

Encouragement in the Lord

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[0 : 0 0] with me to 2nd Chronicles chapter 32 which you'll find in page 383 of your church bibles 2nd Chronicles 32. I want to read again for benefit ourselves and the bible class that have just come in verses 6 to 8. King Hezekiah is facing a mighty enemy. Hezekiah has prepared the city of Jerusalem. He's fortified it. He's cut off the water supply so that the Assyrians don't have that to help them. He's actually built a tunnel under the ground into Jerusalem so that water can get into Jerusalem. But then we read these words in verse 6. And he sent combat commanders over the people and gathered them together to him in the square at the gate of the city and spoke encouragingly to them saying, Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him. For there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our

God to help us and to fight our battles. And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah. And one of the greatest encouragements that the church needs today is encouragement. Encouragement that's rooted in God's word. Encouragement that we give one to another that is based and, as we said, rooted in the word of God. Encouragement to live your life to the glory of God and to do so in particularly difficult times. You need encouragement. I need encouragement. The Lord's people need encouragement, whether it's the Lord's people here in this congregation, whether it's the Lord's people in different parts of the land. We all need that encouragement of God to strengthen you in your daily fight against sin, in your fight against Satan. Your fight, yes, against self. That fight against the world, the flesh and the devil.

Which you see, when you lose sight of the encouragement that God's word gives you. And yes, and when we're more prone to discourage, even discourage one another, maybe through a lack of love, lack of support, and we become discouraged. Well, the consequence of that discouragement is severe. You lose sight or you lose that zeal for the Lord. You lose that zeal for his work.

You become less a foot soldier in the Lord's army and more a deserter, shying away from the conflict that rages in your heart and in your life. Because you're engaged in battle, that battle against sin, that battle against self, that battle against the world. These battles are real.

These battles are fought on a daily basis. And without that encouragement that you gain from God's word and indeed from one another, that zeal for the battle is minimized when you're not encouraged in the fight. That's why we all need encouragement. And you who know the Lord Jesus as saviour, you who are of the Lord's people, then you find that encouragement certainly in God's word.

[3 : 37] Even the Lord Jesus and his ministry, think of him and his conflict with Satan, his conflict with the world, his conflict with those who refuse to receive him as Lord and saviour. Jesus needed the encouragement of his Father. He needed the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. And yes, he needed the encouragement even of his disciples when Jesus required that strength for the fight. And there are many, many instances in Scripture of this whole aspect of encouragement. But there's one example here in this passage that we read that I firmly believe God has brought us to this morning. Because it's a passage that speaks volumes about the need to be grounded in the one true faith in our God of power, in our God of might.

And I pray that this passage, the more that we look at it, the more that we consider it, the more that you allow it to enter your heart, that this passage will actually give you encouragement in whatever circumstance you find yourself in. Whether it be when you're facing the mountains of particular trials in your life, or it may be a particularly besetting sin in your heart, or it may be even the aggravation of the world around you that can so discourage you or has the potential to discourage you.

Well, be encouraged by the Word of God. And remember, as some of us were reminded a few days ago, Old Testament examples are New Testament instructions. Because what we find here, even here in this particular passage of the Old Testament, speaks or directly or is, or certainly speaks to the the fulfilling of New Testament hope found in the Lord Jesus Christ, our encourager.

But let's turn to this passage then more particularly. Three things to notice with respect to encouragement, speech, strength and significance. The speech of encouragement, the strength of encouragement and the significance of encouragement. So let's remind ourselves of the speech that we find here in verse 6. And he, Hezekiah, set commanders over the people, gathered them together to him in the square at the gate of the city, and spoke encouragingly to them. What's happening here?

Well, Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, Jerusalem is facing this mighty warrior, this king of Assyria, this king Sennacherib. This is a fierce king, the fierce king of a fierce warrior nation.

[6 : 22] And this king and this nation intend to conquer Judah, capture Jerusalem, and the king intends to extend his power. I mean, he's got such self-confidence in his power, and he's so confident in himself.

He's got no love, he's got no desire to follow the one true God, the God of Israel. And against him, he's king Hezekiah. And Hezekiah is one of the very, not very, but certainly one of the few faithful kings of Judah. He's exercised so much godly wisdom in his reign. He's seeking to resist the onslaught of the king of Assyria at this point. He's, as we read at the start of chapter 32, he's shown his wisdom in reorganizing the defense of Jerusalem. And even, as you see there, he's cut off the water supply so that the Assyrians can't get that, you know, to help them in the siege of Jerusalem. He's made more weapons in case there's conflict, direct conflict with the enemy. This is all wisdom. This is human responsibility being exercised in the face of this real enemy. But together with these practical aspects of preparation are words. Not just what he does to the city, to the walls, to the defenses. He uses words.

