

“A Son’s Choice”

All in the Family, part #6

2 Chronicles 33: 21-25 & 34:1-8

Take a look around you for a moment. The people sitting near you are so glad you have come to worship God with them. Imagine how it would have felt to walk into an empty sanctuary this morning. We need each other to be the Body of Christ. We cannot be the church alone. And so I thank you today, because your presence is a gift: to me, to us, and to God.

As we get started, I invite you hold your hands out with your palms open to symbolize you are ready to receive something from God. Would you please pray with me?

Lord, if you have something to tell me this morning, I’m ready to listen. Look through me, test my heart, show me anything about myself I need to change, and show me your eternal way. Amen.

If you have ever flown through Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport, you might have seen a fascinating display of a World War II fighter jet in Terminal 2. The display explains that the airport was named after Edward Henry “Butch” O’Hare, a Chicago native and ace pilot in that war. On April 21, 1942, O’Hare became received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions against the Japanese and defending the U.S.S. Lexington. On February 20 of that year, he had faced nine twin-engine Japanese bombers alone. He shot down five of them and damaged a sixth before other U.S. fighters arrived. No enemy bombs made it to the Lexington. The Medal of Honor citation calls it one of the most daring, single

actions in the history of combat aviation. (Sources: truthorfiction.com, Wikipedia.com, and aviation-history.com)

It is no wonder that O'Hare airport is named after him. You would think that such a brave man would come from a solid family with impeccable morals. But let me tell you about his dad.

Butch's father, "Easy" Eddie O'Hare, was an attorney and business partner of the infamous gangster Al Capone. He helped run Capone's horse and dog track operation in Chicago. There was a point when Easy Eddie decided to secretly become an informant for the Internal Revenue Service, and it was with his help that the government convicted and imprisoned Capone for income tax evasion. Some have said that Eddie became an informant because of a change of heart and a desire to go straight. Others have said it was merely his way of saving his neck in the face of potential prosecution. However, Eddie was murdered shortly after Al Capone was sent to prison. (Source: truthorfiction.com)

Clearly, the choices we make will influence our families. But we don't always follow in the steps of our father, as Butch and Eddie's story illustrates. I can relate, a little. My father was a veterinarian for over 40 years. But my brothers and I did not follow his footsteps in the medical field. My brother, Matt, is a professional musician and teacher, and my brother, Todd, is a product line manager for a running shoe company. Not only did none of us become vets, none of us even own a dog. But that does not mean that my dad's choices haven't impacted us. We certainly love and respect what Dad did as a doctor. It is just that as sons, we made our own career choices.

With Bellaire's commencement ceremony Friday and the Baccalaureate service tonight at 6:00, a lot of us are thinking about our students and the choices

that they will make as they seek a future for themselves. So today I want us to hear about a son who followed his father's career, but thankfully, with completely different results.

I am talking about King Josiah. We find his story in 2nd Chronicles 33 & 34 (and 2nd Kings 22-23). Now, Israel's history with kings was a mixed bag of fruit, with most of it rotten. When the Israelite people first asked the prophet Samuel for a king, it was seen as a rejection of God. Samuel warned them a king would be bad news. And they usually were.

Israel's first three kings were Saul, David and Solomon. King Saul helped Israel defeat their enemies, but then he stopped listening to God, and frankly, went a little crazy. So God replaced Saul with King David, the giant-slayer. David went on to become Israel's greatest king, the gold standard against which everyone else would be compared. The Bible says David had a heart for God. But David left a tarnished legacy. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then he failed to discipline his own sons. When David died, Solomon took over. Although Solomon made Israel prosperous and built the temple, his many wives caused Israel to pursue idolatry.

After Solomon, things went from bad to worse. The kingdom was split in two – Israel to the north, Judah to the south. There were many kings, a few good ones, but mostly bad ones. Eventually the northern kingdom was taken captive by Assyria, and the southern kingdom by Babylon.

Near the end of this crazy royal history, there was Hezekiah, Josiah's great-grandfather, a good king. He saved Judah from an attack, got rid of the idols, and celebrated a Passover. Not too shabby. His son, Manasseh, Josiah's grandfather, was a one of the bad kings. He worshipped idols, undoing most of Hezekiah's

work. But Manasseh, after ignoring God, was taken captive by Assyria, humbled himself, and was released. He found a new lease on life, so he got rid of the idols and cleaned up his act.

However, his son, King Amon, Josiah's father, was just plain terrible. Fortunately Amon did not reign very long – only two years. He got into idolatry big time. Amon's officials finally had enough of him and murdered him. For their efforts, the people murdered the officials, and put Amon's son, Josiah, on the throne - an 8-year old. Better an 8-year old king than no king, I guess.

Josiah had a tough start, to say the least. I mean, would you make your 8-year old son king? That could be interesting. No mandatory bed time. National Free Ice Cream Day – everyday. He would probably enact some law involving the enslavement of moms and dads, forcing them to drive their children anywhere they wanted to go. (Actually, that sounds pretty normal to me.)

But Josiah chose a different path than his father. At sixteen years of age, Josiah “began to seek the God of his ancestor David.” (2 Chronicles. 34:3a) Josiah wanted to be like the gold standard in Israel's royal history.

Josiah spent four years seeking God. I believe he did this through prophets and spiritual leaders. He must have sought those who did know God. I bet he spent four years in prayer, talking to God, listening to God. It is the only explanation I have for what he did next.

