

The Boy Wonder

II Kings 22:1-13; II Chronicles 34:1-21

Introduction

A few weeks ago, a member of our church e-mailed to me two pages of things kids had to say about Bible stories and Bible geography. Let me share a few of these with you.

- One kid wrote, “Ancient Egypt was inhabited by Mummies and they all wrote in hydraulics. The climate of the Sarah Dessert is such that the people lived elsewhere, so certain areas of the desert were cultivated by irritation.”
- One boy wrote, “The pyramids are a range of mountains between France and Spain. The Egyptians built the pyramids in the shape of a huge triangular cube.” (I will bet his math homework looks a lot like mine used to!)
- Another wrote, “God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Montezuma. Later, Jacob, the son of Isaac, stole his brother’s birth mark.” (That would hurt!)
- And another wrote, “Socrates was a famous Greek teacher who went around giving people advice – they killed him. Then Socrates died from an overdose of wedlock. [This kid meant to refer to hemlock, which was used in a form of execution for well known criminals.] After his death, his career suffered a dramatic decline.”

Kids are terrific!

Recently, I told you about my two and a half year old daughter Charity, saying such wonderful things to me as, “You’re my best ‘fwrend’. We’ll be ‘fwends fowever’.”

Well, my wife got a kick out of something that happened a few days ago. Marsha had driven out of town with Pastor Eisner’s wife to take her kids to Grandma’s. My secretary, Jean, had picked up Charity and my older daughter Candace, from the babysitters and was bringing them to church that afternoon. My eight year old daughter asked Jean, “Do you like my Daddy’s preaching?”

Remembering that she was on the payroll, Jean said, “I sure do.”

My daughter thought a minute and then said, “Well, when my Daddy’s away and Pastor Eisner preaches, do you like his sermons?”

So, Jean lied and said, “I sure do.”

After a short silence, my daughter then asked, “Well, who’s your favorite?”

Not wanting to get too deeply into that subject, Jean hesitated. Then Charity, sitting in the back seat in her car seat, blurted out emphatically, “I like my mommy the best.”

Sometimes funny; sometimes stressful, the adolescent years are some of the most challenging – for children and parents.

As a graduate student, I fulfilled an internship in the field of child psychology. It struck me, as I would sit through sessions with children, how deeply they thought and how capable they were in sizing up situations involving problems. I often forget that myself now, as the father of kids who slam the back door.

There are supposedly, three questions that an adolescent asks and eventually answers, as he moves toward and through his teenage years. I have

observed the same questions being asked by adults, who never really answered them when they were growing up.

I happen to agree with one author, that a mid-life crisis is not really a mid-life crisis; it is more like a second adolescence in an adult who has never answered these very questions earlier in life. And their lifestyle, in many ways, mirrors the life of a young child who must have his or her way. They make one foolish, immature decision after another, often, like adolescents, running away from their responsibilities and their families with little warning.

Three questions asked by adolescents

1. The first question is the question of identity, "Who am I and where do I fit in the world?"
2. The second question is the question of authority, "Who am I going to obey?"
3. The third question is the question of conformity, "What am I going to be like?"

Now the Bible provides the answers to all three of these critical questions.

What a relief and joy it was, as a seventeen year old to say, "My identity is Christ. What I am is a Christian."

The question of authority is also answered in the words of Peter, "I will obey God rather than man."

The question of conformity is also clear. The book of Romans, in chapter 12, verse 2, says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . ." Chapter 8, verse 29, says, ". . . [you who were] predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son . . ."

What is your answer to the three questions?

What is your answer to these three questions?

1. What is your identity; who are you?
2. Who is your authority; who calls the shots in your life; who tells you what is right or wrong?
3. Who do you want to become most like?

When you turn to the Bible for an example of someone who was answering these questions with godly answers, the last place you would ever expect to find it is in the life of an adolescent. Yet, one of the surprises in scripture is the story of a boy named

Josiah, who became King of Judah when most kids are entering the third grade.

A Horrible History

Josiah's story appears in both II Kings and II Chronicles. We will begin today, in the II Chronicles account. And, you do not have to look very long at chapter 33 to discover the fact that this boy had a horrible history.

We have just completed the study of Josiah's grandfather Manasseh, in chapter 21. Manasseh's reign was compared in scripture to that of Ahab and Jezebel. Josiah's father Amon, was also an idolater. There had been fifty years of spiritual famine and the country was totally given over to idolatry.

According to chapter 33, the swirling events that placed Josiah on the throne were incredibly traumatic. Notice the gruesome words of verse 22.

