

“Hezekiah, I: Going Backwards to Move Forward”

2 Chronicles 29-30

Today we come to the best king so far in Chronicles, that being Hezekiah. Last week we looked at his great grandfather Uzziah. Uzziah's son was Jotham who was a good king but 2 Chronicles gives us only 9 verses on him. Hezekiah's dad, Jotham's son Ahaz, was one of Judah's worst kings and Hezekiah's son Manasseh would challenge his grandpa Ahaz as top wicked king of Judah. So how does Ahaz, a wicked king have a godly son Hezekiah who has an ungodly son, Manasseh. We just don't know. Salvation is by faith through grace; it is the gift of God.

Hezekiah arrives on Judah's scene almost like Gandalf and the Riders of Rohan who save Aragorn, Theoden and the rest of the good people of Middle Earth. Hezekiah takes the throne after his father Ahaz has led Judah away from God, closing the temple and setting up idols and altars at every street corner in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the Assyrians are moving closer to Northern Israel and in 3 years will surround Samaria (capital of the north) and 3 years after that the north will fall and go into exile.

Here Ahaz has now died and his son Hezekiah – all of 25 years old – takes the throne and cleans house – God's house, and turns Judah (and tries to turn Israel too) back to God. Hezekiah wants to see Israel reunited and walking faithfully with God, as they did under David and Solomon. But in order to move forwards he has to go backwards first. He has to repair the damage and remove the garbage left behind by his father's hand. Like a good contractor Hezekiah knew you couldn't just build on top of a flimsy foundation or put a new carpet to hide an old cracked wooden floor. In order to make ...

Spiritual Preparations He Had to Do Spiritual Reparations (29:1-19)

The initial description of Hezekiah in v.2 reads,

²*He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done.*

No exception clauses. No 'as long as so-and-so' mentored him. The writer of Kings gives an even more glowing account:

^{2 Kings 18:5} *He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him.⁶ For he clung to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses.*

Hezekiah was not perfect (nor are we) but he was a breath of fresh air. Hezekiah couldn't simply tell people, 'Okay we're all going to follow God and His Word now'. He had to undoe a lot of bad teaching left behind by his father. Ahaz had taught the people they could worship any god anywhere. He even closed the temple so no one could worship the true God. Ahaz even was invited by the prophet Isaiah in Is. 7 to ask God to show him any sign he wanted for God to prove He could spare Judah from defeat of their enemies but Ahaz refused to ask God for a sign. He didn't want God in his life.

But Hezekiah was not like his father. We know Isaiah had an influence on him when he became king, maybe even earlier. His grandfather was a godly man as well. We read that Hezekiah started making these spiritual changes in the first month of the first year of his reign!! That means Hezekiah had already been following God and planning this for quite some time. This tells us something about making spiritual changes.

It has to be personal before it can be public (vv.1-3)

Hezekiah was following God long before he became king. He rejected his father's wrong ideas about God even though his dad Ahaz made worshipping God almost impossible in Judah. Hezekiah walked with God personally and privately. The public words and actions were a result of his personal and private disciplines. At the age of 25 he was mature in his faith.

If you have a dream to change your school, your workplace or even your neighborhood for God, it won't happen if you're not changing yourself. We can't make an impact for Christ publicly if we're not being shaped by Christ personally and privately. All change starts in our own heart first. Hezekiah rejected his father's false beliefs and chose to follow God and obey His Word. He had been doing this for a few years now. When he became king he was ready to make public changes.

But he also realized too –

You can't do it by yourself (vv.4-5, 12-15)

⁴ He brought in the priests and the Levites and gathered them into the square on the east.

⁵ Then he said to them, "Listen to me, O Levites. Consecrate yourselves now, and consecrate the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and carry the uncleanness out from the holy place.

Hezekiah knew what the Word of God said – only the priests and Levites could enter the Temple proper. He brought them all in and called them to action. In vv.12-15 we get a list of who helped. Note the phrases "from the Kohathites, from the Merarites and from the Gershonites". Levi had 3 sons (Gershon, Merari and Kohath) and only descendants of these 3 could serve as Levites, assistants to the priests, sons of Aaron. This is one of those reminders to the original readers, the returned exiles to Israel from Babylon. When they came back to the land they had to rebuild the temple and restore it back to its proper functions. They would have to clean out the rubble and consecrate it again. They would have to make sure only sons of Levi and Aaron could serve in the rebuilt temple too.

Hezekiah probably knew the story of Uzziah, his great-grandfather, who tried to enter the holy place to burn incense and was struck with leprosy. Hezekiah needed the right people with the same passion he had for God and His Word so that God would be glorified in their capital and country once again.

