

## **Finding the Book**

Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer  
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No. 3: The Best of Books  
Scripture: 2 Kings 22

Today we are going to watch the transformation that the Bible makes to a nation. So please turn to Second Kings in your Bible and take out your message outline as we consider the fascinating subject of **FINDING THE BOOK**.

Last weekend we read the amazing story of how God's people received the Book of the Covenant for the first time. It included the Ten Commandments, written by God on two tablets of stone, and the laws for their new society. In their excitement they responded with one voice, **"Everything the Lord has said we will do." (Exodus 24:3)**

Things went well for awhile but then the book was neglected. People didn't bother to read it.

A generation was born who didn't know of its existence and soon God's word was lost.

That can so easily happen to us. We come to Christ.

We embrace Bible reading but then life gets busy.

Our job is demanding, our family grows and scripture is neglected. We haven't actually lost the Bible. It is there on the shelf somewhere, but we have lost interest in it. Here in Second Kings we learn the consequence of this sad situation.

So let us see **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE LOSE THE BIBLE**.

Much of the story of First and Second Kings illustrates what happens to a nation that turns it back on God's word but it is brought into sharp focus in Second Kings, chapter 21 with the story of Amon, the King of Judah.

He was 22 when he became king and he reigned in Jerusalem for just two years.

His brief rule illustrates three tragic consequences of living without the word of God.

First, **we lose our relationship with God.**

We read of Amon, **"He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done."**

**(2 Kings 21:20)**

Kings before him had known God but Amon didn't.

How could he? He did not have the book of the law.

So he just copies how his father had lived.

But his dad had been a wicked man.

As a result, Amon and his people suffer.

A man asked me the other day, "What does it mean to have a relationship with God?"

It means to know God.

The way we get to know God is through the Bible.

We would know very little about God without scripture. We can deduce certain aspects about God from looking at his creation, but almost everything we know about him is revealed in the Old and New Testament.

Without the Bible, God is at best a shadowy figure.

So if you want a relationship with God, start by reading your Bible. Countless people have met Christ through its pages. The author of scripture revealed himself to them as they read.

A second setback that happens when we lose our Bible is that **we lose the reality of worship.**

We read of Amon, **"He worshipped the idols his father had worshiped, and bowed down to them." (v 21)**

We were made for worship and so we will worship some thing or some one. But there is such a thing as false worship and that is what Amon was engaged in.

The Book of the Covenant gave careful instructions about how to worship God. But without the book Amon was in ignorance.

So there was no life, meaning or joy in his worship.

As a result **"He forsook the Lord, the God of his fathers, and did not walk in the ways of the Lord." (v 22)**

That can easily happen to us.

When worship becomes routine and we are just going through the motions, it is often because we have lost the power of scripture in our life.

The solution to finding the reality of worship is to be filled up with the word of God and then we are able to adore the Lamb of God.

A third disaster that happens when we lose the Bible is that **we lose respect for life.**

Without God's word Judah embraced a culture of death. We read, **"Amon's officials conspired against him and assassinated the king in his palace. Then the people of the land killed all who had plotted against King Amon." (v 23-24)**

There is no respect for life.

You don't want the king, so you kill him.

Then the citizens kill the killers. It is a national disease.

No one is safe because there is no absolute value of the sanctity of life to protect them.

America has lost the Bible and so we have lost respect for life. We see evidence of this all around us.

We can justify the abortion of over a million babies every year. We have laws approving assisted suicide.

We have voices speaking in favor of infanticide and euthanasia.

There is a close connection between our respect for human life and our respect for the book of life.

The nation of Judah paid the price for losing the book.

As a result life was cheap and the land was lawless.

The same is true for any nation that abandons the Bible.

We lose God's laws for a happy and secure society.

But thankfully this is not the end of the story.

For after Amon's death Josiah comes to the throne.

Josiah is a wonderful example to you young people.

He became king when he was just 8 years old.

He turned his life over to God when he was 16.

**"He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or the left."**

**(2 Kings 22:2)**

He becomes one of the best kings Judah ever had.

Many of us who are older look back on our teenage years as the time when we began the journey of faith.

I became a Christian at 16. I was challenged to live for Christ. I urge you children and young people to do the same. Don't waste your life. Make a difference in your family, your school, yes, your nation and your world.

Like Josiah do what is right in the eyes of the Lord.

Then in 622 BC when Josiah was 26 he became deeply concerned about the run down condition of the temple.

He collected money so that repairs could be made by the carpenters and masons.

