

“Finding our Future in our Past and Living the Eternal in the Temporal”
2 Chronicles 20:1-30

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 Title: Jehoshaphat sought the LORD through repentance
 Text: 2 Chronicles 20:1-4
 Theme: We must repent of our past and press forward in our pursuit of the Lord.

Introduction:

Our study for the next four Sundays is entitled, “Finding our Future in our Past and Living the Eternal in the Temporal.” There are two parts to this idea. First, “finding our future in our past” suggests that we have a history that has brought us to this point and that we must have an eye to the future that is being shaped in this moment, right now. Second, “living the eternal in the temporal” suggests that life is not simply going through the motions of our routines and demands, but that what we will be is what we should be right now. With this in mind I would like us to consider “Finding our Future in our Past and Living the Eternal in the Temporal.”

The month of January has always been a time for looking back to the past, and more importantly, forward to the coming year. It's a time to reflect on the changes we want (or need) to make and resolve to follow through on those changes. One website noted the following ten resolutions that most Americans make.

- Spend More Time with Family & Friends
- Fit in Fitness
- Tame the Bulge
- Quit Smoking
- Enjoy Life More
- Quit Drinking
- Get Out of Debt
- Learn Something New
- Help Others
- Get Organized

I believe as a fellowship as we look to the past and project toward the future, there are four resolutions we should consider for the year before us. I will note those four resolutions shortly.

Every Christian ministry is cyclical in nature. It has its peaks and valleys, its times of growth, struggle, neutrality, and deepening. Our fellowship is no

different. As we look forward to the next year we cannot forget the lessons from our past.

George Santayana said, "Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

During the month of January, I would like to invite you to consider the story of King Jehoshaphat of Judah with me.

"Jehoshaphat, (His name means "Yahweh has judged") was the fourth king of Judah, and son of Asa. His mother was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. He was thirty-five years of age at time of accession, and reigned twenty-five years, from about 873 to 849 BC." <http://www.ldolphin.org/pornkings.html>

The story of King Jehoshaphat's 25-year reign simply glows with his devotion to the LORD. He never once fell into the pagan religion or practices that plagued neighboring Israel, and many of Judah's kings as well. Much of his story is a record of his religious reforms, detailed below.
http://www.geocities.com/thekingsofisrael/biography_Jehoshaphat.html

Notice an initial contrast between the book of Kings and that of Chronicles.

Kings

Prophetic Perspective
Wars Very Prominent
Fortunes of the Throne
Israel and Judah Mentioned
Morality

Chronicles

Priestly Perspective
Temple Very Prominent
Development of Davidic Line
Primarily of Judah
Redemption

Initially there are three ideas about Jehoshaphat that will guide us in this four-part study.

- First, Jehoshaphat was of royal lineage
- Second, Jehoshaphat made poor alliances

The great mistake of his reign was his entering into an alliance with **Ahab**, the king of Israel, which involved him in much disgrace, and brought disaster on his kingdom (1 Kings 22:1-33).

Again he entered into an alliance with **Ahaziah**, the king of Israel, for the purpose of carrying on maritime commerce with Ophir (2 Chron. 20:35-37; 1 Kings 22:48-49).

He subsequently joined **Jehoram**, king of Israel, in a war against the Moabites, who were under tribute to Israel (2 Kings 3:4-27).

http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/dictionaries/dict_meaning.php?source=1&wid=T0002014

- Third, Jehoshaphat sought the LORD (2 Chron. 20:1-4)

In verse three, the statement is made that Jehoshaphat “turned his attention to seek the LORD.” The word “turned his attention” is the Hebrew word “Natan.” Our English word “Nathan” is a transliteration of the Hebrew word. It means, “to give.” It is used in 100 references in 2 Chronicles alone. Jehoshaphat gave himself over to seeking the LORD. He became singular in his focus and intense in his expenditure of energy.

The good kings of Judah are all described as those who sought the LORD (2 Chron. 14:4, 7). All the bad kings are described as those who did not seek the LORD (2 Chron. 12:14). The idea behind seeking the LORD is best captured in chapter 15 with the exhortation of the prophet Azariah to King Asa of Judah. Listen to the weight of this idea as presented in the Chronicler.

“And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you” (2 Chron. 15:2).

“And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers **with all their heart and with all their soul**; That whosoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman” (2 Chron. 15:12).