He did evil in the sight of the Lord as Manasseh his father had done, and Amon sacrificed to all the carved images which his father Manasseh had made, and he served them.

Skip to verse 24.

Finally his servants conspired against him and put him to death in his own house.

You can only imagine that Josiah heard the screams that night of terrified servants, as well as a wailing mother. He was at least awakened by the outcry of revenge. Now, look at verse 25.

But the people of the land killed all the conspirators against King Amon, and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place.

What a bloodbath. Perhaps Josiah personally witnessed his father's assassination.

Now this eight year old boy is king! But, with wicked men for a grandfather and father, with fifty years of idolatry, with the entire nation given over to immorality and rebellion against God, and with the beginning of his reign marked by assassination and revenge, what hope would you have for a third grade king?!

A Godly Beginning

Look with me at the startling words of chapter 34, verses 1 and 2.

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. He did right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father . . .

(Amon? No!),

. . . David, and did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

Can you imagine?! What a shock! However, while the Bible does not make the connection, I found it interesting to note that at the same time Josiah began to reign, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum all began their dynamic ministries in Judah.

Now, you need to understand that verse 2 is a categorical statement. Look at that verse again.

He did right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David and did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

That verse refers to Josiah's entire reign, not just what he was like as an eight year old.

Then, in the next few verses, Jeremiah, who is writing these words under inspiration, begins to articulate exactly what Josiah did. He carefully records the year of Josiah's reign, as if to make his point repeatedly throughout this chapter, "This is what a young man can do for God – when he has answered the questions of identity, and authority, and conformity."

Three illustrations

If you would like to know what that kind of person looks like, God is ready to show you. Three characteristics are illustrated in the life of this young man, Josiah. Let me give them to you.

An insatiable spiritual hunger

1. The first illustration is of Josiah's insatiable spiritual hunger.

Look at verse 3a.

For in the eighth year of his reign while he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David . . .

I suggest you circle the words "the eighth year" in your text. God is not including that fact because he just wants to stump us on Bible Trivia games. You could write in the margin of your Bible that Josiah was sixteen years old. If he began to reign when he

was eight, then in the eighth year of his reign, he would be getting his chariot license. Just think, his mother would not have to take him to any more sword fighting lessons or heads of state meetings!

Now, when a young person turns sixteen, what do most parents think? It is a time when people seem to say, "Oh no! Well, I hope they make it through without too much damage. Let's hope for the best?!"

Why do we think like that? According to the Children's Defense Fund in 1990, the reason is because:

- every day in the United States, 2,795 teenage girls get pregnant (that is over one million a year!);
- every day, 1,106 teenage girls have abortions;
- every day, 1,629 teenagers are placed in adult jails;
- every day, 623 teenagers contract syphilis;
- every day, 211 teenagers are arrested for drug possession;
- every day, 437 teenagers are arrested for drunken driving (by the way, drunk driving is the number one cause of death among teens);
- every day, 1,512 teenagers drop out of school;
- every day, 2,989 teenagers watch their parents get divorced.

You might say that, in our society, teenagers do not have a chance. They are surrounded by wickedness, and wrong pleasures and temptations abound. Well, Josiah is a sixteen year old who, at this juncture in his life, the Bible tells us in verse 3,

. . . began to seek the God of his father David . . .

The Hebrew verb "to seek," means, "to carefully, diligently look for". In the book of Chronicles, this verb most often refers to looking for God in every life situation. In other words, Josiah began to diligently, carefully, passionately look for God in every situation that confronted him!

I want to ask you to look around, wherever you are, and look for the color blue. Go ahead, even stare at the person next to you, and look around you for anything blue. You will probably see a lot of blue. But, if I had not asked you to do that and later, I asked you, "Did you see all the blue stuff there? You were

surrounded by it.” you would say, “I didn’t notice a lot of blue.”

That is like most Christians. If you ask them, “Have you noticed God in the circumstances of your life?” and they answer, “No.” it is because they are not really looking for Him.

This sixteen year old set out on a pursuit of God. In every responsibility, pressure, and decision, he sought after God. Josiah had an insatiable appetite for God.

Uncompromising spiritual courage

2. The second illustration is of Josiah’s uncompromising spiritual courage.

Look at verses 3b through 5.

. . . and in the twelfth year . . .

(circle those words “twelfth year” – he is now twenty years of age),

. . . he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, the carved images, and the molten images. They tore down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars that were high above them he chopped down; also the Asherim, the carved images, and the molten images he broke in pieces and ground to powder and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. Then he burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and purged Judah and Jerusalem.

This was headline news! Josiah, now at the age of a junior in college, destroys the industry of idolatry in his kingdom.

