

“Praying as Hezekiah Prayed”

2 Kings 19: 14-19

Dr. Richard J. Alberta

Cornerstone Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Sunday, April 3, 2011

Text: 2 Kings 19:14-19 (NIV) ¹⁴ Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. ¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: "O Lord, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. ¹⁶ Give ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God. ¹⁷ "It is true, O Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. ¹⁸ They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands. ¹⁹ Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God."

Hezekiah prayed ¹⁹ Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God."

Hezekiah was the King in Judah around 700 BC and his story is, as they say, “stranger than fiction!” In fact, this little known Old Testament account of a faithful King and his prayer might just teach us more about God and the wonder of prayer than anything we’ve heard thus far. Actually...I find this narrative so thoroughly fascinating that I can’t wait to share it with you this morning. Hezekiah was a man who went in total dependence before God and prayed passionately and said **“Help!”** But first, let *us* pray.

I will tell you a story...a true story. First, let’s set the stage. The year is 1000 BC and King David has broken his personal covenant with God. David has fallen to the sin of adultery and then the sin of murder and then he has tried to cover it up. From this point forward, Israel as a people becomes more and more distant from God. Eventually, David’s son Solomon becomes the King. Solomon is not sure that he can handle the task so he starts out asking for wisdom. And God answers Solomon’s prayer but Solomon eventually squanders that wisdom. In a few years, Solomon makes alliances with all kinds of godless nations and he takes many, many wives from those nations. Those wives lead Solomon astray to the point where he becomes a worshipper of foreign gods. We read:

1 Kings 11:4-6 (NIV) ⁴ As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God,

as the heart of David his father had been. ⁵ He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. ⁶ So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done.

After the death of Solomon, God tears the Kingdom of Israel to pieces and it is divided into a Northern Kingdom called Israel and a Southern Kingdom called Judah. So, it gets a little confusing when we read the Old Testament historical books because we hear about Israel and Judah and all the different Kings that led them. There were many Kings, some good and some very bad. One of the very bad Kings of Judah, the southern kingdom, was a man named Ahaz.

He became the King in about 735 BC and was real spiritual failure. He worshipped idols and led the people away from God. He even sacrificed one of his own sons. But as sometimes happens, an evil man has a good son. And so we meet his son Hezekiah who becomes the King of Judah on his own when his wicked father dies. OK. Hezekiah begins to restore the proper worship to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He removes the idols and tears down any statues of foreign gods. He even destroys the bronze serpent that Moses had made in the wilderness centuries before because the people had started to worship it! Hezekiah re-institutes the tithe and he organizes the Priests and the Levites for leading worship! Hezekiah is a very good guy.

In the background meanwhile...the other Kingdom, Israel to their north, is not doing so well. Those Jews are under the domination of some very godless Assyrians and they can't even worship. In fact, things are so bad up in Israel that Hezekiah actually invites the Israelites to come down to Judah so they can celebrate the Passover! So...we have this picture of two Kingdoms both filled with Jews who are the descendants of the great Patriarchs. Israel in the north is being dominated by the Assyrians; Judah in the south is doing fairly well under a faithful King.

The year is about 700 BC and now the King of the Assyrians decides that he wants to dominate Judah as well as Israel. His name is *Sennacherib* and he is the Sadaam Hussein of his day! This guy makes the craziest modern brutal dictators in the Middle East seem like Mr. Rogers! He has absolutely no doubt that anytime he wants to do so...he can take over Judah and all its assets. In fact, even though Hezekiah has been faithful and trusts the Lord, even Hezekiah is really quite frightened at this evil man Sennacherib. Hezekiah cannot possibly defend himself against this tyrant. It would be like the Sherriff's Department fighting the entire U.S. Army. Hezekiah has been faithful to God but now, despite his faith, he is scared! Have you ever been like that as a Christian? Filled with faith in Lord but nonetheless very, very scared?

The plot thickens! God knows that His faithful servant Hezekiah is quite anxious. But God has allowed this series of events to come about for His own purposes. So in His mercy, God sends the Prophet Isaiah to re-assure Hezekiah that everything will be ok. Now...when you are up against a foe or a situation and things cannot

possibly come out ok... *but God tells you it will be ok...what do you do?* Typically, you keep praying helpless prayers. But you must cling to the word that God sends you! So, Isaiah sends this word to Hezekiah:

2 Kings 19:6-7 (NIV) ⁶ Isaiah said... "This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard--those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. ⁷ Listen! I am going to put such a spirit in him that when he hears a certain report, he will return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword."

Now right here, we should observe that the man or woman who trusts in God is blessed because they will have the chance to see God do His best work! The situation still looks hopeless but Hezekiah needs only to wait upon the Lord. He knows that he must pray and wait! He knows that he will see God reveal His might and majesty most clearly...when he, Hezekiah, is totally helpless and cannot do anything about his situation! Although this situation is vexing, Hezekiah needs it in order to see God reveal His glory and might! When we belong to the Lord, hopelessness is just what we need to see Heaven in the here and now!

OK. At this pointwe need to ask a question that, when answered correctly, will teach us more about God than perhaps...we have ever realized. Here is the question: *Considering How Great God Is And Considering How Totally Powerful He Is...Why Does He Let Situations Like This Even Develop In Our Lives?* Why not, for example, just vaporize this bad king Sennacherib and keep Hezekiah from the whole unhappy event? Or...why does God allow things into your life that, if He is going to remedy them anyway....it would be better if He had just not allowed them in the first place!? Right?

