

2 Chronicles 30-32

Here in Ch 30 we find ourselves in the throws of yet another spiritual awakening in the southern kingdom of Judah. Ahaz (who was up to this point the single most wicked king that Judah had known) has died and his son Hezekiah has ascended to the throne. And Hezekiah couldn't have been more of an antithesis to his dad; these guys were completely the opposite of one another. And I'm not sure if he just happened to notice his dad's vehement rebellion against the Lord and saw all the devastation and destruction that was brought upon his house and the nation as a result of that. Or if it was the personal and heavy influence of Isaiah's ministry that persuaded him toward godliness, or perhaps a combination of both but be that as it may Hezekiah was the single most godly king that Judah ever had outside of David. And so as to where his dad sought to extinguish the worship of the Lord throughout the land the 1st thing Hezekiah did was to re-open the temple, re-establish the worship and service of the Lord. And it was in his heart to make a covenant with the Lord, to be renewed and revived before Him, to reconnect the nation into a relationship with Him.

And so he brought the priests and the Levites together and he told them not to be negligent in the purifying and sanctifying of themselves for the Lord had called them, chosen them to stand before Him, to serve and minister to Him, and to burn incense. And man how we want to be those people, not who need to be exhorted to walk right, and lead lives that are purified and sanctified before the Lord because He's chosen us to walk before Him, to serve, minister, and burn incense to Him (that is commune with Him in prayer). But we want to be those people who are on fire for Jesus Christ able to admonish and encourage our brother's and sisters, spur them on to godliness, provoke them to good works. God wants to use your life to be a positive, godly influence in the lives of your brothers and sisters. To help keep their eyes on Him, that they might lead lives given over to Him, set apart to Him because He's chosen them to stand before Him, minister to and serve Him. What an honor, may we not neglect the call of the Lord to be holy for He is holy. And we've been bought at a price (the price of the shed blood of Jesus Christ) we're not our own therefore we're to glorify God in our body and in our spirit which are His.

But should we be in that place whereby we've allowed ourselves to slide, we've become indulgent of the flesh, given over to the cares or the things of this world; may we be those who are ready and quick to repent and respond to the quickening of the Holy Spirit in our lives that way. Not get all defensive and think someone is trying to stand above us, or dictate our lives for us, but rather thank God that someone was willing to come alongside and share with us the need to be not negligent of God's call upon our lives, that we might sanctify and purify ourselves before the Lord, and stand before Him in holiness. Because we're all subject to weakness, the spirit's willing the flesh is weak. We need those reminders to keep Christ the center of our lives, and when we get them how we should thank God for them.

So the temple worship has been restored, people are responding and rejoicing, and things are being set in order once again in Judah.

Vs1-5

Now this is quite an amazing thing that is going on here because not only does Hezekiah sense the need to keep the Passover once again in Judah but he extends the invitation to the northern kingdom of Israel to join them. You recall from last week that we made mention of the fact that the northern kingdom of Israel had recently been taken captive by Assyria.

And so the remnant that remains up there who's escaped the 1st round of deportation are sorta floundering around with out direction, they don't have a king. And so Hezekiah's heart goes out to them and he extends to them the invitation to get right with the Lord. And to me it's pretty amazing because if you remember right Israel had not too many yrs prior to this absolutely devastated Judah in a war whereby 120,000 soldiers were killed and 200,000 civilians were taken captive. (Now by grace they listened to the prophet and released the captives) but that's generally the type of thing that causes your heart to go out to a people once they've been devastated by war themselves. He could've had a bitter heart of "you got what you had coming" toward them. Or taken advantage of their weakened state and invaded them, gave them a taste of their own medicine so to speak. But he didn't do that. Instead he reached out to them with the love of God and the opportunity to come to Him in humble repentance. He knew what it was like to be devastated, at the end, overwhelmed and undone as a nation, and so he was sort of striking while the iron was hot in sending them an invitation to restoration before God.

