

Choose Wisely

Hezekiah

Good morning! My name is Matt Chesney and I am the director of youth and outreach here at Eagle Ridge, and it is my pleasure to be speaking with you today. If you're new or visiting, we have been reading through the Bible chronologically for the last 6 months and we've cross the halfway mark! So, if you've been reading along – congratulations! If you haven't, no problem. You can pick right up where we are now and continue forward with us, there's no need to go back and try to catch up.

We have been reading through the books of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles in the last week, and if you aren't quite sure what's been going on, allow me to explain a bit of how things have developed. When king Solomon's son, Rehoboam, reigned the nation of Israel split into 2 countries. 10 tribes in the North were called Israel, and 2 tribes in the South were called Judah. Now, the kings of Israel were all pretty much different degrees of bad – following other gods, treating the people poorly, etc. In Judah, some were bad, some were meh, and some were good. And today we're going to be talking about a few of the kings of Judah in particular with a focus on Hezekiah – the 13th king after Solomon.

So, Hezekiah became king of Judah when his father, Ahaz, died.

- [2Ch 29:1-2 NLT] 1 Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became the king of Judah, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years... 2 He did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight, just as his ancestor David had done.

Cool, Hezekiah was one of the good ones! But as I was reading this, I started thinking... How did Hezekiah learn to follow the Lord? Most people would naturally assume from his parents... but his dad, Ahaz, was not a nice guy.

- [2Ch 28:3-4, 21 NLT] 3 He offered sacrifices in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, even sacrificing his own sons in the fire. In this way, he followed the detestable practices of the pagan nations the LORD had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites. 4 He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the pagan shrines and on the hills and under every green tree. ... 21 Ahaz took valuable items from the LORD's Temple, the royal palace, and from the homes of his officials and gave them to the king of Assyria as tribute. But this did not help him.

So, maybe we should go back a generation to Hezekiah's Grandpa, King Jotham.

Unfortunately, we don't have a lot of details about Jotham, but here's one thing we do know:

- [2Ch 27:2, 6 NLT] 2 Jotham did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight. He did everything his father, Uzziah, had done, except that Jotham did not sin by entering the Temple of the LORD. **But the people continued in their corrupt ways...** 6 King Jotham became powerful because he was careful to live in obedience to the LORD his God.

So, King Jotham did what was right... but he clearly didn't have a lot of influence outside of the palace. Still, God saw his faithfulness and allowed him to become powerful as a ruler. We don't know if he was disappointed that the general public didn't follow his lead, or if he even cared. Maybe Jotham figured that following God was a private, personal thing... And it wasn't up to him to share his faith with others and encourage them to be obedient in following the Lord. We don't know for sure, because the Bible doesn't tell us. But that's not so far-fetched to believe.

I also don't think it's too far of a stretch to say that his grandson was watching, though. I spent a little time working with their ages when they became kings and when they died and Hezekiah would've been 8-9 years old when Grandpa Jotham died. Certainly old enough to have been paying attention to what Jotham was doing (or not doing). And then comparing it to how his dad proceeded to act as king.

Then it was Hezekiah's turn to step up to the plate. Ahaz died, and 25 year-old Hezekiah took over as king. And What did Hezekiah do? Well, **He reopened and rededicated the temple.**

Ahaz had closed the doors of the temple. Effectively saying, "I'm not interested in Yahweh." But the first thing Hezekiah did when he became king was to reverse that. Not only did he reopen the temple, he called out the people of Judah for their disobedience and disregard for the Lord. He told the Levites to purify themselves and clean out the temple. He reminded them of what brought Judah to this place where things were not so great

- [2Ch 29:6, 9 NLT] 6 Our ancestors were unfaithful and did what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God. They abandoned the LORD and his dwelling place; they turned their backs on him... 9 Because of this, our fathers have been killed in battle, and our sons and daughters and wives have been captured.

And then Hezekiah exhorted and encouraged them

- 11 My sons, do not neglect your duties any longer! The LORD has chosen you to stand in his presence, to minister to him, and to lead the people in worship and present offerings to him."

What you do **first** in any given situation speaks volumes about where your heart is. In the first month of his first year as king. This is what Hezekiah chose to do with his power. The desire of Hezekiah's heart was to do what was pleasing to God.

