



Needed: A Tender Heart

Reformation Prelude: What God Did through Josiah, Part 1

2 Chronicles 34:27

David Sunday

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Heavenly Father, You've heard our prayer as we've sung. Teach us, Lord, full obedience, holy reverence, true humility. Test our thoughts and our attitudes in the radiance of Your purity. Your Word is a shining light into the darkness of our hearts. It illuminates us as a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths. And through Your Word Your Spirit transforms us. As we behold Your glory, especially in the face of Your Son Jesus, we are being changed. We ask today urgently, Lord, for that work of change to be happening in our lives. Move us a step closer to Jesus today—every one of us. We need this, Lord. We don't want to stay where we're at, and we don't want to fall back. We want to press on and lay hold of that for which You laid hold of us in Christ. We ask that You would move mightily through Your Word in our hearts today, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Open your Bible to a book that we don't turn to very often—2 Chronicles. I remember when I was a student at Moody Bible Institute, one of the hardest classes was Old Testament Survey, and one of the hardest parts of Old Testament Survey was going through 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles, and trying to keep straight all the names of the kings of Israel and Judah—a lot of which started with "J." Names like Jeroboam, Jehu, Joram, Jehoahaz, Jehoshaphat, and many others.

But there is a name that rises to the top of that list. Some of you have named your sons after this noble and godly king. I want to speak to you today and next week, and maybe even the week after as well, about this king—Josiah. Second Kings 23:25 says of Josiah, "There was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses." What a commendation! But it's not what you expect when you look at Josiah's pedigree.

His grandfather was the notoriously wicked King Manasseh, who ruled for 55 years in Jerusalem doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord according to all the abominations of the nations. Then after Manasseh came King Amon, Manasseh's son, Josiah's father. Amon was so bad his reign only lasted for two years, then the servants of his house rose up to assassinate him.

So with a grandfather like Manasseh and a father like Amon, we'd expect from Josiah something like we've seen in North Korea's supreme leader these last 70 years: Kim Il-sung, followed by Kim Jong-il, who is succeeded now by Kim Jong-un— going from bad to worse. That's what we'd expect.

But King Josiah is not like his father or his grandfather. I want you to see how he is described in 2 Chronicles 34:27. These are the words of a prophetess named Huldah, who's speaking to the servants of King Josiah, telling them what they should say to the king. She describes King Josiah in verse 27 as a man whose heart was tender. His heart was tender. Let's read what Huldah said more fully, beginning in verse 26. Hear the Word of God:

²⁶ But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ²⁷ "Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard his words against this place and its inhabitants, and you have humbled yourself before me and have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the Lord. ²⁸ Behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place and its inhabitants." And they brought back word to the king.

So there is a judgment coming through the exile of the southern kingdom of Judah. We know they're going to be taken away by the Babylonians, but that judgment is going to be delayed now. A time of mercy is going to prevail over the lives of the people in Josiah's kingdom. And the reason judgment is being delayed and mercy is being poured out, according to the prophetess Huldah, is because King Josiah's heart was tender.

I want us to dwell on these words: "Because your heart was tender..." I want to commend to us today this precious and rare virtue—tenderness of heart. I'd like each one of us to search our hearts, "*For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him*" (2 Chronicles 16:9). God's eyes are on active surveillance right now. As God's eyes look upon the Fox Valley, I pray that what He would find in me and in you and in this congregation is a people whose hearts are tender before Him.

As we sit in the presence of God today with His Word ministering to us, I'd like each one of us to be asking the Lord, "Could You say this of me, dear God? When You see me, do You see a heart that is tender toward You? Am I marked more by tenderness of heart or by hardness of heart?" How do you know if your heart is tender?

The Puritan Richard Sibbes said the characteristics of a tender heart are these:

- sensitive to God’s touch
- pliable in God’s hands
- responsive to God’s direction
- yielded to Him
- troubled by the least sin.

I like this illustration he gives: “As water, when it begins to freeze, will not endure anything.” In other words, it won’t hold up anything. It won’t even hold up the weight of a pin. If you drop a nail into the water, it will sink. But after a while, as the water is freezing, it “will bear the weight of a cart,” or in our Midwestern idiom, a snowmobile or a pickup truck. You can drive on to the lake in the middle of the winter.