Because there were a whole multitude of people up there who were emotionally, perhaps materially and most definitely spiritually at the end of themselves. And it's when people have no where else to turn that they're most generally willing to respond to Jesus. As long as there's a glimmer of hope in something else, most people will give that a shot 1st. And it's sad that it's that way, but so often that's the fact. Perhaps a different job will do it, or maybe a new marriage, I just need to get wasted... and on and on the list goes of things people feel as though they need to give a go to find some sort of hope, or healing in this life. And tragically it's often times not until they've exhausted them all and are at the end until they're ready to open up and respond to the invitation to get right with God through Jesus Christ.

So Hezekiah says, "Hey, why don't you guys come down and celebrate the Passover with us?" Now the Passover was a time whereby the children's of Israel (God's people) remembered their redemption from the land of Egypt, they were in bondage, enslaved but God set them free. Each home slaughtered a lamb, placed some of it's blood over the doorposts and lintels of their homes and when the Angel of the Lord "Passed over" the land those who's homes were found "under the blood of the lamb" were spared. But if there was no blood covering you/your home, the judgment of death came upon that house, the 1st born. And through that, (Egypt obviously not submitting to that not being under the blood while Israel obeyed and was spared) Israel was released from bondage and God led them out in redemption.

And they were to remember that annually on the day that it happened, well they weren't ready for it on that day so they opted to do it the next month instead (there was a provision for that in the law in case they for whatever reason were unable to celebrate Passover in the 1st month they could do it in the 2nd).

And of course for us as NT believers we partake of communion to remember our redemption. It's the fulfillment, the substance of that which the Passover foreshadowed. Because we were all in chains, enslaved and in bondage to sin. And God sent His Son, the "Lamb of God," to be slaughtered, shedding His blood for us; so that as we apply (by faith) the blood of the Lamb to the doorposts and lintel of our heart we're spared from the judgment of death having been delivered, and as we partake of communion we're to remember our redemption in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Remember there they were, (Jesus and His disciples) partaking of the Passover, the Last Supper. And Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and He said, "*Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.*" 1 Cor 11:24

And we read that, "*In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'*" 1 Cor 11:25 So no longer the remembrance of the lamb sacrificed for their deliverance from Egypt, but now we (as the people of God) are to partake of the elements of communion in remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, for our redemption and deliverance from sin.

So Hezekiah sends to the tribes in the wounded and broken kingdom of Israel up north and says, "Why don't you guys come down and join us, we're getting right with the Lord and we want to encourage you to do the same."

Vs6-9

Jesus said it like this, "...*the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.*" John 6:37 God will not turn His face from you if you return to Him. James said it like this, "*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*" James 4:8 and This is a reoccurring theme throughout the scriptures, the heart of God being open *to* and anxious to turn *toward* the repentant in heart. Prov 28:13, "*He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.*" Isa 55:7, "*Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.*" I'll give you one more Ezek 18:30-32, "...*Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, says the Lord God. 'Therefore turn and live!'*" This is the message, "Repent, and be forgiven, be renewed, restored." When J.B. came on the scene what was the message? "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." When Jesus began His public ministry what was His message? "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

That's always been the heart of God toward man, why? Because God isn't willing, or wanting for any to perish but for all to come to repentance, because He will not turn His face from you if you return to Him; to the contrary He'll turn toward you, run *to* you and embrace you. The only time you see God in a hurry anywhere in the scriptures is when the prodigal son was returning to the Father. For as yet when he was a long way off, the father saw him, ran to meet him, embraced him and placed the signet ring upon his finger, once lost now found, once dead and now alive again.

Return to the Lord and He'll return to you, don't be stiff necked (that is stubborn or set in your rebellious ways) but yield yourselves to the Lord; enter His sanctuary which He has sanctified forever, and serve the Lord Your God. And the fierceness of His wrath will turn away from you. What an invitation, what an extension of grace and mercy; the Lord your God is gracious and merciful.

Vs10-11

So the message went out, and what was the result? Did every single person with out exception respond with rejoicing and accept the message with joy and gladness of heart? No, there were those who exuded the very essence of what being "stiff-necked" is all about. Here they were beat down, exhausted of every resource, depleted, worn down and washed out yet they refused to turn to the Lord. They mocked the messengers, laughed at them, and scorned them, in essence reflecting the very heart that took them into captivity and exile in the 1st place. Hadn't learned their lesson, weren't ready to repent, and sadly some people never are. They didn't have an argument or rationale *against* it, they simply mocked and ridiculed the idea *of* it.

