

GAME CHANGER

2 Kings 22:1-2; 23:21-25

Rev. John Park

Strive for his kingdom and his righteousness

Many of you know that one of my favourite scripture verses is:

“But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:33

This was the key verse that convinced me to pursue the path of ministry and ever since then I have always been interested in knowing how to strive for his kingdom and his righteousness. In my restless investigation, I discovered in the Bible that God wants us to fulfill it through *his church* and the key factor here is *leadership*. As much as the Bible is about God and his people, you will quickly discover that virtually all stories are focused around a few individuals who were identified as leaders, such as Jesus, Paul, Moses, Daniel, Nehemiah and others. Through these few individuals, God has initiated many incredible reformations and transformations that impacted all kinds of people. We, Presbyterians, are the product of the Protestant Reformation, which was led by a few individuals, like Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Leadership

Through a number of books and courses I have studied, the definition of leadership is this:

Leaders inspire and move people to adapt to change and to rise above circumstances to fulfill the vision and mission of the group.

How well you accomplish this role depends on the quality and effectiveness of your leadership. Furthermore, you may realize it already, but this leadership responsibility is not limited to those who sit on leadership positions; anyone can be leaders, because anyone can use their gifts, resources and influence to inspire and move other people.

The important questions are rather these:

1. *Do you know the vision and mission of your group?*

This does not apply only to this church, but also to your workplace, your home or any groups, to which you belong. For instance, if you don't have a vision for your home or it is simply getting the ends met each day and surviving, you will not go anywhere and achieve the awesome goals God perhaps has for your home.

2. *How can you use your gifts, resources and influence to inspire/move people to fulfill these visions and missions you know for the group?*

For example, one of the important missions my wife and I feel for our home is to raise our son to become someone God wants him to be, a man who is filled with compassion and God's Spirit. In order for this vision to

be realized, my wife and I often communicate about what steps and actions we need to take in order for us to provide a good, healthy and safe environment for him to grow in, and this includes our parenting skills, discipline, financial plan, education and many others. My wife and I also have different gifts, skills and characters that have to work together for the betterment of our son.

I hope these questions make sense to you, because our church’s leadership team, session and staff, are working together to ask these questions to each other and to the congregation and we feel we need to work together if we truly believe we are put together here for God’s wonderful purpose.

Leadership and Change

Now, I would like to go back to the definition I described earlier:

“Leaders inspire and move people to adapt to change and to rise above circumstances to fulfill the vision and mission of the group.”

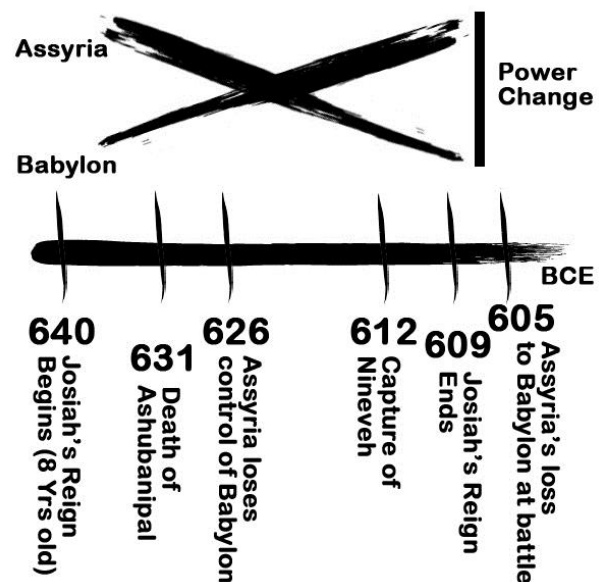
Now, I’m deriving this definition from many experts and scholars on business and leadership. For instance, from Harvard business school, Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky produced a number of books on leadership and they define leadership as *“the process of adaptive work, elevating followers by discussing and aligning value systems to face reality.”* Anyone who is in business or has some scholarly knowledge on leadership would agree that the terms such as *“adaptive”* and *“change”* are critical in our understanding of leadership. But, I would like to challenge this definition based on how leadership is often practiced in the Bible, and my hope and prayer is that you will gain the understanding of spiritual leadership that is shown by King Josiah and apply it to your own circumstances.

King Josiah and Change

If you want to talk about leadership in the face of change, King Josiah is the best example in the Bible. Let’s read again the first two verses:

“Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem... He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.” 2 Kings 22:1-2

Let me give you some historical background to appreciate what these verses present. During his reign from 640 to 609 B.C.E., the surrounding countries were going through a massive change of power and influence. Basically, the brutal empire, *Assyria* (remember Nineveh from the last week’s sermon? It’s their city) was losing its power to the newly emerging empire, *Babylon*. Josiah and his country were caught in the power game of these two empires plus Egypt. Talking about being in the wrong place at the wrong time! You’re located at the central location in Mesopotamia and these big empires are coming to harass this poor 8-year-old king with the question: are you for us or against us. How do you lead your nation in this political/international chaos?



King Josiah and Family Background

Another big historical factor is the wicked works of Josiah's previous kings; we're talking about his father and grandfather. His father was Amon, and the Bible says,

"[Amon] did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done. He walked in all the way in which his father walked, served the idols that his father served, and worshiped them." 2 Kings 21:20-21

What did then his father Manasseh do?

"[Manasseh] did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, following the abominable practices of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he erected altars for Baal, made a sacred pole, as King Ahab of Israel had done, worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them." 2 Kings 21:2-3

In fact, Josiah's grandfather, Manasseh, was the very reason why God, according to the Bible, chose to let Judah fall. (c.f. 2 Kings 23:26).