It is apparent that Jeremiah was courageous in his choice of words to describe Josiah’s actions. Look again at verse 3b, “. . . he began to purge . . .” and at verse 4, “They tore down the altars . . . the incense altars . . . he chopped them down . . . the molten images he broke in pieces and ground to powder and scattered it on the graves . . .”.

Where does the courage come from to run counter to your culture; to take the heat of criticism and ridicule? It comes from answering the questions:

- “Who am I?” with, “I am a Christian.”
- “Who is my authority?” with “My authority is the word of God.”

- “Who am I trying to be like?” with “I certainly am not trying to be like the crowd. I am trying to be like the God of David.”

It is Jesus Christ that you are becoming like every time you say, “No!” to evil and “Yes!” to godliness.

Unshakable spiritual conviction

3. The third illustration is of Josiah’s unshakable spiritual conviction.

Look at verse 8.

Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, . . .

(he is twenty-six years old now),

. . . when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah an official of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God.

It was not enough to tear down; something needed to be built up; that is, the temple.

Application

Let me give a couple of applications that are based on Josiah’s characteristics.

The potential for a young person to impact his generation is possible, so do not underestimate them

1. First, the potential for a young person to impact his generation is possible, so do not underestimate them.

From the time Josiah was eight years old to the time he was twenty-six years old, Josiah stood for God.

This is a message to every young person – you are not too young to live for God. Perhaps you have used the excuse, “Well, my parents don’t live for the Lord, why should I?”

Take a good look at Josiah. He had a terrible history with a wicked father.

This is also a message to every parent – do not set your sights too low; do not underestimate the spiritual potential of your children.

Do not get in God’s way! If you have never sat down with your eight year old or your eighteen year old and said, “Listen, the most important thing you can ever do with your life is live for God; you belong

to Him.” then you are not helping them answer the identity, authority, and conformity questions. In fact, you are a stumbling block; you are in the way.

You are a stumbling block; you are in the way! Who knows, parents, you might have a Josiah in your house, whom God will use to bring about a reformation in the land.

The opportunity to develop spiritual convictions at a young age is a biblical fact, so encourage them

2. The second application is that the opportunity to develop spiritual convictions at a young age is a biblical fact, so encourage them.

Do you want to know the best way to help young people answer the questions of identity, authority, and conformity? It is for moms and dads to have already answered the questions themselves.

I want to read information from a paragraph summary of a book entitled, *The Image Makers*, by William Meyers. This book is about Madison Avenue’s most widely used categorization of people. They have put people into five basic categories and determine their advertising strategies accordingly. Let me give three of the categories.

- The socially conscious achievers (twenty percent of the population).

These are people who care more about inner peace and environmental safety than about success. They are looking for personal, not necessarily professional fulfillment. They will try anything from Zen to acupuncture. They are Madison Avenue’s toughest challenge.

- The emulators (fifteen percent of the population).

These are people who are not so set in their ways; a small but impressionable group of young people in desperate search of an identity and a place in the adult working world. They will do almost anything to fit in. They lack self-confidence and are discouraged about their prospects. They are into hedonism (self-

satisfaction; instant gratification), and finding solutions to their post-adolescent dilemmas.

Imagine millions of young people entering the adult world, still seeking an answer to their identity; to the question, “Who am I?”

- The emulator achievers (twenty percent of the population).

These are America’s materialists, who have it made for the most part. They are a bit frustrated, just below the top rung on the ladder. Though affluent, they are somewhat dissatisfied with not having more.

Ladies and gentlemen, Madison Avenue has developed a strategy based upon the fact that at least fifty-five percent of our adult population do not know the answer to the simple questions, “Who am I? Who should I listen to? and What am I supposed to be like?”

And the pressure is on. One of the most astounding statements concerning peer pressure I have ever heard came from the lips of a Christian teenager. He was in the process of impacting his high school for the cause of Jesus Christ. He and others with him, were holding Bible studies and prayer meetings. This teenager was being interviewed on a Christian program. The host eventually asked the typical question, “Well, how do you handle the peer pressure?”

This kid shot back this answer, “Sir, on my high school campus, I am the peer pressure.”

He had answered the question of identity, authority, and conformity.

Once you answer the question of who you are, you will profoundly impact the world where you do what you do.

We, having our identity in God, obeying the authority of His word, have confidence that our Father has predestined us to be conformed into the image of His Son. And as a result, like Josiah, we, *children and adults*, can profoundly impact our wandering generation to the only way, the only truth, the only life worth living.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 7/14/1996 by Stephen Davey.

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