Even so at the beginning, the heart being tender, trembles at the least sin, and will not bear with even one; but when it once gives way to sins against conscience, it becomes so frozen that it can endure any sin, and so becomes more and more hard.

This is a helpful illustration. Wouldn’t it be a striking way for us as a church to bring glory to God by showing that God’s Spirit is transforming our hearts from their natural hardness to supernatural tenderness? Isn’t this what the beauty and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ should produce in us—hearts that are tender toward Him? So this morning, from the story of King Josiah, I want us to look at three things:

- The making of tender heart.
- The motives of a tender heart.
- The means by which tenderness of heart is cultivated.

The Making of a Tender Heart

We see the making of a tender heart in 2 Chronicles 34:1-3:

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father.

For Josiah, the making of a tender heart started at a young age—when he was just 16 years old. With all the power of the kingdom at his beck and call, at a time when he could have been pursuing the lusts of the flesh and the lusts of the eyes and the boastful pride of life (1 John

2:16)—as a lot of 16-year-olds are doing—Josiah chose instead to flee youthful passions, pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. That was Josiah’s disposition at the age of 16.

He’s seeking after God, which implies a strong, intentional and purposeful devotion. Josiah is not just fitting a few devotions into his crowded social life. He is consumed with a desire to know God. This is occupying his lowly heart. He is set on seeking God’s face. When you consider how many obstacles were in his way—his family background, the culture of godlessness that was all around him and his own lack of biblical training—it truly is amazing that Josiah set his heart to seek the God of David. What caused him to do this?

The second thing we see in the making of a tender heart is that it always begins with God Himself. God the Holy Spirit is supernatural. By nature, our hearts are not sensitive to the workings of God by His Spirit. They are not pliable in the hands of God. They are not yielding to the touch of God. That’s not the kind of heart we’re born with. Sin makes our hearts stony—as insensitive, unpliant and unyielding as a stone is. But God can take these hearts of stone and make them tender, so we’re now sensitive to Him, wanting to be molded and shaped into His purposes. We will want to yield to His leadership and His control of our lives.

This is one of the promises of the gospel for which Jesus Christ shed His blood. He died so that this promise of the new covenant can belong to you and me. In Ezekiel 36:26, God says, *“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”* These are promises from God that Jesus died to secure for us.

And this what God has supernaturally done in the heart of King Josiah. As Josiah is growing up, he begins to hear God saying to him, “Seek My face.” He responds to God, “Your face, O Lord, I will seek. Hide not Your face from me. I need to know You, God. I’m intent on pursuing You” (Psalm 27:7-10).

Friends, as we think about the making of a tender heart, I would urge you to plead with God to create a tender heart within you. This is urgent. Ask Him to do this. I want to speak today to those in our church who are young. Maybe you’re 16 or 17 years old, a college student, a middle school student. Could this be the year when the living God Who created you takes hold of your heart and arrests you by His sovereign power? Maybe He will shine His light into your heart in such a way that you will say, “Oh, I want more than anything to know You, God. I want to seek You with my whole heart, soul, mind and strength. I don’t want to turn to the right or left. I want to learn Your ways, O God. I want to seek after You.”

Young people, I urge you—why wait? Why wait until those seeds of indwelling sin that are in all our hearts are watered—and then the noxious, poisonous weeds start to grow up and choke out the joy you can find in Jesus Christ and in Him alone? Why wait for a better time to seek the Lord, because there is no better time than right this very moment? Whether you're 90 years old or six years old or 16, there is no better time to seek the Lord than right this very moment.

Why not heed the call of Scripture from Ecclesiastes 12:1— *“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come...”*—when you'll say, “I no longer have pleasure in these days.” In Proverbs 8:17 (KJV), God says, *“Those that seek me early shall find me.”* Why not respond to Him, “O God, You are my God. Early will I seek you.” Plead with God to give you a heart that is tender, sensitive, pliable and yielding to His Spirit, a heart that runs in the path of His commandments, that hastens and does not delay to obey Him, a heart that is rescued right now from the perils of hardness.

Just think about some of the precious parts of our bodies, like our eyes. We protect our eyes. We wear sunglasses. Back in August, many of us were running to Amazon: How do I get those eclipse glasses? I can't find them anywhere, and I want to be able to look at the Great American Eclipse on August 21st. But I won't dare look up there without special protection over my eyes, because they're precious.”

How much more precious than your eyes is your heart? How jealous should we be to protect our hearts from being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin?

