

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dearly Beloved,

For the last 2 Sundays of this mini-season of Michaelmas we have meditated on the Lord's gift of sending ministers to proclaim the Gospel, as well as what that Gospel actually is, the forgiveness, or absolution, of sins.

On this Sunday of Michaelmas 3, we consider the spiritual battle around us and inside of us.

It is a constant battle, not one that we ever completely win until we stop breathing.

And while we all recognize that there is a spiritual battle, we get fatigued with it very quickly.

But let us consider our text and the examples that the Lord puts before us of those who both fought that fight and those did not.

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

... Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign. ... And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done. He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it.... He trusted in the Lord... For he held fast to the Lord. He did not depart from following Him, but kept the commandments.... And the Lord was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him.

... In the sixth year of Hezekiah, ... Samaria was taken. The king of Assyria carried the Israelites away to Assyria ... because they did not obey the voice of the Lord their God but transgressed His covenant.... They neither listened nor obeyed. ^(ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* (John 17:17)

A few months ago, we meditated on the division of the united kingdom of Israel under Solomon's son, King Rehoboam.

The northern 10 tribes went under King Jeroboam who led them astray from the beginning by setting up two golden calves and mimicking the authorized services conducted in Jerusalem. Under this new religion, many of the faithful in the north and many of the Levites moved down to Judah where they would be able to continue to serve the Lord as He had commanded. But there were still some, like Naboth's family who remained on their allotted inheritance, but it was not an easy lot, as the story of Naboth's vineyard demonstrates.

For about 225 years, God had contended with and patiently warned the northern Kingdom of Israel.

But every single king they ever had, all 19 of them, did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following after the sins of Jeroboam and establishing their own.

The Lord had sent prophets, servants, to them, some well-known, others unnamed.

Those prophets reminded the people of God's covenant that He had made through Moses and the temporal and eternal consequences for transgressing His covenant.

Their warnings weren't to absolutely no avail; some heeded and repented and believed.

But as a whole, the people and their kings were guilty of neither **listening to nor obeying the voice of the Lord or His covenant**, as we heard in our text.

They acted like those initially invited to the wedding feast in our Gospel:

who **paid no attention and went off to their own business**, indifferent to the proclamation.

Some, however, **seized the prophets, treated them shamefully, and killed them.**
And so we're told that the Lord, like the king in the Gospel reading,
sent the Assyrian troops and destroyed those murderers and the indifferent hearers alike.

As a whole, the Kingdom of Israel did not persevere in the faith.

In fact, should we be surprised about how quickly they fell headlong into false worship and belief,
worshipping in places, times, ways and through people that were authorized, not commanded,
by God, yet believing that they could remain faithful to God through these other means?
It wasn't long before the Baals and the Asherahs were brought in.
But this was the social, political, and cultural progress that was taking place in Israel in those days.

In the south, the Kingdom of Judah didn't always fare much better.

While they had many kings that "**did what was right in the eyes of the Lord,**"
They also had some very wicked rulers who "**did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord**"
even some who "**walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.**"
And along with these kings, were also some priests and high priests as wicked as they.

In fact, before Hezekiah ruled, his father, King Ahaz, had been such a wicked king,
and the priest with him had also proved faithless to the Lord when Ahaz commanded him
to set aside the Lord's altar and set up another, more elaborate altar after the design
of an altar to an idol that King Ahaz had seen in Damascus.

Hezekiah, at age 25 when he began to reign, had lived through the last 16 years
of his father's faithless reign.

He had no doubt seen his father **burn his son** [Hezekiah's brother] **as an offering...**

And **sacrifice ... on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree.**^{2 Kings 16:3-4}
He must have been there when his father, instead of calling upon the Lord for help,
had called upon Tiglath-pileser, the Assyrian King, to deliver him from Israel and Syria's attacks.
And the people of Judah followed right along after him.

You can be sure there were people who never went along with Ahaz's idolatrous reforms.
You can be as equally sure that there were people who wouldn't go along with it at first,
but later joined... or whose children joined in because it was the "cool thing" to do.
You can be absolutely positive that there were some who not only followed,
but even encouraged and rooted for the welcomed idolatrous changes of King Ahaz.

