

II Kings 18:1-12 "Deconstruction and Reconstruction"

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Preacher: Ron

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

2 Kings 18, beginning in verse 1. In the third year of Hosea, son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign.

He was 25 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 29 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi, the daughter of Zechariah.

And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord according to all that David, his father, had done. He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah.

And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made. For until those days, the people of Israel had made offerings to it. It was called Nehushtan.

[1 : 10] He trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him.

For he held fast to the Lord. He did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses. And the Lord was with him.

Wherever he went out, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. He struck down the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory from watchtower to fortified city. But in the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hosea, son of Elah, king of Israel, Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, came up against Samaria and besieged it.

And at the end of three years, he took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of Hosea, king of Israel, Samaria was taken.

[2 : 18] The king of Assyria carried the Israelites away to Assyria and put them in Hala. And on the harbor, the river Gozon and in the cities of the Medes. Because they did not obey the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed his covenant, even all that Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded, they neither listened nor obeyed.

Let's pray together as we approach this portion of God's word. Oh, Father, we thank you for how you have worked in your people.

We thank you for just the gift of this history. Because there we see you at work. But we also get the promise of how you will work.

So, Father, as we study this part of Scripture that many of us have never read, we pray that you would open our eyes to what is here, but also open our hearts to how you might speak into us and give us hope.

So, Father, come and pour out your Spirit. Lead us as we study. And use my words, as weak as they are, in such a way that we will know that by your Spirit, we have heard from you.

[3 : 43] So, come and do your work. In Jesus' name. Amen. You know, I'm sure there's many of you in here that are big fans of HGTV and Chip and Joanna Gaines.

We like those rebuilding shows. I got a nine-year-old grandson who loves that show. Watches it a lot.

You know, and it's the same story. You know, somebody goes and buys a house. They want to buy a house. And they want to refresh it. And so, you know, you go through the story. You look at all the things you can do.

We got to paint a wall here, take a wall out over here. But then when you get down into the nitty-gritty of what's really there, basically the whole thing has to come down.

Because there's a lot more going on than what you can see on the surface. Well, I think in a lot of ways, we take, when it comes to spiritual renewal, we take an HGTV approach.

[4 : 54] But it's more of we want a refreshing. We want a kind of redoing, you know, paint this room, change this wall. We're going to just kind of make it look better, look nicer.

We want good curb appeal. Because everybody else that drives by our home, we want them to see how well we're doing. But we want life to get better.

We want it to look better. We want it to feel better. But the problem is, there might be a lot more at work under the surface than you realize.

You see, we can do this as a church as well. Maybe, you know, we just need to change our schedule. Maybe we need to freshen up our preacher. Maybe we need to...

I'm not suggesting anything since Will is not here. Not at all. But this is the kind of approach we take.

[6 : 02] We just need to touch up here and fix this. But under the surface, there might be a dwelling that needs to be gutted and started over.

You see, this is really what happens in the kingdom of Judah. Judah at this point... Well, let's go back and get a little history lesson here.

Ever since the reign of Solomon, when Solomon died, the nation was split because of just a lot of foolishness.

And so you had the northern tribes, 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel in the north went off to themselves and they were called Israel and their capital was Samaria. But the other tribes remained in the south.

They were called Judah where the capital was Jerusalem. And so they really fared over these years, many, many decades, a whole lot better than their northern cousins because their northern cousins were really led into a lot of bad religion and idolatry through the leadership of Jeroboam.

[7 : 21] So much so that Jeroboam became the standard of badness for all of the kings that would come after him.

So Judah fared a bit better and they had some good kings and some not so good kings. kings. But then comes Ahaz.

And Ahaz was one of the worst. Ahaz built an altar and put it in the temple that was modeled after a pagan altar that he had seen in Syria. Ahaz took his sons and put them on the altar and burned them in the fire to these pagan gods.

This is the king of God's people. He was awful. And towards the end, when he was threatened by the Syrians, he sent to the empire of Assyria who then was really kind of coming into their own and paid them to get the Syrians' office back.

But in so doing, he made Judah and Jerusalem a slave to the Assyrians. And they served Assyria for years.

[8 : 57] And so he was as spiritually bankrupt as all the kings of Israel. And Israel now was finally and totally defeated at the hands of the Assyrians as an act of judgment of God and Judah and Jerusalem were very quickly heading in the same direction.

These were dark days. Along comes a son, fortunately, who didn't get burned. His name was Hezekiah.

Hezekiah, at the age of 25, the death of his father Ahaz becomes king. He is the product of this evil father but also, I think, a righteous mother.

