

Lecture 22

“Hezekiah Attacked by Enemies, Illness and Pride”
2 Kings 18:8 – 20:21; 2 Chronicles 32:1-33; Isaiah 36:1-39:8

You've probably all heard sermons on the subject of anxiety and the effect it can have on our lives.

Most of us face a certain amount of anxiety when we have to take a test, whether it's to renew our driver's license, make application for a new job, qualify for certain careers – like a real estate license, or a legal bar exam – or just to complete any course we've signed up for in furthering our education. Well, surprise! I have a little pop quiz test for you today. Feeling anxious? Ready?

How do you put a giraffe in a refrigerator?

Open the refrigerator, put in the giraffe, and close the door.

This question tests whether you tend to do simple things in an overly complicated way.

How do you put an elephant in a refrigerator?

Did you think – Open the refrigerator and put in the elephant? Wrong: Open the refrigerator, take out the giraffe, put in the elephant and close the door. *This tests your ability to think through the repercussions of your previous actions.*

The Lion King is hosting an animal conference. All the animals attend except one. Which animal does not attend?

The Elephant. The elephant is in the refrigerator. You just put him in there. *This tests your memory.*

Last question: There is a river you must cross but it is used by crocodiles, and you do not have a boat. How do you manage it?

Correct Answer: You jump into the river and swim across. Have you not been listening? All the crocodiles are attending the Animal meeting. *This tests whether you learn quickly from your mistakes.*

That's a little bit of silliness, but learning from our own mistakes, or the mistakes of others, can be serious business, especially if we're going to cope with the anxieties that come into our lives.

For the reign of 19 kings in the Northern Kingdom ending with Hoshea, we've read this indictment: "And _____ did evil in the sight of the Lord following after the sins of Jeroboam." As a result those ten tribes of Israel were deported to Assyria . . . physically taken out of the land. Percentage wise that's like having an enemy invade the United States with success and removing the

population of 42 of the 50 states, taking them captive and into subjugation. Wouldn't that devastate us? Think about it; which 8 states do you think would be left if it were based on the morality of the state's population? How do you think California, or your home state, would fair?

The point is . . . the idolatry, immorality and sin of the Northern Kingdom had a high price tag. Judah was warned to learn from their example.

Last week we were introduced to King Hezekiah, the 7th of Judah's 8 "good" kings. We saw him "look up" to God and determine to do what was right. We saw him "look around" and see what needed to be done to restore the nation to a right relationship with God. We saw him "look into" the nation's heart as they praised and worshipped and celebrated Passover to honor God.

Now it was time to "look out" for the enemies that came to squash his joy (and ours) . . . opposition, illness, and pride.

The events as we studied them from Scripture this week tell us of the confrontational threat from Assyria, the letter laid out before the Lord, Hezekiah's illness and

recovery, and his boasting to the envoys from Babylon.

Many of the commentaries I studied laid out the sequence of these events in this order: first, he used the temple treasure to forestall the invasion of Sennacherib in 715 B.C.; second, he became ill/recovered and received the Babylonian ambassadors in 702 B.C.; and third, again faced the forces of Sennacherib in confrontation in 701 B.C. laying out the letter before the Lord and receiving, as a result of his intercession, the defeat of the enemy.

That's very logical, but I might add, certainly not all commentaries agree. But for the purpose of what we can apply to our lives from this lesson, I'm going to follow the order of events as we studied them this week using the anagram of PRIDE.

P – pressure brings anxiety

R – relying on God brings victory

I – illness brings fear

D – delay brings relief

E – ego brings consequences

PRESSURE BRINGS ANXIETY

R
I
D
E

As the enemy swept through the Northern Kingdom headed toward Judah, King Hezekiah was making preparations and fortifications. Part of that preparation included blocking the source of water from the upper outlet of the Gihon springs and channeling it through a tunnel to the west side of the City of David. (2 Chronicles 32:30) I remember reading an article in *Biblical Archaeological Review* back in the '90's about the water tunnel Hezekiah had built and the fact that it can still be seen today – very interesting. The article is on line now and some of you may have seen it personally if you've visited Jerusalem.

Hezekiah even tried to bribe Sennacherib with money from the temple treasury. It was a costly decision and didn't achieve any permanent solution. Compromise seldom does, light and dark have nothing in common . . . any attempt at coexistence just dilutes the light.

As Sennacherib and part of his army were at Lachish, a city just west of Jerusalem, finishing the

destruction there, he sent a military commander called The Rabshakeh to put the pressure on Hezekiah to surrender without a fight.