It was under this atmosphere that Hezekiah began to reign.

From the get-go, he was fighting an uphill battle, rooting out the idolatry of the previous decades.
Perhaps you might think that this would be easy for the king to do, since he has absolute power.
And we're told that **the Lord was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered.**

It makes it sound so easy, so effortless, as if he never struggled. But don't be fooled.
Just as one example, next week we will hear how Assyria's army came up against him,
threatening to do what they had so ruthlessly done to every other city they had laid siege to.
But Hezekiah persevered, not because he was some great king, but because he had a great King,
His heavenly Father and Lord whom he served, in whom he **trusted** and to whom he **held fast**,

and **did not depart from following Him, but kept the commandments.**

We see the meaning in his name hold true, for "Hezekiah" means, "Yahweh strengthens."
Hezekiah wasn't only working to change the people's habits, but their hearts.

Sure, **he removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah.**

But how maddening do you think that was for the people who used them?

We get a taste of what, no doubt, many misunderstood was happening

when an Assyrian general accused him of tearing down God's altars on the high places.

How confusing for the people when **he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made.**

That was a national artifact! A relic of their historic wandering in the wilderness!

But because it had been a snare for the people, because they were offering incense to it,

He removed their temptation from them so they could direct it correctly at the Temple.

It is to this Hezekiah that we would like to compare ourselves to, isn't it?

We would like God to say of us that we were faithful, that we **trusted** and **held fast** to Him alone
and **did not depart from following Him, but kept the commandments.**

But let us be honest with ourselves. This is not what we see in our own lives.

How can we say we keep His commandments when we struggle to recite or explain them?

How can we say we trust Him when we fear the opinions of the world, and love its approval?

How can we hold fast to the Lord, when we don't even hold fast to our spouse(future) He gave us,
but indulge in, even welcome, the stray sights and thoughts and pleasures of another?

How could we ever believe that we do not depart from following Him

when we find ourselves growing tired of hearing His voice continually say the same thing
week after week: "*I forgive you all your sins. ... I am with you. ... I bless and keep you...*"

and so we tire to come to hear it week after week?

So instead, we find we are more like the wishy-washy people of Judah,

who need the Lord to send a Hezekiah to us, to be our King and Savior,

to **remove the** unauthorized worship that we have set up on the **high places** in our hearts
and to **br[eak] the pillars and cut down the Asherah** of our unchaste desires.

To break in pieces the relics of any thoughts in ourselves of our own worthiness before Him.

And in their place to establish the true religion that does not depart from following Him,
and instill in us the delight to meditate on His law day and night

so that we may **keep His commandments** with a clean conscience,

not trusting in our own works or merits, but **holding fast** to His alone,

and desiring to be wrapped up in them as one would put on a wedding garment.

Thanks be to God, that He has sent such a One to you, your King and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Who not only tears down and effaces Adam's likeness in you, but imprints His image in its place.

Who requires no sacrifice of your child to appease His wrath

but instead has yielded up Himself in death on the cross as the Son of God,

as the only and all-sufficient sacrifice to remove your guilt and sin before His heavenly Father.

This, my fellow redeemed, Jesus is indeed our Hezekiah: The Lord, "Yahweh, strengthens".

He is a King worth and worthy of **following, listening to and obeying.**

Who tells you all you need to hear and trust as He invites you to the heavenly banquet that
He Himself has prepared you for by daily clothing you in His wedding garment
through your Baptism, drowning your sins and evil lusts, and wrapping you in His holiness.
He invites you to the heavenly banquet, the Holy Supper, that He Himself has prepared for you
And as He gives you His holy Body and Blood to strengthen and preserve you
to keep you from fatiguing each week as you daily fight.
It is He who daily calls out to you with the message that gives you strength to persevere
until life's last breath: "**I forgive you. ... I am with you. ... I *bless you and keep you.***"

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria