

# Desecrating the High Places

2 Kings 23:1-25

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## Introduction:

I want to start tonight's message with a very important question for us all to consider.

*"How serious am I about that which offends God?"*

I want this self-examining question to be on the forefront of our minds as we consider what the Word of God has for us to feed on this evening.

We've all been getting a healthy dose of the Old Testament as of late; whether it be Pastor Jack's recent message from Deuteronomy 28 or Pastor Joel's message this past Sunday from the book of Malachi.

It is good that we continue to faithfully examine the Old Testament! Far too many "churches" have thrown it out and want nothing to do with it, but not this church. We understand that for us to really understand and appreciate the NEW, we must be diligent to study the OLD.

Before we arrive at our text tonight, it is necessary for us to consider the context. We're going to look at two aspects of the context of our passage: the broad context and the immediate context.

But before we dive in, let's **PRAY**.

## The Broad Context

At this point in the history of Israel, they are in what's known as the era of the kings. This is not a particularly bright spot in the history of God's people.

Illustration: I'm sure we all have certain seasons of life that we try to avoid talking about and that we would like to forget. These might be our BC (before Christ) days or a season of backsliding.

God never intended on Israel having a king. Other nations that were around Israel had kings, but it was God's heart that *He and He alone* would rule over His people; but Israel rejected the lordship of Yahweh over them and demanded Samuel to give them a king.

Israel was looking at the surrounding *pagan* nations, envying the fact that they all had kings. We see in 1 Samuel 8 that what was at the root of Israel's desire for a king was so that they could be "like all the nations".

God had set them apart as a *holy* people unto Himself and yet there was still this draw toward the world. Still to this day, Satan seeks to do this with us: attempting to entice us and allure us with the ways of this world. May the Lord keep us from this temptation and may we be vigilant against it.

Nevertheless, God gives Israel what they were asking for and it is disastrous for them. God had warned them of the nature of the king they'd be given, and the people did not care.

Application: We ought to be thankful sometimes when God *DOESN'T* give us what we're asking Him for! When we're praying to Him for that job, or for that relationship to result in marriage, etc.

If God gave us everything we asked for, our lives would be a mess! Israel is exhibit A of this very thing.

Illustration: As the philosopher of old, Garth Brooks, said, "sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers".

- A better way of putting it is that we should be thankful to God when He says "no".
  - He only answers prayers with "yes", "no", or "wait".

*"His rejections are His protections"*

Nonetheless, Saul, son of Kish, is chosen to be the first king of Israel and he really makes a mess of things because he was full of pride and disobeyed the Lord.

David succeeds Saul and we all know that David was beloved of God and was a great ruler over God's people. He was a man after God's own heart who sought to DO what was IN God's heart.

Solomon then becomes king, and he has a tremendous start to his kingship but a horrible finish. Because of his 700 wives and 300 concubines, his heart turned from the Lord unto false gods.

Application: Solomon, amongst many others in the Word of God, should serve as a lesson to us all to make it our aim to FINISH WELL.

Israel follows Solomon's example, and they plunge headfirst into a level of idolatry that was just outright horrible.

Israel's history of idol worship is not a short story to tell. Though God had told them in the first and second commandments to "have no other gods before Me" and to "not make any carved images", they constantly were guilty of the grave sin of idolatry.

It can be said that idol worship in Israel peaked during the era of the kings. This sin of idolatry was ultimately the sin that caused Israel and Judah to be judged by God and sent into captivity in foreign lands.

## The Immediate Context

In our text tonight, Josiah is the king of Judah. Josiah becomes king at the ripe old age of 8 years old, due to his father, Amon, being murdered by his own servants. Can you imagine anointing a king over a nation at the age of 8?!

Illustration: This would be like us going up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade room tonight, taking one of those kiddos, and making them the next president of the United States.

But, if you know much about King Josiah, you know that, though he started at such a young age, he would go on to be an amazing king. In fact, he would be the best king that Judah would ever have.

