

This Sunday we're concluding this series of messages we've been studying together through the 5 great affirmations of the Church, particularly as they were handed down to us from the Reformers—we call them the 5 Solas. Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Sola Christus, Soli Deo Gloria, and this morning Sola Scriptura Scripture alone is our guide and instructor for matters of life and faith. One writer called this the doorway to the mind of God.

Throughout this month we have been in a sense preparing for a milestone celebration Tuesday, October 31st which marks the 500th anniversary when the Monk from Wittenberg, Martin Luther, posted the 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church—sparking the Protestant Reformation. And among the gifts of this event, perhaps the greatest, was Luther's commitment to put in the hands of the people a bible they could read in their own tongue. Now Luther could have never known that his effort to purify the Roman Catholic Church would have led to so many different denominational subsets. This is what Historian Mark Noll calls the *chaos of Sola Scriptura*. But if we turn, what appears to be a negative on its head, viewing it in a positive lens, it is a holy chaos of different groups responding to and wrestling with this Scripture's message of new life and renewed hope in Jesus Christ.

This morning we are going to look at a story from the Old Testament from a time in which there was a long period of silence, where God's Word was not available or known by the people, and we will see what happens when we as God's people rediscover this text in our own lives.

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedi'dah the daughter of Adai'ah of Bozkath. And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

How old is Josiah when he begins his reign as king in Israel? Eight. Eight years old. Now many of you have, at one time or another, had eight year old in your home, and are probably thinking “yeah, that sounds about right.” This story would not surprise them one bit. Aren't all eight year olds in charge of the universe? But this Josiah kid really was a king at age 8, this is not pretend, he really is in charge of an entire nation. And the amazing thing is that he already has a knack for leadership. Sure, he's employed some advisors and managers, but the remarkable thing is that this country is actually going in the right direction. It also doesn't hurt that he is coming on the heels of one of the worst kings in all of Israel's history.

The bible says: Josiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. The Old Testament uses this phrase hundreds and hundreds of times, and the first time we see it used is way back in the book of Genesis with a man named Noah who found favor with and did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Now this phrase is sort of like a barometer for the state of God's people. When Israel was on track the scriptures tell us that they did what was right, what was just in the eyes of the Lord; and when they were disobedient it says that they did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord.

One of our favorite movies as kids was Hook, the Robin Williams adaptation of Peter Pan. There's a scene near the end where Peter, after avoiding his identity for so long, finally accepts that he is Peter Pan. And one of the round faced lost boys grabs him by the jowls and pulls him close and says: "There you are Peter." The eyes are the window to the soul.

So, I want to ask you a question this morning, to whose eyes do you look for your identity, whose face do you look toward for approval and direction? Where do you turn when the direction you are traveling is clearly the wrong one?

During a dark period in Israel's history it says that everyone did what was right in their own eyes, in other words they looked to themselves for approval and direction. And why Josiah stands out in history as such a great king was that he constantly looked to the face of God for direction, he didn't stray too far to the left or the right, but kept his gaze squarely fixed on the almighty.

Now a bit of context and history will help us understand this story. The people of God are about to find themselves swept into exile, cast out of the promised land God had given them. Now think about the big picture, long ago God chose this unique group of people and made a covenant that they would be his special people. He saved them from their bondage in Egypt, and brought them into a new and great land flowing with milk and honey. He spoke clearly to them about what was right and what was wrong in giving them the Ten Commandments and the law. Then even when they wandered away, even when they were disobedient, God was steadfast toward them.

Yet in spite of this rich heritage, in spite of their relationship to God, God's voice became little more than a distant echo. When we are no longer able to hear God's voice, we will turn instead whatever seems right in our own eyes. It will begin to feel as though we are a people wandering through life with the lights out. Are you tracking with me?

This looks like Israel's darkest hour. With a neighboring superpower breathing down their neck, ready to swoop down and scatter them, strip them of their identity, Israel is about to be dislocated from God.

Not a lot of good news is there? Not a lot of promise and possibility, it looks like the end for Israel. I wonder what we do when hope feels like just a flicker, how do we maintain our identity when outside forces bear down upon us? Where do we turn when it just feels like silence?

Let's look to the next part of our story for the answer.

In the eighteenth year of King Josi'ah, the king sent Shaphan the son of Azali'ah, son of Meshul'lam, the secretary, to the house of the LORD, saying, "Go up to Hilki'ah the high priest, that he may reckon the amount of the money which has been brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people; 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, that is, to the carpenters, and to the builders, and to the masons, as well as for buying timber and quarried stone to repair the house. But no accounting shall be asked from them for the money which is delivered into their hand, for they deal honestly." And Hilki'ah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD." And Hilki'ah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. 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." Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilki'ah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king.

So Josiah sends his CFO Shaphan on a business trip, he's in charge of the accounts receivable and is responsible for going to the building sites for collection. They're working on a renovation of the temple with the capital campaign funds. Then after they finish their business the High Priest rather nonchalantly says, "Oh yeah there's just one more thing, while we were working on the project I came across a copy of the book of the law."

