

Hezekiah's Prayer (2)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 May 2021

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 0 0] Perhaps you could turn with me this evening to 2 Kings chapter 19 and verse 15. 2 Kings 19 and verse 15.

2 Kings 19 verse 15. In that verse we read these words. Then Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, saying, O Lord God of Israel, you who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone of all the kingdoms of the earth.

You made the heavens and the earth. You can tell a lot about a Christian, not just by what he prays for, but by who he prays to.

Or to put it another way, how he addresses God as the object of his prayer. I don't really make a practice of listening to prayers to find fault in them.

But it seems to me that we can fall into one of two traps in our addresses to God. In the first instance, we can show him too little respect.

[1 : 2 3] And in the second instance, we can show him too little love. Jesus taught us how to find the right balance in an introduction to the Lord's prayer. Our Father who is in heaven.

There is the love. There is the intimacy. There is the relationship. There is the respect. There is the reverence. There is the worship. Well, I wonder what you can tell about Hezekiah's attitude to God from his address to God in prayer here in 2 Kings 19.15.

Remember the conditions under which he was praying. An enemy army is encamped outside his city walls and he has been threatened with the destruction of his nation.

It is prayer under extreme pressure. And I would argue that perhaps his address to God did more than anything else in his prayer to get Hezekiah thinking straight again.

How Hezekiah thinks about God does more than anything else to calm his fear and soothe his anxiety. Let me suggest to you that your attitude to God will do more than anything else in your life to set your heart at rest when you also are praying under pressure.

[2 : 5 1] The closer we get to that wonderful balance that Jesus taught us about in the Lord's prayer, our Father who is in heaven, relationship and respect, the more settled you'll be, even if the world around you is crazy weird.

Well, it seems to me that as we read Hezekiah's address in 2 Kings 19 through 15 to God in prayer, we can learn three aspects of the God to whom we pray.

The God whom to know is life and love and peace. First, the love that will not let us go. Second, the grace that will not let us pay.

And third, the power that will not let us fall. First of all, then, we learn about God, that he is the love that will not let us go.

The love that will not let us go. Hezekiah begins, O Lord, God of Israel. Now, you will know that the word Lord in small capital letters is the covenant name of God, the name Yahweh or Jehovah.

[4 : 04] God revealed himself in this way to Moses in the context of his promise to save his people from slavery in Egypt. God of Israel is another name God gives himself in the context of promise.

This time, his covenant to the father of the Jews, Abraham. You shall be my people, God said to them, and I shall be your God. So Hezekiah begins by addressing the God of covenant promise.

But let's look behind these lofty words, covenant promise. And what do you find? Reach behind the theology of covenant in the Bible, and what do you see?

You see the love of God for his people. The passion of God for his children. Or as one author has put it, the furious longing of God for his people.

George Matheson went blind while studying for the ministry of the gospel. For years afterwards, his sister looked after him.

[5 : 16] But when Matheson reached the age of 40, his sister got married and left him to look after himself. On the eve of her marriage, a nervous George Matheson wrote a hymn.

A hymn we love to sing. O love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee. Now when we use the names Lord and God of Israel, we're thinking about Matheson's love.

Matheson's love that will not let me go. Strip back all this lofty language of covenant, and you're left with this. O love that will not let me go.

That's where Hezekiah begins in prayer. The furious longing of God for his children. The infinite love of God. The eternal passion of God.

When you were a child and all the world was against you, you found your greatest comfort in your mother's arms. The arms of the one person in this world who loved you the most.

[6 : 21] That's what we do when we're under extreme pressure. We find comfort running into the arms of the person who loves us most. And for the Christian, that person is God.

As children, we were taught to sing the chorus. We loved it. Wide, wide is the ocean. High is the heavens above. Deep, deep is the deepest sea.

Is my Saviour's love. When we are under extreme pressure. Faced perhaps by people who are indifferent to God.

Or faced by situations we find it very difficult to cope with. That's where our prayer must begin. By running into the arms of the love that will not let me go.

Maybe that's where some for whom we shall be praying later find themselves. They're under extreme pressure, either from poor health or from persecution or whatever.

[7 : 24] Let's ensure that when we pray for them this evening. That we pray that in their time of deepest need. They'll find comfort in the arms of their loving God.

Yahweh. The God of Israel. The second way Hezekiah addresses God in this prayer. Is as the grace that will not let us pay.

The grace that will not let us pay. Word for word. I believe that you who are enthroned above the cherubim.

Is the highest, most exalted of all God's titles. You who are enthroned above the cherubim. At the centre of the temple in Jerusalem was the Ark of the Covenant.

It was a golden box. Covered by a golden lid. On which were carved two golden angelic cherubim. Their wings outstretched.

[8 : 32] Meeting in the middle. The Ark of the Covenant. The Ark itself contained the two tablets on which Moses had written down the Ten Commandments. The lid of the Ark. On which these golden cherubim were carved.

Was called the mercy seat. We read of that in Exodus 25. And it was there, seated on that lid. On that mercy seat. God promised to dwell.

The overhanging cherubim were his throne. And it was a throne of mercy. A throne of grace. That is the significance of Hezekiah's title for God.

You who are enthroned above the cherubim. It is an intelligent, devout reference to God. As who Paul would later call the Father of mercies.

