

"Passover"

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It is not as hot as it could be, but it is about as sticky as it could be.

! So, I want to reiterate Tyler's invitation. If you are finding yourself overwhelmed by heat and struggling to pay attention, I will not be offended if you get up. You can come out here, get a drink of water. If you need to go downstairs, please take advantage of our overflow seating that live streams our service downstairs in air conditioning because we want you to be able to sit and enjoy God's Word this morning. What's the difference? I should ask Antoine this. I should have asked him this before I started this introduction, but here we go. What's the difference between a renovation and a restoration of a house? It strikes me that a renovation is an upgrade. You want to take something and make it new. You add things that you didn't have, so you get a bigger kitchen, a new island in the middle, extra bedrooms, a man cave, or a new master suite, something like that. That's what a renovation is.

It's making something new by adding on new things. But a restoration, and we in New England know more about that because we have lots of old houses. A restoration is when you take a house and you strip it down to its bones, to its very basic original structure. It's not about adding. It's about discovering the original goodness, the foundational, what was essential to the original, and then bringing that out again. When we think about God's house, when we think about the people of God in need of renewal, it's easy for us to think that what we need really is a renovation. What shiny new thing can we add so that things will get better? We've just, maybe we need to think we want a new program, or a new building, or a new logo, or a new strategy. And look, we've just added a new staff person. In the last 10 years, we built a whole new building. I'm not saying that adding these things are bad in and of themselves.

We refresh our website look every couple of years so that it doesn't look like it was done in the 1980s. Thank you, Jeff Stevens. But the danger in this kind of thinking is that we think that we need to add something new to what God has already done. And maybe instead, we as God's people need to think about the greatest need of the church being a restoration, a return to the core and to the center of what God has done for us. This brings us to our passage this morning. If you're visiting here, we're preaching through the book of 2 Chronicles. And we are looking at the kingdom of Israel and the actions of the kings during that season to see what God has to teach us about what it means to be God's people and how we're to live in relationship to Him in the world. And I think we'll see today in our passage a story about renewing God's people. If you want to read along with me in the Pew Bible, and I recommend it, we're going to be looking at 2 Chronicles chapter 30. I know it says 30 and 31.

True confessions. I'm going to not, I'm just going to ignore chapter 31 today. We're not going to look at it. We're only going to look at chapter 30. So, there it is. There's my confession. It's great. It's a great passage, but it was too much for me today to do. So, we're just going to do chapter 30, page 354 in your Pew Bible, if you want to look there, or if you have it, have your own Bible. And as you turn there, remember what the context is. We're in the Old Testament. We're in the history of the people of Israel. And we now have Hezekiah the king, right? He reigned from the late 700s to the early 600s BC. He came to rise to power after his father Ahaz, who was one of the worst kings ever in the history of Israel. He was wholehearted in his embracing of idolatry and worshiping other gods. And he was completely faithless in his political actions, not trusting God at all, but continuing to try to play factions against one another in the powers around Judah in order to try to save it through his political machinations. And at the end of Ahaz's life, Israel was in a very bad place in relationship to God. And as we saw last week, as

[5 : 21] Tyler preached to us in chapter 29, as Hezekiah came, he started out wanting to please the Lord, unlike his father. He opened the house of the Lord and restored the priesthood and

brought the nation back to a place where the worship of God was restored among the people of Israel. And today, as we look at chapter 30, we'll see the next step in what Hezekiah brings to the nation of Israel and to God's people, and we will see what we have to learn from it. So, with that, let me read, if you want to read along with me, 2 Chronicles chapter 30, starting in verse 1.

Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to keep the Passover to the Lord, the God of Israel.

