

Failure From Success

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[0 : 00] Chronicles and chapter 32, we can begin reading at verse 24. Second book of the Chronicles, chapter 32 and at 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. But Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart. Both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of God did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.

Hezekiah had very great riches and honor. And he made for himself treasures for silver, for gold, for precious stones, for spices, for shields and for all kinds of costly vessels.

[1 : 04] Storehouses also for the yield of grain, wine and oil. Stalls for all kinds of cattle and sheepfolds. He likewise provided cities for himself and flocks and herds in abundance.

For God had given him very great possessions. The same Hezekiah closed the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them down to the west side of the city of David.

And Hezekiah prospered in all his works. And so in the matter of the envoys of the princes of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.

Hezekiah was one of the great kings and is set out for us, along with Josiah, as one of the best kings of Judah.

That's why such a great amount of space is given in Kings and Chronicles for these two reigns. And so it's very sad when you look at the end of Hezekiah's reign, or this towards the end of his reign, how he came to this particular defect in his life, in his outlook.

[2 : 20] We read here that his heart was lifted up in pride. In verse 25, Hezekiah did not make return for the Lord's goodness to him, according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud.

And so it's always sad to see at the end of a life that's been dedicated to God, that's achieved much for God, such as Hezekiah, you find others in Scripture, such as Gideon, for example, who was such a great champion.

And yet at the end of his life, too, there was a defect, there was a turning away, in a sense, from the Lord. There was a blot, if you like, on his character and on his achievements.

And it reminds us, doesn't it, that even the very best human beings, out with the Lord Himself, of course, but even the very best human beings, and even the greatest in terms of their achievement, are flawed individuals.

They have flaws that come to light, and the Bible actually doesn't hold back from telling us about these flaws. We're all liable to fail, and even these great kings like Hezekiah, David, and Solomon, great though they were, godly men though they were in many ways, yet the defects in their lives come through in the description you have in the Bible.

[3 : 46] And it really shows us the Bible's truthfulness. The Bible doesn't airbrush the portraits that you get of individuals like Hezekiah or David. It's not like celebrity photos in magazines, where their skin appears absolutely perfect, where everything about them is just flawless.

There is no airbrushing in the Bible at all. It tells us about things the way they are. It tells us about people, how they were and how they lived. It tells us about their flaws and their defects.

That's why you can trust the Bible. It doesn't pretend, it doesn't actually hold back. It doesn't cover up the defects. It's there just giving us the portrait, the picture, exactly as it is.

And you need to read, as we did in 2 Kings 20, but also Isaiah chapters 38, 38-39, in the prophecy of Isaiah, which covers the same period, because Isaiah is obviously prominent in the reign of

Hezekiah, and as we read, he came to question Hezekiah over what he had shown these envoys that came from Babylon, who were very interested in Hezekiah and his resources.

Now, in 2 Chronicles, we find that these reports of 2 Kings and of Isaiah, indeed, are shortened, so that we can have, we really have pretty much a summary of them here in 2 Chronicles.

[5 : 12] But it's good to have the summary. You can fill it in from the other passages so that you get the extra details. But when you have the summary, it gives you there a summary that you can focus on and just get the main points of what happened.

And our study this morning is entitled, Creating Failure from Success. Because that's really what happened with this episode in Hezekiah's life, in Hezekiah's reign.

He created failure from success. He had been a very successful king, but this episode talks about failure, failure, where he failed.

And we'll see how that happened in the way that God left him to himself, in a sense. And he didn't actually return to God what God, in return for God's goodness to him, had been.

So, the two things that come from creating failure from success, first of all, we'll look at how he was proud when he should have been humble. Hezekiah was proud when he should have been humble.

[6 : 21] And secondly, Hezekiah was silent when he should have spoken about God. He was silent when he should have spoken about God. He was proud when he should have been humble.

Now, you read here about his illness. There's more detail, as we said, in the other passages. In those days, Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And he prayed to the Lord, and he answered him, and the Lord gave him a sign.

And this was what had gone round these nations around him. These people from Babylon had heard about this, and they'd come at least under the pretense of investigating this remarkable thing that had happened to King Hezekiah.

You go to the other passages, there's a mysterious element to this. There's a theological issue, in a sense. It's difficult to really bring it all together, because the Lord had said through Isaiah, Tell Hezekiah, put your house in order, for you shall surely die.

