

## Prestonwood Connection 2005

### #3 Unknown Heroes

#### Josiah: Becoming A Person Of Spiritual Influence

#### 2 Chronicles 34

Wednesday, April 13, 2005 • Dr. David McKinley

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Thank you Britney that was awesome tonight. You did a fabulous job and a..., singers thank you, Rick, let me give you your book here real quick. There you go man, thanks, and a..., just an awesome job tonight with everyone and great to see each and every one of you here tonight as we come together in this midweek Connection Service. I know we did have an opportunity to meet with some of our new members a..., a little earlier this evening and I just welcome all of those of you who are a new part of the Prestonwood family who are here tonight and a..., whether you were a..., with us in this gathering a little earlier or have just recently come to Prestonwood we're so grateful that you're here and if you're a guest with us tonight we're thankful that you've come also and a..., we trust that tonight will be a...a great source of strength and encouragement in your life because together we've been looking a..., at a series that we've entitled *Unknown Heroes*, and trying to meet and to learn some things about some of the characters in the Bible who were often obscure in light of so many of the personalities and figures that are a..., much more well known.

Now I have brought a list tonight with me, a list that I want you to see and that I want you to review, a list of names, names of people that I think you will recognize and so I'm gonna ask that these names come up at this time and I want you to take just a moment and to look at a..., all of the names that are here on this list tonight. I want you to think about these people and who they are and where they are and I wanna ask you this question tonight. Who in this room thinks they know what every single person on this list has in common? How many of you think you know the answer to what every person on this list has in common? Now, they obviously come from a variety of different backgrounds and ethnicities, they speak different languages, they're different ages; some of them don't have an age any more, they died years ago. Some of them are a..., politicians, some of them are preachers, others of them are entertainers; we have such a variety of people who are here on this list tonight, but the question is what in the world could a list of people with such diverse names, backgrounds, belief systems, cultures have in common? Well, let me make it easy, they are all people of influence. Every single person on this list represents someone who has a platform of influence. Their influence is not equal. Their influence is certainly not all in the same sphere. Some of them have influence for good and many of them influence

for bad, but the reality is...is that whatever else you may say about these people tonight they are all people of influence and literally we could take the remainder of the time this evening and just switch names on that screen and we could continue to add to the profile of people whose names you know and I know who are people of influence. But let me tell you something else, we could start putting the names of people who are sitting in this building on that screen tonight, because every person who is here tonight has influence in some sphere of life. Your influence is not equal maybe to that of these that we've already mentioned tonight. It may not be a..., that your influence has national and international notoriety, but the reality is...is that in your life you have a sphere of influence because here is the issue; people influence people. And if you connect with other people in your life you are going to influence people and the influence of your life and the impact of your life matters and therefore I've come to ask you a very simple, but an important question tonight. What is the influence of your life? Who are you influencing and how are you influencing people around you? Because tonight I want us to give some thought to this subject of influence and in particular spiritual influence in life, because if you connect with other people you are gonna ultimately impact their lives.

There's an interesting story from the history, from the life and from the presidency of Calvin Coolidge. It appears that on one occasion there was a guest who was invited to come and to share the breakfast meal at the White House with President Calvin Coolidge and as they were there that day enjoying this meal together, the man who had been invited to come was so concerned that he would do everything according to etiquette and to protocol and so they'd been sitting there just for a few minutes when Mr. Coolidge took the saucer from underneath his coffee, poured a little bit of the coffee there and then picked up a creamer and poured some cream in it, took a spoonful of sugar and began to stir it as he was talking. The guest wasn't really sure what was going on, but he thought to himself if this is protocol with the presidency I'd better get in on it and so he simply took his a..., little saucer and poured some coffee in it and poured the cream and mixed some sugar and they continued to exchange the pleasantries and then to his absolute horror the president took the saucer, put it on the floor and the cat came up and had his morning little nip there with the president. Well, so many times in life when we're simply trying to do what other people do a..., or when we're trying to watch others we take our cues from others and sometimes they influence us in a way that is not right, that is not best. Well, I just wanna ask you tonight what is happening with your life? What is happening with your...your influence and how can you use that influence for good and for God?

