

2 Chronicles 30

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Preacher: Lourens du Plessis

[0 : 00] There's a reason why sorry is the hardest word to say, isn't it?

Any number of reasons actually why that may be the case. Saying sorry to someone for hurt! or offence we've caused them means we're acknowledging by definition we did something wrong and aren't perfect, isn't it? And that's a hard thing to do. It makes us vulnerable.

And we're taught every day to be strong, to stand our ground, to defend ourselves. Especially in a city like London which can be a very harsh place. The law of the jungle very quickly becomes the law of the concrete jungle.

And the other reason why it's hard to say sorry is because things need to change. If we're truly sorry, and if it's about acknowledging our sin, that's even harder.

But it is important to think about how we repent of sin. How we come back to God and say we're sorry for our sin and we turn to him after we've wandered away.

[1 : 30] In the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, in Mark 1.15, the first thing that Jesus says when he starts his public ministry is the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in this Gospel.

So repentance is about more than just being sorry for sin. It is turning from sin and being sorry for it and returning to God.

And if sorry is the hardest thing to say, repentance is one of the hardest things to do. If you're exploring Christianity and you're here this morning, maybe you've not heard this before, but becoming a Christian, Christianity is not just about believing something about God.

It also involves turning from our life before and from sin to Jesus. And if you are a Christian, this morning it's also relevant to you.

Are you still repenting of your sin or has it slipped down the list of priorities in everyday busy life?

But how does it look? How does it look to turn from sin to God? And if it's so hard to do, how do we even do it?

[2 : 57] And that's what this passage in Chronicles speaks to you. Now, the book of Chronicles is maybe one of those books, in the Old Testament especially, that we don't read that often.

I don't know if you're like you, but you might read through the Bible, you get to Samuel and kings, and you read all the stories of all the kings of Israel, and they go into exile, and then you get to Chronicles.

And it's a bit of *deja vu*, in a sense. Like, haven't I just read this? It's a bit like there's a glitch in the matrix, in a sense. We've covered this ground.

But it is because they tell different stories. Not different in the sense of completely different events, but the same story from different perspectives.

So we realize different things. See, the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, or Samuel and kings, answer this question that Israel and Judah had when they went into exile.

[3 : 57] How did we end up in this mess? How did things get to this point, that we're out of the land, away from God, in this foreign land? Why is there no king from David's line on the throne, as God promised?

Why are we not worshipping at the temple, where God said he'd dwell with us? Why is Jerusalem destroyed? Why is there no hope of going home anytime soon?

And the book of Chronicles tells the story, how do we get out of this mess? What has God done in the past, in his faithful nature, in his faithful dealings with us, and how is he going to deal with us in the future?

What must we do to return to him so that he will return to us? How is God going to be faithful and fulfill all his promises to us?

So there are different perspectives on the same story. God's faithful dealings with his people through his covenant, according to his promises, and that's what Chronicles wants to tell the people of Israel and Judah.

[5 : 01] But there's even more to it than that. I don't know if you knew this, but the order of the books as we have it in the English Bible, the Old Testament books, it's slightly different in the Hebrew Bible.

So our books are kind of grouped together, same types of books together. You know, your history books and your prophets and so on. And that makes a lot of sense in many ways, and you've got all the same kind of books together. In the Hebrew Bible, you've got Chronicles right at the end. Because it wants to tell people, God's people, Israel and Judah, as they were in exile, how do you look forward after this? It's interesting the connections that it makes then, in the order of books then. Ruth follows Proverbs, for example, and Ruth is spoken about as a woman of valor, and it's just after the end of Proverbs, which talks about this woman of valor. So an interesting kind of connections that it makes in that way.

But the important thing here is, the writer of Chronicles wants to point God's people to a life looking forward, based on how God has dealt with these people always through history.

[6 : 16] And when we come to these end chapters of Chronicles with that kind of perspective, they almost take on a couple of different nuances.

We look at them in a different way. They're not just a history chapter that tells us about something that happens in the past. There's a different angle to this that's relevant for us too.

That's how God has worked in and through our history too, and how he fulfills his promises. These chapters want to tell us, look up, have faith.

This is how God's people should live, until he returns to us. And that's just another way of describing repentance.