And he makes a U-turn for the nation. He brings about one of the most glorious times of renewal and revival in Jerusalem's history.

It is wonderful. And there's much written about this reign. You'll find Hezekiah, parts of his reign, mentioned in three or four places in the scriptures.

[10 : 25] And I think we can learn a lot about what renewal actually looks like. You know, we may pray for it. We may want it in our lives, personally.

We may want it corporately as a church. But what does it look like when it comes? We can get a good idea here from Hezekiah. So first, there are four things that I think I want to call our attention to.

The first is that spirit-led renewal always, always begins with repentance.

You know, there's a parallel account of Hezekiah's history. If you go over to 2 Chronicles 29, in there we see a few more details. It's almost like on the very first day of his reign, he's got this new

job.

Day one, he begins this cleansing process. He goes straight to the temple and throws open the doors and commands everybody to do a major house cleaning.

[11 : 34] All the altars, all of the trash, all of the filth that Ahaz had allowed to come in there was taken out. Now, all the pagan, all the defilement, it had to go in right worship of Yahweh, the covenant God restored.

Now, this had been done, you know, in previous kings have come and done well and they had done similar things, but not to the degree that Hezekiah did.

Because in the text here in 2 Kings, the writer makes a point. He says, you know, back in the other accounts, we see that the high places were not removed.

These kings would do well, this king would do well and he would bring reform, but the high places were not removed. And it's interesting, here in Kings, Hezekiah removes the high places.

The high places are places of pagan worship. They, on top of every hill, they erected these pillars, they had altars, and they worshipped, those were for the worship of the local fertility gods.

[13 : 00] And these were kind of leftovers, carryovers, from the pagan Christians, the Canaanites, that Israel was supposed to have wiped out when they occupied the land.

But that didn't go as planned, and so a lot of these remained. And so even from the time, before the time of the occupation, these high places were places of worship of these local fertility gods.

And they had become popular for the Israelites to do as well. And so they worshipped there, they sacrificed to the local fertility gods, and it was, and it had been going on for hundreds of years.

This is what we would call syncretism. Syncretism is a blending. We saw this, I saw this very clearly when I went down to Peru back in July, where the Inca religion of those areas was blended in with the Catholicism that the Spaniards brought.

And so you see signs of both of these, you know, the local religion and the Catholicism of the Spaniards, it all just kind of merged and blended. And so they took things of this and took things of this and made something altogether sort of new.

[14 : 35] But syncretism does that. It's kind of like hedging your bets. You don't want to put all your eggs in one basket, so you worship here, but you also worship over here just in case, you know, you're covered.

So the Israelites had become very syncretistic in their religion and that syncretism was leading them towards death.

It's what happened, in fact, really what happened in the north was not syncretism at all. It was an abandonment of their covenant religion, but not in Judah. They held on to temple worship but added some things to it as well.

So on the surface, they still claimed worship to Yahweh, but their hearts were divided. They were trying to live with one foot in both worlds. And God had sent them prophets to warn them.

He had sent circumstances to really kind of break them so that they would understand where they were headed. But up until now, they didn't get the point.

[15 : 59] But Hezekiah did. And he did some. So, are we prone to syncretism? well, yeah, probably far more than we realize.

Now, when we buy into our culture's values and worship at the cultural altars, we claim this religion, we claim faithfulness to this God, but at the same time, we're bowing over here and we blend them in so that it all looks like one neat package, we become syncretistic.

Now, I get a chance often, and I enjoy the opportunity when I do, is to do premarital counseling. But when I do premarital counseling, as soon as a couple walks in my door, I make an assumption.

And I'm rarely proven wrong. That couple will come in and claim to be Christians. They'll claim to believe in God.

They'll claim, you know, whatever. But I also, I assume when they walk in that door that they're sleeping together. It's just a given.

[17 : 30] And I'm real happy if I'm proven wrong. Don't but I rarely am. Most, you know, just, why would we stay chaste?

Why would we stay apart in this culture where we live? Where it's expected? Why would I want to be so different?

One of the cultural values that tells me is that I'm supposed to be happy. And sex is the way there. The problem is that our faith values something very different.

difference. And we can talk why we value something different maybe another day. But too many people want to claim that they worship Jesus all the while bowing at the altars of our modern culture.

love and it's not just sex. It's also our affluence. I was thinking this week, I wonder how I would have reacted when the rich young ruler comes to Jesus and he says, you know, what must I do to enter the kingdom of God?

[19 : 01] He says, hey, Jesus, I want to be a good Christian. What do I need to do? And so he's supposedly asking the right question. Well, Jesus gives him the wrong answer.

