

Creating Failure from Success

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[0 : 01] Let's turn now to the Word of God as we find that in 2nd Chronicles chapter 32 and at verse 24. 2nd Chronicles 32 verse 24 In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death.

And he prayed to the Lord and he answered him and gave him a sign. But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him. For his heart was proud.

Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem. We're not going to read through the rest of the passage there to the end of the chapter because we've read the details and in fact a more detailed account in 2nd Kings chapter 20 just a few minutes ago.

This is a kind of shortened version of what you find in 2nd Kings about this episode or these episodes in the life of Hezekiah. It's sad isn't it?

Here's a man whose life we've been looking at for 2 or 3 weeks in the other chapters before this in 2nd Chronicles. A man who was so faithful to God.

[1 : 18] A man who achieved so much. A man who was a brilliant leader. A man who was a great reformer in casting out all the excesses, the idolatry that had actually been brought into the temple and the worship during the time of his father.

And yet here he is with his heart proud and bringing some of the judgment of God upon his people. Even the best people in God's church are flawed, are prone to make mistakes, are liable to be drawn into thinking better of themselves than they should.

We are all actually prone to the things that Hezekiah here shows in this part of the picture the Bible gives you. And it tells you as well that the Bible is a very honest book.

You know what it's like nowadays when you find particularly celebrities, whether they'd be sports stars or other kinds of celebs, but you find them when their picture is on a glossy magazine, it's nicely airbrushed.

[2 : 34] All the little defects are taken away. The hair is nicely presented so that it's just the right color exactly. The skin is perfect.

Everything is actually just manipulated so as to give you the best possible picture and make the best impression. The Bible's not like that. It doesn't airbrush Hezekiah or Peter or David or any of the figures it gives us.

It gives you an honest report, an honest picture. It doesn't leave out the flaws. It doesn't actually tell us, here's what your life should be like, because this man is perfect in everything he did.

He wasn't. Neither are you and I. That's why the Bible is such a spectacularly different book than every other book you find.

It is God's record giving us the picture that God wants us to see. Now we've read 2 Kings chapter 20.

[3 : 37] You can also read Isaiah chapters 38 and 39, which again are pretty much the same as the 2 Kings passage. To give you the background to this passage here in 2 Chronicles, it shortens it here in 2 Chronicles, and there are two incidents pressed in or compressed into this short passage, and around these two incidents we're going to look today at this study of Hezekiah creating failure from success.

That's a very certain thing, that he created failure from success. The success he had went to his head. And because that happened, he became self-satisfied and complacent, and because then as self-satisfied and complacent, he failed to be the kind of leader he should have been.

And therefore there were consequences for himself and the people. And that is, as we said, such a solemn thing that you find in the life of someone who was such a good man as Hezekiah.

And yet there is this episode just to warn us how much we need to be on our own watch as well. Now, two things about him from these two episodes that we can just use to summarize this passage.

First of all, he was proud when he should have been humble. He was proud when he should have been humble. Now that's why this incident with his sickness, his illness, I don't know exactly what it was, but the passage in 2 Kings and Isaiah tells us that they made a kind of poultice out of things to apply it to a boil or an abscess of some kind.

[5 : 21] Obviously he had some infection from that that was life-threatening. It wasn't a small thing. It was very serious. And in fact, Isaiah at that point, until the Lord actually answered Hezekiah's prayer and gave Isaiah another answer, Hezekiah was told by Isaiah, Put your house in order for you're going to die.

There's no recovery from this. This is the end of your life. That's it. But you see what he said to him was, Put your house in order. Here was Isaiah at that moment.

He was sure that Hezekiah was going to die. That was how Isaiah saw it then. God corrected that a little while later when he answered Hezekiah's prayer. But that is what he said from the Lord at that moment.

That was the word to Hezekiah. You're going to die, so set your house in order. How many times have we heard that ourselves during the course of our life from preaching, from people using it in prayer because these words of Isaiah have come into our theological speech or spiritual speaking and advice and so on.

And they're such important words. As we said to the children in looking at the first catechism, what is man's chief end? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

[6 : 49] That doesn't end in this life. Never mind what the secularists say. Never mind what people who don't believe the Bible and want to chuck out the Bible and want to see you stop using your Bible and don't want it taught in our schools or anything else.

Yes, they'll say, it's all about this life and when you come to die, that's it. There's nothing beyond that. That's not what God's picture tells us. That's not what God's word is telling us.

That's not what God is saying about our purpose in life. What is our purpose in life? Why have we been created? We've been created for eternity. To live forever.