Not only did Hezekiah reopen the temple... **He reinstated the celebration of Passover.** Now, there is catch here. Passover was last month – they missed it. The temple wasn't ready, the people weren't ready. And he easily could have said, "we'll wait until next year because we're not 'ready'" but he didn't. He said, No, we're going to do this thing, because it's important. Again, this shows where his heart was. And it wasn't only for his personal, private worship that he did this... Hezekiah invited all of Judah **and** Israel to celebrate Passover. Now this is a big deal. Remember, Hezekiah is king of Judah. And there was a lot of bad blood between Judah and Israel. No one would think twice if Israel was not invited to the party

- 6 At the king's command, runners were sent throughout Israel and Judah. They carried letters that said: "**O people of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel**, so that he will return to the few of us who have survived the conquest of the Assyrian kings. 7 Do not be like your ancestors and relatives who abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and became an object of derision, as you yourselves can see. 8 **Do not be stubborn, as they were, but submit yourselves to the LORD.** Come to his Temple, which he has set apart as holy forever. Worship the LORD your God so that his fierce anger will turn away from you. 9 "For if you return to the LORD, your relatives and your children will be treated mercifully by their captors, and they will be able to return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful. If you return to him, he will not continue to turn his face from you." 2 Chron 30:6-9

Sadly, most of the folks in Israel laughed at the message. But some came! Those who—perhaps—had been faithful to God right along. The ones whose hearts were headed in the right direction. The *remnant* as Pastor Bill described 2 weeks ago.

But the people who came to celebrate this feast were not ceremonially clean. They weren't supposed to sacrifice the Passover lamb themselves. So Hezekiah had the Levites slaughter the lambs for them.

The people weren't even supposed to eat the meal if they were unclean! So, Hezekiah prayed for them, and listen to what happened:

- For Hezekiah said, "May the LORD, who is good, pardon those 19 who decide to follow the LORD, the God of their ancestors, even though they are not properly cleansed for the ceremony." **20 And the LORD listened to Hezekiah's prayer and healed the people.**

The condition of the people's hearts was more important than ritual purity. They were there for the right reasons—To worship the Lord with all their hearts. Even though they may not have looked like they were “worthy” from the outside. As we've been reading through the Old Testament, I've been surprised at the number of times God has said something similar to this to His people—

- Last week--[Hos 6:6 NLT] 6 I want you to show love, not offer sacrifices. I want you to know me more than I want burnt offerings.
- [Psa 51:16-17 NLT] 16 You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. 17 The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

Hezekiah had every reason to delay, or simply just not do this thing. They were a month late, some people couldn't kill/prepare their own meat, some people shouldn't have even eaten! But Hezekiah knew that those were just excuses and what mattered most was people's hearts and worshipping God. So they did it.

And because of all of this, he **Brought Judah back to the worship of Yahweh.** Now, I want you to listen carefully to some key words here, because this is big... It started with Hezekiah **ordering** the priests and Levites to get the temple up and running. Then he **invited** people to participate in the Passover celebration. And then... look what happened next:

Passover is a week-long celebration. Normally, folks would head home after this. But...

- [2Ch 30:23, 25-26 NLT] 23 The entire assembly then decided to continue the festival another seven days, so they celebrated joyfully for another week... Meanwhile, many more priests purified themselves. 25 The entire assembly of Judah rejoiced, including the priests, the Levites, all who came from the land of Israel, the foreigners who came to the festival, and all those who lived in Judah. 26 There was great joy in the city, for Jerusalem had not seen a celebration like

this one since the days of Solomon, King David's son... [2Ch 31:1 NLT] 1 When the festival ended, the Israelites who attended went to all the towns of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh, and they smashed all the sacred pillars, cut down the Asherah poles, and removed the pagan shrines and altars. After this, the Israelites returned to their own towns and homes.

“...they celebrated joyfully for another week.”

“...many more priests purified themselves.”

“The entire assembly of Judah rejoiced...”

Hezekiah began by demanding, then inviting... but then he just sat back and allowed God to work. **All** the worship sites to pagan gods in **all** of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh were taken down. That’s pretty impressive...and it was all done because the people’s hearts had been drawn back to the one, true God. They weren’t ordered to do it. They didn’t need anyone to tell them it was a good idea. They did it because they knew it was the right thing.