The workmen started to remove the rubble and junk from the temple and one day Hilkiah, the high priest, made a marvelous discovery. He announced, **"I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord."** (v 8)

Hilkiah gave the book to Josiah's secretary who was a man called Shaphan who took it to the king.

Now what was this Book of the Law that had been lost for years? Some scholars think it included Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

We call these five books The Pentateuch.

Other scholars think it was just Deuteronomy which of course includes the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant.

Whatever it was it reintroduced the word of God back into the leadership of Judah and through them to the nation.

It is wonderful to watch the impact the Bible makes in a person and a people.

It is illustrated in the life of this godly king Josiah. Remember the Book of the Law has just been found.

We are told, **"Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king." (v 10)**

Now Josiah had never heard this truth before.

So **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE FIND THE BIBLE?**

First we find **we are torn apart.**

We read, **"When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes." (v 11)**

This was an expression of sorrow and repentance.

Josiah realized how far Judah had fallen from God's standards. As a result he wept. His heart was broken.

Often the first thing that God's truth does to us is tear us apart. The reason is that

**"The word of God . . . is sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)**

The Bible has this alarming habit of pointing out the wide gulf between our sin and a holy God.

Initially it can make us feel very uncomfortable.

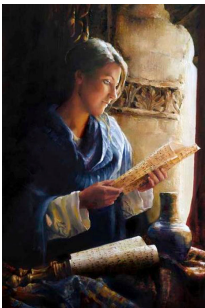
It is the reason why we push the Bible away.

But this first step of being torn apart is necessary.

It leads to a desire to change.

The second blessing that happens when we find the Bible is that **we find a hunger for truth.**

Josiah tells his attendant, **"Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all of Judah about what has been written in this book that has been found." (v 13)**



This young king wants to know more of God' truth.

So Josiah's leadership team goes and finds a woman called Huldah. She was a prophet who lived in Jerusalem and she has a word from God for the king. Here it is.

**"This is what the Lord says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything that is written in the book the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and**

**provoked me to anger by all the idols their hands have made . . . because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I had spoken against this place and its people . . . and because your tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the Lord.” (vs 16-19)**

It is interesting that Jeremiah was the main prophet in Judah at this time but it was this prophetess Huldah who God used to teach truth to this young king. We know little about her except that she loved scripture and God used this woman to satisfy the king’s hunger for truth.

The Bible is likened to bread.

But it is bread that makes us hungry for more.

Have you ever had the experience of going to a restaurant?

Before they take your order they put some hot rolls on the table. They smell so good you can’t resist.

You eat the whole basketful and then ask for more.

God’s word is like fresh, hot bread.

We take a bite and we want more.

Like the disciples we say to Jesus, “Give us this bread.”

That is what happened to Josiah.

The third benefit that happens when we find the Bible is **we find a longing for God.**

In chapter 23 the king orders everybody to go to the Temple. There Josiah did something remarkable.

**“He read in their hearing all (notice all, not just bits of) the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord – to follow the Lord and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul . . . and then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.” (23:2-3)**

The Bible reveals a God who is so gracious that we long to follow him, we long to please him, we long to serve him. But this will only happen if we read his book.

There is a lot of ignorance today about God because people have lost the Bible.

As a result they invent things about God which aren’t very attractive and so naturally they reject a God like that.

But when we hear of the holiness of God and we see the beauty of Christ, and we feel the comfort of the Holy Spirit, then we will have a longing in our heart for this divine and sublime Trinity.

Another change that happens when we find the Bible is that we find **an indignation with wickedness.**

We become angry at what sin is doing to our world.  
That's what happens to Josiah.

**"The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest. . . to remove from the temple of the Lord all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel.**

**He did away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem . . . he took the Asherah pole from the temple of the Lord to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there.**

**He ground it to powder and scattered the dust over the graves of the common people.**

**He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the Lord." (2 Kings 23:4-7)**

These were all evidences of pagan worship that involved idolatry, superstition, and religious prostitution.

This wasn't some quaint folk religion.

It was disgusting and degrading and took advantage of the ordinary people.

It held them in bondage and fear.

Josiah had been aware of this throughout his reign but now that he has found the Book of the Law his anger burns against these abominations that are destroying the lives of his people.

The same thing will happen to us.

When the truth of the Bible gets into our heart we will want to tear down the structures that dishonor God and damage people.

When we read the words of the prophets against injustice.

When we see God's concern for widows and orphans.

When we hear Jesus' love for the hungry and the homeless and those in prison, we too will rise up with indignation. We will want to do something about it.

