Digging Deeper Week 3

What a joy that the under Hezekiah’s leadership the people were able to once again celebrate the Passover. Hezekiah’s love for the people of God – both those in the Northern Kingdom and in the Southern Kingdom of Judah is very inspiring. The people in the north had attacked the kingdom of Judah and had even tried to capture Jerusalem and in the process many from Judah were killed and taken captive. Yet Hezekiah looked passed all of this and invited them to participate in the Passover.

How hard would it be for you to invite someone who had attacked you or someone in your family to a celebration or to church? If you had been betrayed or hurt by someone, how likely would you be to invite them to worship with you? Pray and ask the Lord if there is someone whom He wants you to reach out to and then follow up with obedience.

There is a chart that is part of the Digging Deeper material this week that shows a comparison of the Passover celebration and how we can see Jesus in it. Read over the chart. Did you learn something new about how Jesus can be seen in the Passover?

Paul calls Jesus the Passover Lamb or Paschal Lamb.

1 Corinthians 5:7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

John calls Jesus the Lamb of God.

John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

I hope after reading through the chart you see how our God is in the details. Jesus is our Passover Lamb! He is the perfect sacrifice for us – once and for all. He took our place on the cross and took on the punishment we deserve for our sins. His sacrifice saved us all. Think about who you are today and how different you are than you were a year ago, 2 years, 5 years, or 10+ years ago. Think about how much the Lord has transformed your life and how you are becoming more and more like His Son. Write a prayer of thanksgiving to Him for His sacrifice and for all that He is doing in your life. Acknowledge the changes you have made and those areas where you still need His help.

Because the Temple and the priests and Levites were not cleansed and consecrated until after the time when the Passover was to take place, after consulting others, Hezekiah decided to celebrate it in the second month rather than the first month. Hezekiah cared so much about the people celebrating this festival and not waiting almost an entire year to do it. Why do you think it was important for Hezekiah that the people needed to celebrate the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

What was the purpose of celebrating the Passover?

Why do we celebrate communion?

Having times where we remember what the Lord has done for us is so important. It is one of the things I love about being Anglican and having a liturgical calendar where we are reminded yearly of different aspects of our faith. We celebrate the season of Lent where we spend 40 days reflecting on our lives and how we are living them so we can allow the Lord to show us the ways in which we are not on track. It is at time of examination, confession and repentance so that we can truly celebrate when Easter comes. We have the season of Eastertide where we are reminded that we are indeed, Easter people with the hope of the resurrection and the life that we live in the now and not yet with His kingdom being now on earth but not fully until His return. We celebrate Advent where we wait in eager anticipation to celebrate not only the birth of Jesus at Christmas but also the expectation we have of his second coming. There are other season in the church calendar as well. Which is your favorite season and why? Is there one that you struggle with, why?

Hezekiah’s letters to the Northern Kingdom were me with mixed reviews. Some laughed and some wanted to participate.

2 Chronicles 30:10-11 So the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. **11**However, some men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.

Why do you think his message was accepted by some and rejected by others? Have you ever had a message of faith rejected by someone? Have you shared your faith and had it well received?

Some rejected, but some accepted and humbled themselves. What a great thing that Hezekiah did it regardless of the response he was going to get. When it comes to you sharing your faith with others, are you willing to take the risk knowing that some will accept and some will reject?

Who does the Lord want you to share your faith with today?

How do you think the people of Judah felt about Hezekiah reaching out and inviting their enemies to join them? How would you have felt if you were them?

Look at how the people responded in 2 Chronicles 30:11

The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the Lord.

The people of Judah could have only responded the way they did because the ‘hand of God’ was on them. Have you ever experienced the ‘hand of God’ on you or on others and how did that change the circumstances or responses of people?

Hezekiah had a very specific message for the people in his letter.

2 Chronicles 30:6-9 Do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were faithless to the Lord God of their fathers, so that he made them a desolation, as you see. **8**Do not now be stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the Lord and come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever, and serve the Lord your God, that his fierce anger may turn away from you. **9**For if you return to the Lord, your brothers and your children will find compassion with their captors and return to this land. For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him.”

Hezekiah called the people to:

1. Do not be faithless
2. Do not be stiff-necked
3. Return to the Lord
4. Yield yourself to the Lord
5. Come to his Sanctuary
6. Serve the Lord

If that message were sent to you today, which of these areas would you need to work on? Does your faith need to be strengthened? Are you stiff-necked or another way of putting that is are you stubborn? Have you drifted from the Lord? Are you yielding all of yourself and your life to the Lord or only bits and pieces? Do you need to worship Him in community? (I know this one may not apply as much today as many are not able to do so. If you can’t, what do you miss the most about worshiping with the body of Christ? Where is He calling you to serve?

There were people, especially from the Northern Kingdom who were not cleansed nor had they consecrated themselves prior to celebrating the Passover so Hezekiah prayed for them.

2 Chronicles 30:18b-19 For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, “May the good Lord pardon everyone **19**who sets his heart to seek God, the Lord, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary's rules of cleanness.”

Hezekiah’s prayer was simple and effective. He didn’t use a lot of words and it wasn’t the most flowery of prayers but it was effective. Do you ever worry that your prayers aren’t ‘good enough’, do you ever think your prayers don’t’ sound as good as others?

The Lord wants us to bear our hearts in prayer. He is much more concerned with the motives of our prayers than the eloquence of them.

Matthew 6:7-8 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. **8**Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Jesus makes it very clear that the Lord already KNOWS what we need. He doesn’t need our eloquence, He needs our heart. It is a sign of humility to admit your needs to the Lord. Because He is omniscient, He knows all things. Our crying out to Him in prayer is a way of drawing close to Him. Think about it this way. When you are having a bad day and a friend or spouse asks you how you are doing and you reply, ‘fine’, when they can tell you are less than fine it shows a lack of trust in sharing with them what is going on. When you share with that person what is really going on, how you are having a rough day or what has gone wrong, it makes your relationship closer because you trust them enough to share what is on your heart. The same is true in our relationship with the Lord. We draw closer to Him the more we are willing to share with Him. What do you need to share with the Lord today? Are there areas of your life you have not been willing to talk to the Lord about? Are there sins you have been unwilling to confess? Take a few minutes and share those things with Him now – use this as an opportunity to draw closer to the Lord.

Hezekiah’s prayer was not only simple and effective, it was pure in heart. He cared so much about that he wanted the Lord to show them grace and accept their sacrifices. Our prayers, are not always from such pure motives. We can seek the Lord with ulterior motives. We can want those who hurt us to be punished or even to suffer. We can want those who get ahead from unfair gain to fail. We can want Him to answer our prayers but only if He will answer them the way we want and when we want. Seek the Lord in regards to your prayers – especially if you are expecting Him to do what you want Him to do and aren’t willing to accept His will. Ask Him to reveal any impure motives or any desires for Him to ONLY do things the way you want them done and in your timing versus His timing.

 The people had such a wonderful time celebrating and reconnecting to their faith that they continued it for an extra 7 days – 14 days of praising and thanking the Lord. How thankful are you for what the Lord has done for you and how He is working in your life? Do you have an attitude of gratitude. If you are suffering or going through a difficult time, sometimes praising and thanking God for His past faithfulness is a great way to change your perspective. It is one of the beautiful benefits of having a prayer journal – a place where you cry out to the Lord and record how He answers because you can go back and reread how the Lord has moved in your life. Take some time to thank the Lord for what He has done in your life and to praise Him simply for who He is – for his amazing character.