

"Trials"

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all here. I'm glad you have joined us for worship! This morning. Again, I just want to reiterate, if you find yourself too hot and distracted by the heat, through these doors, the ushers can direct you down the stairs, and you'll be able to find a cooler place to hear the sermon and continue to worship. Helen Rosevere was a missionary, a medical missionary in Central Africa in the mid-20th century. She tells a story about a difficult pregnancy where she delivered the baby, but the mother passed away. The baby was born premature, and as they were readying a hot water bottle in order to try to keep this preemie warm, the last hot water bottle they had burst. And they had no other way to easily keep this baby alive.

She took this need to a group of children who were at the compound where she worked, and she writes this. During the prayer time, one 10-year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt consciousness. Please, God, she prayed, send us a water bottle. It'll be no good tomorrow, God. The baby will be dead. So please send it this afternoon. While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added by way of corollary, and while you're at it, would you please send a dolly for the little girl, so she'll know you really love her. Helen writes this, as often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot.

Could I honestly say amen? I just did not believe that God could do this. Oh yes, I know God can do everything. The Bible says so, but there are limits, aren't there? The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at the time, and I had never ever received a parcel from home. Anyway, if anyone did send a parcel, who would put a hot water bottle in? I lived in the equator.

Can we trust God in the face of crises in our lives? I know He can help. I know He can save in theory, but do I believe that He will? And as with all crises, we see that there is a crisis of the actual circumstances, the physical realities or whatever it is that we're facing, and there is a crisis behind the crisis, and that is the crisis of faith. What do we really believe about God? And we live in an era today where there's a lot that speaks against actually believing in and trusting in God, the God of the Bible, to be our help in these circumstances. Just a couple that come to mind.

Pluralism today would be described as a recognition that not everybody believes God, and there's a right recognition that pluralism is a reality, but often pluralism asserts more. Pluralism asserts all gods are actually the same. There's not really a big difference. The proverbial blind men and the elephant, isn't it all the same God? And so, it doesn't really matter what you believe as long as you believe something, because that belief will be helpful to you, even though the object of what you believe, it doesn't matter, because God is some vague force that everything, every religious and spiritual impulse taps into. So, that would be one thing that would make us maybe think, does it really matter if we pray to the God of the Bible? Another voice in our culture today would be that of atheistic naturalism. It says the world is a closed system. The world is driven by physical, natural forces, and it denies the possibility of a supernatural. It denies the possibility of God's existence, let alone His action in this world. This worldview often comes with an affirmation of human spirit that humans have done without God for a long time. He's not really needed, is He? And in the face of crises, we think maybe the best of humanity will make it a little better.

[4 : 59] And then I think there are some today, pluralism and naturalistic atheism are two of the voices that speak against this. The third one may be cynicism and pessimism. Look at the world, what a mess it is.

Could there really be a God in charge of this? Humans aren't much good either. We don't live in a fairy tale. But we face crises and trials with honest realism and with grim fatalism. All of these voices in our culture speak to us in various ways through media, through entertainment, through intellectual discussion, and all of them ask a question, why would it be worth trusting in God? Is it

really any good?

These questions have a corrosive effect on our souls. They undermine the possibility of confident trust in God. Our text today is about a crisis that challenges trust in God as well.

So, we are in a series, if you're just visiting, we're in a series in 2 Chronicles in the back end, and we're going to be 2 Chronicles chapter 32. I think that is page 354 or so in the Pew Bible. No, oh wait, David is saying 351, 381, 3... 356. All right, close enough. 356. Chapter 32 in your Pew Bibles of 2 Chronicles. And it'd be helpful if you look there because we'll be looking through the passage as we go. And as you're turning there, just a reminder again, if you're new here, the book of 2 Chronicles was written to God's people after they had returned from the worst cataclysm and crisis they'd ever experienced, which is the exile to Babylon. The Babylonians had come in and taken over all of Israel, removed many people as slaves to Babylon. And then 70 years later, they returned to Israel and they were restarting the nation of Israel again in many ways. And they're asking the question, what does God have for us and what does it mean to be his people? And as the writing of 2 Chronicles happened, the writer was looking back at the nation of Israel as it existed in a kingdom earlier in the time of the kings from David and Solomon all the way up to the exile. And it's telling that story. And particularly in these last couple of verses, we've been looking at the kingship of King Hezekiah, who was approximately 715 to 687 BC.

[7 : 57] If you remember, he came to power after Ahaz, his father, who was about the worst king ever. He was unfaithful. He trusted in himself and in political alliances. He worshipped other gods. He was the worst king that Israel... He actually wasn't the worst, but he was about the worst.

