

Kingdom Investment

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[0 : 00] So we're going to come now to our Bible reading and you will find that in the Old Testament book of 2nd Chronicles. Page 382 of our church Bibles.

Josh will be preaching to us later in the service on this much neglected and overlooked Old Testament book. We are jumping straight into a section of the narrative that deals with the reign of King Hezekiah.

And it was a time of great reformation in the land of Judah under this good king. 2nd Chronicles chapter 31 and we begin reading at verse 2.

Hear the word of the Lord. And Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, division by division, each according to his service, the priests and the Levites, for burnt offerings and peace offerings, to minister in the gates of the camp of the Lord and to give thanks and praise. The contribution of the king from his own possessions was for the burnt offerings, the burnt offerings of morning and evening, and the burnt offerings for the Sabbaths, the new moons, and the appointed feasts, as it is written in the law of the Lord.

[1 : 28] And he commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, that they might give themselves to the law of the Lord.

As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel gave in abundance the first fruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field.

And they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything. And the people of Israel and Judah, who lived in the cities of Judah, also brought in the tithe of cattle and sheep, and the tithe of the dedicated things that had been dedicated to the Lord their God, and laid them in heaps.

In the third month, they began to pile up the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month. 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, 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 : 56] Then Hezekiah commanded them to prepare chambers in the house of the Lord, and they prepared them. And they faithfully brought in the contributions, the tithes and the dedicated things.

The chief officer in charge of them was Conaniah, the Levite, and Shimei, his brother, is second, while Jehiel, Azariah, Nathath, Azael, Jeremoth, Josabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath, and Benaniah were overseers assisting Conaniah, and Shimei, his brother, by the appointment of Hezekiah, the king, and Azariah, the chief officer of the house of God.

And Korah, the son of Imnah, the Levite, keeper of the east gate, was over the freewill offerings to God to apportion the contribution reserved for the Lord and the most holy offerings.

Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shekaniah were faithfully assisting Him in the cities of the priests to distribute the portions to their brothers, old and young alike, by divisions, except those enrolled by genealogy.

Males from three years old and upward, all who entered the house of the Lord, as the duty of each day required for their service according to their offices, by their divisions.

[4 : 26] The enrollment of the priests was according to their father's houses. That of the Levites from 20 years old and upward was according to their offices, by their divisions.

They were enrolled with all their little children, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, the whole assembly, for they were faithful in keeping themselves holy.

And for the sons of Aaron, the priests who were in the fields of common land belonging to their cities, there were men in the several cities who were designated by name to distribute portions to

every male among the priests and to everyone among the Levites who was enrolled. Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God. And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart and prospered.

Well, amen, and may God bless to us this, his word. Well, do please open your Bibles again to 2 Chronicles chapter 31.

[5 : 50] Make your mark. Cause ripples all around the world. I was at a graduation ceremony a couple of years ago, and the speech that was given to all the students was about sending ripples around the world.

Take what you've learnt, and as you take your place among the world-class graduates that have all studied here, go and change the world. Invest in something that will make a mark.

Invest your life in creating a legacy. Make your name go down in history. It's a good question, isn't it? What kind of mark will we leave on the world?

What kind of mark will we leave on the world? But away from the fanciful rhetoric of graduation ceremonies, what will be the lasting impact of our time on earth? Well, Hezekiah was a great king. From his very first day in power, he set his stall out. He wasn't a ruler simply for the first 100 days. He wasn't just interested in a fickle re-election campaign.

[6 : 56] Hezekiah turned around the trajectory of his nation after possibly the darkest period in their history. His father, Ahaz, the awful king, had looked around at the world and could see the rise of foreign powers around him.

And instead of putting his hope in the God who delivers, Ahaz put his hope in the global power of the day. And as Ahaz turned to Assyria for help, he subjugated God's people to not just a foreign power, but to their gods.

Opening the doors of the temple to all kinds of deplorable things done in the names of false gods and closing the door of the temple to true worship of the living God.

Hezekiah had begun to undo all of this. That's what happens in chapter 29. Then chapter 30, he gathers together people from all over, from Judah, even from Israel, to celebrate Passover again.