He is referred to as Judah's greatest king not because of his military or economic accomplishments, but because "*he did what was right in the sight of the Lord*".

Application: Don't you love that you and I don't have to wonder "what is right in the sight of the Lord"? God has made it abundantly clear IN HIS WORD what He thinks is right and what He thinks is wrong.

We don't get to call the shots on saying what's right or wrong, GOD DOES, and we are to simply submit and say, "Yes, Lord". He is the source of all morality.

What made Josiah such a great king was that he led *from out in front* when it came to living righteously before God. This is actually what God expects and has called every political leader to do, according to what we see in Romans 13.

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It is here in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of King Josiah's reign that we pick up. The king is now 26 years old and has just recently given a command for money to be collected for the purpose of repairing parts of the house of the Lord, the Temple.

As the Temple is being refurbished, Hilkiah, the high priest, finds the Book of the Law. This truly reflects just how wayward Judah was at this point in time. The nation had been neglecting the Word of God for far too long.

Application: We could say the same of our nation. We once followed the examples of our founding fathers who held the Word of God in such high esteem and truly feared the Lord, but how far from this place we have strayed. We must come back to the place of those in our halls of power fearing God and obeying His Word; then and only then *might* we see this nation revived.

**Alexander MacLaren** gives us this challenging thought to consider...

“Unvalued things easily slip out of sight, and if the preservation of Scripture depended on the estimation which some of us have of it, it would have been lost long ago.”

Upon finding the Book of the Law, Hilkiah tells the scribe/secretary, Shaphan. Shaphan reads it first for himself and then tells King Josiah about this discovery, to which he also reads the Book of the Law to him.

How did King Josiah respond in this moment? Well, look back a page or two at 2 Kings 22:11

### **2 Kings 22:11–13**

<sup>11</sup> Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that **he tore his clothes**.

<sup>12</sup> Then the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Michaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, <sup>13</sup> “Go, inquire of the Lord for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for **great is the wrath of the Lord** that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”

Josiah hears the words of the Book of the Law and goes full Hulk Hogan, tearing his clothes, which symbolized great grief and a rent heart before the Lord.

Josiah has an “**undone**” moment like what Isaiah had when he was at the throne of God standing in the immediate presence of God Almighty.

### **Isaiah 6:5**

<sup>5</sup> So I said: “Woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts.”

The king is CRUSHED because he knew that both he and his nation were walking in outright disobedience to the Lord God Almighty and that they were justly due the curses that God had pronounced in Deuteronomy 28.

- Something interesting to note about Deuteronomy 28 is that it contains 14 verses of blessings for obeying the Law of the Lord, but it contains 54 of curses for disobeying the Law.

Josiah commands Hilkiah the priest, Shaphan the scribe, and others to go inquire of the Lord because he understood that the wrath of the Lord against sin is GREAT.

But, as we’ll see in a moment, though the wrath of God is great against sinners, so great is His GRACE toward REPENTANT sinners.

In one of the Puritan's prayers contained in **The Valley of Vision**, we find this tremendous quote about the wrath of God and the grace of God...

"Let *wrath deserved* be written on the door of hell, but *the free gift of grace* on the gate of heaven."

Upon seeking the Lord, God pronounces judgement on Judah through Huldah the prophetess. His judgment was due to the fact that "they burned incense to other gods" and "provoked the Lord to anger by the works of their hands (idols)".

But as judgment is being pronounced upon Judah, God has a special message that is to be delivered to King Josiah.

### **2 Kings 22:18–20**

<sup>18</sup> But *as for the king of Judah*, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, in this manner you shall speak to him, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "*Concerning* the words which you have heard—<sup>19</sup> **because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the Lord** when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, **I also have heard you**," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place." ' ' So they brought back word to the king.

The reason why Josiah experienced the grace of God was because he had a tender heart and humbled himself before the Lord.

