

Hezekiah Restores Temple Worship

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[0 : 0 0] The first part of the chapter, verses 1 to 19, deals with the restoring and the cleaning of the temple in the days of Hezekiah.

After the previous neglect and idolatry under Ahaz, when Hezekiah began to reign, he began reforming matters again in Judah and became to be one of the great kings, the great reforming kings of the Old Testament.

And as you read there, they began to clear the temple, to clean it of all that was necessary to remove, including matters of idolatry, to do with idolatry that had been imported into the practice of the people.

And then in verse 20, you find that having done all that, they're now ready to restore the worship of God in this cleaned, restored temple.

And that's what you find described from verse 20 through to the end of the chapter. Now, the 2 Chronicles, these two books of Chronicles were written well after the event.

[1 : 1 0] In fact, they were written really for the encouragement of the people of Judah who had come back from the captivity in Babylon. Sometimes, perhaps, we think that these books were written near the time of the things they describe.

But as a matter of fact, they were written for the encouragement. We're not told who the writer of the Chronicles or the kings really was. But they were written for the encouragement of those long after these events that are recorded here in Hezekiah's day.

You'll know yourselves very well the history of the people, how when the last of the kings had served, they were then taken under Nebuchadnezzar, captive to Babylon for a whole generation.

And then after 70 years there, they returned. Things you find described in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra particularly, as well as the prophecies of Zechariah that were themselves part of this whole rebuilding program.

Remember recently we looked at a passage in Nehemiah's writings, Nehemiah's book, that describes some of the things they found and had to attend to when they got back to rebuilding the walls of the city and rebuilding the temple as well.

[2 : 2 6] And here we find that this would have been so superbly suited for those people having come back from this captivity and in those days itself being involved in restoring the temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

And here we find, here they would find an account long before their time of Hezekiah and how he had to approach, in a very similar way, a rebuilding program for the temple and a re-establishing of worship, the worship of God once again in Jerusalem.

And as you look at this passage, there are a number of things which we hope tonight we'll find not only interesting and informative for ourselves and our spiritual edification, but also suitable for us as we approach another communion, as we seek to prepare our minds and hearts once again to remember the Lord's death in the Lord's Supper.

And there are two things that I really want to mention. Firstly, very briefly, the enthusiastic king himself, because that's very firmly a part of this movement, and you'll find that described in verse 20 there especially.

Hezekiah the king rose early and gathered the officials of the city and went up to the house of the Lord. And then it talks about the bulls, the lambs and so on that they brought for the offerings.

[3 : 55] The enthusiastic king, first of all, and then we'll look at the public worship or the re-establishing of worship in the rest of the chapter. Now, you notice his enthusiasm. He is a reforming king, and from his very youth, he was committed to the Lord and to the ways of the Lord and to re-establishing the ways of the Lord, having had in his father's time such an abandonment and such a gross, idolatrous practice again in the nation.

Hezekiah the king rose early. You can get the impression from that that he was just desperate to get on with this. He had ordered the clearing of the temple, the cleaning out of all the filth that was in the temple.

And now that that's finished, and as they've brought the news to him, all the utensils that he has discarded in his reign when he was faithless, we have made ready and consecrate.

Behold, they are all before the altar of the Lord. This is the message that Hezekiah receives. Everything is now ready for him to re-establish the worship there as it should be. So he rose early.

And how important leadership is in terms of guiding people in the ways of the Lord. And these are great challenges to us who try in our day to be in leadership of the church, not only ministers but elders too, but especially in regard to the leadership of the church at such times.

[5 : 20] And at such critical times as we ourselves are facing. So many challenges that have arisen and have come to encroach upon the church and the church's practice and our own practice as a congregation in our local communities.

Things that affect the Lord's Day. Things that are being promoted in Launther, for example, during this month of February, which we really hesitate even to mention, but that's how it is.

These are the days we're living in. And that's where we find the likes of Hezekiah, such an inspiring individual. He rose early.

This man's not going to lie in his bed till midday, just twiddling his thumbs or wanting some other people to do things for him. He rose early because he is so concerned and so desperate to re-establish the name of God and the worship of God again with his people.

And that's very different, isn't it, from our own day as well, when we're so used to hearing that faith and opposition and civil authority really ought not to go together, that they have to be separated.

[6 : 33] Or that office in the church should necessarily mean that you're precluded from office in the community. Because people nowadays are listening to the voice that says to them, you have to detach religion, whatever kind of religion it is, and especially the Christian religion.

You have to detach that from public office. And along with that goes the idea that it doesn't matter really what a man or a woman are, morally speaking. It doesn't really affect how they carry out their office or the duties of their office.

