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Church

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*Who Do You Trust?*

2 Kings 19:1–19

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August 15, 2010

series: Prayers Of Our Fathers

Before I tell this story, I want you all to know that I asked permission from my friend to share it. Well over a year ago I received a phone call that absolutely rocked my world. The voice on the other line was a trusted mentor and friend of mine. We used to work together on staff at the same church, one that I had helped start in the summer of 2000. He was calling to tell me about the resignation of the lead pastor from the church because of a “moral failure.” This man was not just the lead pastor of a growing church, but a good friend of mine, a father figure in many ways, he discipled me as a teenager after I came to Christ, for five years he was my boss, he performed my wedding ceremony and even dedicated my first child. I learned a lot from him about ministry and life. I almost couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I was stunned. I was sad. I was speechless. This was a time of crisis. I knew that the church, as soon as the news got out would be deep in crisis. His family was already in crisis mode and this fall would deeply affect thousands of people that he knew and loved. The church was only months away from moving into a brand new 40,000 square foot, multimillion dollar facility. This couldn’t have come at any worse time. I was one of the first to hear about the resignation and I was also one of the first to call him and offer my support.

For the next couple of weeks I felt numb. As a former pastor of that church, after the resignation became public I received many phone calls from friends also trying to understand it all. As I look back on those dark days there was one area that I really struggled in and that was my prayer life. I honestly had such a hard time praying for him and the church because I was in shock. I didn’t know what to really pray or how to effectively pray. I wanted to pray longer and harder for him, for the church and for my friends, but as I look back I realize that in some ways I was dealing with my own crisis of faith.

We are all familiar with crisis, aren't we? An unexpected death in the family, a bad car crash, a lost job, foreclosure, an unwanted divorce, negative test results, and sad news from a friend are just a few of the different things life can throw at us sending us into crisis. I don't want to make light of any problem you are going through this morning, but I want to remind you that most of the world would love to have some of our problems. We need to keep that in perspective. I am also no expert on crisis in any way, but the question I want to look at this morning is this: How should a person pray during a crisis?

## Background and Historical Context

This morning we are going to look at the life and prayer of a man by the name of Hezekiah. This was a king who was very familiar with crisis and who also had a crisis of faith. In fact, his reign would be defined by a national crisis caused by the King of Assyria. Before we read the text and look at his prayer we need to understand King Hezekiah and the crisis unfolding before him. I find it interesting that Hezekiah's name means, “the Lord is my strength.” He truly did live up to his name. Hezekiah was the 13th king of the southern nation of Judah. He was only 25 years old when he took the throne but would reign for 29 years. He is well known in the Bible as one of the few godly kings that loved the Lord and did what was right in His eyes. One of the first reforms Hezekiah made was a religious one. He sought to bring Judah back to the Lord by removing the “high places” which became places of idol worship. He then reopened the Temple and began to centralize worship in Jerusalem once again. Politically, he set out to reunite northern Israel, who had fallen into enemy hands.

The city of Samaria, which belonged to Israel, was conquered by Shalmaneser, King of Assyria. Many Israelites were taken into captivity and made slaves. These were unbelievable dire times for Israel. Several years later, another King of Assyria, Sennacherib, wanting to control the Mediterranean sea ports and squelch the rebellion Egypt was leading, laid siege to many of the cities of Israel and Judah. As the armies of Sennacherib approached Jerusalem, Hezekiah first tried diplomacy and sent a large sum of money, even stripping the temple of God, the modern equivalent of \$1.5 million, to Sennacherib hoping he would leave their kingdom and go home. The gold only whet his appetite for more. Hezekiah then joined forces with Tyre and Egypt, even though the prophet Isaiah warned him not to, hoping this alliance would provide security for Judah. It didn't work. The King of Assyria finally laid siege to Jerusalem. The Assyrians were masters of war. They would cut off the water and food supplies of a city during a siege so that the inhabitants of the city would eventually die of thirst or starvation and finally give up. That is what they were doing to Jerusalem. Sennacherib wrote about the siege and said that Hezekiah was helpless, “*like a bird in a cage.*”

As if this weren't enough, Sennacherib began to attack the emotional state of Jerusalem and its leaders by sending the Rabshakeh, his chief of staff, with a letter of intimidation. This

would happen three times during the siege. Essentially, the letter said this: Egypt is too weak to help, your own military force is useless and your God apparently doesn't care. In other words, there is no one from whom Hezekiah could expect help. Hezekiah was facing the defining crisis of his leadership as king. Let's read how he responds to this crisis.

