

THE BOOK - HOW WE GOT IT AND HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF IT - Part twenty-two

Teaching #1985 - Sunday, July 23rd, 2017 - 6 p.m.

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THE ONE WHO TREMBLES AT GOD'S WORD (continued)

Isaiah 66:1-4 - "Thus says the Lord: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?[2] All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.[3] 'He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations;[4] I also will choose harsh treatment for them and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke they did not listen; but they did what was evil in my eyes and chose that in which I did not delight."

This has been the last central text for this series of messages. There's a *frame of mind* - a *kind of heart*, that God is particularly likely to work with and bless. The text says He *gives this kind of person His special attention and notice*. It's not that He *loves* this person and not others. Rather, it's that He sees the *fertility* - the *potential* - for His unfolding plan in this heart.

In the last message we looked at two passages that describe something *similar* to a trembling heart, but which are not quite the same. In **Acts 24:24-25** we studied the response of *Felix* to Paul's words of witness. The text, in some translations, actually says Felix *"trembled"* at what Paul said. But it was not the trembling described by our text from the Prophet Isaiah.

Then we studied the words of the apostle James in **James 2:19**. Here James describes the kind of trembling that takes place in *demons* at the truth of God's Word. They *know* the truth. They *believe* the truth. And it makes them tremble. But neither of these passages deals with the kind of heart God values or esteems.

So, having looked at two examples from the Scriptures of what a trembling heart *isn't*, we're going to consider a wonderful picture of what a trembling heart *is*. Here is a great text from the life of King Josiah of Judah:

2 Kings 22:19 - "...because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the Lord, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the Lord."

Doesn't God hear everyone who calls out to Him? That's the issue of this text.

We need to back up a bit because the whole story found in 2 Kings chapter 22 is a fascinating one. Young King Josiah comes to the throne of Judah upon the death of his father *Amon*. Amon was one of the most wicked kings in Judah's blood spattered history. The text says over and over again that *"Amon did evil in the eyes of the Lord."* That's a very good way of reminding all of us that we don't just *do* bad things. Even if we don't take notice of it at the time, the evil we do, even in secret, is evil done in the *"eyes of the Lord."*

During Amon's reign the temple had fallen into total disuse in terms of the true worship of the Lord. No one did anything about this. No one complained. No one missed God at all. Then Josiah takes the situation to heart and decides to refurbish the temple. We have a record of his instructions:

2 Kings 22:4-6 - "Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may count the money that has been brought into the house of the Lord, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people. [5] And let it be given into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the Lord, and let them give it to the workmen who are at the house of the Lord, repairing the house ([6] that is, to the carpenters, and to the builders, and to the masons), and let them use it for buying timber and quarried stone to repair the house."

And there's something in all of us loyalists to God that wants to say, "Way to go, Josiah!" But this isn't the part of the story that deserves mention. Other kings had worked to rebuild the outer house of worship. There is something far more important to notice about young King Josiah.

As they are cleaning through all the dust and rubble, *Hilkiah*, the high priest, finds a copy of the Book of the Law of God - **2 Kings 22:8** - "And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.' And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it."

Think about this. As far as we can tell from the account, this is the *first* time anyone even mentioned the Book of the Law in the whole account of the temple. It had been buried somewhere among all the religious paraphernalia - lost in all the temple rubble. And nobody, until Hilkiah took the time to dig it up and dust it off, even missed it. I've been thinking about that. Apparently you can keep a lot of religious machinery running without any reference to God and His Word. We must never assume we can't actually get used to that. We can train ourselves to *enjoy* a lack of God's Word.

The account continues. *Shaphan* is the official secretary to the king. He brought the book to the young King Josiah and began to read it to him. We don't know from the story what made him do this. Was he devout? Or did he just feel he was doing his official job?

Here's what the account says: **2 Kings 22:8-10** - "And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.' And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. [9] And Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, 'Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the Lord.' [10] Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, 'Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.' And Shaphan read it before the king."

