

Restoring the Temple

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together now to 2 Chronicles chapter 29, looking at these verses 1 to 19, where we find this portrait of Hezekiah.

This is one of the great portraits that you find in this gallery of kings in 2 Chronicles. It's one before which we have to stand for some time and look at the many features that have been included in it, because as you can see, the Chronicles writer deals with Hezekiah over a number of chapters, and that is because he was regarded as one of the great kings of Judah, a reforming king, a king who set in motion so many important reforms in his day that sought to undo the damage that his father Ahaz had done over many years, leading the people into all kinds of horrible practices and idolatry. And isn't it amazing how quickly, after years of such abuse under Ahaz, isn't it amazing how quickly things changed under Hezekiah?

The grace of God is so amazing that after all of these years and the damage that had been done, yet here is a man of God raised up by God, who in fact has set in motion quickly reforms which came into being, and which were enacted very quickly.

And indeed, the end of chapter 29 there, Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced, because God had prepared for the people, for the thing came about suddenly.

[1 : 43] It's like a bolt from the blue, or a light into the darkness. And that's how it is with God. And yet, having said that, it's also quite startling that after this, when Hezekiah had actually done all of this and led such a lot of achievement positively in his day, his son Manasseh is one of the darkest figures in the whole of this gallery.

That's how it is. That's how life is. That's how providence is. That's how experience in the church is. Times of great decline and darkness, then God brings revival.

God quickens things. God brings wonderful change about. And then, mysteriously in some ways, after that, there's a rapid decline again into darkness.

And so the cycles go on right down to our own age. Now Judah, by this time, the nation of Judah, of which Hezekiah is king, of course, they're in a pretty bad shape.

Morally, religiously, in terms of their everyday lives, politically, in every way you look at Judah, they're in really bad shape. Ahaz's legacy is a terrible one.

[3 : 07] It's just left Judah weak, pretty helpless, and embroiled in idolatry and immorality. Israel, the northern kingdom, has virtually disappeared.

The people there have been overrun by the might of Assyria. Many of them have been deported, taken away to Nineveh, and places around there, the capital of Assyria at that time.

So you could say that Israel, the northern nation, has ceased really to exist meaningfully. And Judah has been hard-pressed by the Assyrians as well. This is where you find in the books of the kings, 2 Kings, and also the prophecy of Isaiah, things to do with the reign of Hezekiah.

If you read through Isaiah, you'll find chapters there specifically given to Hezekiah's time, and the pressure that he was under, and the way that he sought, with obviously the help of people like Isaiah, what a huge, huge help someone like Isaiah would be, to a beleaguered king, surrounded by all of these enemies, and facing all the decline that had taken place in his own kingdom.

Just imagine the massive, massive help that Isaiah would have been to him. And yet it's important that we notice that Hezekiah did not use that turmoil as a reason to delay dealing with the spiritual problem of his day.

[4 : 35] There was a huge political problem. There was a real crisis for Hezekiah and for the people. With all of this going on, Israel disappeared, the Assyrians closing in, and intent of taking over Judah as well.

There is a political crisis, along with the moral and spiritual one in his land. Yet Hezekiah doesn't use that as a reason to neglect or to delay the spiritual one.

He doesn't say, well, we've got to get things politically right, or nothing is going to be right. It's the other way about, isn't it? We've got to get things spiritually right, he's saying, or nothing will be right. And there's a lesson in that for us as well. Because, you see, Hezekiah, as a man of God, he was very rightly able to connect the way things were, politically and economically, with the way things were spiritually.

And the connection that he made, very rightly, was, as you can see there in verses 8 and 10 of the chapter, Therefore the wrath of the Lord has come upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he has made us an object of horror, of astonishment, of hissing.

[5 : 45] Behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity. You're probably thinking of Israel as well in that. Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord, in order that his fierce anger may turn away from us.

In other words, Hezekiah is making this equation. We are in a bad way financially. We're in a bad way morally. We're in a bad way politically, because we've been in a bad way spiritually.

Because our relationship with God has broken down, everything else has crumbled along with that. And that is still how we have to look at things.