So, let’s take a step back and look at this from a big picture point of view. Hezekiah had a choice to make: “Do I want to follow in my father’s footsteps, or do I want to take a different path?” Now, we don’t have any record of what his relationship was like with his father (if there was a relationship at all). We also don’t have a record of what relationship Hezekiah had with his grandpa Jotham. But Hezekiah chose to follow the Lord, like his grandpa had - And he took it to the next level! Hezekiah didn’t simply up his game in his own personal faith in God, like Jotham had. He shared his heart and his passion with those over whom he had influence.

And what was the result for Hezekiah?

- [2Ki 18:5-7 NLT] 5 Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after his time. 6 He remained faithful to the LORD in everything, and he carefully obeyed all the commands the LORD had given Moses. 7 So the LORD was with him, and Hezekiah was successful in everything he did.

And this is not some sort of prosperity gospel message. It’s not about “if I do everything right, God will give me lots of money, stuff, and influence” Success in the Kingdom of God is very different from worldly success. Hezekiah was working for the Lord and the Lord

made him successful in all of those things.

Alright, so, this is all well and good, but if we stop here, it's basically a nice story about good kings vs bad kings. And as much as I love story time, we need to take it further. What does this mean for us? Well, the lesson we need to take away from it is that we need to:

- Choose your path wisely

Hezekiah looked at what his father had done to Judah and decided he wanted nothing to do with that.

Ahaz knew what was right... He watched his father (Jotham) follow the Lord (more or less). But Ahaz's heart wasn't in it. His heart was drawn to what was "normal" in the culture of his day. He made idols and worshipped Baal. He sacrificed his own sons in worship to a pagan god. And let's be honest - Everyone else did these things too, so it was normal. Living in obedience to God would have made him stand out as weird and different. So, he closed the temple. It served no practical purpose for him personally, and it cost a lot of time and money to keep it operating. He took the sacred pieces from the temple and gave them to the king of Assyria to avoid being conquered (spoiler alert, it didn't help). They were just **things** to Ahaz, made of gold and silver and bronze.

If Ahaz were here with us today, I honestly believe Ahaz would be surprised to learn that Scripture records him as one of the worst kings of Judah who "did evil in the eyes of the Lord." We look at his story with horror, but he lived a life like so many others in Judah and Israel did. From his perspective, he wasn't doing "anything wrong!" I could imagine him saying, "I just did what everyone else was doing!"

Hezekiah decided to take a different path. One that was different than what was "normal" for his culture. One that would make him stand out to those around him. He followed the Lord even though it would be the harder path. What path are you taking? Are you following our culture, or following where God would have you go?

The next lesson we need to take from this is: Choose your role models wisely

We all have people we look up to. It's human nature to look to others for inspiration and as someone to emulate/imitate. Sports figures, celebrities, authors, public figures. Parents, grandparents, neighbors, bosses, friends.

As followers of Jesus, **He** should be the first and most important role model to growing into the people we were created to be. But God does put people in our lives that are living, breathing examples of what it means to be following Jesus too. I have many people that I look to as examples of how to follow Jesus well and how to love others. Some have a heart for loving others meeting them where they are at to help them grow in their faith. Some have compassion and patience to speak truth with so much love. Some lead faithfully with integrity and genuine care for the people that they serve. Some have generosity and an eagerness to help built into who they are. And I look at my wife for her ability to discern and listen to what God is saying. And SO many other people that have gifts and abilities that I don't have, but that I can develop through practice by watching and learning from them.

However, There is a difference between a "cultural role model" and what I'm trying to implore you to do. If you try to emulate your role model, you're copying another person. Their attitudes, behaviors, the way they talk, what they believe, and in the process, you are not being who God created YOU to be. And role models will always let you down. They are imperfect people, just like us. Here's the thing—I don't want to be a **copy** of the people I mentioned. I want to be the Matt Chesney that God intends for me to be. I want to be a disciple who make disciples. And that means I need to be me, and you need to be who God intended you to be. And that means I need to be patterning my life after Jesus, not another person. And that's what any of these people I mentioned would want for me, too! God draws us to people who will point us to Jesus. Not to themselves.

So, I want you to do something strange. Go back to that last fill-in-the-blank and cross out the word "role models" and change it to "disciplers."