It was probably a collection of scrolls, but I don't have scrolls so bear with me. When we think of the book of the law we normally think of all the laws. But the Hebrew word for law is the word Torah, and the Torah is simply the first five books of the Bible. Say them with me, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. So what has just happened is Shaphan was given a copy of the book of the law by Hilki'ah the high priest and when he returned, after he has given the official progress report he tells Josiah. Oh yeah, and I got this book as well. So let's hear now how Josiah responds to hearing the Word of God read for him, one verse, verse 11.

And when the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes.

Clothing was incredibly expensive, you don't just go down to Walmart to pick up another tunic. Often one's clothing was the single most expensive thing they owned. So when people tore their clothes in the Bible it's not because their favorite team the Minnesota Twins didn't make the playoffs. People tore their clothes only in a time of extreme anguish and grief. Job tore his clothes when his family was so tragically taken from him. Reuben tares his clothes when he finds out his brother Joseph is missing. King David tears his clothes when he finds out he's been betrayed by his own son. The Temple Curtain the garment that protects the holy of holies is torn from top to bottom when Jesus dies, this is God tearing his clothes in response to the cross.

Josiah rips his clothes when he hears the Bible read. He grieves in such a way like that of one whose family has been taken from him or one who has been betrayed by those he loves. Somewhere along the line the Bible got put on a dusty old shelf and it started to gather dust, while the people gathered their idols—a circumstance not unlike that leading up to the 16th Century Reformation. The Bible became a relic of a forgotten time and slowly the people drifted further and further from God, and so Josiah weeps because he's never heard these words spoken before. He may have heard a priest or teacher say something biblical, but he's never heard the WORD OF GOD for himself.

Josiah has ears to hear, but he's never heard the word before now—also true to the culture leading up to the Reformation. Did you know that in America we have more Bibles and easier access to the scriptures than anyone else in human history, and yet in spite of this many of our Bibles are gathering dust on a shelf or sitting in a drawer somewhere, and God's Word to us is silent.

Imagine in response to this if Jesus had walked into the back of Wabash Presbyterian today and taking our Bible and saying I just found this tucked away in one of your homes. And what if after hearing this it made you want to take your finest suit or your best dress and tear it in grief, because you know now what the world's been missing and what you've been losing. I think it's time for us to take our Bibles off the shelf and actually read about this God we believe in. I think people in

America believe more about this book than they know or believe about what's in this book. They put more trust in this book than wisdom they draw from this book. And so it's no wonder that so many live

There is a professor at Huntington University, and I was reading his biography and saw that he recently wrote a book on the Juvenilization of Christianity in America, that is we are quickly becoming a nation that is content to simply be fed fast food Christianity. As long as it's wrapped up in a nice clean and happy package, or it's found in a well preserved relic of a space, we're content to simply leave it at that. Friends God's Word is a wellspring of life, but we will never know unless we go down to drink in its deep waters.

What happens in this Josiah moment is a huge shift in the faith of the people, they are no longer people of the temple they are people of the Torah, they become people of the book instead of people of the building. And as one writer says, "this will not save the people from exile but it will preserve the people during their time of exile." At this point the nation is too far gone to be saved, but the dream will not be forgotten. All this because a young king rediscovered the Bible for himself. Later in chapter 22 it says because Josiah had a humble heart God would gather the people back. Then in chapter 23 it says that Josiah gathered all the people together in the temple and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord. Josiah stood on the covenant and invited all the others to stand on the covenant with him. Literally he invited people to stand on the promises of the Bible. Your instincts are right Josiah invited them to stand on scripture as their foundation.

There was another man who went through something similar. He was a bright young mind, enrolled in law school, because that was what was expected of him from his family. But soon realized that was not for him. So, he left that life to become a monk. His family thought he was crazy, but the more he got into it the more he realized he had an insatiable desire to devour anything he could get his hands on, whether it was philosophy or theology. He had a knack for linguistics as well, and the more he read, the more he realized that the church had drifted miles from what the book actually said. So, this young monk wrote a letter outlining his grievances that got him in deep doo-doo Holy Roman Empire. So, he was summoned to a trial that was so prominent even the emperor and prince themselves presided over it. The prosecuting attorney takes all the stuff that he had written and laid it out on a table before the court and asks the defendant, "did you write this letter? Yes, I did. "And do you stand by what it says?" And knowing that his very life was at stake he said...can I pray about that? So, he prays and prays and then the next day comes back into the court room, and Martin Luther says these words:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason-for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves-I am bound by the scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and I will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. Here I stand, I can do no other. May God help me. Amen.

If we are to have any hope in this world it will be because we've looked into the eyes of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. If we are to have any hope in this world of ours it will be because our hearts are responsive to these scriptures. Josiah tears his clothes so that we might have this book. God tore his clothes so that we might have his son. We are not people of the building, we are people of

the book. Is there enough sensitivity, is there enough tenderness, is there enough vulnerability to embrace the story, the hope and the grace found in this book?