(This idea of God’s response being conditional is not true in the New Testament because we live under the covenant of grace, not law, but the point I would make is that their “seeking” was intense precisely because God’s favor *was* conditional)

Jehoshaphat is identified as one of those who sought after the LORD. Consider the following three statements.

“And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and **sought not** unto Baalim” (2 Chron. 17:3).

“But **sought to the LORD God of his father**, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel” (2 Chron. 17:4).

“And Jehoshaphat feared, and **set himself to seek the LORD**, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah” (2 Chron. 20:3).

There is enormous power behind this idea of seeking the Lord (2 Chron. 15:12, 13). There is nothing casual or splintered or accidental in this pursuit. Consider the various ideas that are coupled with that of seeking the LORD.

“Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and **hast prepared thine heart to seek** God” (2 Chron. 19:3).

“And he sought Ahaziah: and they caught him, (for he was hid in Samaria,) and brought him to Jehu: and when they had slain him, they buried him: Because, said they, he is the son of Jehoshaphat, **who sought the LORD with all his heart**. So the house of Ahaziah had no power to keep still the kingdom” (2 Chron. 22:9).

“That **prepareth his heart to seek God**, the LORD God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary” (2 Chron. 30:19).

“And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, **he did it with all his heart**, and prospered” (2 Chron. 31:21).

There is intent and design behind seeking the Lord. As a fellowship, I am asking that we prepare our hearts individually and collectively to seek the LORD with our entire being, with every area of our life.

Often we seek the Lord only when the odds against us are impossible. It is then that we begin to fear. Fear is not always a bad thing, if it drives us to the Lord.

“He found that he could not possibly stand against such a numerous army, and therefore could not expect to be delivered except by the strong arm of God. To get this assistance, it was necessary to *seek* it; and to get such *extraordinary* help, they should seek it in an *extraordinary way*; hence he proclaimed a *universal fast*, and all the people came up to Jerusalem to seek the Lord.” (Adam Clarke’s Commentary on 2 Chronicles 20:3)

“In all dangers, public or personal, our first business should be to seek help from God. Hence the advantage of days for national fasting and prayer. From the first to the last of our seeking the Lord, we must approach him with humiliation for our sins, trusting only in his mercy and power. Jehoshaphat acknowledges the sovereign dominion of the Divine Providence. Lord, exert it on our behalf. Whom should we seek to, whom should we trust to for relief, but the God we have chosen and served.” (Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary on 2 Chronicles 20)

Listen to the first four verses of chapter 20.

¹ “Now it came about after this that the sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon, together with some of the Meunites, came to make war against Jehoshaphat. ² Then some came and reported to Jehoshaphat, saying, ‘A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, out of Aram and behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar (that is Engedi).’ ³ Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. ⁴ So

Judah gathered together to seek help from the LORD; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the LORD” (2 Chron. 20:1-4).

The odds were certainly against Jehoshaphat.

“The last most notable event of his reign was that recorded in 2 Chr. 20. The Moabites formed a great and powerful confederacy with the surrounding nations, and came against Jehoshaphat. The allied forces were encamped at Engedi. The king and his people were filled with alarm, and betook themselves to God in prayer. The king prayed in the court of the temple, "O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us." Amid the silence that followed, the voice of Jahaziel the Levite was heard announcing that on the morrow all this great host would be overthrown. So it was, for they quarrelled among themselves, and slew one another, leaving to the people of Judah only to gather the rich spoils of the slain. This was recognized as a great deliverance wrought for them by God (B.C. 890).”http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/dictionaries/dict_meaning.php?source=1&wid=T0002014

How did Jehoshaphat seek the LORD?

Jehoshaphat sought the LORD through repentance, fasting, prayer, and surrenderance. These four actions on his part did not obligate God to act. These four expressions are activities of the Holy Spirit in us, through which God is seen and glorified. They testify, not of our spirituality, but of God’s grace. These “disciplines” are not tasks or chores; they are blessings, benefits, treasures, privileges to be enjoyed, tasted, and celebrated. They are not done with a spirit of mourning, but with enthusiasm. They are not things we “have to do,” but rather things we are privileged to do.

These four actions on our part are reminders that the battle is not ours but God’s (2 Chron. 20:15).

The prophet Jahaziel spoke to King Jehoshaphat and said, “Listen, all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: thus says the LORD to you, ‘Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God’s.’” (2 Chron. 20:15)

What does this mean for us?

