

## “Terrifying Transition”

October 22, 2017

2 Kings 23: 1-3

2 Kings 23:1-3 (NIV) <sup>1</sup> Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> He went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets--all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. <sup>3</sup> 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, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.

I want to begin this morning on a light note. A couple of Sundays ago, after church, I got on our treadmill and put on the Lions game. A strange thing happened. After a minute or so, the broadcast switched from English to Spanish. I did not ask it to do that. I did not even touch the remote. It just did it on its own. Now...the Lions are hard enough to watch in English much less in Spanish and no matter what I did I could not get it to correct. The other channels were still in English. Only the Lions channel was in Spanish. The next Sunday the same thing.

That small TV was only about two months old so I took it back to the big store and asked the customer service person, a nice young lady, to process a return. I would go pick out a different TV that broadcasted in English. She said “Sure. But...I wonder what to put down here for reason for return?” I said “Well...just say it broadcasts in tongues! ☺ Or maybe it has a demon.” Anyway...I took home a new and different television and I thought all was corrected. But...the next Sunday it did the same thing. So, it was not a problem with the televisions but with the broadcast. Eventually the cable company came out and changed all the equipment. The guy explained that some of their boxes just do that. OK. Now, the current box only speaks English. An amusing experience.

Let’s think about that. I was just watching a game. But what if I really had to know what was being said? What if eternity depended on my knowing what was being said? What if it was not the Lions game but instructions from God about what He requires of me and desires of me? What if I sensed that God had something to say to me but I could not understand it...or read it? What if the written Word of God was only available to me in a language I could not understand and what if someone wanted it that way because they insisted THEY had to tell me what it means...that I could not and should not read it on my own? Today...let’s consider a young King named Josiah in 620 BC who loved the Word of God and a young law student named Martin Luther in 1517...2700 years later who also loved the Word of God. But first, let us pray.

A terrified man in a storm. An amazing event many centuries earlier.

**Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.  
<sup>2</sup> He went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets--all the people from the least to the greatest.**

The year is 620 BC. An Old Testament King named Josiah learns that the rule book... the Book of the Covenant that apparently summarized the laws of God...has been tucked away somewhere for a long time. No one has read it for generations! This will not do! So, the King calls everyone in his kingdom to come and hear him read it to them! And they come! From all corners and they stand in his presence and they listen as he reads! And their nation begins to transition from godlessness to an increased fear of God and love of God. All because of that reading and, of course, the movement of the Holy Spirit. 2600 years ago.

The Word of God had been neglected. But consider... what if I could read it but it had been hidden away? Think of this... What if fifty years from now Cornerstone is dead because a series of pastors have not believed in the Word of God and have not taught the people the Word of God. Then...a new preacher comes to Cornerstone in the year 2067 and he discovers a collection of Bibles and notes from past preachers years before...and he realizes why the church is dead! So, he sends out a text to every person who still comes to this place and it says "Come and listen all night... Friday night... be prepared to stand and hear from God!" And they come and they tilt their heads and they listen and he reads to them from the Gospel of John...all 21 chapters. And they are stunned and they begin to transition from spiritual deadness to a new life filled with a longing after the living God! That's what Josiah did...at about age 20. Very long ago. 620 BC. 2700 years ago. One man. Years later, 500 years ago, one man was used by God to bring revival thru the Word of God. It began the greatest transition in the history of the church since the Book of Acts.

Our topic for weeks has been TRANSITION. Transition in our lives and in our church. A couple of weeks ago, Pastor Winans brought a fine sermon that spoke of not being a complainer in transition with its many stresses. Last week, he spoke about asking for help and not being prideful in transition. Then the Pastor pointed out that these behaviors should come naturally in our Christian lives because we belong to Christ. Quite so! Today, we need to be reminded that for the Fruit of the Spirit to be present in our lives we must be led and fed in our walk with Christ thru the Word of God! But what if...what if...we could not have that guidance because we were deprived of this book?

Here is the key point: **TRIE SPIRITUAL TRANSITION MUST BE ROOTED IN THE WORD OF GOD AND...** because of the Protestant Reformation, humanity can understand what God wants to say to us. The Protestant Reformation is usually dated to October 1517. We saw young Luther in our film clip. He's a man filled with fear. In the midst of the thunderstorm, he cries out to St. Anne who was thought to be the mother of Mary. He is so scared for his life that he promises to become a monk! This, begins Luther's journey.