And then when he prayed, when Hezekiah prayed, the Lord again answered him through Isaiah, that he had added 15 years to his life. In other words, the Lord had said, I'm not going to take your life now.

[7 : 31] You're not going to die just now. You've still got another 15 years left. Whether that was a good thing or a bad thing, I don't know. But at least he knew that there was that period left of his life.

Theologically, perhaps it's difficult. The Lord's saying at one side, it is difficult. The Lord's saying on the one side, You're going to die. Put your house in order. This illness is going to lead to your death. And then after prayer, the Lord says, Well, I've added 15 years to your life. How do you bring all that together? Well, it's not easy, but everything comes under the sovereignty of God, including the prayer of Hezekiah.

This is always how God had planned it. That's what we have to bear in mind, that although God answers prayer, yet everything, including the prayer itself, is under God's predestinating will, under God's total sovereignty.

So anyway, that's just something you might want to explore afterwards. But here is him recovered from his illness, and this is now how he prayed, and God answered his prayer.

[8 : 30] And that, of course, shows us that under the sovereignty of God, it's something that hardly needs to be said, but it's so important, that prayer continues to be crucial.

Because Hezekiah turned himself toward God, and made this earnest prayer to God. And as he prayed to God, and as God answered his prayer, he made it clear to him that the extra 15 years, if you like, the extra 15 years to the life that he had at that point, was an answer to his prayer.

We have to believe, always, in prayer, as a means that God has given us. Our faith is not in prayer itself, but in the God to whom we pray, and to whom our prayer is attached.

But prayer is something absolutely critical, absolutely vital in the life of the church, and in the life of every individual Christian and believer as well.

That's where you find it so often in Paul's letters. You find him referring to his own prayers, and giving us insight into what he's praying for the church as well.

[9 : 38] And as you find it here as well, you can see how in verse 20, for example, of this chapter, there's another answer to prayer, the prayer this time of Hezekiah and Isaiah.

They prayed because of the impending assault that was being then threatened against them by Assyria at that time. And the Lord sent an angel. He conquered the whole camp, the host of the Assyrians.

Assyrians, he returned with shame of faith. This is Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, returned to his own land. And when he came into the house of his God, as you read there in verse 21, some of his own sons struck him down with the sword.

So the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Now you don't get from that, that there was actually a gap of 20 years or so from Isaiah and Hezekiah's prayer for deliverance to the murder, really, of Sennacherib by his own family.

And that still was an answer to the prayer of Hezekiah and Isaiah for deliverance. This is part of the deliverance, that this mighty king, Sennacherib, succumbed to his own sons.

[10:55] And God didn't actually leave the prayer at just Sennacherib going back home and answer it just in that. He included this in it as well. So our prayer is so, our praying is so, so important.

There's hardly a greater privilege for us than to speak to God. Actually speak to God through the Lord Jesus Christ's mediatorship.

We can come at any time at all and speak directly to God as if He was there just right in front of us, as if we could see Him as clearly as we see each other. What a great privilege that is to be able to pray, to know that prayer connects us with God and to really benefit so much from that.

And of course that means we take everything in prayer to God, including our own personal issues, local issues, public interest issues. We always bring that to God as well.

Nothing's too small or too great for God to handle or for God of an interest in. So his illness and his recovery as a result of prayer is very much a part of this. And that is what you find here that God answered him, he prayed to the Lord and he answered him and gave him a sign.

[12:11] But then you read, but Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him for his heart was proud. God's goodness was not returned by Hezekiah and instead he became proud.

There was so much there that you find in the rest of the chapter there where the great possessions, from verse 27 there, the great possessions that he had, his achievements, his reputation, but he took the credit for that himself.

And when these envoys came from Babylon to look at all that he had, all his resources, as we'll see in a minute, there's no mention there that God had given him all of this. Hezekiah presents it as if this is just his own achievement, as if he has actually had by his own wisdom, by his own ingenuity, by his own ability.

He's taken the credit to himself. His heart is really proud. As we said at the beginning, the Bible doesn't contain any superheroes. Those superheroes in the Marvel comics and magazines, they're fine for entertainment.