And that's why Isaiah gave Hezekiah words that would focus his mind when he was nearing death. Set your house in order. Get your life sorted. Make sure everything is in its proper place. It's very sad, isn't it, when you come to people you know are on their deathbed and they don't want to hear about eternity.

[7 : 58] They don't want to hear about making their peace with God. They don't want to hear about their life needing to be in a right relationship with God before they die. You expect people who have experienced most of life as they come to an older age and as they come to know that they're about to die, you expect people from all of that experience at that particular moment to actually say well there's nothing more important for me now than that I know God as my Saviour that I have my trust in Him.

But it's not always like that, is it? But please don't leave it until you come to your deathbed. Set your house in order today.

You're going to die one day. So am I. But you don't leave setting your house in order until you know the day of your death has come.

Do it now. Make your peace with God. Accept Christ. Come into the kingdom of God. That's what Isaiah said to him. And Hezekiah prayed.

And the Lord answered him. He heard his prayer. It's a very shortened version of it here as we see. But you know from the other reading what actually happened. As he prayed the Lord heard his prayer and the Lord sent him an answer with Isaiah.

[9 : 20] I'm going to add 15 years to your life. And that's what it was. Now it's given us that so that we'll see here's a man who really should have been humble after all of that.

The Lord answering his prayer when he was just at the point of death and the Lord by his grace and by his power gave him the strength to recover. If anyone should be grateful it should be someone who was facing death and then by the Lord's mercy and by the Lord's grace was restored to health again.

Instead he did not make return according to the benefit done to him for his heart was proud. And alongside of that you've got to put verses 27 to 30 which is a list of all the achievements and the possessions that Hezekiah had.

He had very great riches. He had honour. He made himself treasures of silver, gold, precious stones, spices, shields for all kinds of costly vessels. Storehouses also for the yields of grain, wine and oil.

Stalls for all kinds of cattle and sheepfold. He provided cities for himself, flocks and herds and abundance for God had given him very great possessions.

[10:39] God had given him you see is the record here of the chronicler. And yet in verse 31 when these envoys came as we'll see in a minute God left him to himself in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.

Now there's an interesting thing. That God puts us in situations just to know what's in our hearts. Are we going to be true to him or are we not?

Are we going to be humble and dependent upon him or are we just going to be self-sufficient and think we can manage without him? That's what he was doing with Hezekiah. And you would say that of all the people, of all the portraits you've had in 2 Chronicles of these kings the person that's most likely to succeed when God puts him in a situation to test what's in his heart the person you think most likely to succeed would be Hezekiah.

But he failed. Why did he fail? Because his heart was proud. He was proud. He didn't humble himself for the pride of his heart verse 26.

He humbled himself there verse 26 for the pride of his heart. He made repentance over it but this pride of his heart was that which failed the test because of that that God had actually put him in.

[12:12] You hardly think it's possible and yet it is. What does that teach us then? Well it teaches us that we need to really know how to handle success small or great.

We need to actually be aware that success of any kind is something for which we need God's grace so as to know how to handle the right.

There was an old principal in the Free Church College at one time long before my time but I was told by someone who had actually had him as a tutor or lecturer in the college that he frequently had this prayer Lord teach us to carry a full cup with a steady hand.

Lord teach us to carry a full cup with a steady hand. In other words he was really meaning what he meant was when the Lord gives you a blessing he fills your cup when he gives you success of any kind small or great whether it's in the course of your career whether it's in school work whether it's in a good result in your sport whether it's in something that you have seen him do through you and helping other people whatever it is when you can call it legitimately call it success you and I need grace then because that cup then is likely to be spilled it's far easier to spill the cup when it's near the top that was half empty and what Hezekiah was given was a full cup of blessing look at all the things that he possessed look at all the achievements look at everything he had done and sweeping out all of this idolatry his cup was filled there are few kings in this portrait in this gallery of portraits of kings few kings that had so much blessing from the Lord whose cup was as full as Hezekiah's but he spilled it his heart was proud because pride brings self-satisfaction that's what

Hezekiah really came to be someone who was self-satisfied here's a passage that tells us God gave him all these things and you find that at this moment in Hezekiah's life he's basking in the glow of self-achievement it's as if he himself has done it by his own abilities remember that man in Luke chapter 12 we're going through Luke we're past chapter 12 now but cast your mind back to Luke chapter 12 to the farmer or the agricultural businessman who had the land that brought forth plentifully and yet so much eventually that he said to himself soul you have many goods laid up for many years what am I going to do with all of this stuff I know what I'll do he said I'll build barns I'll make them bigger and I'll say to my soul soul you've got so much laid up relax eat drink be merry and of course God came into the picture and said you're a fool you're not calculating that tonight your soul's going to be required of you but you see he wasn't self-satisfied and he wasn't complacent all of these years that he'd been working towards this achievement it's when he had all of this plenty it's when he had all of that gathered together it's then that it went to his head it's then that he began to relax spiritually it's then that he said to himself this is it

