

Picture Perfect Worship

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[0 : 00] Well, take your Bibles, if you would, and we're going to read together now in the Scriptures in the Old Testament, and you'll find the reading in 2 Chronicles at chapter 35.

I think that's page 386, if you are one of the visitor's Bibles. And if not, Samuel, Kings, and then 1 and 2 Chronicles. And Josh has been leading us through these chapters about King Josiah. We saw last week the dramatic beginnings of his reign, his reforms to bring God's people back to the Word of God when they found the book of the law hidden in the temple, neglected for generations.

And the great transformation that that brought about. And here that story continues as we hear about Josiah reinstating the great feast of Passover.

So chapter 35 and verse 1. And we'll just wait until we turn the music off. And everybody else can check their phones and check that they won't be embarrassed by me next.

[1 : 11] Good. Josiah kept a Passover to the Lord in Jerusalem. And they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the 14th day of the first month.

He appointed the priests to their offices and encouraged them in the service of the house of the Lord. And he said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to the Lord, Put the holy ark in the house that Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, built.

You need not carry it on your shoulders. Now serve the Lord your God and his people Israel. Prepare yourselves according to your father's houses by your divisions as prescribed in the writing of David, king of Israel.

And the documents of Solomon, his son. Stand in the holy place according to the groupings of the father's houses of your brothers, the lay people. And according to the division of the Levites by father's household.

And slaughter the Passover lamb. And consecrate yourselves and prepare for your brothers to do according to the word of the Lord by Moses.

[2 : 18] Then Josiah contributed to the lay people as Passover offerings for all who were present. Lambs and young goats from the flock to the number of 30,000 and 3,000 bulls.

These were from the king's possessions. And his officials contributed willingly to the people, to the priests and to the Levites. For Kiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, the chief officers of the house of God, gave to the priests for the Passover offerings, 2,600 Passover lambs and 300 bulls.

Konaniah also, and Shemaiah, and Nathanael his brother, and Hashbaiah, and Jeziel, and Josabad, the chiefs of the Levites, gave to the Levites for the Passover offerings, 5,000 lambs and young goats and 500 bulls.

When the service had been prepared for, the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their divisions, according to the king's command. And they slaughtered the Passover lambs, and the priests threw the blood that they'd received from them, while the Levites flayed the sacrifices.

They set aside their burnt offerings, that they might distribute them according to the groupings of the father's houses of the lay people, to offer to the Lord, as it is written in the book of Moses.

[3 : 40] And so they did with the bulls. And they roasted the Passover lambs with fire, according to the rule. And they boiled the holy offerings in pots, in cauldrons, and in pans, and carried them quickly to all the lay people.

Afterwards, they prepared for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the son of Aaron, were offering the burnt offerings and the fat parts until night.

So the Levites prepared for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron. And singers, the sons of Asaph, were in their place, according to the command of David. Asaph, and Heman, and Jedetham, the king's seer.

And the gatekeepers were at each gate, did not need to depart from their service, for their brothers, the Levites, prepared for them. So all the service of the Lord was prepared that day, to keep the Passover and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the Lord, according to the command of King Josiah.

The people of Israel who were present kept the Passover at that time, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, seven days. No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet.

[4 : 57] None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover, as was kept by Josiah, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

In the 18th year of the reign of Josiah, the Passover was kept. Amen.

And may God bless to us his word. What a great day that was, reinstating the Passover, and all that it signified for the saving of God's people from the wrath of the avenging angel, through the blood of the Passover lamb.

Such a rich, rich symbolism of the promise of God's great forgiveness, pointing forward, of course, to the great Passover lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Do you open your Bibles again to 2 Chronicles chapter 35?

[6 : 03] A picture paints a thousand words. When trying to change or communicate something, there is great power in a vision or a picture.

Showing what things could look like, or showing the difference that it will make, is important to bring people along with you. And when you paint the picture, when you show people the possibilities, you want it to inspire.

You want to show how great it can be. So take sport as an example. If you're coaching someone to help them with their tennis strokes or their golf swing, then you don't give them an average model to go by, to aspire to.

You want to see them have the best swing. You want them to be able to see someone with the best forehand. And what it looks like for the body to be in the perfect position, not just an all right one. Because you want to give them something to aspire to, to aim at. And that's what the chronicler is doing in this passage that we're looking at this evening.