And so Hezekiah came in bringing change, winds of change and renewal. So he renewed spiritually the people of God, rebuilding the temple, reinstating temple worship and observing the Passover. And this is what we've seen. Hezekiah sought God with all of his heart and sought to reunify his people who had been divided. And he is recorded as a good king. But in this passage this morning, he faces a crisis, one that challenged the very core of his trust in God. So that's where we're at. Let's read together, 2 Chronicles chapter 32. We're going to read the whole thing and then we'll walk through it together.

After these things and these acts of faithfulness, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came and invaded Judah and encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them for himself.

And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and intended to fight against Jerusalem, he planned with his officers and his mighty men to stop the water of the springs that were outside the city and they helped him. A great many people were gathered and they stopped all the springs and the brook that flowed through the land saying, why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?

He set to work resolutely to build up all the wall that was broken down and raised towers upon it. And outside it, he built another wall and he strengthened the millow in the city of David.

[9 : 55] He also made weapons and shields in abundance. He set us 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. After this, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, who was besieging Lakshish with all his forces, sent his servants to Jerusalem, to Hezekiah, king of Judah, and to all the people of Judah who were in Jerusalem, saying, thus says Sennacherib, king of Assyria, on what are you trusting? That you endure the siege in Jerusalem? Is not Hezekiah misleading you, that he may give you over to die by famine and by thirst when he tells you the Lord our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria?

Has not this same Hezekiah taken away his high places and his altars and commanded Judah and Jerusalem before one altar you shall worship and on it you shall burn your sacrifices?

Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of other lands? Were the gods of nations of those lands at all able to deliver their lands out of my hand?

Who among all the gods of the nations that my fathers devoted to destruction was able to deliver his people from my hand? That your God should be able to deliver you from my hand.

Now, therefore, do not let Hezekiah deceive you or mislead you in this fashion and do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand or from

the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you out of my hand? And his servants said still more against the Lord God and against his servant Hezekiah. He wrote letters to cast contempt on the Lord, the God of Israel, and to speak against him saying, like the gods of the nations of the lands who have not delivered their people from my hands, so the God of Hezekiah will not deliver his people from my hand.

[12 : 40] And they shouted it with a loud voice in the language of Judah to the people, to the people of Jerusalem who are on the wall to frighten and terrify them in order that they might take the city. And they spoke of the God of Jerusalem as they spoke of the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of man's hands. Then Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed because of this and cried to heaven. And the Lord sent an angel who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame on his face to his own land. And when he came into the house of his God, some of his own sons struck him down there with the sword. So the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, and from the hand of all his enemies, and he provided for them on every side.

And many brought gifts to the Lord, to Jerusalem, and precious things to Hezekiah, king of Judah. So that he was exalted in the sight of all nations from that time onward.

We're going to end our reading there this morning. Let's pray and ask for God's help as we look at His Word. Lord, thank you for this passage and for this account. And Lord, we thank you that it turns our eyes towards you. And we pray that you would help us this morning, that our eyes and our hearts would be turned towards you. Lord, I don't know what crises and challenges are being faced by many in this building this morning. But Lord, you do. And I pray for each of us that we would be turning towards you.

Lord, looking to you and that you would help us by your Word to have faith and trust in you. Lord, I pray for your help that you would help me to speak as I ought this morning. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friends, the point of this passage this morning is really simple. God delivers His people. God delivers His people as they trust in Him in the face of great trials. That is simply the message.

[15 : 10] Now, we're going to unpack that. We're going to look at the preparations of a heart that trusts God. We're going to look at the taunts of the enemies that challenge a heart that trusts God. We're going to look at the expression of a heart that trusts God in prayer. So, if you're taking your outline, there's your... there's your outline. I'll try to repeat those. But first, we're going to look at verses 1 through 8 and the preparations of a heart that trusts God in the face of crisis. So, remember, we're talking about Hezekiah and he's the king of Judah, the southern kingdom where Jerusalem is, and they are in big trouble because Assyria is this large national superpower at this point.

It came to ascendancy around 750 BC and started conquering the nations around it. And at this point, it's already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and the 10 tribes that were a part of the northern kingdom have been scattered and they cease to exist as a political entity. If we went back and looked at 2 Chronicles chapter 28, we would see that Hezekiah's king played fast and loose with political alliances with Assyria. And he said, hey, Assyria, will you help us against these other nations that are trying to attack us? And then he changed his mind and he said, no, actually, we're going to lie with these other people, leaving them in a very vulnerable position politically. Imagine yourself, say, in France in 1939 as Germany expands across Europe, right? And you just know it's coming. You know this invasion is coming and it feels overwhelming. It feels unstoppable. This is what it probably felt like in Jerusalem at this time. And so, we see, sure enough, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, sets his eyes to invade Judah and particularly Jerusalem and to take it over. This is what verse 1 says.

