

Reform – 2 Chronicles 29

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Set Scene

1. As we return to the story of the Kings of Judah, we come to the one most like his great ancestor, David; Hezekiah.
2. His devotion to God stands in stark contrast to both his father & son, who were the 2 *most* evil rulers Judah had.
3. His father Ahaz had *gone wild* in the worship of idols;
 - a. Building pagan altars all over the place.
 - b. But worse of all was his vandalism & eventual closing of the temple after ransacking its treasures.
4. Under Ahaz, Judah was brought to an all time low; weak, defeated, pillaged by enemies.
 - a. The economy was in shambles & society was nearing total meltdown..
 - b. Looming on the horizon was the mighty Assyrian empire, who used *terror* as a policy of warfare.
 - c. So real was the Assyrian threat, just 3 years after Hezekiah came to the throne, the northern nation of Israel was conquered & carried away captive.
5. It was in such dire straits & bleak times Hezekiah began his reign.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-2

¹ Hezekiah became king when he was 25 years old, and he reigned 29 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah the daughter of Zechariah. ² And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done.

1. Only 3 of Judah's kings are likened to their greatest ancestor David: Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, & later, Josiah. Of the 3, *Hezekiah was most like him*.
2. Assisting & counseling him in the ways of God were the prophets *Isaiah & Micah*.

B. Vs. 3-9

³ In the 1st year of his reign, in the 1st month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. ⁴ Then he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them in the East Square,

1. The kingdom of Judah had 2 great needs: *political peace & religious purity*.
 - a. Hezekiah dealt with them in the right order.
 - b. He addressed the spiritual need *first* because he understood everything else hinged on that.
 - c. He sought first the Kingdom of God, knowing all else would fall into place.
2. The advisor whose thoughts are *dominated by politics* would tell the young king to deal with Judah's *enemies today & the temple tomorrow*.
 - a. But Hezekiah knew *religious corruption* was the *root* of the nation's ills & went after that.
 - b. It's *useless* to mend a nation's *fortunes* unless you first mend its *morality*.

3. What was true of that day is true of this.
 - a. The news is dominated by the looming financial disaster threatening to dramatically alter our way of life for decades to come.
 - b. We hear talk of bailout plans & the billions it's going to take.
 - c. Why the crisis? Whence it's origin?
 - d. The experts chart the crisis & give us the timeline for *how* it happened.
 - e. But the *real cause* lies deeper; it rests in the fact that *we've turned our backs on God*.
 - f. Decades ago, several astute theologians & economists *warned* that our free-enterprise system of capitalism could only continue if those operating it were *moral*.
 - g. *Without* the moral virtue, capitalism becomes a vehicle for unrestrained greed & avarice.
 - h. Without an abiding faith in a Holy God who Judges the deeds of man, free enterprise becomes little more than a selfish & materialistic pursuit of power & sensual pleasure.

4. Hezekiah knew that to heal Judah's woes, she must *first* be brought back to her God.
5. And he was *quick* to act. As soon as he was crowned, he went to work.
 - a. Alexander MacLaren, the great Scottish preacher once said, "We can never begin good things too early, & when we come to new positions, it is always [wise] as well as brave to show our colors unmistakably from the first. - It is easier to take the right standing at first than to shift to it afterwards."
 - b. There are some things best done *quickly*, both in individual & national life.
 - c. Quitting a bad habit by slow degrees is not hopeful.
 - 1) One ought not reduce one's *theft* over time. Or *slowly wean* yourself off *gossip*.
 - 2) Such sins ought to be brought to a sudden & final end.
6. Hezekiah knew he could not engage in a long campaign of public persuasion to bring Judah back to the Lord.
 - a. It was his task *as King* to lead & do what was right.
 - b. So he reopened the temple & called for the priests to renew their service.
7. He gathered them next to the temple & . . .

⁵ and said to them: "Hear me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place.

8. *Sanctify* means to *consecrate*; to set something apart from all other uses, solely for that for which it exists.
9. When Ahaz closed the temple, the priests & their assistants the Levites lost their jobs & ended up finding whatever work they could.
10. Now that the temple was reopened, they needed to lay aside what they'd been doing & return to their sacred calling.
11. The first thing they needed to do was clean the temple & its grounds which had become a dumping ground.

⁶ For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the LORD our God; they have forsaken Him, have turned their faces away

from the dwelling place of the LORD, and turned *their backs on Him*.⁷ They have also shut up the doors of the vestibule, put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel.

12. Hezekiah said it like it was. He didn't pull any punches in admitting how greatly his father & his followers had messed up.
13. They had both *figuratively & literally* turned their backs on God.
 - a. Though they'd closed the doors of the *temple*, they continued to use the *courtyard*.
 - b. They moved the altar of burnt offering several yards east & dedicated it to an idol.
 - c. When they set sacrifices on it, they stood with their backs toward the temple, toward God.