Someone has written these words:

*My life shall touch a dozen lives before this day is done,  
Have countless marks for good or ill ere set the evening sun.  
This is the wish I always wish, the prayer I always pray,  
Lord, may my life help others live that it touches by the way.*

Lord, let my life be a life that helps others, let my life be a life that influences others for good and for Your glory. And tonight I wanna introduce you to a man whose life legacy is one of strategic and significant spiritual influence and we meet this man in the Old Testament in the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, 34; 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, 34. You know in recent days it's become common to hear athletes and entertainers who often make the statement when they are interviewed publicly; they often say, you know I don't wanna be a role model to anybody. I'm not anybody's role model, I just live my life, I just enjoy my freedoms, I just a..., am grateful for the benefits of my success and I just wanna live my life the way I wanna live it. It's up to other people to choose their path in life. And there's certainly some truth in that. Every one of us are responsible for our lives for our choices for the decisions that we make, but I want you to know that every time I hear someone say that it turns my stomach. It turns my stomach because every single person has to recognize that whoever you are and whatever you do your attitudes, your values, your behaviors influence people in your world and whether you wanna be a role model or not you are an influence and so the challenge is to become the kind of influencers that can make a positive difference.

Let's meet our influencer tonight in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, chapter 34, beginning in verse 1:

*Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images.*

And then look down in verse 33, the Bible says at the close of this chapter:

*Thus Josiah removed all the abominations from all the country that belonged to the children of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel diligently serve the LORD their God. All his days they did not depart from following the LORD God of their fathers.*

We begin with a king who purposed in his heart to follow the God of his fathers and in the close we find that he's influenced the nation, to change their course and to impact their lives to be followers after God. There's another statement written about the life of Josiah, found not only here in the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, but found over in the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings and I wanna encourage you to turn over just for one more minute to 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 23:25, because I wanna to be sure that you write this verse down and that you mark this verse in your Bible, ~~2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles...excuse me~~ 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 23 and verse 25, listen to what it says:

*Now before him...*

That is Josiah.

*...there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all of his heart, with all of his soul, with all of his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did there arise any like him.*

What a statement of spiritual influence. Of all the kings of Israel there was not any before and not any like him who so followed the Lord with all of his heart, with all of his soul and with all of his strength. Oh that it would be said of people in this room tonight, that we are people who follow hard after God, because the secret to knowing who and how you influence is ultimately wrapped up in who and what you follow. And it was this follow-ship in Josiah's life that made all of the difference. He was a man of remarkable strength and courage. He was a man of strong faith. Josiah is a name that stands out and stands above a list of kings that are recorded in these books of history, dark chapters, foreboding chapters, tragic chapters of men who rose to the a..., height of leadership in Israel, only to be men who were unfaithful to God and unfaithful to their people. And there are all sorts of character flaws and all sorts of national sins that are exposed in these portions of Scripture in Kings and Chronicles, but then there's Josiah and Josiah's life and Josiah's faith and Josiah's influence was incredible. His name Josiah means Jehovah will support and the strength of his life was not in himself; it was in the strength of the Lord. Josiah was a man who lived to say the Lord is the strength of my life and rather than being up on himself he was focused on God and it was the God's strength in his life that gave him such great influence with other people. But you know one of the things that I love so much that we learn about Josiah from the very beginning back in our text in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles is that fact that he followed the Lord from his youth. The Bible says that he was 8-years-old when he became king and by the time he was 18, he was a young man whose heart was given to God. When I read that passage of Scripture I couldn't help but think of the passage in the book of Ecclesiastes when King Solomon after all of his exploits and all of his experiences in trying to find the meaning of life ultimately came down to this conclusion: [12:1]

*Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come and years draw near when you say, I have no pleasure in them.*