Because Jezeiah knows that all the practical preparations, that's not enough. He's going to have to stir the hearts of the people against the enemy. And that's what we see here in verse 6. He does something that has a profound, significant effect, a strengthening effect. A effect that will move the hearts of the people in Jerusalem.

What does he do? He speaks words of encouragement to the people directly. Here's, we might say, here's leadership in action. This is the heart of a true king, a king true to God, who's reaching out to the people who are who are afraid of the power of the king of Assyria. And the people, they would have known of the king and what the king had previously done to show his power. History books tell us, certainly affirmed here in 2 Chronicles 32, Hezekiah, Sennacherib had already taken 46 cities in Judah, the 45 fenced cities in Judah.

He'd captured over 200,000 inhabitants. But Hezekiah is not going to allow the fear of the people who know what already has happened. He's not going to allow that fear to overcome them there in Jerusalem.

[9 : 11] He will speak, as we're told here, encouragingly through them. Before I actually see the words that he uses, again, we have to just pause and see what's happening here. The word in the original language for encourage speaks of the mind. So it speaks about engaging the mind, speaking into the mind to give strength, to give strength, to give courage. And all the weapons of Jerusalem, all the fortified structures of the city, they're not going to win the battle unless the will of the people was right to withstand the enemy and the enemy that was threatening the very existence of the nation of Judah. And you'll see how the mind, in a moment we'll see how the mind was strengthened in the knowledge that God the Lord was with them. And so I think we can say this then, for your encouragement, for our encouragement in that spiritual warfare that exists and is daily in your life as a Christian. I mean, look at the encouragement we have here. King Hezekiah spoke words of encouragement to the people. He's directing these words to the minds of the people. He's seeking to strengthen the resolve and commitment. And you have another king who speaks words of encouragement to you. Words that meet every aspect of your life in every circumstance of your life.

And that's speaking encouragingly to you. Well, what are these words of encouragement? These speaking encouragingly to you? The words that we find in Scripture. God's word. You who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, says the Lord Jesus. These words that are spoken encouragingly to you by the very voice of grace through the power of the Holy Spirit. Words that will heal a broken heart.

Words that will soothe a troubled mind. Words that will strengthen you for the battle ahead. Words that are spoken to you. Words that are words of grace. Words that are words of grace. Words of love. Well, listen to these words. Let your mind absorb them. And dwell in them. Be encouraged by them. And have that will to do as these words speak to you. To do for the glory of God.

What are some of these words? Well, think of the words that Jesus spoke to his disciples. The words that, as he spoke to them, he speaks to you. Are you suffering for being a Christian? Well, hear the voice of Jesus speak encouragingly to you.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Are you anxious? Are you anxious? Anxious about the future? Are you anxious about God's provision for you? Well, hear the voice of Jesus speak encouragingly to you.

[12 : 18] If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? When you come before God in your prayers, with your petitions, will he hear the voice of Jesus speak encouragingly to you.

Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you'll find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, and the one who seeks, finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

These words of encouragement that Jesus spoke encouragingly to his disciples, that he speaks encouragingly to you. These are words applied through the Holy Spirit's power that will give you that strength that will truly calm your fears and allay doubts.

And speak to your heart and mind to give you that joy in the Lord, to apply what you're given in these words that are spoken encouragingly to you.

To give you that strength, to give you that courage, to enable you to face what God in his providence gives you to face. Whether it's a trial or a difficulty that you're facing in your life.

[13 : 33] And that strength, I think we need to explore more fully here. The strength of encouragement is you see what happens next after we're told of these words spoken encouragingly.

Well, what are the words? Verse 7 to the first part of verse 8. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the whore that is with them.

For there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh. But with us, with the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles. These are words of power.

These are words to enter the very inner recesses of the heart and mind. Now we know, of course, from Scripture that this isn't the first time that a servant of God gave encouragement to someone else to be strong and to be courageous.

Remember when Joshua was to succeed Moses, when Joshua was going to lead the Israelites into the promised land? Moses instructed Joshua to be strong and courageous.

[14 : 40] You know, in the face of all the hurdles, the massive hurdles that were before Joshua and the people. But it wasn't simply, you know, be strong and courageous full stop.

Not at all. It was to be strong and courageous in the Lord. In the Lord. The Lord's presence that was promised to Joshua and the people that God would be with him.

Therefore, be strong and courageous. And when Hezekiah gives this command to the leaders and to the people, this command to be strong and courageous, you notice it's an association with the same presence of God to be with the people.

But why did the people need to hear these words? What exactly did Hezekiah say that calmed the fears of the people?

