

“HULDAH THE PROPHETESS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for the Sermon: II Kings 22:11-20

Introduction.

We come this evening to Huldah, the final of the three good, named prophetesses in the OT. Next week Pastor Mike will preach on Anna, the prophetess in the temple when Jesus is born.

As with Deborah, we will need to consider the background and context of II Kings 22 and Huldah's place in it.

By the time we get to II Kings 22 we are almost to the end of the monarchical period in Israel, nearly 500 years after David and Solomon. King Josiah is the 16th of 20 kings in Judah, so the end of Judah and its fall to Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzars is quickly approaching.

There have been more bad kings than good. In fact only 7 of the 20 were called good, and only three of them were compared with David, Asa, Hezekiah and Josiah, who turns out to be the last of the good kings.

II Kings 23:25 Before him 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, nor did any like him arise after him.

Josiah was 8 years old when his father was assassinated by palace servants. Josiah's father, Amon, and his grandfather, Manasseh, before him both “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”

They were the two worst kings in Judah's history. They sold Israel into moral and spiritual slavery. They were spiritually, morally, ethically corrupt to the core. The idolatrous cults they promoted were fertility cults, filled with cult prostitutes, ritual sex. His grandfather, King Manasseh, sacrificed one of his own sons to a god. They did much evil and they lead Israel to do the same.

Consider being immersed in that culture and growing up surrounded by it. Then consider that Josiah rejected all of it and did not follow in the ways of this father and grandfather. How is that possible? How would you go against the flow of your whole culture?

We live in a similar time. Their age was post-Davidic, ours is post-Christian. Theirs was awash in aggressive, determined, willful, pervasive paganism shared by the leaders and the people, as is ours.

How many of us are dabbling in some aspects of our culture that is unrighteous, unholy? Who has the courage to go against the flow, to resist the peer pressure?

Romans 12:1-2 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

The light of the glory of Israel and its once great Temple worship was flickering and about to go out. The people were immersed in idolatry, sexual immorality and every kind of paganism.

What happens is truly a miracle of God's grace and power, to bring a light out of such darkness.

God in His completely unmerited mercy raised up a king, a son of Amon, who was not at all like his father or grandfather. Though his father was a wicked man, he had a godly mother who trained him in the fear of the Lord.

II Kings 22:1-2 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah ... 2 And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.

At the age of 26 he began rebuilding the Temple which is when the book of the Law was found. Notice his reaction when the Book of the Law was read, when he learned what a holy God said about sin and evil and the abominable practices of the nations around them.

Josiah was horrified. He felt great shame and guilt that these things were being done on his watch. He had a genuine fear of the holy, righteous wrath of God. Everything in him rose up with a desire to obey God.

I have been to Athens and walked on the Acropolis and in the Parthenon, the temple dedicated to the goddess Athena. I have been to China and Tibet and been in Tibetan Buddhist temples, seen the Buddha statues and prayer wheels. I have been to Kolkata, India and seen the Hindu Shinto shrines and beautifully carved statues. In Delhi we visited the impressive Lotus Temple of the Bahai religion.

I confess I looked at all those things the way most others look at them, for the impressive architecture or beauty. Although I do remember seeing the people in China turning the big prayer wheels or spinning their little hand held prayer wheels and feeling a real sense of sadness of the darkness, the blindness, the futility and hopelessness of their religion.

But I didn't react the way Josiah did. Why not? One reason is I was seeing with the eyes of man and not with the eyes of God. I didn't think to see what God sees and feel what God feels.

Those things are an abomination, an offense to the holy God and creator of all mankind. Idolatry falls under the curse and judgment of God.

Do we see as God sees? Do we see what God sees? Do we feel what God feels?

Who has the grace of tears? Who is genuinely moved by the horror and terror of sin, to the point of trembling, of hating sin and its offense against God? True religion cries, weeps, grieves, about such things.

Josiah confessed the sins of his nation and did everything he knew to do to repent. Why was he the only one? Why didn't the Word of God cut like a double-edged sword into the hearts and souls of the high priest and temple secretary and others?

King Josiah being a wise and godly man wanted to inquire of the Lord concerning this book. He orders a five man commission to go get prophetic clarity and direction. He show his seriousness by sending his best men, men of highest rank. One purpose of this commission is to enquire of a prophet of God just when this judgment is to begin and if there is any hope of averting it.

Huldah the prophetess.

In the midst of this great wickedness and committing of great abominations against God, in the midst of a toxic culture sold out to immorality and over which hung the judgment of God, there was a woman whose heart was true and faithful to God. In her the truth of God still burned bright.

II Kings 22:14 *Huldah the prophetess*, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter).

This is the only time in Scripture she is referenced, and this is all the information we have about her.

Huldah was a prophetess. There are other prophets alive and functioning at this time, most notably Zephaniah and Jeremiah, one of the greatest prophets of all time. We are not told why they went to her nor are we told why Jeremiah was silent during this time?

Huldah was righteous before God and she was blessed and gifted by God with prophetic insight. She was known in the kingdom of Judah. People of such noble character shine especially bright in the dark world around them.

The priest and servants went directly to Huldah, the prophetess. They went to Huldah to hear from God.

And indeed she did. “Thus saith the Lord” is the mark of a prophet's words, of one authorized to speak on behalf of God. She says that four times.

Huldah was the wife of Shallum, keeper of the wardrobe. This is the only mention of this occupation in the OT.