First, as believers we are of royal lineage. This puts us in the right place.

Second, as believers we often find ourselves making poor alliances with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Third, as believers we need to seek the Lord through repentance, fasting, prayer, and surrenderance.

This morning I would like us to consider the first of four ways that expressed how Jehoshaphat sought the Lord – through repentance.

Jehoshaphat was a man of great diplomatic skill, and his biggest weakness was his habit of forming alliances with evil men — first with Israel's King Ahab, then later with Ahab's son King Ahaziah, and finally with Ahab's son King Jehoram. The LORD soundly reprimanded him for supporting sin in that way.

In spite of this weakness, Jehoshaphat must be remembered as one of the great heroes of faith, completely dedicated to God.

http://www.geocities.com/thekingsofisrael/biography_Jehoshaphat.html

The great mistake of his reign was his entering into an alliance with **Ahab**, the king of Israel, which involved him in much disgrace, and brought disaster on his kingdom (1 Kings 22:1-33). Escaping from the bloody battle of Ramoth-gilead, the prophet Jehu (2 Chr. 19:1-3) reproached him for the course he had been pursuing, whereupon he entered with rigour on his former course of opposition to all idolatry, and of deepening interest in the worship of God and in the righteous government of the people (2 Chr. 19:4-11).

Again he entered into an alliance with **Ahaziah**, the king of Israel, for the purpose of carrying on maritime commerce with Ophir. But the fleet that was then equipped at Ezion-gaber was speedily wrecked. A new fleet was fitted out without the co-operation of the king of Israel, and although it was successful, the trade was not prosecuted (2 Chr. 20:35-37; 1 Kings 22:48-49).

He subsequently joined **Jehoram**, king of Israel, in a war against the Moabites, who were under tribute to Israel. This war was successful. The Moabites were subdued; but the dreadful act of Mesha in offering his own son a sacrifice on the walls of Kir-haresheth in the sight of the armies of Israel filled him with horror, and he withdrew and returned to his own land (2 Kings 3:4-27).

http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/dictionaries/dict_meaning.php?source=1&wid=T0002014

Jehoshaphat consistently turned from his poor choices and sought the LORD through repentance. Failure is never fatal if you learn from your mistakes and continue in your pursuit of the LORD. Repentance is a part of every normal Christian lifestyle. Repentance is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that He is working in us and through us to those around us.

I am not asking you for morbid introspection, but if your spiritual expression is clogged by past sins and present bondage, then I would call you to repentance and confession. It is never too late for repentance and confession.

As an individual I am called to repent and as the pastor of this fellowship and a member of the elder council I am calling this fellowship to church wide repentance.

What are the dangerous conformities and common patterns that seduce us away from repentance and confession?

Repentance and confession takes humility. It must have the ability to say, “I am wrong and I have sinned against God and man.” In the absence of repentance and confession you do not have genuine saving faith.

Repentance has been much debated theologically as to its place in the Christian life. Regardless as to what or how or why one might repent, everyone everywhere at all times must repent. Repentance is not a declaration of our commitment or devotion, but of our contrition and desperation. We repent because we are a needy people. Repentance is here to stay for a long time. The only time believers will not be repenting is after they leave this temporal existence and start living in the eternal.

As we consider seeking the Lord through repentance, I would like to ask four questions. First, what is repentance?

I. What is repentance?

Repentance is found throughout the Old Testament and means “to change direction” either physically or intellectually. The idea is that of going in a different direction than what you were. In the New Testament, it is decidedly a justification term and not a sanctification term and it is not used heavily by Paul. In fact, John never uses the word in his gospel. John’s favorite word is “believe” or “faith.” Whereas Paul uses the idea of “putting off” to describe what the believer does after justification.

Yet what is repentance? Repentance simply means to turn from. **Confession of sin is verbalized repentance and repentance is visualized confession.** They are two sides of one coin. All believers confess sin and repent from it simply because it is a work of the Holy Spirit in all of His people. It is like John exhorting believers to love one another for without it the love of God is not in them. Believers have no option but to love. So it is with confession and repentance.

This brings us to our second point in our study.

II. Why do I repent?

Some people see confession and repentance as the first step before justification and others see it as a necessary component to progressive sanctification. In fact, they see it as the first act to “walking with God” so much so that in its absence no one can be in fellowship with God and thus walk with God.