[15:53] I've made it I don't need anything else and what's true of individuals can be true of congregations we can say that as a congregation God has blessed us thankfully that we're still seeing God's blessing that there are evidences that God's blessing is still coming into our

experience that he's given us growth that he's given us unity that he's given us new faces that he's given us all of these things even in recent times to enjoy to be glad for you could say in a sense that's success in terms of what we want to be as a congregation but remember that congregation in Revelation chapter 3 the congregation of Laodicea where the Lord said you're saying I am rich I am increased with goods I have need of nothing and yet you don't know that you are poor and naked and blind why were they poor why were they naked why were they blind how could a church as rich in goods as they were full of material things full of achievements how could they actually be poor and blind and naked in the estimation of the

Lord because they were proud because they had come to the point where they had put God outside the door as it were and where they were living on their sense of self achievement that's why they were in a desperately poor state once you start thinking you can do it by yourself once you've started thinking that it's by your own skill or by something you have done that things have been achieved you're putting God outside what was that letter to the Laodicean church how did it conclude behold I stand at the door and knock if any man will hear my voice I will come in and I will sup with him and he was me that text is often used evangelistically and I'm not saying it's wrong to use it evangelistically an appeal to people to open the door of their hearts so that Jesus can come in but actually strictly speaking it's a text that's applied to a church that's gone cold a church that's become proud a church that because of its pride has put

Jesus outside effectively and he's appealing to them let me back in come back to depend upon me do away with your pride come again to be humble the way you once were that's what he's saying to them and that's the danger that you and I always face in every kind of success like Hezekiah there's the danger of being proud when we really ought to be humble Hezekiah had every reason to be humble through what God had done and restoring him to health and in realizing that all the achievements were in fact by God giving these to him God left him to himself to test him to know all that was in his heart sadly when God looked into his heart at that time God saw self sufficiency complacency pride written on it he was proud when he should have been humble secondly he was silent when he should have been speaking for

God here's this incident of these envoys that came from Babylon we need to know something of the background to that that's why we read in 2nd Kings these envoys from Babylon had come on a mission to Jerusalem they'd heard about Hezekiah they'd heard about his achievements they'd heard about this sign that had been given I'm not going to go into that sign it's a bit complicated it was to do with the sun dial of Ahaz and the sign was that the shadow of the dial instead of the way it would normally go forward as the sun proceeded throughout the day Hezekiah said that's too simple if the Lord will give me a sign for the shadow to go back the way and that's anyway that's not the main point is that these envoys from Babylon they had come on a political scouting mission they were concerned with

Assyria just as much as Hezekiah was Assyria was the big threat for them too and even although Babylonians were beginning to grow in power Assyria was something that they needed to face the might of Assyria the power of Assyria so they had come on a scouting mission would Hezekiah and the people of Judah be prepared to support Babylon would they actually be prepared even to cause maybe an uprising in Judah so that it would take the heat of Babylon as far as they were concerned so the Assyrians would come and focus on Jerusalem instead of Babylon all of that sort of political mix is behind the scenes as you read about this it's shortened obviously here you don't know from this but when Hezekiah showed them all the things that he possessed he showed them all of that and you can get the sense of pride coming out even in that itself he didn't leave anything of his goods even his armory for the defense of the realm it was all exposed everything was shown to his envoys from

[22 : 03] Babylon and Isaiah very very sharply rebuked him why did Isaiah rebuke him so much so sharply well because it wasn't just that pride made Hezekiah show these Babylonians everything that he had what that means is that he was really ready to throw in his lot with them that instead of trusting to God against Assyria he was now beginning to think I need these Babylonians and I must have these Babylonians to be my allies I must put my trust in them against the Assyrians you see he is beginning to move away from his previous trust in God from looking by faith to God to see him through the crisis and Isaiah gives him that rebuke and Isaiah effectively says to him well if you love Babylon that much let me tell you what's going to happen to all this stuff you've shown them it's going to be taken to Babylon one day that's what happened not in Hezekiah's time and it's actually