Well, maybe not. In the strictest sense, maybe not. They may be very orderly, very efficient, and all of that. But gone are the days when public officials were looked to as role models as well, in terms of living a decent moral life, and having a lifestyle that conformed to the teaching of Scripture, and to the Christian faith and the Christian ethic.

And here is a Bible that tells us, you can't just detach these things, though, people in the modern day in which we live actually want to do that. And you can see how Hezekiah went about his business.

Not only did he rise early in the morning, but he gathered the officials of the city and went up to the house of the Lord. Here's a man who says, not only am I the king leading this movement, and I want you to see that I'm wholehearted about it, but he's got all of these officials leading this movement as well.

[8 : 05] They're not left out of it. They're not left to the side. They're in the leadership of this movement of reform. And that's why it is so important that our public officials also have a Christian ethic, and a Christian outlook.

Why it's important we pray that those who honor the Lord will continue to be elected to government nationally and locally, because these are the things that we find in the Scripture united together.

that people are never really led properly. And I don't want you to misunderstand what I'm saying, and I'm not getting at anyone in particular. But people are never led properly when there's an absence of the Christian ethic from how they do things and how they live.

We need godly leadership. We need leadership that's not ashamed of the Bible. We need a leadership that really honors the Lord and his day and his commands. We pray that that will be re-established and increased in our own midst as well, not only in our national interest.

So here's Hezekiah then, and he is leading up this movement. He's enthusiastic about it. He's gathering all these officials. He wants them to be seen as also at the very top of this movement and leading this movement and not reluctant to engage in it or to participate in it.

[9 : 31] And what next you find in verses 21 to 35, an account of the worship that's then being re-established. Now this is mostly about sacrifices. And sometimes perhaps we think that sacrifices are very interesting, maybe in their own right, but they belong to the Old Testament and they've been replaced by Jesus and his fulfillment of these sacrifices.

And therefore, yes, we're interested in them. We know that's what happened. We can learn something from them, but there's not all that much relevance in them. But that will be very wrong for us because tonight we're looking at this passage and asking ourselves, first of all, what's the pattern of these sacrifices?

What sort of order do they come in? And what can you learn from the order in which they're listed and in which they actually went about these sacrifices and these offerings? And if you look at them carefully, you'll find that they are arranged in a very definite order because they begin with atonement, then they move to dedication, and then thirdly, they end up with thanksgiving.

And that's what you have essentially in preparation for communion. The central issue is atonement, the death of Christ.

The related issue is dedication when we come to give ourselves anew and pledge ourselves anew to this Jesus Christ as our King, as our Savior. And following that is the thanksgiving, the way in which we bring ourselves and our offerings of praise as the chapter ends and the days of Hezekiah, the offerings of praise and of great rejoicing as they made their thanksgiving known to God.

[11 : 17] Let's look at these three briefly. First of all, you have atonement, verses 21 to 24. They brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah.

And he commanded the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer them on the altar of the Lord and so on through to verse 24 where you find that the king had ordered that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel.

So the sin offering, the sin offering related to making an atonement for the sin of the people, for the whole people is what they begin, what they begin with. And as they begin with that sin offering, so that sets the pattern for ourselves as to where we begin and what our lives are actually set upon.

This great offering of Jesus Christ in his death on the cross, this atoning sacrifice of Christ, everything really follows from that. And that's what you're working towards remembering, as you well know, on the Lord's day.

But notice the emphasis there on transference. They slaughtered the bulls, they did the same with the rams, their blood was thrown against the altar, they slaughtered the lambs, the goats for the sin offering were brought to the king and they laid their hands on them.

[12 : 37] You can read that over very quickly and perhaps not realize that it's actually very, very important. They laid their hands on them. Why did they lay their hands on them? What were the priests doing laying their hands on the heads of these goats?

Well, it was symbolic of their sin and their guilt as a people being transferred to that which was being offered as a sacrifice for sin. It's a brilliant illustration of what happened when Christ died for our sins.

Our guilt and our sin transferred or imputed to him so that his righteousness would come to be imputed to us.

That's the great text of 2 Corinthians 21, isn't it, where you find in that X shape, if you like, of a verse, the thing that is true of us is actually given over to him.

He has made him, God has made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us so that we might become or be made the righteousness of God in him.

[13 : 50] What's ours as sinners becomes his as an atonement. What's his as a saviour becomes ours for our salvation.

That's the transference, the greatest transfer in history. Sin to the sinless son of God, righteousness from him to unworthy sinners.

That's what you remember in the Lord's Supper, that transference of our sin to Jesus. And you notice that the blood is mentioned here as being thrown against the altar.

More than once, it says that with the bulls in verse 22, they threw the blood against the altar. They slaughtered the rams and their blood was thrown against the altar.

