah. Here’s the story...

*Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. His mother’s name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah; she was from Bozkath. <sup>2</sup>He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and followed completely the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.* Now when it talks about Josiah’s father as “David” this a reference to the fact that Josiah was a descendant of a godly king generations earlier named David. It was to David and through David’s descendants that God had promised he would send another King—the Messiah who would be the Savior of the world one day.

And so right off the bat, isn't this amazing? I mean how do you get a guy like Josiah after generations of people like Manasseh? And the answer is apparently that Josiah had some godly mentors. There at least was a man named Hilkiah, the LORD's high priest, who evidently put a premium on teaching Josiah the difference between right and wrong, teaching him about the LORD, teaching him about the LORD's promise of a Savior to David. So this right here ought to convince us about the importance of reaching kids where they're at as early as possible and the importance of Christian parenting and mentoring. God's Word along with patient, consistent instruction can break a family's cycle of idolatry and even change the spiritual trajectory of an entire community. That's why whether you're married with kids or single or you don't have any kids of your own our world needs you to be spiritual role models who act like Jesus and serve as mentors to young people. The church needs to continually shift its attention to reaching the next generation because we're always only one generation away from losing the word of God. Friends, who are you mentoring—intentionally spending time with, communicating with, praying for? Could you serve once in a month even in our Victory Kids ministry? You can make a difference!

<sup>3</sup> *In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah sent the secretary, Shaphan son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, to the temple of the LORD. He said: <sup>4</sup> "Go up to Hilkiah the high priest and have him get ready the money that has been brought into the temple of the LORD, which the doorkeepers have collected from the people. <sup>5</sup> Have them entrust it to the men appointed to supervise the work on the temple. And have these men pay the workers who repair the temple of the LORD— <sup>6</sup> the carpenters, the builders and the masons. Also have them purchase timber and dressed stone to repair the temple. <sup>7</sup> But they need not account for the money entrusted to them, because they are honest in their dealings." <sup>8</sup> Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD."*

Don't you love this? "Look what I've found!" So when Josiah was 26 years old he made it a priority to repair the temple of the LORD. It had been abused and neglected over the years. And while getting ready to make these repairs...they found—maybe even hidden at the bottom of the temple treasury—a book. But not just any book. They found *the Book of the Law*. They found what God had given through Moses—the first books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy about how God had chosen for himself a special people to safeguard the promise of a Savior who would come for all the world and about how God wanted his special people to live in response to this promise. Perhaps it was hidden away with good intent to protect it from Manasseh's reign of terror. We don't know exactly how it got lost. But somebody had forgotten about the Bible. And so what had happened is that the worship of the LORD faded away. They had no spiritual foundation for what to believe. They had no standard for right behavior. The times were dark.

There was another time in history when the Bible was all but lost. Do you know when it was? About 2,000 years after Josiah lived was the time known as the Dark Ages in Europe. About 1,500 A.D. This was the world that a young man named Martin Luther grew up in. Now in a certain sense they still had the Bible. Churches and monasteries across Europe often had copies of the Bible which by this time included the New Testament. But the true knowledge of the Bible's message was lost because in part the translations of the Bible were still in Latin. And the thing is that at this time very few people understood

Latin anymore. Certainly where Martin Luther grew up in Germany none of the ordinary people knew Latin and the printed page itself was the sole possession of the rich man and the scholar.

So picture yourself going to church to stand for the duration of a service in a cold stone building just going through the motions of watching the priest do his thing and listening to the same words being repeated over and over each Sunday in a language you couldn't even understand! And because they didn't have the Bible in their homes and they couldn't read the Bible for themselves even if they did, what the people were actually being taught by the church was not God's message from the Bible. It was a message corrupted by human traditions and man-made teachings and rules.

For example, pieces of paper called indulgences were being sold with the approval of the Pope all across Europe. These were pieces of paper that promised pardon from sins' punishment in the form of years reduced in purgatory—a fictitious place never mentioned in the Bible. But this fit right in line with the church's teaching that in order to receive God's favor you had to do something to earn it. And so when the Bible was lost, the grace of God—the gospel message about Jesus was also lost. As a result consciences were tormented. You could never be certain that you'd done enough penance. So people lived in uncertainty and fear. They were driven by it. That's what happens when you lose the Bible.

But in Josiah's day, when they began the work of restoring the temple, they rediscovered the Book of the Law. Hilkiyah the priest ... *gave it to Shaphan, who read it.* <sup>9</sup> *Then Shaphan the secretary went to the king and reported to him: "Your officials have paid out the money that was in the temple of the LORD and have entrusted it to the workers and supervisors at the temple."* <sup>10</sup> *Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.* <sup>11</sup> *When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes.*

Don't you love that understatement?! Shaphan comes into King Josiah's presence and says, *"He's given me a book."* And what happens when the king hears what's actually in the book? A reformation begins! But before we see what reforms Josiah puts into practice, notice where it begins...where reformation must always begin...with the heart of a single person. <sup>11</sup> *When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes.* Why? It was like he'd never heard these words before. But God's Word began to reform his heart. Josiah realized his own personal need for repentance.