There's nothing wrong with them in that sense, but the Bible is such a different book to that, such a different presentation of lives compared to what you find in your superheroes. Superheroes, of course, they're able to experience sometimes setbacks, sometimes they're almost at the point of death, but then they recover and they start off again and off they go and they're stronger than ever and they never die and they never actually succumb to the enemy.

[13:44] They always actually present themselves in a way that's almost untouchable. There's nothing like that in the Bible. Not even Jesus.

Because he was not a superhero. Somebody who didn't know what temptation really was.

Somebody who didn't know what real genuine suffering was.

Somebody who didn't really die. He did. The Bible doesn't have superheroes for us to follow.

Although we follow Christ, he's more than a superhero. He's the son of God. So here is Hezekiah and his heart was proud.

In verse 31, when you see what's said there as well, when these envoys came from Babylon, it says, God left him to himself in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.

[14:45] In other words, when it came to this testing, when these envoys from Babylon came to inspect, remember this is all political maneuvering because the Babylonians at that time were beginning to grow in ascendancy and in power.

The big power was Assyria. The Babylonians eventually took over from Assyria. Every empire comes and goes. The Assyrian empire waned. The Babylonians came over, came and took over. And at this time, they're looking for helpers. They're looking for allies. They're looking for some political alliances that they can use against Assyria so that they can actually gain the upper hand. So they're coming to inspect. They've heard about Hezekiah. They've heard about his greatness. They've heard about this remarkable recovery he's made. What's going on here? Let's go and see. Let's see if this man will be useful to us.

So Hezekiah just opens up all his treasury, including his armory. Every single thing that he has by way of resources, he opens up and he shows these envoys from Babylon.

[15:46] And when it says in verse 31, that God left him to himself. Well, that sounds rather ominous, doesn't it? But it's really, in a sense, it's saying that God knew he had everything that he needed to come to a right conclusion.

He had the knowledge of God. He had the knowledge of God's will. He had Isaiah. He had everything there that he could lay his hand upon to actually deal with the situation properly, to come in an honorable way and deal with these envoys from Babylon to secure his own future and the future of his country in a way that was honoring to God, in a way that depended on God for his resources in the future as well as those that he had already given him.

He didn't do that. Instead, he was proud in his heart. And he took the credit himself.

And that's why Isaiah questioned him. And questioned him as to what he had shown these men.

Hezekiah was foolish because this prestige, the treasures that he had, not only were these people looking for a treaty with him, some sort of alliance against their enemies, but it could have led to an invasion altogether.

It could have led to these people saying, hey, he doesn't really have that much after all and we've got a lot more in terms of our army and our resources. We can easily conquer this man and all his resources.

[17:15] It's not a problem. Let's go back and tell those at home. Isaiah had been foolish to open up to those envoys from Babylon. And that makes the point for us and it's a very important point that it's important how we look after success.

That we take care over what we can call success if it's success that God has given us as he gives us success, as he gives us his blessings, as he enables us to prosper, not just spiritually, but materially, financially, whatever.

We have to take care over that, how we handle that. I heard from a senior minister when I was not long into the ministry.

He told me that in his days in what was then the Free Church College, now Edinburgh Theological Seminary, but in those days when he was a student there, he said there was one of the professors that repeatedly, very frequently, in his prayers would always ask God the same thing and it was this, Lord, teach us to hold a full cup with a steady hand.

Teach us to hold a full cup with a steady hand. You've got a cup filled to the brim and you have to walk a certain distance with it. It's not easy to do it without spilling it.

[18:34] What he meant by that prayer was when the Lord has filled your cup, when the Lord has given you his blessing, when the Lord has actually shown his goodness to you, take care how you carry that. Don't spill that.

Don't treat it carelessly. Don't just take it for granted. Don't imagine that it's by your own ingenuity it's come about. It's the Lord's blessing and you have to hold the Lord's blessing with a steady hand and I have to hold the Lord's blessing with a steady hand because it's when things are going well with us individually or congregationally that's when we're at our most vulnerable.

We're not at our most vulnerable when the going gets tough. That's when it's much more likely you're going to depend on God or turn to God as Hezekiah did with his sickness. It's at the other times when you know more of the comfort of his grace.

