

2 Kings 18:1-12 – Hezekiah

24th August 2014

Are you a chip of the old block? I ask that because I think my son John is a bit like me. People say he looks like me, our mannerisms and personalities are similar. However, is he really a chip off the old block? John is brilliant at DIY – I'm hopeless. DIY for me stands for destroy it yourself. John is also a bit of an entrepreneur. He started his own business aged just 15 and it continues to flourish. So maybe he's a 'chip of the old block' of someone else. His grandfather (Ruth's dad) is a carpenter and ran his own business. John's excellence in DIY and desire to run his own business probably comes from his Grandad not me.

Today as we continue looking at some of the kings of the Old Testament our attention turns to Hezekiah. Was he a chip off the old block? Hezekiah's dad was king Ahaz and in 2 Kings 16:2 it says: *he - Ahaz - did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God*

Actually that's an understatement. Look at 2 Kings 16 and glance through 2 Chronicles and you'll discover Ahaz is one wicked king with all sorts of very iffy stuff going on. In those days there were two world powers - Assyria in the northeast and Egypt in the south west. In between were Judah and Israel trying to stay alive while being pawns in the politics of these two superpowers. Ahaz in particular groveled before the Assyrian king and worshipped the Assyrian gods and encouraged the people of Judah to do the same. Ahaz was the ultimate example of a godless father to his son Hezekiah. He was one of the most wicked kings in the history of God's people leading them far away from God and deep into depravity.

Now let's look at Hezekiah. He was 25 when he became king although for a number of years prior to this it's likely he'd have been "in training" as the king in waiting. This is how you rule Judah. This is what a king is supposed to do. Think about that. All the perversity - the rejection of God - the disastrous political alliances - the selling out of his people. Hezekiah had a front row seat in the classroom with his dad Ahaz. But fortunately he was not a chip of the old block! Hezekiah came from a long line of Godly kings. Scripture says that his grandad's did what was right in the sight of the Lord. And ultimately Hezekiah is related right back to King David. In this Godly family Ahaz is the bad exception.

In verse 2 Hezekiah is introduced along with his mother - Abijah and his grandfather on his mother's side - Zechariah. Both were Godly people influencing his life towards God. Hezekiah would also have known the prophets Isaiah and Micah who he probably heard speak a number of times and in particular they'd have spoken God's word against his father. Hezekiah knew God's word. Hezekiah - unlike Ahaz was a Godly man.

So...on the one side we have Hezekiah - a Godly man but he grows up in a really messed up situation in a nation his father is leading down the tubes spiritually, morally and politically on a downward slide into depravity and idolatry and Hezekiah has a front row seat to all this. While his father is still king Hezekiah is powerless to step in and make a change. You can imagine Hezekiah coming before God and asking, *"God this is so wrong. God, why do I have to put up with this? God You gotta' do something. How can You let this go on?"*

Life can still feel like that today. Look at events in Gaza, the war in Syria, what's happening in Iraq and other atrocities going on around the world. Sometimes it may be something going on in our own lives. We pray but it seems overwhelming, hopeless. We just witness more of the same and worse. How can we possibly come through this situation? How do we do the

right thing at the right time? But... In God's time - God gave Hezekiah the opportunity to do what was right in God's sight. The sovereign God - who has given to Hezekiah a Godly family (apart from Ahaz) and Godly mentors like Isaiah and Micah and who has prepared Hezekiah to know wrong and right - to be pure and open before Him.

In God's timing the sovereign God removes Ahaz and places Hezekiah on the throne. And Hezekiah did what was right in the sight of the Lord - what pleased God - what God approved of. When things are tough, when we have no expectation of anything different. When we're wondering if God could ever use us or change the circumstances around us. Well... difficult as this may sound we perhaps need to **expect** God to move. We need to hang on in there - trusting God to do what He promises to do while daily renewing our commitment, obedience and service to Him. We need to be preparing ourselves - deepening our relationship with God - confessing sin - letting go of what keeps us from being totally surrendered to Him - letting God purify and prepare us. Because God - in His time will move through us to accomplish His purposes.

So let's dig further into this passage and see what emerges. There are three words I'll highlight...

1. Remove
2. Trust
3. Cling

1. Remove

Hezekiah did right in the eyes of the Lord? What does that mean? Look at V4: *He* – (Hezekiah) **removed** the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles.

The first thing Hezekiah did was **He Removed**. The word "remove" in Hebrew means "to reject" - to abolish - to turn aside from. Hezekiah **removed** the "high places." - the places that were out of touch - unseen. In turning the nation over to God Hezekiah broke down the phallic stones dedicated to Baal – he dealt with the perverse sexuality that was going on. Hezekiah smashed the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah poles which was the female version of Baal. Then (as we discover in the rest of V4) He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan). Nehushtan – is a nickname literally meaning "the brass thing." Let's say a little bit about this bronze snake. Back in the time of Moses and the Exodus we discover in the book of Numbers 21:4-9 how the people grew impatient and spoke against God and against Moses...."Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" So God sent venomous snakes and many of them died of snake bites. The people then repented so God said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

But here's the problem. In the days of Ahaz that bronze snake was still around. But instead of being something that demonstrated God's presence and power and something that reminded people of his mercy and forgiveness it had become an object of worship instead of being a reminder of whom to worship. Rather than worshipping the God of their salvation God's people were worshipping the symbol of their faith (the bronze snake) rather than the

God who establishes that faith. It still happens today. In many churches we witness people creating a whole religion based on the symbols of Christianity. But we don't worship symbols rather we worship a living God who wants us to grow in his image and surrender total control over our lives to Him.