### Hezekiah's Response

As soon as King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD. And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz. They said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the point of birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. It may be that the LORD your God heard all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the LORD your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left." When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, Isaiah said to them, "Say to your master, 'Thus says the LORD: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land, and I will make him fall by the sword in his own land.'" The Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he heard that the king had left Lachish. Now the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Cush, "Behold, he has set out to fight against you." So he sent messengers again to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah: 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction. And shall you be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my fathers destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?'" (2 Kings 19:1–13).

Upon hearing the second devastating letter he immediately goes to the house of the Lord, the Temple. It is significant that many of the prayers we've looked at during this series were offered from inside the Temple. The place where heaven and earth intersected. The place where God's name dwelt. A holy place. You could say that he went to church! I've found that when people are in a crisis, often just being in their presence provides great comfort to them. Hezekiah needed the presence of the Lord.

After the worship service, Hezekiah comes out and dispatches Eliakim, Shebna, and the leading priests, all dressed in sackcloth, to meet with Isaiah so that he might hear God's word through the prophet. Hezekiah was a godly leader who knew that there were deeper spiritual issues at work in this crisis. He needed the wisdom of Judah's chief spiritual advisor, the prophet Isaiah; he needed to hear from the Lord. Hezekiah's request to Isaiah was simply "pray for us." Hezekiah through his key advisors urges Isaiah to join him in prayer for God's people. The first principle we can learn here is that during a crisis we need to ask trusted people to pray for us.

### Principle #1: Ask trusted people to pray for you.

This almost sounds like a no-brainer for some of us. From experience I can't tell you how many times I'm the last to hear about a problem or issue from my family, friends, and even people in the church. How often do we hide from others what is really going on in our lives? How often do we put on a "church face" and keep to ourselves the problems and issues we are dealing with? When you are dealing with a crisis or even something much less difficult do you have a few trusted people who love Jesus praying for you? All of us, myself included, need a few godly and trustworthy friends whom we can simply ask face to face, on the phone, or in an email, "Hey, pray for me. I'm going through a difficult time. Pray for me." Hezekiah believed in the power of prayer and wanted his trusted friends to pray for Judah. James 5:16 reminds us of this truth, *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."*

Isaiah begins to pray for Judah and for the king, but he also has a word from the Lord. Isaiah's words must have tasted like sweet tea on a summer's night to the king. Isaiah reassures him with these words, *"Do not be afraid."* How often do we hear an encouraging word from a friend during a crisis that is just what we needed to hear? Isaiah tells the king, "Do not be afraid, God is at work and has a plan." King Hezekiah needed that assurance, he needed to be reminded of that truth. Maybe some of you need to hear those words from the Lord this, "Do not be afraid." All throughout Scripture the Lord encouraged men and women with those words, "Do not be afraid." Isaiah then explains to the men what will eventually happen to Sennacherib. He will return to Assyria and die by the sword. What a powerful and wild prophecy.

Isaiah's reassuring words would soon be eclipsed by the return of the Rabshakeh. This is now the third letter sent to King Hezekiah. It is safe to say that this was what we would call today hate mail. The King of Assyria not only attacks King Hezekiah, but he mocks the Lord. Look again at verse 10, *"Do not let your God in who you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria."* The letter goes on to say

that no gods from any nation have been able to deliver them from the hands of the King of Assyria. “Look at my track record King Hezekiah, I’ve already captured and destroyed 46 towns and cities. Jerusalem is next.”

One thing I’ve learned about crisis is that it tends to reveal who and what we really fear. Prayer offers a way to voice our fear and anxiety to a God who cares. The temptation for Hezekiah was to fear Sennacherib. Things were not looking good. It seemed to be only a matter of time before Jerusalem would be invaded. Hezekiah was a righteous king who instead feared God. The second principle this account teaches us is that we need to fear God and not man.

### **Principle #2: Don’t let the fear of man overcome the fear of God.**

We call fear by many names. We call it worry, tension, anxiety and stress. One study that I read about looked at 500 different people and discovered 7,000 total fears. On average, every person carries with them 14 different fears. What fears are you carrying with you this morning? The problem with fear is that it’s contagious, it’s limiting, and it’s draining. As one pastor said, “It’s the dark room where negativity develops.” Fear and worry have a purpose—they reveal who we really are and what we truly love and value. This is precisely why Isaiah’s encouragement to Hezekiah was, “Do not be afraid.” This was a reminder to not trust in Egyptian power, the security of armies, the riches of a kingdom or political alliances. Instead fear God. Proverbs 9:10 says, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”* Ecclesiastes 12:13 says, *“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”* The fear of God drives us to the cross. To fear God is to have a healthy respect and reverence for who he is and what he can do. I think fearing God is like my fear of the ocean. I love the ocean, but I also fear it. I have a healthy respect for its power and capabilities. Hezekiah had a choice—fear man, specifically Sennacherib, or fear God. He chose to fear God. It shows in how he prayed.

