

**THE CHALLENGE – IF HE’S GOD THEN LIVE LIKE IT!****2 Chronicles 31:2-20; Matthew 6:25-34****(Read Matthew 6:25-34)**

**Intro:** Is God really first in your life? That’s the challenge – we need to put our money, sometimes literally, where our mouth is. If we say we are God’s first, that means that we acknowledge God for who he is – the creator and sustainer of the universe, the one who provides for the birds of the air, the one who designed the lilies of the field in all their intricacies; the one who provides with just in time delivery our very daily bread and the clothing on our back. If that is the God we believe in then we need to live like it. Many of us have read and heard the Sermon on the Mount and heard sermons from it countless times, and as a result we’ve heard those 10 verses I just read from Matthew 6 many times. Here it is again, *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* Matthew 6:33. And even with all those times, the temptation still is to seek first in some other direction other than the only one who can deliver what he promises. So let me say it again . . .

**Make God FIRST!**

- I’m a history nut, I love trivia (I always won when we played TRIVIAL PURSUIT), I grew up playing cowboys and Indians, and the American West is my happy place. So when Keith Crone told me about Dodge City: Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, and the Wickedest Town in the American West I secured it on my library app and devoured the book. It is a more accurate take on flawed characters that had been made larger and better than life by pulp novels and Hollywood. For the most part the book followed two familiar men who were at various times buffalo hunters, law men, saloon or brothel owners, and gamblers. They were Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson. They were town marshals (sometimes together) in various towns through the west like Dodge City, Kansas (as the title suggests), Tombstone, AZ, Trinidad, Colorado and many other places. They were the model in mind when the expression “There’s a new sheriff is in town.” When they came to town, they often cleaned things up and, sometimes, they messed things up even worse.
- Well, in 2 Chronicles 29 a new sheriff comes to town in Judah. Hezekiah is the new king. He's 25 years old and, unlike his predecessors who were quite wicked, he is very much dedicated to God. The first descriptor of this young man after how long he served and who his mother was is that Hezekiah . . . *did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.* 2 Chronicles 29:2. That is a simple yet powerful tribute to a courageous young man who turned the tide of evil that was leading the people of God deeper into sin and, instead, sought to make God First.
- As you read through 2 Chronicles 29 you see how the king took a hands-on approach at restoring the dilapidated temple, and reinstating priests and religious leaders who had been silenced by the evil practices of the worship of false gods. You almost get the idea that he personally opened the doors of the temple and repaired and cleaned up. You can picture the king of Judah with a broom sweeping with dust flying. He brought the religious leaders back and commanded them to do their job. All vestiges of the evil worship that had come before, that had driven God's people into sin and slavery, were cleaned away. And then he restored worship to the holy place. Despair was replaced with rejoicing because a new sheriff was in town.
- And then . . .

**Worship was restored!**

- 2 Chronicles 30 is completely taken up with an account of how Passover, which had not been celebrated for years was reinstated. You need holy people to celebrate Passover – and now, with the leadership and urging of Hezekiah a date was set for the celebration. It had been so long and the people of God had wandered so far from him they didn’t even know when their holiest of holy days was even supposed to be.
- Read it when you get a chance – but let me just tell you: The word went out and everyone prepared by cleansing themselves and confessing and repenting and thousands of sacrificial animals were offer up to God and the account ends with this description *So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to his holy habitation in heaven.* 2 Chronicles 30:26-27. You can almost feel the joy jumping off the page.
- What follows is in the passage Sharon read for us and in it is . . .

## The reminder to give

- As Passover ended the people of Judah dispersed throughout the kingdom and cleaned away everything that was not of God. Judah was a new place and dedicated to God.
- And with that cleaning done, Hezekiah completed a reorganization of the priests and there needed to be provisions for them. People hadn't been thinking about that for a while, but after a renewal like what the people of Judah experienced, what follows is a reminder to give. They needed to support the ministry.
- We need to support the ministry. A couple weeks ago I shared that preachers are often reluctant to preach about money. When I was in Kenya I asked Ilam how often he preached about giving to the work of the Lord, and his response was, "Oh no Servant of God, I do not do that. I leave that to other preachers to do for me." I know that poverty is a real thing there but I just had to wonder if some teaching about the fact that you cannot outgive God would have opened some hearts.
- Truthfully, for preachers to preach about giving seems self-serving. And it can be that way – especially if the preacher has his own jet or drives a Bentley. But a preacher does need to be paid, and the lights and heat need to be on, and ministries around the world need to be funded because it's the ministry of the Kingdom.
- That was what Hezekiah was doing. He was ensuring the funding of the priests and Levites, who, by the way, did not have their own land like the other tribes did – their support came from those tribes who had inherited land and its fruits.
- And notice how Hezekiah led by example - he gave first and then he commanded the people to give. Yes – they didn't have a choice – he was reinstating the tithe which had been neglected and forgotten – now he commanded his people to bring into the storehouse their tithes and offerings.
- And did they people gripe and complain? Did they go home and have the preacher for Sunday dinner? Nope – they gave and gave and gave. There were piles and piles of what they gave. (which reminded me of the harvest a number of years ago when corn was piled at the elevator in Mansfield because there was no room in the bins – thus the background on my PPT this morning) There were piles and piles of offerings and the collection went on for four months. They had seen what the Lord had done and they couldn't help but give.
- I love how Eugene Peterson paraphrased the final verses of what Sharon read. Let me read them from the ESV first, and then I'll read them from Peterson's Message. Listen, *When Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed the Lord and his people Israel. And Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites about the heaps. Azariah the chief priest, who was of the house of Zadok, answered him, "Since they began to bring the contributions into the house of the Lord, we have eaten and had enough and have plenty left, for the Lord has blessed his people, so that we have this large amount left."* 2 Chronicles 31:8-10 (ESV) Now, the Message, *When Hezekiah and his leaders came and saw the extent of the mounds of gifts, they praised God and commended God's people Israel. Hezekiah then consulted the priests and Levites on how to handle the abundance of offerings. Azariah, chief priest of the family of Zadok, answered, "From the moment of this huge outpouring of gifts to The Temple of God, there has been plenty to eat for everyone with food left over. God has blessed his people—**just look at the evidence!**"* 2 Chronicles 31:8-10 (The Message).
- Just look at the evidence! JUST LOOK AT THE EVIDENCE! They knew then what we know now – you cannot outgive God.

**Conclusion:** It was a command then, it is a privilege now. Yes, Hezekiah commanded the people to give – that was the Old Testament. It's true that the New Testament has no command at all to give. The reason for that is giving is simply expected of the one who is God's first – everything they have and everything they are belongs to God – therefore we give. So we prayerfully and thoughtfully and faithfully give to the one who cares for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

*God has blessed his people—just look at the evidence!*" So here's the challenge – if he is our God, then let's live like it! Amen.