So, this is the threat. This is the challenge. This is the crisis. What are we going to do? And you see two things that Hezekiah does in response to this threat. He responds in actions and he responds in words. In verses 2-5, He responds in actions. He knows that Jerusalem is the heart of the kingdom and He knows that He needs to protect it above all things. So, He takes practical steps to try to strengthen, fortify Jerusalem.

He does things like He diverts water streams, right? Some of the water He diverts into the city of Jerusalem so that they'll be able to withstand a siege. Some of the other water He stops up so that Assyria can't get it, right? He repairs towers. He builds walls in defense against the Assyrian

battering rams and siege engines. There's some cool archaeology. They found these massive walls in uncovering the ancient city of Jerusalem. He reorganizes His army, bringing order, appointing officers so that they are ready to be a fighting force, right? And so, he with eyes of faith in trusting God does practical things to try to prepare himself for this occasion. Now, it's interesting. Some commentators actually see this as faithlessness on his part, where it looks like he may be trusting in himself. But it doesn't seem that the chronicler sees him that way because of what comes right after. Because with His word, in verses 6 through 8, He says something very different, right? When you look at verses 6 through 8, remember His words, starting in verse 7. He says to the people, 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 fight our battles. And the people took confidence in the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. Now look, Hezekiah looks at the situation, and if you started counting soldiers, this just isn't true, right? Assyria's army was overwhelmingly large compared to the Judean defense force, right? It would have been completely overwhelmed militarily. But Hezekiah sees his situation with eyes of faith. And he says, they may have lots of horses and chariots and soldiers, but we have God. They may have a bigger army, but we have a bigger God. And He will fight our battles for us. And remember the history of Israel.

God has fought so many battles for His people. He delivered them from Egypt when they were enslaved. They weren't even a military force. They were slaves and God delivered them. As they traveled from Egypt up to the Promised Land, God defeated the kings that would stand in their way and seek to bring them in or to attack them as they entered the Promised Land. God defeated His enemies. And throughout the kingship era, God protected and preserved His people over and over again. And it was seen that God could do this not because He provided them with enough armies that humanly we just saw, oh, He's going to do it. He did it in ways that showed that God Himself was acting. And this was the history that Hezekiah was reminding the people of when he said, we have a bigger God. So Hezekiah worked to prepare, but the most important thing is to trust God.

[21 : 29] Okay. So have you ever wondered why the Marvel superhero movies are so popular today? Right?

Have you ever wondered why it's captured our imagination and they're the blockbusters of all blockbusters, even the terrible ones? Like everyone goes to see them. Maybe not quite so much now. But why it's captured our imagination because they tap into our feeling of crisis. They connect with our helplessness. There always seems like there's a bad guy who's so overwhelmingly powerful that it taps into our sense of a need for someone to help us and to deliver us. Right? We need a superhero. And as Iron Man says in the Avengers, we have a Hulk. Right? And what God is reminding Hezekiah and the people of Israel in this passage is God is better than the Hulk. Now, that's sort of trite to say. But our love and our culture for superheroes is something in our soul that makes us long for a deliverer and a savior, for a power that's greater than us. And this is because we were made to know God and to trust Him.

He is greater than any situation, any enemy, any trial we face. But it's not always easy to trust God, is it? Particularly when the voices we hear challenge us. And this is what we see in the second part of the passage. In verses 9 through 19, the taunts of the enemy challenge a heart that trusts in God.

Sennacherib was a shrewd warrior. He was cunning. He didn't just fight with armies. He fought with words. He fought with words. Right? Now, this is a little sidebar. The chronicler tells this story in one chapter. This same story is told in two different places in 2 Kings chapters 18 and 19 and in Isaiah chapters 36 and 37. And there's a whole lot more nuance and particularity about this story.

And it's fascinating that the chronicler just wants us to see the bare bones of what this looked like. But notice how much time he spends on the taunts. He wants us to think through what this means. Right?

[24 : 22] One of the important details that you see is not listed here. If you read this passage just as it's written, right, it sounds like maybe Sennacherib just sent a little small group to say, hey, we're going to come and taunt you. We're going to come and mock you and see if you'll just surrender without even having an army with us. But when you look at 2 Kings, it's actually very clear that the emissaries brought a whole army with them. Lots and lots of soldiers. So the threat was real.

