

NUMINOUS 2-SEEING GOD IN UNEXPECTED PLACES
KING JOSIAH-2 CHRONICLES 35
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I don't know if you saw it but Sinead O'Conner was in the news this past week. In the 12-minute video, she confesses in her hotel room that she is all alone and having a really hard time. She explained once again that she is mentally ill and feels completely abandoned. It was actually really sad. When you zoom out and look at her body of work, you realize she has had a lot of ups and downs. She's recorded over ten albums on her path to being a worldwide popstar. She has also been married several times, tried to commit suicide and had her fair share of public controversy.

You might remember her most famous moment that comes to mind for several people is her appearance on *Saturday Night Live* 26 years ago. Sinead sang a cover of Bob Marley's song *War*. At the end, she said, "We have to fight the real enemy." Then she held up a picture of the Pope and tore it in half. Then there was silence. Nobody clapped. Everyone was shocked. Not quite sure what they had seen a 24-year-old Irish Catholic just do by ripping the Pope on national television.

This was a huge mess. Everyone was appalled. People thought she was just being shocking to be shocking. Trying to incite and get ratings, but in her song, Sinead was calling out the Catholic church for abuse of children. She saw a problem before anyone else did. She said something, and she was destroyed for it. Her career took a huge hit, she was maligned and pushed to the edges.

Now when you see a moment like that, you can take it or leave it. At the time, nobody really listened. What does a 24-year-old with a shaved head know about the world or about faith. How dare she speak ill of one of the most beloved men on the planet? Or even in hindsight, you can say she was always a bit mentally ill and unstable and this is one more snapshot of that. You can think she is unfit to speak for God or about God.

But the bottom line is this, she spoke up over a decade before the huge national scandals finally began to break. She spoke about things that other people tried to hide and cover up. In the coming decade, it was revealed that thousands of boys and girls were abused and a conspiracy had been launched covering it up which allowed it to continue. Sinead was right. I think I would say, "It's clear now that she was speaking for God."

Last week we started a series called *Numinous*. Numinous means having a mysterious spiritual experience. We launched this series as an opportunity to see God in unexpected places. To experience God in unexpected places. To hear from God in unexpected ways. As we launched this series, the premise was built upon this idea that modern Christianity in the West can be obsessed with facts and words and theology, which is okay. The question last week was, is there more? Are there more ways to see, experience and know God that we are missing out on? Are we willing to open our eyes so that we see an infinite God in infinite ways?

Last week we talked about this in terms of inspiration. I want you to see it this week in terms of prophetic exhortation. We are going to look at a story this week in which a pious, godly King of Judah is spoken to by God, but he refuses to hear it because it came through an unexpected channel. A person seen not unlike the way Christians in 1991 might have seen Sinead O'Conner. Thinking to themselves, this person doesn't know God and doesn't speak for God, and this person definitely doesn't speak for God when it comes to prophetic exhortation or correction of the church. But he did. So the question is, are we listening? Can we hear from God in unexpected ways? Are we willing to be corrected from places we never expected to get correction?

2 Chronicles 35:20-23

This story needs some explanation and some back story for you to receive the full weight of its power. To summarize, an Egyptian king is on his way to battle. Not unlike today, you have to see major regional politics going on in this region. The Assyrians were the super power for several hundred years and they are losing their power. The Babylonians are the emerging super power. These two super powers are fighting and people are picking sides.

King Neco, with the Egyptians, is trying to help the Assyrians, and it looks as though King Josiah, with the Israelites, is siding with the Babylonians.

There is nothing new under the sun. Politics and war and countries aligning with different countries for a host of reasons. When you put all of that aside, you have two men meeting on the plain of Megiddo. One is Josiah. Josiah is often referred to as a good if not great king in the history of Judah. Here's why. Early in his kingship he seeks after God. Not unlike David, the Bible says he seeks out God. In that process, a few interesting things happen. Josiah sees the Israelites were far from God and worshipping idols, so he begins to clear the nation of idols. He also launches a mission to clean up the temple so that people can resume worshipping Yahweh. In that process, he finds the book of the law. Unlike today where you can have multiple Bibles in one household, they didn't have scriptures bound up and available to every citizen. Somehow the scripture had been lost as the people turned from God but Josiah found it. He had it read to himself and the people and realized how far Judah had fallen away from God. He reinstates the work of the Temple and leads the people to worship through the observation of the Passover.

