

Transformed and Committed

2 Kings 22:1-2

[1] Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adamiah of Bozkath. [2] He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

The average age of the five presidential candidates on the ballot in Virginia this year is 64. Imagine being in a situation where the person taking on the position of king was only 8 years of age. If that's not strange enough, this eight-year-old king was taking over for his father, who had been assassinated by his servants at the age of 24!

That is the background story to one of Judah's finest kings. In fact, 2 Kings 23:25 says, "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to the law of Moses; not did any arise after him." His name is Josiah and his story illustrates the type of commitment that arises out of true transformation by the power of God.

Josiah was the grandson of one of the worst kings in the history of Judah. Manasseh was only twelve years of age when his rule began. His 55 years on the throne were characterized by evil, idolatry, blasphemy and bloodshed. He rebuilt all the pagan "high places" that King Hezekiah had torn down. He built altars in the temple for the sun, moon and stars. He made his own son "pass through the fire," which meant he put his own son to death by fire as a sacrifice to the pagan god Molech. He made a carved image of the pagan god Asherah and put it in the temple. We are told in 2 Kings that he shed much innocent blood, to the point where the city was filled with it. To put it simply, when evil kings are considered in the Old Testament, they are compared to Manasseh, who is taken to be the epitome of evil.

When Manasseh died at the age of 67 his son, Amon took the throne. Amon was 22 when he began to rule. The scriptural assessment of his two-year reign is that he continued the evil things that his father, Manasseh had done. Amon's servants murdered him two years after he took the throne and after the people of Judah had put his assassins to death his 8-year-old son, Josiah ascended to the throne.

The next several years are relatively quiet as far as the Scriptures are concerned. However, when Josiah turned 26 he began to truly exercise his authority. He began repairing and renovating the temple. While the workers were involved in this task, a book was found in one of the rooms in the temple. Shaphan, who was the temple secretary, read the book aloud to the king. Most biblical scholars believe that the scroll was at least part of the book of Deuteronomy. When Josiah heard the reading of God's law and the consequences of disobedience, he was shaken to the core. He sent the high priest and some of his closest advisors to the prophetess Huldah, to find out if there was any hope of avoiding the calamities

described in the scroll. Huldah said that Judah would indeed suffer, but that the weight of the calamity would not fall on Josiah because he had shown remorse for the sins of the people.

Over the next 13 years Josiah committed himself to restoring the true worship of God in Judah. He had all the pagan idols torn down and removed from the temple. He tore down all the pagan “high places” that Manasseh had rebuilt. He had most of the pagan priests put to death and he reinstated the observance of the Passover. Throughout his rule, Josiah committed himself to following the LORD and leading Judah to do the same. The LORD transformed Josiah and Josiah demonstrated that transformation through a committed life.

As we look at Josiah’s story, what can we learn about the commitment that bears witness to our own transformation by the Holy Spirit?

First, **we see that Josiah’s commitment came from a heart transformed by God’s Word.** We know from the Scriptures that Josiah apparently had a heart for God that was more like that of his great-grandfather Hezekiah than the pagan hearts of his grandfather Manasseh and his father Amon. He had already taken the steps of converting the temple tax to its intended use, the maintenance and repair of the temple. In fact, it was while the cleaning and repairing of the temple was going on that the scroll of the law was found. Even though his heart was inclined toward God, once Josiah heard God’s Word and realized his sinfulness and the transgression of the people, his whole life direction was changed. It was no longer sufficient simply to make sure that the temple was maintained for the worship of God, he had to remove every pagan idol, every idolatrous place of worship from the landscape. He would not allow anything to remain in Judah that would be an affront to God Almighty.

That’s the way God’s Word works in our lives. The Scriptures don’t just take bad people and transform them into people who want to be good, it takes good people and transforms them into people committed to being better, being more like Christ. Psalm 119:11 says, “I treasure your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you.” This indicates that God’s Word, stored up in our hearts, so transforms us that we live more fully committed to righteousness. 496 years ago as Martin Luther was standing before the emperor and the representatives of the pope, men whom he knew could have him put to death at a moment’s notice, he stood before them defiantly and said, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God.” For Luther it was God’s Word that the Holy Spirit used as the foundation of his transformation. That transformation became the foundation of a truly committed life. Next year the world will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther has been hailed as the one through whom God began to work a miracle of renewal and rebirth within the church that was possibly the most significant event since New Testament times. When he was asked about his role in the Reformation, however, Martin Luther took no credit. Here is what he said. ***“I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip [Melanchthon] and my Amsdorf [Nicholaus von], the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing. The Word did it all.”*** One of the first things Martin Luther did as part of the Reformation was to go about translating the New Testament into German.