They slaughtered the lambs and their blood was thrown against the altar. And of course, that tells us something of huge importance in relation not only to these sacrifices, but to what was fulfilled in the death of Christ himself.

[15 : 01] Because the death of Jesus, just like these animals symbolized, the death of Jesus first and foremost is directed not toward us, but towards God.

The death of Jesus makes an atonement for us, for our sins, but is directed towards God. He offered himself without spot to God.

That's the direction of the atonement. And we will never understand the atonement properly, or in any sense at all, until we begin with the fact that it's directed God-wards before anything is directed man-wards.

Because God has to be dealt with or God has to deal, if you like, with himself, with his wrath, with his view of sin, with everything that God himself needs to have dealt with, pacified.

propitiated, covered from his sight, and then blessing flows to us, toward us.

[16 : 09] And when you remember the death of Christ in the Lord's Supper, of course you're remembering the benefits that have come to you. It's important that we do that. But there are no benefits to us unless, first of all, there is a blood that's sprinkled on the altar of God, unless there is an atonement towards God that's adequate for our sins.

And that's all built into this very reference to the blood thrown against the altar and the blood of the goats too made a sin offering with their blood on the altar to make atonement for all Israel.

So there's the atonement, first of all. Secondly, there's the dedication, the burnt offering, verses 27 to 30. You'll find there the emphasis on it being the burnt offering.

When the burnt offering began, Hezekiah commanded that burnt offering be offered on the altar. Now the burnt offering was an offering where the whole animal was used and burnt up and the holocaust is put off the sacrifice.

It was all used. But it represented the dedication of the offerer, the person bringing that animal for the burnt offering.

[17 : 31] By bringing that animal which was to be offered whole as a sacrifice to God, that person was really saying I'm bringing this because it represents that I'm giving myself.

I'm giving the whole of myself to God. It's a sign of my dedication to God. It's a mark of my dedicating of myself and my consecrating of myself to God.

And of course that too applies to Jesus himself personally first of all. Because when Christ came to die the death that he died which he had come into the world to do, he died the death in which he offered himself to God.

that's how Hebrews chapter 9 verse 14 puts it, doesn't it? That he by the eternal spirit he offered himself without spot to God.

How much more then shall his blood purge our consciences from sin when it is no longer the blood of goats and bulls and lambs but the blood of Christ the blood that was given in terms of a whole offering where he offered himself without spot to God.

[18 : 52] Christ kept nothing back when he gave himself for you. Nothing. He offered himself.

himself. He gave himself as your sacrifice to God. It's little enough that we can do in giving our whole selves to him in every sense in which we come to come to the Lord's table to publicly witness for him.

What else can we do when he has done so much for us? When he has given his whole self are we going to be happy giving part of ourselves of our time of our commitment of our dedication?

That's why Paul has these sort of things in mind in the likes of Romans chapter 12 you know very well that in Romans 12 he comes to apply the doctrines of the previous chapters and that he begins that chapter 12 by I appeal to you therefore brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual or reasonable worship don't don't be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind you see what he's saying there I appeal to you by the mercies of God by the mercy that you know has already been directed to you and you've received from God that mercy is something that draws you to do what to present your bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God it doesn't say to God well I want my whole body

Lord to be yours and everything that I do with this body of course it includes that and Paul deliberately mentioned bodies so that we wouldn't leave the physical aspect of it out but it didn't mean in any sense that our soul is not involved because our commitment and dedication and consecration to God begins in our souls and reaches out so that it brings our whole person as he gave himself so we give ourselves to him in response and then you find a remarkable thing Hezekiah in verse 27 commanded that the burnt offering be offered on the altar and when the burnt offering began the song to the Lord began also and the trumpets accompanied by the instruments of David king of Israel the whole assembly worshipped and the singers sang and the trumpeters sounded all this continued until the burnt offering was finished and when the burnt offering was finished the king and all who were with him bowed themselves and worshipped and then they gave further orders to praise the

[22 : 03] Lord with songs and it's interesting isn't it that only after the atonement has been rendered and the sacrifice of atonement is then followed by the burnt offering the offering of dedication only then does the singing begin because your singing is attached to your sin being dealt with properly and completely in the act of atonement that Christ himself has perfected for you and you can well sing when that sacrifice of atonement is finished as it now is Christ has died he died once for sin he's entered into his rest in heaven where does that leave us well it leaves us with remembering his death in the same way in which they remembered it there the same way in principle at least militates against our rejoicing of our showing of our rejoicing and our expressing of our rejoicing because that's exactly what they were doing here when the sacrifice of atonement had been offered and accepted as soon as that was over and they began the burnt offering where they were dedicating themselves to