As I was preparing this message, I was reminded of a song that has really touched me. It came out in 1987, so I was 16 or 17 years old. It was by a group that was really, really cool back in the day—Petra. But if you go to YouTube and listen to this song now, it's highly synthesized and it doesn't sound so cool anymore. But I listened to it yesterday and it brought back the same tender feelings I had back then, remembering how I would pray that the reality of this song would be true in my life. The song says:

Don't let your heart be hardened
Don't let your love grow cold
May it always stay so childlike
May it never grow too old

Don't let your heart be hardened
May you always know the cure
Keep it broken before Jesus
Keep it thankful, meek and pure

Let His love rain down upon you
Breaking up your fallow ground
Let it loosen all the binding
'Til only tenderness is found

Don't let your heart be hardened. Don't let your love grow cold. Young people, I urge you to pray like that, to seek God like Josiah did at age 16. And church, I ask you to resolve to pray for our children and grandchildren. Pray for the youth of our church. Pray for the children who are being ministered to back in the classrooms. Many came to Awana this past Wednesday night. Wayne reported over 100 had signed up. That's more than we've seen in a long time. There are a lot of people working faithfully to minister the Scriptures into the hearts of our children.

Pray for the youth ministry. Pray for those who are laboring and serving as educators in the schools throughout our community. What an opportune place that is to minister to the hearts of youth. Friends, pray earnestly, because our youth are not going to drift into seeking the Lord. That's not the way we drift. The spiritual inertia of our culture is not going in the direction of King Josiah. It's not going in a Godward direction. A status quo, business as usual approach to raising children in this culture is not going to be enough to withstand the tsunami of unbelief and godlessness that is engulfing our nation.

But friends, the God of Pentecost—Who set tongues on fire and Who sent a mighty rushing wind—is the same God Who can raise our youth above the prevailing tide of our culture and fill them with passion for God. I urge you, friends, to pray for what happens in that youth room on Wednesday nights. Pray that God would so move in the hearts of those who lead, all the way down through the high schoolers and the middle schoolers, that we would see nothing short of a widespread revival amongst the youth of our church. Pray that they would be gripped with a passion for seeking the face of God.

Pray for a youth ministry full of leaders and youth who are sensitive to God's call, who are pliable in God's hands, who are yielding to God's direction. Church, would you make that a matter of your earnest prayers? Would you be inspired by what you see God doing in making a tender heart in a 16-year-old king whose dad was murdered when he was six, and whose grandfather was one of the most wicked leaders Judah had ever known? Pray, because God is the Maker of a tender heart.

And if you're 90 years old today and your heart is stony, God can still turn your heart and make it new. It doesn't have to take long at all. God is a God Who takes away the heart of stone and makes it tender (Ezekiel 36:26).

The Motives of a Tender Heart

We can discern the motives of Josiah's heart by watching the actions he took. A tender heart is always manifested in zeal to obey God's commandments. It will always show itself in actions that are intended to restore to God the glory that belongs to Him alone. That's what we see taking place in Josiah's life, beginning in the 12th year of his reign, when he was just 20 years old. Look at the second part of 2 Chronicles 34:3.

"In the twelfth year," when he was 20 years old, *"he began to purge..."* Now I want you to pay attention to the strong verbs here: *"...he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim..."*—these were fertility poles that they worshipped before and did sensual things before in the hope that they would be made fruitful—*"...and the carved and the metal images. And they chopped down the altars of the Baals in his presence..."* Just imagine this young 20-year-old king watching them as they came to the altar of the Baals, saying, "Chop them down! Get rid of them!"

"And he cut down the incense altars that stood above them. And he broke in pieces the Asherim and the carved and the metal images, and he made dust of them"—pulverized them—*"and scattered it over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them..."* because idols ultimately kill and destroy your life. *"He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem."* All of this was happening in the southern kingdom.

But then concerning the northern kingdom, which has already been taken into exile, Josiah says, "I'm not going to stop down here in the south. I'm going to reunite the kingdom under the ways of Yahweh. We are going to be reunited again in the worship of God." So he starts moving northward to *"...the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali. In their ruins all around, he broke down the altars and beat the Asherim and the images into powder and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel"*—he northern kingdom. *"Then he returned to Jerusalem."*

The first motive of a tender heart is that such a heart is intent on purging oneself and one's fellowship of all false gods. we are enticed by the world in so many ways. That was part of what drew these people to these Asherim and Baals—the enticement, like we're enticed by the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life (1 John 2:16). But even more than the enticement of these gods was the allure of the sense of security they offered. The people worshipped these gods because they believed they would ensure fertility, success and safety.