For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the Passover in the second month, for they could not keep it at that time because the priests had not consecrated themselves in sufficient number, nor had the people assembled in Jerusalem. And the plan seemed right to the king and all the assembly, so they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel from Beersheba to Dan that the people should come and keep the Passover to the Lord, the God of Israel, Israel at Jerusalem, for they had not kept it as often as prescribed. So, couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes as the king had commanded, saying this, O people of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. Do not be like your fathers and your brothers who were faithless to the Lord God of their fathers, so that he made them a desolation as you see. Do not now be stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the Lord and come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever, and serve the Lord your God, that his fierce anger may turn away from you. For if you return to the Lord, your brothers and your children will find compassion with their captors and return to this land. For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you if you return to him. So, the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. However, some men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the Lord. And many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month of very great assembly. They set to work and remove the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for burning incense they took away and threw them into the Kidron Valley. And they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. And the priests and the Levites were shamed so that they consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings into the house of the Lord. They took their custom posts according to the law of Moses, the man of God, the priest through the blood that they received from the hands of the Levites.

For there were many in the assembly who had not consecrated themselves. Therefore, the Levites had to slaughter the Passover lamb for everyone who was not clean to consecrate it to the Lord. For a majority of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves. Yet they ate the Passover otherwise than as prescribed. For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, May the good Lord pardon everyone who sets his heart to seek God the Lord, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary's rules of cleanliness. And the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people. And the people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness. And the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with all their might to the Lord. And Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of the Lord. So they ate the food of the festival for seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the Lord, the God of their fathers.

[10:29] Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the feast for another seven days. So they kept it for another seven days with gladness. For Hezekiah, king of Judah, gave the assembly a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep for offerings. And princes gave the assembly a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep.

And the priests consecrated themselves in great numbers. The whole assembly of Judah and the priests and the Levites and the whole assembly that came out of Israel and the sojourners who came out of the land of Israel and the sojourners who lived in Judah rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem for since the time of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people and their voice was heard and their prayer came to His holy habitation in heaven. This is God's Word.

Let's pray and ask for God's help as we look into it this morning. Lord Jesus, we pray this morning that You will help us as we read this passage together. Lord, for a story and a time, a place far away and a time long ago. Lord, yet You have recorded it for our benefit so that we might learn of You and of Your ways how to be Your people. Oh, Lord God, be with us this morning. I pray for Your help that I would speak clearly as I ought. I pray for our hearts that we would be ready to receive Your Word and by Your Spirit that we would receive it and obey it and rejoice in it. Thank You, Lord. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. This passage is about the renewal of God's people by the call to return to the gospel of grace.

We're going to look at the original story first. We're going to spend a bunch of time just looking through so you can try to put the pieces together of how this story all points to this central idea of a renewal by return to the gospel, and then we'll consider its implications for today.

Okay. So, with that, first of all, let's think about this call. What is the purpose of Hezekiah's call? Look with me in verses... with verses 6 through 9. This is the message that was sent out to all of Israel, right? Return to the Lord is the... is the fundamental thing. He says it at the beginning of verse 6. He says it twice in verse 9, at the beginning and then the end of the verse. He says, return to the Lord, yielding yourself and coming to His sanctuary to serve Him. And so, this is the fundamental call to come back to the Lord, to forsake the ways of how they had lived before under Ahaz, to forsake apostasy, to forsake abandoning God, and to return to the Lord. And as you see it in verse 9, because God is a gracious and merciful God. So, this is the fundamental call that Hezekiah puts out.

[13:52] Come back. And how are we going to do this? Well, we'll see in just a minute. We're going to celebrate the Passover. But first... but secondly, if the call is to return to the Lord, secondly, who does He call?

And I don't know if you picked this up, so I want to make sure you see it really clearly. Hezekiah called all the people of Israel. Not just... if you remember the history of the nation of Israel, back after Solomon, the kingdom divided into the north and the south, right? And Judah, that Hezekiah is a king of, is the southern kingdom. And the northern kingdom had lived a whole... generations upon generations of unfaithfulness. And in fact, right before Hezekiah became king, they had been judged by God through the coming of the nation of Assyria and been destroyed. Politically, they had been scattered. But what you see here is Hezekiah is calling all people, not just from the southern kingdom, from Jerusalem or from Judah, but from... you heard the repetition... from Manasseh, from Ephraim, from Issachar, from Zebulun. In verse 5, it says the call should come out from Beersheba to Dan. That's like saying the call should go out from Maine to Florida and from California to

Washington, D.C. The whole country, every... the whole land is meant to hear this call. It's an invitation for the twelve tribes of Israel to return to Jerusalem and to return to the right worship of God by doing that. And it says that some laughed and mocked, but some responded. And God was pulling together a remnant of His people, those who would seek to really be faithful, and they responded. But it's also interesting to note the timing of this call because this relates to who He called. Did you pick it up? Verses 2 and 3. Look with me again. The Passover was meant to be celebrated on the first... in the first month, on the 15th day. That was when it was prescribed in the Law of Moses.

That was when it was intended to be... to be recognized. And they didn't do it. Verse 3 says why. Well, the priests weren't consecrated. That is, they weren't prepared to do this, to perform these services because they hadn't done the things that God had prescribed for them to do. But also, the people hadn't gathered. They hadn't prepared. They hadn't done this. And so, they did it in the second month.

But the second month is also important for another reason. If you turn to Numbers chapter 9, you would see that they had a whole discussion in a subsequent keeping of the Passover where there were people who couldn't participate in the Passover because they were ritually unclean. They had been near a dead body. They had some sort of skin disease. There are all these sorts... these things in the Levitical law that made someone ceremonially unclean. And they couldn't come and participate in the Passover celebration because of that. And they said, why should we be kept from doing this? And so, Moses said, you know what? That's a good question. And the Lord said, it's okay. On the second month, those who are unclean in the first month can come and celebrate the

Passover. And I believe that this story helps us recognize something because Hezekiah knew that the whole nation coming together was actually unclean.

[17 : 51] They knew... and their cleanliness wasn't merely ritual uncleanness of being near a dead body or... their uncleanness was in their hearts because they had participated in the apostasy and the unfaithfulness of Ahaz. And so, even in Jerusalem and Judah, they knew they were coming not as the pure and righteous ones, but as those who had no claim to God's mercy and grace. They knew that they were sinful and that they had failed. Let alone the call to the tribes of the northern kingdom who had just experienced great judgment of God. They just experienced the worst judgment of all and had been scattered and broken. And we're wondering, where do we go now? And this call is to you, the unfaithful, to you, the stained by sin, to those who know that they don't deserve anything from God. This is the invitation to come to the Passover.

And so, Hezekiah recognizes this, even in his prayer in verses 18 through 20, may the good Lord pardon everyone who sets his heart to seek God, the Lord, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary's rules of cleanliness. And the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people. So, the invitation is to all people, the whole tribe, and it's to come not as those who deserve, but as those who are unclean and who need a God of redemption, a God of mercy, and a God of grace.

Okay, so that's the prologue, right? He called them to renewal. Who did He call all these people? What does He call them to? Well, He calls them to observe the Passover. Now, many of us may know this, but let's remind ourselves of what the Passover was. Remember the history of Israel, right?

Abraham was a father of many... was called to be the father of great nations, but he had one son, and his one son had... well, he had more than one son, but there was one son of promise who then had one son of promise named Jacob or Israel, and he had 12 sons. And because of a famine in Palestine, they moved to Egypt and were miraculously delivered. This is the story of the end of Genesis, if you want to go back and read it. But they ended up staying in Egypt, and over 400 years, they became enslaved to the nation of Egypt. And the Pharaoh treated them poorly and oppressed them.

And they cried out to God for deliverance because they couldn't worship Him as they ought to, and because they couldn't be who they're meant to be, and because they were suffering. And so, this is the famous story of Moses. God raises up Moses, and Moses comes to warn Egypt of God's judgment. He brings the 10 plagues. And when we go through all nine... the first nine of them, then we get to the 10th one. And the 10th one is... God says, I will kill the firstborn of every family in Egypt. And then He turns to His people, and He says, except for you, because I'm going to give you instructions. I'm going to give you instructions to take a lamb, an unblemished lamb, a perfect lamb, and you're to take that lamb, and you're to sacrifice it. And when you sacrifice it, you're to eat the food, but you're to take the blood, and you're to paint it on the lintel and on the doorposts of your home.

[21 : 41] Because on that night, I will come and bring this judgment. And every household that doesn't have that blood on the doorstep, they will receive my judgment. But every household that is covered by this blood, the blood of a slaughtered lamb, will be delivered and saved.