When things are going well in your life. When you don't have the big problems that you've just overcome or had in the past. That's when you're most vulnerable. That's when the devil knows he might just get right into your life and persuade you to be proud of yourself.

Because self-satisfaction always leads to carelessness. Whether it's individually like the man in Luke chapter 12 or congregationally like the church in Laodicea in Revelation chapter 3.

[20:00] Think of that man in Luke chapter 12. There he was. The ground he had brought forth plentifully. He had so much return in his crops that he didn't know what to do with them.

What did he say to himself? He said, I will build bigger barns and I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much increase of goods. Relax, eat, drink, be merry.

And then the word came to him, you fool. Tonight your soul will be required of you. And then, whose are these things going to be that you're boasting in?

You see, his cup was full but he was spilling it. He wasn't carrying it with a steady hand. He wasn't depending on God. He wasn't giving thanks to God. He had no return to God just like Hezekiah here.

He did not actually make return according to the benefit done to him. And so individually, we always need to be thinking of giving thanks to God even for the least of His blessings and making sure that we make return because thankfulness is sadly so absent from the world in which we live.

[21 : 15] And your life as a Christian and your life as a church-going person must be marked by thankfulness just like mine. Remember when Paul wrote to the Philippian church where he was teaching them there about not being over-anxious about anything.

Not worrying about it. Not having the sort of mind that was stressed out. But he says, in everything by prayer and supplication make your request known to God.

No, he didn't just say that. He said, in everything by prayer and supplication with thankfulness make your request known to God. Because you leave out the thankfulness you're leaving out that particularly important ingredient of your interaction with God.

And it's only after he said that including thankfulness that the next verse said, and the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep, shall garrison, shall protect your heart and mind through Christ Jesus.

don't let's imagine that if we keep missing out the thankfulness that God's goodness is automatically going to keep coming to us. It's always good to say thanks and especially to God to thank him to make return for his goodness to us.

[22 : 34] Johann Semen in the church in Laodicea Revelation chapter 3 let me mention that. Remember that's one of the churches that the Lord wrote to in the seven churches mentioned there in Revelation.

And this is a church that was saying to herself I am rich and I am increased with goods and I have need of nothing. And yet the Lord's message to her you don't realize that you are actually poor and destitute and naked spiritually and morally.

There they were really saying to themselves look at us we've really done well. We've got everything here that we need all these resources that we have look at all the people we have look at what's going on in our congregation look at the amount of activity we've got and all the time they were just expressing their pride I am rich and I am increased with goods and I have need of nothing.

Friends, the Lord's been good to us as a congregation. His goodness continues to us. He goes on being good to us.

We have so many things that He's given us. Just as Hezekiah opened his treasury if you open up the resources of this congregation the resources that we have in terms of personnel in terms of attendance in terms of activity in terms of meetings in terms of work with young people with children with old people everything that you put together the activities and the worship services of this congregation you could say look at all the stuff that's there but let's never be absent let thankfulness never be absent from our relationship to God.

[24 : 23] We have to continue to thank Him. I know you're doing that but I'm as liable to forget it as you are to continue to give thanks to make return according to the benefits that's done to us.

So we come together today part of the reason is to express our thanks to say collectively together to God Lord we give thanks for all the resources you have given us for the way you continue to enable us to serve you in the gospel we give you our thanks please continue to provide us with what we need.

See that's what he didn't actually at all remember to give in return to God and of course in verse 26 you see that though he humbled himself for the pride of his heart both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem at that time saw that the wrath of God did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah and that's one of the things we always have to ask ourselves constantly ask ourselves what legacy are we handing on to those who are coming after us is what we are just now is what we're doing is what our life is like is that going to be a hindrance or a help to the young folks today who are going to come after us in the church we pray and we hope we always have to ask how are we handing things on to them what are we handing on to them are we giving them that which will actually enrich

their lives and make their service in the gospel what it should be so here is Hezekiah being proud when he should have been humble just in closing he was silent when he should have spoken for God these envoys came they looked in to see what his resources were like when Isaiah questioned him