Her family was the keeper of the either the priestly and Levitical wardrobe or the king's royal wardrobe. She has closely associated with life inside either the Temple or the palace. It could also just be a reference to being a tailor.

Huldah's status is evident in that she is the one sought out by the King and the High Priest. She confirms that the book is the Book of the Law of God, and she gives a prophecy concerning it.

Huldah's prophecy.

Huldah responds to Josiah's commission with two prophetic oracles, one of judgment and one of mercy.

First, there is a prophetic oracle of judgment (vss. 15-17). There is no hope of stopping it, Yahweh is fully committed to bringing great disaster on Judah because they have forsaken God.

This first oracle has several key aspects. First, it is to be told exactly as she gave it to the man who sent them. Second, it is from the Lord.

Then she gives the sentence. God is going to bring disaster, including all the curses in the Book of the Law, the greatest of which is exile (Deut. 4:27-28; 27-29).

Then she gives the reasons for the terrible sentence of judgment. Israel has forsaken God and turned to other gods. The wrath of God will utterly destroy Jerusalem.

This is a glimpse of hell. The fire is unquenchable, and it is a fire of the people's own kindling, they have stirred up and provoked the just and justifiable wrath of God against their sin.

This judgment has been long warned of in God's Word, there is nothing new, nothing surprising, nothing unexpected here. God is true to Himself, His Scripture will be fulfilled.

God's patience with Judah had come to an end.

Second, there is a prophetic oracle of deliverance or salvation, of mercy (vss. 18-20). Since Josiah's heart was tender, soft, humble toward God, God will spare Josiah from seeing this terrible judgment.

This oracle also has several key aspects. Again, she tells them to tell the king her exact words, and again she confirms this is a word from the Lord, she only says what the Lord says.

The reason for the positive oracle is given, God saw the king's heart and his genuine humility and the sincerity of his repentance and regret for the sins of his nation.

Because of his concern for God's honor and glory, God is favorably inclined toward him and promises he will not suffer His wrath. He will be spared the agony of seeing his nations destruction.

Judgment is definite, but judgment is delayed. "Those that most fear God's wrath are least likely to feel it."

The focus of this story is on Josiah, and that is a key part of Huldah's prophecy. Josiah stands out as a rather rare individual. Where do we find men or women who when confronted with God's Word, are humbled, who have soft, tender hearts, who actually are moved to repentance and great remorse, who tear their clothes and rend their hearts, who genuinely grieve over their sin and the sins of their fathers and their nation? Who trembles before a holy God and His holy Word?

We learn that our God is a God who delights in mercy and relents from sending calamity.

Josiah's heart was to seek and follow the Lord. As is often the case with such individuals, God by His grace led him to a discovery of the Word of God. To a hungry and thirsty soul, the Scriptures are a refreshing deep stream. God will lead us to Himself through His Word.

I have said before repetition is always important in Scripture. Four times Huldah said "thus says the Lord." She is not an oracle, some independent speaker of wisdom.

She is a servant of the Lord, a pure channel through whom God speaks. She is not prompting herself or advancing herself. The true prophets of God are always humble. They consider themselves nothing.

Amos 3:7 The Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his *servants* the prophets.

Her gift was to serve God and serve His people. So it is with all God's spiritual gifts. Notice Josiah didn't have the gift of prophecy. God doesn't give all the gifts to everyone. He spreads them around, so each of us is necessary in the body of Christ. Your gift is given to you by God making you necessary to the rest of the body. Who has God gifted you to help?

She spoke with boldness and courage. She was speaking a hard word from God. In the history of Israel many prophets were persecuted or killed for their unpopular prophecies. People don't like to hear the harsh truth.

She spoke the truth and her words gave King Josiah great courage to follow the Book of the Law of God and do all that was in it. He acted immediately and with great courage, without regard for how any of the people might have objected.

He made a covenant to walk after the Lord, and to keep all the commandments of God. He did this even knowing the threatened curse would not be lifted. In other words, he obeyed for obedience sake. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, not in the eyes of the people. His heart was completely inclined toward the Lord, he sought the Lord when no one else did.

Huldah was a good and true prophetess raised up by the living God to speak His truth and to reveal prophetically what was the future of Judah.

If we wish to be thought wise and sought out as wise, then make sure the Word of God is in your heart and on your lips. Know God, know His Word. Write His Word on your hearts.

Proverbs 25:11-12 A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.
12 Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reproof to a listening ear.

She had a word fitly spoken, for just such a time as this.

Implications and applications.

Huldah worked alongside her husband in the care, and making of clothes for priests or kings. There was nothing particularly outstanding about her life, she went about her daily duties. And God called her to do this one thing. She no doubt went back to her daily duties after the men left. In the midst of her common, daily life God used her. And He can do the same now.

Huldah was a prophetess who gave divine guidance to a king in Judah.

Huldah didn't put herself forward, but was sought out.

Huldah was bold and courageous, speaking the truth of God in a time of judgment.

Huldah was a servant, she used her gifts and talents for the sake of others.

Huldah was a mother in Israel, a godly witness.

Notice the profound influence and difference a godly mother woman can make.

Notice the profound influence and difference a godly wife and servant of the Lord can make.

Huldah should be honored and given the praise she deserves. She, like many women like her, played a key role in God's redemptive history, and is honored by God by being named in Scripture.

Proverbs 31:30-31 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.