

I. Introduction

- A. You might notice that we're doing things a little out of order today. We are breaking the routine today. We've been teasing you online, telling you we had a surprise for you, and we do.
- B. But I need to set it up a little.
- C. I'm going to mash up two places in the Bible today, and then I'm going to open the door for you to do something awesome.

II. King Hezekiah

- A. The first place in the Bible is the story of a king named Hezekiah. He was the king of Judah and Jerusalem in a time when faith in God was at an all time low. His father, Ahaz, was a horrible king. His father brought in all kinds of pagan religions, false gods, corrupt idols, and sexual perversion.
- B. The chronicler of these horrible days wrote,
 - 1. *The Lord humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he cast off all restraint in Judah and had been most unfaithful to the Lord. (2 Chronicles 28:19, Kaiser)*
- C. This wicked king left the true temple of the true God unused and un-maintained. The temple was falling apart and was basically a garbage dump. This was the soul of the nation. This was the focal point of faith. And it was falling apart... just as their spiritual lives were a dumpster fire.
 - 1. That was King Ahaz, and he was a horrible king.
 - 2. But then he died, and his son took the throne.
- D. When Hezekiah took the throne, he was only 25 years old. The people he led were emotionally broken, morally corrupt, and spiritually confused. He saw this, and it broke his heart.
- E. The first thing he did was to gather the priests and the spiritual leaders of the people. Hezekiah confessed that their fathers had not done a good job of keeping the faith and handing it down to their generation. He said, We're messed up because of this. Our people are struggling. And the blessing of God is a million miles away.
- F. Then the King said this:
 - 1. *"Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us." (2 Chronicles 29:10)*
- G. This is the part I want to zero in on: *"it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord."*
 - 1. Look inside your heart. What is in your heart?
 - 2. Could it be that God is calling you to this today? Is it in your heart to make a covenant with God?
 - 3. And I don't care if you're 25 like Hezekiah or a 95, is it in your heart to make a covenant with the Lord?
- H. Whatever spiritual, life-giving, God-honoring, joy producing switches his father turned off, Hezekiah wants to switch back on.
- I. So he backs up his intention with action.
 - 1. *"In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. Then he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them in the East Square, and said to them: 'Hear me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place.'" (2 Chronicles 29:3-5)*
 - 2. Hezekiah is taking care of unfinished business.
 - a) Ahaz shut the temple doors and locked them down. Hezekiah opened them.
 - b) Ahaz broke the temple doors. Hezekiah repaired them.
 - c) Ahaz disbanded the priests and Levites and scattered them. Hezekiah gathered them and set them back to preaching grace.
 - d) Ahaz perverted the religious leaders. Hezekiah sanctified them.
 - e) Ahaz made the worship space a garbage dump. Hezekiah carried out the rubbish from the holy place and polished it to a magnificent reflection of God's love.
 - 3. Basically, all the stuff that was on the back burner got brought to the front.
 - 4. And as they got caught up with unfinished business, God healed their hearts.
 - a) The people had "great joy," so much joy that the Bible says they hadn't seen that much happiness for generations (2 Chronicles 30:26)...
 - (1) I hope you know that if there's a cloud over your family tree, God can turn that around in one generation.
 - b) And, as a bonus, when they got caught up with unfinished business, the whole land prospered (2 Chronicles 31:21).
- J. Christian,

1. **When you pay attention to unfinished business with God, you create space in your heart where God can pay attention to your joy.**

- K. So, I'm wondering if there's unfinished business in your spiritual life today? Something you need to do and haven't done? Or something you need to do again, because it's been a long time and maybe your heart has cooled off a little.
1. Because I have a suggestion... and I'll get to that in a minute.
 2. But this is about your heart. What is in your heart with Jesus?

