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SERMON TITLE: God Changes an Entire Nation through Worship

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 29:28-36, *Why Worship?* Series

DATE: November 4, 2018

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also Romans 14:6-9, 11-12

Times were prosperous and peaceful when Ahaz became king of Judah. He was the 31st king since Solomon. Two hundred years had passed. Ahaz was not a believer and he took his people down a very negative path of idolatry. Out of forty kings, there were only five that were good in the eyes of the Lord.

Ahaz was not one of them.

He filled Judah with idol worship, child sacrifice, and other barbaric practices of the nations whom the Lord had driven out before the people of Israel.

So enemies came against Judah, including Israel, the other half of the divided nation. It happened after Aram attacked Judah and took many people captive. Then Israel attacked and defeated Judah, slaughtering many and carrying 200,000 others away to make slaves of them, along with taking booty from them. But the prophet, Obed, intervened and stopped Israel, and they reversed their action.

Then King Ahaz's governmental leaders began fighting amongst themselves. They killed some of Ahaz's sons, killed the commander of the palace, and even assassinated the next authority to the king. Things went from bad to worse. Edom invaded and defeated Judah. The Philistines also led raids on their cities. Everything was falling apart—internally and externally. Ahaz appealed to Assyria for military help, but instead of strengthening Judah, Assyria oppressed him.

God brought Judah very low.

Then, in an attempt to recover, Ahaz stripped the temple, increased his sacrifices to the idols he had built, and finally closed the doors of the temple. It was out of business.

So if you think it is bad for us now, it can get much worse when people abandon the Lord and God's ways.

Ahaz died. I doubt anyone went to his funeral. His son, Hezekiah, succeeded him.

He was a good king. He honored and obeyed God just like his ancestor, David. His first act was to open the doors of the temple and he repaired them. He contacted all the ministers

(priests) and lay leaders (Levites) and said, "Sanctify yourselves. We are cleaning this place up." They carried away all the filth of idolatry. They were directed by Hezekiah to not give up or be negligent; they were to restore the house of the Lord so that a covenant could be renewed with the Lord.

Hezekiah was leading a revival. He admonished these leaders of the church by saying, "The Lord has chosen you to stand in his presence to minister to Him by making offerings and leading the people in worship."

So the priests and Levites did exactly as they were asked. They purified themselves by confessing their sins and renewing their commitment to God, and then gave the church a good cleaning to prepare the house of the Lord for worship.

Today our elders and deacons, ordained pastors and other staff members are equivalent to priests and Levites, and we are the ones who see that faithful, joyful, musical worship happens. We see to it that the Bible is taught so that people can understand; that each week we humble ourselves and confess our sins; that we pray every week, and that we bring our tithes and offerings. Others prepare for communion once a month and that is an important ministry in this church.

All of that is worship.

God calls for it to be wholehearted.

It is not just cerebral! It involves our whole bodies.

Think about teaching a toddler the different parts of his body. If you make it a cerebral activity, it is going to take a long time. But if you teach the child through movement and song, they can learn it in five minutes:

Head and shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes,
Head and shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes,
Eyes and ears and mouth and nose
Head and shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes!

Sing that three times and he's got it! Look at how children worship. They love to sing, shout, and dance.

Often Presbyterians are reserved, hardly moving or lifting our hands because we worry about what others think—for example, when my mic is left on by accident during a praise song I am mortified! I love to sing out . . . I just don't want you

to hear me! But worship should bring the joy a high school football game brings.

You and I should practice all week so that we are comfortable worshipping on Sunday wholeheartedly. For example, Paul advises, “pray without ceasing” (1 Thes. 5:17). If we learn to do that, then in worship it is not so uncomfortable to speak to the Lord. Practice your favorite praise song during the week; it will lift your spirits. Then you will feel confident to sing in worship because music lifts your eyes to the Lord. Read your One-Year Bible each day and as you learn its stories, the sermons will be more meaningful to you. Make a meal for a neighbor or volunteer in the community regularly and that habit of giving will help you give your offering on Sunday.

Worship is core to the life of the believer; in fact, Hezekiah believes it is the first activity to revive a nation. But it is meant to be wholehearted, *not ho-hum*. It is meant to be giving to God first. Worship is an expression of your love for the Lord.

You notice that Hezekiah wanted the place cleaned up. He made sure the altar table, its utensils, and other items were made ready for worship. The sanctuary is a holy place and needs to be treated as such.

How might we prepare not just ourselves, but our very building for worship? Are we conscious of any disarray? Does it matter if the chairs are crooked or the wall paint is faded or prayer cards and Bibles are available? Is our music well-selected, practiced, and excellent quality?

After the building was prepared, King Hezekiah rose early, assembled all the city’s officials, and together they went to church. No one went empty-handed. They brought an abundance of animals to offer God. The priests sacrificed them, and they made atonement not just for Judah, but *for all Israel*.

Have you ever thought of asking God to forgive your neighbor’s sins? What about praying for the sins of Oklahoma or New York or the entire nation?

It means something very important to God for you to, during worship, pray. And remember how Jesus said, if you are here praying and you remember you have an issue with someone, take care of that right here and right now. Lay it before him and ask Jesus to heal the rift. If you practice during the week, it will help you.

The singers and musicians—strings and brass—began playing as the final offerings were made. Hear the Word. READ 2 Chronicles 29:28-36

Worship is something we do. Through it we exalt God, give credit to God’s goodness, and glorify God’s name. We put every aspect of our being into it—**wholehearted worship**. God

deserves it! We benefit from it. Dallas Willard says “worship imprints on our whole being the reality that we study.”¹

Have you ever seen ducks raise ducklings? Have you seen the mama duck with a trail of ducklings following behind? It is the walking after her, or imprinting, that stops traffic in the storybook, *Make Way for Ducklings* by Robert McCloskey. Everyone who read it was so touched.

I saw a video of a duck that imprinted on a dog. It followed the dog until it was an adult and the dog accepted it. But then the dog had puppies. And when the duck got did its usually following and got too close, the dog attacked it. Life became dangerous for the duck because it imprinted on the wrong thing. What are you imprinting on?

When worship is imprinted on you, it changes your heart and people notice. Worship disrupts evil all around you. But do not expect to be passionate about it if you are not preparing your heart all week. Do not expect to “tack on” a little religion to the end of your list of priorities for it to keep the glow in your heart. You must make space for it to change you. As it changes you, then your world will be changed.

When Ahaz was imprinting on non-gods and giving worship to idols, the nation fell into conflict internally among its governmental officials and was attacked externally by other countries. Ahaz did not see God as a resource to help curb evil and enhance unity and peace. But Hezekiah came along and restored worship.

There was an abundance of offerings (so many animals there were not enough priests to sacrifice them) . . . So the Temple of the LORD was restored to service. And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced because of what God had done for the people, for everything had been accomplished so quickly. (2 Chronicles 29:35-36)

In fact, the small nation of Judah began to invite their other brothers and sisters, Israel, to celebrate Passover worship with them. Some people laughed but many came, and peace among them came during the reign of Hezekiah.

What about the rift in our nation? What if a revival of worship was wholeheartedly embraced by God’s people? Perhaps we, too, might draw our divided nation together.

God rewards those who worship him. Worship involves giving to God enthusiastically. The most amazing thing was that things changed for Judah almost immediately. The people were amazed. Isn’t that a great blessing?

AMEN

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), 363.