

Hezekiah's Prayer (1)

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[0 : 00] Turn back with me in your Bible to 2 Kings 19 and verses 14 and 15. 2 Kings 19 verses 14 and 15.

Hezekiah received a letter from the hand of the messengers and read it. And Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord.

I don't know what to make of King Hezekiah. Overall, he was a very good king.

The summary of his reign is found in 2 Kings 18 verse 3 where we read, He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord according to all that his father David had done.

King Hezekiah instituted great reforms in the national and in the spiritual life of Judah. He largely removed idol worship and restored the services of the temple.

[1 : 05] He is a very important figure in the Old Testament. His story is told three times in 2 Kings, in 2 Chronicles and in the book of Isaiah.

But as you read his life story, you begin to wonder whether his devotion to God was slightly patchy. That's fine as far as it goes.

I like reading about and learning from people whose devotion to God is slightly patchy because it means I can relate to them. They remind us that there really is only one perfect king who will never disappoint us.

Jesus. And that even the best of men are men at best. Well, in 2 Kings 19 verses 14 through 19, we see and hear Hezekiah, the man, praying.

You really can't tell so much about a person by the way they pray, by the things they pray for and the things they don't pray for. When you take Hezekiah's prayer into account, your estimation of the man goes up.

[2 : 19] For along with the prayer of King Jehoshaphat, which we'll look at later in the year, his prayer is deeply perceptive. And it's a wonderful model to follow for all of us who find ourselves in a similar situation to him.

Not that any of us are kings like he was, but we're all believers. And there are times, whether or not, where we all feel under great pressure, just like he did in 2 Kings 19.

So tonight, by way of introduction to Hezekiah's prayer, I want us to notice briefly four things. First, when he prayed.

Second, where he prayed. Third, how he prayed. And last, why he prayed. These are the four basic introductory points, which I hope you'll find helpful in your own prayer life.

Remembering that though our discipleship is at best patchy, the prayers of Christ on our behalf perfect our inconsistent, imperfect prayers.

[3 : 32] First of all then, when he prayed. When he prayed. You find this in verse 14, 2 Kings 19, 14.

King Hezekiah lived in difficult days. The land over which he reigned, Judah, was strategically placed. As such, it was the target of all the powerful nations in the area.

At that time, Assyria was the world superpower. Its army was massive, well-disciplined, and fierce. Up until this point, it had never been defeated in battle.

In 722 BC, it invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and wiped it off the map. Israel was assimilated into the Assyrian Empire.

It's people deported and new people settled in its place. And now this vast, fierce, well-disciplined army is invading the southern kingdom of Judah.

[4 : 38] And Hezekiah and his army and his people are besieged in the city of Jerusalem. City by city, the Assyrian army is destroying Judah and only Jerusalem is left.

The Assyrian emperor, Sennacherib, sent his chief negotiator, a man by the name of Rabshakeh, to arrange Jerusalem's surrender.

The Rabshakeh was the Joseph Goebbels of the day. He was a propaganda genius, an ancient example of a spin doctor. And he delivered letters to Hezekiah, taunting him, mocking him, intimidating him, threatening him.

And finally, he writes Hezekiah a letter with a terrifying question. Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, devoting them to destruction.

And shall you be delivered? Shall you be delivered? What then does Hezekiah do when he receives the Rabshakeh's letter?

[5 : 48] He prayed. He prayed like he'd never prayed before. What would you have done in his place? You've got the school bully promising to give you a good thrashing.

There's a ring of children round to watch the massacre. And you, the scrawny kid in your class, have 999 on speed dial. What do you do when the school bully marches out into the centre of the ring of those gathered vultures, pulls up his sleeves to reveal huge fists and even bigger muscles?

Well, there's a time to run and there's a time to pray. And whereas you might be able to run away from a bully in school, Hezekiah was trapped within the city walls of Jerusalem and couldn't run anywhere.

Well, I guess we can apply this by reminding each other, we're not the first believers to have found ourselves in tight spots, nor will we be the last.

Jesus prayed in the tight spot of Gethsemane's nighttime pressure cooker. We're not the first believers to be laughed at and threatened.

[7 : 02] We're not the first to be intimidated and bullied. It doesn't have to be a physical bully like the Rabshakeh or a school bully, Meathead.

It can be a credit card statement. It can be a red letter from your utility supplier. It can be bad exam results. It can be a worrying medical report.

Whatever it is, you've got more reason than most to pray. And maybe, just maybe, it's the jolt you need to get you to start praying in the first place.

When he prays. When he prays. But secondly, where he prayed. Where he prayed. We read in verse 14 that having received the Rabshakeh's message, Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord.

He spread it before the Lord. He didn't take the letter to his military generals, nor to his courtroom politicians. He took it straight to the Lord in his temple.

[8 : 09] At that time, the temple in Jerusalem was considered to be the dwelling place of God on earth. And so, by going up to the house of the Lord, it was as if Hezekiah was giving the letter to God.

In the new covenant, the temple isn't a building or a place. The temple's a person. The new covenant temple is Jesus Christ himself.

It's to him we take our letters from the Rabshakeh. Our statements. Our medical reports. Our mockings.

Jesus says to us, Come to me, all ye that have received a letter from the Rabshakeh, and I will give you rest. I've always been intrigued by what Hezekiah did with that letter.