[7 : 14] He wants his readers to have worship as their priority. The chronicler was writing to the people who'd returned from exile. They were back in the land of promise.

So things were looking up after the exile. But all was not well. The challenge for the people who returned to the land was to reestablish the critical pillars of life that were part and parcel of belonging to the Lord.

And central to life as God's people is wholehearted, joyful worship of God. And so we see in all the books that are written to the returnees this kind of focus.

So in the last three prophets of the Old Testament, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, and in Ezra and Nehemiah, the histories written to these same people, these are the kinds of things that are focused on.

Things like rebuilding the temple. Things like reforming worship. Rebuilding Jerusalem to what it once was. And so the chronicler is trying to inspire the people towards what life as God's people is really like.

[8 : 24] He's picturing for them, through their own history, what life as God's people ought to be prioritizing and shaped by and shaped around.

And so as we approach the celebration of Passover that we have in this passage, it comes off the back of the significant rediscovery of the book that we saw last week. Josiah had found again the book of the law, the book of the covenant, most likely Deuteronomy.

And this discovery led him to recommit the life of Judah, a nation that had so disastrously ignored God's word, to recommit to the great covenant that God had made with his people.

And here, Josiah is put before God's people as a great king. He's a model for believers. And the climax of his example to us is in the celebration of the Passover.

And this is not just any Passover. It's not average Jews serve or average Jews golf swing that's being modeled. No, this is the greatest Passover that is celebrated under the kings of Israel.

[9 : 36] Look at verse one. It's a summary that tells us that Passover was celebrated. And then there's a step back in time from verses two to 15.

They tell us all about the preparation that went into celebrating the Passover and the provision for the Passover. And then look on to verses 16 to 19. They carry on straight from verse one as further summary of what happened.

And they tell us about how significant this particular Passover was. Look at verse 18. No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet.

Samuel, of course, the kingmaker, the one who first anointed kings in Israel. None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah.

So this is the crowning example of what true worship looks like. This is picture perfect in order to shape and inspire God's people in how to live as his people.

[10:53] And the chronicler tells us three things about the preparation and celebration of this great Passover that take us to the very heart of true worship. But notice before we look at the three points that this Passover happens, verse 19, in the 18th year, the same year as the rediscovery of the book.

And so the chronicler is wanting us to see that this flows very much from what happened with the rediscovery of the book. He wants us to see that God's spirit-given words working in his people drives them to true worship.

So that this celebration is not a hollow, outward, ritualistic thing, but instead is celebrated as real-life worship that flows from God's voice speaking to the heart of his king and his people.

And so we see that true worship is firstly careful. God's word at work and the life of his people turns them to careful worship, verses 2 to 6.

God's people truly worship him as they obediently carry out what God has revealed to them.

Worship is not an experience that we choose around what suits us best.

[12:16] It's not primarily about how it makes us feel. Worship is our response to all that God has declared and all that God has done.

And it's obvious even on a human level, on a relational level, that our response to a wonderful gift or our response to the wonderful outpouring of love by someone, our response to that is shaped by what the giver will appreciate.

When our affections are stirred by something or someone, then the response ought to be something that likewise works to their affections. So if I was wanting to show appreciation for my wife, for her loving support, it would be a mistake for me to buy her tickets to see a football match or a new gadget.

Not only is that something that's more for me than for her, she's told me many, many times that she doesn't like it. And just as she's told me that she doesn't appreciate these things, she's hinted, she's told me explicitly even, I know that what she does really appreciate is more like flowers or nice candles.

So that's the way to show gratitude and response. And similarly, wholehearted worship of God isn't shaped by what God's people like.

[13:39] No, it's shaped by what God has said. And that's what we see here in Josiah. Look at verse 1. Josiah kept a Passover to the Lord.

But notice the details that were given. We're told specifically that it's kept in Jerusalem as it should be. Then notice again, verse 1, that the lamb is slaughtered on the 14th day of the first month as it should be.

Now these details might seem unimportant to us, but they can't be taken for granted. Hezekiah, just a few chapters earlier, celebrates a Passover that's on a similar level to this, though not quite as great.

And Hezekiah delays the Passover by a month. Now he does so for good reason, and there was precedent in the law for doing that. But here in Josiah, we see particularly the picture-perfect celebration of Passover.

there's no nuance, there's no deviation from what is perfect. Everything is as it should be. Josiah has carefully planned and prepared for this grand event.

