

K is for Kings (Southern Kingdom part 2)

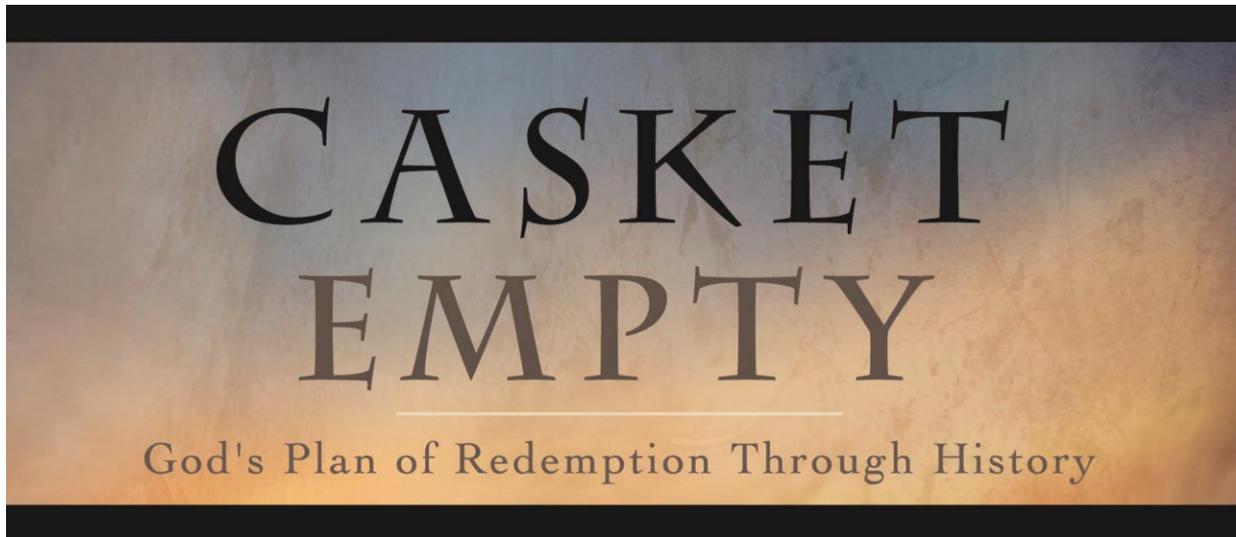
CASKET EMPTY Sermon Series

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

November 12, 2017

TEXT: 2 Kings 2:1-20



How fitting it is that we can come to the Word of God asking that God would speak and instruct us today. The passage that we heard read for us is one of the most remarkable passages in the whole Bible. It's a passage about what happens to an individual, to a leadership group, and to a nation when the Word of God is read and heard and comes into our lives. Please keep your Bible open to 2 Kings 22. We have been going through a series this fall at Kenwood, *CASKET EMPTY, God's Plan of Redemption through History*, and we are looking at how the Bible can and should be read as a single, narrative of redemption. When you understand this single story, it's much easier to find your place within that story and to live out of it. Let's review very quickly where we have been so far: C is for CREATION; A is for ABRAHAM; S is for SINAI; K is for KINGS, and that's where we are in the narrative this morning. The God who makes the world creates us in His image and likeness. Though we fall and disobey Him, He initiates this plan of redemption with the call of Abraham, an idolater from Ur, and leads him and his descendants to Mount Sinai in the place of God's covenant. He brings them into the land and they are to listen and obey Him. As we've seen the last few weeks as we have looked at the narrative portion of the kings, which occupies a tremendous amount of space in the Old Testament—1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles,—the ministry of the major prophets is all during this period. We have seen the last few weeks that the leadership in Israel and Judah don't follow the Lord

and that this provokes God as Lord of the covenant to judgment.