However there were others who did respond, who did repent, who humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. And there's obvious application in here for you and me because we're like these runners. We've been given a message, and the message is an invitation to repentance that you might receive redemption by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" Mark 16:15 But not everyone is going to respond to that message, or that invitation with joy and gladness of heart. There'll be those who'll laugh, mock, ridicule and make fun of the message, who'll rebel against it and reject it. But then there will be others who will humble themselves, respond to it, receive it and repent. We're not called to worry about the response, we're called to get the message out, we're not responsible for how a person might respond, but we're to give them the chance *to* respond one way or another. The farmer sows the seed, but he can't control the yield of the ground, sometimes the birds of the air snatch the seed from the surface of the ground. Sometimes the seed lands on stony ground, sometimes amongst thorns or briars, and some lands in fertile soil, yields a reward some 30 some 60 some 100 fold. And as you know that's like the heart of man, we're just to sow the seed of the word of God into the heart of man. Sometimes the enemy will snatch it away as soon as it hits, while it's right there on the surface. Perhaps that person has a hard heart so it he never lets God's word sink too deep, could be that the cares of this world consume him so that the word gets choked out and never yields fruit.

But some people are going to take it in, let it burrow deeply down, establish roots and bring forth fruit in their lives, some 30, some 60, and some 100 fold. We just need to get the word out, the rest is between the individual and the Lord. Some in Israel rejected it, others received it.

Vs12

And this is who we want to be as a body, singleness of heart in obeying the word of the Lord. Unity of purpose, one heart, one mind before the Lord knit together in the love of God striving together to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Vs13-17

We spoke along the lines last week of “cleaning house.” Taking those practical steps to set our lives in order before the Lord, not out of legalism, but out of wisdom and obedience and love for the Lord. Here we’re seeing more of that, it’s extending now from the personal into the public, they’re removing all the altars in Jerusalem, and all the various incense altars and throwing them in the brook. And whether these were pagan altars, or various altars made to worship the Lord makes no difference for the point at hand (I would imagine they were pagan in origin having been put in place by Hezekiah’s dad) they were both prohibited. And so the city was being cleansed of any and every scripturally unauthorized forms of worship.

God has a prescribed manner in which He’s to be worshiped, and if you love Him your desire is going to want to be obedient *to* Him. Remember Jesus said, “*If you love Me, keep My commandments.*” John 14:15 Which is to say that our love *for* Him is going to be demonstrated by our obedience *to* Him. If I claim to *love* the Lord but have zero desire to know what His word says that I might yield myself and be *obedient* to it, than I find myself in a real quandary regarding the words of Jesus and need to search my heart. Because there’s a need for some repentance to be set in order there. John said, “*Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.*” 1 John 2:3-5 You see how intricately *knowing* Him, *loving* Him (having His love in us) and being *obedient* to Him is woven together? If we know Him, if we love Him and have His love flowing into and through us, that’s going to evidence itself in obedience to His word being made manifest in my life. God’s word didn’t/doesn’t prescribe worshiping Him any ol’ way I felt/feel the need. Under the old covenant there was a specific way and a specific place (there at the temple in Jerusalem), though you were always free to express your heart to the Lord. He had a prescribed format for worship/sacrifice.

Today He still does, we worship Him in spirit and truth, that is honestly and from the heart. It’s not born out of ritualism but out of a love relationship with Him. These people were getting right with God, therefore they were getting rid of the various things in and around them that were prohibited *by* Him.

And the priest and Levites were blown away by what God was doing, so they felt bad because they'd been in compromise themselves, so they caught the vision, sanctified themselves and started serving the Lord from the heart.

Ordinarily the man of the house would be able to kill his own sacrifice, and the priests and Levites would be able to help from there, but since people were coming who weren't ceremonially clean, the Levites were slaughtering the lambs for them.