Anxiously, Hezekiah sent his emissaries to hear the man out. 1 Kings records the confrontation:

Vs. 21 – you can't trust Egypt as an ally – intimidation

Vs. 22 – God's insulted Hezekiah tore down the high places – lie

Vs. 23 – we'll give you 2,000 horses (if you have that many fighting men) – ridicule

Vs. 25 – the Lord Himself sent me on this mission – another lie

Vs. 26,27 – he appealed to bystanders, make your own decisions – intimidation

Vs. 29,30 – don't believe Hezekiah – instill doubt/fear

Vs. 31,32 – promise of peace and plenty – lie

Vs. 33 – has any God ever delivered a nation from Assyria? – Blasphemy

Vs. 35 – How can the Lord deliver Jerusalem? – again Blasphemy

But the people remained silent. Sometimes that's the best answer – self-control in a threatening / aggravating

situation. Wouldn't we all like to be able to do that . . . Control our tongue and control our temper? I read a statement, "Anger is always a breakdown on the road of life; patience is the repair truck that's needed."

The pressure of confrontation always makes me churn inside with anxiety. I'm not very good at it. Silence is most often my personal choice while I pray, consider the source, and try to recognize what I can change and what I must leave to God. One thing is for sure; replying must have one essential ingredient – truth!

Can't you imagine the emissaries revulsion at listening to the enemy speak against the Lord? Those whose spiritual perception has been sharpened through knowledge of the Savior and His Word are quite properly revolted by such insults to their God. But then we can see that the Rabshakeh was seeking victory, not truth.

PRESSURE BRINGS ANXIETY
RELYING ON GOD BRINGS VICTORY

I
D
E

What to do with an anxious heart? Go to the throne of God in prayer. Hezekiah humbled himself in sackcloth, called for God's prophet, Isaiah, and pled to God on

behalf of the remnant. He was too wise to dismiss the threat of the enemy and too determined to succumb to him easily.

Have you ever thought about this example of literally laying out your problems before God? A lot of us would rather just ignore them and hope they'll dissolve themselves or just go away, but this is really a positive action, perhaps recorded especially for our instruction.

In my early years as a Christian, I used to keep a record of prayer requests and a record of God's answers, but He kept giving me more than I could think or ask. It helped to solidify my baby steps in the faith to a point where I am totally confident that whatever I ask in His Will He will do. I may forget my prayer requests made last year, but He does not and nothing is impossible for God!

Hezekiah's actions in the temple showed:

- 1) He adored the Lord that Sennacherib blasphemed.
- 2) He appealed to God concerning this insolence & profaneness.
- 3) He prayed God would glorify Himself in the defeat of Sennacherib and the deliverance of Jerusalem.

Isaiah's reply was encouraging:

- 1) God hears the prayers.

- 2) Sennacherib would be defeated.
- 3) The land resources devoured by the Assyrian army would be replenished.
- 4) There would be peace and safety for Zion.

The victory was the Lord's. Sennacherib awoke to find 185,000 soldiers dead by the hand of the Lord's angel. He returned to his capital city Nineveh and was eventually assassinated by his sons. You're in trouble when you pick a fight with God.

PRESSURE BRINGS ANXIETY
RELYING ON GOD BRINGS VICTORY
ILLNESS BRINGS FEAR

I
D
E

Certainly some of the greatest anxiety and fear we experience is in connection with serious illness – life and death situations. We are so out of control. King Hezekiah was about 38 or 39 – what we usually term the “prime of life. No matter what your age today, the life force within us tells us that “we’re too young to die.” We have dreams and goals, people to care for, work to do for the Lord . . . any number of reasons why we too might beg the Lord to postpone His calling us home. But Hezekiah was told to put his house in order.

Our questions asked us to think about our own preparations for putting our house in order. For me personally, I'm thankful that I am spiritually perfectly ready to meet my Savior. I know the Lord Jesus Christ and have accepted His blood atonement for my sins. I am "in Christ." I am saved.

Physically, however, this is again a reminder that although I've taken care of many things, it's time to take action on some unfinished and necessary business. How about you? Is your house in order? Have you made a will? Have you made an advance directive for your health care should you be unable to do so for yourself? Those are things hard to think about but we all need to do it.

Well, Isaiah was barely out of the palace having delivered the decree that this illness would lead to death, than the Lord told him to go back and tell Hezekiah that He'd heard his prayer and in answer would do several things: 1) heal his body, 2) prolong his life for 15 years and 3) give Hezekiah a sign to increase his faith.

The miracle of Hezekiah's healing was not in the method used, which was applying a poultice of figs, but in God curing the incurable. Some of you may have had

personal experience with just such a marvelous healing, and certainly we know that Jesus performed many healing miracles in His time here on earth. That is why we pray for ourselves and others suffering with health issues . . . because we KNOW that our God can and does heal. We also know that God in His sovereignty may choose at this time to give us our ultimate healing with Him in heaven.

Now what about the sign given to Hezekiah? We remember that Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, was challenged to ask God for a sign but he refused. But Isaiah 7:14 says, "The Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." We're reminded that the sign was to offered to strengthen the faith of Ahaz.