This morning, we turn to the kingship of Josiah. It is one of the bright spots in the narrative and deeply instructive for us. So, let's jump right in and let the Word of God speak and teach us how to walk in His ways. We learn in 2 Kings 22 that Josiah was young. I don't know what you were doing when you were eight, but when I was eight years old, I received the best birthday gift of that year from my dad: a book about venomous animals, and I loved it. That's what I was doing when I was eight. When Josiah was eight, he became king. He was eight years old and he began to reign, and his reign was 31 years. Josiah dies at age 39, but his reign is a long one. We hear that his mother's name was Jedidah and that she herself was the daughter of Adaiah. You will notice that all three of those names, Josiah, Jedidah, and Adaiah, end with "iah" or "ah." That is the short form of Yahweh. That's important to notice, because Josiah and his mother and his grandmother have names that call to our mind Yahweh, the Lord of the covenant, the true and living God. Josiah begins to reign in 640 BC, and we are told something that we hardly ever hear in this portion of Scripture. We are told that he did what was right. Isn't that thrilling to hear? Isn't it thrilling to hear of a leader that they did what was right, and they did what was right, not in their own eyes. We all can do that. You don't need the gospel to do that. You can wake up in the morning and do that without anyone instructing you to do it, but Josiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He walked in all the way of David his father. He did not turn aside to the right or to the left. Faithfulness in Scripture is lived out. It is love in action. It is not simply an affection, but it can be observed, and Josiah lived and walked in a way that was pleasing to God, and he did what was right in His eyes. What a strong contrast this is with Josiah's immediate predecessors. Josiah's predecessors as king of Judah were Manasseh and his son Amon. Let me remind you about Manasseh. Manasseh was the worst king that Judah ever had, and the worst part about it was he reigned for a really long time. Manasseh was 12 years old, we read in 2 Kings 21, when he began to reign, and he reigned for 55 years. Let me tell you what he did. The narrative says in 2 Kings 21:2:

"And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel."

Remember, way back in Genesis 15 when the Lord cut the covenant with Abraham, He said: "It's not time yet for you to inherit the land. It is not the moment for you to dispossess the Amorites because their sin hasn't reached the full measure. But Manasseh wanted to live like the ways of the nations that had been kicked out of the land, and that is described in horrific detail in 2 Kings 21:3:

"For he rebuilt the high places that Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them."

We read that Manasseh lead people astray to do more evil than the nations had done whom the Lord destroyed before Israel came to the land. This is an incredible statement, and the Lord says he will judge the nation. Manasseh's son, Amon, reigns for two years. He takes the reign when he is 22 years old, and we are told that he walked in all the ways of his father Manasseh, serving the idols and worshipping them, and then it is said in summary of Amon's reign that he abandoned the Lord, the God of his fathers, and did not walk in His ways. What a devastating prelude. Amon is struck down by a conspiracy, and the people of the land grab this young boy, Josiah, and say: "Would you lead us in the ways of the Lord?"

Can you imagine? Eight years old! So what does he do when he begins to reign? We are not told a tremendous amount about his early years, but we are told in 2 Chronicles that in the eighth year of his reign, when he was 16 years old, Josiah began to seek the God of David. That is why student ministry is so important. You can resolve when you're 16 years old to say: "You know what? I don't care how the people around me have abandoned God. I am 16 years old, and I am resolving to seek after the God of my ancestor David, and I want to discover what it means to walk in His ways." When Josiah was 20, we are told that he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the idolatry of the land. When we come back into the narrative of 2 Kings, we reach this pivotal moment in 2 Kings 22:3, in the 18th year of his reign and Josiah is 26 years old. At this point, he sends Shaphan to the house of the Lord. Shaphan in Hebrew means the *rock badger*. I think that's got to be a nickname. *Mr. Rock Badger* is a good choice if you are choosing leading positions of state, especially people who are going to do accounting and keep track of funds and hold people accountable. So Shaphan goes to the house of the Lord by the king's command. He is told in 2 Kings 22:4:

"Go up to Hilkiyah the high priest, that he may count the money that has been brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people."

Shaphan is like the Tom McGregor of Kenwood. We have a whole team of people that count the money. Do know that it takes \$20,000 a week to run the ministry of Kenwood? This is an extraordinary place. Not all of you are at all the ministry that happens here. Today, for our KBC Thanksgiving meal, we will have turkey for 320 people. That's an exciting thought, and this is the fourth large meal that has happened here in the past four days. There's a lot of ministry that happens here. What a powerful service we had here yesterday in memory of our dear brother Frank Russell. Thursday night, we hosted the churches of the Miami Association and stirred our hearts towards faithfulness. Last evening, we hosted a dinner for the Japanese Fellowship. God is at work here.