Nothing is going to be right. A few things are going to be right, politically or financially, or even if they are, by and large, in a fairly healthy state. There's still a lot wrong if our spiritual connection with God is not right.

That's true personally. That's true congregationally. It's true nationally. And Hezekiah is an example to us, and it should be an example to our readers in government as well or whatever else, that the spiritual and moral state of a nation is something that needs to be rectified, or else other things will inevitably follow that need to be corrected also.

[7 : 17] And when you set about correcting spiritual and moral defects, many other things will then follow as a matter of course.

That's what Hezekiah is really saying, that's what Hezekiah is setting before us, or God is setting before us, in this portrait of Hezekiah. And He set about doing it immediately.

In the first year of His reign, in the first month, if you and I have something to put right, if you and I have today something belonging to our relationship with God that we need to put right, that we need to correct, that we need to rectify, Hezekiah is an example to us as to when to do it.

You do it now. You do it without leaving it, because leaving it means it will get worse. And it will be more difficult to deal with it the more you leave it.

Hezekiah realized that. What he said really, in coming in to take over as king, in the first year of His reign, in the first month, he said, right, this is what's in my heart.

[8 : 29] This is what we have to attend to. This is what we have to now put right. And he then called these Levites and priests, these religious leaders, and said, look, you are the man appointed by God to deal with these issues.

Now go and do it. That's also for ourselves. Therefore, such a lesson. So many lessons in that ourselves, and the motivation for it we have seen is in verse 10 there.

Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord in order that His fierce anger may turn away from us. Now therefore, he says, my sons, don't be negligent.

Three things we're going to notice in this portrait, from this chapter at least, we're going to go and just deal with the first of these today. The chapter tells us this portrait has a picture, in the picture, you have a restored temple.

And then also in it you have a restored worship. The temple is restored, in order that worship can be restored. And along with the restored temple and the restored worship, you have a restored or a rededicated people.

[9 : 41] And you know, all of that fits in with one of the main reasons why Chronicles was written. The people who had come back from exile in Babylon, long time after the days of Hezekiah.

You know yourselves, what had happened. After the Assyrians came, the Babylonians. And the Babylonians eventually conquered Judah and Jerusalem, took the people captive, installed a puppet king there.

That's the end of the house of David, in a political sense. And after they came back, 70 years after that, when they came back, they started rebuilding the temple.

You'll find that, of course, in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra. Especially, they were concerned with that. This book of the Chronicles was there to inspire them, to motivate them, to encourage them. And what they would say, looking at these passages to do with the reign of Hezekiah, looking back over the years, they would say, well, look what happened in the days of Hezekiah. We're back to repair the temple so that we can actually restore the worship of God in Jerusalem, so that we can be a restored people, a restored community of God's people, worshipping Him again in Jerusalem. [10:55] We saw that in our studies of the book of Nehemiah, not all that long ago. Here's the same thing here, and this is what proves to be, for these people much later on, such an inspiring account.

Well, here's a restored temple. Three things in that that we're going to look at today. You notice how it says, first of all, that He reopened the doors.

In the first year of His reign, in verse 3, in the first month, He opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. They needed to be opened because, as we saw with our study of Ahaz, one of the things that he had done was to close up.

In the previous chapter, verse 24, He gathered together all the vessels of the house of God and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and He shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and He made Himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem.

Why is that such a big issue? Why is that so important in the writing of the Chronicles? Why is that so important in relation to Hezekiah opening the doors of the temple?

[12:01] Well, the temple, as we said in relation to the psalm we sang earlier, was of critical and central importance to the worship to the people of Judah and Israel. The temple was where God had placed His name.

The temple was where the sacrifices associated with their approach to God were actually given. The temple was the central place of worship where God met with His people, where His people came to meet with Him.

You could say the temple is really the spiritual well from which all the channels of grace and of blessing flow to the people.

The means of grace, as you would put it nowadays, they are set in the temple, in the activities of the temple, in the spiritual life of the temple.

It is absolutely crucial to the spiritual well-being of the people. You close the temple, you're shutting up the means of grace. You're blocking up the channels of blessing.

[13:07] That's what He has did, effectively. That's what closing the doors of the temple means. It's just the same as if someone today was going to decide, right, that's it, we're not going to meet for public worship anymore.