Friends, do you want a reformation to take place in our world? In your neighborhood? In your family? You know where it needs to start first? With a single person's heart. Yours. That's the truth. Daily repentance starting with confronting your own ungodly desires like envy or greed, your own self-serving attitudes like laziness or lust, your own hurtful actions like lying or manipulation. It means confronting the double standard in our hearts regarding our entertainment culture. I'm talking about where we watch shows about addiction, sex scandals, and crime... and as long as they are fictional, we binge on them and can't get enough. Then the very same actors who we praise and award for portraying these characters and situations, when they fall into the very situations in real life...then we villainize them and hate them without recognizing the sin that lurks in our own hearts. I appreciate how our friends from the worship band Koine say it in one of their music videos, *"Reformation begins with the quiet collision*

*of a sinful heart and the Word of God.”* That’s where it started for Josiah. That’s also where it started for Martin Luther.

And if there’s going to be another reformation today...where must it start? Right here (with your heart and mine). Not just with going through the motions of worship to feel better about ourselves compared to those other godless people out there. Not just with confessing our sins and then going home to do and say the same hurtful things as if nothing happened. Not just with treating God like he’s there for our own personal self-fulfillment to rubber stamp what we want to do. Not by reading this or that blog online whichever happens to agree already with what we want it to say. But by letting God speak to our hearts with his Word. By letting God’s Word shape our thoughts to conform to his thoughts. By turning from our sins and finding again our joyful certainty in Christ alone.

That’s what happened when Martin Luther found the Bible again! And as he studied the Bible and then translated it into the common language of ordinary people so everyone could read it for themselves, the Holy Spirit opened his eyes to find in it a treasure that had been lost for ages. A treasure called the gospel—the message that says your relationship with God isn’t based on what you do. It’s based on what Jesus Christ has already done for you! Repent from your sins, turn away them...yes!...but then trust in the completed work of Jesus Christ as your Savior who purchased your soul from death and hell with his holy, precious blood poured out on the cross. Then you can have the joyful certainty of knowing that your sins are fully forgiven right now. Then you can have the confidence that you are going to heaven the very moment that you die. No detours. Because Jesus did it all!

And this won’t turn you into a spiritually complacent person. Not at all. When a person believes the gospel, it becomes not just a comforting message but a mighty power that can’t help but produce sweet fruits of faith—kindness, courage and love. Luther once said, “Faith is a living, busy, mighty, active thing.” The old way of every man-made religion is you do something good for God and then hopefully he accepts you. The gospel says God accepts so now you can be good. And so this gospel message transforms everything. And the only way one can find this joyful certainty and this new kind of motivation is in the Bible—Scripture alone!—through its simple, clear message of what Jesus Christ has already done. <sup>8</sup> *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—* <sup>9</sup> *not by works, so that no one can boast* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

2 Kings 23 tells us a bit about the Reformation that took place in Josiah’s day... *Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> He went up to the temple of the LORD with the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. <sup>3</sup> The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD—to follow the LORD and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.*

When the Word of God impacted his heart, what did Josiah do with it? He went public with it. When the Word of God impacted his heart, what did Luther do with it? He went public with it. Famously, when Luther was asked to recant or take back what he had written he said, “My conscience is captive to the

Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”

So friends, what will you do with the book that's been given to you? Lose it? Or will you use it, study it, and publicly share it? A couple years ago I talked with someone who had visited our church for the first time when we still at the cinema. You know how she found our church? She was going through a crisis. A friend told her to she should find a Bible church. So she asked me, “Are you a Bible church?” And you know what I said? “Absolutely! Everything we believe and teach comes from the Bible which tells all about Jesus and the good news of what he's done for us. We would love to help you learn more about this wonderful message that is also for you.”

Friends, that's why I have what I've been calling my Bible 101 class. Have you been a part of it yet? I've revamped it a bit. You might say it's undergone a bit of a reformation so that you in 7 weeks you can learn the key truths of the Bible that will help you have the joyful certainty that comes from knowing Christ's victory—including the very special gifts God gives us in baptism and the Lord's Supper. And you can invite anyone to be a part of it with you. Basically everything I used to teach in 101 and 201 I have combined in to a new Bible 101 class. I would love to have you be a part of it.

Because here's the good news. Remember how I started out by having you imagine what would happen if you lost the wedding rings for your best friend's wedding? Well even if that happened...that wouldn't change the marriage promises that were made that day. Rings are a sign of the marriage covenant but they're not the essence of it. Likewise if you've grown lazy in reading your Bible or perhaps you've even lost it or don't know it is right now, that doesn't actually change the unconditional covenant promise God made with you either. The Reformation means you can reclaim right now that wonderful certainty of the promise God made at your baptism when he claimed you as his own for time and eternity. For in his word that endures forever he says, *“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you*” (Isaiah 54:10). Amen.