14. It was an insult & put down of the highest order

15. Now Hezekiah explains the *result* of their rejecting God.

⁸ **Therefore the wrath of the LORD fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble, to desolation, and to jeering, as you see with your eyes.** ⁹ **For indeed, because of this our fathers have fallen by the sword; and our sons, our daughters, and our wives are in captivity.**

16. Because they'd forsaken God, His judgment came in the form of all kinds of distress.
 - a. There was *trouble & desolation*; words which speak of *social & economic ruin*.
 - b. They'd become *the object of mocking & jests* by others.
 - c. They'd suffered one military defeat after another.
 - d. Their children & wives were *captives*.
17. As we read this, I can help but think of our own time.
 - a. *Society* is crumbling & nothing could be clearer evidence of that than the CA Court decision a while ago overturning Prop 22 & legalizing SSM.
 - 1) When the civil government tells us marriage is *anything other than* what God made utterly clear in His Word—we are in dangerous days of social dissolution.
 - 2) The polls indicate that Prop 8 which will reverse this travesty, is *not* going to be passed.
 - b. I don't need to tell you about the *economic trouble* we're in.
 - c. The asymmetrical nature of the War on Terror with radical Islam means *militarily*, we can't bring the thing to a clear end. We're not losing, but we certainly haven't won.
 - d. As for our children & wives being captive; not in a foreign land, but they're *virtual captives* at home because the streets are so violent.
 - 1) What parent doesn't carefully watch his/her child's movements for fear of abduction?
 - 2) Who doesn't watch their way thru the parking lot to make sure they're not the victim of another carjacking?
 - 3) Drive by's, school shootings; it's even dangerous at the post office &

local fast food place.

- 4) We are “captives” in our own homes.
18. And all because, like ancient Judah, *we’ve* turned *our* backs on God.
19. Right after Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, Billy Graham’s daughter, Anne Graham Lotts was being interviewed on the *Early Show*.
 - a. The host asked her, “How could God let something like this happen?”
 - b. She replied, “I believe God is deeply saddened by this, just as we are, but for years we've been telling God to get out of our schools, to get out of our government and to get out of our lives. Being the gentleman He is, I believe He’s calmly backed out. How can we expect God to give us His blessing and protection if we demand He leave us alone?”
20. Hezekiah knew the way *out of their distress* was to return to the Lord.
21. Hopefully, we will awaken to the same.

C. Vs. 10-11

10 “Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us.

1. One of the most important qualities a leader needs is clear understanding of the situation & an awareness of what course to follow. Hezekiah had that.
2. He knew the root problem from which all their trouble sprang was that they’d forsaken their covenant with God. The solution was to renew it.
3. And as the king, it was within his power to start the nation in the right direction.

11 My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, and that you should minister to Him and burn incense.”

4. Hezekiah used his influence as ruler to call these men to their God-ordained task.
5. He never would have warned them against *neglecting* their call unless there was a problem.
6. The priests were reluctant to begin their duties because the temple was a disaster. There was a huge amount of work to do & they were overwhelmed.
7. And besides, the previous king, the entire kingdom had turned to idols;
 - a. The God of Israel wasn’t *popular* anymore. It wasn’t “*in*” to worship at the temple.
 - c. God was old-fashioned, passé, out-of-date.

8. Hezekiah wasn’t interested in being hip, relevant, or in-step with a culture that was so out of step with God. *And neither should we.*
9. Our nation has turned its back on God & told Him to get out.
 - a. The courts use the so-called separation of church & state as a legal cudgel to batter people of faith into silence.
 - b. Using hate-crime laws, they threaten to arrest & jail preachers & pastors who are simply declaring what God’s Word says about homosexuality.
 - c. God is mocked relentlessly in the media while Christians are increasingly marginalized.
 - d. We see all this & are *overwhelmed* – just as the priests were in Hezekiah’s day.

- e. Just as he rallied & roused them to *not neglect* their divine calling to worship & serve the Lord, *our King* calls us to the same.
 - f. In 1 Peter 2 We read that we are *all* priests & priestesses in Jesus. [2:4-5]
 - g. Like the priests of old, our divine calling is to represent God to the people, & the people to God.
10. Hezekiah's name means – *The Lord is my strength*.
- a.,. God sent him to the priests to call them *back* to their mission.
 - b. The Holy Spirit is speaking to us through these words to call us *back to ours*.
 - c. It doesn't matter how great the challenge or overwhelming the odds.
 - d. The Lord is our strength! And greater is He who is with us than those who are against us.

D. Vs. 12-19

1. Hezekiah stirred them up to restore the temple service.
2. But before that could happen the temple had to be cleared & cleansed.
3. In vs. 12-19 we read of the Levites who did the work.
4. In v. 15, after the list of their names we read –
¹⁵ And they gathered their brethren, sanctified themselves, and went according to the commandment of the king, at the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD.

- a. Before they went to work, they *set themselves* before the Lord for His forgiveness & empowering for the work.
- b. Before they could set their hands to the work, they set their hearts to the Lord.
- c. Impure hands are not fit for the work of religious reformation, though they have often been employed in it. [MacLaren]
- d. In Psalm 24:3-4 we read –

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. . . .