He spread it out before the Lord. It was probably written on a parchment scroll. And so what Hezekiah did was unroll that scroll.

[9 : 16] It's as if Hezekiah wants God to see every word in it, to see it all. Take a pack of cards and fan them out in front of your face. You see every one of them.

Spades, diamonds, hearts and clubs, ace through king. That's what Hezekiah did. He held nothing back. He took it all to God.

In my home village in the north, whenever you ask someone how they are, they'll say to you, You're seeing it. You're seeing it. When you get a letter from the Rabshakeh, whatever that looks like, take it to Christ and make sure He sees it.

Take the letter itself, perhaps, if it is a letter, and pray through it on your knees with God. The Bible on one side, the letter on the other.

Let Him see it. Don't take it to a place. Take it to a person and open up your heart to Him. Where He prayed.

[10 : 19] Well, third, how He prayed. How He prayed. We read, at the beginning of verse 15, that having taken the letter and having spread it out in the Lord's temple, then Hezekiah prayed before the Lord.

Now, that word before is more literally translated in the original Hebrew language as, to the face of, to the face of.

Hezekiah prayed in the, or to the, face of God. The picture is that of Hezekiah looking straight into the face of God as he prays.

Among all the other pictures of prayer, this has to be near the top. That of God's desperate child looking into the face of her loving heavenly Father.

The Latin phrase is, Before the face of God. Hezekiah lived prayerfully and dependently.

[11 : 29] I don't know about you, but there are times that I don't want to look into my heavenly Father's face. Maybe I feel that I've disappointed him by my sinfulness and unfaithfulness to him.

Maybe I feel that I should be able to deal with my own Rabshake letters without having to bother him. Or even that I really shouldn't be feeling so anxious and worried about these letters from the Rabshake.

Perhaps as the king Hezekiah felt like that. As the most powerful man in his nation, he shouldn't have to bother God with such a trivial matter as the Assyrian army.

That he should somehow have the wherewithal to deal with it by himself. You know, there's only one place to deal with a spiritual problem. And it's face to face with God.

Face to face with God. It's not that he doesn't already know. You need him to see the pain in your eyes and the worry in your heart. And you need to see his loving and sovereign power, which is at work in you and for you.

[12 : 43] You need to go back there to that place of prayer where you meet with God face to face and tell him how it really is with you. Not just to spread Rabshake's letter before God, but to spread your heart out before God also.

This is where we get the measure of Hezekiah, the man. He went face to face with God. If we as Christians won't get face to face with God in prayer.

We won't get face to face with God anywhere. And then lastly, why he prayed?

Why did Hezekiah pray? It's true that there are no atheists in the trenches. And that one of the first instincts of any human being in trouble is to pray to whatever God they've been taught is out there.

But why did Hezekiah pray to the God he did, where he did, how he did, and when he did? I strongly suspect that it was not Hezekiah's default instinct.

[14 : 08] Rather, I suspect he was encouraged to be a man of prayer by another man of prayer. He learned why to pray and how to pray at the feet of the mighty prophet Isaiah.

By the time Hezekiah was king, Isaiah was a very old man. And yet he still spoke for God. This chapter, 2 Kings 19, begins with Hezekiah being threatened by King Sennacherib of Assyria.

And Hezekiah immediately sends a messenger to Isaiah the prophet to glean his wisdom. And in verses 6 and 7, Isaiah says to Hezekiah, this is the same Isaiah that wrote the book of Isaiah, Thus says the Lord, do not be afraid because of the words you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me.

Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land, and I will make him fall by the sword in his own land.

You see what Isaiah is doing here? He is reassuring Hezekiah that the Lord is sovereign over the situation he is facing.

[15 : 32] That the Lord is fighting Hezekiah's battles for him. That true power and true victory does not depend upon the strength of Jerusalem's walls or Jerusalem's armies, but upon the strength of Jerusalem's God.

Isaiah the prophet turned Hezekiah's eyes toward the sovereign power and the inexistent love of God.

Look at the bully and see his bulging muscles, and you'll fret and you'll panic.

Look to your altogether more powerful father, who makes your bully look like a little ant, and you'll be prayerful and bold. Think of King David, Hezekiah's ancestor.

He looks at Goliath, and he's fretful, and he's panicky. Rather, he concentrates on the God he worships, and he prayerfully fits one of those smooth stones into his sling.

[16 : 49] Why then did Hezekiah pray? Answer, from verses 6 and 7, because he had a friend who turned his eyes upwards to the sovereign power and inexistent love of his heavenly Father.

Can you be this kind of friend to a Christian you know is struggling at the moment? Can you help them turn their eyes away from the bullying storms around them, whatever they may be, these rabshacky letters, and encourage them to fix their eyes upon the sovereign power and inexistent love of their heavenly Father?

That's the kind of friend that I need in my own life. And that's the kind of friend that I aspire to be in the lives of others. The friend who will go against the flow and turn your eyes vertical rather than horizontal.

Yes, you can tell a lot about a man from his prayers. Indeed, you can tell a lot about a man's friends and who he listens to by his prayers, as we'll see in a few weeks' time.

Hezekiah here is in the eyes of a perfect storm. The empire of Assyria is beating on the gates of Jerusalem. But as you will know, sometimes the eye of a storm is the calmest place to be.

[18 : 32] Especially if it should be an eye where prayer to our heavenly Father through Jesus Christ comes first.