

## **Profile in Courage: King Josiah**

**Intro:** Every year the Profile in Courage Award is given to someone who displays the type of courage that John F. Kennedy described in his book of the same name. It is given to individuals (often elected officials) who, by acting in accord with their conscience, risked their careers or lives by pursuing a larger vision of the national, state or local interest in opposition to popular opinion or pressure from constituents or other local interests.

If such an award were available in ancient times it might have gone to King Josiah of Judah. In his life we can see some remarkable manifestations of courage. His inspiring story can be read in 2 Chron. 34-35. Let's take a few moments to consider his example of courage and how we may benefit from it.

### **Courage to reject an evil family legacy**

*Pulpit Commentary noted, "Josiah is the most astonishing instance that is contained in Scripture of goodness springing up, and attaining high perfection under the most extraordinarily unfavorable circumstances" (Pulpit Commentary, Vol 5, 440).*

Josiah's grand-father was the infamous Manasseh. Though the son of the godly Hezekiah, Manasseh appears to have tried to undo all the good his father had accomplished. And though he repented of his transgressions later in life, the nation would never recover from the many years he led Israel astray.

Josiah's father Amon reverted to the evil practices of his father Manasseh.

With role models like these it is remarkable that Josiah should serve God at all!

*And he did right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David and did not turn aside to the right or to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign while he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David; (2 Chronicles 34:2-3)*

***It took a remarkable amount of courage to reject this evil family legacy and listen to the voice of God coming through holy people like Hilkiah, Huldah, Jeremiah.***

***We too need that kind of courage.***

It is awfully easy to justify our bad actions by saying, "Well, that's the way I was raised".

Many a young person has simply fallen into the evil environment in which they were born and never even tried to know God or His will; but every once in a while I see a young person who, though growing up with little spiritual instruction or example, wisely sees the unhappiness and suffering created by such a lifestyle and chooses to take another road. Like Josiah, such people are people of great courage.

## **Courage to confront entrenched societal evils**

***Idolatry was well-entrenched in the nation. The evidence of corruption could easily be seen in a look at Josiah's iconoclastic measures. The temple had been turned into a smorgasbord of idolatry.***

*For in the eighth year of his reign while he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, the carved images, and the molten images. And they tore down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars that were high above them he chopped down; also the Asherim, the carved images, and the molten images he broke in pieces and ground to powder and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. Then he burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and purged Judah and Jerusalem. And in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, even as far as Naphtali, in their surrounding ruins, he also tore down the altars and beat the Asherim and the carved images into powder, and chopped down all the incense altars throughout the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 34:3-7)*

***It does not appear that Josiah did such things because they were popular with the people; but instead they were done in spite of their popularity. It took great courage to do this. Josiah is a worthy hero for all of us, especially our youth.***

***Today it takes real courage to throw out and tear down what everyone else is bringing in and building up.***

But like Jesus, when we see the institutions of God suffer at the hands of those motivated by self-interest we need to resist—to “turn over the tables in the temples of their theologies” and drive out unscriptural innovations and inventions of man.

We can stand passively by and watch society deteriorate at the hands of those who fear “theocratic rule” and who seek to eliminate religious influence in society and actively promote everything that is immoral like the killing of the unborn, legalization of gay marriages, the commoditization of human life in harvesting human embryos for stem cell research, the failure to provide justice for the poor and needy.

***Do we have the courage to speak out?***

## **Courage to rebuild what had been neglected**

***Josiah was no mere iconoclast! He was a man of deep conviction who had become persuaded that the way of God had been perverted by his predecessors. Israel bore the name of God and had been privileged to know the Lord and to be the people among whom He dwelt. But Israel had done a poor job of honoring Him and preserving the temple and worship He had instituted. He realized that neglect itself is a vote against God by those who do not honor Him. Josiah took matters into His own hand. He had the courage to rebuild what had been neglected.***

*Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah an official of the*

*city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God. (2 Chronicles 34:8)*

***Josiah's vision called more money, effort, and change. It took courage to change the status quo.***

***Even so today we must have the courage to rebuild what has been neglected. In some places the church and its work may look a little dilapidated because everyone has just believed that God's work is self-perpetuating, only to learn that when the work of God is not paid attention to, things will move to disorder and ineffectiveness. It's easy to look the other way rather than roll up our sleeves and do our part. Do we have the courage to rebuild what has been neglected in God's work?***

### **Courage to make personal changes when confronted with the truth**

***Josiah's order to repair the temple brought a new challenge for him personally. All this good work was to be met with a disturbing discovery. The book of the Law was discovered in the temple. It was brought and read to the king and he became confronted with a most shocking revelation of his and his people's own neglect in keeping the covenant of God. And it came about when the king heard the words of the law that he tore his clothes. (2 Chronicles 34:19)***

***The discovery of the Law of Moses was to bring Josiah himself face to face with numerous errors of omission in keeping the Law. Sometimes those who challenge error vigorously in others, do not have the courage to confront their own personal sins. Josiah could have said, "Look at what I'm already doing. How can I do more?" Of course, he could contend that he didn't know; but his reaction was godly. His symbolic gesture showed the deep feeling of sorrow and penitence he felt in Israel's neglect of their covenant responsibilities. It was accompanied by tears of sorrow for sin; and he wanted to know what could be done about it. He had to hear from the prophetess the unwelcome message that the covenant curses were inevitable for Israel's neglect. The only consolation was that his penitence had caused the Lord to delay the day of reckoning until after his death.***

***Do we have the courage to change when confronted by the truth? We show lack of courage when we say, "Well, that's just your interpretation! That's the way we've always done it. Or, I've been like this too long to change". We show the courage of Josiah when we say, "I'm sorry, I didn't know and make the needed changes in our lives". How we respond to new truth says a lot about us, "Whether our goal is self-justification or whether it is the glory of God".***

### **Courage to lead others in doing what's right even when not popular**

***Give credit to Josiah for one more thing. In spite of the fact that the prophetess Huldah revealed that destruction was inevitable, Josiah decided to do what was right for the sake of the truth itself. He had the courage to go out on a limb. He knew that the hearts of the people were not inclined to***

***do what is right; but in spite of this, he boldly and publicly made his vows to obey the Lord.***

*Then the king sent and gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up to the house of the Lord and all the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the Levites, and all the people, from the greatest to the least; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord. Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the Lord to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant written in this book. (2 Chronicles 34:29-31)*

***Josiah's courageous leadership was to have a great impact upon his generation.***

*It brought about a Passover unlike any practiced in centuries! And there had not been celebrated a Passover like it in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet; nor had any of the kings of Israel celebrated such a Passover as Josiah did with the priests, the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 35:18)*

*It resulted in a whole generation remaining true to the ways of God. And Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands belonging to the sons of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel to serve the Lord their God. Throughout his lifetime they did not turn from following the Lord God of their fathers. (2 Chronicles 34:33)*

***Do we have the courage to do what is right when it is not popular and when the likelihood of a lasting response is remote? There may be something inside of us that tells us at times that everything we try for the Lord may produce few results. Maybe we can see that the hearts of people are not very receptive to the things we're teaching. Will we have the courage to teach them anyway? Maybe we can see that all the invitations we're giving are not being accepted. Will we have the courage to invite anyway? None of us has a prophet(ess) to tell us what the future holds; but that shouldn't change our commitment to do what is right now!***

**Conclusion:** I hope that you will derive inspiration from the heroic courage of Josiah. It is a difficult time in which to serve the Lord. Our generation craves the idolatry of personal pleasure, ease, and entertainment. Like Josiah, we need the courage to take a different road; and not doubt the power of courageous living!