Josiah sends *Rock Badger* to go to the high priest to count the money, and we read that this is money that has actually been given for the repair and upkeep of the temple. It costs \$20,000 a

week to run the ministry of Kenwood, and we praise God for that and I praise God for your faithfulness in giving. If you're not regularly giving, I want to encourage you to do so. The best way for the church is when people give automatically. It really helps stabilize the budget. See Pastor Glenn if you'd like to get involved with that. We have also benefited from people's remembering Kenwood in their estates. I just want praise God publicly because Dick Lyons, who served as pastor of this church for 14 years and went to be with the Lord, remembered Kenwood and we received a generous gift from his estate this week. We praise God for that. This task, though, before us in this passage, is the money that was set aside for the repair. Lyle Fiore and I were counting how much money has been put into the building in the last 10 or so years. We calculated that about \$750,000 has been invested to keep this building running and looking good. Just recently, the youth room was renovated. It cost \$26,000 to do that. The parking lot had smooth lines painted on it. It cost \$34,000 to do that. The chapel roof was repaired, and that cost \$30,000. New carpet has been put in the Multipurpose Room and there's a plan for the entryway. All those funds to keep the ministry going. People walk on those carpets. The remarkable thing about this group in 2 Kings is that the money was given to the subcontractors, the carpenters, builders, and masons, and no accounting had to be done, because they dealt honestly. Is that how you work with your contractors—just give them the money because they are honest? We can't even imagine a world like that. And yet, this is what's happening here. It is like a business administrator's dream. Well, Shaphan goes for the reckoning of the funds to see how the repair of the house of the Lord is coming, and things are going well, but the narrative takes a decisive turn in 2 Kings 22:8. Hilkiyah, the high priest, comes out to Shaphan, presumably after telling him that the repairs are going well, the workers are doing what they're supposed to be doing, the house of the Lord is in increasingly good shape, but he said to Shaphan:

"I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.' And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it."

In Hebrew, this is just one word: *wa-yikraehu*, "and he read it." Shaphan read the book, and after reading the book, Shaphan came back to report to the king, and he frontloaded the fact. He said in 2 Kings 22:9:

"Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD."

He doesn't give any details about the repair work, but he comes right back into focus on this book. In 2 Kings 22:10, Shaphan the secretary tells the King:

"Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book.' And Shaphan read it before the king. "

The narrative makes this point in emphasizing, *wa-yikraehu*, that Shaphan read the book to the King. This is a decisive moment in the life of Josiah, and it's a decisive moment in all of our lives.

How will we respond to the hearing of God's Word?

Hilkiah the priest says: "I found a book, and it's not just any book in the house of the Lord. It is the Book of the Law." We shouldn't imagine a codex, like we think of a modern book. That's not until the third or fourth century A.D., but the book at this time is a scroll. He says: "I found the scroll of God's Word," and he read it, and gave it to Shaphan, and Shaphan read it in the presence of the king. How will you respond when God's Word is read in your hearing? When Josiah hears the words of God, the Book of the Law, he responds by tearing his clothes in an expression of contrition and remorse. When he hears the Word of God, he discovers what all of us discover when we hear God's Word and we see God revealed: that you and I are out of compliance. We are not living as God requires, and the first response of a tender heart before God is to feel contrition. Josiah tears his robes, and then he instructs his leaders in 2 Kings 22:13:

"Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

So they go and they meet with a prophetess named Huldah. Huldah speaks instructive words to the king. She replies to highlight for us a response that is desired from God when we hear His Word. Huldah reports to tell the King God's perspective on his response, and this is brought before us in 2 Kings 22:19:

"Because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, . . . and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the LORD."