That's quite a resume. He returns the nation to God, eliminates the idols, finds God's scriptures and leads the people to observe Passover once again. That is pretty impressive stuff. You can read later in 2 Chronicles 35 how revered and loved Josiah was. After his death, we read this:

2 Chronicles 35:24-25

He is mourned and even the prophet Jeremiah wrote a lament over Josiah's death. You know the same Jeremiah who sees the country going astray, but he sees in this King Josiah a holy man who has returned his people to God. That's who you have in one corner.

Then you have King Neco, an Egyptian Pharaoh. He's not a priest, he seemingly doesn't know Yahweh and beyond that he's from Egypt, the same place that enslaved the Israelites several generations earlier. The same place that is now aligning with the Assyrians who decimated the northern kingdom and killed thousands of Israelites.

Back to our story today, we have the Holy King of Judah who has led the country in repentance and a return to worship, and the pagan king from a foreign land who is interconnected with multiple past events of Israelites' oppression. I can understand why Josiah was unwilling or unable to listen. Neco says God has told him to do this, but he can't possibly know or speak for God, and yet he does, because his prophecy comes true. Verse 22 says Josiah died because he did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God. What do you do with a story like this?

We are really asking, how do we know when someone speaks for God? Especially when it is a prophetic message that we might not want to hear?

You are probably somewhat familiar with the name and work of Galileo. Galileo practiced many forms of science and is referred to as one of the fathers of observational astronomy. At the heart of Galileo's work was the heliocentric model for understanding our galaxy. Based on Aristotle and then affirmed by scriptures, people believed the earth was the center of the universe and everything orbited the earth. Quite simply, that earth was the center of the universe. People did not like Galileo's assertions. Psalm 93:1 says, "The earth shall not be moved. Its foundations are set." Ecclesiastes 1:5 says, "The sun rises and then returns to its place." There is nothing in there about orbits. Earth was the center of the universe and Galileo was condemned for his heresy, and he was placed under house arrest.

Well we all know how that story ended. Galileo was correct. The church was wrong. Galileo was refuted by theologians and a high church court. And who was Galileo? He didn't speak for God. He just had a spyglass and some paper to write down his kooky theories. In more ways than one, the church receives a prophetic message that they are not the center of the universe, but they refused to listen.

You have to know this might have been Josiah's problem as well. He was on a bit of an impressive streak. This moment with Neco comes several years after his works of reformation and leading the nation to repentance and leading them to worship Yahweh again. Josiah was so right for so long, he might have forgotten that he too wasn't the center of the universe. That he spoke so long for God, he didn't think anyone else could. That

maybe when he opposed the Egyptian/Assyrian alliance, it was more rooted in his country than his faith?

I don't know if you saw this last week but Dallas made the news. Sometimes that makes me happy, usually when it's Cowboys related, but not so much this past week. After threats of nuclear fire and fury were bandied about in our government, a spiritual advisor to the president, who also happens to be the pastor at FBC Dallas, said that Romans 13 gave our president the authority to kill, defend and nuke North Korea. Listen, I know the North Korean dictators have never been sensible or good global citizens, and I know they constantly hold the world hostage with their threats and pursuit of power, but I also know we have kept them at bay for decades through negotiations and work behind the scenes. I also know, there are passages in the Bible about loving your enemy and forsaking violence, so when I see a pastor ready to pick a side and to encourage a huge loss of life, I wonder again if this is something more rooted in our country than our faith.

This is more center-of-the-universe thinking. Christians have the inside track to God and thus are supremely favored. America is ostensibly a Christian nation, so we have an inside track to God and are supremely favored. When that center-of-the-universe ideology takes root, the logical conclusion is that we violently attack anyone who might question our role in the center of the universe.