And what can we apply to ourselves in these words of encouragement? Well, the first thing surely to say is this, and we've touched on this a moment ago, and that's that the people had real fears.

[15 : 48] I mean, the king of Assyria and his armies, they were known by reputation. As we've seen, they'd already caused, not just in Judah, but so much else in that part of the world, they'd caused so much destruction in their conquering different parts of that area.

Assyria, they'd already, in fact, conquered the northern kingdom of Israel some 20 years before. They'd carried off so many of the people back to Assyria. Assyria, as we say nowadays, northern Iraq and southeast Turkey.

It was a fierce army. And, you know, even the fact that Hezekiah uses this word, the horde. You know, a mighty army. And Isaiah, if you read in Isaiah chapter 36, Isaiah affirms that, you know, Hezekiah had taken so many of these fortified cities of Judah, and now he's reached the walls of Jerusalem.

And the people can see, they can see this is a mighty force outside there. There's real fear in their hearts. There's real fear in their mind. And, you know, you can just hear them thinking, are they going to suffer the same fate as the northern kingdom of Israel?

Are they going to suffer the same fate as these other areas in Judah? Will they be taken to Assyria? Are they going to leave Jerusalem forever, never to see the city again?

[17 : 11] I mean, the enemy was real. The danger was real. They had real fears. And you know that the enemy of the soul is real. Satan is real.

His demons are real. The danger and reality of satanic attack is real. The danger of being led into satanic territory, where God is dishonoured, is real.

You face a real foe. And so you do need to hear words of encouragement, words that are centred on the presence of God, that gives you that confidence in Him.

I mean, the people had real fears. But the people had a real God, a real God whose power was greater than any of His enemies.

See how Hezekiah puts it? For there are more with us than with them. And the people are looking out, and they can see the vast number of troops from Assyria, far outnumbering the population of Jerusalem.

[18 : 18] But Hezekiah knows his God. That God, almighty God, the Lord God of hosts, the Lord God of armies, the Lord God is greater, infinitely greater, than the human might of the king of Assyria and his armies.

And that is true today, and eternally, and always. Old Testament examples, and New Testament instructions. Remember what the Apostle John said to his readers, readers that were facing enemies, great enemies of the truth.

John said to them, He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. And that surely tells you that you're not alone. There are more with you than with Him. More in terms of power, more in terms of might, more in terms of greatness, more in terms of the one who is the victor, the victor over sin, over sin, over death itself.

Because you who know Him as Lord and Saviour, He tells you, I'm with you always. Because you have with you the Lord of glory. You have with you the Lord who's conquered sin, conquered Satan, and conquered death itself.

You have then, you have that assurance of victory. Victory in Christ. You're facing the enemy of the soul. You have that assurance that He is with you.

[19 : 50] So listen to the words of encouragement. And act to these words. As in, Hezekiah was encouraging the people to act upon what he was saying, that he was giving them these encouraging words.

Because God had given Hezekiah these words to give to the people that told of God and all His greatness. The words that show the contrast between God and the enemies of God.

With Him, verse 8, With Him as an arm of flesh, but with us, is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles. You see the contrast. The king of Assyria on the one hand.

The king with all this vast horde of armies, soldiers. And the king and his armies, they've been compared to, well, they've been compared to something that's so minimal, so, almost, so weak, an arm, a single arm of flesh.

But opposed to that single arm is the covenant God of Israel. I mean, an arm of flesh, what does that mean? What does that signify? It signifies weakness.

[20 : 59] It signifies, you know, just human, mere human strength, which in fact, there's no strength at all in relation to the God of all power. And you see, the contrast couldn't be greater.

With Assyria, there's mere humanity. With the people of Jerusalem, as the Lord, our God. And don't ever forget that truth. With you, with God's people, is the Lord, your God.

With all else, is the arm of flesh. And that little preposition, you know, with, you know, it's just like a, it's like a stick of dynamite that contains so much power.

You know, that promise that God gives of his abiding presence with his people. The promise that was revealed even before Jesus was born. You read in Matthew 1, they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means, God with us.

And think of that, the abiding presence that Jesus spoke to his disciples. Behold, I am with you always, even to the very end of the age. And think of the promise of God's, God's abiding presence with his people through the Holy Spirit.

[22 : 08] That's the Spirit indwelling every believer and just as Jesus promised. He's in John 14, I will ask the Father and he will give you another helper to be with you forever.

Even the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him, you know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

Surely then that tells you we might say that the truest intimacy, the truest closeness, that closeness that gives you strength for the battle, that closeness of God with you to encourage you in your faith and your trust in him so that you are and able to stand strong as you face all that would, you know, seek to try and distance you from our God and Savior.

and that knowledge that God is with you surely to give you that confidence to, yes, to face the present and the future knowing he is with you, he, God, Almighty God, with you, weak you, weak me.