The word *penitent* is a fancy word that means *your heart became repentant* when you heard God's Word and you see how He wants us to live. Josiah turns. Not only is he repentant, but he humbles himself before the Lord. Even though he is the king, he prostrates himself in a posture of humility before the Lord God Almighty. He tears his robe as an expression of contrition. We are told that he even weeps before the Lord, and as a result, God says: "I've heard you." We live in a hard world. We live in a society that is easily angered. We live in a societal moment when we easily surround ourselves with real faces or virtual ones who will agree with everything we think, and it's easy to live inside of an echo chamber of our own opinions. That's why we need God's Word. We need God's Word read. We need God's Word heard, and we need soft hearts that are open to receiving God's instruction. The word *Torah* in Hebrew means *instruction*. God our Heavenly Father is teaching us who He is and how He wants us to live.

What does Josiah do next? Not only is his heart soft and his heart grows humble in God's

presence as he weeps before the Lord, but Josias then gathers people around him. Look at 2 Kings 23. What does he do next? When we hear the Word of God, we want to share it. The king sent and he gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him. He went up to the House of the Lord, and with him all the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priest, the prophets, and all the people both small and great. I love that. This is not a reference to stature. It doesn't mean just short people and tall people. It's the idiom in the Bible for the great people, the people that you tend to think highly of, and the ordinary people. You know, God's Word is distinctive in this regard. God's Word is written and communicates in a way that can be understood by any age and any education level. God's Word is not esoteric; it's not difficult; you don't need advanced degrees to understand the will of your Heavenly Father. It is accessible. Early Christians were criticized by their pagan neighbors who felt like the Word of God was written in a simple style. The pagans looked at the Bible and said it wasn't fancy enough. I love the response of early Christians. They said: "You know, it may not seem as fancy as your books, but who really can read Plato?" They said actually God's Word is written so that everyone can understand, and we praise God for that. Josiah gathers everyone, and notice what the king does in 1 Kings 23:2. Josiah follows in the footsteps of Hilkiah and Shaphan:

"And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD."

The leader reads the Word of God to the people and leads the people in a renewal of the covenant. In 2 Kings 23:3, we read:

"And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this Book. And all the people joined in the covenant."

By the pillar in the temple of the Lord, Josiah renews the covenant and commits himself and the people to walk after the Lord and to keep His commandments and testimonies with all his heart and soul, echoing Deuteronomy 6:5:

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Josiah leads the people around him in covenant renewal. When you hear the Word of God, you allow it to come in, and you want to share it. The Word of God comes into Josiah and it brings him to a place of repentance, contrition, and humility. It leads him to a place where he is sharing God's Word with those around him. Not only does he do this, but he begins to lead his society in transformation, and this is where I want us to see that the Word of God will take us if we are willing.

Josiah, after hearing the Word of God and leading the people into covenant renewal, goes into what I call the “destructive phase” of discipleship. We usually don't use this language, and yet we need it. The destructive phase of discipleship is when you begin to grow in the ways of God and you realize that the first thing you need to do in following the Lord is to destroy some things in your life. I mean really destroy them. The destructive phase of discipleship is when you look at the house of your life and you realize there are all these things in here that don't belong here. There are things in my life that are leading me away from following the Lord, and I need to get rid of them. This is one of the works of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity, and the Lord says, “I am a jealous God. Have no other gods before Me.” The destructive phase of discipleship is when we clean out the junk, when we get rid of anything that is distracting us from following the Lord, and Josiah launches into this destructive phase of discipleship and it is glorious. What does he do? We read in 2 Kings 23:4:

“And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the keepers of the threshold to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven.”

He tells them to “get those things out of here,” and he takes them out of Jerusalem into the fields of Kidron and he burns them and utterly destroys them. Not only does he destroy the apparatus, but he destroys those of who are leading the people in the worship of Baal and Asherah, and he tells those priests that they are out of a job, and they are removed. He takes the Asherah from the House of the Lords and burns it at the brook Kidron and even beats it to dust and casts the dust of it on the graves of people. It is a scene of holy desolation. You need that, and I need that.

