

# NOTES FOR SPEAKING

**Meeting: Freshwaters Christian Fellowship 10:30am**

**Date & Time: 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012**

**Title: Never Before**

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## **Introduction**

In my recent bible readings I have been reading through **1 and 2 Kings**. It can be a bit depressing when king after king rebelled against God and led the people into sin, however there are some exceptions and I want to spend some time looking at one of those this morning, his name was King Josiah, he became King when he was just 8 years old, he reigned for 31 years and there is this wonderful summary of his reign found in **2 Kings 23:25 'Never before had there been a king like Josiah, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and soul and strength, obeying all the laws of Moses. And there has never been a king like him since'**.

Wouldn't you like to have something like that written about you, **never before has there been a faithful servant like [your name], never before has someone loved the Lord so much, served Him so faithfully, worshipped Him so wholeheartedly or proclaimed Him so boldly.**

As we take this traditional time to reflect on the years that have passed and to look forward to the years to come, could we aspire to such a place. You may not have enough faith to enter into the 'never before' category – but what about 'rarely before'. Don't dismiss the possibility, don't limit your future because of your past – reach out for more, seek God for greater things – **believe that you could stand out in your generation as an exceptional child of God who turned around a nation.**

## **Not limited by heredity but a new beginning**

Just before we take a look at Josiah in a bit more detail, I want to take a quick glance at his father and grandfather.

Josiah's father was Amon, and this is a summary of his reign from **2 Kings 21:20-22 'He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, just as his father, Manasseh, had done. He followed the example of his father, worshipping the same idols that his father had worshiped. He abandoned the Lord, the God of his ancestors, and he refused to follow the Lord's ways'**. Just a slightly different summary of his reign compared to his son Josiah. He followed the evil example of his father Manasseh – lets look at a summary of Manasseh's reign and read from **2 Kings 21:1-11, 16**.

Now Manasseh was the son of a good king, Hezekiah, but he threw away all the good work of his father, refused to follow his good example but chose to abandon the Lord and to lead the people into terrible sin. His son Amon followed his example and it wasn't until Josiah that things changed.

Josiah was young when he became king, just 8 years old, it would have been so easy for him to follow the example of his father and grandfather, but he didn't. In **2 Chron 34:3** it says **'During the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, Josiah began to seek the God of his ancestor David.'**

So when he was just 16 Josiah sought the Lord wholeheartedly, he refused to have his standards of life and morality set by his immediate descendants, or by the standard of the majority around him. The nation had been corrupted, idolatry and witchcraft were rife, but Josiah even at such a young age said in effect enough is enough; I will seek the Lord and set my standard by Him.

It is so easy to set our standards according to those around us. Perhaps blaming the example of our parents, perhaps excusing ourselves by saying well everyone else around us is doing it. Now is a

good time to stop and take stock – are there things I am doing, or not doing that I have been excusing because it's what everyone else does. We need to be radical – we need to set out standards by seeking the Lord and following the good example of Jesus. Perhaps like me you are a first generation Christian, we may not have several generations of Godly inheritance, but we can say here and now I'm going to make a stand – I'm going to be the one that brings a change in my family line – I am going to seek God and with His help will change my attitude and behaviour according to His righteous standard.

Let's read together the account of Josiah's reign and recognise those things he did to turn a nation back to God. [2 Kings 22:1-7](#)

## **Restore the temple**

We see that Josiah's starting place was to restore the temple of the Lord which had been neglected since the time of his great great grandfather Hezekiah. Restoring the temple in itself could not change a nation, but Josiah recognised the importance of a place where people could gather to worship the Lord. There were plenty of shrines and temples to idols, but the place for worshipping the Lord had been neglected and abandoned. There were practical steps that were needed, offerings were received from the people, carpenters, builders and masons were appointed, and the practical work was begun.

Now you will all know that we pursuing the possibility of taking over the old Council social club right in the heart of Netteswell. You may not know that this stands in the grounds of what once was St Michael's church, a place of worship that was demolished. The building we are looking at has been neglected; it will take money, builders and carpenters to restore it. We know that having a building will not in itself change Netteswell or the rest of Harlow, but like Josiah we recognise the importance of a place where people can gather to worship the Lord and to honour Him. You will know that we are also intending to provide a service to the local community from this site, **attracting people throughout the week into a place where the Lord is worshipped and honoured.** The building is not the be all and end all – but it will play an important role in the area. How could you support it? Will you 'adopt' Freshwaters gathering place and commit yourself to praying for it? Are you willing to give time and money to see it restored and to see a place of worship returned to that sight?