Repentance is a big word. Kids, on your sheet somewhere there should be something about that too. But it's really just a way of describing us turning from our sin, where we've wandered away from God, confessing that sin to God, being sorry about our sin, and turning back to God.

[7 : 24] And that is the picture that is described in this chapter. How God's people do that. There's a fascinating couple of bits in these last couple of chapters.

Just after Ezekiah's story that we just read, in chapter 33 and so on, we read about an evil king again, Manasseh.

Chronicles is very honest. It doesn't kind of gloss over the bad kings that Israel had and the sins they had. But it focuses attention on the hopeful future that lies in returning to God and God's faithfulness.

But it's interesting how it's contrasted sometimes with, as I said, the kind of story that we've read in Kings, about these kings. See, in 2 Kings 21, Manasseh is described in this way.

He says in verse 9, But they did not listen. And Manasseh led them astray to do more evil than the nations had done, whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel. He'd done more evil than the evil nations who'd been there before.

[8 : 35] Therefore, thus says the Lord the God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such disaster, that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle.

That is a pretty shocking indictment. And in 2 Chronicles 33, it doesn't gloss over those things. For example, it tells us, Manasseh burned his sons as an offering in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. So these chapters then gloss over the unsavory parts of Israel and Judah's history.

But where's the emphasis in Chronicles? Again, in chapter 33, verse 11, Therefore the Lord brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks, and bound him with chains of bronze, and brought him to Babylon.

And when he was in distress, he entreated the favour of the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his forefathers. He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty, and heard his plea, and brought him again to Jerusalem, into his kingdom.

[9 : 51] Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God. And he goes on to talk about how they removed all the foreign gods and the idols from the temple, and restored altar and temple worship.

We tell different versions of the same story as well, don't we? You read about an event in the news, and it looks like the Guardian and the Daily Mail's reporters were on opposite sides of the planet. I watch an Arsenal-Tottenham match, and although you'd think the facts can only be described in one way, that Arsenal is always superior, where a Tottenham supporter, for some reason, would describe a game where they played much better than they did.

It's not necessarily malicious. Different perspectives. The difference here, though, is that both of these perspectives are God's perspective. The all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful God, who directed all of these events to bring a people to himself.

And they're both true. And the emphasis, even in Manasseh's account, which we saw, is on repentance and turning to him. That's the central idea here. God is faithful.

[11:07] God is just. God is righteous. To have sent us into exile. But if we return to him, he does not turn his face from us. He turns to us.

And it is glorious. Manasseh repents, but it is only because God leads him to repentance. And through him the people. And don't miss this. Even Manasseh can repent.

They still went into exile. There were still consequences for their sin. But no one is beyond saving. What a message for a people who were in exile to hear as they were going back to the Promised Land.

So these last couple of chapters of the book of Chronicles has much to teach us, too, about how to return to God. How to repent of our sin. How does this look like? And if you've had anything like the week I've had, or just any week at all, you'll know that repenting from our sin and turning to God is not something we ever stop doing.

We see a couple of things about repentance in this passage. And the writer clearly wants to stress for us. And for the people in exile, as they were about to go back to the Promised Land.

[12:23] Here's the first thing. Repentance is to God, for God, and because of God. verses 6 to 13.

Hezekiah writes to all of Israel. They were in the southern kingdom at this stage. The northern kingdom had gone into exile already. Had been taken into exile. Had been captured and taken to another land.

That's not their home. And he calls to all of them to come and celebrate the Passover. We'll touch on the Passover again later. But not just Hezekiah, the princes and the entire assembly.

They do it together. This is a corporate exercise. This is not just an individual exercise. This is an exercise for all the people to come together and repent and turn to God.

Earlier in the service, we confessed our sin and heard of God's forgiveness. We continue to do the same thing. All over the world, God's people do that today. So the St. Kuri is far and wide through the land and they tell them the first thing to realize about repentance, it is necessary.

[13:27] It is absolutely necessary. Why? Because this is what their covenant Lord requires. Verse 6. O people of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria.

Do not be like your fathers and brothers who are faithless to the Lord of their fathers. Do not now be stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourself to the Lord that his fierce anger may turn away from you.