Vs18-20

There are those who think there are 2 different Gods seen in the bible, the God of the OT who is hardcore, judgmental and harsh. And the God of the NT who is gentle, gracious, and merciful...loving. And those are people who don't know their bibles, because though God is holy, just, and righteous, He's seen and portrayed throughout the scriptures as loving, gracious, compassionate and full of mercy. There were people coming from the northern kingdom of Israel who'd lived their whole lives and never heard the word of God. But they wanted to be right with God so they came. Well, they knew nothing of ceremonial sanctification and things of that nature, they just had a heart to seek the Lord and wanted to be made right with the Lord. And so Hezekiah seeing what was going on, knowing the spirit of the law, not being caught up in the letter of it prayed for them, stood in the gap and interceded for them. "God, would you look to the hearts of these people, they don't know Your word but they long for your forgiveness, they want to be pleasing to You, obedient to You, they're seeking You, so may You provide atonement for them." and God heard him, and healed them, that word healed could be translated "restored" He restored them.

He could've justifiably judged them, but He granted unmerited favor to them instead, what's that called? Grace. God's grace is on display not only in the NT but throughout the entirety of the scriptures. The primary reason Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh was because he *knew* God was gracious, and that if they repented God would refrain from judging them. And he wanted God to judge them, so he took a ship headed the other direction, but God had a submarine pick him up and take him back where he needed to be. But has displayed His grace toward man even from the beginning in providing a sacrifice to cover Adam and Eve in the garden, which spoke of another sacrifice to come to deal with man's sin, of course that sacrifice would be found in Christ.

But this also shows us that God's primary concern has always been regarding the heart of man, not simply the rituals or the regimen associated with the law. Remember man looks to the outward appearance, but God searches, or looks to the heart.

Vs21-22

Is it scriptural to worship the Lord with the instruments up loud? According to this it is; they were singing and offering praise to the Lord, accompanied by *loud* instruments.

And notice that Hezekiah encouraged the Levites who *taught the good knowledge of the Lord*. Which is to say while people were there to worship, they were also receiving expositional teaching of the Word. They were instructed in the word while they were there, something desperately need, some having never heard God's word were now being given insight and understanding as to the ways and will of God as discovered in the Word of God.

We might see it like this; God was willing to *receive* them just as they were, but He loved them too much to *leave* them in that same spiritually deprived condition. God will receive us just as we are, but He loves us too much to leave us that way. He wants to take us, and teach us, instruct us in His word as to His heart, His ways, His will for our lives, that we might lead lives pleasing to Him, set apart to Him, obedient to Him bringing glory to Him. So though they came to Him in ignorance they would leave that place insight and understanding. "The good knowledge of the Lord."

We also see through the peace offerings the aspect of fellowship. The idea behind the peace offering was fellowship with God. A portion of the sacrifice went to God, a portion to the priest, and a portion to you and your family. And the idea was that of communing/fellowship with God as there was the partaking of the common meal. And so we have worship, God's word, fellowship, and prayer taking place here as the people were making confession. Be it confession of their guilt or God's goodness both are a healthy aspect of our prayer lives. But these are signs of spiritual health and well being, priorities being placed on worship, God's Word, fellowship and prayer.

Vs23-25

Another sign of spiritual health and well being (which we'll see more next time so we won't emphasize it this time) is generous giving. Hezekiah himself leading by example gave 1,000 bulls and 7,000 sheep, and the leaders of the assembly gave 1,000 bulls and 10,000 sheep so that they could continue with the feast for another week (much like we seen in the days of Solomon). But we have no indication that they continued to offer the lambs in the sense of the Passover, the emphasis for the 2nd week was upon a continuation of worship, God's Word, fellowship and making confession, it was just a blessed occasion of celebration and restoration before the Lord.

Vs26-27

The blessing which the priests were commanded to pronounce over the people is found in Num 6:24-26, "*The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.*" and God heard it, He blessed it, and was blessed by it. And as God looks into your life, my life, may He see and hear what's going on, and find a heart that He can bless and be blessed by.

Prayer Points:

Lord God that's our heart's desire. Not simply that you would bless our lives, but that our lives would be a blessing to You. And we thank You for Your grace & Your mercy, Lord work

in us individually and as a body that we might be spiritually healthy, with priorities upon worship, Your word, fellowship, communing with You in prayer. And may we be faithful “runners” with the message of the redemption to be found in the person of Your Son for the one who repents and places their faith in Him, knowing that there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we *must* be saved. May we be not a stiff-necked people, but a people soft and pliable in Your hands, open to Your direction, and Your correction, use us for Your glory.