

CHAPTER 29

We are here entering upon a pleasant scene, the good and glorious reign of Hezekiah, in which we shall find more of God and religion than perhaps in any of the good reigns we have yet met with; for he was a very zealous, devout, good man, none like him. In this chapter we have an account of the work of reformation which he set about with vigour immediately after his accession to the crown. Here is,

I. His exhortation to the priests and Levites, when he put them in possession of the house of God again (v. 1-11).

II. The care and pains which the Levites took to cleanse the temple, and put things in order there (v. 12-19).

III. A solemn revival of God's ordinances that had been neglected, in which atonement was made for the sins of the last reign, and the wheels were set a-going again, to the great satisfaction of king and people (v. 20-36).

~~420~~ 2 CHRONICLES 29:1-11

HEZEKIAH'S GOOD REIGN

Here is,

I. Hezekiah's age when he came to the crown. He was *twenty-five years old*. Joash, who came to the crown after two bad reigns, was but seven years old; Josiah, who came after two bad reigns, was but eight, which occasioned the delay of the reformation; but Hezekiah had come to years, and so applied himself immediately to it. We may well think with what a sorrowful heart he beheld his father's idolatry and profaneness, how it troubled him to see the doors of the temple shut, though, while his father lived, he durst not open them. His soul no doubt wept in secret for it, and he vowed that when he should receive the congregation he would redress these grievances, which made him do it with more readiness and resolution.

II. His general character. He *did that which was right like David*, v. 2. Of several of his predecessors it had been said that they did that which was right, *but not like David*, not with David's integrity and zeal. But here was one that had as hearty an affection for the ark and law of God as ever David had.

III. His speedy application to the great work of restoring religion. The first thing he did was to *open the doors of the house of the Lord*, v. 3. We are willing to hope his father had not quite suppressed the temple service; for then the holy fire on the altar must have gone out, and we do not read of the re-kindling of it; but he had hindered the people from attending it, and the priests, except such of them as were of his own party, ^{<12615>}2 Kings 16:15. But Hezekiah immediately threw the church doors open, and *brought in the priests and Levites*. He found Judah low and naked, yet did not make it his first business to revive the civil interests of his kingdom, but to restore religion to its good posture again. Those that begin with God begin at the right end of their work, and it will prosper accordingly.

IV. His speech to the priests and Levites. It was well known, no doubt, that he had a real kindness for religion and was disaffected to the corruptions of the last reign; yet we do not find the priests and Levites making application to him for the restoration of the temple service but he calls upon them, which, I doubt, bespeaks their coldness as much as his zeal; and perhaps, if they had done their part with vigour, things would not have been brought into so very bad a posture as Hezekiah found them in. Hezekiah's exhortation to the Levites is very pathetic.

1. He laid before them the desolations of religion and the deplorable state to which it was brought among them (v. 6, 7): *Our fathers have trespassed*. He said not "*My father*," because it became him, as a son, to be as tender as might be of his father's name, and because his father would not have done all this if their fathers had not neglected their duty. Urijah the priest had joined with Ahaz in setting up an idolatrous altar. He complained,

(1.) That the house of God had been deserted: *They have forsaken God, and turned their backs upon his habitation*. Note, Those that turn their backs upon God's ordinances may truly be said to forsake God himself.

(2.) That the instituted worship of God there had been let fall. The lamps were not lighted, and incense was not burnt. There are still such neglects as

these, and they are no less culpable, when the word is not duly read and opened (for that was signified by the *lighting of the lamps*) and when prayers and praises are not duly offered up, for that was signified by *the burning of incense*.

2. He showed the sad consequences of the neglect and decay of religion among them, v. 8. 9. This was the cause of all the calamities they had lain under. God had in anger delivered them to trouble, to the sword, and to captivity. When we are under the rebukes of God's providence it is good for us to enquire whether we have not neglected God's ordinances and whether the controversy he has with us may not be traced to this neglect.

3. He declared his own full purpose and resolution to revive religion and make it his business to promote it (v. 10): "*It is in my heart* (that is, I am fully resolved) *to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel* (that is, to worship him only, and in that way which he has appointed); for I am sure that, otherwise, his fierce anger will not turn away from us." This covenant he would not only make himself, but bring his people into the bond of.

4. He engaged and excited the Levites and priests to do their duty on this occasion. This he begins with (v. 5); this he ends with, v. 11. He called them *Levites* to remind them of their obligation to God, called them his *sons* to remind them of the relation to himself, that he expected that, *as a son with the father, they should serve with him* in the reformation of the land.

(1.) he told them what was their duty, to sanctify *themselves* first (by repenting of their neglects, reforming their own hearts and lives, and renewing their covenants with God to do their duty better for the time to come), and then to *sanctify the house of God*, as his servants, to make it clean from every thing that was disagreeable, either through the disuse or the profanation of it, and to set it up for the purposes for which it was made.

(2.) He stirred them up to do it (v. 11): "*Be not now negligent*, or remiss, in your duty. Let not this good work be retarded through your carelessness." *Be not deceived*, so the *margin*. Note, Those that by their negligence in the service of God think to mock God, and put a cheat upon him, do but deceive themselves, and put a damning cheat upon their own souls. *Be not secure* (so some), as if there were no urgent call to do it or no danger in not doing it. Note, Men's negligence in religion is owing to

their carnal security. The consideration he quickens them with is derived from their office. God had herein put honour upon them: He has *chosen you to stand before him*. God therefore expected work from them. They were not chosen to be idle, to enjoy the dignity and leave the duty to be done by others, but to serve him and to minister to him. They must therefore be ashamed of their late remissness, and, now that the doors of the temple were opened again, must set about their work with double diligence.

2 CHRONICLES 29:12-19

THE TEMPLE CLEANSED

We have here busy work, good work, and needful work, the cleansing of the house of the Lord.

I. The persons employed in this work were the priests and Levites, who should have kept the temple clean, but, not having done that, were concerned to make it clean. Several of the Levites are here named, two of each of the three principal houses, Kohath, Gershon, and Merari (v. 12), and two of each of the three families of singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, v. 13, 14. We cannot think these are named merely because they were chief in place (for then surely the high priest, or some of the heads of the courses of the priests, would have been mentioned), but because they were more zealous and active than the rest. When God has work to do he will raise up leading men to preside in it. And it is not always that the first in place and rank are most fit for service or most forward to it. These Levites not only bestirred themselves, but *gathered their brethren*, and quickened them to do *according to the commandment of the king by the word of the Lord*. Observe, They did according to the king's command, but with an eye to God's word. The king commanded them what was already their duty by the word of God, and, in doing it, they regarded God's word as a rule to them and the king's commandment as a spur to them.

II. The work was *cleansing the house of God*,

1. From the common dirt it had contracted while it was shut up — dust, and cobwebs, and the rust of the vessels.

2. From the idols and idolatrous altars that were set up in it, which, though kept ever so neat, were a greater pollution to it than if it had been made the common sewer of the city. The priests were none of them mentioned as leading men in this work, yet none but they durst go *into the inner part of the house, no, not to cleanse it*, which they did, and perhaps the high priest into the holy of holies, to cleanse that. And, though the Levites had the honour to be the leaders in the work, they did not disdain to be servitors to the priests according to their office; for what filth the priests brought into the court the Levites carried to the brook Kidron. Let not men's usefulness, be it ever so eminent, make them forget their place.

III. The expedition with which they did this work was very remarkable. They began on the first day of the first month, a happy beginning of the new-year, and one that promised a good year. Thus should every year begin with the reformation of what is amiss, and the purging away, by true repentance, of all the defilements contracted the foregoing year. In eight days they cleared and cleansed the temple, and in eight days more the *courts* of the temple, v. 17. Let those that do good work learn to rid work and get it done. Let what is amiss be amended quickly.

