

Hezekiah's Prayer (3)

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[0 : 00] 2 Kings chapter 19, the words we find in verse 16. Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear. Open your eyes, O Lord, and see.

And hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. The Bible wasn't written in an ivory-towered monastery, immune from all the problems of the world outside. It wasn't written by people who have their head in the clouds, who were so absent-minded that they didn't realize what was going on around them. The Bible was written by real people in real situations, many of them far more desperate and severe than we think.

The prayers of the Bible were, more often than not, prayed in times of great stress, pressure, and desperation. That's not unlike many of us, where in times of stress and pressure, we redouble our efforts in prayer.

Our language perhaps becomes more desperate, and our requests more urgent. Well, that's where Hezekiah is in 2 Kings 19 verse 16.

[1 : 26] He is a desperate man, under great pressure, praying in the temple to God, while outside the walls of Jerusalem are encircled by the largest and fiercest army the world had ever seen, intent on its destruction and annihilation.

And in the heart of this pressure, Hezekiah prays these words. He prays, Remember how he spread out that letter from Sennacherib that he had sent him, he spread out before the Lord. Now Hezekiah is beginning to pray that letter through. His language is desperate. His requests are urgent. Again, that's where we so often find ourselves, under great pressure, opening our hearts out before God.

That's where Hezekiah's descendant Jesus found himself, in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the night of his betrayal. Well, this evening in our prayer meeting, I want us to consider Hezekiah's prayer in this verse, under two request type headings.

First, give attention to me. And secondly, give perspective to me. Give attention to me. Give perspective to me. Remember, the reason I'm taking us this year through the prayers of these biblical saints is not just to hold them up as role models for us in our prayers, but perhaps more important still, to help us to identify with them in their stress, and to learn how to pray at those times and in those places.

[3 : 25] First of all then, give attention to me. Give attention to me. Hezekiah prays, Incline your ear to me, O Lord, and hear, and hear.

Open your eyes, O Lord, and see. And hear the words of Sennacherib. Now this is serious stuff. Hezekiah is not play acting. He has been backed into a corner by Sennacherib, king of the Assyrians.

Hezekiah's response is to cry out to God in prayer. Incline your ear to me, O Lord. You will notice from the Bible you have in front of you that Hezekiah uses the covenant name of God, Lord.

The name that we are to use when we want to emphasize God's covenant commitment in relationship to us. Jesus teaches us to pray our Father, to remind us that when we ask for daily bread and for the forgiveness of our sins, we're not praying to a dispassionate divinity.

We're praying to our loving Father. And in the same way, Hezekiah prays to the Lord to emphasize God's commitment to His covenant people.

[4 : 42] When we pray, we're not speaking into fresh air. And we're not addressing a God who's too busy to care for us. But a Father who wants what is best for us.

Who has proved His love for us by giving His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for us. Among the prayers of 8 billion human beings and counting, God hears His children calling to Him.

Gentoo penguins hatch their eggs in vast colonies on the polar ice cap. And then they leave their chicks while they go to feed in the vast Southern Ocean.

When they return, amidst the deafening cacophony of the calls of other chicks, they can hear their own chick calling. To us, all the penguin chicks look exactly the same.

But for a Gentoo penguin mother, it can make its own chicks call out among those of 10,000 others. And Hezekiah is using the Lord remembering that His loving Father can make out His own people's calls to Him, even though it be hidden behind 8 billion others.

[6 : 06] The word incline means to bend down or turn toward. God may be our Father, but He is in heaven. He is enthroned on high and He is constantly worshipped by millions of angels.

And yet, when Hezekiah prays to Him as Lord, it's as if God hushes the hosts of heaven by saying to them, will you not all be quiet for a moment?

Behold, Hezekiah, my child is praying. I must hear him. Do you notice that during His earthly ministry, Jesus does not choose to listen to the high and lofty of Israel, but rather to the low and to the downtrodden, that He chooses to pay attention to the poor and the humble, not to the self-sufficient and the self-righteous.

And nothing's changed since those days. In Psalm 138, verse 6, we read these precious words. For though the Lord is high, He regards the lowly, but the proud He knows from afar.

King Jesus, from His throne in heaven, still gives His full attention to the lowly and to the humble when they call to Him in their time of need.

[7 : 37] And He is quick to help with fresh supplies of grace. He's never too busy to hear, but rather like that mother gentoo penguin.

He can hear each of us as individuals calling to Him over the cacophony of everything else happening in the universe at any one time.

Open your eyes is a frequent request in the Old Testament. It's as if Hezekiah is thinking about the massed encampment of Assyrian troops outside the walls of Jerusalem and thinking of how Sennacherib has so threatened him and insulted him that he says to God, can you not see what is happening to us?

Can you not see? God's got a universe to watch over. All the creatures of the sea, all the animals of the land, the climates of a million planets and the expansion of galaxies.

He has the movements and the situations of eight billion human beings and counting to watch over. And yet, as we said about His hearing earlier, He is watching over us as individuals, His children with special care.

