

Written Copy: 2 Chronicles 30:6-9 “Return to His Table”

Maundy Thursday Worship

Thursday, April 6th, 2023

Text: 2 Chronicles 30:6-9

⁶ So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, “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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.”

The text’s intent

Show Hezekiah as the good and faithful king who called his people back into Covenant faith with the LORD, and not just the people of his kingdom, but the remnant left in the Northern kingdom. He calls them back to worship the LORD alone, and obey His commands. As a sign of this return, he arranges for them to celebrate the Covenant meal of Passover, which had been neglected during his evil father’s reign. He intercedes in prayer on behalf of those who have not followed the LORD’s command to purify themselves to celebrate the Passover, and the LORD listens and has mercy on them. Hezekiah’s reform would end with his death, as his son King Manasseh would lead the nation away from the LORD and back into idol worship.

Focus Statement:

King Hezekiah was the good king who worked to call God’s people back into a Covenant relationship with Him. King Jesus fulfills this call by His life death and resurrection. He becomes the New Covenant by doing what we could never do on our own, win for us forgiveness by being our perfect Lamb of sacrifice. He calls us back into an intimate faith relationship with Him in baptism and continues to restore us in that relationship through baptism’s ongoing work of confession and absolution, and the Lord’s Supper. There is the supper we are renewed in our Covenant relationship of faith with Him as He gives us His body and blood to restore us body and soul, and give to us the hope of the Promised Land to come.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

We, like God’s Old Testament people defile ourselves with sinful thoughts, words, and actions. We disqualify ourselves from having fellowship with Him now and for eternity. There is no amount of work we can do to make ourselves right with Him

What the hearer should do as a result:

Heed His call that begun in our baptism, is renewed through Word and Sacrament in worship. Come to His table and enjoy the unique fellowship it provides with Him and one another.

Subject Sentence: Christ calls us to intimate fellowship in His Supper

Introduction: Love of history renewed

Through most of high school one of my least favorite subjects was history. My opinion was “Who wants to learn about a bunch of dead people and stuff that happened a long time ago. That was then. This is now.” I remember my history teacher, whose name was Mr. Parrot, tried his best to engage us. What he earned for his trouble was our collecting those cellophane wrapped crackers they gave out at lunch with the soup. By the spring quarter we had collected a box full of them, which we proceeded to dump all over his desk. While the saying goes “any attention is better than no attention at all”, I think he may have disagreed with that.

In any event as I have grown older, I’ve changed my tune about how important history is. And I’ve worked on making up for my inattentiveness to history in High School and College. For that reason I really loved our historically based sermon series for Lent “Chronicles of the King” which looked at that lives and rule of some of the better kings of Judah. And as a way to finish off that series I’ve saved one of the best for last: King Hezekiah. In my own personal opinion Hezekiah was maybe the best of the best, going all the way back to his forefather King David, who set the standard for all the kings that followed him.

Good King Hezekiah Calls God’s People Back to Covenant

Hezekiah succeeded his father, the evil King Ahaz, who had turned the nation away from the LORD to worship the false gods and idols that the Canaanites worshiped. It was because of their detestable idol worship that the LORD had ordered and worked through His people to wipe out these Canaanites when He gave their land to His people. And He made a Covenant with His people Israel that He would be their God who would protect and provide for them and give them this bountiful land as their permanent possession. And their part of the Covenant agreement was to worship and serve Him alone as their one true God.

While the LORD was faithful to His side of the agreement, Israel failed time and again to live up to their part. Because of the evil ways of King David’s grandson, King Jehoram, the nation of Israel was split in half, with 10 of the 12 tribes composing the Northern Kingdom, and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin composing the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Northern Kingdom never returned to faithful worship of the LORD God. As a result, as judgment against them, the LORD allowed the evil empire of Assyria to invade and destroy the Northern Kingdom, taking most of the people away to exile, leaving only a remnant in the land.

This happened during the beginning of King Hezekiah's reign in Judah. Unlike his father, Hezekiah was a faithful believer in the LORD God. And perhaps fueled by the desire that the fate of the Northern Kingdom not happen to Judah, Hezekiah began a campaign of reform to call his people back to faithful Covenant worship of the One True God. He restored and cleansed the temple in Jerusalem that had fallen into disrepair under his father's rule. And he removed the altars to the Canaanite gods in the temple and in Jerusalem that his father allowed to be erected. His people followed suit as they helped rid the city of these false idols and altars.

But his greatest act was to restore the celebration of Passover that had been neglected for so long. This was the festival of remembrance of that Covenant agreement the LORD had made with His people all the way back in Egypt. In the final sign to the Egyptians and to His people Israel that He alone is the LORD God who rules over all nations, He sent the angel of death to kill all the firstborn children and livestock throughout the land of Egypt. But the Israelites, in obedience to the LORD's command through Moses, slaughtered a perfect lamb, roasted and ate it, and smeared its blood on the doorposts of their houses. When the angel of death saw the blood on the doorposts, he "passed over" their houses and did not touch their firstborn. From this gracious act comes the name for the festival: Passover. But the Egyptians, who did not have the blood to protect them, suffered the death of their firstborn as punishment for keeping the LORD's children enslaved. This moved Pharaoh to let God's people go.

The Passover meal recounted these events, as well as the salvation the LORD provided at the Red Sea where His children passed through the waters of the sea on dry ground, but the Egyptians who tried to follow were drowned when the waves came crashing back over them. Here the LORD reminded them of another supernatural example of His saving power and love for them. Part of this meal also recounted how the LORD led them through the wilderness for 40 years and brought them to the Promised Land which He was giving to them.

