

# I believe in the Holy Spirit

23 April 2017    Spring Walk    King Josiah

I need a volunteer please. They need to be 8 years old.

What do you like doing? What would you like to do when you're older? Are you busy tomorrow?

Crown them King.

Sit here on the throne.

Imagine this happening today! This is what happened for a kid called Joe, or as his mother called him, Josiah. He was the 17<sup>th</sup> King of Judah and he was born in 648BC. His mum was a Jedi, well not really, but her name was Jedidah, or Jedi for short, and his dad was only 16 when Josiah came along.

Like with lots of history, their stories can be gruesome and horrid and not particularly normal, and Josiah's upbringing is no different. Sadly, Joe's dad was killed, he was assassinated while he was in the palace one day, which is why Josiah was made king at such a young age – just 8 years old.

But things in King Josiah's day were not good. He was king of a place called Judah, which is in modern day Israel today, and his home was in Jerusalem; and Jerusalem was a very special place, because it was here that the house of God could be found – a great temple. In this temple, the God who made you and me, the God who made everything that you can see, the bluebells outside, the daffodils and tulips (as well as everything you can't see) the God who himself was never made, but has always existed forever – he chose to make this place, this temple in Jerusalem, his home on earth several millennia ago. A place where people could come and worship him, a place where people could be made right with God.

As Christians we don't have temples today, at least not temples made of bricks and gold. When Jesus came to earth, he said that his body was God's temple; *he* was the very image of God, and all the fullness of God lived in him, not in a building, but in a person. And then when Jesus returned to his Father in heaven, we're told that *we* are now a part of God's temple. Each one of us, if we trust in Jesus and put him first, make him the boss of everything - it's like we become a brick in the temple that is Jesus, we become a part of his body, his family – living stones in his temple!

But back to Joe, things in his day weren't good. His family didn't like the temple - well it's not that they didn't like it, but they didn't think there was anything special about it. You see God was very particular about how and where he ought to be worshipped. He knew that people, like you and me, have a tendency to get mixed up in the way we worship.

We might go to a church service and end up worshipping the beautiful stained glass windows or the gold lined statues and ornaments – we like pretty buildings, like this one; or we worship the music or the band or the people singing in a church service; or we worship the speaker and how good he was, or wasn't - it's the things and people that can take up most of our attention, they're often what we talk about, they're what we get upset about, they're what we focus on, sometimes more often than the God that all these things are meant to point to. We have this tendency as people to worship things, rather than the God who made every thing.

God knew this, so he was very careful to say that there should only be one temple, one place to bring sacrifices and worship to God. But Joe's family - his dad, his grandad and lots of people before them - built lots of other little temples and special places on top of hills or in beautiful valleys, and said, 'let's worship God here as well, let's sacrifice to God over there, that's a bit closer to home, and there's a

nice view from the top of that hill.’ And while they were at it, they also started worshipping lots of fake gods.

We easily get mixed up in our worship, and people throughout history have tried to worship all sorts of things, other than the God who made everything. In Josiah’s day, their neighbours made up gods called Ball and Asherah, and Joe’s grandparents began worshipping them. They worshipped the sun and the stars and all sorts of other things. We might think it sounds odd to us, but you know, we can do the same thing today too, we just give it a different name.

All of our hearts are idol-factories, we take good things and make them into idols that drive us. We may not worship the sun or a pole in a ground somewhere - but what caused the people in Joe’s day to do that, is the same thing that drives us – we like having the approval of others, a good reputation, so we worship people and their opinion of us; or we like to have power *over* others, so we worship the idea of control and it drives us; or we want to be financially stable, so that’s something that motivates us; or we chase after a certain experience or pleasure – so many things drive us, and if it’s not God, it’s an idol, it’s a little temple we’ve placed in our dream world, on our career plan, in our thoughts each day.

It’s a big issue, and King Josiah knew it.

I need another volunteer please. Put your hand up if you’re 16 years old. Would you like to come and sit on the throne? What are you most looking forward to this year?

Would you like to read some verses from 2 Chronicles 34:1-7 please?

*Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for thirty-one years. 2 He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and followed the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.*

*3 In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David. In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles and idols. 4 Under his direction the altars of the Baals were torn down; he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them, and smashed the Asherah poles and the idols. These he broke to pieces and scattered over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. 5 He burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and so he purged Judah and Jerusalem. 6 In the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim and Simeon, as far as Naphtali, and in the ruins around them, 7 he tore down the altars and the Asherah poles and crushed the idols to powder and cut to pieces all the incense altars throughout Israel. Then he went back to Jerusalem.*

When Joe was 16yo, it says he began to seek the God of his father David. King David, was Josiah's great great great great great grandfather, and he was one of, if not *the* best king Israel had ever seen. Not many kings since him had the sort of heart the David did, a heart that loved God and loved the things that God loves - but Josiah did, and it was around the time when he was 16, that he really began to seek God.

It was a time when he really began to think about the world and what was going on around him. 'Will I follow the way the world is going? My family, my neighbours, the whole culture, is obsessed with themselves, with chasing after the desires of their own hearts – these little idol factories. They don't care for God, for *his* ways, for the things *he* loves. What am I going to do? Am I going to follow the crowd, jump in the river of life and see where it takes me – that's where everyone else is going?'

It's very easy to do, and in a way it's our natural position, it's our default, go-to way of thinking – because it's not really thinking at all. If you jump into the water when the current's going a certain direction – of course we'll be swept along with everything else.

But in the passage we just read, it says that while he was still young, Josiah began to seek God. And as he did, he noticed that all around him was a world that completely ignored God. There were idols and altars and temples and Asherah poles, and people and priests who worshipped anything and everything *but* the God who made them.

If you read the rest of his story you'll read about some pretty terrible things people did to worship these false gods and idols, I almost don't want to mention them. But as Josiah was seeking after God, he realised all the idolatry around him was so offensive, so a few years later, as a 20-year-old, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem.

*Purge* is a good word, we use it when talking about getting rid of things, whether it's purging our body of toxins by going through a detox diet. Or companies slowly purging sugar from their products. Or even just having a yearly purge of old clothes and clutter around the house – who still has VHS tapes lying around? It's the sort of thing we purge from our lives – things we don't need or that are harmful to us.

Josiah purges his kingdom in a monumental way. It was the greatest reform Israel had ever seen. Almost everything and anything was burnt, removed, defiled and destroyed. All the offensive places, altars and priests were gotten rid of. I love the words the Chronicles use – these things were torn down, cut up, smashed, burnt, broke to pieces, scattered, crushed to powder.

King Josiah is ruthless and efficient, completely thorough, and literally leaves no stone unturned.

But just in case we think, wow, this guy is a bit of a legend, I wish I could seek after God like he did, I wish I was as scrupulous in purging out the sin and idols in my life – we need to remember how God works. Ultimately this is all his work.

Nearly 300 years earlier, God gave a remarkable prophecy about Josiah's life. In 1 Kings 13, it says: a man of God came from Judah to

Bethel, as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering. [This was an earlier king who started all sorts of idolatry, Jeroboam was an evil king] It says: 2 By the word of the Lord [this prophet] cried out against the altar: ‘Altar, altar! This is what the Lord says: “A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you [the altar] he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.”’

So 300 years earlier, God spoke his plans to the wicked king of the day, Jeroboam - and of course, he carries out what he says he will do. He orchestrates things so that a man called Josiah is born 300 years later, and he gives this young man a heart that seeks after God, and stirs within him a desire to purge the land of its evil. This is God’s work, he spoke about it in the past and by his grace he brings his plans about to show us what he is like, that he is king over all things, and must be worshipped rightly by all his creatures.

So while Josiah is a bit of a legend, we need to see that behind him, is a God who’s at work, keeping his promises and changing people’s hearts.

