

Introduction:

- A. They had waited for *600 years!* 600 years since they'd had a king to lead them, to unite them, to put them on the map. And there he came! Riding on a donkey, the signal of a king coming in peace. People were already calling him the King of the Jews. There he came, a parade of one. People ahead of him and people behind him shouted, *We're saved! The Son of David is here! We have our King! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Salvation from heaven itself!* People spread palm branches and cloaks under the donkey's feet like carpet for the King. 600 years they'd waited and here he was: Jesus, from Nazareth.
- B. They had the right King, no doubt about that! And their praises couldn't have been more perfect. But they didn't know just what the best King ever could do for them. **It's a tragic mistake—to set your sights to low when it comes to Jesus Christ.** To expect too little.
- C. When the OT book of Chronicles was written the Jews had no king. They'd spent 70 years in exile because of their sins, and the sins of their kings. But in their history, there had been a few good kings, true sons of David. Perhaps the best of them was Hezekiah who became the king in Jerusalem about 715 years before Christ and some 200 years after David. Turn to **2 Chron 29**. Four chapters are given to tell about his reign. **Now why would the Chronicler dangle the stories of this wonderful king in front of Jews who had no king at all?** One reason was to remind them that **God had not changed!** Another reason was to remind them **that they were still God's people;** that what made them great was their relationship with the LORD. So the message was, *"Return to the LORD and he will return to you."* And yet another reason was **to stir in them a yearning for the King, the Messiah,** whom God had promised to send them.
- D. So on that Sunday before Passover as Jesus came into Jerusalem they thought perhaps that day has come! *Hosanna! Saved!* We look at the story of Hezekiah's reign for the same reasons they did, except that we know the King they longed for. **29:1-3...**

The very first thing this new, 25-year-old king did was, *“He opened the doors of the temple of the LORD.”* That was remarkable because Hezekiah’s father, Ahaz, was such a wicked king. Ch.28 says he was as bad as they came. He ignored the LORD and put up Baals on every high hill. The rituals were like orgies and the nation was muddy with sensuality. He even sacrificed his own children as burnt offerings to Molech (Hezekiah’s brothers). When he was attacked he tried to make an alliance with the wicked kings of Assyria, but that only created more trouble for him. Look at **28:22-24**, *“In his time of trouble King Ahaz became even more unfaithful to the Lord. He offered sacrifices to the gods of Damascus, who had defeated him; for he thought, “Since the gods of the kings of Aram have helped them, I will sacrifice to them so they will help me.” But they were his downfall and the downfall of all Israel. Ahaz gathered together the furnishings from the temple of God and cut them in pieces. He shut the doors of the Lord’s temple and set up altars at every street corner in Jerusalem.”*

Then after a reign of 16 years Ahaz died and his son Hezekiah became king at age 25. Somehow, despite this horrible, wicked home, Hezekiah loved the LORD and the first thing he did was set out to restore the worship of the LORD in the temple. He summoned the Levites, the tribe responsible for Israel’s worship. (The priests were one branch of the Levites. They were the descendants of Aaron, one of the sons of Levi.) Here were guys who hardly remembered what they were supposed to do but he told them to look into God’s Law and to go clean and purify God’s temple for worship.

In a little over two weeks they had cleaned house and they reported to King Hezekiah that they were ready to bring sacrifices to the LORD. Remember, this all happens in the first *16 days* after Ahaz’s death! **29:20-24...** As you will see, the people of Judah rejoiced! And we can take our cues from them.

I. WE LOVE JESUS CHRIST OUR KING BECAUSE HE OPENS THE WAY FOR US TO BE FORGIVEN (Ch.29)

- A. I think guilt and God’s absence lay heavy on the Jews. Without the temple, without priests, without sacrifices they had no way to come clean, no way to pray, no way to be healthy within.

They were a sick and dying people. They had watched their kin—the northern tribes—fall to the brutal Assyrian army only a few years before and they were terrified of being next. Then in less than a month every-thing changed because Hezekiah opened the way for them to be forgiven by God.

- B. You've heard just how wicked Judah had become. Wickedness like that is pervasive. It infected everyone, not just the king. They were a deeply sinful people.

So the turn-around here is stunning. In 16 days the temple is cleansed and consecrated once again to God's holy use, "*following the word of the LORD*" [v.15]. Their priests, whose white linen robes still smelled of mothballs, brought 28 animals to sacrifice for the sin of the nation. That's all. *Seven bulls, seven rams, seven male lambs, and seven male goats.* That's what God required as "*a sin offering to atone for all Israel*" [v.24].

And in a miracle of God's grace, he accepted the blood of those animals as payment for all their sins. 16 years of gross sin covered by the blood of 28 animals. No one thought it was an even trade. No one thought it was just a religious ceremony. **Everyone's life depended on those sacrifices on the altar in the temple of God.** Hezekiah and his people prayed and believed God would honor his promise to forgive.

God does not forgive people because they're sorry. He forgives because his justice has been satisfied. Those sacrificed animals were, you might say, *place holders*, till Christ died on the cross, "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" We are forgiven for all our sin when we believe God will accept Jesus as our sacrifice and declare us clean. **Heb 9:14** says, "*How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*"

- C. Look what happened: **vv.27-31...** I love that statement in **v.27**, "*As the offering began, singing to the LORD began also.*" They sang psalms they'd very nearly forgotten, songs of praise for

forgiveness. Perhaps they sang, “*Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered*” [Ps 32:1]. It is so good to be clean, to come again into God’s presence, to pray, to sing again! You know the feeling, don’t you!