- e. MacLaren wrote, Some think it their ministry to set the church aright. Let them begin with themselves, lest they leave dirty fingerprints where they have been cleaning.
-
5. The Levites began by sanctifying themselves to the Lord, then went to work.
 6. It took 16 days. But finally they had all the refuse cleared out, the furnishings back in their place, & the sacred items ritually cleansed so that worship could be restored.

E. Vs. 20-30

²⁰ Then King Hezekiah rose early,

1. No delay! He was eager to do what was *needed*.
gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the LORD.
- ²¹ And they brought 7 bulls, 7 rams, 7 lambs, and 7 male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom, for the sanctuary, and for Judah. Then he commanded the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer *them* on the altar of the LORD. ²² So they killed the bulls, and the priests received the blood and sprinkled *it* on the altar. Likewise they killed the rams**

and sprinkled the blood on the altar. They also killed the lambs and sprinkled the blood on the altar. ²³ Then they brought out the male goats *for the sin offering* before the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them. ²⁴ And the priests killed them; and they presented their blood on the altar as a sin offering to make an atonement for all Israel, for the king commanded *that the burnt offering and the sin offering be made for all Israel.*

2. This was a bloody scene – & it wasn't observed at a distance. It was up close & personal.
3. The bulls, rams & lambs were offered, then for the last round of sacrifices they took the male goats – the animal used for the *sin offering*,
 - a. & the priests walked out & among the crowds
 - b. So the people could reach out & lay their hand on it.
 - c. It was a symbolic transfer of their sin & guilt to that goat.
 - d. Then they were brought to the altar where they were offered up.
4. The sin offering was a *picture of Christ*, who came to identify with us & carry our sins to the cross where in His death we find release from guilt.
5. After the sin offering, they made more sacrifices – called the “burnt offering,” where an entire bull was offered up,
 - a. Nothing was taken back for the priests or people – the whole thing belonged to God & was *entirely* consumed by the fire.
 - b. The burnt offering was a picture *of total consecration* to the Lord –
 - c. It foreshadowed Paul's call in Romans 12:1 that we offer ourselves as *living sacrifices* to God.
6. All these offerings were evidence of their turning back to God & renewing their covenant with Him.

²⁵ And he stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the LORD by his prophets. ²⁶ The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. ²⁷ Then Hezekiah commanded *them* to offer the burnt offering on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD *also* began, with the trumpets and with the instruments of David king of Israel.

7. What a glorious picture! As the smoke of the consecration offering was ascending, they lifted up their voices & began to worship & praise the Lord.
8. This wasn't a boring, dry, emotionless sing-along.
9. Their song was a joyous, heartfelt *giving of themselves* to God.
10. It was a time of vulnerable, relational intimacy!
11. It was all this *because it was connected* to the sin & burnt offering they'd just made.
12. For *our* worship = Unless it's motivated by the cross where Jesus died for us, & an expression of whole-hearted surrender to God, it's not going to be what it ought to be; what God is *worthy* of.

28 So all the assembly worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all *this continued* until the burnt offering was finished.

13. It takes a while to roast a bull.

29 And when they had finished offering, the king and all who were present with him bowed and worshiped. 30 Moreover King Hezekiah and the leaders commanded the Levites to sing praise to the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshiped.

14. Even after the people stopped, the leaders went on – just as they should.

III. CONCLUSION

A. V. 36

1. After this renewing of temple service, Hezekiah invited the people to come with their own offerings & to worship the Lord on their own.

2. There was a massive response as the people lined up to offer sacrifices & worship the Lord.

3. Then in v. 36 we read -

36 Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had prepared the people, since the events took place so suddenly.

4. The morally bankrupt policies of Hezekiah's father had brought the kingdom to its knees.

5. The writing was on the wall – one more shock & the nation would crumble into chaos.

6. Before Hezekiah, a handful of prophets like Isaiah & Micah were faithful to their calling & warned the people. They listened, but didn't *do* anything with what they heard.

7. They had a vague sense a change was needed but waited for someone else to make it.

8. In His amazing grace, sandwiched between the wicked Ahaz & the equally wicked Manasseh was Hezekiah who didn't wait for someone else to do what was right – *he* did it.

9. And in just a few short years, the dark clouds of trouble that had settled on Judah broke up into a glorious new day of God's blessing.

10. Hezekiah was God's spark to start a revival that delayed God's wrath & restored His favor.

B. Our Day

1. God has not changed.

2. We are not Israel – but our time parallels what we're reading here.

3. We too have turned our back on the God Who so manifestly was a part of the founding of our republic.

4. Who can deny that the blessings we've known are from His hand?

5. We only deny at our great peril the *removal* of that blessing now in this the season of our distress.

6. Oh that God would send us His *divine* Hezekiah – the Holy Spirit, Who is our

strength.

7. The One who will empower us to consecrate ourselves to our calling as the priests & priestesses of God.
 - a. Let us clear our lives of all that mocks the name of Christ & is unworthy of Him.
 - b. And worship Him from the place of the cross, casting ourselves without reserve to Him & Him alone.
8. For THAT – is the only hope for our nation, our state, our city, our families.