But...the Reformation did not actually begin with Martin Luther. We will come back to him but first consider those who laid the groundwork. Luther wanted all men and women and children to hear from God but it was because of the providence and mercy of God that the Reformation could really begin in the 1500's. Here is what I mean: please follow this truth...every great movement in history is preceded by events that set the stage for that movement. World War Two was inevitable because of the way they settled World War One. The tidal wave of miracle drugs in the last century came about after a guy named Fleming discovered penicillin from a mold in 1928. We have smart phones in 2017 because the Russians began the space race in 1957 by launching "Sputnik" a word that means "Traveler." So...what brought about the Protestant Reformation...humanly speaking? What did God allow in history to bring about the Reformation? He brought about the Renaissance that preceded it for over two hundred years. Without the Renaissance preceding it there would have been no Reformation! The word "renaissance" is related to the word "re-birth."

Think of it. If we are living in Europe in the end of the thirteenth century...say in the year 1290...we probably cannot read. We have not travelled more than fifty miles from where we were born. Medicine is scarce and life is very hard. We probably live as servants on a small feudal manner working hopelessly for some low level monarch. Our life expectancy is maybe thirty-five years. Our only link to God is thru the Priest. We dare not cross him or we will be deprived of the Lord's Supper and our children will not be baptized and they and us will be eternally lost. That is what we are told. We do not question the church.

When we do go to Mass, the Priest speaks right past us in Latin. We know almost nothing about God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The irony is that the Priest is probably unlearned in the Bible himself. The Church of Rome tells us what to believe and the church expects no arguments about anything spiritual. The governments of Europe are usually under the Emperors still in Rome and Germany and Spain...so disloyalty to the church is considered disloyalty to the state. But we do not know any better because even if we can read, we do not have the Bible in our own language and even if we have it...we are told we cannot understand it.

It's a terrible time to live...in the year 1290. Unless someone comes along and fixes the broadcast so we can hear the game in English! Unless someone comes along and fixes the translation problem and we can read the Word of God in some language we understand...but first we must learn to read. So, a radical transition of the society itself is needed.

Then, by God's grace, comes the Renaissance. A burst of learning and education that began in fourteenth century that lasted unto the seventeenth century. A humanistic revival of learning true...but God was in it because it saw millions finally learn to read. Literature and theatre and architecture and science and medicine advanced. Travel became common. Commerce expanded and new universities opened. And the world was literally made ready...to hear from the Word of God a hundred years before Luther was even born. So, in a very real sense, the Protestant Reformation did not begin 500 years ago but well before that.

Now...before Luther.... God raised up a string of critical people who set the stage for the Reformation and the Transition of the church. Well before October of 1517, there were men whom we should appreciate for what they did for us...and the transition of the church that they brought about...by God's grace. The trail of events that gave us the Reformation is quite astounding.

Somewhere around 1350, a English clergyman named John Wycliff translated the Bible into English and began to call for the reformation of the church. He was despised by the Church of Rome and they were relieved when he died of a stroke. But he had stirred up the theological pot. Later, in 1431, in the midst of the Renaissance, a Czech Priest named John Hus was executed by the authorities. Why? For teaching the same things. The church so hated Hus that they burned him at the stake as a follower of the late Wycliff! And...just for good measure, they dug up the bones of Wycliff and burned them too. All of Europe was ablaze with religious debate and tension.

Then a German man named Johannes Gutenberg invented something that would change the world the same way modern computers changed our world. The printing press! In 1519, all kinds of documents are being printed at the same time more and more people can read. Almost simultaneously a young monk named Martin Luther is undergoing a dark night of the soul.

Consider what happened next...a young man, Luther would attend Mass with his family of nominal church-goers. His father labored hard to enable Luther to study law but even then Luther was more interested in theological speculation. One day in 1505, he is travelling back to see his parents in Erfurt when he is caught in a terrifying thunderstorm. Since he has been nearly obsessed with what happens after death, this is a completely unwelcome. He is about to undergo a terrifying transition! He cries out to Saint Anne. He survives the thunderstorm and within days he tells his father his law studies are over. He enrolls in a very strict Augustinian order and begins life as a monk.

He does whatever he suspects might earn him salvation. He fasts and he goes without sleep and he prays and he embraces a life of total denial of self. No rest or recreation...no pleasure of any kind. He is, if you think about it, trying to earn his salvation. He himself wrote "If ever a man could be saved by monkery, I was that monk!" But he finds no peace.

