

God's love language

2 Kings 22-23:3

Has there been someone in your life that you would do whatever they told you to do? Why did you want to obey what they told you?

In my life, there's been leaders in youth groups I've wanted to obey to earn their approval. There's been girls for whom I'd do whatever they said for them to notice me. There's been friends I've wanted to do as I'm told for to feel I belong. There's been teachers I've wanted to be a good boy for to boost my chances of getting good grades. There's been rules I've wanted to obey so that I could be considered a good person.

Maybe you can relate to some of that. Obeying for approval. Obeying to be noticed. Obeying to belong. Obeying to get a good result for yourself. Obeying to be considered good. In today's passage we read about another king, King Josiah, and his deliberate choice for obedience. And what we're going to see is that he chooses obedience for two different reasons.

The first is to obey God as fully as he can to avoid or at least put off God's judgement for sin. And the second is to obey God as fully as he can because he *loves* God.

The story starts in 22:1-7 with Josiah physically repairing the temple, and ends in 23 with him spiritually repairing the nation in obedience to God's Word. It's whilst he's undertaking this task of repairing the temple to honour God that God gives Josiah and his people something to draw them closer to Him. Something they've been missing for a long time.

In v.8, Hilkiah unearths the 'Book of the Law' in some hidden corner of the Temple whilst those repairs are shifting things around. This probably refers to a copy of the book of Deuteronomy - the record of God's Law, given to Moses. How does the Bible get lost in the Church?

It happened then, and it still happens now. And rather than running with that thought as a judgemental one about other people or other churches, a more helpful question to consider is, 'how dusty is my own Bible? Is the Bible the first tool our church reaches for?'

Well, Hilkiah takes the first step, a step that some of us need to take. He picks up the Bible and dusts it off, in v.8. It's back on the table. He gives it

Shaphan. Shaphan, crucially, takes another important step. *He reads it* (v.8). And *then* he passes it on to King Josiah - actually, he reads it with him (v.10).

Now it seems obvious to move from picking up the Bible to reading it. But it's really, really easy for to pick up the Bible, and pass it on to others *without* reading it. If you're teaching one of the kids groups, or your own kids. Leading a Life Group. Just sharing what the Bible says with a friend.

You can default to relying on memory. Telling others it'll be good for them to open the Bible and read it and spend time in it, but not doing that yourself because you already did that some years ago and you're pretty sure you can still tell it right. Instead of thinking of the Bible as a reference book to look to when you can't remember what it says anymore, let's start treating it as the God breathed message He wants to keep speaking to *us today*, something we read before we tell others to read it.

King Josiah, crucially, takes it one step further. Not only does he have the Bible down off the shelf, and not only does he read it - he *responds* to it. With immediate, life re-ordering, concrete, practical change. He takes steps to actually change course on the basis of what he's hearing and seeing in the Bible. He chooses to obey, not just in theory, but in practice.

The whole of chapter 23 (which we only read the start of) describes how he did this. That chapter tells us about really thorough religious reforms he makes in the nation of Judah, really sweeping practical changes to make in response to the Word of God he had read and heard.

James 1:22 puts it like this: 'Do not merely *listen* to the word, and so deceive yourselves. *Do* what it says.' If you just read your Bible, and don't act on what you read, James says you are 'deceiving yourself.' Telling yourself that you've done what God as King commands because you've read your Bible today.

Everybody remembers Jesus' famous words in Matthew 7 and Luke 6 about the wise man building his house on the rock and the foolish man building his on sand. But you might not remember that in both those passages, what comes before it is Jesus saying, 'How can you call me "Lord, Lord" and not do what I say? Or that both the wise and foolish men *knew* the words of Jesus, but the difference in the wise man was that He *put them into practice*.

The King has given us instructions - not just to read, but to actively obey.

Which of these motives do you come to your Bible reading with? Are they balanced, or is one stronger than others?

To receive comfort / To receive answers / To receive promises / To receive commands

In vv.11-20, we read about Josiah lamenting the disobedience to God and His Word that he's become freshly aware of by engaging with the Bible. It's the really humble confession before God, 'I have sinned... we have sinned!'

