

Sunday 7th April 2019 – 10.30 am Annual Church Meeting

2 Kings 22.1 – 22.3 (abridged)

King Josiah was a child King. He reigned from the age of eight – just imagine it – Daniel Houghton – (actually I am sure he would want you to know that he is nine!) King over all of us – what a scary thought that could be!

But as I am sure Daniel would, Josiah did reign well. We are told that he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father, David. And I'm excited to think that following our sermon series on David and his 'friends' that hopefully now means a bit more to us. We know something of the ups and the catastrophic downs of David's life but most of all we know that David was someone who was faithful to God throughout his life - even if he was extremely human and fell into sin. So Josiah walking in the ways of his 'father' David is a good thing.

And as a result Josiah is remembered as one of the holiest and most courageous of the kings of Judah. Well into his 31 year reign he feels compelled to organise the repair of the Temple which during the period of over 300 years since its construction had been allowed to fall into disrepair. The King gives orders that the Temple Tax which visitors paid for entering the complex should be handed over to the craftsmen to pay for the labour and materials required to shore up the crumbling masonry and the dodgy woodwork - sound a familiar story?!

This was a godly decision by Josiah – seeking to restore God's house to its former glory. But while this was happening we read that an old book was discovered in the Temple. The temple yields up a book – we don't know quite exactly what the book was but we can perhaps guess that it was a copy of the book of Deuteronomy. It's hard to imagine quite how such a book could have got lost but perhaps that it happened tells its own story. So after its discovery, it was read to King Josiah. Josiah realised that it was, if you like, the 'architects'

plans' for the holy life God wanted that entire nation to embrace. He realised quite how far the nation of Judah had slipped from the life which God had set out for them to enjoy. The nation had broken its covenant with God and it would incur penalties.

So Josiah begins to realise that the outer restoration of the Temple was meaningless without an inner restoration of the spiritual life of his people. And Josiah knew how far short his people now were from the standards expected by God. A prophetess, Huldah, was called upon to give her opinion too. She confirms that the people of Judah stand condemned and will face punishment, but their repentant King, Josiah, will be spared and allowed to die before God's sentence is pronounced on the people. And so it happens. Josiah puts in place his reforms to seek to bring the people back to God. Idols are displaced, the festival of Passover is celebrated once again, other corrective actions are taken but none of these reforms actually change the hearts of the people of Judah. And Josiah is killed in a pointless battle before worse still happens to his people.

So why this story today? I hope that is obvious. We are busy, so busy looking towards the outer restoration of our 'Temple' our Tower and Spire. But how are we ourselves doing? For all that work on our building will be of no consequence, if there isn't inner restoration as well. I'm not saying we are acting just like those people of long ago but a restoration for us and our hearts and minds, now that would be something . . . Perhaps we should inspect ourselves and see what needs to be re-built or restored in us as we look to the Tower and Spire project. And I'm not necessarily talking about doing that individually but perhaps we need to do it collectively. Perhaps that should be the first task our PCC takes on.

I joke that once the Tower and Spire Project is complete, nobody will be able to notice any difference. The job will have been done well if there is no obvious evidence of the money and time and skill spent. There will be some finials replaced and a shiny weather vane but otherwise the restoration will be seamless. With us the difference again may not be outwardly visible but

inwardly we will know things have changed and hopefully people will spot it too. And things will have changed because in response to God's love and his grace, we will have made or allowed change to happen in us that will make us more like him, more like Jesus Christ. And that will be individually and corporately.

And as much as we will soon see the scaffolding erected around our Tower and Spire what is the scaffolding which will enable our own inner restoration? I would suggest that will start with prayer and reading the Bible. Perhaps think again about carving out a regular time in your every day to spend some time with God as we all seek to be Seven Whole Day Christians.

Yesterday here, we held our Alpha Holy Spirit morning. It gave the opportunity to those in our Alpha Group to think about and be prayed for – that the Holy Spirit should fill them in truth and in power. We thought about the Holy Spirit equipping ordinary people to do extraordinary things and making us all sons and daughters of God. We thought of how the Holy Spirit can develop and deepen our relationship with God as it says in Ephesians 1.17:

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." And we thought of the appearance of God's character in us more and more as we bear the fruit of the spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

This is the sort of personal scaffolding which can assist in shoring up our inner restoration – the knowledge of the Holy Spirit as we pray and read God's word. And if we do that, then our motto verse for the year comes very much into play.

'Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build labour in vain'.

Yes, we want God to be part of our plans for the restoration of this church with all the different facets of the project coming to fruition. But as Josiah understood we also need God to be the master builder when it comes to our own inner restoration – ne heeds to be working in us. For as we heard on our

Away weekend we are living stones and God seeks to fashion us and to build us together into something greater than ourselves. Amen

Heavenly Father

You have called us to be your church here in this place at this time.

We thank you for the legacy of this wonderful building.

May we continue to be good stewards of it as a place of worship, refuge, hospitality and peace.

Guide us in our Tower and Spire project and in our continuing Seven Whole Days Vision.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Amen.