God designed His work – the temple and the church – to be team oriented. Everyone has a role. Everyone is needed. Lone rangers need not apply. We are often too guilty of going alone when we know we should enlist help. God always has others who share our passion for Him in our church so let's work together so He is glorified among us and our community will see it too.

The Levites must consecrate themselves; they must deal with their own sins and properly prepare themselves to enter the holy place again. Now that they are ready Hezekiah takes another slow backward like step before he can move forward. Before he can start the worship again he must,

Assess the spiritual damage (vv.6-9)

⁶ For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done evil in the sight of the LORD our God, and have forsaken Him and turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the LORD, and have turned their backs. ⁷ They have also shut the doors of the porch and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel.

⁸ Therefore the wrath of the LORD was against Judah and Jerusalem, and He has made them an object of terror, of horror, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. ⁹ For behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this.

The temple was a mess because the people were a mess. Hezekiah calls sin what it is. Being unfaithful, doing evil, turning our face away from God, even turning our backs on God. This last one was really sad because Ahaz closed the temple doors but set up idols right outside the temple and with their backs to the temple they burned sacrifices to false gods. I believe this was intentional because it was Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple that if God's people pray towards "this place" God would hear from heaven and forgive (1 Kings 8:29). What was Daniel's 3 times a day discipline while a captive in Babylon? He prayed 3 times a day at his window which faced Jerusalem.

We can't move forwards in obedience if we haven't first moved backwards with forgiveness. We all know the Lord's Prayer by heart but we rarely practice it. We might pray for our daily needs but do we pray daily that God would forgive our sins as we forgive the sins others do against us? Jesus often accused the Pharisees of being white-washed tombs. They painted the outside without dealing with what was inside. Let's call our sin what it is. Let's ask forgiveness for turning our back on God when we have disobeyed His Word. Perhaps you've held on to sin for years and only now realize why you've never been able to move forward in your spiritual life because you've never moved backwards to clean your 'house'.

Hezekiah enlists the help of God-centered people, the Levites and priests. He says we have to get right with God first. But then he paints the picture of what a cleansed sanctuary and people can look like.

¹⁰ Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel that His burning anger may turn away from us. ¹¹ My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him and serve Him to minister before Him, and to burn incense."

He shows people what God desires (vv.10-11)

He reminds the Levites what God had called them to do. Overwhelmed by the sin all around them under Ahaz's reign they forgot their calling before God. 'He chose you to stand before Him and serve Him.' The sins of the culture do not negate the calling of God. Just because sin is rampant around us and we live in a country that redefines marriage, family and even what male and female our anymore doesn't change our calling to go into all the world and preach the gospel! People need the Lord – it's pretty obvious. You and I are chosen of God to be saved and to serve Him.

- chosen to stand before **Him**
- serve **Him**
- to minister before **Him**

If our goals in life are self-centered then we've lost why God saved us and chose us. As much as I'd like to have a handicap in golf under 10 that's not God's purpose for me. As much as we'd all like to be a great parents or successful in our jobs or grade A students or a star athletes or just find a godly spouse and have children, those are not why God chose us. His purpose is for us is to

stand before Him and serve Him and minister before Him in the context of being the best athlete, student, husband, wife, parent, artist, etc., so that we serve Him in all that we do. Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, do it all to the glory of God.' And if what you're doing or pursuing takes you away from God then stop doing it or change why you do it.

Hezekiah reminds those who have been chosen to serve God that they have lost their focus and need to get back to God. And they won't be able to do that without . . .

Removing the garbage so cleansing can happen (vv.16-19)

For 8 days they brought out all that was unclean from the temple and took it to the dump – that's what happened in the Kidron Valley. Then it took another 8 days to clean it; practically and ceremonially. You can't just worship God without dealing with the garbage first. You can't just throw down a carpet over all the dirt on the floor and go on with business as usual. And you can't just sweep it under the couch either! Eventually there won't be any more room. Get rid of the dirt before approaching God.

I wonder how many of us did that before we came here this morning. Dealt with sins before we came and worshipped? The Levites removed all that was unclean before they could put back the temple furniture and articles that Ahaz had removed. You can't just worship God or spend time reading and praying ignoring the sins we refuse to deal with in our life. David said in Ps. 66:18,

"If I had cherished sin in my heart the Lord would not have listened."

"But your iniquities have separated you from God; Your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear." (Is. 59:2)

Hezekiah knew you can't go forward spiritually (worship and serving) until you've gone backwards spiritually (forgiveness and repentance). Spiritual preparation can't happen until there's spiritual reparation. But.. .

Spiritual Reparation Results in Spiritual Celebration (29:20-30:26)

Early the next morning – Hezekiah wastes no time because the people are ready to come back to God – he gathers the leaders of the community and has the priests and Levites perform the sacrifices necessary for worship. Now in a public worship context with the leaders there he offers burnt offerings (which was the offering that symbolized you are giving yourself in service to God) and the sin offerings because he is publically . . .