God then they began to sing then immediately the song to the Lord began also friends I know it's difficult in these troublous days to find a song in your heart but if there's one place that we should always find it it's at the Lord's table and the Lord's table may well be and we trust it will be for us at this communion God willing an uplifting and even a restoring of a song in our hearts of a singing in our souls as we celebrate the fact that Jesus died for our sins and rose again and took our guilt to the grave with him and that's worthy of being praised and in the midst of all that would threaten and the darkness that we are aware of in these days let's celebrate the death of

Christ as we should let's give him the praise that he's due let's sound out our gladness to him so that he hears it in heaven and so that as we do so our hearts will find that we are in tune with his will that he has done all this so that we should rightly rejoice in him and then there's thanksgiving thirdly just very briefly thanksgiving now he says in verse 31 now that you have consecrated yourselves to the Lord come near bring sacrifices and thank offerings and then you have a list of all the various things that they brought now you notice there there are three offerings mentioned there are thank offerings there are peace offerings and there are drink offerings sometimes difficult really times to distinguish between these the way you find them in the Old Testament but interesting they're all gathered together here in this passage the thank offerings were really just a verbal accompaniment where they gave and expressed their thanks to

God and then you have the peace offerings and peace offerings really the fat of the peace offering you find there in verse 35 there was the fat of the peace offering and then the drink offering as well in the peace offerings only the fat of the animal was burnt and the rest of the meat was then shared out so that it could be eaten and you know that itself really also fits in so wonderfully with what you find in what God has provided in the Lord's Supper it's a commemoration of a death the death of Christ the sacrificial atoning death of Christ but it's in such a way that you feed upon that death together you share out among yourselves the benefits of Christ's death and interestingly the confession of faith actually puts it this way that thereby those who come to the

Lord's table by faith they feed upon Christ crucified and all the benefits of his death it doesn't just say they feed upon all the benefits of his death they feed upon Christ crucified and all the benefits of his death they feed upon that atonement itself and all that it has resulted in for them because you're connecting with Christ himself and it's from Christ himself the living Jesus who died it's from him that you're receiving the blessing it's from him that it comes into your soul and you share as a fellowship and that's why sometimes these were known as fellowship offerings because they were shared out as the Lord's Supper is for his people it's not just an individual thing you could say it's not even primarily an individual thing that was one of Paul's accusations rightly against the people in

[28 : 16] Corinth where he set out the pattern for the Lord's table which we follow to this day at least in the principles of it one of the things he said was when you come to the table wait for each other don't come in an individualistic way to the supper come in a way that comes as a people as a body of people as a fellowship because it's a sharing occasion an occasion when we feed upon Christ crucified and the benefits of his death thank offerings peace offerings finally drink offerings they were accompaniments of the burnt offerings usually and a drink offering was really poured out usually water poured out along with the other offerings mentioned and the drink offerings were again an expression of thankfulness but also in which you were represented as just giving yourself and interestingly

Paul again mentions in Philippians 2 and in 2nd Timothy chapter 4 and verse 6 where he's more or less signing off his life where he says I am now ready to be offered and literally you could say I'm ready to be poured out as a drink offering he knows his end is near his death is near but he's looking upon it as his life poured out for Christ poured out to his praise and to his glory given readily to him even in death and we come to the Lord's Supper and that is our pledge to the Lord we never do it perfectly of course but it's our desire to do it as perfectly as possible to be poured out for him to give ourselves and to be dedicated once again to him to renew our vows and so to commit ourselves anew to this great

God and Saviour who through atonement has done so much that captures our hearts and minds but notice the last verse Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced because God had prepared for the people for the thing came about suddenly and you go back over the chapter and you ask yourself what does that mean and it means really this that God was with them to such an extent that they managed to do all this work clearing out this temple this huge building of all that had been gathered there of all the idolatrous remnants that were left there after many years they did it in less than three weeks it tells you in the chapter don't need to go over it but you'll find in the chapter when they began and when they finished sixteen days that's all it took why well because

God had prepared for the people God was in it God was with them God had energized them and you know when that happens look out world because when God is with his people things happen quickly things come about so unexpectedly that you like they were there you're at the point of the blessing before you know it and must we not pray for that not only at this communion but during these times that God will prepare for us as a people Hezekiah led this reform but God created it and that's what makes all the difference we can be in leadership of all sorts of things but when

God creates it and we follow then the best things happen may bless his word to us let's pray Lord our God we pray that you would bless us indeed this evening and in the days to come and we ask Lord as we would seek to dedicate ourselves to you as a people once again that you would be pleased to manifest yourself in our midst Lord show to us we pray the great pattern of your provision for us in atonement in the dedication of our hearts may be glad in your presence that we will know Lord in our hearts the joy of your salvation for we know from your word that the joy of the Lord is indeed our strength go before us now we pray and in all of these things glorify your great name for Jesus sake Amen