You see, God's not just an abstract God, is he? He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, the covenant Lord who made a covenant with these people that he would be their God and they would be his people.

And they've broken faith with him. The eternal creator of all things who chose them to be his people and they were rebellious, stiff-necked. It's always such a satisfyingly descriptive phrase that's used about God's people.

And they turn to other gods. And Hezekiah is spelling out what should be blatantly obvious to them. Israel, the northern kingdom, you're in exile.

[14:48] Your brothers are far away because they rejected God. You know this. When you're in a hole, stop digging. Come back to God.

Your land's empty and abandoned, but He is here. Return to Him so His fierce anger may turn away from you. Sounds obvious. But, if it was so obvious, they would probably do it.

See, there's something here about we need to be reminded of the seriousness of our sin. Even when we can see the consequences in our lives. At adult Bible school, at adult Sunday school, in the mornings, we're looking at the atonement in the morning.

In the last couple of Sundays, we're about how serious our sin is. Israel knew the consequences of their sin, but they needed to be reminded of the seriousness of it. We see it every day.

The world has fallen. We see the consequences of sin every day in wars, in the vile politics that's going on, in the way people talk to each other. Our own relationships are strained and fall apart.

[15:59] But until we realize that that is because the world has abandoned the God who created this world, we won't necessarily realize we need to return to Him.

But it doesn't stop there. What happens when the people return to God? Does Hezekiah tell them? He says, God is gracious and compassionate. And we should never forget to bring those two together.

that God is just and righteous and angry about sin. But He is always gracious and compassionate to those who return to Him. So in verse 9, Hezekiah says, If you return, your brothers will return for the reason why they will return.

It's not because you returned in the first instance and did the right thing now, but because the Lord your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn His face from you if you return to Him. Isn't that incredible?

You see, in that time, God's presence was with them in the temple and in the promised land. In that city of God, in Jerusalem, being far away in a foreign land meant they were physically far from God.

[17:17] And here He says, If you return to Me, I will return you to the land that I promised you, that I gave to you. And more importantly than that, I will not turn my face away from you.

And some mocked and scorned these messengers as they kind of went through the land. And that kind of rings true with our experience too, doesn't it? People who want to call the world back to God often get mocked and scorned.

So it's not a new thing. But some did return from Manasseh and Zebulun and Asher. And they've been, you know, from tribes of people whose people have been in exile for a long time.

But some of them were left and some of them came back to God and it seems humanly impossible. From a human perspective, they were a write-off. But God is faithful despite their unfaithfulness.

Despite the people around them mocking and scorning these messengers, some of them come back to Jerusalem. They return physically to Jerusalem, but even more than that, they've returned spiritually.

[18:24] They humble themselves to come back to God. And that's significant. But then you probably know as well as I do someone that might come to mind who is never wrong and will fight to the death rather than admit that he or she was wrong.

You might recognize that in yourself. You might be driving somewhere and suspect you're on the wrong road and start to realize you're on the wrong way.

And the people in the car start to realize you're on the wrong way. And everyone realizes, everyone else has realized that we're on the wrong way. And you do your best poker face expression to desperately try and work out how you're going to get back on the right way without having to admit at all that you went the wrong way.

The sat nav's a bit broken or something like that. I did that yesterday and I was late for the thing I had to be at yesterday afternoon. We all know ourselves when we fought tooth and nail to prove we're right even when we're obviously wrong, don't we?

No, I didn't lie to you. No, of course, I'd never say something behind your back. Why is it even possible to repent?

[19:56] If that's our natural instinctive reaction to justify ourselves, to prove we're right and not to admit defeat, how does it work? We see this amazing thing in verse 12, the hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the prince has commanded by the word of the Lord.

See, when God expects us to return to him, he returns us to him. We repent, but it is God who causes us to repent.

The Lord himself shows us grace by giving us hearts that want to repent and return to him when we're unable to do that. Judah was not able to return to the Lord.

The people from Israel, from Asherah, Manasseh, and Zebulun, were not able to return to the Lord themselves. Here's the encouragement for us. If you're struggling to fully turn from sin to God, don't give up.