This meal served as a renewal of the Covenant relationship with His children in Judah. But King Hezekiah, moved by the Holy Spirit, wanted to extend that Covenant renewal with those who were left in what used to be the Northern Kingdom too. **2 Chronicles 30:6,9** ⁶ **So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, "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. ⁹ 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."**

Many of those left behind in what was the Northern Kingdom met this gracious invitation with scorn and ridicule, the kind that pours out from a sin-hardened unbelieving heart. These people had lived their lives, as their parents and ancestors before them, worshipping gods other than the LORD God, and had no love or place for Him in their hearts. This had to grieve the hearts of King Hezekiah and his couriers. Yet some did answer the invitation to return to the LORD and came to Jerusalem to celebrate His Passover. The Holy Spirit worked through this gracious invitation to restore faith in those who came, and they were restored to the family of faith in this Covenant meal.

There was a problem though, caused by the years of neglected faithful worship of the LORD. Many of those who came to celebrate had not ritually cleansed themselves as the LORD required in order to celebrate Passover. And this problem was not just with the lay people, but many of the Priests and Levites had not prepared themselves to officiate the slaughtering of the Passover Lambs. But King Hezekiah interceded for them in prayer. And the LORD mercifully blessed this Passover celebration, even though it happened a month later than it was supposed to, and even though some partook of the meal without the ritual cleansing. The LORD healed and restored them, honoring Hezekiah's prayer and the repentant faith in the people's hearts.

Hezekiah's renewal of faith in Judah would be short lived. It would end at his death. His son, King Manasseh, would lead the people back into worshipping the Canaanite gods that had angered the LORD and caused Him to exterminate them from the land. And 200 years later, because of their continued unfaithfulness, the LORD would send Babylon to destroy the Southern kingdom of Judah and take the people away as captives into exile.

How King Jesus Fulfills what Hezekiah Could Not Do

King Hezekiah, through the work of the Holy Spirit, did a great work of turning the hearts and minds of God's people back to the LORD. But in the end Hezekiah did not have the power or ability to institute lasting reform. And that is why the LORD sent King Jesus to us. His death led to the greatest reform and restoration of faith ever.

We were born in faithlessness just as dark and deep as those in the Northern Kingdom. But King Jesus sent out His personal invitation to join Him in His kingdom of grace and mercy in the waters of Holy Baptism. Instead of calling you to travel to Jerusalem as the Hezekiah's couriers had to do, King Jesus brought His kingdom, His temple, to you. In the water of Baptism, the Spirit brought the reign and rule of King Jesus into your heart through His presence and His gift of faith.

King Hezekiah moved his people to get rid of the idols and their altars. In baptism and it's continuing work done in our Confession and Absolution the Holy Spirit does the continuous work in your heart and mind to cast out all the sinful idols of this world that we hold fast to, including the worship of ourselves. And He creates in you and me repentant hearts that look to Him alone as your protecting, providing, merciful and gracious God who is always ready to forgive and restore our wandering and wayward hearts.

As a sign of their repentance, King Hezekiah initiated the restored celebration the Covenant Meal of Passover so that the people would be reminded of the LORD's saving power, and worship Him as their Redeemer God. King Jesus calls us to a meal that is the fulfillment of that Passover Seder. And His meal provides what the Passover was not able to. He gives to us the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

In this meal we receive the body and blood of our Passover Lamb of Sacrifice, King Jesus Himself. You receive the body of that perfect Lamb of Sacrifice and the very blood that was shed for you on the cross to forgive all your sins, both truly present in the bread and the wine. He gives to us Himself and all that His life, death, and resurrection earned for us: forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life.

King Jesus is the author of the New Covenant: The one where God Himself, who took on our humanity, does all that is necessary to make us right with God and restore us to His kingdom now, and keep us there until the day His kingdom becomes the reality all around us in the New Heaven and New Earth. In this Sacramental meal, our Lord does a truly miraculous and supernatural work. He brings us into intimate fellowship with Him. And not just with Him, but through our communion in His body and blood we are restored in fellowship with all who gather at the rail. And not just with them, but with all who celebrate around the world this Sacramental meal. And not just with them, "but with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven", including those dear souls of our loved ones who have departed in faith to be with Jesus. What an awesome gift this is that Christ has given to us, His Church.

King Hezekiah's reform ended with his death. Jesus' reform and restoration to His kingdom is His ongoing work in you. His Spirit is working on it right now and will continue until He takes you home to be with Him. He continues to pour into your heart and soul all that His life, death and resurrection earned for you. This supernatural work happens whenever you participate in the means of grace: the Word that is preached, read, and sung, in your remembrance of and faith in what His Spirit has done and continues to do through your Baptism, and whenever you come to the rail to join with your brothers and sisters in the celebration of the communion He establishes in you through His Supper: His very body and blood given to you.

Conclusion: Come to the Lord's Table

King Hezekiah sent out couriers to invite all to come and celebrate Passover. We here at Lamb of God invite all of you who are baptized and instructed in the Small Catechism to join us for the fulfillment of that Passover Meal, the Lord's Supper. The Holy Spirit does the work of preparing you to celebrate it through your participation in Confession and Absolution. Jesus gives to you personally all His gracious gifts of forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life, right into your hands, right into your mouth in His Supper. So come, all of you who are here today. And those of you who are worshipping at home, the Spirit sends His invitation to come. Come and let the Holy Spirit prepare your hearts and mind through our Good Friday worship tomorrow night at 7:30 PM. Then come on Easter to join us in the grand celebration of Jesus resurrection on Easter Sunday. Join us either at 8:00 AM or 10:30 AM service. Come and join us at the rail as Jesus gives to us His resurrected body and blood. Come and be built up in faith toward Him of whom the Apostle Paul promises us in **Philippians 1:6** **And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.** Amen.