[2 Kings 22:8-23:2](#)

## **Restore Honour for the word of God**

As they began to restore the place of worship that had been abandoned and neglected, so they discover the word of God similarly abandoned and rejected. As Josiah receives the book of the law he has it read to him, his response is immediate as he humbles himself before God and repents for the way that God's word had been neglected and abandoned – because of his response the Lord promises to hold back His judgement upon the nation at least for another generation.

**Have you ever heard the phrase 'hidden in plain site' – well today we live in a time where, particularly in the 'west' God's word is hidden in plain site.** There are more bibles around than any other book, there are more bibles sold than any other book – even today most households will have a bible somewhere, most of us will have several – and yet it's contents are hidden, why?, because it is not read.

Many people give and receive bibles, at weddings and christenings, but have no idea what's inside because they never open it up and read it. Even for many of us, much of the bible is a mystery. We rarely read it and when we do we stick to familiar passages that we enjoy.

Like Josiah we need to lead the way in honouring again God's word. We need to be willing to repent for any apathy we have towards the bible and we need to repent on behalf of a society that has neglected the truth of God's word. Josiah repentance included hearing the word himself and reading it to others. We too can revive our own interest in God's word, through daily readings, through CD's,

through the internet. Right at the start of this New Year, let's make a decision to make the bible part of our daily routine.

As we restore our own view and experience of the bible, let's be those who are willing to take God's word to others. Not by 'bible bashing' but by being willing to share verses that we have found helpful. By perhaps including a verse of scripture in letters and cards, or even e-mails we send. By inviting people to church where God's word is read and honoured week by week.

## 2Kings 23:2 – 3

### Renewed the covenant

After restoring the temple of the Lord, after restoring honour for God's word Josiah goes on to renew the Lord's covenant. A covenant is an agreement between two parties – in this case between God and the people. Again this is a good time of year to think about our lives and the agreement between God and us. Now you might think that because we live in a time after Christ that covenant is no longer relevant, but in actual fact what Jesus said as recorded in **Luke 22:20** is **'this wine is the token of God's new covenant to save you – an agreement sealed with the blood I will pour out for you'**. So there is still a covenant, just a different one. No longer is our salvation dependant upon our works but instead upon the blood Christ has shed for us, but still there is in the covenant a response which we make to the amazing grace of God, for example by **'offering our lives as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Rom 12:1)**

In a few moments Phil & Sandra are going to lead us in a renewal of our covenant promises to God, like Josiah we want to declare however much I may have fallen short in the past, however strange this may appear in the culture and time I live, I will start afresh today, determined with God's help to begin something new in my life and perhaps to become a catalyst for others to do the same.

## 2 Kings 23:4-20

### Destroyed idolatry and purified the land

Josiah was zealous in destroying every trace of idolatry in the land. Tearing down everything that could tempt the people back into sin.

Now we are not called to tear down physical buildings or to harm people who worship idols, but we can be zealous in tearing down idols in our own lives and in getting rid of those things that tempt us to sin. Are there books or magazines that tempt us to lust or gossip, or to covetousness, why not get rid of them. Are there DVD's or games that we know affect us and damage our relationship with God – get rid of them. Don't pass them on to someone else, destroy them.

How could we have an influence upon wider society? What about complaining to the broadcasters when we are particularly shocked by something portrayed on TV. There is a phrase from one of Godfrey Birtill's, 'God help us' which goes **'we used to ridicule Mary Whitehouse, O we thought we were being so funny. Now pornography's flooded the system, as if we never saw it coming.'** Where are the people who will take a stand in our generation and say enough is enough, I am going to write a letter, or start a petition to get something changed that I know is corrupting my community?

## 2 Kings 23:20-23

### Restored true worship in the land

Finally we see Josiah re-establishing genuine worship in the nation. He was not just against false worship he was **for** true worship of the living God and this began with a huge celebration of Passover.

We need to be a people who are not just against what is wrong – but we need to model and encourage what is right. Part of our vision is to be a worshipping people. In Netteswell where we are going we need to model true worship to our living God and we need to draw others in to become worshippers.

## **Conclusion**

As I finish and just before Phil & Sandra come to lead us in a renewal of covenant promises, lets just take stock. Whatever has gone before, and whatever others are doing around us, are we willing to begin something new, to change something in our lives and perhaps for our community, our town or even our nation that will set the trend rather than just following it.

- Are we willing to help restore a place for worship in Netteswell?
- Will we honour God's word in our lives and introduce it to others?
- Will we re-commit ourselves to following the Lord with all of our heart?
- Will we be zealous in destroying idolatry in our lives and playing a part in purifying our town and our nation?
- Will we model and encourage true worship?

Let's not be those who conform to the standards of those who surround us, but let's rise up and become a people that will be written about, never before have such a people sought and served God with such passion and enthusiasm that a nations was changed.