Whether that is giving our money or going with our skills or getting politically involved.

This is why we do backpacks for kids. We are taking down the shrine of hunger in our community and raising an altar to compassion.

This is the reason why there are those in our congregation involved in Habitat for Humanity. They are tearing down the shrine of homelessness and in its place building lovely houses where people can have a future and a hope.

Chuck Colson was an advisor to President Nixon. He was charged in the Watergate Scandal and sent to prison. There he started to read his Bible.

When he finished his sentence he began to speak out for those in prison. He started Prison Fellowship, which is a ministry to prisoners and their families.

When Chuck Colson was in the White House he was not concerned about the plight of those in prison.

It was the power of the Bible that brought about the change in his heart.

Another great transformation that happens when we find the Bible is a that **we find a love for life.**

One of the greatest things that Josiah did is, **"He desecrated Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnon, so no one could use it to sacrifice his son, or daughter in the fire to Molech." (2 Kings 23:10)**

Part of this pagan worship that pervaded Judah since they lost the Bible involved child sacrifice.

They would burn their children in the fire. It was part of a fertility cult to improve the productivity of their crops and to make them more prosperous.

Those child sacrifices had been part of the religious scenery of the country for as long as anyone could remember.

It was impossible to imagine that things would change. But they did because the king found a Bible.



We may despair in making changes in our country but we need to remember that the word of God is revolutionary.

So we must not give up or become discouraged.

Our nation can find a love for life if God's people are willing to obey him with all their heart.

Once we meet the Lord of life we have new reverence for life. God gives us a compassion for those that society thinks are expendable.

That love for life means we not only want to save the child in the womb, it means we want to tell the man who encouraged his girlfriend to have an abortion about the Lord of life who forgives.

We want the girl who suffers from the memory of an abortion to experience the comfort and grace of Christ.

Josiah not only pulled down the shrines to Baal.

He built up the altar to the Lord.

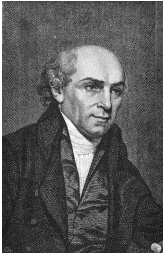
This love for human life is why Bible saturated Christians are involved in ministries like New Life Family Services to encourage women and girls in crisis pregnancies to choose life.



It is the reason a Christian woman called Dame Cicely Saunders back in the 1960's became concerned that people should be able to die with dignity. So she founded St. Christopher's Hospice in London. It was just a few miles from my theological college and I went there as part of my training. St. Christopher's was the beginning of the worldwide hospice movement that continues at Seasons Hospice here in

Rochester.

For our love for life extends to the end of life.



A love for life is the reason why William Carey fought the practice of sati in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This was a ritual in which Hindu women threw themselves upon the burning funeral pyres of their dead husbands in hope that this act would bring blessing on their family and contribute to their own salvation.

Carey was a Christian missionary with a God-given love for life.

So he campaigned to stop the practice.

He showed that the Hindu sacred books did not require this cruel custom.

Eventually in 1829 the burning to death of thousands of widows was outlawed.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of the change the Bible makes is found in the life of Norma McCorvey.



She was the Jane Roe of Roe vs. Wade.

That was the name of the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in America.

Back then Norma wanted to fight for the right of abortion. But in 1995 she was born again.

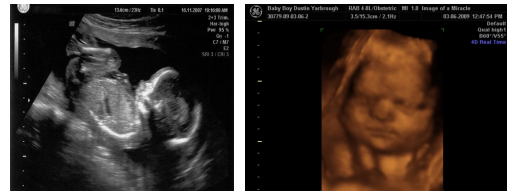
She said "Roe is no mo."

She is now prolife because she met the Lord of life.

The very best way to change the attitude to abortion in our country is to give people God's word and share with them God's truth. That is happening and as a result abortion rates are falling.

Developments in medicine and science are supporting the prolife movements.

The improvements in ultrasound means that what was once an abstract debate becomes very



real once people see what is actually being aborted is a child.  
The more we know about life in the womb the more we understand this is a person not just a blob of tissue.



There are all sorts of treasures that can be found in people's homes. Last November an old Chinese vase found in an attic fetched 83 million dollars and the owners thought it was rubbish.

Last July some Ansel Adams photos were found at a garage sale. They may be worth 3 million dollars. But something more valuable is in your bookcase and mine. It is the word of God and it is priceless.



We need to find it for it imparts the message of salvation and eternal life.

When we do, we can say with the Psalmist, **"I rejoice in your promise, like one who finds great spoil." (Psalm 119:162)**