And we see in chapter 30 that the Passover is huge. Turn back to chapter 30. It's such an occasion that they want to extend the celebration.

[8 : 07] Look at 30.23. They keep it for an extra seven days. Look down a few verses to 30.26.

Since the time of Solomon, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. Hezekiah had led God's people to reformation after the reign of Wu under Ahaz.

Now there was a return to worship. And the scene is one of great joy. They want it to go on and on. There hasn't been anything like this for over 200 years.

But Hezekiah wasn't interested in just a one-off high point. And that's what we see in our passage today. Hezekiah wanted true worship of God to continue.

So steps needed to be taken for that. There were two key things needed to ensure the temple continued to be at the heart of Israel's worship. First, they needed funding.

[9 : 10] And second, they needed to lay foundations for the ongoing functioning of the temple. Funding and foundations. And so in these two sections in our passage, we see Hezekiah shaping the life of the nation to be able to keep on worshipping.

That is an investment that will leave a lasting legacy. So first, a church that is truly committed to God's word is seen in their funding of ministry, verses 2 to 8.

A church that's truly committed to God's word is seen in their funding of ministry. You see, ministry hadn't been done in Ahaz's day. The doors of the temple were shut up, unused.

The priesthood hadn't been functioning. We even see hints throughout these chapters that the priest didn't even quite know what it was they were to do. They were so out of practice. So Hezekiah doesn't want the grand Passover celebration that just happened in chapter 30 to be the end of the story.

He wasn't a king for the one-off show. He was a king for the day-to-day. And the pattern of the Christian life is the same. We don't shape our lives around grand spectacles of worship.

[10 : 24] We don't live for conferences. We don't hold Christian celebrations to be the barometer of our ongoing spiritual lives. No, it's our regular, daily commitment to living lives of worship for Jesus, giving our lives as fragrant offerings.

It's in the regular, weekly participation in the life of church. So verse 2, Hezekiah appointed the divisions of priests and Levites, division by division, according to his service, for burnt offerings, for peace offerings, to minister in the gates of the camp of the Lord, and to give thanks and praise. Hezekiah was reordering the collective life of the nation so that the regular worship was happening. That was to be the mark of his reign. And that is the model for God's people in every generation. Yes, Passover was to be celebrated, but just as important was making sure that the week-by-week regular worship was happening.

So Hezekiah verse 2, makes sure that there were people able to serve where needed for the burnt offerings, the peace offerings, to minister at the gates, the musicians, to lead in praise.

[11 : 48] And this is the chronicler finishing his book, setting out a road map of blessing to God's people so that he could see what it really means to prosper. And true prospering is following Hezekiah's lead in prioritizing the collective worship of God's people.

But what must always come with ongoing worship is provision for it. For it required that these priests and Levites who've been divided up could be set apart to focus on these tasks.

That's what we see in verse 4. Hezekiah commands the people to give the portion that was due to the priests and the Levites. This is so often the litmus test of where God's people are.

The days of Ahaz were firmly put behind Judah. The temples reopened. The Passover was reinstated. People from all over the land joined together in this.

But would they commit to it in an ongoing way? When the turnaround was going to hit their wallets, when it would cost them some of their crop or their herds, what would happen then?

[13 : 01] Well, look at what happens. Verse 5. As soon as the command spread abroad, the people of Israel gave in abundance. Notice that. Instantly, as soon as the command was spread, there was instant response.

But it's not just instant. They give in abundance. Giving the first fruits, the best of what they had. giving grain, wine, oil, honey, and all of the produce.

These particular things were for the provision of the priests. They were to get the first fruits of these things. But Hezekiah's command was to provide also for the Levites. And so, verse 5, they brought in abundantly, again, the tide of everything to provide also for the Levites.

Look at verse 6. The command is exceeded in every way. They instantly responded. They responded in abundance. And verse 6, look at who it is that responds.

It's people from Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah. They brought in the tithe of sheep and cattle and dedicated things. They respond instantly. They respond in abundance.