There'll be no more Lord's Table, there'll be no more communion, there'll be no more baptisms, there'll be no more preaching of the Word of God. You can do all that at home, but there'll be no gatherings, there'll be no centralized worship, it all closed up.

How would you feel if that were to be the case today? Well, that's how it was, and even more so when the temple itself only was the only place where people, by God's own arrangement, were gathering to worship Him and gathering to meet with Him.

Now Hezekiah is reopening the doors. Hezekiah again is giving access to the people into the courts of the temple, and the priests have to come and take up their own responsibilities and activities in relation to the sacrifices of the temple.

The doors are being opened, the doors are being repaired, there have been years of neglect, they've been blocked up, they've been closed up, they've fallen into disrepair, and Hezekiah has come to put that right.

[14:29] And you notice that the words filth and uncleanness are used in relation to what Hezekiah told these Levites to set about doing.

What you find in verse 5 there, consecrate the house of the Lord, consecrate yourselves and carry out the filth from the holy place.

And then you find later on, verse 16, they brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the Lord into the court of the house of the Lord as they were cleaning it up.

But these are the words that are actually used to describe it, and it doesn't just mean the dust and the rubble and the things, as we know ourselves, a building that's neglected as it becomes all dusty and needs to be cleaned up.

That would have been true of the temple as well over these years that it was closed up. But there was more than that to it. These are moral words. These are spiritually loaded words.

[15 : 32] These are words that in the writing of the Chronicles and in the mind of Hezekiah, these are words that are deliberately used because in Hezekiah's mind it wasn't just dust that was associated with the closed temple.

There was the filth and uncleanness of idolatry and of idolatrous objects and things which had been introduced into the practice of the temple that belonged to paganism.

That's why he called it filth. That's why he used such strong languages. Filth and uncleanness. It's not just to do with giving it a good dusting and taking away some rubble or some debris that had gathered in the temple.

It's taking away the uncleanness, the filth of all the idolatrous practices and all the objects associated with them that Ahaz introduced into the temple.

And that's of relevance to us today as well. We're not talking nowadays so much about buildings as ourselves as a people.

[16 : 38] Because in the New Testament we come to find that the temple of the Lord is his people. We're no longer as we were as they were in the days of Hezekiah having to gather in one place in Jerusalem or in Zion in the temple where everybody from all around gathered in that one building and there is no other building associated with the worship of God.

The people of God are scattered now all over the world and wherever they gather they are the temple of the Lord. God resides in them. They offer up spiritual sacrifices to Him instead of the literal ones which have been fulfilled in Christ as was the case in the Old Testament.

But how do we block or close off the doors of this temple? How do you actually if you like close off access to God meaningfully in our worship in our gatherings wherever they are?

Well by firstly by subtraction and secondly by addition. If you subtract from the gospel the things which are central and important to it it's effectively doing the same thing as in Hezekiah's day literally they closed the doors of the temple therefore they didn't have access to the temple and to the things of divine worship there.

If you take away from the gospel the things which for example if you take away the authority of the Bible and you say it's no longer God's word it's just a compendium of human wisdom gathered over the years and put together over many generations but in that sense yes in that sense it's different to many other books but it's not different to the Quran and it's not different to any other holy book so called it doesn't really have any great authority above those.

[18 : 33] If you have that attitude to the Bible you're beginning to close the doors of access to the means of grace because the Bible no longer is the word of God. If you take away from the teaching of the Bible things which are factually correct the death of Christ the resurrection of Christ the fall of man in Genesis chapter 3 if you bring to the Bible a mind that extracts the factuality the historicity of these and say well they're fables they're myths they're important in terms of conveying teaching but it didn't really happen.

You're closing up the doors of the temple you're actually taking away from the gospel things which mean that what you're left with is really meaningless as far as your spiritual well-being is concerned. You may have been left you may leave some certain moral teaching there you might have something there which tells you something about a man called Jesus but you don't have access to life if you don't believe he rose from the dead.

You're not really able to deal with a real human condition as it is unless you believe in the fall of man and in sin as the Bible describes it and therefore the cross of Christ really loses much of its meaning as well because Jesus died for our sins.