Identifying the need for forgiveness (vv.20-24)

Now that they've dealt with their sins personally they can confess and acknowledge it publically. Notice in v.23 that King Hezekiah and the officials assembled placed their hands on the sin offering publically acknowledging forgiveness they needed. Once that is done they ...

Celebrate God's grace to forgive (vv.25-30)

The Levites start up the worship band and sing God's praises while the burnt offering (we're offering ourselves completely to God) is offered up to God. God invites praise and song! He created it and commanded it. I hope Sunday morning isn't the only time all week you here songs of praise to

God. We can get caught up in the busyness of our week or lost in the dreariness of the news or wallow in the despair of our problems. We need to hear God's praises everyday. There's Christian radio, cd's, the internet. If this isn't part of your daily experience try it this week and see how God will change your attitude.

²⁹ When the offerings were finished, the king and everyone present with him knelt down and worshiped. ³⁰ King Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to praise the LORD with the words of David and Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness, and bowed their heads and worshiped.

And then Hezekiah turned to the people gathered there

³¹ Then Hezekiah said, "Now that you have consecrated yourselves to the LORD, come near and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the LORD." And the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all those who were willing brought burnt offerings.

Then we read how many offerings were presented – all kinds were brought willingly. Then in v.35

³⁵ There were burnt offerings in abundance together with the fat of the fellowship (peace) offerings and the drink offerings that accompanied the burnt offerings. So the service of the house of the LORD was re-established. ³⁶ King Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced over what God had brought about for the people, because it was done so quickly. [or suddenly]

We not only celebrate God's grace to forgive but we

Rejoice together in the work God does through us (vv.31-36)

Did you catch that last verse? They rejoiced over what **God** had done because it happened so quickly. Hezekiah was the catalyst. The people were ready to come back, even though he didn't know if they were. He just obeyed God and God did the rest. They did it together. The Bible teaches that God works in the community of His followers. They celebrated with fellowship or peace offerings because that was the only offering the people got to share in. I call it the potluck offering. You offered that at the end of all the other offerings because you had asked forgiveness of sins, offered yourself completely to God, gave Him a tithe of your income and now you were right with God and each other. If we don't worship or serve together we miss out on the seeing what God can do through us. If our experience of worship and fellowship is only Sunday morning, we're missing out on so much God has to offer us, as a community and we won't see what God is doing around us because we're not involved in each other's lives.

Ch. 30 continues the context of this early celebration and restoration. Hezekiah then commands the people to come and celebrate the Passover. The problem is Passover is in the first month and they used up that time to get the Temple ready. So now they have to wait a whole year to celebrate God's act of salvation in their life, right? Wrong! 30:4-5 says that they planned together to celebrate the Passover on the 15th day of the 2nd month and we're going to invite all Israelites from the north as well. You mean the guys who walked away from God, the ones who left 'church' – you want them back? Absolutely So they sent messengers all across all Israel – not just Judah and while some Israelites scoffed and rejected the invite, some came. Some from Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem (31:11).

Hezekiah knew the Assyrians were knocking on Samaria's door to the north and that it wouldn't be long that they came to Jerusalem – and they will. Hezekiah knew that the only way they

could survive an attack from Assyria was to repent of their sins and come back to God – north and south! He was trying to bring the nation together like it was in David and Solomon's days. So Hezekiah showed everyone the same thing God showed him and all of God's people, he

Exercised grace (ch. 30)

God wasn't overly concerned that the Passover wasn't celebrated in the exact month; He wanted right hearts with the right attitude. God is not a legalist, people become that way. God extends grace to those who scorn and ridicule Him (30:10). He didn't step in and stop the celebrations when the Levites performed some of the sacrifices because the priests weren't all consecrated yet. The ones who exercise grace understand it because they've experienced it.

Eph. 4:31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

You know those sins that we haven't confessed to God yet, even though we've come this morning and worshipped as if everything is all right between us God and the people in our life? God has exercised His grace by letting us come together, keeping us healthy, providing for our needs, blessing us in more ways than we deserve. But He's still waiting for us to confess and repent. Because we can't go forward until we've moved backwards and dealt with the spiritual garbage in our hearts that we keep covering up and pretending it's not there. We've fooled people publicly when we haven't been staying close to God personally. We've taken our eyes off of God's purpose for us (serve Him, glorify Him) and are following our own desires.

Sin is like dirt. No matter how clean we look or our houses look, there's always something dirty and when we ignore it collects more dirt. Let's do some spiritual house cleaning this week. It won't all get done in a few minutes, but we have to start by assessing the spiritual damage in our lives, identifying what areas of our life need forgiveness and remove the garbage from our lives. Then we can celebrate together what God is doing in our lives.

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