IV. The report they made of it to Hezekiah was very agreeable, v. 18, 19. They gave him an account of what they had done, because it was he that set them on work, boasted not of their own care and pains, nor did they come to him to be paid, but to let him know that all things that had been profaned were now sanctified according to law, and were ready to be used again whenever he pleased. They knew the good king had set his heart upon God's altar, and longed to be attending that, and therefore they insisted most upon the readiness they had put that into — that the vessels for the altar were scoured and brightened. Those vessels which Ahaz, in his *transgression, had cast away* as vessels in which there was no pleasure, they gathered together, sanctified them, and laid them in their place *before the altar*. Though the vessels of the sanctuary may be profaned for a while, God will find a time and a way to sanctify them. Neither his ordinances nor his people shall be suffered to fail for ever.

2 CHRONICLES 29:20-36

HEZEKIAH'S SACRIFICE

The temple being cleansed, we have here an account of the good use that was immediately made of it. A solemn assembly was called to meet the king at the temple, the very next day (v. 20); and very glad, no doubt, all the good people in Jerusalem were, when it was said, *Let us go up to the house of the Lord*, ^{<B21>}Psalm 122:1. As soon as Hezekiah heard that the temple was ready for him he lost no time, but made it appear that he was ready for it. He rose early to go up to the house of the Lord, earlier on that day than on other days, to show that his heart was upon his work there. Now this day's work was to look two ways: —

I. Atonement must be made for the sins of the last reign. They thought it not enough to lament and forsake those sins, but they brought a sin-offering. Even our repentance and reformation will not obtain pardon but in and through Christ, who was made *sin* (that is, a sin-offering) for us. No peace but through his blood, no, not for penitents. Observe,

1. The sin-offering was *for the kingdom, for the sanctuary, and for Judah* (v. 21), that is, to make atonement for the sins of princes, priests, and people, for they had all corrupted their way. The law of Moses appointed sacrifices to make atonement for the sins of the whole congregation (^{<B43>}Leviticus 4:13, 14, ^{<B54>}Numbers 15:24, 25), that the national judgments which their national sins deserved might be turned away. For this purpose we must now have an eye to Christ the great propitiation, as well as for the remission and salvation of particular persons.

2. The law appointed only one goat for a sin-offering, as on the day of atonement (^{<B65>}Leviticus 16:15) and on such extraordinary occasions as this, ^{<B54>}Numbers 15:24. But they here offered seven (v. 21), because the sins of the congregation had been very great and long continued in. Seven is a number of perfection. Our great sin-offering is but one, yet that one *perfects for ever those that are sanctified*.

3. The king and the *congregation* (that is, the representatives of the congregation) *laid their hands on the heads of the goats* that were for the *sin-offering* (v. 23), thereby owning themselves guilty before God and expressing their desire that the guilt of the sinner might be transferred to

the sacrifice. By faith we lay our hands on the Lord Jesus, and so *receive the atonement*, ^{<81>}Romans 5:11.

4. Burnt-offerings were offered with the sin-offerings, *seven bullocks, seven rams, and seven lambs*. The intention of the burnt-offerings was to give glory to the God of Israel, whom they owned as the only true God, which it was proper to do at the same time that they were by the sin-offering making atonement for their offences. The blood of those, as well as of the sin-offering, was *sprinkled upon the altar* (v. 22), to make reconciliation *for all Israel* (v. 24), and not for Judah only. Christ is a propitiation, not for the sins of Israel only, but *of the whole world*, ^{<10>}1 John 2:1, 2.

5. While the offerings were burning upon the altar the *Levites sang the song of the Lord* (v. 27), the Psalms composed by David and Asaph (v. 30), accompanied by the musical instruments which God by his prophets had commanded the use of (v. 25), and which had been long neglected. Even sorrow for sin must not put us out of tune for praising God. By faith we must rejoice in Christ Jesus as our righteousness; and our prayers and praises must ascend with his offering, to be accepted only in virtue of it.

