

- "King Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign in the southern kingdom of Judah." That was my opening line in a sermon I crafted to win a speaking contest in Bible College.
- I came in second place to another young man whose father was on the board of trustees for the school and pastored a church that was one of the largest donors to the college.
- Ask me if the reason I still remember the experience is because I am still bitter about the loss after nearly 50 years have passed. **Of course not!** 😊
- Maybe I do still harbor a little bit of competitive spirit but the big reason I remember the sermon, other than having memorized it word for word and practiced it 100+ times, is that it's text became one of those touchstone texts—one of those unforgettable narratives for me in the Bible.
- A story from the life of young King Josiah reminds me of something I valued then, still value now and will continue to value for my life and the life of FBC unless God somehow changes my thinking.
- I first selected that story for my 2nd-place sermon because it could be preached just like a sermon of an older man's preaching that was effective and admired in my circles at the time.
- This older preacher's sermons were marked by three things: 1. His best sermons usually had a narrative—often an **OT narrative** as the text--told in a very animated fashion 2. His sermons were always **short** and 3. His sermons were as close to being **biblically based** as any I heard from pastors in our group of 2000+ churches.
- Most of our pastor/preachers used the Bible as supporting evidence for the sermon they wanted to preach. Or, they would use a biblical text as a "launching pad" for the subject **on their heart** even if that

subject had nothing whatsoever to do with the biblical text they read in the sermon.

- Very often, this preacher I was mimicking, in my 2nd-place sermon, would actually use the exegetically reproducible meaning of the text he used as God had intended the text to be used. He was my first brush with the importance of BIBLICAL preaching and the priority of being BIBLICAL in my life and ministry.
- Over the years, I have dropped his first two priorities—always working from a vivid narrative—and preaching short—BUT I have never dropped the priority that I be truly biblical in my preaching and my life.
- I did not what to preach or live based on feelings ginned up inside me and then called biblical because they happened to come from an experience of reading a certain word in the text that set my thoughts going in a direction that had nothing to do with what God was saying in that text.
- I knew early on I would value biblical truth more than my own emotions and feelings created by experiences with spiritual stuff.
- Whether you know this or not, some people don't agree with me on this primacy of biblical truth (that is truth defined as what God intended to say in the texts he had written down for his people).
- The ***Roman Catholic Church*** doesn't exactly agree with me on this. However, that doesn't bother me very much since they don't care what I think and I have little or no influence in the life of that church.
- Closer to home, ***many teachers and pastors*** that you might listen to or read do not agree with me on this importance of biblical truth rather than spiritual experiences and the feelings and emotions that accompany them. That bothers me a bit more because of the storng

influence some of us give theses teachers treating them as experts because they have been published or are very popular speakers.

- What matters most to me is that ***some of my brothers and sisters in FBC*** might not hold this value of biblical truth being the foundational truth for life and mission.
- It may be because they don't understand the difference between biblical truth and personal spiritual experience and so they conflate the two. They might even place experience as the ultimate definer for interpreting the Bible and the Christian life.
- Or, it may be that they have been taught otherwise by the "experts" or maybe that has been their theological background growing up in the Christian life.
- Or, perhaps, they just like thinking of truth this way because it feels better and maybe more alive to them.
- There is a tendency in churches who, by current standards, are supposed to be loving and accepting on matters of guiding values to just hope we believe the same things. If we don't, that can produce divisions that are very difficult—actually usually impossible to alleviate.
- So, we often sweep the differences in what we truly value that guides us under the rug and hope it all works out and we can stay friends who go to the same church.
- This is a fine thing to do if all that matters is attendance at a service on Sunday and a few programs we like.
- It is a devastating thing if we have a desire to move forward on a mission that requires true unity—true *koinonia*--because that mission from God is bigger than any of us alone. We must hold the same guiding values to truly be together on the bigger mission.