"**tender**" – penitent, repentant

When faced with the reality that we are sinners before a righteous God, how are we to respond? We SHOULD respond with a sense of brokenness over our sinful state and plead with God for mercy!

### **Isaiah 66:2b**

"But on this *one* will I look: On *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.

"**contrite**" – crippled, broken, feeling or expressing pain or sorrow for sins or offenses

### **James 4:8–10**

<sup>8</sup> Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Draw near to God in repentance and He will draw near to you! The one who is humble, God lifts up.

### **1 Peter 5:5b**

"*God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*"

The one who is humbly repentant before Almighty God gets His grace, but the proud is resisted by Him and He stands against them.

Application: What is our heart's response when, like Josiah, the Word searches us and exposes our sin and disobedience towards the Lord? When we look into the mirror of the Word of God, which exposes our imperfections, do we invite the Holy Spirit to sanctify us as we repent and obey the Word?

God vows to King Josiah that he will not see or experience the impending calamity that will soon befall Judah for their idolatry.

Now, I know that was like a sermon before a sermon, but all of that time spent looking at the context will give us such a greater understanding into the text that we will exposit tonight in 2 Kings 23.

## **READ 2 KINGS 23:1-25**

### **1. A Reverent Recommitment (vs 1-3)**

Josiah has just heard the Law read and has become absolutely broken before God, but he doesn't stay there.

*Condemnation* and *conviction* are not the same thing. Both share the attribute of brokenness but it's really the fruit of each of these that distinguishes them from one another. Condemnation drives a person to experience shame, whereas conviction drives a person to repentance and to the heart of God where there is MERCY and GRACE.

Josiah makes the call and basically says to all the elders of Judah, "We need to get back on track as a nation. We've been derailed for far too long and it's time for us to recommit ourselves to Yahweh".

Application: Maybe tonight you, like Israel, have been wayward and God is calling you to make a recommitment to get back on track. Don't overthink it, just repent and come back to His loving arms!!!

Josiah gathers the attention of the nation and reads the Book of the Law in their presence. He goes on to declare in the presence of all a reverent recommitment to get back obeying the Lord.

He leads the nation spiritually by making a covenant to the Lord "to perform the words that were written in the book" (vs 3). All of Josiah's heart and soul went into this renewing of the covenantal vows Israel had made to the Lord centuries ago.

Application: Can you imagine if our political leaders did this?! If they would speak to America the Holy Word of God and declare that this nation will once again be that "city on a hill" that both God and our

founding fathers intended for it to be. It's hard to imagine because of how far from God we've strayed, but it's not too hard for God to do this!!!

This covenant that Josiah makes is just like the covenant that Joshua led the Israelites to make to the Lord just before his death.

### **Joshua 24:14–15**

<sup>14</sup> “Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! <sup>15</sup> And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

King Josiah knew that if they wanted God's blessing on the nation of Judah, they must commit to fully obeying His precepts. The idol worship must cease, and they must only worship Yahweh.

### **Deuteronomy 30:19–20**

<sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; <sup>20</sup> that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He *is* your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

This portion of Deuteronomy would have literally been read to the people in this very moment.

But what would Josiah do with all of the idolatry that existed in the land? Under Josiah's watch, things wouldn't go back to how they were before: he would lead them in...

## **2. A Ruthless Repentance (vs 4-20)**

Remember our title, “Desecrating the High Places”? It's our title because it's exactly what Josiah proceeds to do after being convicted by the Word of God.

“**desecrate**” – to disrespect or destroy that which has been deemed sacred

- Other translations use “desecrate” in place of “defile” (vs 8, 10, & 13)
- Under other circumstances desecration is bad, but because Israel had all of these “sacred” high places where they worshipped idols, this kind of desecration was good and pleased God!

Josiah understood that trying to recommit to obeying the Book of the Law without repenting of their sins was a recipe for failure: things had to change.

The essence of repentance is to CHANGE (your mind, your actions, your direction).

