

## 2 Chronicles 28:22-29:11

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[ 0 : 00 ] So who are these people with funny names? I'm willing to guess most of you probably haven't read 2 Chronicles recently.

! Very few people do. I find it kind of fun when doing a one-off guest sermon to sometimes pick things that are a bit obscure. Things that maybe we don't usually look at in our normal preaching through different sermon series.

And so I want us to look today at the story of King Hezekiah. And this is only the first bit of the story. But why do I want us to look at that? Well, because the writers of Chronicles is actually taking a look at the history of Israel.

And as he's doing this overview, he's dealing with a very important question to the people of his day and his culture. And the question is essentially, does what we worship really matter?

And that's a compelling question, isn't it? Does what we worship really matter? Does it matter who or what we worship? I would guess that most of you or many of you in this room this afternoon would probably say yes to that question.

[ 1 : 08 ] But are you really sure? And the reason I ask you that is because the answer our culture would give to that question is a resounding no. It doesn't really matter what you worship as long as you're satisfied with it.

If it gives you some meaning, if it gives you some purpose, if it makes you feel better about your life, then it's a good thing. Tim Farron, the now former leader of the Lib Dem Party, recently gave an interview where he said in his experience out on the campaign trail, what he found was that generally people are happy with your faith.

They're okay with it, especially if you have a nice building or you wear funny clothing. You know, you're different, you're interesting. Then that's a good thing. And it actually helps our credentials as a liberal society because we can say, you know, we get along with people of all different cultures and different faiths and different religions.

But here was his conclusion. He said the moment that you actually assert that you believe a certain creed or that it actually impacts the way you live or the way you think or how you make decisions, the instant that that faith actually does something to your life, transforms it in some way, well, that's the bit that we can't put up with.

Does what we worship really matter? It's the question that's on the mind of the writer of Chronicles. So the writer of Chronicles is writing to a group of people who had been in exile. They've been taken away from their homeland, their ancestral land.

[ 2 : 43 ] And now they're coming back. And it's a generation or two later. And they've in that time, they've been stripped of their cultural identity. And so they're returning to the land of their forefathers.

And the question on their minds is, well, does it really matter what we worship? Are we still the people of God? Are we coming back to the land that he promised us? Does it does it make any difference what we worship?

And here we are, twenty five hundred years later, with extremely different circumstances, but much the same question. So this afternoon, I want us to look at a little piece of this story, a little piece of the history of God's people.

It's the story of King Hezekiah and actually his father as well, King Ahaz. And what we're going to see in this time, I hope, is that behind a deeply flawed man, God works in a remarkable way.

Can we learn from this? Can it impact our lives today? Does it still resonate with us? I believe it does. What I want us to see in our time together are three things. First of all, just the setting.

[ 3 : 50 ] What's the setting when Hezekiah comes to the throne? The second is the turn. What does he change? How does he turn things around? What does he do different from his father? And then lastly, I want you to see the joy that comes from the worship of the true God of the universe.

So first of all, the setting. And this is where we looked at in chapter 28. The setting is dire circumstances. So King Ahaz is the king of a tiny bit of the nation of Israel.

Israel at one point, they were the people of God. They'd been brought out of Egypt. They'd entered into the promised land. Here we are years later. The kingdom has been split into two. The southern kingdom is called Judah.

That's the part that Ahaz rules. The northern kingdom has been split multiple times. They've been taken over by various other groups. And now Judah sits surrounded by enemies.

Surrounded by smaller nations. Some of them they have historic cultural ties to. But many of them are nations that have invaded. So the southern kingdom is there.

[ 5 : 04 ] And Ahaz finds himself with enemies at the gate. So what does he do? Well, he decides to turn to other gods for help. Did you notice that?

In verse 23, he sacrificed to the gods Damascus. Which had defeated him. And said, because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them.

I will sacrifice to them. That they may help me. So Ahaz is faced with a major problem. He has these smaller kingdoms around them.

But then there's a much larger kingdom. There's a superpower that's starting to systematically eat up each of these kingdoms. They're called the Assyrians. And the Assyrians, if you want to know more about them, you can go just up the road to the British Museum.