Hezekiah said I showed him everything I showed him everything I didn't actually keep back any of the stuff at all and so Isaiah as we read elsewhere said that all of these things would be taken to Babylon eventually that was going to be years down the line but these envoys visit as we said was a politically motivated thing and here as he showed them all these resources whenever whichever passage you read Isaiah or 2nd Kings or this one Hezekiah did not mention God made no mention of God at all I know we can't make too much of that but we could also make too little of it He should have mentioned to these representatives of Babylon a pagan country here is the king of Judah the nation of God the people that honor and worship the Lord God the true God the only true God and yet he doesn't mention him he doesn't say well it's the Lord it's our God that's done all this for us and our God is always with us and our God will ensure that he will protect us and keep us he said nothing like that you contrast that with

Nehemiah and the next book of the Bible sorry in the book after Ezra you find Nehemiah frequently mentioning God in terms of how he presents himself and the work that he's doing to those enemies that are trying to stop that are trying to infiltrate the work that he's doing there he's not afraid of speaking about God of presenting God of standing up for God of being clear about God and that's why you find in chapter 6 for example of Nehemiah this conspiracy from Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and all the rest of our enemies they heard that I had built the wall and there was no breach so they actually tried then to again interfere with that and we come there in chapter 6 of Nehemiah and verse 16 you see he says the wall was finished in verse 15 and when all our enemies heard of it all the nations around of us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God how do you actually frighten your enemies spiritually you tell them about God you tell them what great things

[28 : 48] God has done you keep on telling that your God is great and what he's done in your life and what he's done in our congregation and what he's done in history and what he's done all the way through the pattern and the life of his people that's why Nehemiah was able to say there that all of these nations around about who were essentially their enemies they actually fell in their own esteem they began to really doubt whether they could possibly take on these people at all because this God was with them this great God had helped them do we do that are we as ready to do that because isn't it all too often the case with us myself included that we see the opposition out there just so big and so threatening and we know that our God is great but do we always speak up for him in the way that we should in a way that shows well whatever you are he's superior to that and when you come to interact with people well as Ephesians 5 says look carefully how you walk not as unwise but as wise making the best use of the time because the days are evil our opportunities to speak for God to say something about God you don't have to be a great theologian you don't have to be able to argue what justification is what sanctification is or anything else like that simply in ordinary everyday conversation tell them why your faith is important to you how it features in your life why Jesus is precious to you how he saved you what God has done for you let them then think about that you don't have to argue it further but just make it clear that your

God is great and that everything is done for you you appreciate and that your life is what it is because of him that makes its own witness its own testimony and that's something that we can all do as we give testimony to God as we make return in the words of 2nd Chronicles here for the goodness of God there are a couple of verses that came across called the gospel according to you written by a man Arthur McPhee I don't know anything about him I'm sure where he was but this is attributed to him he says the gospels of Matthew Mark Luke and John are read by more than a few but the one that's 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 always make return to God for all his goodness to us and use the opportunity he gives us to speak for him to act for him to let people know he is great and worth our service let's pray help us

Lord we pray in the success that you enable us to know not to create failure out of it as we see in the example of Hezekiah help us Lord we pray to pursue to give thanks to you in return for your goodness and a willingness on our part to take our share of the work of the gospel so that your

name will be made great among our contemporaries we give thanks for every help that you give us for the resources that you have provided us with as a congregation we pray Lord as we seek to use them that blessing might come not only to ourselves but to others through them help us to be faithful to you forgive us for our times of unfaithfulness the times of our reluctance to be as we should be in the presence of the world forgive us Lord for every defect that we know exists in our lives we pray that you would help us to apply to you and to depend upon you for the grace that we need each day receive our thanks now we pray for Jesus sake amen let's conclude our service this morning singing in psalm 119 119 on page 167 singing verses 161 to 168 though rulers hound me without cause my heart fears nothing but your word for in your promise

I rejoice like one who finds great spoil O Lord all falsehood I abhor and hate with all my heart I love your law I praise you seven times a day for your commands I hold in awe and so on to the end of that passage the section 161 to 168 to God's praise God will I shine me with thy cross my heart fears nothing but you have heard what in your promise tha wie

With both my heart I love you at all I praise you seven times, honey For you come as I hold in all Great peace of those who love you all They will not come but in the way I wait for your salvation, Lord And your commands I will obey

[35 : 58] I will, O Savior, statutes, Lord My love for them is great as you Your laws and precepts I obey For all my ways are known to you If you let me get to the main door, please, this morning Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit Be with you now and evermore Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen

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