6. The king and all the congregation testified their consent to and concurrence in all that was done, by *bowing their heads and worshipping*, expressing an awful veneration of the divine Majesty, by postures of adoration. This is taken notice of, v. 28-30. It is not enough for us to be where God is worshipped, if we do not ourselves worship him, and that not with bodily exercise only, which profits little, but with the heart.

II. The solemnities of this day did likewise look forward. The temple service was to be set up again, that it might be continually kept up; and this Hezekiah calls them to, v. 31. “Now that you have *consecrated yourselves to the Lord* — have both made an atonement and made a covenant by sacrifice, are solemnly reconciled and engaged to him — now *come near, and bring sacrifices*.” Note, Our covenant with God must be pursued and improved in communion with him. Having consecrated ourselves, in the first place, to the Lord, we must bring the sacrifices of prayer, and praise, and alms, to his house. Now, in this work, it was found.

1. That the people were free. Being called to it by the king, they brought in their offerings, though not in such abundance as in the glorious days of Solomon (for Judah was now diminished, impoverished, and brought low),

but according to what they had, and as much as one could expect considering their poverty and the great decay of piety among them.

(1.) Some were so generous as to bring burnt-offerings, which were wholly consumed to the honour of God, and of which the offerer had no part. Of this sort there were seventy bullocks, 100 rams, and 200 lambs, v. 32.

(2.) Others brought peace-offerings and thank-offerings, the fat of which was burnt upon the altar, and the flesh divided between the priests and the offerers, v. 35. Of this sort there were 600 oxen and 3000 sheep, v. 33. Perhaps the remembrance of their sin in sacrificing on the high places made them more willing to bring their sacrifices now to God's altar.

2. That *the priests were few*, too few for the service, v. 34. Many of them, it is likely, were suspended and laid aside as polluted and uncanonical, for having sacrificed to idols in the last reign, and the rest had not the zeal that one might have expected upon such an occasion. They thought that the king needed not to be so forward, that there was no necessity for such haste in opening the doors of the temple, and therefore they took no care to sanctify themselves, and being unsanctified, and so unqualified, they made that their excuse for being absent from the service; as if their offence would be their defence. It is recorded here, to the perpetual shame of the priests, that, though they were so well provided for out of the offerings of the Lord made by fire, yet they did not mind their business. Here was work to do, and there wanted proper hands to do it.

3. That the Levites were forward. They had been *more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests* (v. 34), were better affected to the work and better prepared and qualified for it. This was their praise, and, in recompence for it, they had the honour to be employed in that which was the priests' work: they *helped them to flay the offerings*. This was not according to the law (^{CRUIES} Leviticus 1:5, 6), but the irregularity was dispensed with in cases of necessity, and thus encouragement was given to the faithful zealous Levites and a just disgrace put upon the careless priests. What the Levites wanted in the ceremonial advantages of their birth and consecration was abundantly made up in their eminent qualifications of skill and will to do the work.

4. That all were pleased. The king and all the people rejoiced in this blessed turn of affairs and the new face of religion which the kingdom had put on, v. 36. Two things in this matter pleased them: —

(1.) That it was soon brought about: *The thing was done suddenly*, in a little time, with a great deal of ease, and without any opposition. Those that go about the work of God in faith and with resolution will find that there is not that difficulty in it which they sometimes imagine, but it will be a pleasing surprise to them to see how soon it is done.

(2.) That the hand of God was plainly in it: *God had prepared the people* by the secret influences of his grace, so that many of those who had in the last reign doted on the idolatrous altars were now as much in love with God's altar. This change, which God wrought on their minds, did very much expedite and facilitate the work. Let magistrates and ministers do their part towards the reforming of a land, and ascribe to him the glory of what is done, especially when it is done suddenly and is a pleasing surprise. *This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous.*