[14:52] And so verse 2, he also places the priests in position to serve in the way that they're meant to. In truth, they've already been involved in Josiah's reforms, heavily involved.

We saw that last week. They're at the center of the rebuilding of the temple. But here they are again involved in the Passover. And then verses 3 to 6, we have the meticulous instructions given to the Levites.

And this is where we see the real care in the preparation. Josiah gives seven commands to the Levites. If you look at verse 3, you can see two of them there.

They are to put the ark in the temple, and they are also to serve the Lord and His people. Verse 4, there's another one. They're to prepare themselves into the correct divisions, to follow the example and the instructions of David and Solomon.

Verse 5, there's another one. To stand in the holy place in the correct divisions. And then verse 6, there are three more commands. Slaughter the lamb, consecrate yourselves, and prepare for your brothers to do according to Moses.

[16:01] Seven ordered, meticulous commands, seven commands to carefully celebrate and worship the Lord as it should be. And look at a couple of the things that the commands focus on.

Josiah is careful because of who God is. There's a focus on holiness. Look at verse 3. The commands are to those who were holy to the Lord.

That is set aside for this particular service. And they're to put the holy ark where it belongs. And where it belongs is of course the temple, the center of life before a holy God.

And then verse 5, they are to stand in the holy place. Verse 6, they're to consecrate themselves.

They're to be prepared, clean, washed, in order to participate and serve and enable the worship of God.

So great care is taken because God is a holy God. There must be care taken because we cannot approach God with the flippancy that we might approach a friend or a colleague or a family member.

[17:16] God's love for us, our unique relationship with God, doesn't mean that we can be casual about how we relate to him. He is still the creator and we the creation.

He is holy and we are far from it. So in the same way that a parent or a spouse won't appreciate being treated like any other person, a random friend or acquaintance, well, true worship of God takes seriously just who he is.

A holy God. But a holy God who welcomes us to worship him. A holy God whose word speaking to us, whose word at work within us turns us to him and draws us to worship him.

So care is to be taken because of who we worship. It can't just be any old thing we'll do. When it suits me, I'll turn up and do it. It can't just be on our terms what we like, what we enjoy and not the other stuff.

God's spirit given word draws us to see the immense reverence that God's people are to have for him. And Josiah's worship was so exemplary because he got that God's holiness is to be taken seriously.

[18:35] Everything was as it should be. Because it is an immense thing to come before God in worship. It is an immense thing to join with the whole heavenly host of angels in acknowledging that holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty.

The whole earth is filled with his glory. That is who we come before. That is who our God is. But these commands don't just focus on taking seriously that God is holy.

Notice that they are also concerned with God's people. Verse 3 the Levites are to serve the Lord and his people and that is what part and that is part of what is behind the ordering into groups and divisions in verse 4 and 5.

We'll see that a little bit later too. But then notice verse 6 the Levites are to prepare for their brothers to celebrate the Passover because whilst care is to be taken so that worship of God is reverent it is also in gathering together as God's people that they are reassured that God is who he says he is. That he has acted mightily to pour out grace to his people. That's what we do as we gather together.

[20:04] We gather to worship God and to be reassured of his great grace poured out to us really and truly. And so Josiah sets before us a great example of a people who are driven by God's word and so his spirit to worship.

To take God seriously as he must be taken. And whilst worship does involve all of life it is particularly focused on the gathering of God's people.

and the example is that true worship is driven by God and who he is and it's driven by seeing all of God's people partaking in that partaking in that which assures them of God's grace.

All of this is so very far from the ideas of worship that we can so often hear when it's about how it makes us feel. Is it how we like it?

How experiential is it for me? Well Josiah's worship was careful but it was also costly.

[21 : 17] God's word at work in his people drives them to costly worship. Verses 7 to 9. God's word at work in his people is uniquely able to bring them to the point of pouring out gifts to him sacrificially and generously.

For an encounter with the living God and his gospel word completely transforms what is of true value. In Josiah we have set before us an example of generous sacrifice of giving out of a heart of worship.

Look at verse 7. Josiah made contributions for the lay people. He provided 30,000 lambs and goats for the Passover.

Notice he gives out of his own herds his own belongings out of his own pocket and he gives incredible numbers of animals so that people could worship God.

He provided so that ministry could happen. he provided so that people could be assured that God is gracious to be reminded that God is the one who can and has rescued his people.