And that was the amazing thing about Josiah, that from childhood, that from his youth, he was a man who sought God, a young man with a heart for God, a young man who at an early age made a pointed decision that he would go for God. I also thought about our pastor when I read that passage of Scripture. Our pastor was 6-years-of-age when he confessed Christ as his Lord and Savior. The influence in his life was his grandfather, a man who took time to read him the Scriptures and to teach him the things of God. Interestingly enough it was a grandfather, a former king by the name of Hezekiah who had great influence in the life of young Josiah and what happened in Josiah's heart, much like what happened in our own pastor's heart is that there was a sense of knowing that what mattered in life was living for Christ and living all out for Christ and that's why more than

ever in this day, in this hour, in this generation we much be riveted in our resolve and focus to win children and students to Christ, because when we win them to Christ, when we teach them to be God followers and God seekers we can change the generations of the future. We're not gonna change a lot of what's happened in the generations of the past and what we are even living in many of us today, but we can change the future if we will become influencers for God and influencers for good. There's 60 verses in the book of Chronicles that describe the life of Josiah and while I can't read all 60 of these verses tonight, I wanna simply give you 5 simple statements, 5, I trust, valuable insights tonight that will help you to know how you can become a person of spiritual influence; how you can be a man, how you can be a woman at any age or stage of life, because it's not limited to those who begin to follow God at a young age. Thank God for so many incredible passages of Scripture that show us the grace of God working in the lives of adults. But the important thing is...is that beginning today you need to make the choice in your heart that you want your **LIFE TO COUNT AS A SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE**. How does it happen? Well, let me just take from the life of Josiah these insights and share them with you.

#1 **PURPOSE TO KNOW AND TO DO THE WILL OF GOD IN YOUR LIFE**. Purpose to know and to do the will of God in your life. The emphasis in the life of Josiah is that he sought the Lord, a..., again 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 34 and verse 3 says:

*For in the eighth year of his reign,...*

He would have been 16-years-of-age.

*...while he was young, he began to seek the God of his father...*

Josiah was a God seeker and whatever age you may be tonight, whatever stage you may be in...in life tonight, whatever experiences you may have had or whatever heartaches or hurts you may have endured; here is the ultimate reality tonight, you can begin today to be a seeker after God and it is when you begin to seek God that God begins to change the course and the force of your life. The Bible encourages this over and over again. Listen to these passages of Scripture; Isaiah chapter 55 and verse 6, Isaiah 55 and verse 6:

*Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.*

Seek the Lord the Bible says. Listen again, Matthew chapter 7 and verse 7, Jesus is teaching us to pray and He says:

*"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be open to you."*

And then in John chapter 7 and verse 34 Jesus says:

*"You will seek me and not find Me, for where I am you cannot come."*

~~That's not the right verse. [pause for congregation laughter] Well, I just dispelled any myths of sinless perfection tonight right? [more laughter] Let's go on to the next one, I was tryin to figure out what that verse was supposed to be, but instead of me running through it up here how bout we just move on to Hebrews 11 and verse 6? Go home tonight, take your concordance, look for seek in the book of John and you'll find the right verse, okay? Hebrews 11 in verse 6, listen to this the Bible says:~~

*But without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to Him must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently...*

What?

*...seek Him.*

Seek God, purpose to know and do the will of God in your life. Purpose to be a man, to be a woman who's active pursuit and highest priority is that you want to live for God's purpose and God's plan and for God's glory. That's what I love about what happened in the heart of the apostle Paul. You know that the life of Paul was a life marked a..., by religion, but religion without a relationship with God and Paul in his middle-age years had an encounter with Christ that changed his life and in the book of Philippians, the text that our pastor is using and preaching from in his *Fit For Life* series, Paul expresses what's happened in his life when he says:

*<sup>12</sup>Not that I've already attained, or that I'm already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind and reaching forward to the things that are ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press toward the goal ~~for the upward...~~for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

That's what I'm talking about in life, seeking God, daily, hourly, minute by minute, being a man or a woman who purposes to seek God. I ask you tonight are you seeking God? I didn't say are you seeking knowledge, I didn't say are you seeking religion, I didn't say are you seeking to live a better life, I didn't say are you seeking to be a better parent or to be a better mate. Those things are all important in their rightful place, but I'm asking you tonight are you seeking God? In the Psalms there's a passage of Scripture that talks about those who seek God's hand instead of those who seek God's face and how easy it is for us to seek the hand of God. God what can you do for me? Give me, give me, give me! And that's what so many of us become in life, it's just people who look to God for what we can get, we look for His hand, but you see Josiah wasn't someone who looked for God in his hand, Josiah looked for the face of God. He wanted the pleasure of God in his life and that's what will matter in your life and in my life is when the intent of the heart is to be a God pleaser then the influence of the life will be to influence people spiritually for

God. You can have great spiritual influence in lives of others for God, but you have to seek God. Purpose to know and do the will of God in your life.