[14 : 17] And more people than were even commanded respond. Look back at verse 4. Look at who Hezekiah makes the command to.

He commands those in Jerusalem. But then look again at verse 6. It happens throughout the whole nation. Was this spiritual revival that was happening in Judah the real thing?

Well, here's how we knew. Look at verse 7. It's an emphatic answer. They began to make heaps of all that was offered, piling up the offerings.

They began on the third month and it took them until the seventh month. So picture this. If they'd begun in the middle of June of this year, that's before a ball was kicked in the Rugby World Cup, it's around the time Theresa May was still in office and resigned.

It's before Boris Johnson was Prime Minister. If it had started way back then, then it would have continued until today. Think of all that time that's passed.

[15 : 28] Day by day, hour by hour, week by week, month by month, piling up offerings. Four months of piling up abundant offerings to provide for the ministry that would see God's people continue to worship him.

Four months piling up offerings that would provide for the ministry that would help to shape their lives to enjoy all that he's promised. Four months piling up the offerings that come as a response to remembering his grace they've just celebrated in that Passover.

You don't get a hint of any begrudging giving here. This was a generous sacrificial pouring out of praise to God four months in order to provide for the temple.

But look at what the chronicler tells us is driving this. Verse 3. Hezekiah was doing what was written in the law of the Lord. Verse 4. The provision was so that the priests and Levites could give themselves to the law of the Lord to shape the people by the word of God.

The mark of a church that's truly committed to God's word isn't just in saying that they are. It's in paying for the ministry of it. Christians very often find it incredibly hard to talk about money. [16:56] But the way that God has designed his church is that the people of the church provide for and fund the ministry from which they benefit and from which the church will grow and reach other people.

Ministry and money can't be separated. This revival in Hezekiah's day would have halted if the people were not prepared to fund it. But they did because they'd remembered grace. Similarly in the New Testament we see the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians make a staunch defense of his right to be supported by those who benefited from his ministry. In Philippians Paul tells the church that they're pouring out financial support for him was something that showed fruit in their lives. He says that in doing so it was increasing their credit. He's saying giving is good for you. He describes their funding of ministry as a fragrant offering to God. So a church budget is not a boring add-on to a yearly meeting. [18:08] It's not to tick a box to say we've covered it. A church budget is not something that concerns only the church accountant. No, it's the means of showing our wholehearted support for the ongoing ministry of the gospel.

It's God's people pouring out a fragrant offering to him. It's very often the case that what we spend our money on shows what we truly love. So it isn't just left to Margo and Richard to have a keen interest in our finances and our budget.

It's something that falls to all of us. When the church notice sheet, as I see it has today, I didn't know that was going to be there, has an update in it every quarter. It may be pleasing to some people who like statistics, who like money, it might be pleasing to those involved with the finances, but actually it's something that concerns each one of us.

So if it says that we're behind budget for the year, that's something that all of us need to consider. You see, all the money in the world belongs to God. He's got no shortage of resources, churches, but the way he's designed things is that every Christian, everyone who belongs to a church, is involved in the gospel by providing for the ministry.

His means of pouring out all the wealth and resource that are his, is through his people responding to his grace. And it is a response to grace.

[19:40] Notice that Hezekiah's command to provide, and then the overflowing response of the people starts with the king. Look at verse 3.

It flows from the king, lavishly providing for his people. Before the king makes his command, he himself pours out his contributions. And look at what he provides.

He provides the burnt offerings for morning, evening, provides the offerings for the significant times of year, and for the feasts. He provided all of these sacrifices so that the people could be assured of God's grace poured out for them.

One commentator puts it like this, the chronicler delights in demonstrating that faithful and generous kings prompt similar generosity in the population.

Hezekiah led the way for the people. In the previous chapter, we see him give, out of his own herd, 8,000 animals as an offering, 8,000.

[20:47] Hezekiah is a king who's generous and exemplary when it comes to giving offerings. He gives them so that grace may be evidently abounding in Israel. But Hezekiah's offerings, his sacrifices are but a shadow of what we have.