So now we know what they were doing when the Scriptures were found. They weren't hunting for God's Word. They were looking for *money*. They were rooting about for temple treasures that they could use to finance the refurbishing project. And it was while they were looking - quite literally - for *gold*, that they found something infinitely *more precious* than gold.

Try to picture it. Josiah is a very young king. So perhaps, for the very first time in his life, Josiah actually hears the word of God read out loud. *How* would he hear it? What response would pop up in his heart? He has been trained, under his unscrupulous father Amon, in nothing but wickedness. There had been no exposure to God and His law in Josiah's past. And now he hears words - like words from another planet - words that confronted everything that had ever shaped his whole way of life.

Verse 13 records the miracle of miracles. Josiah's response isn't typical of such an environment: "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and 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 kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

If that isn't enough, Josiah sent for *Huldah the prophetess* to find out what God has to say about Judah's neglect of God's ways for all of these years: **2 Kings 22:13-14** - "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and 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 kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us." [14] So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter), and they talked with her."

The point here is Josiah doesn't want to miss anything. He doesn't want some *approximate* obedience to God's word. The people have been neglecting God for a long time. It might be easy to make a quick, emotional response. It might be easy to be less than *thorough*. Josiah wants to dig right down to ground zero as he leads the people back to God.

Huldah's response is found in **verses 15-20** - "And she said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: 'Tell the man who sent you to me, [16] Thus says the Lord, behold, I will bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. [17] Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. [18] But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, [19] because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the Lord, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the Lord. [20] Therefore, behold, 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 disaster that I will bring upon this place.' And they brought back word to the king."

Don't misunderstand these words of judgment. It wasn't that God would never again show these people mercy. But they would *first* have to bear judgment. They would bear judgment because they *needed* God's wrath before His grace would be *fruitful* grace in their lives. They hadn't actually repented *for themselves*. It was the nature of a theocracy that the king led

the nation back to its knees. They had simply obeyed the **king**. They had not necessarily changed their hearts toward **God**. So, for their own good, they needed to learn the importance of taking God seriously.

And here's the point - without a trembling heart toward God's Word there is no tool left for God to use to awaken their souls other than judgment. The hard heart always paints itself into this corner when dealing with the Almighty.

But Josiah had been the one exception. He was the **one** - to use the words from Isaiah chapter 66 - the **one** in the crowd who had personally **trembled before God's Word - just at hearing it**. Because Josiah's heart was tender and responsive to the Word of God, he would be spared seeing all of this coming disaster and would die in peace.

I took the time to work through this whole story because it drives home the preciousness of a trembling heart before God's Word. Out of the pool of all of the stubbornness and rebellion and corruption among the people of Judah, we see one person standing out in God's eyes. In the midst of total corruption, Josiah had a trembling heart.

Josiah's young heart had trembled just at **hearing** the Word of God. Josiah never saw a miracle. There was no angel. Someone read the Scriptures to him. That's it. And Josiah couldn't stand it. God had been ignored. God's ways had been perverted. Josiah drops to his knees. He tears his clothes. He cries his eyes out. No one else in the account responded this way. But Josiah - remember the last teaching in this series - hears **God** in the Scriptures.

Josiah gets no more than any of us will get this Sunday. He hears God's Word. That's it. But in the **way** he trembles at God's Word, he changes his whole destiny. Believe me when I tell you it's incredibly rare to get such a **big** response from such a **common** event.

Perhaps this will have a bit more impact if we consider two people back to back. Think of **Pharaoh** just for a minute. God wanted to get a message through to Pharaoh's heart. It takes **six chapters** of narration just to list the **ten plagues** and the **ten times** Pharaoh **sort of listens** but doesn't **really listen** to God. **Josiah** lives in just as godless a time as Pharaoh. He has no outward spiritual advantage. The same God speaks the same type of message. And Josiah is spared untold agony and reaps an inward harvest of righteousness. All because he had a heart that trembled when God's Word made its appearance.

But what is it that fixes the spiritual attention-span of the human heart? There are so many factors that shape our spiritual ears. And there is so much at stake. The process isn't complicated. We'll look at some practical helps next week.