*“My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought,
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!”*

- D. We love Jesus, our King, because he opens the way for us to be forgiven. Remember how, immediately after Jesus died on the cross, the huge veil in the temple of God was torn from top to bottom? With our sins paid for there was no reason to keep people from God’s presence. Hezekiah opened the temple so God’s people could worship him there. Jesus made the temple unnecessary because he brings us directly into God’s presence. How privileged we are to serve such a King as Jesus Christ!

But Hezekiah wasn’t done. **30:1...** It had more than 200 years since the Jews had celebrated the Passover together. The nation was split and the northern tribes had been conquered by the Assyrians. If God’s people were to be healthy—if they were going to return to the Lord—they needed to celebrate the Passover and they wanted to do it together.

So not only did Hezekiah call all the people of Judah to come to the celebration, **he also sent out couriers—missionaries—to the Jews remaining in the Assyrian-held territories inviting them to come.** The lands of Ephraim and Manasseh were just to the north but then **v.5** says they decided to send the proclamation “*throughout Israel, from Beersheba to Dan*” – from one end of the land to the other. Remember, these people had been enemies for 200 years!

The Passover was the celebration which God commanded so that Israel would always remember how he redeemed them out of slavery and death in Egypt. **One thing God’s people cannot forget is that they were saved by God’s mighty power and love.** If we forget that, we lose our identity, and we will surely lose our love for the Lord. That’s

What’s more, celebrating our salvation is what unites us as God’s people so that is why Hezekiah sent out the invitation. **Vv.6-9**

tell us what the message was. It sounds like an old-fashioned revival message. [vv.6-9...]. This is really poignant. It is like finding long-lost brothers, living on skid row, and delivering the message, “*Come home. Our father wants us to be together. He misses you. He is gracious and compassionate and he will forgive you. Just come home and celebrate with us.*” Hezekiah and his couriers were like God’s shepherds looking for the lost sheep, like the woman searching for her precious lost coin, like the Father watching the horizon for the rebellious son to come home.

Vv.10-12... It was a family reunion like Israel had never seen. It was kind of a makeshift Passover. They had to bump it back a month just to get ready. The priests and Levites were out of shape spiritually and had to consecrate themselves for this holy service. **Vv.18-20...** God saw the hearts of these beleaguered people. They didn’t remember the important God-given rules that governed Passover but their hearts were in the right place and God not only let them go on, but God “*healed the people.*” He restored their souls when their king prayed for them.

II. WE LOVE JESUS CHRIST OUR KING BECAUSE HE INVITES ALL WHO WILL COME TO CELEBRATE GOD’S SALVATION (Ch. 30)

- A. God offers us holy hospitality. Being saved is like being invited to God’s home and table. He saved Israel when he redeemed them out of slavery and protected them from death by the blood of the lamb. That’s what he does for us, too, through Jesus. Redeems us out of our slavery to sin and the devil and atones for our sin so that we need not fear his judgment in death. And to celebrate all that, he invites us to dinner—a feast for our hearts. A family reunion. And everyone is invited. The Bible says, “*Whosoever will may come.*” Look at **v.25**, “*The entire assembly of Judah rejoiced, along with the priests and Levites and all who had assembled from Israel, including the foreigners who had come from Israel and also those who resided in Judah.*” You didn’t even have to be Jewish!

Jesus told a story about a great man who held a banquet. When he learned there was still room at his table he told his servant, “*Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.*” Could that be

you? Do you hear God's invitation to you right now? "*The LORD your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him.*"

B. The celebration was so wonderful that the people decided to extend it for another week. It is strange how people have this picture of worship as somber and tedious. Listen to the end of the story in **v.26...** There was joy because these were people who were right with God! Only weeks before they had been bound up in sin under a king who violated every command of God, including disowning the LORD in favor of imposters, and who locked people out of God's very presence. Then a king took the throne who opened the way for them to be forgiven and restored, and who then invited all who would come to the Father's family reunion and to the feast of salvation, a celebration of the dark night when death passed over the blood-sheltered people of God.

C. **V.27...** All over Jerusalem, amidst all those people who had come home to the LORD, when the feast was finally over and people were packing up, the priests and Levites blessed them. They held their hands out over God's beloved people and gave them their ancient birthright:

*The LORD bless you and keep you,
The LORD make his face shine upon you,
and be gracious to you.*

The LORD turn his face toward you, and give you peace. And the verse says, "*and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place.*" The chapters to follow show how God blessed them and how generous-hearted they became in return, and how God miraculously rescued them when the Assyrian army besieged them. When you receive God's blessing, when you trust him and are grateful for his salvation, those gifts really come to you!

Conclusion

There is nothing more important to be said about us than that we are the people of God, saved through Jesus Christ. You are blessed in rich and

everlasting ways. Whether you are in a good season or hard, **seek the Lord**. If you are far from God, **come home**. You will not be turned away. And today especially, rejoice that we have such a King as Jesus, who has come in the name of the LORD.