According to him, he said, go, sell all your possessions, give the money to the poor, and you'll have treasure in heaven, and then come follow me.

So how would I respond if Jesus said that to me? Would I say, run off, or would I run off in despair like that rich young ruler, or would I say to him, been there, done that, I'm with you, it's all gone?

Sadly, no. See, worship is all about what I treasure. And do I find my treasure in Jesus, or do I find it somewhere else?

I read this last week, there was an interview done by this author, her name was Nancy Jo Sales, and she did this with some teenage girls, and I'm talking about teenage girls here, but just realize that this refers to most of us adults as well, particularly talking about their social media habits, and their level of social standing with their peers, there was a very elaborate protocol on social media of how you maintain your position and status.

[20 : 49] In other words, who you liked, what you liked, what you commented on, who could comment on this, all of this stuff. And a young girl simply said, social media is destroying our lives.

So the interviewer asked, so why don't you get off it? And the girl responded, because then we would have no life.

I don't know if she was a believer or not. I know a lot of us that claim faith in Jesus would have a very hard time putting down our phones and social media.

Because that's where we're trying to build life. If I have no life outside my devices, if I have no life outside my retirement account, if I have no life outside of pleasure, I'm syncretistic.

When I throw off the worship of God, in order to offer my kids on the altar of sports, experiences, or entertainment, I'm syncretistic.

[22 : 16] When I think that my highest value is personal freedom or individual choice, I might be syncretistic.

Shall I continue? Notice I haven't even brought up football. It was a very inconvenient schedule, preaching that this week.

Though I will say Marshall in West Virginia did very well. we are too often trying to stand with one foot in both worlds.

One with Jesus and the other in our high places. And we're dying. Too often we want renewal without disrupting those worship sites.

Too often we want renewal that just helps us to feel better, to make life work better, so that I will be more affluent or more popular or you name it, more successful.

[23 : 31] And we think that's what Jesus has come to do. And the high places remain.

But if real renewal, if a real restoration with Jesus is going to take place, those high places must come down.

To let them remain is like getting married and then not getting rid of the pictures of the old girlfriends, keeping their phone numbers and addresses and even going back and visiting now and then.

Because again, you don't want to, you got to hedge your bets here. Ask your spouse what she would think of that. Or he would think of that.

It's the renewal of a love relationship is what we're after. And it's a relationship with our first love, our true love, who will tolerate no rivals.

[24 : 41] And that's what renewal is. And like in a marriage, when you get married, the scriptures say in Genesis 1, it says you are to leave your father and mother and then cleave.

And that means to kind of stick like glue. And it's interesting, that's the very word that the writer of Kings uses here in this text.

When it says that Hezekiah held fast, it's the word cleave. Hezekiah was leaving and cleaving.

He was leaving all rivals behind and He was cleaving to His true love. And that is what repentance is.

It is throwing off false loves and coming home. We belong to only one and to only one we are to cleave.

[25 : 44] So renewal begins with repentance. Always begins with repentance. But secondly, renewal, spirit-led renewal pays the price of repentance.

The cleansing that Hezekiah brought about in this nation was incredible. But it was costly. You know what he risked by even tearing down all those high places that everybody else in the country was very used to using?

But even more so, there was Assyria. Because when Ahaz turned to Assyria for his security, which was something very clearly taught to him that he was not supposed to do, and the prophets warned him that he was not supposed to do it, he subjected Jerusalem to their authority, to their reign, and Israel, Jerusalem, not Israel, Jerusalem, Judah, had to pay a very high price to them on a regular basis to keep that security.

And for Hezekiah, if he was going to worship and trust Yahweh alone, he had to deal with Assyria. And so what the text says, he rebelled against the king of Assyria. But if you notice in the text, the writer of Kings very importantly puts verses 9 through 12 right here.

[27 : 22] It's like, why is there this little section, it jumps out and talks about Israel and their downfall? It's because to show that when Hezekiah made this choice, he was doing so in this context.

He's already seen what Assyria can do and will do. And he chose that.

So here was Hezekiah's choice. He could die, just like Israel. They could not do anything.

They could not go through all this cleansing. He didn't have to repent. And they could just hope that they could repel the armies of Assyria, which no one up to this point has done, nor even slowed them down.

So He could die this same death that Israel has died as an act of the judgment of His God, death.

[28 : 34] He could die. He could die. He could die. He could die. He could die. Throwing himself on the protection of God, but facing this huge army of Assyria.

His choice was not whether he wanted to die or not. The choice was how. His choice was death, or death.

And that's what repentance is. Repentance is choosing death one way or the other.