But the attack first comes with these questions. On whom are you trusting? You're trusting in Hezekiah? Are you kidding me? Hezekiah just tore down all these religious places.

Isn't that going to offend your God? It's fascinating. Sennacherib clearly does not understand the God of Israel at all. Because that would have actually pleased the God of Israel to tear down the high places and the altars and all those things. But Sennacherib doesn't know that because he's a pluralist.

And so he just thinks they're all worshiping the same God. So he thinks if you tore down all those religious things, how terrible would that be? Hezekiah isn't pleasing God. He's making him mad. He's not going to help you.

And then he says, and look around. Look at how great our conquest has gone so far. Look at Syria. Look at Neo-Babylon.

[25 : 57] Go on and on. Look at the Northern Kingdom. How well did they do? Did their God save them? No, of course not. Is your God going to save you? No, of course not.

Why would you think that God is going to save you? Why would you put your trust in Hezekiah? Just give up now. And so the summary is, verse 15, And then 16 through 19, it goes on and he says, and they didn't just do this in Aramaic, which would have been the language of diplomacy that the leaders would have understood. They came and they spoke Hebrew.

So that the soldiers on the walls and the people working behind the walls, the everyday people would hear these taunts. And they spoke with contempt in an attempt to frighten and to terrify the people.

And the thing that's above all, verse 19, and they spoke of the God of Jerusalem as they spoke of the gods of the people of the earth, which are the work of man's hands.

Do you see what's at the core of this? Your God is no God at all. It's just like all these other gods made by human hands. Do these lines of thinking and questioning sound familiar to you? On whom are you trusting?

[28 : 16] We live in a world that says, I trust in hard work. I trust in myself and my own self-determination. I trust in human effort or the human spirit. I trust in the things that I can control.

I trust in my life and my own self-determination. I trust in my life and my own self-determination. do you really think your Bible study, your prayer, or your faithfulness matters? You suffer just like your neighbors do. They don't care about God. Do you really think God is going to help you? Do you really think God is going to deliver you?

Isn't your God just like what everyone else believes in a different form? Isn't it all the same? Isn't God just something else that was made up? All these arguments have a corrosive effect on our hearts, don't they? They cause doubt and uncertainty. They are not the honest questions of seeking faith, but they are the voices that seek to attack. And friends, we need to be aware of how these questions and these voices resonate and ring in our heads. We need to be aware of them, and we need to confront them, and we need to see them. And that's what we see as we move to the last part of our passage, that Hezekiah saw those voices and he confronted them. And it's fascinating because the chronicler doesn't give us a long description. It's actually incredibly brief what he says, but what we see is an expression of a heart that trusts God through prayer. Hezekiah fought the words, the battle of words of these doubting questions with his own words, that is, of prayer. So Hezekiah and Isaiah, who was a prophet during the time of this... And there's discussion, is this Isaiah who wrote the book of Isaiah? That's a long story. We could talk about that another time. But this Isaiah comes in and they together... I think it is, by the way... They come in together and they pray. And we don't see the content of their prayer, but I think it's worth looking at it in 2 Kings. So Richard's going to put it up on the screen. 2 Kings chapter 19 verse 15 and following.

This is the prayer of Hezekiah in this context. And he says this, O Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear. Open Your eyes, O Lord, and see. And hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God.

[31 : 15] Truly, O God, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste to the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore, they were destroyed. So now, O Lord our God, save us, please, from His hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You, O Lord, are God alone.

Do you see how He confronts these taunting, corrosive questions with an affirmation? There is one God, and He is the God of the Bible who created heavens and earth. He is the sovereign creator, and He is the Lord over all kings and all nations. And yes, other nations do have gods, but they're not really gods. They're just statues. They're idols made of wood and stone that will burn.

And they were literally created by human hands. But you are not a God who lives in human temples. You are not a God who was created by people. But you are a God who created us to know You, and to love You, and to follow You. And You alone, of anywhere we would look, You alone are God, and You alone are able to save us. Hezekiah reminds the people in his prayer through a declaration of who the God of the Bible actually is.

And God responds. And again, this is the briefest explanation. You can go and see more in those other accounts. He sends an angel. The angel destroys the leadership of the Assyrian army, and the king tucks his tail between his legs and heads home. And that's what happens. There's no battle. There's no fight. God supernaturally and in... And what's the word I'm thinking of? God supernaturally intervened and acted to deliver them without them having to do anything but pray. And so, the summary in verses 22 and 23. So, the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hands of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, and from the hands of all his enemies, and He provided for them on every side. To the original hearers in the post-exilic period, a small remnant of Israel brought back to the land of Palestine, seeking to rebuild and having a temple with less glory that was there before, having no king sitting on the throne and wondering, how do we do this? There is this promise and this pattern and this expression of who God is.