You extract all of these things you're closing up the doors of the temple and saying that because not because we've done it ourselves but because it's done in so much of what surrounds you of the Christian religion so called in our day.

[20 : 19] You can also add things to what you find in the Bible you can add other books to it you can add practices to it that you import from Hinduism or Shintoism or African animism or whatever else you find your practice it's just exactly like Ahaz did.

2 Kings chapter 16 verses 10 to 12 there's an account there of Ahaz in his reign going to Damascus capital N of Syria and then when he went to Damascus he went to meet Tiglath-Pileser the king of the Assyrians when he was in Damascus he was taken up with this altar an altar that he saw there

in the pagan rituals of the Assyrians and he made an exact copy of it drew a copy of it exactly as it was sent that back to the priest in Jerusalem and he was ordered to make an exact copy of this pagan altar and to put it in the temple and you read in 2 Kings 16 of how the priest was ordered to take the existing altar of bronze out from its place the altar associated with burnt offerings important central sacrifice in the worship of Israel as appointed by God take that out he says put this one in its place take the altar of bronze offering and leave that one for my exclusive use so that

I may inquire at it what does that mean so that he would in a pagan way engage in a pagan sort of ritual of divination using often animal entrails and horrible things like that to try and gauge the mind of God or look into the future that's what Ahaz was up to he didn't just take one thing out he put something else instead of it he put something pagan instead of something that God had himself specified in its design and its placement all the way back in the days of Moses you see whenever you actually put something into or along with what God has specified what you're effectively doing is not opening up a greater access to God you're actually closing off access to him you're substituting the way he himself has appointed with something that's of human imagination human origin human wisdom and what

Hezekiah is doing here is getting rid of all that he's putting all of these things right that Ahaz had got wrong and as he comes to it he calls it a cleansing throw out all that filthy thing and the uncleanness that's in the temple open the door but get rid of all of that uncleanness now all of that has a personal reference to us as well we've been talking by and large up to now of a more general application to the church to the gospel to the context of a relationship as a people to God but it has a it has a it involves you and I personally as well because as Christians if we're Christians and if we want to be Christians that means we want God to live in our lives we want

God to inhabit our souls we want God to truly live in us so that our life is dominated by him and ruled by him and that we have our life secure in him that he is our refuge that he's our strength that he's our father that he's our king but then you've got to ask the question is my house clean am I keeping it clean for him is there something there that needs to be cleaned out is God saying to me today open the doors of your soul let me see into what I find in your heart and if there's anything there that's to do with the filth and the uncleanness of sin of practice and of thoughts and of actions that are contrary to what God requires then get rid of it he's saying cast it out clean it out restore it for my use that's what

[25 : 07] God is saying to us isn't it does matter whether we've come to confess him we're coming to approach a communion what do the Lord's people do what are we required to do as we approach a communion well Paul tells us doesn't he in 1st Corinthians 11 let a man examine himself and so let him eat we don't come to the Lord's table without examination we don't examine ourselves so as to stay away so as to discourage ourselves we examine ourselves so that we will see that we are in a fit state to take communion that we have dealt with the filth and this uncleanness of sin that we are pleased to rest in Christ and to come to the splendor and the cleanliness of his righteousness and his holiness and not our own so there is the reopening of the doors in order to facilitate this cleaning but then there is consecration of the workers notice he is saying to them in verses 4 and 5 he brought the priest and the

Levite saying now consecrate yourselves and consecrate the house of God we can deal with that fairly briefly but it's important we mentioned how it involves our own selves personally how there's a personal aspect to this as far as we ourselves are concerned before we get on with the work of the Lord we have to consecrate ourselves what does that mean it means we have to give ourselves to the Lord wholeheartedly we have to come before the Lord and dedicate ourselves to him what he's saying here of course was a ceremonial thing in those days they had to be ceremonially consecrated and clean but it's a thing of the heart it was in Hezekiah's heart to do this to cleanse the temple to get rid of its filth and it has to be in the heart of those who are doing it that they're doing it for the Lord they're not just doing it for Hezekiah they're doing it for their God they're doing it because he is the one who lives in that temple it's his residence and in the same way the New Testament reminds us that we are to be as salt and as light in our lives and as we saw in Luke recently if the salt loses its saltiness you can't re-salt it it's then useless for anything you have to throw it out and you have to retain your saltiness in your life that's to say you have to maintain that spiritual vitality that life by which people know that you're a Christian that you are the Lord that God is the most important person in your life and you retain that by retaining your relationship to Him by coming to maintain your life of prayer of reading your Bible of coming to worship Him privately