The king meant business! He was not messing around. He calls for the priests of the Lord to go into the temple and remove the articles that were made for false gods such as Baal and Asherah.

These articles were objects of idol worship that were literally in the place where God and God alone was to be worshipped. The articles are brought to Josiah at his command and he sets them ablaze outside of the city in the fields of Kidron and then carries their ashes to Bethel.

Next, Josiah drives out of Judah all of the idolatrous priests who were appointed by the kings of Judah who came before him.

For too long God's people were worshipping idols AND attempting to worship Him too, not understanding that *He is a jealous God*. Other areas of Scripture such as Jeremiah and Isaiah liken this to harlotry/adultery. Judah had been unfaithful to the Lord who was ONLY faithful to them.

Application: Before we look down upon Israel, far too many of us are guilty of this same sin. We profess to be in a living relationship with Christ and yet are adulterous and unfaithful to Him daily as we are entangled in sin.

- Illustration: IG reel "Me laughing at Judas for betraying the Lord for 30 pieces of silver then realizing I betray Him all the time for free"

God is ONLY interested in UNDIVIDED worship: nothing less than this is acceptable to Him.

It wasn't simply that Israel was bowing down to a gold statue or things like that, they were participating in pagan worship rituals that were grotesque and a direct offense to God.

In verse 7, we see Josiah tear down the high places where sodomy and prostitution were practiced as a form of worship to these pagan gods. God's very people were participating in this!!!

Application: Do we not still have this same type of worship today all over our culture? Sex has been taken outside of the design of God (one man, one woman, within marriage) and it is literally worshipped in our society!

Are we not commanded to basically bow down and swear allegiance to the rainbow flag or else we risk being cancelled? May we *never back down or compromise* on things that God has made it clear He is against! DON'T BOW, NO MATTER THE COST!

King Josiah was going to town destroying these altars that existed as an affront to God. We see in verse 8 that from Geba to Beersheba, he broke down the high places: that is, from the most northern part of the land to the most southern part.

In verse 10, we read that Josiah goes on to desecrate/defile Topheth so that the worship of Molech would cease.

I believe that the worship of Molech was the straw that broke the camel's back from God's perspective. \*\*\*SEE PICTURE\*\*\*

To worship Molech, innocent babies were placed into the hands of this statue that had been heated up to an extreme heat. To drown out the noise of the infant's screams and cries, drums would be continually beat upon until the child was dead.

"The rabbis say that Topheth had its name from *toph*, a *drum*, because instruments of this kind were used to drown the cries of the children that were put into the burning arms of Molech, to be scorched to death." – **Adam Clarke**

Brothers and sisters, I have news for you, *the worship of Molech is as alive and well today as it has ever been*, except now it looks different. Now, it doesn't happen at a burning statue but at the high place of our culture known as Planned Parenthood.

Well over 1 million babies are murdered each year at the hands of Planned Parenthood. They are the number one abortion provider in the nation and blood is on their hands. This is the greatest human rights issue the world has ever seen.

Will we be silent and complicit about what grieves the heart of God? Will we speak up, get involved in the fight, and tear down that high place?

- If you want more information about how to get involved in the war against abortion, go check out "Love Life USA" or call the church and asked how you can get connected with our "Love Life" team here at CCCH.

Josiah goes on to demolish the altars that were erected by the former kings of Judah who did not obey the Lord, nor walk in His ways. Josiah is literally going around opening tombs so that bones could be burned for the purpose of DESECRATING these false gods! I love it!

A perfect New Testament comparison to what Josiah was doing is when Jesus entered into the temple and began to flip the tables of the moneychangers in the house of the Lord. Our Lord was righteously angry about that which was an offense to God, and we should be the same way!

Josiah was RUTHLESS about sin. He even crossed into the northern territory of Israel, which was in Assyrian captivity, so that he could cleanse the land even more!

Illustration: TV commercial, “But wait! There’s more!”