I remember as a brand-new Christian, I loved music, and I had a full collection of music. After I was led to Christ, I started not enjoying some of the music that I'd been listening to, and I remember thinking this is not moving my heart anymore. Then the Holy Spirit moved me even further and said, “You know, these things are actually leading you away from wholehearted devotion to the Lord.” I resisted a little bit, and I thought, “Really? Really?” Let me just take a selection at random from my music collection.” I reached in and I pulled out one of the albums from Megadeath. There may not be a lot of Megadeath fans here, but I pulled this out and I scanned down and decided to simply play just this one song at random. The song was called: “Looking Down the Cross,” and the song lyrics were just total blasphemy about despising Christ on the cross. I had listened to that for two years, but now that I had heard the Word of God, had been reborn, I was just thrilled to get rid of it! I got rid of it and I felt great freedom. The Word of God this morning calls us to this destructive phase—a holy destruction, and I want to challenge you this morning to take whatever is in your life that is leading you away from a wholehearted following after God and just get rid of it. Throw it out. You are no longer

obligated to these things.

I love discipleship for children. Children often don't have to go through this phase in the same way. Whenever you do discipleship for adults, it is like building something in downtown. When you do discipleship for kids, it's like building a building on an open field: the ground is level; you just have to tear up the grass, build the foundation, and you can start to build the building. If you want to build something downtown, the first thing you have to do is knock something down, and that is the case for us. But, the glorious news is that after the destructive phase of discipleship there is a **constructive phase**, and that is where Josiah goes. He gets rid of what's distracting the people from the Lord, and then he goes into a constructive phase. The constructive phase begins in 2 Kings 23:21 where the King gathers all the people, and he commands the people:

“Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.”

The Lord God Almighty, the God of the Scriptures, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, wants us to get rid of the things that distract us from following Him so that we can enter into the joy of actually following Him. Jesus says: “If you want to follow Me, pick up your cross and follow Me.” That sounds like a frighteningly negative image, but Jesus says: “If you lose your life for My sake, you actually find it.” When we destroy the idolatry in our lives and we get rid of the things that are distracting us from following God, then we can actually enter into the joy where real joy is to be found. God actually commands joy. Do you believe that? He knows us better than we know ourselves, so He says: “I’m going to work this out. I’m going to command you to celebrate massive parties three times year. Collect a tithe so that God's ministry flourishes.” In the Scriptures, there's a second tithe. Do you know what you're supposed to do with the second tithe? You are supposed to bring the second tithe to Jerusalem and blow it on celebrating God. The Passover is a time of celebration and joy and remembering that God rescued us from the house of slavery and brought us into the glorious freedom of following Him. The king rediscovered that we are to follow God and rediscovered the joy in doing that. He gathers the people to keep the Passover as is written in this Book, and then we are told this astonishing thing in 2 Kings 23:22:

“For no such Passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah.”

This doesn't mean that no one had celebrated the Passover, but no one had celebrated the Passover like this since the time of the judges. That's over 300 years! When you rediscover the Word of God and your heart is tender before Him, the Spirit of God will take you through that destructive phase, and you'll have all this open space in your soul, and you will say: “What do we do now?” The invitation of the Word of God is to celebrate.

I was thinking this week, "Oh Lord, wouldn't it be just so perfect if we were able to celebrate today with a big meal and feast together with thanksgiving about God's goodness! And then I thought, wait, we are doing that! There are 160 pounds of turkey roasting under my feet right now. But notice 2 Kings 23:23. It says:

"But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem."

Note that Josiah received the Book of the Word of God in his 18th year, and all of that transformation, that getting rid of the junk in our lives, and the commitment to celebrate the Lord, the timeframe of that is immediate. It's not in the 28th year. It's in that very same year, and so I want to challenge you this morning and myself to respond right away. Don't wait; respond right away, all the way, to the Word of God heard. The life of Josiah in 2 Kings 22 and 23 challenges us this morning. It challenges us to read the Book: *wa-yikraehu*, "and he read it." I want to challenge you to be a regular reader of God's Word. If you're a parent or a grandparent, that also means reading God's Word to the people you care about. The Scripture reading is such an important part of the worship service, when we listen together. Soren Kierkegaard says:

"When you read God's Word, you must constantly be saying to yourself, it is talking to me, and about me."