publicly these are all the ways by which we maintain our saltiness Paul says a similar thing in Philippians 2 that you be blameless and harmless the sons of God without rebuke amongst in a generation that is unclean in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation among whom you are to shine as lights in the world holding forth word of life and you can see in his appeal just mention this briefly in passing his appeal had three things in it what things were like and why that was so our fathers have been unfaithful they have done evil in the sight of the Lord therefore the Lord has turned against us in his anger and then what he himself wanted to do and why and then also who they were and why they were appointed to this task these leaders now you bring all that together and you make it relevant to your own situation what are things like in our nation what are things like as we are surrounded as they were in those days by people of a different point of view or mindset we are surrounded by people who no longer value the Bible we are surrounded by movements that are deliberately against the Bible that want you to throw your Bible away or at least not use it seriously that will say to you well it's not really important you go to church every week you don't have to go every week every time there's communion surely that's enough for you and there's people who will go further than that and say religion is actually really bad for you you should become secularist in your mind and just think of things without any religious dimension to them at all that's the state things are at why are things as they are because we've gone away from the Lord because we're no longer obedient to God and it's in your heart and my heart surely as far as we can possibly engage in the work of the Lord to do our bit to put things right even if we think we're small in number and we'll see that in a minute with regard to these people even if we regard ourselves as small in number and small in influence that's not really the important thing there weren't many of these

Levites and when you set them against the problem that they faced it's a huge problem just the same as when Nehemiah ordered the walls of Jerusalem to be rebuilt there weren't that many people for the task when you think of the size of the task God is saying that's not the important part if every one of my people does their bit well when you put all of that together that's a lot of activity and that's what these people were told by their king you he said are the people in verse 11 the Lord has chosen you to stand in his presence to minister to him and to be his minister to make offerings to him that's because they were Levites and priests they were specifically appointed to this work and when you ask about the problems of our day and the darkness of our day and the relative paganism of our day and the unbelief of our day and all the things that out there exist against the gospel who's going to stand for the

[31 : 56] Lord if it's not you people if it's not the church of God if it's not the people who form the church I'm not just talking about those who actually go and take communion and are in the communion role of congregations this really means all of us that we all have to be engaged in the work of the Lord in whatever way we can and we have to ask ourselves today am I as involved for the Lord as I should be am I as openly on his side as I should be as I want to be as I desire to be am I holding back something for which God has specifically appointed me in this day and generation to help towards restoring things to what they should be like that's the challenge for us that's consecrated workers they arose instantly they didn't delay in the matter they actually arose in verse 12 there then the

Levites arose they gathered their brothers and they went in as their king had commanded them to cleanse the house of the Lord there are some who will say I would like to be involved I would like to be a communicant I would like to go to the prayer meeting I would like to have more of that to my life I really desire that but I just don't think it's the right time I don't think I'm ready for it well make yourself ready for it take a step consecrate yourself tell yourself today and tell your Lord today I'm not going to hold back any longer it's in my heart to do this for you Lord it's important to me and it's important to you more especially Lord that for the little as I can do even if it's a tiny amount compared to all that needs to be done let me do my part let me do it because the cause is so important and if I can actually do something towards the restoring of the temple in my day let it never be said of me when I come to the end of my life

I should have done it but I didn't that's what the challenge was to these Levites you are the ones who have to do it and God is saying to us today you are the ones that represent me in the world you are the ones who form my church in the world cleanse out my temple remove the filth get rid of the uncleanness do your part in reaching that objective and as we said the names are given to us there why does this chapter contain these names well so that we'll see that they're not important in the

sense of comparing them to Hezekiah himself or to Isaiah the prophet that lived at his time these became prominent famous people their names live on down through the generations do you remember Mahath the son of Amasai when you think of names from the Bible does it come to mind the sons of