He proceeds to execute the idolatrous priests, knowing that they were unrepentant and only going to continue to lead the people astray. These men were “given up” by God to their lusts and passions: they were reprobate and Josiah knew this.

*“So, what does all of this mean to us today, Tate?”*

Application: The obvious application for us today is that there are high places in our culture that are an affront to God, and the question is “what are we going to do about them?”. God wants these places “torn down”, but the way we do this is by recognizing that it is a *spiritual fight, not a physical one*: the sooner we realize this fact, the more effective we’ll be in the fight.

### **2 Corinthians 10:3–6**

<sup>3</sup> For though we walk in the flesh, **we do not war according to the flesh.** <sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare **are not carnal** but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, <sup>5</sup> casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, <sup>6</sup> and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

But what actually must come *before* our participating in the desecration of our culture’s high places is the destruction of the high places that exist in our own heart.

It’s been said before that our hearts should be thought of as a throne. A question worth our consideration tonight is, “who or what is on the throne of my heart?”. Is it you? Is it a career? Is it a relationship? Is it a passion?

The greatest indicator of who or what is on the throne of your heart is TIME SPENT.

Illustration: Your daily time being like a pie graph. What does that graph look like? How much of it belongs to God? He wants it ALL.

*If it’s not God* on the throne of your heart, then it doesn’t matter what it is because *it’s an IDOL*.

We need to start getting ruthless about the sin that exists in our lives like how Jesus commanded us to do in the Sermon on the Mount:

### **Matthew 5:29–30**

<sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Whatever sacrifice we must make to untangle ourselves from sin is WORTH IT.

All throughout the NT, the language that is used when it comes to a believer dealing with sin in their life is quite violent:

### **Colossians 3:5**

<sup>5</sup> Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

### **Romans 6:6, 11**

<sup>6</sup> knowing this, that our old man was **crucified** with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

<sup>11</sup> Likewise you also, **reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin**, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now, after leading the nation in a ruthless repentance, Josiah then brings implements...

## **3. A Radical Reformation (vs 21-25)**

In this section of our text tonight we see Josiah reinstitute the Passover, which should've never stopped in Israel. The Passover was to serve as a reminder of how God delivered Israel out of Egypt and was to foreshadow how Christ would come and atone for our sins as the sacrificial Lamb of God, who delivers us from sin and death.

This Passover was different. We see in verse 22 that it was unlike any Passover since the era of the judges, and it was unlike any one that would take place in the era of the kings.

Josiah puts away the diviners and *everything* that he saw that was an offense to God in order that he and Judah might COMPLETELY OBEY the words of the Book of the Law. Josiah wasn't interested in partial obedience, which really is no obedience at all, he wanted complete obedience.

Josiah was the perfect king for such a time as that.

Application: News flash, YOU are the perfect servant of God for such a time as this!

God has not made a mistake by putting you and I in this exact moment in human history. Will we be the salt and light He wants us to be in the day and age that He has ordained for us to live in since before the world began?

We could easily look at the evil days we live in and think "man, this really stinks" OR we could think as God would have us to, saying "Lord, *you've called me for such a time as this*".

Illustration: Frodo and Gandalf's conversation while in the mines of Moria, when things are bleak:

**Frodo:** "I wish the Ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened."

**Gandalf:** "So do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us. There are other forces at work in this world, Frodo, besides the will of evil."

## **Conclusion:**

Because of how Josiah made a reverent recommitment, a ruthless repentance, and radical reformation, he left a monumental *legacy*.

The way he treated that which offended God is something to be admired and something you and I should learn from.

What will be the mark that we will leave on this world? What kind of legacy will we leave? What will be said of us at our funeral or when we're gone?

We should all seek to leave a legacy of...

*STANDING FOR WHAT GOD SAYS IS RIGHT, RESISTING WHAT GOD SAYS IS WRONG, AND  
BEING LIKE JESUS.*