- So, I have introduced this sermon in this way because some of you may disagree and, at this point in the adventurous life of FBC we need to know if we disagree. We should not be saying, "*Oh! We are saying the same thing!*" when we are not saying the same thing.
- I value being **Scripturally biblical** as a rock bottom governing value for me and for FBC. We have stated that as a value for years. We
- claim that the shape of our *mission* stream and our value of *free-grace* is controlled by the rock bottom, streambed, truth of being as **Scripturally biblical** as we know how to be.
- I want to address two historical situations—that of King Josiah and then that of our current church in the context of our present culture. I'll talk about the first context, Josiah's' this week and the second, our context, next week. You'll need both to get the big picture. The sermons will be posted on line to read or to hear if you need that.
- I pick Josiah, to begin, not because there is any one-to-one correspondence of an ancient Israelite king and his nation to a current church called FBC. I pick his story because it still shocks me and makes me ask could we make the same mistake they did in our own way?
- Let's start that 2nd-place sermon one more time. "***King Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign in the southern kingdom of Judah.***"
- The northern kingdom was already gone. God had brought judgment on his people because they had created their own images of God to worship—idols. They had forsaken their God-given mission announced by God and his prophets to be his light to the world—to image God—to shine forth his glory—left it for a mission of personal prosperity supported by their new visions of God in the idols they had shaped with their own minds and hands.

- Just the southern tribes—now called “Judah” remained. What would they do with respect to God’s revelation of himself and his mission?
- King Josiah’s grandfather was the wicked King Manasseh the son of a Godly king Hezekiah. Manasseh abandoned the truth of God’s revealed image and mission for the image of gods he preferred represented by the false gods and idols of the pagans around them.
- Josiah’s dad was King Amon. Amon was no better than Manasseh. He too led the nation to reject what God had revealed in order to worship gods that had more appeal to his darkened heart.
- So along comes King Josiah. He ascends the throne at just 8 years of age. Surprisingly, Josiah has a heart that loves the true God—the revealer and covenant maker—Yahweh—the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob—the God of King David.
- In the 12th year of his reign, Josiah used his kingly authority to reform the kingdom. He tore down the idols and began to restore the Temple and the worship of the true, self-revealed rather than human-created God. You can read the whole story and details in *2 Chronicles*.

We will read just **2 Chronicles 34:14-19** of the carefully revealed by God Word of God written down in Scripture for us concerning the carefully revealed Word of God already written down in Scripture for them.

- While clearing and renovating the Temple that had been out-of-use for Yahweh worship, Hilkiah, a priest who was helping Josiah with the reforms discovers in the rubble (likely in boxes next to the Kings vintage Corvette) something very special that should never have been lost there.
- He discovers a written down copy of the very Word of God that had been “lost/forgotten.” It is easy to lose things you don’t really value.

- When he encounters this written down Word and reads it to the King, it has great power over Josiah. The written Word produces fitting feelings and emotions so strong King Josiah rips his clothing in sorrow and repentance.
- Upon hearing the revealed Word of God, Josiah realized he had been doing good things in his religious reform but that even with his best heart his great emotions of honor and maybe even feelings of love toward God, without the revealed Word of God there was nothing that could keep Josiah from the mistakes of creating his own personal image of God for the people to worship.
- That felt, experienced, emotional image of God might have been better than the images others created from pagan influence, but those internal impulses were not the same as the revealed truth of God!
- Were there feelings and emotions involved in what God was trying to reveal here? Of course! How could a man not have feelings when encountering the Word of God?!
- However, those feelings and emotions were secondary and controlled by now knowing what God himself had revealed in his word that had been written down but lost.
- The written down word was alive with God's power to accomplish God's plan as God had revealed himself and that plan. There was far less danger that even good King Josiah would now shape an incorrect image of God based on his best feelings, emotions and human insights into what God is like and how he acts.
- Why does this Josiah—*found-the-lost-book*—story stick with me after all these years? Because I am shocked and hopefully always warned by how easily God's people can desert the true image and

plan of God for a self-created image and plan informed by their culture rather than by God's clear revelation of Himself to them.