[34 : 20] God is able to save. God is able to deliver. God will provide for you on every side. He delivered Hezekiah from Assyria. He delivered Israel from Babylon. He will deliver you.

And we are encouraged to trust God in the same way. Are we not? Now, here's the thing. Here's the challenge. Because as I prepared the sermon, I thought, okay, this is what this passage is about.

I'm going to tell you, trust God. Try harder to trust God more. But we all know how hard that is, isn't it? Hezekiah himself showed that. If we read the rest of the chapter, we'd see Hezekiah stumbled at the end. Even though he believed God and sought God and did so many things, his pride captured his heart and he ended up showing the riches of his treasury to Babylon, putting the seed of the Babylonian exile into the geopolitical world. And he didn't please God in that. And he didn't trust God in those things. And we struggle, don't we, to trust God in every circumstance. And it's harder the further along we go in life, it feels, to continue to trust God as we face yet another crisis, another trial.

We need help that's beyond ourselves to trust God. But friends, you know this because God has done that for us. God has sent us the help that we need. Jesus is our Savior and our Deliverer, and He understands because He Himself was mocked and reviled for trusting God. The Gospel of Matthew in chapter 27, as Jesus is hanging on the cross, records this starting in verse 39. He says this, And those who passed by derided Jesus, wagging their heads and saying, You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself. If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.

So also the chief priests and the scribes and the elders mocked Him, saying, He saved others. He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel. Let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him.

[36 : 49] He trusts God. Let God deliver Him now if He desires Him. For He said, I am the Son of God. And the robbers who were crucified with Him also reviled Him in the same way. Friends, Jesus endured the same questioning, the same mocking as He hung on the cross for us. And yet, the Apostle Peter reminds us of this in 1 Peter 2, 22.

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued, trusting Himself to Him who judges justly.

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds, you have been healed, for you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

Do you see this, friends? Jesus trusted to the very end when we couldn't. He trusted in our failure, and He trusted God all the way to death.

And the people who mocked Him, the people who reviled Him, all of those taunts were turned to dust.

[38 : 32] Will God deliver Him? Will God save Him? God raised Him from the dead and exalted Him in a place that is above every name, so that every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

Did God abandon Him in that time of trial? No, He did vindicate Him. He did deliver Him. His body was raised on the third day. He did not save Himself, but He gave Himself, so that we who are unfaithful and untrusting of God could be saved by Him.

This is our great deliverance. And we know that in that victory and in that exaltation, there is a victory to come in the end. Right now, He has defeated sin and death, and so that all by faith in Him will know that victory now.

But we know that one day, He will put all things under His feet, and His victory will be complete. And all the voices that doubt that God is God alone in the world will be silenced, and the whole world will be filled with worship, just as Hezekiah prayed, so that the whole world would know that you alone are God.

This is the God of the Bible. This is Jesus who died and was raised for us as our deliverer and our Savior, so that we can put our trust in Him no matter what.

[40 : 10] Even when we fail to do it, He will carry us as we continue to turn to Him. Friends, I need to be honest with you.

God isn't going to deliver you from every Sennacherib in your life. You know this. God doesn't choose to save us from every trial, every difficulty, every sickness.

But I have seen that even in the midst of those trials and those difficulties, when we look to God, He has delivered. He has delivered me from despair.

He has delivered me from faithlessness. He has delivered me from spiritual death. And He has reminded me that when I am joined with Christ by faith, I am raised to a new and imperishable life. And this will carry us through the trials. And sometimes God will. Helen Rosevear finishes her story.

[41 : 25] A package arrived midday that day, unlooked for. She opened it. Yes, under the clothes and other gifts was a brand new hot water bottle.

She cried. She writes, I had not asked God to send it. I had not truly believed that He could. Ruth was in the front row of the children.

She rushed forward crying, If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly too. And rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully dressed dolly.

And her eyes shone. She had never doubted. Friends, this is the God that we serve. Let's pray. Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief. Lord, we confess how often we find our faith eroded by the voices of our world, by the disappointments and hurts of life in this world.

[42 : 41] Lord, help us this morning to be renewed in our trust in You as we gaze upon Jesus, the One who entrusted Himself completely to You, even unto death.

Lord, that we might be saved and that He might gain the victory. Help us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.