Well, now his son, Hezekiah, accepted the challenge of naming a sign. One commentator wrote, "The existence of sundials in ancient Babylon and Assyria are well known. Ahaz, who was a pro-Assyrian ruler, had brought back the Assyrian sundial to Jerusalem. What this sundial looked like is not totally clear; however, it had steps as time indicators and the shadow of the

sundial would fall on these steps. Following the daily course of the sun, the shadow would move clockwise from one step to another. Naturally, it would be impossible for the shadow to move back counterclockwise." Hezekiah's request was that the shadow go back ten steps on the stairway of Ahaz.

Just as the sign of Ahaz would benefit the whole world, here then was another sign that would be manifest throughout the whole world, for to cause the shadow of the sun to turn backward meant that some major physical change had to occur on the earth.

Scientists now know that a shift in the axis of the earth (which is a slant of the earth in relationship to the sun) would have such a result. This miracle brings us to the link with Isaiah 39.

According to 2 Chronicles 32:31, the ambassadors from Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylon, came to see Hezekiah because they saw the sign which was given Hezekiah. They wanted to investigate what was going on in Israel that resulted in such dramatic changes in the course of nature. What an indication of the tremendous interest God has in what happens to the house of David.

God was willing to adjust the forces of nature to encourage the faith of Hezekiah.

PRESSURE BRINGS ANXIETY
RELYING ON GOD BRINGS VICTORY
ILLNESS BRINGS FEAR
DELAY BRINGS RELIEF

E

Delay often proves more of a challenge than accepting the circumstances at hand, but we're people who like to "put off until tomorrow." Kind of makes you think of Scarlett O'Hara's line in Gone with the Wind, doesn't it? "I'll think about it tomorrow."

When you think about it, **the test of adversity** tells a lot about the character of a person doesn't it? When the tough times come do you seek the Lord; examine yourself to see if sin in your life contributes to the problems at hand? Do you rely on God's sovereignty to select what's best for you when adversity or suffering strikes?

Aren't we all encouraged by those who persevere . . . who continue to praise the Lord in all circumstances of life? Aren't we encouraged by those who suffer with grace and seem to just keep reaching out even when life would have them withdraw into a shell of self-pity?

Hezekiah said, "Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish." That is a truth that we can only learn by looking back on the tough times. So it's true: Adversity is hard on a man . . . but prosperity may be even harder.

**PRESSURE BRINGS ANXIETY
RELYING ON GOD BRINGS VICTORY
ILLNESS BRINGS FEAR
DELAY BRINGS RELIEF
EGO BRINGS CONSEQUENCES**

P-R-I-D-E . . . it culminates in ego. Restoration of health, the promise of extended life – who wouldn't be rejoicing as Hezekiah did! But again 2 Chronicles 32:31 says, "God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart." Can't you just imagine him saying to his son, Manasseh, "Son, one day all of this will be yours" as he enjoyed his wealth. It's no surprise that Isaiah 39 revealed the results of the **test of prosperity - - pride.**

Doesn't that just break your heart? Doesn't that touch us right where we live? How often has God delivered us only to see us skipping away in our relief from misery and returning again to our reliance on ourselves until the next time we desperately need Him.

When Hezekiah received a letter from the king of Assyria, he handled the threat by spreading it before the Lord. But now when he received the letter from Babylon – a flattering letter and a present with it, Hezekiah acted very differently.

Isaiah 39:2 says, “Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses – the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine oil, his entire armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in all his palaces or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.”

He did not consult Isaiah, who had already warned him about Babylon, and we don’t read a word about Hezekiah extolling God’s faithfulness and wonderful blessings. In fact, when Isaiah learned of the visit and Hezekiah’s actions, he predicts . . .

Isaiah 39:6-7 The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your own descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born

to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

Do you ever wish you could take back something you've done or said? Omar Khyam wrote, "The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on. Nor all your piety nor wit can lure it back to cancel even half a line of it." In our human frailty we all make mistakes we regret.

What you choose to do does have consequences . . . sin may be fully forgiven at the foot of the cross covered by the blood of Jesus, but the consequences of sin may have to be lived with. Hezekiah responds, "The word of the Lord you have spoken is good." But he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime."

Only God knows the thoughts and intents of Hezekiah's heart. Was that a callous attitude – "At least it doesn't affect me personally" statement? Or was it gratitude that – "At least my eyes won't have to see the full consequences that my sin has caused my children." Only God knows.

Well, let's wrap this up.

Ahaz (an evil king) was the son of a godly father (Jotham) and the father of a godly son (Hezekiah);

Hezekiah (a godly king) was the son of a wicked father (Ahaz) and the father of a wicked son (Manasseh) as we'll soon see.

Three quick applications:

- 1) The enemy would have us doubt God's power, don't listen to that. "Greater is he who is in us, than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4)
- 2) Our suffering would have us question God's goodness, don't accept that. "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him." (Nahum 1:7)
- 3) Our human frailties bring us to many crossroads reminding us we need a Savior, don't reject Him. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (John 3:36)

Let's pray.