They have a whole section on the Assyrians. And the superpower. And so Ahaz looks at them. And he becomes afraid. And so what does he do?

[ 6 : 07 ] Well, first of all, he adopts their gods. But then secondly, he actually goes to the king of Assyria. And he asks him for help.

He goes to him and he says, Look, I've got all these little kingdoms around me. They're causing me all kinds of trouble. Could you come and possibly help us out?

So he does this in order to maintain power, to maintain control. But he does it because he doesn't really think it matters what he worships.

The gods of the Assyrians and the Assyrians have defeated him. The gods of Damascus. So perhaps if we adopted those gods, if we took on a bit of the culture, then perhaps they could help us where the God of the universe could not.

See, his greatest ambition and his greatest hope is simple survival. See, at the heart of Ahaz's actions is a simple pragmatism, isn't it?

[ 7 : 09 ] When he's faced with a dire situation, he wants the quickest and simplest way out. He probably faces intense social pressure as well, doesn't he? He's the king.

What do we do to our politicians when there's a problem? What do we want them to do? We want them to fix it, don't we? If they don't fix it, we'll boot them out and get somebody else in who we think will.

And when they don't fix it, we boot them out and get someone else in who we will. And then the problem is going to get... But Ahaz probably felt that social pressure. Fix the problem. Well, how do we fix the problem? Well, we'll go ask the enemy for help and then we'll take on their gods.

And if they see that we're really serious, then, you know, everything will be just fine. See, spiritually and culturally, we live in a time not so similar to that of Ahaz.

We may not be faced with enemies at the gate, but we're faced with intense social pressure to conform, to simply accept everything that culture gives us and just kind of live with that.

[ 8 : 11 ] I believe that Tim Ferriss' quote that I mentioned earlier actually nails our society. We're a deeply religious society as long as our religion isn't deep. And the reason why this is relevant to our discussion is because every single person in this room, in one way or another, has been impacted by this view of faith.

So the story that our culture tells us and that most of us have probably bought into is that the greatest desire and the greatest happiness in life is to look within yourself and to find the true you. To find just whatever might work for you. And that's the promise that Ahaz had believed in as well. We just need to find what's going to work for us.

We need to protect ourselves from our enemies. What's going to work? Perhaps idolatry. Perhaps just being nice. But do the promises of Ahaz's idols work?

And do the promises of the idols of our day work? Look at verse 23. No.

[ 9 : 26 ] Yeah, 23. The second bit. But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel. Did they work for Ahaz? No, they didn't. And what you get a sense of is the desperation of Ahaz.

He's looking for that thing that's going to work. But he finds only disappointment. And we see in the end that he dies a broken man. They don't even bother burying him with the other kings of Judah and Israel.

But they bury him in the city in Jerusalem. This is a way of saying basically he was a broken man. He was a disgraced king. And he was set to the side and largely forgotten.

And the question I have for you this afternoon is, what leaves you feeling empty? What leaves you broken? Oftentimes when we talk about idolatry, we ask, what's the thing that you desire the most? And that's one way of looking at it. But my question for you is, what's the thing that you desire most in life that ultimately leaves you feeling empty? That's our idols.

[ 10 : 29 ] And what generally happens is, as those things disappoint us, we move on to the next thing and the next thing. Ahaz didn't have that luxury. He dies a broken man with his enemies on the plains of this country, bearing down on his capital city.

And he leaves his son to clean up the mess. And it's quite a mess that they're in too, isn't it? So what does Hezekiah do? Is he going to continue to do the same thing as his father? Is he going to continue to just try and find what works?

Well, here's where we see the turn. What did he do? He actually does the opposite of what his father did, doesn't he? He turns and moves everything in a different direction. He moves in a different direction from his father, from his culture.

And the calling of faith in the God of the Bible is actually a calling to be radically counter-cultural. It's a calling to believe differently. It's a calling to act differently.

It's a calling to live differently. But does it work? Well, let's find out together. I want us to look at five things that Hezekiah does here.

[ 11 : 34 ] We're going to go through these very quickly here. There's more than five things that we can point out, but these are the five that I think we should really see here. First of all, look at verse 2 of chapter 29.

He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David, his father, had done. The first thing that Hezekiah does is he believes differently. He doesn't believe that religion is just a thing to get him through the day, but he actually believes in something deeper than that.

He believes in the God of the universe. This young king doesn't do what his father does, but he wants to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord. See, clearly Hezekiah recognizes the emptiness of the promises of his father's idols.

His father looked at other gods and he saw opportunity. Hezekiah looks and he sees only need and he sees brokenness. And so he, like David, who is one of the greatest kings in the history of Israel, looked to someone different.

He looked to the Lord and he saw true hope. What I want to suggest to you today is that most of us are probably like Hezekiah in one way or another.

[ 12 : 47 ] Most of us are probably desperate. We're desperate to find some meaning and some hope. And sometimes we even think we have it, but it fades away over time.

But the calling of the gospel is to believe differently. To place our hope in someone far more solid and far more real and far more powerful than the gods of our lives.

To look outside of ourselves and to find a solid hope in the greater God, the God of the universe. And the beauty of the gospel is that you today can believe in that same God. The same God that Hezekiah believed in 2,500 years ago.

We can put our faith in today. The second thing we see Hezekiah do, the first thing he does is he believes. The second thing we see is he actually turns.

He makes a change in his life and in his kingdom. Believing differently causes him to turn from his father's ways. To change the momentum of his kingdom. And turn to something else.

[ 13 : 51 ] We see in verse 3 a powerful statement of this. In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. So what does that mean? So the first month of the first year of his reign is fancy biblical language for right away.

Immediately, he does something different. He opens the doors of the house of the Lord. The very doors that we saw in chapter 28, his father closed. The very same temple that we saw his father steal from.

Those are the doors that he opens. See, it's not enough to simply believe. But that belief has to take action. And that action is to reverse the wrongs that have been done.

Christianity isn't a call to keep going as we have before. It isn't a bit of inspiration for our day-to-day lives. If you want to just think more positively, there's cat posters for that.

You can get them at the corner shop. Christianity is a calling to a radical change and a radical new direction and momentum in your day-to-day life.

[15:01] And this is a change that you don't work out for yourself. But you have the blessing of God's Word. You have the blessing of the Holy Spirit. And you have the blessing of the fellowship of the local church.

If you're with us this morning and you're not involved in a local church, speak to one of us afterwards because we want to get you involved. The church is there to walk alongside you.

If you're walking the journey of faith alone, stop and get with people who can help you along the way. The third thing we see is that Hezekiah is obedient.

Verses 4 and 5. It isn't enough to simply believe and it wasn't enough simply to stop doing what was wrong. But he became actively obedient to the law of God. When he calls together the priests and the Levites, what does he tell them to do?

He tells them to go and cleanse themselves, to consecrate themselves in line with the Old Testament, the law of Moses that God had given to him.

[16:06] So it was spelled out very clearly in the law of God how they were to approach God. It was spelled out very clearly in the law of God how they were to worship God. And they hadn't been doing any of those things.

And so the first thing that he does is that he calls the priests in and he says, let's get our worship right. How do we do that? We do that by obeying the law of God.

And this is the biggest difference between God and our culture. See, our culture says it's all about you. It's about how you feel. It's about what you're getting out of this.

But Scripture says it's all about God. Our focus is to turn and approach God as he calls us to in his word. We tend to think of the law as something that's prohibitive that keeps us from being able to do the things that we want.

But the law of God is actually intended to speak deeply to our humanity. To reveal to us who our creator is. What his character is like. And to show us who we are and what we're like.

[17:10] And to show us the expanse between us and to call us back to God. It's meant to bring us in line with who we were created to be. So what's the next thing that we see Hezekiah do?

The next thing, the fourth thing, is that Hezekiah confessed. So he believed, he turned, he became obedient, and then he confessed.

Look at verse 6. Our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God. They have forsaken Him and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the Lord and turned their backs.

In Hezekiah's day, the king represented the entire people. He represented the entire nation. And so his sin was the nation's sin. And so Hezekiah openly acknowledges that.

He openly admits that. He openly faces that. There was no reason to hide it. There was no reason to be polite about it. Oftentimes after someone has died, they become an absolutely perfect person, don't they?

[18:19] We don't speak ill of anyone, no matter how terrible they might have been. But Hezekiah actually is honest about the sins of his father and therefore the sins of his nation.

There's no reason to overlook it. When you come to know God, you can't help but be honest with Him about your wrongs. So are you broken?

It's okay to admit that. Have you done things that you're ashamed of? Have you done things that you know are wrong? It's okay to tell that to God. He invites us to do that.

He calls us to do that. He doesn't want us to hide behind a smiling facade. He doesn't want us to hide behind just saying everything's okay. But He calls us to an honesty that Hezekiah embraced.

Finally, the last thing that we see Hezekiah do is we see repentance. And we see that worked out in these other verses you can see, 20-25. What does Hezekiah do? Once the priests have

consecrated themselves, once they have set themselves apart, they come to Hezekiah and He calls them to offer sacrifices.

[ 19 : 27 ] So He sought atonement for His sins and the sins of His people. And it was good for them to confess their sin, wasn't it? But a simple admission of guilt wasn't enough.

There had to be something done for that. There had to be atonement made for that guilt. And so Hezekiah took sin against God seriously. Because he knew that God took sin against him seriously. And so when everything had been prepared, they made sacrifice for their sin. See, true repentance requires atonement for sin. And so where do we find that?

In Hezekiah's day, they made sacrifice. Lots and lots and lots of sacrifice. If you go back and look at this passage in your Bible, you see even going into the next chapter where they were sacrificing thousands and thousands and thousands of sheep and goats and bulls.

Just tons and tons and tons. of animal sacrifice. See, in Hezekiah's day, they made lots and lots of sacrifice. But these were just a picture. They were a signpost that was pointing forward to something greater.

[ 20 : 37 ] They were in anticipation of a greater atonement that would be made by a greater king than Hezekiah. See, at the appointed time in history, God would send His Son, Jesus Christ, to make atonement and to be the ultimate and perfect sacrifice for our sin.

And if we look to Christ by faith, we find forgiveness of sin. And you'll receive the full measure of atonement.

So very finally, what's the result of all of this? What's the result of the faith of Hezekiah? What's the result of our faith in Christ? Look down at verse 36 of chapter 29.

It's on your sheets. And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced because God had prepared for the people for the thing came about suddenly. Notice the contrast between the story of Ahaz and the story of Hezekiah.

Where did Ahaz's pursuits leave him? Broken and undone and dead. But where does Hezekiah's pursuits lead him and his people to joy?

[ 21 : 49 ] Verse 36 says, they rejoiced because God had done a great work in them. God had prepared it and God had executed it. It wasn't because of anything special that they had done.

It wasn't because they were doing all these great works. But it was because God had prepared that work to be done. God had placed it on the heart of Hezekiah and his people to turn from their sin to God.

If you get one thing out of this this afternoon, get this. If you've zoned out for the last 20 minutes, I don't blame you. It's okay.

But get this. The scriptures are ultimately about God. And every story in the scripture tells us something about his character.

And what we see in the life of Hezekiah in the story of God's people is that the God of the Bible is a God who saves. He's a God who saves His people.

[ 22 : 50 ] He's a God who gives hope where there is none. He's a God who calls us to be human by knowing Him and glorifying Him. To this day, the greatest hope for our world is to look to the same God who Hezekiah looks to for salvation.

Because what He offers us is a better hope and a better story than the gods of our world. He offers us much more than a nice religion or a great philosophy, a happy approach to life.

So our world offers you fulfillment by finding your true self. But what the God of the Bible offers you is your true self. When you place yourself under the reign of the King of creation, when you place yourself in the hands of Christ Jesus, you find joy amidst sorrow.

You find hope amidst fear. Do you want to experience the peace of God, peace amidst chaos of our world, and look with faith to God and know His grace through His Son, Jesus Christ?

Please pray with me.