At 20 years of age, Josiah began an immense reform. He tore up the place, quite literally. Israel was full of hillside pagan worship sites and Asherah poles – Canaanite sacred trees or poles used to worship a fertility goddess. Do I really need to explain in any more detail? Josiah brought down the high places, smashed the Asherah poles, and burned the idols. The Baals were bulldozed, the

incense incinerated, and the poles pulverized. The remains of this idolatry were scattered on the graves of those who had practiced it. Josiah's wrecking crew took the bones of the bad priests and burned them up, too. Everywhere Josiah went, the reform swept up the land.

It took six years to get Israel cleaned up. Some of the parents are thinking, yup, that's sounds like my children's bedrooms! But Josiah wasn't done cleaning. God's house, the temple, was a wreck. At 26 years of age, this was Josiah's next project. While the temple was being cleaned out, the priest found the "book of the law," the words God spoke to Moses. After the secretary read it aloud, Josiah tore his robes. In other words, he was distraught, panicked, sad, angry, and afraid. Josiah consulted a prophetess of God – perhaps even the one who helped him seek the Lord when he was eight. She told him, "Yup, this is bad news. God is going to do punish Judah by exile." But there was a little good news – this would not happen in Josiah's lifetime, because he humbled himself. The prophetess told Josiah, "Your heart was responsive." (2 Chronicles 34:27)

Then Josiah celebrated the Passover – the national holiday for Jewish people, remembering their independence from Egypt. 2nd Chronicles 35:18 sums up Josiah's Passover this way: "The Passover had not been observed like this in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel." It was even better than his great-grandpa's Passover. Everyone was involved. That is a pretty good legacy.

Josiah faced a pretty stiff challenge as a boy. Imagine getting your father's job because he was murdered. Imagine the risk he took to change his country, to bring them back to God.

I believe that today we face a similar problem to Josiah's. The truth is, many people have forsaken God. Many people simply do not know who Jesus is,

what the church stands for, or even why we need grace. Daily we face threats of terrorism, violent crime, and loss of morality. The question is, how will we face it all? What choice do we make in the face of godlessness? How will we face the world? Will we ignore it, or will we work to improve it?

I want to specifically speak to the young people in the room, especially the graduates. What is your choice? Will you seek God? You must come to the realization, as Josiah did, that this is the most important question you will ever answer in your life. The choice you make right here, right now, will impact your future in this life and in eternity.

If you want, you can choose to just have passive faith. You can choose not to invest in your relationship with Jesus, and that will lead you down a path that is easy, popular, and pointless. We can just go along with the flow. But you should know, Jesus said the way that is wide and easy leads to destruction, and the way that is hard and narrow leads to life. (Matthew 7:13-14.) Josiah chose the narrow path, with great risk and great effort, and with great results. What about you?

It is not just the graduates. All of us face the same choice daily. What way will we go? How will we respond to this broken world? How can we choose what God wants, and receive his blessing?

I think we can follow Josiah's plan. It seems pretty straightforward. There are four parts: seek God, clean up the land, find the Book, and celebrate the Passover. Let's break them down.

#1 – Seek God. In other words, PRAY. Talk to God. Find God. Read about God. Seek God with all your heart. At 16 years old, Josiah sought God. Maybe Josiah knew this verse from Jeremiah 29:13: "If you seek God with your whole

heart, you will find him.” Finding God is a good thing. That’s where Josiah started. He sought God.

#2 – Clean up the land. We need to deal with our sin. Hebrews 12:1 says, “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.” When Josiah was king, he took care of his kingdom. Does your spiritual kingdom need spring cleaning? What does your schedule and bank statement say about your priorities? What needs cleaning in your life? Your heart? Your eyes? Your ears? Your habits? Your playlist? Your computer browser?

2nd Chronicles 7:14 contains a great promise directly from God. “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” I would love to see our land healed, wouldn’t you? If so, then we must live like Josiah and seek purity.

#3 – Read the Book. In other words, study the Bible. The B.I.B.L.E.: Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. The Bible is a love letter from God to you. It has fewer pages than the entire Harry Potter series, and it is much more significant to your life. Get a version you can read. Get the Bible app from Lifechurch. <https://www.bible.com/app>. But beware, this book might cause you anguish. Or it might give you hope. You may be challenged, or reassured. The truth is, we don’t read the Bible; the Bible reads us. Let it direct you.

Finally, #4 – Celebrate the Passover. To us today, this means to worship together. Connect with other Christians, like-minded people who also want to follow God. Don’t settle for dead religion. If your church is not following God and the Bible, find one that is. Students, get in on a campus Christian group, like Wesley Foundation, InterVarsity, Campus Crusade, or His House. There are so

many opportunities. For those of us who can no longer attend college, it's simple. Bible study, bible study, bible study. Go to Sunday School. Find a small group. Start one. Get two others and a bible and say, "Let's do this." Find some accountability, and celebrate together. We have six groups in the church right now, not including children's Sunday School and youth group. Join one or start one. It's that simple.

The four things that Josiah did made him a good king. We can do them, too, even though we are not royalty. Seek God. Clean your house. Study God's Word. And worship together. This is something we all can do, and must do, if we are to make a choice to live a life that honors God.

(Lead into a time of prayer for the graduates, followed by prayers of the people.)

Memory verse

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:13

Reflection questions

1. Do you like to clean your house? What is the strangest (or dirtiest) thing you've even found?
2. In what ways do you think God wants us to "clean our land" today?
3. In what ways do you seek God? How could you improve your relationship with Jesus?
4. What corporate worship and celebration do you practice with others? Who helps lead you closer to God?