III. Joshua

- A. I want to rewind from King Hezekiah way way back to Joshua, which means going back in time over 700 years.
- B. Joshua was one of the leaders of the Jews. Along with Moses, Joshua led God's people through 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, 40 very depressing years. Forty very unnecessary years.
- C. They were supposed to be in the promised land, but that older generation never made it. They never made it because they had unbelief in their hearts about the grace of God (Hebrews 3:19).
 1. Is it possible that you might have that same unbelief?
- D. After 40 years in the wilderness, it was time to finally enter their Promised land...
- E. So they do... they cross the border into the land. That border was the Jordan River. God parted the river like he parted the sea 40 years ago. And they crossed through. It was epic.
- F. You now have a couple million people finally where they belong.
- G. But before they can take possession of their land, they have a problem. They have to evict hostile tribes that have settled there in their absence.
- H. That means it's time for war.
- I. So they gear up. They make a battle plan. All the generals of the armies are gathered in a tent with Joshua. They make their plans. They are going to drive out the inhabitants of the land.
- J. And God speaks into their planning.
- K. So what does God say to Joshua on the eve of war?
 1. *"At that time the LORD said to Joshua, 'Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time.'" (Joshua 5:2)*
 - a) In other words, restore them to being a circumcised nation again.
- L. On what planet is this a good plan? Is this a good time, on the eve of war, to INCAPACITATE your entire army?
- M. How do you explain this?
 1. First of all, circumcision was a sign of the relationship between God and his people. That relationship was called a covenant. God said this to Abraham, the father of the Jews.
 - a) *"This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised." (Genesis 17:10)*
- N. Baby boys were circumcised on day 8 of life... a sign that they belonged to God, and their whole family tree, was dedicated to God.
- O. But for the 40 years that they wandered in the wilderness, guess what sign of the covenant they didn't practice.
 1. Circumcision.
- P. So now, these are not baby boys. These are men, and they are going to be circumcised as adults.
- Q. And this isn't easy. Because they are adult men. And also because they are supposed to use **flint knives, made of rock**, which is nowhere nearly as sharp as iron. Flint knives coming at you.
- R. Let's just call this their uncomfortable but necessary reconnection with the covenant of grace.
 1. For Joshua, circumcising the men was the non-negotiable sign of that covenant. Just like...
 2. For King Hezekiah, reviving the temple and its worship was the non-negotiable sign of that covenant.
 - a) For us, there's a modern parallel.
 - b) I'll get to that in a moment...
 - c) But is your heart willing to do it, whatever it is?
- S. So we have a generation that had some unfinished business in their relationship with God.
 1. Now what is so important about Circumcision for Joshua's generation?
 2. And what is so important about the temple and its worship for Hezekiah's generation?

IV. Circumcision and the Temple

- A. **These things were a declaration, a proclamation, and a confirmation that, AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE, GOD COMES FIRST.**
- B. Christian, can you say that?

- C. God comes first because God is your Source.
 - 1. He is your source of everything good. He is your source of everything true. Of everything real.
- D. This is consecration. This is dedication. This is the visible manifestation of one of the most real, authentic, heartfelt, monumental truths in all of Scripture.
 - 1. **When you put God first in your heart, God puts grace first in your life.**
- E. Which means that...
 - 1. If you are going to war, it is more important to circumcise your men than to have healthy soldiers.
 - 2. If you are going to build a nation, it is more important to restore the temple and the worship of God than to divert that money to public works.
 - 3. If you're going to have success in anything in life, it is more important that God has first place in your heart than anything and anyone else.
 - a) *"When You said, 'Seek My face,' My heart said to You, 'Your face, LORD, I will seek.'" (Psalms 27:8)*
- V. Unfinished Business
 - A. Both the Joshua generation and the Hezekiah generation had unfinished business with God.
 - 1. For Joshua, it was circumcisions that had been neglected.
 - 2. For Hezekiah, it was the temple that had been neglected.
 - B. But on the deeper level, both were the same thing.
 - 1. People of God neglecting the grace of God, and putting off the symbols and means of his grace.
 - C. Well, as Christians, we don't have a the Old Testament Temple. And we don't do the Old Testament rite of Circumcision.
 - D. Do you know what the New Testament counterpart is?
 - 1. It's water baptism.
 - 2. And if you've already been baptized, it's consecration.
 - E. But the deeper question of my message today is really really simple.
 - 1. **Will you truly, madly, deeply take your Christianity to heart?**
 - F. Oh, don't keep it on the surface. Don't let it be mechanical. Don't just go through the motions.
 - G. I pray that you let Jesus in deep down to your roots. Deep down into the heart of the heart of the heart of who you are.
 - 1. Let him past your defenses.
 - 2. Let him past your plans.
 - 3. Let him past your resentments.
 - 4. Let him past your fears.
 - 5. Let him past your boredom.
 - 6. Let him past the walls of your cynicism about church and Christians and God.
 - H. When you hold him at arms length, you're only holding yourself away from love. He only wants to bless you. He only wants to bring you to grace and love and more grace and more love.
- VI. Baptism
 - A. So I have good news for you today. Today, we are doing surprise baptisms, right here, today, for you.
 - B. If you are saved, and you've never been baptized, that's your first and most important piece of unfinished business with God. Jesus said,
 - 1. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," (Matthew 28:19)*
 - C. You need to be baptized.
 - 1. Oh, won't you light a fire in your heart with God?
 - 2. Won't you put in your heart to embrace that wonderful covenant with God that became yours the day you were saved?
 - D. No more delays. No more excuses. No hesitations. In just a couple more minutes, I'm going to have you get up, and go out those doors in back if you're willing to be baptized.
 - 1. Get ready... not yet... but when it's time, don't hesitate. Just do it.
 - E. Some of you are new Christians, rookies in the faith. Some of you are veterans... you've been around for a long, long time.
 - F. It doesn't matter. No shame here. Just an opportunity to tell the world, and tell God, and tell the church, and tell the angels and tell the demons that you have Jesus as your Savior.

