

## Come Before The Lord (2 Chronicles 30:1-5, 10-22)

- 1) He invites you to his Word
- 2) Approach him with a proper heart

Now that my wife and I are homeowners, we do things we once had little interest in. A few weeks ago there was a home show at the Tucson Convention Center selling all kinds of things a homeowner would want – pools, patio furniture, kitchen knick-knacks, you name it. But what struck me is the sheer amount of people willing to give you something if you share your contact information with them. Just about everyone was offering something provided you did business with them or joined their mailing list. In our verses this morning from the Old Testament where King Hezekiah celebrates the Passover, he too reached out to all the people in Israel. He offered them something far greater than any prize from a home show – God’s life-giving Word. A lot of people heard the news, but relatively few came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. But those who did make the journey came before the Lord to hear his wonderful message.

When Hezekiah became the sole ruler of the Southern Kingdom of Israel things were a spiritual mess. 5 years before the Northern Kingdom had been conquered by the Assyrians and most of their Jewish countrymen were deported.<sup>i</sup> Politically things looked better in the Southern Kingdom, but idolatrous worship was everywhere because of Hezekiah’s evil father, King Ahaz.<sup>ii</sup> It had been a long time since the people had celebrated the Passover or done sacrifices as required by the Law of Moses. King Hezekiah knew that if he was going to get anywhere, he would need to start by reforming the spiritual mess he inherited. He got the temple cleaned up and back open for worship. And, as we see in these verses, he invites all the people of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms to travel to come before the Lord by celebrating the Passover. What was the result of all their traveling? **“The couriers went from town to town...but the people scorned and ridiculed them. Nevertheless, some men [from the Northern tribes]...humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem. Also in Judah the hand of God was on the people to give them unity of mind to carry out what the king and his officials had ordered, following the word of the LORD.”**<sup>iii</sup> Many invited, yet relatively few came.

Doesn’t that sound like our world today and how people respond to God’s invitation to hear his Word? Some families will plan their vacations around church events. Others won’t make the 20 minute drive to come on Sunday morning. If you were to look at how you’ve responded to God’s invitation to hear his Word, would

you identify with the Northern Kingdom or the Southern Kingdom? Many times people turn down God's invitation to hear his Word because they don't recognize how much they need it. This may come as a surprise to you, but you and I aren't all that great. We need to hear God's Word as much as the person who hasn't stepped foot in church for years. We break the laws of our country all the time – driving in traffic, reporting our taxes incorrectly, taking shortcuts at work and school...and these are only the laws that tell us how to act! What about God's law that tells us how to think and talk as well? How many times a day do you think or say hurtful things about others maybe without realizing it? It can often seem that living in this world is like climbing an endless ladder. For every good thing we do, we climb a rung and get closer to heaven. Meanwhile climbing that 1 rung, we've slipped down 2 or 3. We'll never get to the top by our own efforts. And when we lose our strength in death, do you know what will happen if your hope for salvation comes from outside God's Word? You'll fall into the depths of hell.

But those who go to God's Word for their salvation don't have to worry about falling into hell. For their salvation comes through faith in Jesus who is our Passover Lamb. What was the big deal about King Hezekiah celebrating the Passover? It goes back to the days of Moses and the 10 Plagues.<sup>iv</sup> God was going to send the angel of death to kill every firstborn son. But if a family painted the blood of a spotlessly healthy lamb on their door frame, the angel of death would pass over them, leaving them untouched. Hence the name Passover. That same night Pharaoh begged the Israelites to leave Egypt before things got worse. In memory of that historic night, God commanded the Jewish people to celebrate the Passover every year to remember his mercy shown in Egypt.

As the blood of the Passover lamb kept the Israelites' firstborn sons from death, so the blood of our Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, keeps us from eternal death in hell.<sup>v</sup> Jesus never once sinned while he walked on earth. While you and I can't go a day without breaking one of God's laws, Jesus never had that problem. Jesus stayed as spotlessly perfect as the day he was born in Bethlehem. As the Old Testament believers learned, there is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood. And the blood Jesus shed on the cross was as innocent as any Passover lamb's. Jesus gave his life for you and me so that we may have his forgiveness. Those who believe in this promise from the cross don't have to worry about that endless ladder. For it's not us who gets ourselves up to heaven. It's Jesus, our Passover lamb, who washes our sins away with this blood and lifts us up to heaven when we pass away.