Choose your [disciplers](#) wisely

The difference between having a role model and having someone to disciple us comes down to the desires of our hearts. Hezekiah's desire was to follow the Lord and bring his nation back to true worship. **Our** desire is (hopefully) to be committed to the mission that Jesus gave us after He rose from the grave:

- [Mat 28:19-20 NLT] 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you..."
- [Act 1:8 NLT] 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere--in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Everyone needs someone who can help guide them in their walk with the Lord. When Jesus sent his disciples out to do the work, he sent them in pairs. And there are plenty of examples in the Bible of pairs of people working together to do ministry. Paul and Silas, Paul and Timothy, Barnabas and John Mark. The point is, **Everyone** needs **someone**. Who are you looking to as someone who can help you grow as a disciple?

The final lesson this story has for us is: **Obedience is contagious**

Hezekiah got the ball rolling by ordering the priests and Levites to do their jobs. He could do that—He was the king. That’s the one thing his grandpa Jotham **didn’t** do. But, Hezekiah took the next step by inviting all of Judah and Israel to the Passover celebration. Again, he had more influence than most of us do because of his position. But even the king got laughed at, but he didn’t let that stop him. He kept doing what he knew was right. And the remnant who had always remained faithful were the example to the rest of the people. Then Following God in obedience took off like a wildfire

- A huge crowd gathered to celebrate Passover
- More priests and Levites purified themselves
- The shrines and altars to pagan gods were destroyed
- The celebration continued beyond what was required by the law God gave to Moses

All because they were seeking God with all their hearts. And it started with Hezekiah seeking God with all **his** heart.

So, if those are the lessons, what do we need to do with the lessons?

- **Steps of Obedience**
 - Answer this question for yourself—**Where do your heart’s desires lie?**
 - Does your heart desire to be like **Ahaz**?

- “Following our culture is just fine”
- “I don’t need anything other than that”
- “I’m not interested in being a disciple”
- Maybe your heart is more in line with **Jotham’s**
 - Your faith is private and nobody’s business but your own
 - You don’t want to have any influence over anyone else and their faith journey
 - Because that’s not your responsibility
 - You do you, and others can do their own thing
- Do you want to follow God with your whole heart, like **Hezekiah** did?
 - Do you want your own life to be a reflection of Jesus?
 - Do you want others to be influenced by the way you live?
 - Do you want to become more and more the person God created you to be?
 - Do you want more than anything to be a disciple who makes disciples???
- This is between you and God
 - Are you willing to say this to God???
 - [Psa 139:23-24 NLT] 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.
- If you don’t settle this right now, the other two action steps today will mean nothing
- Be in a discipling relationship
 - Everybody needs someone to help them on their journey as a disciple
 - Most of the time, role models aren’t even aware of which people are looking up to them
 - **You** might be one of **my** role models and not even know it!
 - A discipling relationship is different because it is **intentional**
 - There have been times I have asked someone if they would disciple me
 - “Could we meet so I could learn from you and you could help me grow in my obedience to Jesus and His mission?”
 - There have been times I have had people ask me the same thing

- Either way, it's an intentional relationship
- Who is doing that for you?
 - If you think you are the exception and you don't need that... You're wrong
 - We all need to be in intentional discipling relationships with others
- Who is looking to you for discipling?
- If you aren't in that kind of relationship now—
 - What can you do this week to change that?
 - Pray for God to show you who to talk to
 - Call, text, or email that person and ask if they'd be able to meet for lunch (or coffee—Cultivate is a great place to meet) and have that conversation
 - If you don't know how to get started, talk to one of our staff people
- **Be courageously contagious**
 - Our culture does not encourage anyone to follow God
 - It took courage for Hezekiah to push back against cultural norms and be obedient to God's commands
 - He got laughed at for it
 - It will take courage for us to push back, as well
 - That doesn't mean we need to be aggressive and hostile about it
 - It means we need to live courageously according to the standards God has set out for us:
 - What can you do to love God with everything you have?
 - Which of your "neighbors" do you need to show an act of love?
 - **Back to what Bill L. challenged last week**
 - What can you do for the least of these brothers/sisters of Jesus?
 - Where can you join in the work where God is restoring His kingdom here on earth?
 - We may not be able to see how God is going to use us
 - That may not be a bad thing
 - We may get scared and want to run away if we see too far down the road!
 - The key is to do **something**