I need one more volunteer and we’ll be done. Is anyone **26**? This is another key age in Josiah’s life. Do you fancy being a king?!

What’s the best book you’ve ever read?

Do you know, I’ve lost my Bible. Can anyone help me find it please? It’s in a black leather case, and it’s got my name on it...

Imagine if you lost your Bible; but not just your Bible, but all the Bibles in your home; and not just your home, but all the Bibles in Caterham – in fact in all of Surrey, or even the whole nation, there was not one Bible to be found.

This is what it was like in Josiah’s day. They didn’t have many copies to start with, but nobody had read God’s word for years and years. Can you read this next bit please?

*In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, to purify the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan and Joah to repair the temple... 12 The workers laboured faithfully... 14 While they were bringing out the money that had been taken into the temple of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord that had been given through Moses... Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.*

*19 When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes... 21 [He said] 'Great is the Lord's anger that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept the word of the Lord; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book.'*

*...29 Then the king called together... all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book which had been found in the temple of the Lord. 31 The king stood by his pillar and renewed the covenant... – to follow the Lord and keep his commands... with all his heart and all his soul, and to obey the words of the covenant written in this book.*

*32 Then he made everyone in Jerusalem pledge themselves to it.*

Josiah is probably most famous for finding this book that had been lost or kept hidden for decades and decades. He was 26 when they found it, and for the rest of his life he carried on purging the country of its evil, and reforming their worship, the way they lived, and the way they related to God.

There was a huge celebration, it says they had a festival bigger than the greatest feasts in David and Solomon's day.

Things seemed to be going well. They were moved when they heard the word of God. They believed it, and did what it said, even when it meant radical and perhaps unpopular decisions. They put *God* first and set about worshipping him alone, rather than any of the idols our hearts can create.

When Josiah was only 39 - I'm not going to get anyone else to sit here, but at 39yo – Josiah was killed. And sadly, it seems his godly reign came to an end because he didn't *listen* to God's word. He did so well throughout his whole life, but for some reason, right at the end he chose not to listen.

In chapter 35 of 2 Chronicles, Josiah goes to fight a Pharaoh as he passed by his country. Necho the Pharaoh told Joe (v21): *'It is not you I am attacking at this time, but the house with which I am at war. God has told me to hurry; so stop opposing God, who is with me, or he will destroy you.'*

*22 Josiah, however, would not turn away from him, but disguised himself to engage him in battle. He would not listen to what Necho had said at God's command but went to fight him on the plain of Megiddo.*

*23 Archers shot King Josiah, and he told his officers, 'Take me away; I am badly wounded.' 24 So they took him out of his chariot, put him in his other chariot and brought him to Jerusalem, where he died. He was buried in the tombs of his ancestors, and all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for him.*

Josiah did so well in seeking after God and reforming the worship of the nation, removing the idols from the land, discovering God's word and doing what it said. But right at the end, for some reason, God chose to speak through a pagan king, and Josiah didn't listen. His life was ended short, and he was shot with a bow and arrow.

God often speaks in unusual ways, he has given us this word, it's complete and sufficient, and he has given us his Spirit, to discern and understand what he's saying to us today.

King Josiah was a great king, the Bible holds him in the highest regard, but it still leaves us longing for a king that will listen to God's word perfectly, and always; a King who will deal with sin and the idols of our hearts once and for all, because after Josiah died the people

went right back to setting up new idols and high places, as if Josiah never even happened – the heart will always be an idol factory – this story leaves us longing for a King that can change our hearts; and a King who will be the very Word of God himself – a Word that will not get lost, or left in a library somewhere and forgotten about, but is living and active in our hearts today.

Josiah, as every king does, points us to King Jesus. Jesus demands absolute loyalty and obedience; but he also is a king of love and mercy. He's a king who gives us his very own spirit so that we *can* seek after him and love his ways and obey him. He is full of grace, and he's calling each of us tonight to trust him more and more.

We're going to sing about the greatest King to finish.

Sing: You're the Word of God the Father