[22 : 30] And likewise verse 8 following their king's lead his officials contributed 2,600 lambs and the chain reaction continues verse 9 others give 5,000 lambs.

great and sacrificial giving. But notice two things about that giving. The chronicler emphasizes in verse 8 it was contributed willingly voluntarily.

Josiah didn't have a sword to his officials throats forcing them to open their wallets. No, God's word was at work within the people and so they gladly willingly pour out what they have generously to him.

But as well as the offerings being given willingly look at what is given. This is a Passover celebration but Josiah and all the officials give above and beyond what is required.

Notice the huge numbers but they're not just meeting the immediate and imminent need. They're going above that for they give bulls too.

[23 : 41] Lambs were given for the Passover celebration but there were also bulls and these would be used for thank offerings and other kinds of things like that. The costly pouring out of offerings wasn't just for this one occasion but was so that God's people would continue to truly worship him.

They were going above and beyond. The chronicler was showing that this pouring out of gifts he was showing us this to inspire and to draw wholehearted worship in God's people.

And this is often a struggle for God's people when they live in this world. For the things that belong to this world can seem to trump what God has said and promised.

Turn over to the prophet Haggai. Haggai was another prophet who ministered around the same time as the chronicler.

And look at chapter 1 verses 2 to 4. This is what Haggai says. Thus says the Lord of hosts these people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.

[25 : 02] Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet. Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruin?

The chronicler was addressing an issue in his own day. A people truly transformed by the life-giving spirit-given word will willingly give to the Lord just like Josiah and his officials.

Whereas we see the remnant here in Haggai who've returned to the land who received this book.

They were busy building their own nice houses with beautiful wooden panels.

And this whole area of giving cuts right to the heart. Those who Haggai was ministering to would have been getting nervous at the mention of giving. It would have been uncomfortable for them knowing that their credit card statements, their bank balances would point to what they really loved and it would be making them squirm.

Whereas Josiah and his officials give lavish sums willingly with the attitude that Paul describes in Corinthians. They were cheerful givers, willingly, lavishly.

[26 : 26] The chronicler wants God's people to see exemplified in Josiah something akin to the woman who anoints Jesus' head with very costly ointment. She pours it out without reservation, without care for the cost, and she's told that that is a beautiful thing.

And so whilst true worship is in one sense costly, there is a sense in which it isn't costly. because pouring out things for the Lord, giving lavishly to his kingdom, shows that things, money, animals, wooden panels, ointment, aren't that valuable.

Because this giving actually shows that God is of greatest value. It shows that God's people to light, to live, for that commendation on the last day, well done, good and faithful servant.

You've done a beautiful thing by pouring out the costliest of things. That is true worship that's responding to God's living word at work within his people.

And so Josiah's model, Josiah's Passover models for God's people that true worship is careful, and it's costly, but also true worship is covenantal.

[27 : 53] Verses 10 to 15. true worship finds its expression within the covenant relationship that God's people uniquely have with him. And so worship encompasses all of God's covenant people.

It was the scale of this Passover, the involvement of all people, verse 18, from Josiah all the way down to the lay people, even from the north in Israel.

That's what made his Passover so great. the very basis of our relationship to God, the very reason that means we sinful human beings can come before a holy God and not be instantly obliterated, is because of God's covenant with his people.

And so we see the celebration reach its climax in these verses as the blood is spilt, as the rescuing lamb is slaughtered, verse 11. it's important that this picture perfect scene of worship centers around Passover, the spilling of blood, the rescue for God's people.

Back when God's people were groaning in their slavery in Egypt, we read that God heard them and he remembered his covenant. And that is what brings the great rescue that the first Passover realizes and the subsequent ones celebrate.

[29 : 25] God acting to keep his covenant promises, to rescue his people from slavery and to lead them to the land of promise. Josiah's exemplary model revolves around the festival that remembers God's great mercy in saving his people from slavery.

That's what's being remembered, that's what's being celebrated. God passing over the Israelites who had blood spread over the doorposts, a great rescue from judgment that came to Israel only because of God's grace.

The chronicler emphasizes in this passage that not only was Josiah a true son of David, not only was Josiah a great king who followed after Solomon and David, Josiah's obedience, Josiah's responding to God goes further back than the great kings.

He was obedient and he was a faithful son of David. Notice how often there are mentions of David throughout these verses. If you look at verse 3, we see both Solomon and David mentioned. The chronicler holds them as the great kings. verse 4, we see them mentioned again. And verse 15, we see David yet again.