If we choose not to repent, we choose death. Because our sin will kill us. It will suck the life out of us eventually.

Maybe slowly, but eventually. And it hardens us. Or, we can choose death.

[29 : 49] To die to those high places. To die to the grip those idols have in our hearts. Some years ago, I had to deal with an area of sin in my own life that was slowly but surely crushing me.

And my life and joy were being sucked away, drawn away, and living under this weight of the guilt and the shame, the slavery that comes with it, I had a choice.

I could either let it continue and let it take my life. Or, I could choose to die.

Die to myself. Die to my reputation. Die to my shame and guilt. And tear down the high place.

Those are the choices. The question was this. It was not whether I was going to die, it was whether how.

[31 : 19] But the big question was, if I chose death through repentance, would Christ be enough? Could Christ be sufficient in his righteousness, in his caring, in his presence?

Would that be enough to make do, to make up for everything else? Would Christ be sufficient for me?

And I came to one conclusion, that he would. Our high places must come down.

They offer only temporary relief. They promise only temporary rest and hope.

But true death is coming. And we can either die to those high places or we'll die on them.

[32 : 31] You can sell your possessions and it will feel like death. You can get off of your computers, put your phones down and it'll feel like death.

The promise we have is that if that's the choice we make, there is life on the other side.

Hezekiah knew it. Do we know that. The warning giving us here by Kings is that our true love will simply not tolerate these rivals and we need to choose to die to those idols because there is a redeemer who will come and save us.

third thing. Now you're seeing that I wasn't lying about the sermon. Spirit-led renewal remembers the redeemer always.

Spirit-led renewal always runs to the redeemer. It's interesting if you go back to 2 Chronicles and you see more of what Hezekiah did, one of the things that he did was he reinstated the Passover a Passover that had not been celebrated for decades maybe centuries and so the Passover was critical.

[34 : 10] Why the Passover? Well the Passover reminded the people of Jerusalem a couple of key things. One it reminded them that they were God's people and that he bought them through the blood of the Lamb that he was their God.

They were his people and that lamb was offered as part of the covenant that he made with them so it reminded them of that covenant but it also reminded them of his power to save and preserve because through that Passover the very first one he took down one of the most powerful nations the world had known and that was the nation of Egypt and so that Passover as they came and celebrated it was a reminder it was remembering who they were what was their identity who are we and whose are we who do we belong to and what will this one do that we belong to to work for those who wait for him and so the Passover was wonderfully significant in fact you ought to go back and read this they had so much fun celebrating the Passover that they extended it for an extra week they were supposed to this feast of unleavened bread they celebrated for a week and they got through and it says we're not done and so they did it for another week and it also said that the Levites who were leading them in worship were singing at the top of their lungs they were singing with all their might that's something happens more in football stadiums than in our churches but they were rejoicing because they remembered they remembered and that's why we come to worship that's why this time together is so critical is that we come to remember who we belong to who is with us and I love the phrase there in 2nd Kings where it says and God was with him because of the work of the cross I am not my own I have been bought out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light I have been paid for by the blood of not just a lamb but the ultimate lamb and he is now mine and I am his and he wraps me in his care and will let nothing nothing get to me outside of his love and goodness spirit led renewal runs back to Jesus and to worship and finds him sufficient for everything fourthly spirit led renewal also hopes for a greater king as great a king as Hezekiah was he was simply a pointer he was a marker he was yes so much better than the others but he pointed Israel Jerusalem and Judah to a future king who would come and not just tear down pagan altars but would come and transform hearts he would come and make all things new and he would come and reign righteously over not just Jerusalem and Judea but over all of the world and this king is our hope when Jesus comes to our lives he doesn't just come to make it better he doesn't come to refresh he doesn't come just to patch holes he comes to restore to deconstruct so that we can be rebuilt into the temple fitting for him to dwell this this is what

Christ comes to do will we trust him to do that how do we know we can because he's already paid he's already shown us how far he will go through his death on the cross he is worthy of our trust he's worthy of our dying to these piddly little idols and altars that we would come give our lives to the true king let's pray father I pray that you would pour out your spirit on us and bring us to this place of renewal in many ways it may be hard we acknowledge that we need deconstruction we acknowledge that we need a deeper work than what just appears on the surface we acknowledge that we cannot do it ourselves we need you and your spirit to come and do this work would you would you do it in us individually would you do it in us as a church do it so deep that our joy will raise it will rise up and proclaim to the world how great you are so come we give ourselves to you to do as you wish in the great and strong and good name of

[40 : 45] Jesus Amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org for more information visit us online at southwood.org for prayer for more care to transition to square to center