So, in Exodus 12, it says this, The blood shall be a sign for you in the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations as a statute forever. You shall keep it as a feast. Hezekiah is remembering this call and remembering this work. This work which is at the very heart of it, the most important work of redemption in the Old Testament. This is God's delivering of His people, His work of salvation in the Old Testament.

Right? And how did He do it? He did it through sacrificing a lamb. What's the logic of this? This feels very weird and Old Testament-y and sort of pagan, right? But it's not.

Because the logic in the Bible is this. Because of sin, death came into the world. And death is a proper judgment upon our sin, our rejection and rebellion against the God of life.

And the only way to remove that judgment was for there to be a substitute. Right? God must judge sin, but there could be a substitute. And so for this, the lamb served as a substitute. The lamb died, and His blood, the blood of the lamb represented His death. And so that death then satisfied God's judgment. And those who were covered by that sacrifice then would not receive that judgment

themselves. Because it had already been satisfied through the sacrifice.

[24 : 02] This is the fundamental work. And Hezekiah called them back to remember. Do you remember how God has saved us? How God has saved us as a people through sacrifice? Return to this. Remember this.

And they do. And they come back. And they worship God. And they observe the Passover. And what does it produce in them? Verse 4. What's the product of this call? It is joyful worship. Did you see the end of the passage? Verse 21. The people who were present, they worshiped with great gladness. And the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with all their might. Because they remembered, God has saved us.

God has rescued us. God has made us His own. What a great God we serve. He is worthy of all of our praise. And what joy it brings to our hearts. And we... They did it so much, they said, let's do it again.

So after seven days, they said, let's do seven more. And the kings led and the princes led in providing the sacrifices. So seven more days, there was praise and glory and honor. And it was all of Israel.

[25 : 22] So in verse 25, remember what it said, the whole assembly of Judah and the priests and the Levites and all that came out of Israel and the sojourners that came out of the land of Israel and the sojourners who lived in Judah, they all rejoiced together. And there was great joy in Jerusalem for the first time since Solomon, the son of David, the king. There had been nothing like this.

Because there had been this division, because there had been this disunification of the people and this scattering and this pattern of unfaithfulness and idolatry. But Hezekiah's call brought them back together.

And the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people. And their prayers were heard in heaven. And this is the story of Hezekiah bringing renewal to his people.

Not by doing something new, but by going back to what is old and what is known. By going back to the very essence of what it meant to be God's people.

Those who were delivered and saved by his gracious hand through the blood of the Lamb. How does this apply to us today as a church?

[26 : 50] Well, I said this at the beginning and I'll say it again. It's easy for us as a church to think what we need to be renewed is renovation.

We need new programs. We need a new structure. We need better systems. We need better resources. We need better facilities.

We need better training. There are all sorts of things. And here's the thing. None of those things are bad things, right? None of the... I'm not demonizing those. But what I want you to see is that is not the core.

That is not the heart of what will bring renewal to our church and to our lives. Because we here at Trinity believe that it's a returning to the gospel over and over and over again.

Remembering it. This is what will bring renewal in our lives individually and our lives corporately as a body. And not only in this church but even more broadly in the church widely.

[27 : 55] And like Hezekiah, this is a gospel call for all people. It is a people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

Not just the 12 tribes of Israel but all the peoples of the world. It is a call for all people to come, return to their Creator.

And it is a call to sinners. You may be sitting here this morning and think, God doesn't want me. I know what I've done. I know what kind of person I am. God's not interested in me.

But this story reminds us that it's not the clean but the unclean who need a Redeemer. It is not those who are perfect but those who know their unrighteousness who need a Savior.

And this is what Jesus has come to be for us. Some of you this morning are here and you haven't yet known the redeeming power of Christ in your lives.

[28 : 57] You haven't put your faith in Him. You're exploring this. Maybe you've seen something in the church that you like, an ethic or a community. Maybe you're searching for meaning or for hope or for forgiveness or for something beyond just a natural world.

Today God is calling you to this gospel, to the gospel of Jesus. Some of you have been at church for a long time.

And the gospel call is for you as well. Because you need renewal as well. Because though sin has been dealt with at the cross, it is still a part of our lives.

And how easily we forget God. And how easily we fall into the patterns of unfaithfulness. And distrusting God. And living independently of Him.