OK....here is where our reasoning breaks down. Ask yourself this question: Is God's highest priority making things go nicely for me so I have very little stress and distress? I mean...many presentations of the Gospel these days suggest exactly that. That what God is really all about is blessing us and frankly sheltering us from the storms of life! But that is a man-centered view of things. I'd suggest that God's real priority is not our convenience...*but his Glory!* And how will God be glorifying Himself in our lives? By putting us into impossible situations that only He can fix!

Consider Moses for a moment as he was dealing with Pharaoh. Moses was sent to the man over and over again demanding that the Israelites be released to go out into the desert and worship God. But God hardened Pharaoh's heart so Pharaoh would refuse! Why? Because God had a purpose far greater than anything Moses had thought of. In fact, the purpose of God was revealed during this assignment given to Moses. We read:

Exodus 9:13-14 (NIV) ¹³ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may

worship me, ¹⁴ or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.

We see that last part! Christian, here is the whole sermon today: God will allow things into your life so that so you may know that there is no one like him in all the earth! That is what God always does and that is what He is doing in your life and mine! God brings us into situations that only He can resolve so that it will be abundantly clear that He alone is God! Amen? God be praised! Hezekiah in retrospect probably praised God for his adventures with Sennacherib and Moses probably praised God for his adventures with Pharaoh! We need these impossible situations in order to see God in His Glorious Greatness right here on Earth!

We've seen it. Every Christian needs to see it to have the privilege of worshipping God much more deeply. God be praised! Let me tell you that thirty three years ago this very month, in April of 1978, Donna and I with our one year old son Chris had our house for sale in the little town of Montgomery, New York. We had been clearly called by God to move to Massachusetts so I could begin studies for my Master of Divinity Degree. We were supposed to be there on June 2nd. But nothing, absolutely nothing was selling in the real estate market. At any price. And we were out of time to find a buyer and get the whole matter buttoned up in time to move. It was puzzling. We had even taken the sign down from the lawn because nothing was selling. But all we knew was that God had called us.

One night we prayed and said "Lord Jesus...here is our situation. We cannot obey your call because we cannot move. If you want us to move to Massachusetts you will have to do the impossible...which will not be impossible for you...but we need a buyer immediately with financing like yesterday! So...you will have to send us a buyer...please?!" Well...the Lord sent us a realtor! And she said to us: "I've written an advertisement that will start in a few days. It says 'The right house, for the right buyer at the right price!'" Well...we thought that was pretty cheesy but ok...fine...whatever the ad says is great. "Right house...right buyer...right price. OK. That ad is as good as any other. We're helpless here so why not?" But listen to what happened before she could even run the ad...

The next day was a Saturday and a man knocked on the door. I opened it and he said "Hey...is this house for sale?" I let him in and Donna came around the corner and said "Oh Hello. Ahh...where did you come from?" And he looked up and said jokingly "From Heaven!" Then he introduced himself. And his name was... "David Wright!" ["Right house-right buyer-right price!"] He bought the house that day and he closed on it a couple of weeks later. He paid cash and told us to stay in it until June second if we wanted to...which was exactly the date that we had planned to move! We would never, ever have had that experience unless we had been totally and completely helpless!

Hezekiah was helpless. And helplessness before God is the best thing that can happen to the Christian and for his or her prayer life! Consider Hezekiah's

helplessness. But consider the arrogance of Sennacherib....he had actually said these things:

2 Kings 19:10-12 (NIV) ¹⁰ "Say to Hezekiah king of Judah: Do not let the god you depend on deceive you when he says, 'Jerusalem will not be handed over to the king of Assyria.' ¹¹ Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries, destroying them completely. And will you be delivered? ¹² Did the gods of the nations that were destroyed by my forefathers deliver them: the gods of Gozan, Haran, Rezeph and the people of Eden who were in Tel Assar?"

No, but that's the point Sennacherib! The true God is not one of the false gods of the nations! So, at this point Hezekiah does the smartest thing that he can do! Notice please. He goes into the Temple and spreads out the letter from Sennacherib! And he looks up and prays:

¹⁷ "It is true, O Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. ¹⁸ They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands. ¹⁹ Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God."

Not long after that, God delivered Hezekiah from his desperate situation. We read:

2 Kings 19:35-37 (NIV) ³⁵ That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning--there were all the dead bodies! ³⁶ So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there. ³⁷ One day, while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.

This deliverance was very much like the miracle when God delivered Israel from the Egyptians a few hundred years before. A helpless people told by God to paint the doorposts of their houses with the blood of a sacrificed lamb...and the angel of death would "pass over" them and their families. And as we move to the Communion Table, I hear the Lord Jesus Christ saying again:

John 6:51 (NIV) ⁵¹ "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

And so we are like Hezekiah...unable to save ourselves. So we go to God and say "How can we be saved and gain eternal life?" And God sends us Jesus who indeed said:

“If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”

Christian remember...spread out the problem before God. When you have no solution, trust that the One who gives you eternal life in Christ will deliver you so that it may be known that *He alone is God throughout the earth!*

Let us pray.