But the second thing is also found in that same 3<sup>rd</sup> verse. The Bible says:

*For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge...he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of all the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images.*

You wanna know the second secret to having a life of spiritual influence? **YOU HAVE TO PURGE YOUR LIFE** of attitudes, activities, alliances and affections that compete with your loyalty to God. You have to not only say Lord I'm seeking You, but you have to be willing to let go. It's not enough to just stretch forward there has to be a sense of letting go from what's behind and being willing to say I'm not simply trying to see how much I can straddle the fence and stay in the middle and be close enough to looking like, living like and acting like the world and still be committed to God and I think that's a major issue in our day, because what I find to be the fatal flaw of so many of our lives as believers and yes, I struggle with these temptation too, is to find enough appeal to the world that we are acceptable to the world while failing to ultimately give my allegiance to God. And if I want to live a life of spiritual influence I have to have the clarity and the conviction that Josiah had in life when he said that I'm going to give the energies and the impacts and the activities in my life to the things that are priorities with God. I'm gonna purge my life. I'm going to examine my life. I'm going to consider the associations, the alliances, the activities, the attitudes that are keeping me from being the man that God wants me to be and then I'm going to say the loyalty of my heart is to God. What needs to be purged? Is it an attitude? Is it an attitude that you harbor in your life for someone who's injured you, offended you? Is it an attitude of rebellion that surfaces in your life to someone who is over you or who doesn't respect you? Is it an attitude of hatred that you're holding on to tonight? It needs to be purged. Is it a possession? Is it an automobile? Is it a...is it a...a recreational a..., type vehicle? Is it a..., is it some form of a house? Is it some sort of a place? What is it in your life? I'm not saying that God doesn't want you to have any of those things I'm just saying that too many times those things have become the wooden things and the carved things and the molded things in our lives. And don't think that idolatry is just somethin that a bunch of pagans had in their world years ago; we got a lot of idolatry in America today. We've got a lot of idolatry in our churches today and we have to deal with this issue of purging the allegiances and the activities of our lives that ultimately keep us from being all that God wants us to be. Am I saying God doesn't want us to have fun, God doesn't want us to have recreation? Certainly I'm not saying that. We have to have those things as a part of balance in life, but I'm asking you again to look at your heart, to look at your influence and to say is there something in me that is limiting the influence of my life for God? God help me to become a person of spiritual influence.

Third, **PATTERN YOUR LIFE ACCORDING TO BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES**. Pattern your life according to biblical principles. Look down again in the 34<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles and here in 34 beginning in verse 15 I want to read to you a couple of verses that are important. It says:

*Then Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan.*

And then the Bible goes on to say here down in a..., chapter 35 and in verse 1:

*Now Josiah kept a Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem, and they slaughtered the Passover lambs on the fourteenth day of the month.*

Now what was it that caused Josiah to do what he did? Well, if you were to read more in the 34<sup>th</sup> chapter you would find that what the scribe and the priest found they brought to Josiah and Josiah heard the word of God in his life, the word that he had not heard, the word that he had not understood and the word that he had not embraced. In verse 19 the Scripture says:

*Now it happened when the king heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes.*

And then it tells us again down in verse 21:

*"Go inquire of the Lord for me, and those who are left in Israel and Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found; for the great wrath of the Lord is poured upon us..."*