Likewise, how tempted I am to run after riches, thinking I can provide for myself, or man's empty praise, thinking that in the approval of men I will find my joy and my identity. I need constantly to be purging my heart of these false gods. I need to be saying, "You, Lord, are

my inheritance now and always,” because when we run after the gods of this world, it has a heart-hardening effect on us. It distracts us from seeking the treasure that can only be found in Christ. A tender heart longs for a closer walk with God and says, in the words of William Cowper:

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.

So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb.

Purge my heart, God, from all that keeps me from going after You.

Second, a tender heart is determined to pursue the worship of God in Spirit and truth in a positive and purposeful way. That's what's going on in this chapter. At age 16, Josiah starts seeking, then at age 20 he's taking action to demolish all the idols and all the high places that competed with the pure worship of God. Finally, after he has cleansed the land and the house, in the 18th year of his reign, he says it is now time to repair the temple. In 2 Chronicles 34:8-13 we read the description of the repair process. Funds are brought to restore the temple to the condition it should be in, because it had become dilapidated.

Walter Kaiser said it had been about 250 years since a comprehensive renovation and repair had been made on the temple. Just think about that. How long has the White House been around? Has it even been 250 years? And we've done many renovation and repair projects on the White House. There are probably not very many of us who are old enough to remember President Truman, but during his presidency about 70 years ago, he had to totally move out of the White House just so they could restore it to good condition.

But in 250 years, no one cared enough about that temple—or about the God Who is worshipped in that temple. But Josiah said, “That's going to change.” His heart is moved by a desire to pursue the worship of God in Spirit and truth in a positive and purposeful way.

The Means by which Tenderness of Heart is Cultivated

While that temple repair project is going on, something remarkable happens. Let's read, beginning at 2 Chronicles 34:14. You're going to see a remarkable discovery. And when you make this remarkable discovery in your own life—and when the church sees how the thing that

was discovered in Josiah's day still is remarkable in our day—you'll see this is the means by which God keeps our hearts tender before Him:

¹⁴ While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiyah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord given through Moses. ¹⁵ Then Hilkiyah answered and said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord." And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan. ¹⁶ Shaphan brought the book to the king, and further reported to the king, "All that was committed to your servants they are doing. ¹⁷ They have emptied out the money that was found in the house of the Lord and have given it into the hand of the overseers and the workmen." ¹⁸ Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it before the king.

¹⁹ And when the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes. ²⁰ And the king commanded Hilkiyah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, ²¹ "Go, inquire of the Lord for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book."

Now, you have to imagine that it's been 200 years in this church, and no one has read a Bible in church all these years. Then someone in the utility room way in the back finds one of these Bibles like we have in the chair racks. So he comes to you and says, "You can't believe what I found back there. I've been reading it and I think we're in trouble because we have not been following the words of this Book."

What an amazing discovery this was for King Josiah. Remember, from age 16 through 26, he had been seeking the Lord earnestly without a copy of the Scriptures. What would your prayer life be like if you didn't have this Book? How earnest would you be in pursuing God if you couldn't hear the Word preached? We have plenty of Bibles and the Word is preached in our church every week, but do we prize this precious privilege?

Some scholars think the book that was found was the scroll of Deuteronomy. How long do you think it takes to read Deuteronomy aloud in the presence of the king? Two or three hours? King Josiah dropped everything and listened. Nothing was more important than this. What if I said to you, "Next Sunday in church, we're going to do nothing but read Deuteronomy

aloud, and take our time doing it. Don't put your roast in the oven, because this is going to take two or three hours. Be ready to stay in church for a long time"? How many of you would come?

Maybe it wasn't just Deuteronomy. Walter Kaiser thinks it was the first five books of Moses that were found. Do you know how long it takes to read Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Number and Deuteronomy aloud? Ten to twelve hours. But the king said, "Nothing is more important than this. I rejoice at Your Word like one who finds great spoil. Your Word is worth more to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. I open my mouth and pant with longing for Your commands, because Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

Friends, it's important that we understand that Josiah had been seeking the Lord for ten years before the Word was brought to him. The Word was God's reward for a life that was devoted to seeking Him. And the same is true today.