That is the message of God's Word. And when you hear God's invitation to listen to it, take him up on his generous offer! This very next Sunday we will be celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation at Tucson High School. The invitation has gone out to all the Tucson area Wisconsin Lutheran churches. Reformation 500 will be a service unlike any you have seen in this area of the country. The more I hear about it from Pastor Kassulke and the Planning Committee, the more I find myself having the joy that the believers had at Hezekiah's Passover celebration. We will get to come before the Lord and hear his truths in wondrous word and spectacular song. Come before the Lord as the believers of the Southern Kingdom did. If you know of people who are on the fence, encourage them to this special event. For the message that God tells us in his Word is life-giving.

And when you come before the Lord, approach God with a proper heart that wants to listen to his Word. The believers at Hezekiah's Passover showed their proper hearts by how they followed God's Word. They gladly came to Jerusalem and cleansed it of idolatrous worship. As our verses tells us, **"they removed the altars in Jerusalem and cleared away the incense altars and threw them into the Kidron Valley."**<sup>vi</sup> All the damage that evil King Ahaz did in the previous generation was starting to be undone. The people who came from the Northern Kingdom, the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, didn't know they have to ceremonially purify themselves before eating the Passover meal.<sup>vii</sup> Although they ignorantly went against the letter of the Passover law, they were obeying the spirit of the law. They approached God with a proper heart – a genuine want to hear his Word and learn from it. King Hezekiah interceded for the people and prayed to God, **"May the LORD, who is good, pardon everyone who sets his heart on seeking God — the LORD, the God of his fathers — even if he is not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary."**<sup>viii</sup> And what did God do for these people who came before him with a proper heart? **"The LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people."**<sup>ix</sup>

When we come before the Lord, do we approach him with a proper heart? I'll admit that I don't always. Like every child and teenager, there were some Sundays I didn't want to wake up early and spend the morning studying God's Word. Do you want to know why I came before the Lord on those particular days? Because of my parents. They knew that what I got at church was far more important than a few extra hours of free time. Why are you here today? It is because of a proper heart that wants to learn more about God and grow in faith?

When you and I come before the Lord with a proper heart, do you notice how quickly our minds wander off? In middle of a worship service our week's to-do list pops in our heads. And we start stressing about that instead of joyously receiving our God's generous forgiveness. When you open your Bibles at home and get into God's Word during the week, remind yourself why you're doing it in the first place! Is it to get through the chapter or section and cross it off your reading plan? Or is it to sit at the feet of God, the teacher of all eternal truth, and trust in him all the more? Just as we easily sin by turning down God's invitation to come before him through his Word, so we easily have improper hearts when we listen to God's Word.

We need someone to talk to God on our behalf as Hezekiah did for the ceremonially unclean Passover participants. And we do have someone – Jesus Christ. Whenever we sin against God the Father, his Son intercedes for us as our great high priest. Jesus puts his robe of righteousness over our sinful selves so that when God the Father looks down from heaven all he sees on us is our Savior's righteousness. Jesus Christ continues to give us the promise of the cross, the forgiveness of sins, whenever we come before the Lord with a proper heart. And for all these blessings, we give joyful thanks to God for what he generously gives us through his Word as the Old Testament believers joyfully celebrated the Passover with King Hezekiah.

God offers us blessings far greater than what this world can give us. Even if you were to win all the offers at a home show, God's Word would still beat it. In his desire for people to know and trust in their Savior, he invites all people to come before him in his Word. Yet relatively few take God up on his invitation. You and I thankfully have made use of his invitation. I pray that we will always willingly come before the Lord through his Word. Because it is in his Word we see our Savior who corrects and forgives our improper hearts. Who takes our sins away as our Passover Lamb and who talks to God on our behalf. May we never forget these blessings and fail to come before the Lord with a proper heart. Amen.

## End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Paul Wendland, *People's Bible Commentary: 2 Chronicles* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 329.

<sup>ii</sup> 2 Chronicles 28 has all the details.

<sup>iii</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:10-12. All biblical quotations are from the 1984 edition of the New International Version unless otherwise stated.

<sup>iv</sup> Exodus 11:1-12:30 has the details on the first Passover.

<sup>v</sup> Interestingly enough, Jesus was crucified during Passover weekend. While I can't say dogmatically that this was on purpose, there are certainly strong allusions between the yearly celebration of the Passover and Christ's death on the Passover.

<sup>vi</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:14.

<sup>vii</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:18a.

<sup>viii</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:18b,19.

<sup>ix</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:20.