

2 Chronicles 35:20 (William George Turner) 71817

Bible Treasury: Volume N9, After All This (35:20)

These words mark an epoch in the inspired record of the life of Josiah, king of Judah. They indicate the close of a career of brilliant usefulness, and the commencement of a course of self-will leading to defeat, disaster and death. To the saints of God the whole story is full of solemn warning, and furnishes food for reflection. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). "All these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition ... wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:11, 12).

Like a sign-post on the highway of Josiah's life-story there stand these three ominous words "After all this." They point backward to many distinctly marked evidences of early piety with all their wealth of promise. Josiah began well, for at the age of fifteen he began to seek after the God of David his father, and when only nineteen years old was so zealous for the honor of Jehovah, that he commences a national revival by purging Judah of the high places, images and idolatrous emblems which by their defiling presence dishonored the true God, and disfigured the place He had chosen.

Josiah's zeal increases as the years pass, and produces four most important results. The temple is cleansed; there is a re-discovery of forgotten truth and prophecy; a voluntary, personal self-dedication takes place; and the greatest passover kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet is solemnly celebrated. Truly a marvelous record for a young man to achieve; and, more happy still, is the gracious moral effect upon his own heart; Josiah's humility and tenderheartedness receiving special mention by God. Add to this his splendid character given in 2 Kings 23:25, and we have afforded us a pen portrait, up to a given period of his life, of a pious, zealous, humble-minded, tenderhearted servant of God. Then, like the note of a tocsin, sounds these three terse words of ominous import, "After all this," with an abrupt introduction to a collapse, pathetic indeed, and full of tremendous warning for saints today.

There are many striking points of resemblance between the circumstances of Josiah's time and those of our own.

Christendom, like Israel when Josiah ascended the throne, had slipped away from the simple, sufficient rule of the word of God as the true believer's rule of life and directory of worship; and, by additions, and accretions which had gathered around the revealed will of the Lord, had created a situation fairly corresponding to images, high places, and groves, namely, worship and service fashioned after human devices, imaginations, and long-grown religious customs.

Then nearly a century ago, by the re-discovery of long forgotten truth, many were humbled by the church's failure and became tenderhearted; zeal and piety revived to a surprising degree; and once again the Lord's death was shown week by week in the breaking of bread after the simple, primitive and apostolic manner recorded in Acts 20, the whole church of God being contemplated in its observance. Upon the ground of the one body of Christ, saints gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus, rejoiced to keep the feast knowing that Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us.

It was the re-discovery of the will of the Lord in His word which constituted the sole sufficient authority for so acting in independence of any mere churchly sanction or human rules. Freshness, joy and holy enthusiasm reigned, but "after all this" came the long years of quiet simple testimony; and these are the days of real testing.

It is interesting and instructive to note that between the glowing account of Josiah's great passover—the high water mark, so to say, of his reign, and the record of his decline, there occurs one of those silences of scripture which speak so loudly to the thoughtful reader. Thirteen years elapse without any mention made of their passing. They speak of the long quiet years when principles are being tested. No great work of idol-breaking done; no excitement caused by new discoveries of truth; no stirring of emotion by great spiritual crises such as the wonderful passover and the service of voluntary self-dedication; but a tranquil period, a testing time, the long and eventful years of maintenance, of holding fast to known truth and position.

Individually the condition of many a young believer morally resembles that of king Josiah. The first flush of youthful piety is very gracious; the earnest, zealous willingness to serve the Lord is very delightful to behold; the ardent devotion to His blessed Person is very beautiful; the holy emotions of sacred seasons at His table are peculiarly sweet; but after all this—what? Shall we adopt the easy path of least resistance, and by dalliance with the world, the flesh and Satan prepare for deterioration, or, as we read the inspired history of Josiah's life, hearken to the striking note of warning and alarm sounded in those words — "after all this?"

For these words appear to signify that the years of quietness had in his case bred deterioration, the parent of declension and self-will. "After all this" we hear of Josiah's meddling with God, and of his being sorely wounded in affairs which neither concerned his person nor his position. What an ending for one who had such a splendid record of piety and service behind him! Yet, as we ponder, we are afresh reminded that "the best of men are but men at the best," apart from the grace of God.

His motives were probably good. He may have thought that his knowledge and position warranted interference on his part; but the inspired history records three facts which, may we not say, are of singular significance for saints and servants of the Lord to-day. First, it is quite evident that he acted independently; then that he refused advice, not hearkening to the word of God; and, lastly, he disguised himself, acting unlike himself, appearing other than he really was.

"After all this!" Warned, willful and wounded, Josiah is now cut off from all further usefulness in his prime at the early age of thirty-nine years! The more noteworthy is this, in that length of days was a mark of divine favor to a godly Israelite. How entirely unlike the true Servant of Jehovah, who —we say it with reverence—not only began well, but eaten up by the zeal of God's house, continued in holy dependence, confidence and communion throughout His life here, and in those last hours upon the cross gaining more glory to God than ever man and Satan combined had robbed Him of. Blessed be His holy name forever!

The believer who acts independently of the will of the Lord, meddles with God; leaves the position of true usefulness (albeit perhaps with the notion that he is well employed); and of necessity, like king Josiah, disguises himself. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Nothing can ever dispense with the need of constant dependence upon God, the continual looking to Him for direction, and the reverent, habitual searching of the word. However splendid a record one may have for piety, zeal, devotion, humble mindedness and tenderheartedness, nothing will keep the heart fresh and true to the Lord, like the threefold mark of the Lord Jesus when here as man, namely, absolute dependence upon the living God, unwavering confidence in Him, and unbroken communion with the Father.

Only by this, practically known, shall our conduct, character and conversation be such as becometh saints in these days when the marked tendency is to surrender much that was once prized. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." W. G. T.

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