"Still the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him." 2 Kings 23:26

That's how evil the deeds of Manasseh were before God. And we have this 8-year-old boy, Josiah, who was raised in the family of these wicked kings. I believe he had every right to blame his family background or the international affairs his country was put in at the time if he failed to lead the nation in fulfilling God's vision and mission. And yet, the Scripture says,

"[Josiah] did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left." 2 Kings 22:2

He had all the reasons, backgrounds and factors that could lead him to failure in leadership, and yet he managed to become one of the greatest kings in Judah's history. How did he do this?

Josiah's Reformation

Let me briefly explain to you what he actually did during his reign. He began to seek the God of David in the eighth year of his reign and to remove the idolatrous high places from Judah and Jerusalem in the twelfth (c.f. 2 Chronicles 34:3)

"For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still a boy, he began to seek the God of his ancestor David, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the sacred poles, and the carved and the cast images." 2 Chronicles 34:3

Notice his age when all these were taking place.

Discovery of the Book

The temple purification began in his eighteenth year, at which time the book of the covenant was discovered (c.f. 2 Chronicles 34:8,14).

“In the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God. While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the Lord, the priest Hilkiyah found the book of the law of the Lord given through Moses.” 2 Chronicles 34:8,14

Many scholars believe this book to be Deuteronomy for many good reasons. But, how could they lose the whole book in the temple? Well, according to the Law, the book of Deuteronomy was supposed to be kept beside the Ark of the Covenant (c.f. Deuteronomy 31:26).

“Take this book of the law and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God; let it remain there as a witness against you.” Deuteronomy 31:26

But Josiah’s grandfather, Manasseh, would not have wanted it there nor would the priests have wanted to provoke him by leaving it there. So, the book was probably thrown into the corner of the temple storehouse, and as they were clearing out all the articles of idolatry from the temple, they found this book buried under them (c.f. 2 Kings 22:8).

“The high priest Hilkiyah said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord.” When Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, he read it.” 2 Kings 22:8

As the King reads this book of the Covenant, his heart was tormented by the realization that he and his country had been ignorant of God’s ways (c.f. 2 Kings 22:11).

“When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes.” 2 Kings 22:11

He then inquired the prophetess Huldah to give God’s words regarding their ignorance of the Law. She received the word, and sure enough the curse of the covenant would rest on them. So Josiah immediately begins reformation. He first called all his people, read the Scripture to them and renewed the Covenant between Judah and God. He then ordered all idolatries to be removed throughout the country.

Josiah’s Passover

Then, he ordered the whole nation to observe the Passover (this is the celebration of Israel’s exile from Egypt) according to the Scripture.

Notice how the Scripture recorded this:

“No such Passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, even during all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah; but in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was kept to the Lord in Jerusalem.” 2 Kings 23:22-23

Now, hold on a second; I have to pause here, because I know this is not the only time Passover was celebrated in Israel (Some versions translated these verses as if Passover had never been celebrated prior to this day). For example, 2 Chronicles 30 describes in details how Hezekiah, Josiah's great grandfather, prepared and celebrated Passover. Let me read some verses in 2 Chronicles 30, where this Hezekiah's Passover was described. From verse 13, it says,

"A very large crowd of people assembled in Jerusalem to celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread in the second month." 2 Chronicles 30:13

Verse 15:

"They slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed and consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings to the temple of the Lord." 2 Chronicles 30:15

They were ashamed because the people who were slaughtering the lamb were not following the Scripture. According to the Scripture, the priests and the Levites were the ones who should have slaughtered the lamb, but at the time people let everyone do it. Then, verse 16:

"Then they took up their regular positions as prescribed in the Law of Moses the man of God." 2 Chronicles 30:16

So, the priests and Levites finally decided to take their positions and do what the Law told them to do according to the Scripture. Then, verse 18:

"Although most of the many people who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover, contrary to what was written." 2 Chronicles 30:18

Notice how Hezekiah's Passover was not following the Scripture. In fact, virtually all Passovers in Israel never followed the Scripture; they followed their own customs and traditions, but never bothered to consult the Scripture. In contrast, King Josiah consulted the Scripture and celebrated the Passover according to the Scripture, and this is why today's reading says,

"No such Passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, even during all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah." 2 Kings 23:22

This brings me to my last point.

Change According to the Scripture

The true change that pleases our God happens when we consult, study and follow the Scripture. Martin Luther, John Calvin and many Reformers in the 16th century consulted and studied the Scripture, and in order to follow the teachings of the Scripture, they had to challenge the existing traditions and authorities. If we truly want to be leaders in the areas God has called us into, we have to consult and study the Scripture and often be willing to challenge our current traditions and authorities. I have to challenge myself everyday with what the Bible tells about God's will and purpose. For example, many people assume that the new contemporary worship service, which we may potentially have, would be a so-called "Seekers' service." But, we have to consult the Bible if it is

in accordance with God's will in the Scripture. I am willing to challenge everything in worship service in order for myself and the worship service to be in line with the Scripture. Can we have a worship service that is so scripturally-based and yet brings a great revival in the younger generation? Yes, I believe it is possible, because Josiah has shown it is possible. If a 26-year old young adult could change the nation in the direction of God's will in the midst of all the challenges and negativities he was facing, I believe we, Oakridge Presbyterian Church, the church that is built on the Rock of Christ Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit, could change this city, this generation and this nation.

Game Changer

Can you be that leader that God is looking for? Can you be that game changer in your group, at your home, your work, your faith community or in this world? You and I make all kinds of excuses for failure in our leadership or game changing role, but when you begin consulting the Scripture and following the God of David like King Josiah, I can promise you these words from our Lord:

"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." John 15:7

May the God of David, Josiah and all the game-changers bless you today. Amen.