- Is this only an OT phenomenon for Israel as God's people? No, it is not.
- Last week we read the story of Jesus and Nicodemus. Although it is not the theme of John 3 and the discussion between them, Jesus points out that Nicodemus, as a ruler of the Jews, shouldn't need the teaching about everlasting life and the Messiah and a new birth that Jesus must teach him.
- Why? Because they have all been shown in the recorded, written down Word of God that the Pharisees like Nick say they so revere.
- What has happened? How have they lost these teachings and to what result?
- The rulers and teachers of the Jews have lost these teachings because they have covered them up and hidden them beneath the personal desires of the day. They wanted to experience the Messiah as a great military deliverer who would restore Israel, God's people to their rightful leadership of the world.
- With this garbage in the way, they were able to cover up the Word of God and feel very good—feel very righteous about it because the god they had created was a god of their own making shaped by their desires and not subject to the truths of all of Scripture. Their god was as much an idol as the idols of the evil Kings Amon and Manasseh that Josiah wanted to destroy.
- Ok, well, maybe Nicodemus, wasn't yet a *believer* and he didn't yet have the Holy spirit in him to guide him. Raleigh, "Jesus says the comforter will come and be in his people and he says that this one will guide them into all truth. So, unlike Josiah and Nicodemus, we

indwelt-by-the-Spirit believers can rely on that internal light to give us the truth."

- Ok, the written word is important but we believe we know that Word well enough to now rely on what we feel—our inner impulses of emotions to know the truth.
- I hope to see more next week, but please think about and go back and look at all the verses in the epistles written to churches in situations more like we are today.
- Think for example of Paul's letters to Timothy who is trying to deal with issues that might crush the mission in the church of Ephesus.
- In 2 Timothy 3 where Paul is telling Timothy what his resource is that can dig below the surface of the idols of their own likings that people have created of God in the church out of their feelings about what is good or bad.
- Paul describes Scripture, the written Word of God to Timothy as the resource he must use because it is ***"God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."***
- The Apostle charges the man who is there to lead—to help this church who is losing its way among all the personal opinions of who God is and what God means for his people based on what they feel.
- He doesn't charge Timothy to pull out of his inner feelings and light the truth that will help. He says "PREACH the WORD!—all the time everywhere to everyone even if it seems out of place among the calls to shape personal gods by god's people.
- Why? Well, says Pau, the time will come when believers will simply want to hear affirmation of what they think and feel. They will not put up with teaching of the doctrine of written truth in Scripture but will chase after what Paul calls "their desires."

- They will find pastors and teachers and books and blogs and DvD's and videos and all manner of sources that will tell them, look yourself inside for the truth that fits what you desire.
- Don't worry about what God's written Word says. That's too impersonal. That doesn't produce the good feelings of a relationship designed as I see it should be with God.
- When I say "Fellowship **Bible** Church is "biblical"—that is has as a value being biblical, I mean that the written Scriptures that are the very LIVING WORDS of God actually govern our lives.
- When I say we are biblical, I mean we submit, feelings and dreams and visions, and emotions, and liver quivers, and ideas and all other internal senses of communication to the clear revelation of God's Word—to Scripture.
- If I am not able to do that, I am willing to find someone who can, to show me so that I do not create even a well-intended idol by shaping God and his mission from my internal desires.
- Lord willing we can talk some more next week.
- Meanwhile ask yourself about one of the most famous admonitions of the Prophet Jeremiah He was prophesying in Josiah's day. It is an admonition from Jeremiah to Josiah and the Nation concerning the human heart. The heart here is at least the seat of our desires and emotions if not more.
- See if you think there is still some way that description of hearts might apply to us and our inner guidance mechanisms today. You'll need to consider the anthropology of a NT saint with a new heart still living in a fleshly earth suit.
- They are the words of the LORD in **Jeremiah 17:9**.