[30 : 47] And that's similar to what we see in some of the other great kings and chronicles. Hezekiah celebrated a Passover himself a few chapters earlier. And likewise, he's compared to David and Solomon.

But there's a different emphasis here. For whilst there are numerous mentions of honoring the practices of David and Solomon, Josiah is also keen to honor what Moses has said.

And naturally, this followed the rediscovery of the book of the law, the book of the covenant, which Moses was the author of. And so we see verse 6.

Josiah was doing things according to the word of Moses. Verse 12, things were being done as it is written in the book of Moses. And then there's another subtle reference to Moses in verse 13.

The detail about the offerings being carried quickly to all the lay people. Well, that's just as happened at the very first Passover, where there was a command to celebrate in a way that they were ready to leave, built, fastened, eat in haste.

[31 : 58] And so this worship flows out of the very heart of the gospel itself, for it flows out of God's rescue of his people, and the definitive covenant relationship that flows out of that rescue.

And so notice in these verses the purpose of all the ordering that took place in the preparation. Verse 10, the priests and the Levites stand in their places as the king commanded.

Remember, we saw that in verses 4 and 5, the ordering of people into their divisions. And then, once the slaughter has happened, look at verse 12. The careful ordering of things allowed the distribution to reach the lay people according to their groupings.

In fact, verse 13, it allowed the offerings to reach all the lay people. And so verses 10 to 13 focus on all the lay people, the average believer, receiving this Passover meal.

But that wasn't all. The ordering also allowed verses 14 and 15, the priests, the Levites, the musicians who were serving the people to also take part.

[33 : 23] Look at verse 14. The priests were busy serving the people by offering the burnt offerings until night. They were laboring all day, but they were not to miss out on this celebration.

So they too are provided for. Likewise, verse 15, the singers were in their positions, leading the people in songs. The gatekeepers were in position, all doing important jobs.

But again at the end of verse 15, none of these people needed to depart from their service for the Levites prepared for them all.

The focus of verses 10 to 15 is that everyone participated, everyone celebrated. This Passover encompassed all God's people.

It was a covenant meal for the whole covenant family. And true worship is for all who belong to God. This Passover is set up as a great model and example, and all of this despite Josiah hearing that Judah was heading for exile.

[34 : 38] There had been much sin in the recent history of these people. That's what we were told in chapter 34. Their future was bleak. But that doesn't preclude them from worshiping God here.

The warning was heeded and they turned to God. Any who humble themselves and seek God like Josiah had begun to do, any who do that are able to worship God.

And any who see that in celebrating God's great act of rescue, whether it be the Passover lamb or the true great Passover lamb, the Lord Jesus himself, that is the only reason that God's people have hope and are able to worship him.

I'm sure I'm not the only one here who knows the feeling of being completely unworthy to come before God. But we see here that the celebration, the worship that rejoices in God's rescue and remembers his grace is for all who belong to God, for all who come to him like Josiah did in chapter 34, mourning and realizing what they've done wrong.

Belonging to God is never about our achievements. It has always been about responding in faith to God's spirit given word, just as this whole Passover is about.

[36 : 07] God's word.

That's what Josiah so starkly and obviously does here. The discovery of the book changed his life. and for any who hear God's word and respond to it in faith then you can become part of God's family you can become part of the people of God there's provision for you for whilst Josiah gave all these animals to be sacrificed there's a king who's provided the sacrifice that we all need grace for all who believe a covenant relationship for all who believe and so a heart open to the possibility and the longing to worship God the chronicler sets before God's people a model of true worship and anyone who receives God's word and responds to it any church that takes God's word seriously can truly partake in the immense experience of coming before a holy God and rejoicing in who he is and what he's done that's what we see in Josiah's picture perfect worship amen let's pray

Lord we know what you have done for us we know that you have moved and worked to enable us to be your people and so we ask that you would plant your word deep within us so that would be our life's joy to bring honor to you in all that we do and that as a church our worship of you would be a pleasing aroma and we pray this in Jesus name amen this in Jesus name really so thank you so much for us thank you so much for asking about this Amen we also want you to pray for this and I'll Sapcast that you will make a prayer and I'll see you and we can see you and take the prayer and see you at the Sunday you just and see you and Romans and I'll talk to you He told you you how to see youlene