Elisaphan were Shumri and Jewell of course not they're obscure people they're people whose names have not lived on like Isaiah and Hezekiah but what a work they did in their day what an achievement by the Lord's strength and blessing and so you and I must see ourselves as well obscure unimportant very very little compared to other people undiffed compared to other people God is saying that's not what I'm looking for I'm looking for obedience I'm looking for obedience as far as you can present your life to me that's all I'm requiring that you do your bit that you do your best and leave the rest to me a reopening of the doors and a consecrated workforce let's today be a consecrated people to

God let's dedicate ourselves to the work of the Lord let's really say this is so important I can't afford to let my bit go undone finally there's cleaning out the filth itself and near the end of the passage we read about how they actually came to remove all the uncleanness and just a couple of things from that you notice that it's really in a sense as we saw taking out the new and restoring the old there are times when you need to go back to the old things and take out the new things now that of course can be misused I don't mean that in the sense that everything new is bad but the new things that Ahaz had introduced such as this altar that he saw in Damascus that he introduced that was harmful to the worship of God that was harmful to the people of God it was harmful to their spiritual well-being and health therefore they had to get rid of it they had to go back to the old in the sense of what God had specified the original template that God had given them whether it's for the altar or for the way they worshipped or for the temple itself all the things to do with it

[37 : 45] God's pattern is the only one that's acceptable and that's how it applies to life as a whole we need to go back as Jesus you remember at one time came to the temple it was cluttered up at least this part of it the courts of it with people that sold all kinds of things money changers all kinds of commercial things happening in the temple what did Jesus do he made a whip he made a scourge out of cords and he whipped them lashed them out of the place vehemently threw over their tables and said get out it is written my house shall be called a house of prayer but you have made it a den of thieves they had corrupted that part of the temple precincts to a use that it was not designed for we have to clean out the filth we have to set about the task of restoring when it needs to be restored as in our day it needs to be restored in terms of the way things are generally so much has been brought in so much has been added to

God's template that needs to be got rid of you and I have to do our part in that but there's also you notice the way that we'll make this our final point just the way that they brought all of that to the brook Kidron mentions that in verse 16 Levites took all of this uncleanness they carried it out to the brook Kidron what does that mean why is it mentioning that well the brook Kidron was a brook or a small river that ran past very near to where the temple was situated and if you look out the window of course as you know yourself there's a brook that runs out Namoille comes down there right past the church down past the man and onto the shore and at some points there's a rather steep banking to Alt Namoille but that's very small compared to the steep banks of the book Kidron because in many places at least of the book

Kidron it had such steep banks that they were virtually cliffs a big distance from the top right down to where the brook was so this is deliberately telling us they carried it to the brook kid in other words they were taking all of this filth and uncleanness they were throwing it over the edge what they were really doing by that was effectively saying we never want to see this stuff again you see they could have said let's just put it outside the temple let's just dump it out beside the walls just find a place for a dump it there no that's too convenient too much of a temptation to go and bring some of it back in again so what they did was indicate this cleansing was meant to be permanent when they were taking this stuff and throwing it over the cliffs they were really effectively saying we never want to see this stuff back in the temple again that's how it is with you and with me too isn't it you don't come to think of the cleansing of your heart the removal of the filth of sin and you just dump it beside you you just throw it over the cliff until you say to it

I don't want to see you back again it's bad for me you spoil my relationship with God you make me unholy so when you get rid of it you get rid of it oh I know it comes back it comes back in my experience as well and what we do one day in resolving to get rid of sin we throw it over the edge

but sometimes we reach out and take some of it back again all too readily but you just throw it back again and you do it instantly and you get rid of it in a way that is deterrent that it's final that it's complete that it's total that it's not going to come back that you're going to live a life that's clean that's for the

Lord well that's Hezekiah restoring the temple next time we'll look at the restored worship and the restored people that come to use this restored temple for the glory of the Lord let's pray grant oh Lord our God that we may withdraw lessons from your word that by your Holy Spirit we might meaningfully apply them to our own lives and to the circumstances of our day too bless us now we pray for Jesus sake Amen