

THE PRAYER OF HEZEKIAH

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Scripture: 2 Kings 18, 19

A little background about Hezekiah:

Hezekiah was the son of King Ahaz who was a really wicked king and did a lot of evil in the sight of God. Hezekiah took over at the young age of twenty-five, and ruled for about twenty-nine years. The bible tells us that he was a good king. He made the people take away all the other idols that were there, broke down the Asherah poles and made them focus on Yahweh. He was instrumental also in breaking the bronze snake that Moses had put up, which had now become an idol to the people. A good king! But now he is faced with a predicament. The Assyrians are gaining an ascendancy and they are coming at him. They had already conquered all the nations on the west and subjugated them; and now they turn their attention to the east, and Judah.

We pick up in the 18th chapter when the chief of staff of the Assyrian king stood and shouted in Hebrew to the people of Judah. Reading from chapter 18, verse 29 onwards:

²⁹ *"This is what the king (i.e., Sennacherib) says: Don't let Hezekiah deceive you. He will never be able to rescue you from my power. ³⁰ Don't let him fool you into trusting in the LORD by saying, "The LORD will surely rescue us."*

³¹ *"Don't listen to Hezekiah!"*

³² *"Don't listen to Hezekiah when he tries to mislead you by saying, 'The LORD will rescue you!'"*

³⁵ *"...So what makes you think that the LORD can rescue Jerusalem from me?"*

Proud arrogant words! And yet, they come on the heels of a king who's been rampaging victory after victory against all the nations on that side.

Chapter 19:

¹*When King Hezekiah heard their report, he tore his clothes and put on burlap and went into the Temple of the LORD.*

Then he asks Isaiah, son of Amoz, and says to him. ³"Today is a day of trouble, insults, and disgrace. It is like when a child is ready to be born, but the mother has no strength to deliver the baby. ⁴But perhaps the Lord your God has heard the Assyrian chief of staff sent by the king to defy the living God, and will punish him for his words. Oh, pray for those of us who are left!"

Then Isaiah responds and says, ⁶*This is what the Lord says, "Do not be disturbed by this blasphemous speech from the Assyrian king's messengers. Listen! I myself will move against him, and the king will receive a message that he is needed at home. So he will return to his land, where I will have him killed with a sword."*

But the story doesn't end here. Then Sennacherib says this, because he's been called back to his country. Before he goes, he tells King Hezekiah:

¹⁰*"Don't let your God, in whom you trust, deceive you with promises that Jerusalem will not be captured."* The arrogance of those words!

¹⁴*After Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers, and read it, he went up to the Lord's Temple and spread it out before the Lord. ¹⁵He prayed this prayer before the Lord: "O Lord, God of Israel, you are enthroned between the mighty cherubim! You alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You alone created the heavens and the earth. ¹⁶Bend down, O Lord, and listen! Open your eyes, O Lord, and see! Listen to Sennacherib's words of defiance against the living God.*

¹⁷ *“It is true, Lord, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these nations. ¹⁸And they have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire and burned them. But of course the Assyrians could destroy them! They were not gods at all – only idols of wood and stone shaped by human hands. ¹⁹Now, O Lord our God, rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O Lord, are God.”*

This is Hezekiah’s prayer in the face of this threat. He is the man in power. He is the man in authority, and facing him is this huge Assyrian army. The bible tells us that they had something close to 250,000 soldiers, and we learned that when they were mocking Hezekiah, they said, “If you have even 2000 men, we will give you 2000 horses to go to another country.” 250,000! And not even 2000 – as big a problem as you can get. We know Hezekiah has heard about what the Assyrians did with Israel just about 20 years back, because this is around 703 or 701 B.C., and Israel was taken into captivity in 723 B.C. He understands what the Assyrians can do, and his first response is to take that letter and go and pray.

What can we learn from Hezekiah, this good king, about how to handle problems that seem like huge mountains that are in our path? So, bring up that huge situation, that circumstance that is facing you today; bring it up, keep it front and center, and see what God can do with that problem in your life, through the lens of how Hezekiah handled his problem.

LESSONS TO LEARN FROM HEZEKIAH

1. His total dependence on God.

When we have a situation, we need to treat it as a ‘you, God, and the problem’ kind of situation. That’s what Hezekiah did. He took that letter which outlined his problem and he placed it on the altar in front of God and said, “Lord, this is what I am facing.”