[8 : 56] In Psalm 121, God has described us the one who watches over Israel. And again, isn't it remarkable how little attention Jesus gives to the great and good of His day, but how much attention He gives to the poor and downtrodden.

God has much to watch over. But as our Lord and as our Father, He chooses to watch over us with special care.

Give attention to me, Hezekiah cries, and hear the words of Sennacherib. Who or what is your Sennacherib tonight?

Who or what is putting you under this great pressure and is making you feel so desperate? Is it your work? Are there tense relationships within your family or among your circle of friends?

Is it heartbreak or grief? Whatever it is, call out to the Lord who is your heavenly Father for His attention, that He may incline His ear to you and open His eyes to you.

[10 : 18] Tell Him the way it is with you. Not just the situation that you face, but the way that situation is making you feel.

Hide nothing from Him. Hear the words of my mouth and my heart, O Father. See the situation I face.

Give attention to me. In the second instance from Psalm from 2 Kings 19, 16. Give perspective to me.

Give perspective to me. Stop taking everything as a personal insult. Stop taking everything as a personal insult.

That was the advice given to me about something many years ago. I think it was about a change in the law that I didn't like. I was getting a bit angry about it. That is until an older, more mature friend of mine said to me, stop taking everything as a personal insult.

[11 : 25] In my younger, hot-headed years, I really needed his mature perspective. And in the second part of this verse, Hezekiah describes what Sennacherib has written to him as sent to mock the living God.

To mock the living God. Hezekiah is praying that God would give him the perspective that Sennacherib isn't really fighting against a king called Hezekiah, but against a God called the Lord. But everything Sennacherib is doing is ultimately being done against God. In other words, there's far more going here or going on here than meets the eye.

Oh yes, Sennacherib's immediate enemy is Hezekiah. But all the time, his ultimate enemy is Hezekiah's God. Throughout the years, we've coined a new phrase when it comes to warfare. We talk about proxy wars. Proxy wars take place between big nations through smaller nations fighting against each other. For example, you could argue that most of the conflicts in the Middle East are proxy wars where Iran is fighting against Saudi Arabia, but just using smaller nations to do their dirty work for them.

[12 : 57] The United States have historically fought proxy wars against both Russia and China. And what Hezekiah is praying is for God's perspective on Sennacherib.

But actually, Hezekiah here is caught up in a proxy war between Sennacherib and God. As we'll see next time, power has gone to Sennacherib's head.

Now, back in verse 12 in his letter to Hezekiah, Sennacherib has boasted of how he destroyed a whole list of nations and in so doing also defeated their gods.

And I wonder whether this megalomaniac king of Assyria was actually beginning to think that he himself was a god. Or at very least, a god slayer.

And next in line is the god of Israel. Hezekiah is praying for God's perspective. But while Sennacherib has made this war personal, it is only in as much as he is fighting against the god of Israel.

[14 : 07] And what else the gods of all the other nations were wood and stone, the god of Israel, the lord himself, is in the words of Hezekiah, the living god. Sennacherib never fought against a living god before.

Far less the living god. He doesn't have a clue what he's up against. A tin pot human king with his stick men army against the mighty lord of heaven and earth, omnipotent, almighty and absolutely committed to the good of his people.

Listen carefully. Hezekiah is praying for the perspective to see that it's not so much that he is fighting against Sennacherib for God, but that God is fighting against Sennacherib for him.

Yes, that's the perspective Hezekiah is praying for. The perspective to stop taking everything as a personal insult, but to see the bigger picture.

Sennacherib is fighting against the living God and the living God is big enough to fight his own battles. And it's not so much that Hezekiah must fight against Sennacherib for God, but that God will fight against Sennacherib for him.

[15 : 36] And so again, I ask the question, who or what is your Sennacherib this evening? Who or what is putting you under this great pressure and is making you feel desperate?

Is it your work? Are there tense relationships within your family or your circle of friends? Is it heartbreak? Is it grief? Whatever it is, remember that ultimately it is a proxy battle where the Christ you love and serve is the ultimate target.

His ability to supply you with the sufficiency of His grace. That's what's being tested. Not your ability to cling on to Jesus, but Jesus' ability to cling on to you.

That's what's being tested. Remember that. And so in prayer you're asking for a new perspective on your struggles to see them as new opportunities for the true living God to supply you with His grace and once again to demonstrate His infinite reliability humility.

What you're going through is only personal in as much as you choose not to involve God by prayer and see things from His bigger perspective. You see then how the prayers of the Bible they were never prayed in ivory towers or in closed-off monasteries.

[17 : 04] If they had been, they would have been of no use to us whatsoever because we don't live in ivory towers and we don't live in closed-off monasteries. We live in the real world of pressure and desperations where from time to time, perhaps all too often for our liking, we find ourselves having to pray just like Hezekiah.

incline your ear, O Lord, and hear. Open your eyes, O Lord, and see, and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God.