I love how Mike Bullmore puts it: "Those who seek God are rewarded by God in the pages of this Book." Friends, if you seek God with an earnest heart, God will reward you in the pages of this Book by showing you great and mighty things that you do not know right now. He will reveal His face to you, especially in Jesus Christ, because the greatest reward in this Book—and the greatest place where our hearts are tenderized—is by beholding the love of Christ. It's revealed in the pages of the Scriptures.

As we behold Christ and His gospel, our hearts become like wax before the sun. They melt. The discovery of this Book is an answer to what God had already said in 2 Chronicles 7:14: *"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."* Friends, the primary way by which tenderness of heart is cultivated is by prizing being pierced by the Word of God. A tender-hearted person is someone who prizes being pierced by the Word of God. Is that true of you? Do you prize being pierced by God's Word? Because God's Word has piercing power.

We see it in the king's response. He's been earnest about following God, but as he hears the words of the law of God (in verse 19), he tears his clothes. He's undone. He's falling under the weight of the majesty of God's holy Word. He's sensing the gravity of God's holiness. He is humbling himself before the Lord and he wants to hear more. So he seeks out the prophetess Huldah, who declares to him, *"Thus says the Lord..."* He hears a word of mercy and a word of hope about a God Who will heal and a God Who will help His people when they repent and turn to Him.

So Josiah calls the people together and leads them in repentance, and great mercy is shown by God. We'll look at that more next week. But for today, I want us to remember where it

all begins. It begins with a tender heart. Friends, look at verse 27 again. Would you focus your mind and heart on those words? *“Because your heart was tender.”* Can that be said of you today?

Lord, do You see in me a heart that prizes being pierced by Your Word? Lord, do You see in me a heart that is humble and broken and repentant over the least sin—my sin, the sins of Your people?

Because, dear ones, there is mercy for broken, tender-hearted sinners. And that mercy comes in the form of God’s healing and God’s help. If you are feeling a little out of touch with God today—or maybe a lot out of touch—but you feel it, take heart. It’s a sign that God is at work in you. He’s revealing to you that some calcification is building up in your heart. It’s time to let the love of Jesus rain down upon you, breaking up your fallow ground. It’s time to let Him break the bindings until only tenderness is found. And He does just that.

The difference between a true child of God and one who is unsaved is that a true child of God is aware when hardness is setting in—and we hate it and we want it to change. Richard Sibbes put it graphically when he wrote:

The child of God has not total and final hardness of heart, but has a sensibleness of it—he feels and sees it. Total hardness doesn’t feel anything—but a Christian that has hardness of heart does feel that he has it, as a man that has the stone in his bladder feels and knows that he has a stone.

Anyone who’s gone through that knows it won’t be ignored. There is a difference between hardness of heart and a hard heart. The child of God may have hardness of heart, but not a hard heart. Because the child of God brings his heart to the Word of God, which pierces the heart and breaks up the fallow ground, doing angioplasty on the calcifications that are building up there. The child of God, coming to the Word of God, beholds in it the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. As he sees the love of Christ Who was lifted up on the cross—dying for one who so little deserved it, but pouring out love so amazing, so divine—finds his heart melting like wax before the sun. Jesus died to purchase a tender heart for you. He died to take away the heart of stone and give you a heart that is tender.

So let’s call on His name. Let’s marvel at the wrath that Jesus bore. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, God’s wrath is not delayed merely for 13 years, as it was in Josiah’s time, but for all eternity. Let’s let our hearts be melted before Him.

Meditate on the words to this song, praying that the Lord would give you a heart that’s tender before Him:

O great God of highest heaven
Occupy my lowly heart
Own it all and reign supreme
Conquer every rebel power
Let no vice or sin remain
That resists Your holy war
You have loved and purchased me
Make me Yours forevermore

I was blinded by my sin
Had no ears to hear Your voice
Did not know Your love within
Had no taste for heaven's joys
Then Your Spirit gave me life
Opened up Your Word to me
Through the gospel of Your Son
Gave me endless hope and peace

Help me now to live a life
That's dependent on Your grace
Keep my heart and guard my soul
From the evils that I face
You are worthy to be praised
With my every thought and deed
O great God of highest heaven
Glorify Your Name through me

(O Great God by Bob Kauflin)

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

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