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SERMON TITLE: **Hezekiah Restores Worship in his Nation**

Series: *Hezekiah the Reformer*

SCRIPTURE: **2 Chronicles 29:1-12, 30:1-10**

DATE: **November 1, 2020**

View online service at [www.fpcd.org/live-stream](http://www.fpcd.org/live-stream)

Read also *Luke 4:1-8*

**2020** has been a tough year. How much can we take? It's very easy to be pulled off center into worry and preoccupation with current events. How can we believers navigate life in 2020? The answer to that question is rather redundant around here:

*Pray, and read your Bible.*

If you've been reading the *One Year Bible* you know that in August, we read 2 Chronicles where a man came into power in a particularly difficult time for divided Israel. He was king of Judah and Scripture tells us he was faithful and good. But times were terrible. His name was Hezekiah. Four chapters are dedicated to his rulership—chapters 29-32. He can help us through our own "Troubled Times in 2020."

Hezekiah was an unusual king. He began his reign at the young age of 25, and in the very first month of the very first year, 715 B.C., he began to address what he saw as the chief problems in the nation.

You've heard the saying, "What goes around comes around," or as the Bible puts it, "You reap whatever you sow" (Galatians 6:7).<sup>1</sup> So divided Israel had abandoned the faith, closed the temple, turned to false gods and was suffering under the threat of brutal Assyria. The Bible says disobedience brings disaster.

*What goes around comes around.* If we go back to Genesis we see that the pattern of people is resistance to God:

- Genesis 6, the time of Noah, "people only did evil, all the time."<sup>2</sup> And the Lord was very sad, but then God noticed Noah, because God actually wanted to save humans (and animals!), not annihilate them.
- In Genesis 11, at Babel, "people sought a name for themselves" out of pride.<sup>3</sup> So God scattered them to create nations and settle the earth.

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 6:7 "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow."

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 6:5 "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 11:4 "Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'"

- In Egypt, the goodness of Joseph was forgotten and a power-hungry Pharaoh ruled over them. Egypt enslaved God's people.<sup>4</sup> But God noticed and set about to rescue them and give them their own land.
- After Solomon's reign, ten tribes revolted and Israel divided into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. This is when idol worship began in the north. King Jeroboam set up two calves for the people to worship. He set up a false religion to keep his people from returning to the south. Thus, pagan worship began because a king wanted to be great and fell to the temptation of grasping power.

But even though again and again the people failed to honor God, God wanted to preserve this nation so they would fulfill God's plan to bring salvation through them to all the nations.

God is very patient. God is still patient even though resistance to God still persists today.

Even Jesus was confronted with the temptation to lead without God.

"The devil took him up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 'I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over all of them . . . if you will worship me,' the devil said." (Luke 4:5-7)

But Jesus, in wisdom, replied,

"The Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'" (4:8)

That's our template. **We must put worship of the Lord and service to God first.** How are you doing with that? It will help you in these times of trouble.

Hezekiah was among a handful of kings in Judah who loved and obeyed God first. That love of God led his people into revival. Let's read the passage. 2 Chronicles 29:1-12a

Hezekiah looked at the nation and assessed, "We need a spiritual revival!"

When you look at our nation, do you think, *if only we had this political party or could get rid of that particular leader we would be*

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 1:8-11 Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country." So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor.

*fine.* But I believe, looking at Scripture, our problem is deeper than that. Here's what Hezekiah noticed about his nation:

"Our ancestors were unfaithful, did evil, abandoned the Lord and his dwelling place; turned their backs on him; shut the doors to the Temple; snuffed out the lamps; stopped burning incense; and presenting offerings at the sanctuary." (2 Chronicles 29:6-7)

God was not the number one priority for the people or their leaders. So God got their attention with all kinds of trouble and calamity. We might not interpret 2020 that way. But we *might* interpret it that way.

Trouble often makes you look up to God really fast. With his nation in a challenging position Hezekiah humbled himself before God, which I believe will also help us in the coming weeks as our divided nation rocks from the outcome of a very contentious election in the midst of a very challenging pandemic..

At our October Session<sup>5</sup> meeting, your elders discussed that very question—how does our nation cope during the next month?

Your Session resolved that God is able to accomplish God's good, hopeful will regardless of who is elected. Church, we need to pray to God to deal with the things we are each concerned about, whether it is the ongoing relentless pandemic, which candidate wins, or our nation's entrenched division, or what we fear will happen if things don't turn out as we expect.

Often our view is restricted to the short term where God sees way out in front of us.

Let's think back. God wanted to stop evil but also wanted to save us (and the animals!) so God had Noah build the ark. God wanted to develop nations, so God scattered the people at Babel. God had a plan for Israel be a self-ruled nation so God intervened, defeated Egypt, and brought them out to freedom. God wanted to keep Israel intact so Jesus could come through Israel as planned. So God led Hezekiah to revive the people, and persuade the church leaders—both lay leaders and pastors—to minister to all the community.

The leaders responded. They cleansed the church and themselves, preparing all for worship. All the church leadership and immediate community got together. There were not enough priests so the lay leadership stepped in.

That would be like saying there aren't enough preachers, so the elders and deacons had to do the job. You do the same here!

We believe in the priesthood of all believers, that we all do ministry. Remember how many times Jesus said to his disciples, "No you do it; you feed the people, you heal the sick, you cast out demons, and all that you see me do! I will help you!"

So the people stepped in, held a revival at the temple and here's the result:

"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 29:36).

Well, worship was such a huge success for Judah that King Hezekiah got a crazy idea. He said—I'm going to invite all of Israel. You know, that divided side; the ones north of our border who had become the enemy. Let's hear it. READ 2 Chronicles 30:1, 5-6, 10

It would be like if there was a revival in one U.S. political party and they were so elated with reconnecting to God that they invited the other political party! Can you see that happening here?

God is a miracle worker, even though we have huge uncertainty. God sees into the future and brings hope, even when we are mired in the muck.

The invitation went out; runners traveled to the north and knocked on doors. But the people of northern Israel just laughed at them (except for a few, who humbled themselves and responded). But the story is not over. It's only the middle of the second chapter.

Are you letting political concerns overwhelm you? Trust that God is way ahead of you and at work to bring us hope.

This week, whatever happens, it is not the end of the story. Be patient. Wait on God. Be patient with your neighbor who believes differently from you.

Pray for our nation and its leaders.

Even though things look bad, and you may not be happy with the outcome this week, God is at work and God is never hindered.

AMEN

<sup>5</sup> Presbyterian churches call their Board of Elders The Session.