For the first time in their lives Christians were able to read the Scriptures for themselves. Once they were exposed to the Word of God, their lives were transformed and they were committed to answering the call to change the church.

We are often reminded that committed Christians train their focus on God's Word. The reverse is also true. If we immerse ourselves in the truth of the Scriptures, God will so transform our hearts that commitment to His kingdom will be second nature to us. Reading and meditating on the Word of God draws us closer to Him. We cannot draw closer to Him without feeling the need for greater commitment to His cause.

Groum Pale is a 20-year-old young man in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. At the age of 9 he found himself on the streets with his sisters eating out of trash cans, infested with worms and lice. Both of their parents had died of AIDS. Some missionaries found him and his sisters and took them to an orphanage for shelter and support. In addition to providing them a place to sleep and food to eat, the people at the orphanage introduced Groum and his sisters to the Word of God. Using a "Proclaimer" that played portions of the Bible in various languages, Groum was transfixed and then *transformed* by God's Word. They would listen to the Bible during the day and then try to repeat the portions back to each other at night. As he internalized more and more of the Bible he felt his despair changing to hope and his fear changing to confidence. This boy who could not read when he entered the orphanage quickly moved to the top of his class. He began spending all his free time back out on the streets of Addis Ababa with a "Proclaimer" in his hand, sharing the Scriptures with other children in hope that they would find the same life-changing message he had. Now he is preparing to go to the university to study engineering. When asked, Groum tells anyone who will listen how his life was transformed by the Word of God and he shares with them his commitment to help others hear and know Scripture as well.

In Groum's testimony he talks about how God used the Bible to transform him. The result of that transformation was a firm commitment to do the Lord's work. Is your conscience captive to the Word of God? Have you experienced the transforming power of Scripture in your life? If so, then commitment to the Lord's work and to the cause of Christ is no question for you. If commitment is sometimes hard to make or hard to maintain, open yourself up to the washing of the water of the Word and let God's Spirit do the rest.

A second thing we see in the example of Josiah is that **his commitment was characterized by action, not words**. Commitment is not a feeling that can be expressed by words, that is conviction. Commitment is a lifestyle that is characterized by action. In the first chapter of James we hear these words: *"But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing."* Do you hear what James is saying? He is telling us that the true Christian life is a life of commitment that demonstrates itself in action, not just feelings or words. When God transformed Josiah's heart, he put his conviction to work. He committed his resources to doing the Lord's work. He

was willing to stand up against the flow of the culture for the sake of God's higher calling and he was satisfied with nothing less than concrete results from his actions. 2 Kings 23 is a chapter filled with strong verbs as it describes Josiah's commitment. He READ the law to others. He COMMANDED the priests to cleanse the temple. He PULLED DOWN the pagan idols. He REMOVED the pagan statues at the entrance to the house of God.

If we are going to live lives that demonstrate how God has transformed us, we must show that transformation through the commitment of our resources for the sake of His kingdom. We offer to the Lord the material and financial resources He has placed in our hands. We devote time and energy to the Lord's work. It comes as second nature to us. Even as we demonstrate our own transformation through commitment, God uses our committed lives to bring the hope of transformation to others.

A final thing we see in the story of Josiah is the reward that comes with commitment. **Josiah's commitment was honored by God.** The Lord honored Josiah's commitment for eternity because He included the story of that commitment in His Word. 2 Kings 1:2 says, *"He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left."* 2 Kings 23:25 says, *"Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him."* Did you catch that? The Lord made sure that all generations to come would know that he was pleased with Josiah's commitment.

Jesus tells us that our commitment can evoke the same kind of honor from our heavenly Father. In Matthew 25:31-40 he says—*"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'* Jesus told those who were listening to Him that the Father will honor those who commit their resources and their effort for the sake of the King and His kingdom.

In the parable of the talents that precedes this in Matthew 25, Jesus says—*"For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But*

the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.' Then the one who had received one talent also came forward saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Her you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him out into utter darkness.'"

The worthless slave who was condemned by his master was not condemned for doing anything wrong, but for doing nothing. Those who were honored by their master were honored for their faithfulness in committing what they had been given for the sake of the Master. If God has transformed us by His Spirit, the greatest desire of our lives should be to hear Him say, "Well done." It is the commitment of our lives and our resources that makes such recognition by our Father possible. Those who, like Josiah, have been transformed by the Word of God demonstrate that transformation by commitment...commitment demonstrated by actions, not merely words. Their reward is the recognition of their heavenly Father. May we settle for nothing less.