And the God of all grace. As you read through the history of Judah. You realise that they had been unfaithful to God. Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, had been a very wicked man.

[9 : 41] Who indeed had outlawed the worship of God. And spread idol worship across the whole nation of Judah. This was a land that did not deserve God's favour.

It did not deserve to be rescued from the Assyrian army. It deserved wrath. But Hezekiah, rather, appeals to God's mercy.

And God's forgiveness. And God's grace. The God whose love will not let us go. Is the God whose grace will not let us pay.

Or to put it another way. The God who will do for us exceeding abundantly. All that we can ever ask. Or imagine. Or deserve. At no cost to us.

Now, perhaps there are times. When at least in some small part. We have brought the extreme pressure we are under.

[10 : 39] Upon ourselves. Maybe we said or did the wrong thing. At the wrong time. Look back on Hezekiah's dealings with Assyria. And you'll learn that for some time before the invasion.

He had been sending gold to Assyria. To bribe them. And the Assyrians weren't stupid. They knew that where there is some gold. There is more gold. And so at least partly.

Hezekiah had brought this invasion upon himself. And his nation. In other words. Hezekiah deserved nothing from God. Except his judgment. But what he got instead.

Was God's mercy and grace. And so from the depths of his own fear. Hezekiah prays to the God. Whose grace will not let us pay. To the God who was enthroned above the cherubim.

And in this he's rather like that tax collector. Jesus referred to as going up to the temple to pray. A man who stood at a distance. Jesus. Who beat his chest and cried out.

[11 : 44] Lord be merciful to me. A sinner. It was that tax collector. Not the self-righteous Pharisee. Whose prayer God heard that day. And this is gospel prayer.

When we're praying out of a sense of our own unworthiness. And we're crying out for the grace of Christ. A grace we don't deserve. But of which we're assured through his cross and resurrection.

The legalist believes he deserves God's favour. Because of his own religious or moral efforts. But the Christian appeals to the mercy of God in Christ.

As the basis for God's favour. He appeals to the grace that will not let him pay. This is where to go. When you're under extreme pressure.

And partly because of your own making. To the God who is enthroned. Above the cherubim. The third and final way that Hezekiah addresses God.

[12 : 48] Is the love that will not let us go. The grace that will not let us pay. And third. The power that will not let us fall. The power that will not let us fall. Hezekiah closes his prayer off to God in this way.

You are God. You alone. Of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth. Now we'll look more at this in weeks to come. But it's almost like Hezekiah is saying.

Doesn't Sennacherib know who he's messing with here? That the God to whom Hezekiah is praying is not a figment of his imagination. Rather he is the one true and living God.

The God who is sovereign over all peoples and all kingdoms. The God whose power is unlimited. The Sennacherib and Assyrian army might think that they can do what they want.

How they want. When they want. To whom they want. But all the time they're on a leash. God's leash. That's the thing about the bullies of this world.

[13 : 54] The Rabshakes and the Sennacheribs. They think they're in control. But they're not really. They are self-deceived. There is only one king of kings. And Lord of Lords.

The creator of the heavens and earth. God himself. And it's to him all men must bow. Sennacherib. The Rabshake.

The Assyrian army. They're all playing at being big in power. But the one true and living God. Only he is the real deal. Goliath was playing at power.

But the God who empowered the shepherd boy David. Is the real deal. Herod the great was playing at power. By massacring the infants. But the God of Israel is the real deal.

Satan plays at power. But he is nothing before the almighty. All-powerful. Omnipotent God. Of heaven and earth. So you see this is to whom we come when we pray.

[15 : 01] Our father. Full of love. Full of grace. Who is in heaven. Full of power. God of all the kingdoms of the earth. Not just Judah but Assyria also.

The maker of heaven and earth. The God who gives the Assyrian soldiers the very breath in their lungs. And the strength in their arms. And can take it away just as quick.

And you see as Hezekiah reflects on the infinite power of God. You can almost see his nerves calming. And his blood pressure dropping. The armies besieging Jerusalem don't seem quite as big.

In comparison with the almighty power of God. On a recent walk. I was reflecting and meditating on that wonderful verse in Ephesians 6 verse 10.

Rendered so well in my devotional Bible. The Holman Christian Standard Bible. Let me read the verses that's rendered in that version of the Bible to you. Finally be strengthened in the Lord.

[16 : 06] And by his vast strength. Finally be strengthened by the Lord. And by his vast strength. And I was struck by that. Phrase. His vast strength.

Our Father is vastly strong. And vastly powerful. Whatever the nature of the extreme pressure you're under.

It's not vast. In its comparison to the vastness of the power and strength of the God of all the kingdoms of the earth. If we should begin our prayers with the greatness of God.

Then we'll get a sense of perspective. As your pastor. I urge you to take Hezekiah's address to God in prayer.

Into your hearts. When you pray under extreme pressure. You are praying to the love that will not let me go. The grace that will not let me pay.

[17 : 08] And the power that will not let me fall. In light of these truths. Would you not rather be with an under pressure Hezekiah. Sieged in Jerusalem.

Than with an overconfident Sennacherib. At the head of his huge army. This is the power of the gospel of work in you.

Our Father. Who is in heaven. Amen.