God's Word comes into us; it speaks to us. Martin Luther said:

"The Bible is alive, it speaks to me, it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold on me."

It can be powerful and dangerous to our unbelief to have regular exposure to God's Word. One of my mentors said that as a pastor all you have to do is con people into reading the text. He said that over time the text will take you to the living center who is Christ. In C. S Lewis' book, *The Screwtape Letters, the main character in the book, the devil says:*

"A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere - Bibles laid open, millions of surprises - ...God is, if I may say it, very unscrupulous."

When you read the Word and you hear it, change starts to happen. My favorite story, and forgive me if I have shared this with you before about what happens to us when we when we get exposed to the Word, is a story of a Gideon. This Gideon was passing out Bibles, and a prisoner in a prison in Slovakia received a Gideon Bible. The missionary tells this story:

"A certain prisoner named Peter one day approached one of the counselors and told him, 'I have good news for you.' The counselor asked, 'What is the good news?' 'I have accepted Christ.' the man said. 'Oh, that's wonderful! What has brought you to that point: to give your life to Christ?' 'Well, I am too embarrassed to tell you, but if you insist...'

"The first time you came here, and brought Bibles for us, I took one right away. When I held

a copy of the New Testament in my hands, and felt the pages, they were so crisp... The very first thought came to my mind: 'This is a great paper to roll my own cigarettes.' Since I had plenty of tobacco in my cell I just needed some nice and crispy paper to make my own cigarettes.

"When I got that first New Testament, I literally started to tear off the first pages from the book of Matthew one-by-one. I had gone through several pages a day. I enjoyed getting such a fine paper for free. As I licked, rolled, and smoked the cigarettes I didn't pay any attention to the words that were in these pages. After several weeks, I came to the Gospel of John.

"With a little curiosity, because my name is John, I wondered what John could write about thousands years ago. I started to read the first chapter. . . After I read the first chapter, I just continued. I came to chapter three, where I read: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

"I have never ever in my life heard, read, or even considered thoughts about God, Christ, salvation, heaven and hell. The words of John kept my mind busy - it sounded as nice philosophy. After several days it started to puzzle me. Specially, when I came to the part where Jesus met this, what's his name, Nicodemus!

"There were a few words I read over and over, like: 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.'

"I stopped tearing pages off and continued to read, occasionally returning to previously read passages. By the time I came to the end of The Gospel of John, it was very clear to me what I had to do. Sometimes I am ashamed; sometimes I laugh that I had to, literally, smoke through the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, and Luke before I accepted Christ."

I don't recommend that method of Bible study, but my point is that the Word of God changes us. As you hear it, as you listen to it, let it come in and respond with repentance and humility and have the courage to embrace the destructive phase.

We are going to sing now again to the Lord, and as we sing, I am going to pray for us, and I want you to come before the Lord and bring what needs to be destroyed and resolved to do it and prepare your heart to celebrate. Would you stand with me, and let's pray to the Lord together.

Lord God Almighty, we praise You. We've sung this morning, Lord, a prayer that the Word of God would speak. Lord, I pray for us as a church family that we would hear Your Word well and it would come into our hearts, Lord, and that we would see Your greatness and our ungreatness. Strip aside our pride. Lord, give us humble hearts this morning, and, Lord, in the brilliant light of Your glory, we want to come before You now, and we want to bring things in

our lives that need to be destroyed. Give us the courage, Lord, to set those at your feet. For some of us, Father, it's obvious idolatry; for some of us is an addiction that has gripped our heart affections; for some of us it's a bitterness that we just have grown so comfortable with that we don't want to let go. Lord, would you destroy it now? Destroy it, and in that free and open space, would you come in Holy Spirit and renew our joy in Jesus right now, and lift our hearts together in unity to celebrate You and what You have done. Use us, Father, as redeemed people, united in faith, empowered by Your Spirit, to worship You, Lord, to live by your Word, and to join Your mission to share this Good News with those around us, we pray. Word of God speak.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.