If you know someone you are praying will turn to God, do not give up. What seems impossible to us is always possible with God.

[21 : 12] Don't ever, ever give up. God can turn anyone back to him or to him so that he won't ever turn his face from them.

You see, we're not physically in exile like Israel and Judah, but spiritually we are too. We live in a world that's rejected God and doesn't know him.

And the Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter, Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you've not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the trespassions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

You see, God is always faithful in returning to those who turn to him from exile of his presence. And until Christ returns, he brings us to that repentance day after day when we're not able to do it ourselves.

The second thing that we see about repentance in this passage is it must lead to right worship. See, coming into God's presence as we do every Sunday in a particular and a special way means we need to worship incorrectly.

[22 : 22] That's why we do things in a certain way. We have certain elements of the service. We have a call to worship and we confess our sin and we hear forgiveness and we hear God's word preached. And we see here it didn't go smoothly for God's people returning him to worship him correctly.

They didn't know how. They had forgotten how to do it right. And that would have sounded familiar to God's people in exile reading this as an encouragement.

And for us if we've struggled with sin or felt far away from God or felt we'd wandered off from him we can feel unprepared to come to God and unworthy.

So they removed the altars to the idols. They came to slaughter the Passover lamb but not all the people were ready. And in fact the priests and the Levites were not ready.

In verse 15 they slaughtered the Passover lamb and the priests and Levites were ashamed so they consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings into the house of the Lord. They saw what was happening and responded by consecrating themselves, by making themselves ritually clean and returning to God.

[23 : 40] They realized the importance of coming to him as he had told them to. And in verse 17 though the people themselves weren't ready either. There were many in the assembly who had not consecrated themselves and therefore the Levites had to slaughter the Passover lamb for everyone who was not clean to consecrate it to the Lord.

And the writers of the Chronicles doesn't condone it. But here's the point he makes. It's not people's outward expression of repentance and faith.

That is the prime factor, the most important factor in the Lord's consideration of it. Whether they came ritually clean and did all the right things according to the law wasn't the most important factor. A couple of weeks ago Chris preached from Malachi and there was this shocking line in chapter 1. God speaks to them and he says, Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain.

I have no pleasure in you says the Lord of hosts. I will not accept an offering from your hand.

There's a way of doing the external things that hides something severely wrong in our hearts.

[24 : 58] And what happens here is the opposite. Their hearts have turned, their hearts are set to see God, and he recognises that.

So despite them not be outwardly ready, God provides someone to intercede for them. Hezekiah prays and God heals them in verse 20.

Spiritually makes them acceptable in his presence to keep the Passover because they set their hearts to seek the Lord. here's the reality about repentance.

None of us come ready completely and fully to God to be acceptable in his sight. We cannot do that. We have a constant need of repentance.

We sin all the time. And if you're waiting to come to God because you feel you need to be perfect before you can do that, this passage in Chronicles tells us, don't wait for that.

[26 : 06] If your heart is set to seek God, come to him and seek him and repent and turn to him and believe in him. And God's abundantly gracious. He accepts them, healing them spiritually and

there's an intercessor who intercedes with God on their behalf.

You see, we have a high priest who does the same thing for us, don't we? In Hebrews we read, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him and was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his reverence.

See, if there's any reason for you to think you cannot approach God, we have a better high priest than any high priest Israel ever had. We have the Son of God himself praying for us at this very moment and every day in a way that Hezekiah could never pray for the people.

and you can come to the throne of grace to God with confidence, perfectly righteous, perfectly sanctified, perfectly consecrated.

[27 : 42] But here's the most important thing that we see about repentance here. It's to God, for God and because of Him. it leads to right worship.

But repentance is incomplete without trusting only in God's gracious saving work. See, we haven't yet answered the question that I kind of alluded to earlier.

Why this massive focus on the Passover at the end of Chronicles? You see, we've got it here in chapter 30. A couple of chapters later, we've got Josiah coming. The king, after Manasseh and Amon, went off the rails again a bit and came back to God and led the people astray.

Josiah reforms things again. They find the book of the law, they read from it, they all cut to the heart, they repent, and they celebrate the Passover again. Chronicles talks about the Passover as much or more than any other book in the Old Testament.