This center-of-the-universe stuff is throughout the Bible. Jesus started preaching to people and the entirety of his message seemed to be de-centering. Moving individuals out of the center and putting God there. As an extension of that, putting other people ahead of yourself and humbling yourself on the periphery. That's why he told parables like the Good Samaritan. A man gets beaten and left for dead. The religious professionals, the Jewish heroes, walk by on the other side of the road. They have good reasons to, they'd become unclean, they could get beaten too, they could lose money. Who knows? So they pass by.

Then a Samaritan passes by. In the same way that some considered Galileo, King Neco and Sinead O'Conner, that's how the Jews considered the Samaritans. They were theological mutts and ethnically mixed. You see after Josiah dies, Babylon, the new super power on the

block, soundly defeats Assyria and Egypt, and from that day onward, Babylon took over the region. They were the center of the universe. As a part of that process, they would take people from their homes and move them into Babylon in order to assimilate them. Much of Israel was treated this way. They were conquered and forced from their homes. Some stayed behind and they intermarried with Babylonians and they diluted their beliefs and their bloodlines. Out of this, they worshipped in a different way and had a completely different temple mount.

So the Samaritans were outsiders. They weren't orthodox, and they were national traitors because they intermarried and diluted the bloodlines and faith. For the next 600 years, the anger and arguments grew between these two groups. Then a carpenter from Nazareth comes along and tells a de-centering story. The religious professionals of Israel were not the heroes. They walked on by. Then the Samaritan with prophetic actions, tends to the hurt and broken man. He spends money and time loving him anyway.

You want to talk about refuting center-of-the-universe thinking? That's all Jesus preached. Not only did he preach it, but he lived it. Put Jesus in there with King Neco, Galileo and Sinead O'Conner. He was considered a heretic from all of the insiders. He was not a person who spoke for God. He said things like, "You have heard it said" in which he grabs ideas from scriptures, then he said, "But I say to you." Just like Galileo and Sinead O'Conner have been vindicated with time, so too has Jesus. But don't forget, early on it was a faith for de-centered rebels who loved radically. With 2,000 years of hindsight and vindication, Christians have again returned to the center of the universe.

That is why sermons like this exist. To remind us that we are to be a displaced people. A group that refutes center-of-the-universe thinking. A group that loves radically and listens for the voice of God.

The question for today is, if it is true that God speaks in unexpected ways through unexpected people, 1) are you willing to listen? 2) How can you know it is God speaking through an unlikely source? Because you have Sinead O Conner and Galileo and King Neco, but you also have Charles Manson and Jim Jones. You have false prophets who are speaking

out of selfish motives. Let me give you this tool for discernment, and it is connected to our sermon for today. There are other ways and more things you can consider, but start here if you need help.

Is this message centering or de-centering? Does this message make me comfortable in the center of my universe or does it cause me to consider my place before an all-powerful God? You see when celebrities or someone you have little faith in the possibility that they have faith, when they say, "God told me..." and the message is self-serving, violent, self-aggrandizing, immoral etc. you have the right to ask, does that seem like centering or de-centering language? When someone you have little faith in the possibility that they have faith, when they say, "God told me..." and the message is about reconciliation, standing up for outsiders, serving the needy, etc. you should ask does that sound like centering or de-centering language? When you can answer that question honestly, you are quite likely to know whether it is God speaking to you.

The great irony for this whole Sinead O'Conner debacle is that it gave rise to more artists realizing they could get publicity if they mocked the church. There is a potential upside, but not so for Sinead. She took a lot of flack. She was condemned by everyone. She became suicidal. Let's not forget, Sinead O'Conner is Irish Catholic. She grew up in a country that revered the church and its leaders. She wasn't just some pop star doing a publicity stunt, she grew up steeped in the faith in one of its most passionate bastions, yet she still sent that message. You have to ask, why did she send such a message? Sinead O'Conner was beaten by nuns as a child to help reform her behavior. There is a reason she was an outsider, and there is a reason she spoke up for those outside of the center. The great irony is that people rushed to the church's defense not recognizing it was the problem all along.

In much the same way, Josiah was trying to defend and align with Babylon. That was his fatal flaw. He was aligning with the country that would eventually conquer his own. He aligned with power at the center of the universe in hopes of getting a taste of it. May Jesus be central in our lives and may we be open to being discombobulated and decentered in that process.