very sad when Isaiah told him even some of your own sons will actually be taken captive to Babylon but it wouldn't happen in his day and Hezekiah you might say he just kind of that's okay then it's not going to happen in my day so the word of the Lord is good because I'm going to get out of it myself even whatever happens in the future that's in the Lord's hands but it's not going to happen in my time so that's a relief isn't that sad for a man of God to actually say that doesn't it remind us how important it is for ourselves to think of what are we handing on to our own descendants what sort of legacy are we actually giving to them because that's what happened here with Hezekiah because of this the wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem and we have to look at what we're handing on to the next generation are we giving them a legacy that will be to the help spiritually and morally or are we giving them something for which they will criticize us it's a very important question always to ask ourselves but come back to this Isaiah's rebuke is because he was silent when these envoys were going about because as you read in Kings and in Isaiah the one thing that Hezekiah did not mention when he was showing these envoys proudly around all that he was possessed of all the things that he had and a grand sense of achievement the one thing he didn't mention was God he didn't say to these envoys others this is what our God has actually brought us this is what our God has enabled us to achieve this is the kind of God we worship in Judah who gives his people such plenty in his mercy he made no mention of God at all he showed them all of these things in the pride of his heart now that means in our application of that every gift we have from God we must think of it as precious really, really precious every single thing our health our work our home having fresh water having food to eat having enough money having everything that's to our advantage being part of his church having freedom from persecution not living in poverty it doesn't matter where you look in your life today you will see many, many things that are gifts of God

James in his epistle puts it that way doesn't he? James 1 verse 16 every good and perfect gift comes down from above that's what Hezekiah forgot at this stage of his life all of the things that are mentioned there that big list of his possessions and his riches they hadn't come from beneath they hadn't come from his own creation they had come from above God had given that to him and every gift we have is from above everything that is good comes from the Father of lights with whom is no variableness or shadow of turning that means that he's always consistent he's always true to himself that's why we trust in him we must give thanks we must appreciate we must hold precious thankfully every gift we have but secondly we must also speak up for him we must tell people where this is from and we have opportunities every single day of life in ordinary conversation in our place of work in our interaction with different people there will always be circumstances when people will make mention of something that will give us an opening if we want to use it into telling people about our God and how good he is and what he has enabled us to achieve that's what Hezekiah failed to do he was silent about God when he ought to have been speaking up for him not only that but you need to speak up for God in other ways too we have many challenges to face in our age we have many challenges in our own nation to face right at this moment challenges regarding public morality challenges regarding public legislation what is our chief end?

[28 : 38] it's to glorify God and to enjoy Him how do we glorify God? we speak up for Him is one way of doing it we actually do what Hezekiah failed to do and tell people that God is actually most important to us these attempts at the moment in Parliament to introduce legislation some of it already in principle sadly has gone through in terms of marriage there's also going to be another attempt to introduce another attempt to introduce euthanasia to give permission to medical people to end other people's lives when it's deemed that that life is not worth continuing that's really what it's about who is going to decide whether a life is worth continuing or not who gave the life whose life is it your life is not your own not as mine nobody's life is their own it belongs to God no one has the right to take another human life specifically condemned by God so we have to actually speak up for God who's going to do it if we don't do it if we as people don't do it write to your MP write to your MSP write to the Prime Minister tell him simply what you think tell him this is wrong this is not in accordance with what public decency and morality ought to be tell him that you believe that there is a law that has been given for human society in every age and it's called the Bible don't be afraid to point out to these people that this book this standard of God is a standard for our age as well as every other age because there are plenty other people and plenty other groups who will be telling them otherwise who will be actually encouraging them to get rid of more of the Bible and more of the Bible's influence and to diminish the effect of the church and its voice and its preaching and its people if you let them that's what they will do they will listen to all the alternatives to Christianity and

to the standards of God and that's what will be for our people the basis of their future you must not and I must not as far as we can allow that we ought to God to speak up for him not to be silent when we ought to be vocal in his name let me finish with these verses you may have come across this already a couple of verses by a fellow

Arthur McPhee called the Gospel According to You the Gospels of Matthew Mark Luke and John are read by more than a few but the one that is most read and commented on is the Gospel According to You You are writing a Gospel a chapter each day by the things you do and the words you say men read what you write whether faithless or true so what is the Gospel According to You let's pray Lord our gracious God we pray that You would help us to be true and abiding witnesses for You forgive us too we pray for the many flaws in our lives for the number of times that we know we do fail to be the kind of people we ought to be forgive us

Lord we pray when our witness is dim when the light of our life has become feeble help us to recover it we pray help us Lord to consider those things that Your Word has taught us today in the life of this great man of God in the past and enable us as we seek to apply that to our own lives and to our own day that we may seek You with all our hearts and seek Your grace to help us to carry forward in our lives all that we seek to do for You help us to be humble dependent help us to go onwards Lord seeking to use every opportunity to speak for You we pray these things seeking acceptance in Jesus name Amen