Our king has lavishly given much more than this so that we can be assured, certain of grace. You see, Jesus doesn't ask us to open our wallets for his work without giving us everything.

You see, our king hasn't just given animals that we might be forgiven. Listen to what the writer of the Hebrews tells us. He says that Jesus himself entered once for all into the holy places not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

We've got a king who's poured out his own blood for us, emptied himself, who embraced the loneliness of humanity and took the form of a servant for his people.

If faithful and generous kings prompt similar generosity from their people, well, we have a king who has spared nothing for us. He's left nothing back.

[22:14] He's gone before us and in giving up all things even to the point of death, he's secured for us and offers us everything. That's the gospel promise.

One day everything will be ours. And so the Bible doesn't just suggest that we worship God with our wallets. It's the right response to grace.

God has designed it in such a way, but because we have Jesus as king, we've received more and will receive much, much more than we could ever give away in this world.

So the four months of heaping up offerings was not Hezekiah and his people outdoing God. Likewise for us, we will never be able to out-give our king because he's given us and promised us everything.

And so verse 8, just as Hezekiah blessed the people for the offering, we have a king who looks at our costly sacrifices, those of us who've given generously to building funds, those of us who support mission overseas, those of us who support the regular work of the church, we have a king who looks at those offerings and they are a pleasing aroma to him.

[23 : 42] Well, that's the first mark that we've looked at this morning, funding. Ministry needs money. But we see secondly in this passage that a church that's truly committed to God's word is seen by their laying foundations for future ministry.

That's verse 9 to the end of the chapter. A church must ensure that ministry can continue to happen in the days, weeks, years, and generations ahead.

Verse 9, immediately after seeing the offerings, Hezekiah asked the priests about the heaps. His question was, is it enough?

Hezekiah was checking the budget. How are we placed for ministry? Look at verse 10. the chief priest says that since the contributions have been brought, we've had our fill and there's plenty left for the Lord has blessed his people so that there's a large amount left.

Notice there's great giving because God has blessed his people and because of the great giving and what was left, Hezekiah sees a need. The new need is storage and management of the resources.

[24 : 59] You see, Hezekiah isn't interested in a glory day or a glory year and the way to ensure that his reign was more than one big occasion was proper and prioritized provision for the priests.

So verse 11, they prepare the chambers in the temple and verse 12, they begin to bring in all the contributions to store them. But the point here is also that they bring them in in order to steward them.

The offerings were to support the priests not just for the present week, but long into the future. And so from verses 12 through to 19, what we have are various directions and details that are here to ensure the ministry of the priest is ongoing.

The details here are all about organizing to maximize ministry, organizing to allow the priests to keep serving. Verse 10, they've already had their fill.

This is using what's left, putting structures in place to support and aid and invest in ministry for the months and years ahead. So verse 12, Kunaniah is put in charge of the resources and he's given his brother to assist him.

[26 : 19] Verse 13, they've got 10 others. And the detail continues. Verse 14, Korah was placed over the other offerings to make sure the apportioning was right. It's all done in careful, precise order to look after and to be shrewd about what they have.

Korah himself has given six helpers to look after the priests in the cities. Verse 15, So we see here that there isn't just a copious offering to see that ministry could happen, but there's careful oversight.

These details all spell out who was to get what. Those in verse 19 who had fields to work in so that they could provide for themselves, well, they were going to get a different provision from those who didn't have fields.

And there was care about who was enrolled and thus provided for. it's all done so carefully and to order, carefully administered to maximize what could be done.

Nothing going to waste. So some people would get more than others depending on need, but it was only the right people who would get anything. So we see in Hezekiah's day that there wasn't just a sizable and plentiful investment, but structured and planned implementation.

[27 : 37] All of this so that the ministry could keep happening. You see, the greatest disaster for Israel, for Judah, the greatest disaster for all God's people is ceasing to worship God, is to not have His word at work amongst us.

That's what leads to exile. That's what leads to the crumbling of someone's experience of God's kingdom. We, of course, now live in this age with the knowledge that the church will not be snuffed out.