This is not the emphasis Scripture places on this particular fruit. It is part of our daily walk with the Lord only in so far that we still have an old nature, but it has no less or more value than any other works of the Holy Spirit.

Repentance is not something I think about, no more than do I think about loving you. I simply do it as the occasion arises. Repentance is me agreeing with God in confession and turning from my sin in repentance. Yet neither confession nor repentance is possible apart from the Holy Spirit producing this fruit in me.

In attempting to answer the question, “Why do I repent?” let me begin with three negative reasons.

- I do not repent to gain greater intimacy with God.
- I do not repent to merit favor or earn extra blessings.
- I do not repent to restore broken fellowship.

So . . . if these are not the reasons as to why I repent, “Why do I repent?”

- I repent because it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that He works in me and through me.
- I repent because I still sin due to my old nature which loves sin more than God.
- I repent because it pleases the Father to see this fruit of the Holy Spirit in me.
- I repent because it allows more of Jesus to be manifested in and through my earthen vessel.

This is why I repent. I repent because of past failure and present compromise. I repent because I do what I should not, and fail to do what I should.

This brings us to our third point in our study.

III. From what do I repent?

I repent from the weights and the sins that so easily entangle me (Heb. 12:1, 2). Some things that I repent of are not sins to anyone but me. Some things I repent of are sins plain and simple.

- I repent of improper desires.
 - This addresses my purity.
- I repent of laziness and sloth.
 - This addresses my diligence.
- I repent of pride in failed recognition.
 - This addresses my humility.

- I repent of envy when I despise another person's prosperity.
 - This addresses my contentment.
- I repent of gluttony.
 - This addresses my abstinence.
- I repent of greed and ingratitude.
 - This addresses my liberality.
- I repent of hateful anger.
 - This addresses my charity.

Our lists might be different, but there are lists nonetheless. I do not have to deal with every sin every day, but these are the kinds of things that confront all of us. The first items listed are the seven deadly sins and the second items are the seven heavenly virtues.

This brings us to our fourth point in our study.

IV. What should I expect from repentance?

The great thing about our relationship to God is that it is not based on or sourced in what we do, but in what He has done. Repentance does not affect who I am before the Father. Although all of this is true, repentance does have a place in the Christian life.

- When I repent I am agreeing with God about my weights and sins.
- When I repent I am manifesting the Holy Spirit through my earthen vessel.
- When I repent I am more like Jesus in what I communicate to those around me.

Repentance is both individual and corporate. There are sins I struggle with that no one else is aware of. There are other areas in which I choose to make myself accountable. In this accounting, I am confessing and repenting. There is an honesty and transparency that can only exist in the context of confession and repentance. If we will not be honest with ourselves and if we cannot be honest with others, then biblical intimacy through confession and repentance will be impossible to enjoy.

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here? What is the NEXT STEP?)

Listen to the exhortation by C.H. Spurgeon the great Baptist pastor in London during the late 1800's.

“Oh! men and brethren, what would this heart feel if I could but believe that there were some among you who would go home and pray for a revival. Men whose faith is large enough, and their love fiery enough to lead them from this moment to exercise unceasing intercessions that God would appear among us

and do wondrous things here, as in the times of former generations.” C. H. Spurgeon

This thought leads me to four NEXT STEPS.

First, what weights do you have in your life that are not sins for other people but are for you?

You need to identify these weights and repent of them. This does not demand a prayer for discovery. You already know what they are.

Second, what sins do you have in your life that are biblical commissions or omissions?

You need to identify these sins and repent of them. This does not demand a prayer for discovery. You already know what they are. Let’s be honest and transparent and move on.

Third, who can you confide in and share your struggles without fear of condemnation?

Everyone needs someone that will be a friend, someone with whom you can share your personal struggles without fear of condemnation.

Fourth, who have you betrayed when they have come to you and you judged them without love and grace?

You need to repent of your ungracious attitude and apologize to them where possible.

I am calling us to seek the Lord through repentance. Let us confront our past and present failures and then step over them in our pursuit of the Lord.

Listen to the rest of the story . . .

First, they engaged in reverent worship (v. 18).

Second, they united in joyful praise (v. 21).

Third, they formed orderly procession (v. 24).

Finally, they fought in confidence of victory (v. 7).

May God give us an honesty that confronts our sin and then looks to the cross and Christ for our victory.