And again, we read about God responding to that, honouring that, in v.19 - 'Josiah, you will not see the judgement that I have spoken of.' There's the grace. Remember one of Josiah's motives for obedience is to stave off God's judgement. But now Josiah knows, he and his people will not live under judgement in Josiah's time. So how will he respond?

In just this situation, his great-grandfather Hezekiah responded with complacency. 'Oh well, everything will be fine for me then - I'll relax.' (*Describe Babylonians spying Judah out*).

But Josiah responds differently. It's with obedience to God and His Word. Obedience that seeks real, practical change. A choice for obedience as opposed to complacency. It's obvious enough to say, 'choose obedience as opposed to disobedience.' But open disobedience is not, I think, the problem for many Christians today. Complacency is.

'I've come to Jesus and been forgiven for my sin, so I don't need to do anything more.' As emerging young Christian leaders, I invite you to take a stand and set an example like Josiah did - to choose an active obedience to God's Word as your response to grace, and to show young people that that's how to live.

As we read on into chapter 23, we read about *a thorough pursuit of obedience to God*. vv.4-25 of that chapter are filled with religious reforms in the nation the likes of which had never been seen before. There's a completely thorough 'getting rid/throwing out.' (*Explain*).

And there's a 'restoring' of the patterns of worship that had been forgotten. 23:21-23, we read that Josiah restored the Passover as part of the worship of God's people. A pursuit of worship that had been abandoned for centuries, restored.

(What needs 'thrown out' and what needs 'restored' in your life?)

Some of this has happened before with some of the few kings described as 'doing right in the eyes of the LORD' in 1 and 2 Kings. But Josiah goes wider and deeper in his pursuit of holiness and obedience than any of his predecessors.

What's going on in his heart, I think, is quite different to the hearts of many a Christian today. I think many of us think about obedience this way - 'What can I get away with and still be on side with God? What's the minimum obedience to avoid crossing the line?'

This could be about sex, alcohol, and social activities. It could be around honesty, effort and attitudes in school or the workplace. It could be around appropriateness of relationships outside your marriage, how you fill in your tax forms, or the way you serve in church.

But Josiah's thorough pursuit of obedience has a different heart motive. Rather than 'how much can I get away with without crossing a line?', it's, 'how can I most glorify God? What's the obedience that will maximise His glory, honour and fame?'

That's why he goes wider and deeper with his practical active response to God's commands about what to throw out. That's why he restores the Passover as part of the worship of God's people. Because a leader after God's own heart wanted to glorify God as much as possible in His obedience.

This, you see, is *love*. *Love* for The LORD God is Josiah's motive for obedience. At the start I said that one motive was to stave off God's judgement. But with that already secured, only one motive remains. His love for the God who has shown His people grace.

In 23:3, we read that, 'The King... renewed the covenant in the presence of The LORD (to) keep His commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul...' Later on, in 23:25, we read this summary of Josiah's life: 'Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to The LORD as he did - with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength...'

What does that language remind you of? '*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.*' The Shema, the Jewish daily prayer. The greatest commandment, as Jesus affirmed. This thorough

pursuit of obedience - stretching for it with heart and soul and mind and strength - was rooted in Josiah's *love* for The LORD his God.

Why obey God, as thoroughly and actively and practically as we can? Because we *love* Him! Because we *want* Him to be glorified, due to our *love* for Him! A choice for obedience as opposed to complacency is like the choice to express love instead of take your loved one for granted. Obedience is God's love language. He delights in it when His children offer it to Him.

Does obedience to God usually sound like a chore to you? How might it begin to become a delight?

The willing, loving obedience of a Christian can be hugely influential on those they are trying to share God's Word with. How will they come to a point of desiring to read it and live it out themselves?

Let's have a look at how Josiah led his people in 23:1-3. First of all, he himself had been reading and responding to the Bible - we talked about that earlier. But he then invites others in these verses to gather with him to hear it and respond to it too.