Hezekiah took all that self-serving religion stuff and broke it into tiny pieces and - removed it. By the time Hezekiah was done removing things there was nothing left to remove. As new Testament Christians we need to be doing the same – removing everything that gets in the way of worshipping God, the idolatry of our modern lives that hinder our relationship with Him. We need to be praying and asking God to help us deal with the sin that's holding us back. Removing all the bad stuff so our faith is more than hoping Jesus will just make things better. Rather we open ourselves to Jesus for Him to come into our lives to take over so we become more and more like Him.

And so to our second word. **Trust.**

V5: Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him.

Have you ever been on a team building course where they blindfold you and ask you to fall backwards? The idea is to trust your other team members will catch you. As you fall backwards there is a point of no return, where you are completely dependent on the rest of the team because you can't stop yourself from falling. You have to fully rely on the team to catch you. At that moment you put your complete trust in them.

Hezekiah trusted God and put that trust into action in seeking to revive the spiritual life of the nation. Immediately he began to restore the Temple. In 2 Chron 29:3 we read: In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of the LORD and repaired them. Hezekiah also envisioned the Levites to cleanse the temple. 2 Chron 29:5 says: "Listen to me, Levites! Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the temple of the LORD, the God of your ancestors. Remove all defilement from the sanctuary". He then called on the Levites to offer sacrifices before inviting the people to celebrate the Passover again. Hezekiah was a man of prayer who recognized the sovereignty of God.

In short – having started by removing all the bad stuff – he put his trust completely in God - there was no going back. He put himself and God's people in God's hands. They turned from sin and turned towards God. However, and this is really important if we look at 2 Chron 29:36 we read: Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced at what God had brought about for his people. Remember – this was what God had done not Hezekiah!

If God doesn't catch me there's no Plan B. There's only Plan A - trust God. And so to our final word. **Cling.**

V6: He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses.

In Hebrew 'he held fast' translates as 'he cleaved'. To cleave is to cling, to stick - to be inseparably joined. Cleaving is a daily commitment for a lifetime. A dogged commitment regardless of the circumstances. *"I will cling to God."*

Hezekiah obeyed God's commandments regardless of public opinion or whatever the financial cost or whether it was easy or hard or regardless of how it changed his lifestyle. Hezekiah didn't stop following after and obeying God. He clung to God. And look what happened. **He was successful.**

V7: And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.

The Lord was with Hezekiah and went along with him and with Godly wisdom Hezekiah rebelled against the king of Assyria. You could argue that was not exactly the best move politically. But whereas Ahaz trusted in Assyria not God. Hezekiah on the other hand trusted in God not Assyria.

Then in V8: From watchtower to fortified city, he defeated the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory.

Hezekiah reclaimed land that had been promised to them by God but lost during the time of Ahaz. He's reclaimed territory lost to sin. Politically these seem like reckless moves - stirring up a deadly hornet's nest. But spiritually - there's wisdom here. A strong statement of what it means to be accompanied by God through life - to live life with the living God - to know and do the right thing at the right time. A bold statement made before God's people and the world. Hezekiah's success in overcoming oppression by Assyria and the Philistines comes after trust and obedience in all areas of life. As we read v7: the Lord was with him.

Now contrast this with v 9-12 where the northern kingdom of Israel is crushed and the people deported to Assyria. Why? Well at a human level one might say Israel's defeat was because she rebelled and broke the treaty with Assyria and suffered the consequences. But the real reason was because Israel violated the Lord's covenant. By contrast Hezekiah and Judah kept the Lord's covenant and obeyed His commands.

With God there's no need to trust in anything or anyone other than God. Sometimes in life what we're up against seems impossible to overcome and we become despairing and discouraged and the only expectation we have is that things are going to get worse. But the more we live for God - at work, at home, wherever we are - being Godly, coming through for God and recognizing that in Jesus we are ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven - then we discover more and more whatever the situation - in the strength of God we have what it takes. In Christ alone our hope is found!

But in our humanness and own strength we wobble. Even Hezekiah wobbled. In v 14-15 (not in our reading today) we discover when Assyria came knocking he opened the Temple treasury to them, even stripping the gold from the doorposts! In 2 Kings 20 some envoys arrived from Babylon and Hezekiah shows them round his treasury clearly trying to impress them with what he might bring to an alliance against Assyria. This brought a strong response from God via Isaiah because of Hezekiah's willingness to lean on Babylon rather than God. And that brought a rather selfish response from Hezekiah that at least there would be peace in his lifetime (2 Kings 20:19)!

It's important as we close to realize even this good king in his humanness got it wrong. And it's the same for us. So don't beat yourself up. But nevertheless let's be encouraged by Hezekiah. He grew up with a dad who was bonkers and nation that was depraved but he expected God to move. He was committed to hanging in there and letting God deal with the

deep issues of his life. When God moved he was prepared. Prepared - without hesitation to take leadership in removing sin. To openly put his life in God's hands - trusting God, clinging to God, boldly living out God's version of success and doing the right thing at the right time. To be used by God to lead a nation back to God. But remember... "Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced **at what God** had brought about for his people"

All of what we have talked about this morning was actually what God did. And so what about us? In closing let me ask you again – are you a chip off the old block? Well if you are a follower of Jesus then you are God's child and therefore you are not a chip off the old block but a chip off the Saviour of the world. You are the "living temple" of God, of which Jesus is the foundation. As followers of Jesus we are founded on the ultimate heavenly foundation, Christ Jesus Himself. Praise God that because of what Jesus has done our salvation is secure. And so you have every reason to trust and cling to God having been shown His grace when God moved for you in Jesus. Where on the cross Jesus bled and died **to remove** your sin once and for all and through His resurrection He will come again and take you home where you with all God's children will proclaim His greatness. And so we have every reason to bring Him honour and stand strong for Him in our daily lives growing in his image and becoming more and more a chip off the cornerstone of Jesus Christ himself.