The story of a man who fell off a cliff, grabbed onto a branch on the way down, and was hanging there precariously. He shouted, “Anybody there?” There was no answer. Finally he said, “God, are you there? What should I do?” and God said, “Let go off the branch. I’ve got you.” The man looked down fearfully at the distance to the ground, then looked around and said, “Anybody else there?” sometimes, that’s how we respond to our problems when we take it to God. When God says, “I’ve got you; let go!” you think: My goodness! This is too dangerous to just take my hands off. I’ve got to do something myself. But with Hezekiah, it’s you, God and the problem.

Remember Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. We read that He took His disciples to the garden of Gethsemane, but then He told them to wait there while He went on to be alone with God and the problem and the situation that He was in.

Accept the outcome. When you go to God, just say: This is the problem, Lord, and accept it. Lay it down there. Don’t go to God with a problem and come back with it. Leave it at the foot of the altar. I like this Don Moen song that says:

All that I am, all that I have
I lay them down before You, O Lord
All my regrets, all my acclaim
The joy and the pain, I’m making them Yours

Lord, I offer my life to You
Everything I’ve been through, use it for Your glory

Lord, I offer my days to You
Lifting my praise to You as a pleasing sacrifice.

Complete relinquishment to God!

2. 'Tell it like it is.'

He does not mince any words. He says, "Lord, this is exactly what I'm faced with." He tells God, "Listen to Sennacherib's words of defiance." We see in 2 Kings 19:10 *Don't let your God in whom you trust deceive you with promises that Jerusalem will not be captured. The kings of Assyria have destroyed all the other nations. This is what has happened. This is what is happening all around me.* He's just recounting the exact situation. Then he says: *Look, they have completely destroyed the city. Lord, he's mocking You.* And he ends by saying, "Save us Lord, for Your glory!"

It reminds me that sometimes, when we go to God with a problem, we say, "God, here's this huge problem I have. You know all that's going on, Lord. Please take care of it." And yet, while Hezekiah knew that God is omniscient, He knows all things, he still told God every detail of the problem. I wonder whether, as we say every aspect of the problem, it's like handing it over to God. Nothing is left in the mind. It's all brought out and handed over to God.

Sometimes, it's good to be able to articulate and say: Lord, look at this. This is what I am facing. This is what is being said. These are the problems that will come from this. These are the issues – just name them one after the other. Be articulate. It's a 'tell it as it is' kind of prayer. Maybe, take this mountain, this huge thing that's in front of you. Break it down into its pieces – the way you've seen it, what it's doing to you, how it's making you feel, what kind of burden you're bearing, what are the ramifications of it? What are people saying to you about it, about you? Take it to the Lord and detail it out for Him.

3. God came through.

19:32 This is what God said, "His armies will not enter Jerusalem. They will not even shoot an arrow at it. They will not march outside its gates with their shields, nor build banks of earth against its walls. The king will return to his own country." This is what God said. Then, what did God do? We read in vs. 35, That night, the angel of the Lord went out to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. When the surviving Assyrians woke up the next morning, they found corpses everywhere. Then King Sennacherib of Assyria broke camp and returned to his own land. He went home to his capital of Nineveh, and stayed there. One day, while he was worshipping the temple of his god, two of his sons killed him with their swords.

The Lord took care of the problem. When did He do it? He did it while Israel slept. How beautiful! When we hand over that big problem to God, we can then rest and be assured that God will handle it. God doesn't look at the odds and say: My goodness! Those are huge odds. Odds don't matter to God. Let me remind you, impossible is not a word in God's vocabulary.

4. You need to also do what you need to do.

I'm not contradicting myself. We leave the problem with God, but there are some things that we also need to do that is within our scope and range. One of the things that Hezekiah needed to do was to make sure that, if a siege occurred, then he was taking care of his people. So, while he handed over his problem to God, he also said that in the event there is a siege, I need to make sure that my people get water. So, he built the tunnel of Siloam. Today, in Jerusalem, one can see that tunnel which was built to bring water into Jerusalem from another way. In case of a siege, the first thing that enemies would do is shut off the water access. So, he did what he needed to do.