- G. You will be met with one of our leaders, who will ask you if you're saved and for a 30 second profession of faith. And then it's time to get wet.

1. I'M GOING TO INVITE OUR WORSHIP TEAM BACK UP RIGHT NOW...

VII. Logistics

A. You might say: I didn't dress to get baptized today.

1. That's okay. You'll dry off. We have towels. We'll give you one. Plus it's nice out.
2. You will be getting baptized just as you are - in your clothing. No need to change. Just come as you are.
 - a) *Let's just call this your uncomfortable but necessary reconnection with the covenant of grace.*
3. Leave your stuff, wallet, watch, purse, with someone you came with. If there's no one, bring it down, and we'll take care of it.
4. You come. If there's a modesty issue with how you're dressed, we will help you.
 - a) There is NO REASON TO NOT BE BAPTIZED TODAY.
 - (1) We've thought of everything.
 - (2) We will take your picture.
 - (3) We will give you a baptism certificate.
 - (a) It's all taken care of.

B. I have to say this: we are not going to baptize any minors today... we're going to do that next week.

1. And you need mom or dad's permission. If you are junior high and high school age, (grades 6-12) and want to be baptized, please come back next week with your mom or dad and we will do this whole thing again for you.

C. You might say, I was baptized as an infant. Does that count?

1. I would say, you should be grateful for a mom and dad who wanted to give you a head start. That was THEIR choice.
2. But now you need to own that choice. You need to make it your own. You need to be baptized as an act of your own free will.
3. You come. You be baptized today by your own choice.
4. Same thing if you were baptized in some way that wasn't you, or if it was before you were saved. You come too. Be baptized today and do it right.

D. You might say, I'm not the Christian I should be. I'm imperfect. I'm floundering.

1. I would say... maybe you're floundering because you're resisting this very call of God.
2. When a son or a daughter comes home, no matter how far you've gone, the father receives you with wide open arms.

E. You might say, Bill, I'm saved, and I've already been baptized. But my heart is lukewarm. My spiritual life is cold.

1. You come too, but not to be baptized. We have a prayer for you to pray. It's a prayer of consecration. It's on this card.
 - a) These are on the stage.
 - b) They are in the back corners of the auditorium.
 - c) They are in the upper deck, in the corners and in the middle.
 - d) You come, and get this card, and go back to your seat and dedicate your life to Jesus. Sign and date this card, and tuck it into your Bible or put it in your car.

F. Finally You might say, Bill I've never received Jesus as my Savior... what should I do?

1. I say, get up and go with everyone else.
2. When you sign in, tell them you need to receive Jesus first... and we have people who will help you do that.

- G. I could explain more, but I think I've done enough. It's something to be experienced. What you're seeing is a symbol of a new life. Every regret, every doubt, all washed away forever.

VIII. Logistics

A. Okay... the time is here.

B. LET'S STAND UP.

C. When the singing begins... YOU GO. Leave your seat, and go take your stand for Jesus. Leave your seat and go get baptized.