And Josiah started to do everything according to what was written in the book. Josiah began to live his life with an understanding that not only would he seek God and not only would he purge things that kept him from God, but that he would establish the principles of God as the principles of his life. Josiah began to realize that what mattered in life was living just like this. Have you come to that place in your life, where you understand that the Christian life is not standing on the word of God? Now don't get me wrong it is our firm foundation, but that I stand under the word of God in all of my life, because this book is the book of authority, this book is the book of truth, this book is the book of reality in my life and everything in my life as a child of God is dependent upon my willingness to take and to honor the principles of this book by the grace of God and to live under the book. I live under the book. When we stand and preach week after week we're not on this platform because we're exalted above you; I stand here under the book and God forbid that whether it be my life or the life of our pastor or anyone else who ever stood on this platform or stood behind this pulpit that anyone of us would ever try to stand on the book; we stand under the book. And there's a call to obedience and the thing that made a difference in the life of Josiah was



that he was a man who lived his life according to biblical principle. He made a big deal about the authority of the Scripture in his life and it was the word of God that became the source of his wisdom, of his strength and of his walk. It's not enough for preachers, it's not enough for theologians, it's not enough for denominations, it's not enough for churches to stand and to defend the voracity, the truth of the authority of the Scripture, you and I must defend it by living according to the principles of the book.

There's a fourth thing that we see in the life of Josiah and that is not only that we must purpose to know and to do the will of God, purge our lives of all... **< turn tape >** ...with loyalty to God, pattern our life according to the...to biblical principle, but...

**#4 WE HAVE TO PRACTICE WHAT WE PREACH.** You have to practice what you preach. Let's go again there to chapter 35 in verse 1, He heard the book, he made much of the book, he began to know the book, but here's the thing, he was doing the book. The Bible tells us that before the time of Josiah that it had been years since the Jews had celebrated the Passover. You see I know that most of us tend to think that indeed the Passover begun with Moses has been practiced in an unbroken stream until our day and indeed there have been a remnant of Jews who were faithful even in those days, but let me tell you what happened. There was a period of such wickedness, of such ignorance and of such rebellion in the history of Israel that they went years without practicing the Passover. And so the Bible says that this man Josiah, understanding that the Passover was such a picture of the grace of God and of the power of God and of the provision of God in the life of...of His nation, of His people Israel that he began to reinstate the Passover and it says in verse 18:

*There had been no Passover kept in Israel like that since the days of Samuel the prophet; and none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as Josiah kept, with the priests and the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present...present, and the inhabitants of Judah...of...of Jerusalem.*

God used him to begin to change the practice of the people. Why? Because he changed his own practices. We can stand. We can preach. We can teach. We can do everything we wanna do, but until we practice what we preach we're not gonna change anybody else's life. And I'm not just talkin about the pulpit, I'm talkin about the pews, okay? That's where the power is. Yes, there's authority, yes, there's power, yes, there's purpose in a pulpit, but let me tell you the power of the pulpit is in the lives of the people who go out to practice what they hear preached and when they practice it's amazing what that practice does to change lives. That's why James encourages us and challenges us and warns us in the book of James chapter 1 and verse 22, he says to us that we need to put aside all of those things, all of the things that would get in the way of hearing and understanding and obeying the word of God and that ultimately that we are to be able to:

<sup>21</sup>*...receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save our souls,*

And then listen to it, what does it say. Look at that last line. Read it out loud with me right now, can we do that? I want you to say it.

<sup>22</sup>*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*

Did you know that there's nothing more than deception that happens in church if people come and hear and don't do? They think that because they have knowledge of the Scripture that it's the equivalent of being obedient to the Scripture and that's not true. It begins here with knowledge, but it goes from here with the seed of faith and with feet of obedience and that has to do with giving and that has to do with serving and that has to do with praying and that has to do with witnessing and that has to do with purity and it has to do with every other part of life because the victories are won not by the notes that you take at church, the victories are won by the battles that you fight at work and at home and every other place that you go. Well there's a final thing that I want you to see tonight and that is that if you wanna be a person of spiritual influence you have to...

**PERSEVERE IN DAYS OF HARDSHIP.** You can't quit. You can't have an easy believe-ism. You can't just go with God when the goin's good, you gotta go with God all the time. And one of the things that is so curious to me and frankly is almost disappointing to me is that as I read about the life of this incredible man Josiah, I'm expecting that the outcome of his life is going to be just this all pervasive, history making, life changing, nationally a...a..., altering experience that's gonna change the spiritual conduct of Israel. But I want you to see what the Bible tells us back again in the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings chapter 23 and beginning in verse 25, 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 23 and verse 25 [pause] It says:

<sup>25</sup>*Now before him...*

We read this earlier.