### **Hezekiah’s Prayer**

**Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD and spread it before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said: “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. Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste 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” (verses 14–19).**

We finally get to Hezekiah’s prayer. I have purposely taken most of our time to look at the context leading up to this prayer so that we could all understand the anxiety and stress the king was under. Hezekiah prays this prayer because he is completely vulnerable and has exhausted every other available resource. He is a desperate man who really has no where else to turn. The question Hezekiah was wrestling with was this, in whom will he trust? This is where the rubber meets the road for us: a crisis reveals who we really trust.

### **Principle #3: Our prayers reveal who we really trust.**

A time of crisis presents a good opportunity to identify the foundation on which we construct our lives. Life is a constant opportunity to trust God. What can Hezekiah do in the face of such raw Assyrian power? He can pray. He can trust. Let me point out a few highlights from his prayer.

First, he mentions God’s power. He affirms that God is over all the kingdoms of the earth and is the creator of heaven and earth. There is no God like him. Hezekiah is encouraging and reminding himself about who he is praying to. Unlike the other pagan nations, with gods made of wood and stone, Hezekiah is praying to the right God, the living God. We’ve said this several times already, but prayer should always begin with God and be about God. Jesus taught us to start our prayers with God, *“Our Father who is in heaven hallowed be your name.”*

Second, Hezekiah mentions the problem. It is interesting to me that he has this letter spread out before the Lord. By doing that he is saying, “God, see this letter! Hear its words! Sennacherib is mocking you, God! In case you haven’t noticed, I’ve got the letter right here!” Hezekiah’s prayer is specific; here is the letter. What he does here reminds me of being a father. One of the job descriptions for a dad is the “fixer of all things broken.” When my kids have a toy that won’t work or needs new batteries, they bring it to me. They know that I’ll do my best to fix it and that I’ve got the right batteries somewhere. Hezekiah is doing the same thing. As a child bringing his broken toy to his father for repair, Hezekiah laid the issues in God’s sight for Him to fix. What papers do you need to lay out before the Lord and bring to His attention? Test results? Foreclosure papers? Divorce papers? Financial statements? In humility and as an act of surrender, Hezekiah lays out the letter before the Lord and ask his heavenly Father to fix it.

The third thing I want you to see in this prayer is that Hezekiah mentions God’s greater purpose. Hezekiah appeals to God on behalf of God’s own reputation. Look again at verse 19, *“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.”*

Hezekiah wants the Lord to answer this prayer for the sake of the Lord's own name and reputation. Don't just answer this prayer to save us from the enemy's hand (though we'd really appreciate that, Lord), do it for Your name and reputation. The Scriptures make it clear that God will not be mocked, that God is zealous for His name and reputation. When crisis hits, it is important to remember that God is still God. That God is still sovereign. Our God saves because our God is able.

## Conclusion

Through prayer, the power of God was tapped into and was proven mightier than the armies of Judah and the armies of Sennacherib. God sent an angel to deal with the arrogant Assyrians and in the morning over 185,000 soldiers lay dead on the battle field. God did deliver Judah. Now everyone would know that God is God alone. Romans 8:31 reminds us, "***If God is for us, who can be against us?***" That is a promise to take to the bank!

I want to give a brief update about the story I shared early. The church has hired a new lead pastor. He is doing a good job leading with humility and seeking to grow not just a large church but a healthy one. In a conversation I had with my friend who resigned, he told me that his marriage is stronger than it has ever been. He has been meeting with a team of pastors who are helping him wade through some of the deeper waters of his life. He is growing, maturing and developing into the man of God he has always wanted to be. Even though he regrets the hurt and pain he has caused to so many people, through this crisis,

he has experienced great inner transformation and change. Crises drove Israel's leaders to God and it does the same for us. CS Lewis made a great statement when he said, "We may think God wants actions of a certain kind, but God wants people of a certain sort."

What crisis are you going through? What do you need to be delivered from this morning? Bring them to the Lord. Confide in a godly friend who will pray for you. Remember to fear God and not man or your situation. And trust Him with the outcome. He is creating people of a certain sort.

In his book *Thoughts in Solitude*, Thomas Merton wrote fifteen lines that have become known as "the Merton Prayer." I'd like to end praying this prayer for us. I've edited it for us all:

*My Lord God, we have no idea where we are going. We do not see the road ahead of us. We cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do we really know ourselves, and the fact that we think we are following your will does not mean that we are actually doing so. But we believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And we hope we have that desire in all that we are doing. We hope that we will never do anything apart from that desire. And we know that if we do this you will lead us by the right road, though we may know nothing about it. Therefore we will trust you always though we may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. We will not fear, for you are ever with us, and you will never leave us to face our perils alone.*

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*