And so we need the gospel regularly and all the time to renew our hearts, to clarify our thinking, and to refresh us in our worship of God.

[30 : 01] And so this call is for everyone to return to Jesus. Bethany read earlier, Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us.

For what happened in Egypt long ago, and what was celebrated by Hezekiah and the people of God, all prefigured what God would do in His final and full act of redemption.

It pictured what Jesus would do. Because Jesus came. And remember John the Baptist, when he saw Him, he said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And Jesus would willingly go and be that sacrifice for us. He would taste death so that we would no longer be under the judgment of death for our sin.

And He would rise to new life so that we could be His people. And know the joy of forgiveness of sin. And of new life with Him.

[31 : 13] This is the good news of the gospel. And just to bring it home a little bit more, remember what the writer of Hebrews tells us about the sacrifice.

It says, Jesus entered once for all. This is Hebrews 9, 12 and following. He, Jesus entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats or calves, but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification of the flesh, that is, in the Old Testament law, it allowed them to come and worship God, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Friends, this is what it means to be a gospel-centered church. We come back week after week after week to be reminded that Jesus is the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world.

That Jesus is the Passover Lamb sacrificed for us so that because we are covered by His blood when we put our faith in Him, we no longer experience judgment, but instead mercy and grace to return to God and to be His people.

[32 : 41] And friends, this is my greatest hope and desire for this church, is that we would truly be a gospel-centered church, that the gospel of Christ would capture our hearts and change our lives, that we would meditate and dwell on and grow in our understanding of all that He has done so that we would exult in the depths of our salvation, that we would remember that we are saved from judgment and have received mercy instead, that we are forgiven of our sins and graciously embraced, that we are given a right standing before God, no longer under condemnation, that we are no longer God's adversaries, but we are reconciled to Him, that we are brought from spiritual life to... from spiritual death to spiritual life, that we have gone from being aliens and enemies to being God's children, His sons and His daughters, that we are being transformed so that we can live distinctive lives that display the gospel of grace in our lives to a world that is dying and longing for hope.

And we are brought into a body, a new family, the people of God that we will know and worship forever. Not... Let me rephrase that.

We will... God gathers us into a body of people who will know and worship Jesus forever as we gather because of what He has done.

This is what Christ has done. This is what His Passover death does for us. And friend, when we see these things and when we treasure Christ because of all that He has done, it does change us.

When we treasure Christ, we see our desire for sin wither. When we treasure Christ, we forsake our idols of money and power and pleasure as being empty and worthless and unable.

[34 : 45] We... When we treasure Christ, we are able to humble ourselves and to serve other people. When we treasure Christ, we love to gather with His people.

When we treasure Christ, we submit all of our plans and all of our possessions and say, Hear my Lord. Send me. Use all that I am for Your good. When we treasure Christ, we care for the vulnerable and the weak and the needy as He did.

When we treasure Christ, we hunger and thirst for more and more of God. And so we seek His Word and we feed on it regularly. When we treasure Christ, we love one another as He laid down His life for us.

And when we treasure Christ, we recognize that what He's done is so amazing. We can't stop talking about it. And our friends and our neighbors and our co-workers and our family and our children.

No! Because Jesus is so great in our hearts. And friends, I say this to you knowing that I need this renewal as much as any of us.

[35 : 56] I need to be captivated anew by this Christ. But this is what we've come to do.

This is why we gather. This is what this church is here for. May God have mercy on us and may this be true in increasing measure for us.

Let's pray. May God have mercy on us and may this be true in our hearts. Oh, Lord. By Your Spirit, do work in our hearts.

Bring this renewal that is a restoration. Lord, help us to come to the foot of the cross and behold Your glory in Your death.

And Lord, change us. Help us to turn away from all the things, Lord, in our lives that we cling to and allow to clutter our lives in ways that obscure You.

[37 : 23] Lord, help us instead to see all of those things in light of You. Help us to treasure You above all and to return to this gospel of grace.

Forgive us of our sin. Renew a right spirit in us. Lord, we pray for this individually. We pray for this as a church that we would be a church where the gospel of grace rings out because of what You have done.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.