He confides to a friendly Priest that not only does he fail to love God...he hates God! God to him is a God of judgment and wrath and just like his earthly father! Angry with him and always ready to find some fault. Luther studies and earns several advanced degrees. He begins to teach theology even though he is still uncertain of his own salvation. But his big transitional moment comes from time immersed in the Word of God. Like those listening to the young King Josiah, his mind and spirit awaken as he reads...in particular in Romans Chapter One. Remember Luther has been asking "What must I do to be saved?" To be righteous in God's sight. Then he reads:

**Romans 1:16-17 (NIV) <sup>16</sup> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.**

Luther asks himself “But what *is* the Gospel? What does it teach? What does it say? What is the point? What must I do? Is the Gospel telling me to make sure I do not miss church or the Mass? Is the Gospel about penance and good works? What does the Gospel teach me?” asks Luther. Then the lights go on. Then the moment of Divine transition comes to Luther and he “gets it.” He reads where Paul says:

**<sup>17</sup> For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."**

“A righteousness from God!?” From first to last...all the way thru! It is a righteousness “by faith” he realizes! His life is transitioned all in a moment! Let me quote from Luther’s journal about this verse and this moment:

***"There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which a merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, He who through faith is righteous shall live. Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gate!"***

Paul was quoting from the Old Testament Prophet Habakkuk who spoke of the proud man who thought he was good enough to earn eternal life by his works. He said:

**Habakkuk 2:4 (NIV) <sup>4</sup> "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright-- but the righteous will live by his faith—"**

That righteousness is passive in the sense that we can only receive it by His grace. In other words, a “right” status before God comes when we admit we cannot be righteous in and of ourselves but God is willing, if we ask Him in faith... God is willing to accredit His righteousness to us by faith! Luther now realizes that the righteousness of Jesus upon the Cross is what enables God to transfer to us a new label. Now God looks at me or you or Luther and sees the righteousness of Christ! Our sins are covered over by His righteousness!

Let me make this point with a silly story. I had a secretary many years ago when I was the Administrator in an overseas mission. She was a wonderful young woman and always eager to help... but a miserable typist. This was before the days of word processing on a computer. There she was for hours at her IBM Selectric...sending letters to our missionaries and our financial supporters...important activities. But there she was making typos wholesale. She regularly typed the Holy Spirit but it came out the Holy Sprite! Her version of “Quiet Time” was usually “Quite a time!” A poor typist. So...do you remember “White Out?” I used to buy

it buy the quart for her. Her documents looked like a paint by number project! But the white out? It worked. White out covered her mistakes...her sins on the typed page! This truth is found in the Psalms:

**Psalm 32:1 (NIV) Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.**

The Psalmist just said God takes white out” and covers our sins when we come to Christ! Luther has realized that God has taken the white out of Christ’s righteousness and covered over **his** sins. Now Luther is a changed man! He can stop trying to earn his salvation! He can stop striving and fasting and making himself miserable because Christ has taken white out to his sins! Now he can love God and His Gospel and His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, as Rome keeps sending out bad teachers who want the people to stay unlearned and ignorant...and who want the people to give their spare money so Rome can build more palaces and fight more wars.... now Luther becomes livid. Now the transitional spark that really sets things off is lighted.

It is October 31, 1517 and Luther goes to the Wittenberg Castle Church with its great and heavy wooden doors. He takes his scroll with its 95 propositions or theses or arguments and he presses it up against the door and he nails it on its corners...and within minutes his fate is sealed and the Reformation in its formal sense has begun. Why? Because in that document Luther challenges the church over and over about what it is teaching and this simple monk, as he is known, brings a theological indictment against the Pope and all of the hierarchy of the church...perhaps naively thinking they will read what he has to say and consider it. But they do not. His ideas set off a hurricane of criticism and books will be burned and people will die and Luther will be chased into hiding...but ultimately the Gospel will thrive throughout the world.

What was it that Luther said in that list? What were even a few of his statements that caused so much tension? I will tell you. Next week. Let us pray.



A few minutes ago, we got in our time machine and went back to the year 1290. Now...let's go way back...much farther back...from 2017 to 640 BC. 2757 years! Josiah has become the King in Judah. His father Amnon has died and he will not be missed. Amnon had been an idolatrous king with no fear of God and his son replacing him would be wonderful except that...the young King Josiah is only eight years old. Yet even at eight, he shows great spiritual maturity although he needs help from older and Godly men. And he gets it!

Within a few years young Josiah begins to clean up Judah spiritually. Things are improving morally. Then something really shocking happens. Josiah brings about a transition in Judah. A nation-changing transition! Consider this: his High Priest, a guy named Hilkiah, has found the "Book of the Covenant" which was a compilation of the covenant laws God had given to His people. No one has seen it since who knows when? God's covenant laws have been tucked away! It has been ignored for years and the people were not aware of it! Perhaps Josiah has said to himself "No wonder my people are in such darkness and my father was such a spiritual dwarf! They've not heard from God since whenever!" What does Josiah do? We read:

He is what it says:

**He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. <sup>3</sup> 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, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book.**

The leaders had to do that first. The leaders had to renew his own covenant with God and promise to worship and only serve God and have no idols and yield his their loves to the ways of God. And when the leaders did that, the people did it as well. We read:

**Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.**

Slowly God brought about transition in ancient Judah by calling the people back to His Word. The same thing happened in the centuries leading up to Luther.