But he's with you and has promised to be with you forever so that you know that you're not on your own. So you have that confidence to know that you're not on your own, that he's with you just as the people there in Jerusalem were given that confidence as you see in the second part of verse 8 and the people took confidence from the words of King, of Hezekiah, King of Judah.

[23 : 43] The word confidence here is that meaning of support. So the words, the encouragement, encouragingly spoken words were words that literally supported the people.

I mean, Hezekiah is a man of faith. He's a king who is a king of faith and faithfulness in the Lord. And he himself has that confidence in God and he's expressing that confidence to the people to give the people that same confidence so that the people don't lose heart, so that their confidence is placed in God alone.

I mean, only a man of faith could actually have spoken these words of encouragement to the people. I mean, only a man of faith could have that confidence in God the Lord that God would be true to his character, true to his covenant and be with his people and save them.

And it's that confidence in the Lord that would reveal that the people would not be overcome by the enemy at the gate there in Jerusalem.

And that's why we read on in the chapter we see that their confidence was rewarded. This king of Assyria, King Sennacherib, he didn't prevail. I mean, you see the words that he used, he was trying to terrify the people, he was trying to undermine God by saying, well, I've defeated every other area where they have deities and your God will be no different to the others.

[25 : 16] But Sennacherib didn't have the last word. God had the last word. God had that victory over the arm of flesh. And you know, you think on the confidence that the people had after King Hezekiah's words of encouragement, that speech.

Well, remember this, that the confidence that the people had, the confidence that Hezekiah had, it wasn't self-confidence. I mean, King of Assyria, he had self-confidence. He had that confidence in his own abilities.

But the people didn't have self-confidence. Their confidence was in God the Lord. And so, the reassurance that the words of encouragement gave to them told them that God hasn't abandoned the people, that He's with them and will deliver them from their powerful enemy.

I pray then that that's an encouragement to you. That you continue to depend on the Lord God in every area of your life, in every aspect of your life.

And, as we said, the word confidence speaks of support. And yes, rely on Him for that support. Because He will never desert you. He won't let you down even when you're going through the most difficult and we might even say precarious of situations.

[26 : 44] You're in that dark night of the soul. Continue to remember that the Lord, your God, is with you. And He gives you that support. He gives you that confidence. Yes, even in the season of your trials.

But remember, it's a season. It's a time. Have confidence in Him. Have confidence when you're facing the decisions of life that, you know, crucially affect your life.

Even the very details of your life under God. Have that confidence in Him. And not self-confidence. Even when the plans that you've made in your life, have that assurance.

Give them to Him. Have that confidence in Him who leads and guides you. so that you truly can say, as we were singing just a moment ago, that you will fear no evil when you call upon Him for you are with me and your rod and staff, they comfort me.

And so, I pray that you have been encouraged by God's Word this morning, that He's spoken encouragingly to you. And yes, be encouraged as you go from here.

[27 : 52] Have that confidence in God, the God who is there and the God who loves you. But if you're not a Christian, well, again, look at the contrast that this passage shows between the confidence that the believer has in God and the false confidence of the one who's not in God.

Who would you rather be? Would you rather be supported by, as it were, the arm of flesh that's no strength at all? Will you come to know the Lord God as your Saviour, the one who saves you and protects you and promises to be with you always?

So who will you go to for that confidence? Go to the one whose support for you will never fail. Go to Him who promises to rescue and deliver you and give you that eternal life that means that you're safe in Him eternally.

Who will you go to? Will you go to the Lord God? Will you go to the God that disappoints, the false God, the arm of flesh? Amen.

Let us pray. Lord, may it be that truly we are encouraged in your Word, by your Word, through your Word. And as you speak encouragingly to your people, even in these times, at such a time as this, we pray, Lord, that your people will have confidence in you and will know that strength that abides in you for you are the God of strength, the God who saves, the God who delivers.

[29 : 30] So hear us, Lord, as we continue before you in worship and praise. Lord, you are the one who is worthy of all our praise. Hear us as we come before you in that praise.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, let's close in Psalm 20 on page 24.

We'll sing the whole psalm. May the Lord answer you when you cry in distress. May Jacob's God keep you whose name you confess. May God send assistance from his holy place and grant you from Zion support by his grace.

And then the last day stands a last singing verse and horses or chariots some trust for defence. For the name of the Lord is our strong confidence. They're brought to their knees while in strength we arise.

O Lord, save the King. Hear and answer our cries. One to nine, Psalm 20, the tune of St. Daniel to God's praise. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[30 : 36] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.