And it comes right here at the end, and right here at the end of the Old Testament in the Hebrew Bible. Why? Why does God focus so much attention on this for us too?

[28 : 57] So we've got to think, what did the Passover signify? It recalls the Exodus, when God rescued his people from Egypt. as he had promised Abraham he would do, and make a people from them.

Their rescue from Egypt was not their work. It was God's gracious saving work to save them from Egypt. They could never have done it themselves. It reminded them that an atoning death in their place was necessary when they sacrificed the Passover lamb and put the blood on the doorpost to show that they realised that their sin was serious and they would be accepted in God's presence when blood has been spilled for it.

It was a serious thing to remind them of. And God promised to bring them to the promised land when he took them out of Egypt. This tiny nation, powerless, powerless in the context of the world they lived in, into this lush land that overflowed with milk and honey.

And it reminded them that God had promised that he would send a Messiah to put an end to sin and death. all of that was wrapped up in there. And with the recounting of the Passover is such a powerful thing in their life as a nation that God had commanded them to do every year.

And we have this shocking announcement here in this passage that they had not sacrificed the Passover, celebrated the Passover as often as commanded.

[30 : 28] it. And when that happens there's a danger, isn't there, when we forget that we rest in the finished work of God.

And what could have happened with these Israelites and Judahites going back from exile to think that if they do the right things, if they return to the sacrifices in the right way, that they could become right with God through their contribution, their action.

And as we saw in Malachi, that is to an extent what happened. But it's when they celebrate the Passover in this passage that their joy is complete.

I don't know if you saw in verse 26, there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, there have been nothing like this in Jerusalem.

It wasn't because they had a great feast and there were loads of bulls and there was a great time in Jerusalem. Jerusalem, it's because the Passover showed that God turned to them when they had not yet turned to him.

[31 : 49] Because he had promised to provide them with a savior who would be the true Passover lamb, the one who died in their place so they could be rescued from sin. So we know we need to

turn from sin.

We know that part of repentance. repentance. If you've been in a church for any length of time you would have probably heard that or if you haven't been in a church. We know very often that our lives need to change.

Instinctively we feel that. But here's what this chapter tells us. Our joy will not be complete until we only rest in the finished work of God on our behalf.

You see the Passover looked backwards and forwards for Judah in very powerful ways. But what they look forward to is present reality for us. But we have the Lord Jesus Christ interceding for us in heaven right now.

We heard this morning at our Sunday school from Jeremiah 6 where God rebukes the priests and he tells, he rebukes them for crying peace, peace when there is no peace.

[33 : 03] saying, they healed the wound of my people lightly. Hezekiah prayed to the Lord and he healed the people. He reconciled them to him. Jesus Christ paid a much greater price than these sacrifices in the Passover lamb to heal us and to reconcile us to God permanently.

And there was a perverse joy in Jerusalem when the true Passover lamb was sacrificed for us.

The people rejoiced over that Passover lamb but in a very wrong way. But we know there is great joy in heaven when a single sinner comes to repentance.

repentance. And our prayer is heard every moment of every day in God's holy habitation in heaven through Jesus' prayers on our behalf.

Let's continue to return to God with confidence. The God who turned to us in Christ when we turned away from him.

[34 : 12] And he will never turn his face from us as his beloved children. Let's pray. Heavenly Father our sinful hearts find it hard to return to you when we've wandered, when we've sinned.

We are proud. We are often stiff necked people. Father we give you such great praise that when we return to you it is not because we were able to make the effort because we will never be but because you turned our hearts, because you set our hearts to seek you.

Father we praise you that in the Lord Jesus you turn to us in a way we could never have expected demanded or demanded or deserved. Father we pray that you will turn each of us to you again in you in this week to come and that we will see your face and be glad.

Father we pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing again now. The hymn Lord of the Church from page 7 of the booklets.

Linger on these words in the first verse. Lord of the Church we pray for your renewing Christ over all our undivided aim. Fire of the Spirit burn for our renewing.

[35 : 53] Wind of the Spirit fan the flame. We turn to Christ amid our fear and failing. The will that lacks the courage to be free. The weary labours all but unavailing to bring us nearer what a church should be.