Jesus said that even the gates of hell will not prevail against His church. So we can continue to do what churches are to do. We can do it safe in the knowledge that God is powerfully behind it. But we also knew that there needs to be preparation for that. For whilst His church will not be overcome, any local church could be. How many church buildings do we see up for seal around the country?

How many weather spoons do we see that used to be churches? We must not be complacent about this. Foundations need to be in place to ensure that ministry will keep happening.

[28 : 54] And that means money, as we've seen. Indeed, money is a great way to bless the work of the church, even after we're gone. The one certainty at our annual church meetings is Richard Henry's plug for the legacy.

But that is one definite way to invest, to cause a ripple that will last for God's kingdom long after we're gone. But the foundations here are about more than just money.

It's laying foundations in any way that will enable gospel work, even after we're gone. So I want to draw attention to a few things that that might mean for us. It certainly means training and developing future generations of gospel workers.

As a church, we have a fairly sizable staff team, but that's not just for now. Having people on staff training with us is investing in the future.

Having a steady stream of people as apprentices, as ministers in training, is organizing for ministry to keep on happening. And isn't it an exciting prospect to think about where some of our staff might be in 10 or 20 years' time, where the gospel will be being ministered perhaps all over Scotland long after we're in glory.

[30 : 14] So each time you put up with a blue-par sermon from someone like me, that's laying foundations for the future. That's investing so that the gospel and ministry can continue in years ahead.

laying foundations means being prepared not just to give money to ministry, but people.

So as parents or grandparents, we want all kinds of things for our children and grandchildren, but we must also be prepared to let them or even encourage them away from a respectable or lucrative career to ensure that ministry can keep happening.

Maybe they would be a great doctor, a great teacher, a great engineer, a great whatever it is. But if the greatest need is for people to be trained for ministry, then it will be an act of pleasing worship of God to give that up.

But notice the names that are given in this passage. They aren't all names of the priests who would be doing the ministry, but we do have the names of all those who would be ensuring that it happens.

[31 : 30] Those who were part of the structures that were in place to ensure that it could happen. What a noble service that is. The world might think it crazy for people to give up a potentially successful career to do administration in the church, but that is ensuring that ministry can keep on happening.

It might not seem glamorous, but that too is a pleasing sacrifice to God. Sometimes what's required to ensure that ministry can keep on happening into the future is rejigging how things are done, reassigning, redeploying resources in different ways to maximize what we have so that we can see more people reached with the gospel of Jesus.

So it might mean deciding to stop some ministries to use those resources better, to put attention and resources where we'll be best able to reach the hundreds of thousands of people in Glasgow who only know darkness.

A good question to always be asking for a church is how can we ensure that more ministry can be happening? More people reached, more people rescued, more people being refined into the image of Christ, more people being resourced to do more ministry.

Well, as that large room full of new graduates were told to leave a lasting legacy, to invest their lives in making ripples, the truth is that few of them will probably do anything that the world will notice.

[33 : 11] But we have the opportunity to leave a lasting legacy, one that will ripple into eternity, one which will serve God's kingdom now and in generations to come, even when we're in glory.

And as we do it, it is a fragrant offering to God. Hezekiah in doing this, verse 20, did what was good and right and faithful before the Lord.

He's commended for it. And look at verse 21. The chronicler makes clear that the path to prospering, that's how he finishes this off.

He prospered. The path to prospering is the path of prioritizing the ministry of God's word for God's people so that God's people can be doing what the Bible says, so that God's people can be assured of the grace poured out in Christ.

All that our King has lavishly offered to us, all that Jesus has promised and offered is ours as we commit to being a church that truly loves God's word. True prospering, which is prospering into eternity, comes to all those who place God's kingdom, his church, at the center of their lives and pour out their substance to serve it.

[34 : 42] Every work that Hezekiah undertook in the service of the house of God in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart and prospered.

Let's pray. Lord, help us to fix our eyes on what will last.

Christ, we ask that you would guide our hearts to invest our lives, not in the ephemeral things of this world, but in what will count both now and into eternity.

So spare us from what might drag us away and tempt us, so that it would be our delight to see many come to know Jesus, many matured through your Son, for we pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.