*...there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all of his heart, his soul and his might, according to the Law of Moses, nor after him did any arise like him.*

But verse 26 says:

<sup>26</sup>*Nevertheless the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, in which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. <sup>27</sup>And the Lord said, "I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off the city of Jerusalem as I have chosen, and the house of which I said, 'My name shall be there.'"*

I wish I could tell you tonight that the outcome of Josiah's life was

simply that a..., everything just got great, but things got worse. Things got worse, ~~but look again now in chapter 24 of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings and beginning in verse 12; 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 24 in verse 12: [long pause] Well, you don't have to read that because that's not the right text either. [congregation laughter] But I'm glad I recognized that before I started reading, cause there are a whole lot of hard names in that passage of Scripture [more laughter] and that would have been difficult to try to have gotten through. It's amazing how just one key stroke when you're doin your notes can change everything about what you're trying to say. The bottom line is that Josiah did the will of God anyway. He did the will of God anyway and here's the lesson that I want you to take away from this last point tonight; you don't live and you don't die in vain if you live for the will of God.~~

**YOU DON'T LIVE AND YOU DON'T DIE IN VAIN IF YOU LIVE FOR THE WILL OF GOD.**

The issue for Josiah was that he was a man who fulfilled the will of God in his generation, in his day, in his hour. Did he influence many people? Yes, he did. Did he change many lives because of his influence? Yes, he did. The nation still went on it's path of rebellion, the wrath of God still unfolded against the nation and in history it is recorded that God fulfilled His purpose, a purpose greater, wiser, fuller than anything that I could have imagined, but Josiah was still a part of the purpose of God and the judgment of God was still clear and exact.

In February of 1791 John Wesley, the founder of Methodism along with his brother Charles, wrote a letter to a young man that he admired who was in the thick and who was in the battle. It would have been easy for this young man to have quit, thrown in the towel because the position that he held in his day was very unpopular and he was despised and he struggled throughout most of his life, but he was determined to be a influence for good and for God. John Wesley wrote these words:

*"Unless the Divine Power has raised you up I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that a scrap-able villainy, which is the scandal of religion of England and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing you will be worn out by opposition of men and devils, but if God is for you who can be against you. ~~Are you of them stronger then...Are all of them stronger than God? O be not weary in well doing. Go on in the name of God and the power of His might till every American slavery...till even...excuse me...American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun shall vanish away before it. That He who has guided you from your youth up may continue to strengthen you in this and all things is the prayer of your affectionate servant John Wesley.~~"*

Who did he write? He wrote William Wilberforce. Wilberforce at that time was a young man who had taken on this battle to try to remove the scourge of slavery in England. Four days after Wesley wrote that letter he died at age 88, but the influence of that letter and of that challenge in the life of Wilberforce would continue for a lifetime. Wilberforce continued to do everything that he could to try to speak to the Parliament, to change the

laws and time and time again he was defeated. He could hardly get a hearing and he would struggle and he would fight, but in the final years of his life, in fact in 1807 the slave trade of England was abolished. William Wilberforce died and after his death in 1833 slavery was finally outlawed in the empire. He lived and struggled, he persevered in difficulty, he did what he believed to be the will of God and he lived with the influence of another man's life and the result of that influence and of his influence changed the history of England and changed the history of America. Wilberforce was buried in Westminster Abby and a part of his epitaph reads as follows:

*"Imminent as he was in every department of public labor and a leader in every work of charity, whether to relieve the temporal or the spiritual wants of his fellow man his name will ever be specially identified with those exertions which by the blessing of God removed from England the guilt of the African slave trade and prepared the way for the abolition of slavery in every colony in the empire."*

That is a legacy. That is a life of spiritual influence and tonight my challenge to you is not to have an epitaph written in some place in history, but to have an epitaph written in eternity that you are a man, that you are a woman of spiritual influence.