

Over Thanksgiving, I got to spend some time with Alyssa's family. And I always try to make sure that I get to spend some time with one of her cousins in particular. At one point the two of us were talking about the year I spent at the University of Arkansas.

I told him that I enjoyed my time in Arkansas while I was there. But, this was 23 years ago and I definitely didn't have Wednesday at the time. So, now my opinion would be a little different.

I realize that seems like a strange statement to make. I was teaching classes at the university. But I was appalled by the education system in Arkansas at the time, and I can't believe that it has gotten any better. Most things I could get over, but the one thing that I did not want was if I ever had kids I did not want them to learn history there.

One day I went over to a friend's office to pick him up for lunch. When I walked in he was in the middle of a discussion with eight other graduate assistants about the Civil War, and he was losing. The argument was about who actually won the war. He and one other person were arguing that the North won. The other seven argued that the South resigned the war because the slaves asked them to.

The idea that the slaves asked them to stop the war and they did seemed a little outlandish to me. But all seven Southerners swore to it. They said that the slaves rallied and said that too many landowners were getting killed because the Yankees didn't understand that they were happy. So, if the Confederacy surrendered, then the landowners would be safe and once the Yankees left they would all be happy again.

This was the year 2000. And all of these highly educated people had learned that growing up and believed it. We did an internet search and never found a source that agreed with what they were taught. One of the Southerner grad students told us that she wasn't going to believe our Yankee propaganda. She had gone to a Yankee college for her undergraduate and they tried teaching her there, but she held true to her convictions. The next day she brought in her high school history book and it said exactly what she told us.

While I was driving home, I was really thinking about that. The Civil War ended in 1865, but people are still believing that the South didn't lose. They believe that the slaves were happy being slaves. It is almost 160 years later and there are still distinct differences between the North and the South. And that got me thinking about today's reading and the books of Kings.

I haven't really talked about the books of Kings. Originally they were one book. It is believed that it was composed of notes from different prophets and priests starting with King David and ending with King Zedehiah or the fall of Jerusalem. The prophet Jeremiah took the notes and wrote the book, which was then split into two books when the bible was written into Greek because it could more easily fit on two scrolls.

Today we are reading about King Josiah, who was labeled the "Greatest King" because his loyalty to God never wavered. That is a pretty bold statement. Compared to the kings of Judah and Israel that had worshiped other gods, it is an easy comparison.

But, The author of Kings is saying that he is even greater than Kings Saul, Solomon, and David.

One of the things to remember with this, is that King Josiah was king since he was eight. He was appointed king by his father, King Amon's, royal advisors. It was believed that they had him killed for his ties to the Egyptian gods and trying to combine their practices with those of the Jews. These advisors then raised Josiah to be king.

King Josiah believed that God needed to be shown more respect than his predecessors had granted him. So, he decided to renovate the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was the house of the Lord, and he lived there so it should not be in shambles.

While they were renovating, the high priest found a book in the vault. The book was believed to have been the book of Deuteronomy that King Solomon had placed in the vault at the completion of his temple being built. Upon reading the scroll, King Josiah realized that he was like the second generation Jews that Moses was preaching to in Deuteronomy.

If you remember, when we read the ten commandments, we read them from the book of Deuteronomy and not Exodus. We read Moses' sermon to the second generation of Israelites just before they were no longer exiled. The difference between those two messages was that God was angry with the first generation because they continued to worship false idols. The younger generation would be given a chance by God in the new land, but the others would not.

So, Josiah had all the false gods destroyed. He removed the false prophets and prostitutes from the temple and made Jerusalem the Holy City for all to worship at. He also brought back the Passover festival that had not been celebrated since before Saul was appointed King by Samuel. He started a religious revolution and tried to bring his people back in good favor with God. King Josiah even created a new covenant with the people of Judah and Jerusalem, and God.

But, the people of Israel and Judah had been opposed to God for so long, that it would be too late. Israel had already been conquered by the Assyrians. So Josiah was really only hoping to maintain Jerusalem and Judah. He had hoped that he had done enough to regain God's favor.

Some people choose to believe that this lesson teaches us that no matter what we do, when we have done wrong for so long, God will not forgive us. He has already judged us and no matter how much we repent and try to make repercussions it will not change our fate.

But I disagree. King Josiah made changes and protected Judah and Jerusalem for as long as he could. He died fighting against the Egyptians as they tried to conquer Jerusalem and Babylon. His sons ruled after him and instead of being killed viciously when they started to stray, they were simply removed and sent into exile. If God had not

given them a chance as a result of King Josiah's actions, he could have easily wiped out Judah as he did Israel.

Sometimes we do not realize that we are doing the wrong thing or are following the wrong path. It is hard when we are confronted with the truth and realize that we have been wrong. But it is then that we can choose to either ask God for forgiveness or we can dig in harder and refuse to change. I believe that God will take pity on us and guide us with his wisdom if we ask.

God of faithfulness, your servant Josiah restored your holy words to a people longing for your guidance. Help us learn your Scriptures so that we might carry your words in our hearts, in our words and in our actions. Amen.