He calls the leaders to come and see and hear and respond. He calls all the people, from the least to the greatest, to come and see and hear and respond. He calls *everyone* around him to join him in responding to God with obedient love. And what follows is not an altar all from a dispassionate professional. It's a personal commitment to change, inspiring others to do the same.

Here's how it goes: 1. Josiah gathers people around the Word of God, in vv. 1-2. 2. They read it (or hear it) *together* (v.2). 3. Josiah commits *himself* to change in the light of God's Word, and does that in front of those with him (v. 3). 4. Those with him are inspired to commit to change too, and make their own choice for that (end of v.3).

Where you could be inviting other people to gather with you and look at God's Word together? Is it bringing someone to Alpha with you after the summer? Getting a few friends together to read the Bible with those simple questions - 'What is God saying to me?' and 'What am I going to do about it?' Is it in your family, reading the Bible together in the evening?

Of course, I've set myself a trap here, haven't I? I've got to model this now. In my own engagement with God's Word this last few weeks (both my own

reading, and reading it together with others in our Life Group) God has been convicting me about the way I speak to my family.

My nearest and dearest. How I can be polite as punch in public, but snappy and mean and grumpy with them. They're the ones that suffer me using language and tone to make me feel bigger and them feel smaller. And that must stop. And so it will. I have already been changing here. But I commit to that practical change now.

And God's been telling me patiently, over and over, that there's a real poverty in my time with Him. That I need to sit still and *listen* to Him. That there's *nothing* more important than sitting with Him, no work that can't wait for that to come first. And so I commit to reading my Bible and stilling myself before God *before* waking up my computer each day.

King Josiah has proven a pretty inspiring example. Never a king like him, we heard, before or after, who thoroughly pursued obedience to God, choosing that over complacency, out of his *love* for the God of grace. And yet...

In vv.26-27, we read that it's not enough to save Judah. It's going to fall under God's judgement still. Josiah can't save God's people. He dies in v. 29, in battle - a reminder that he's just another mortal king who lives and dies and can only achieve so much with his own obedience. And so the story points forward to a truer and better King.

In Matthew 5-7, we read Jesus giving His famous Sermon on the Mount. God incarnate, giving instructions to obey. Commands for how to live. Commands so good and lofty that, if we were all to obey them perfectly, would make the world completely beautiful.

But commands that are also so good and lofty (raising the ethical bar ten times *higher* than the Book of the Law Josiah found) that we can't help but feel as we read them, 'I can't obey all that. I haven't. I've fallen short.'

But within that sermon are the words we need to hear about that. In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus ramps up the stakes and says you'd have to be *more* obedient than the Pharisees, who make a profession out of obeying God's Law, to stave off God's judgement and enter His Kingdom. But He also says this - 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to *fulfil* them.'

Jesus *fulfils* God's Law! He does what not one of us, even good King Josiah, could do. He obeys God to the point of perfectly fulfilling God's Law. And here's why that's good news for the people who take Jesus as their King. When we stand behind Him, He represents us to God, and offers that perfect obedience to God on *our* behalf.

That perfect life offered to God *for us*, along with that death on a cross offered as a sacrifice for our disobedience *for us*, along with that resurrection that breaks the power of sin and death, removing every trace of God's judgement from us - that's very good news. And it changes everything about our obedience to God.

Because now, it's never about obeying for God's approval. Or obeying to get God to notice us. Or obeying to belong to God. Or obeying in the hope of God giving us a good result. Or obeying for God to consider us good. Or obeying to stave off God's judgement.

Because Jesus has covered absolutely *all* of that for us! So do you see what that leaves us with? Just one thing; one reason to obey God, with a thorough pursuit of obedience to His glory. It's that we *love* Him. We really, really *love* Him, and we're free to obey God and His Word for that reason and that reason alone.

To make a choice for an obedience of love as opposed to a complacency of taking God for granted. To speak God's love language, by a thorough pursuit of living out what we hear Him say in His Word.