Somebody said, "Get on your knees and pray like it's all up to God. Then get up and work like it's all up to you." There still are things you can do, and you need to do it. And Hezekiah did just that. Built the tunnel so that water could come through.

5. Leave it there and trust God.

Leave that problem there after you've done what you need to do, and then trust God. Be able to walk away and say, "Lord, I have done what I need to do; now I can't do anything more, and I leave it at Your feet."

Many years ago, I was doing my music degree at Houghton College, and thinking of going on to seminary. So Sheila and I visited Asbury Seminary and we were sitting in the Estes Chapel. And I felt such a sense of God's rightness about where we were. There was another student from Houghton who was also applying to Asbury. Both of us applied, and we got back messages from the financial aid saying that we had to raise 'x' amount of money in order to get admission. This friend of mine from Nigeria who had also applied to four or five other colleges, and he asked me which other seminaries I had applied to. I replied that it was only Asbury that I had applied to. He said that I can't put all my eggs in one basket. But I said that I felt that this is where God is leading us, and if we don't go there, then we were heading home. He shook his head in disbelief.

But we trusted that this was what God wanted us to do. We didn't have the money and a couple was trying to raise it for us. We were supposed to go in January, but in December they told us that they were only able to raise \$1297. They wrote to Asbury and said not to hold the seat for the Clements as they were not able to raise the required amount. But we were surprised when we got a letter back from financial aid saying, "Let the Clements come. we believe that God will provide the rest for them." And God provided along the way. We took that problem to God and said: God, we feel that this is where You want us to go. We don't have the money and we are ready to go home if it doesn't work. But we trust You. And beloved, God just provided. It could be the same for you. Take this huge problem that is yours and trust God; trust His timing.

What does trust involve? To a certain degree it involves going through moments of fear. What if...? What if it doesn't happen? I think the best way to handle fear is to just wake up the Lord when the storm comes, and say, "Lord, I'm fearful." Just as the disciples, in the moment of that storm; they were scared out of their lives, and the Lord was sleeping with them. Maybe, what you want to do when you get fearful is just go to God and say, "Lord, this is a fear that is coming upon me. Would you help me?"

Not a shadow can rise,
Not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt or a fear,
Not a sigh or a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.

The other thing that can sometimes come our way is when the evil one comes to create mistrust, to make us doubt God. We see that in this passage. "Don't listen to Hezekiah when he tries to mislead you by saying the Lord will rescue you." Attempts by the evil one to try and dissuade you from fully trusting God. When that doubt comes, remember that the evil one comes only to kill, to steal and destroy. The evil one has no good intentions. He will take away trust in God and when you trust in him, you will lose something, be killed, stolen or destroyed. When doubt comes, plow on in faith. Doubt is an integral part of faith – we overcome doubt with faith, else it's not faith.

Martin Luther made his famous stand for the gospel at the Diet of Worms. He was immediately put into hiding because people wanted to try and kill him. In this place where he was hiding, he wrote these words that we still sing today, although it is cloaked in old English. It says:

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe.

The body they may kill;
God's truth abideth still,
His Kingdom never faileth.
A mighty fortress is our God.

Beloved, with this huge mountain that's facing you – maybe enemies that are out to get you, maybe it's a relationship that's just not getting any better, or payments that need to be made, health issues whatever. The word for us today is take it to God and say, "Lord, this is bigger than anything that I can handle or have ever faced. What have I on earth besides You? You are bigger than all my problems, as the song writer would say. Lord, I'm bringing it to You, surrendering my will, my plans to You and leaving it at Your feet. Lord, You take care of it. All to Jesus, I surrender." That must be our attitude as we look at this huge mountain in front of us. First, surrender to Him everything, leave it at His feet. Don't walk back with your problem, and trust Him to take care of you through it.

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your word that is so encouraging. That you for the way in which Hezekiah walked through this problem. It gives us insights into how to handle these huge problems, these mountains that are sometimes in our path. I pray for everyone Lord, who is facing a mountain right now, who came into this service just with that sense of what do I do, or have given up – this is my lot. Would You let faith arise in each one's heart, to be able to bring it to you and leave it at your feet and trust you to take care of it and to take them through it. We love you and we surrender ourselves to You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.