



This week was a treat for my family; we went on a Disney cruise to celebrate our 10-year anniversary! We had never been on a cruise before and we had a wonderful time. Being on a cruise is great! Someone makes your bed for you. Someone cleans your room. You get to experience gorgeous destinations. You can eat six meals a day, and they're all free! They even have an ice cream station open all day. There is no commuting, no cooking, no cleaning, and tons of fun.

Too bad being on a cruise isn't reality. Life's not always a soft bed to sleep on with unlimited room service. Sometimes life is more of a crisis we're trying to overcome. We're all familiar with crisis, aren't we? An unexpected death in the family, a lost job, an unwanted divorce, or bad news from the doctor are just a few of the different things life can throw at us. I'm no expert on crisis in any way, but the question I want to look at this morning is: When a crisis hits, who or what do you depend on? The obvious answer to this question is God, but all too often we try to solve the problem on our own. We depend on ourselves in the dark times.

### **Finally, A Good King**

For the last couple of months we've been in a series called The Story where we're taking a big picture look at the entire Bible. If you look at the artwork around the room you can see we've turned a corner and are starting the second half of the series. Let me refresh our memories where we're at: the Nation of Israel is torn into two smaller weaker nations. Most of these kings have been defined as evil and God has sent prophets to declare His word and encourage them to return to Him. This morning we're going to look at the life of King Hezekiah and the crisis he encounters. Before we get there let's learn about Hezekiah and see what kind of king he is.

**He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done. He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)**

**Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not stop following him; he**

### **kept the commands the Lord had given Moses (2 Kings 18:2–6).**

Finally there is a good king. Hezekiah was the 13th king of the southern kingdom of Judah. He was only 25 years old when he took the throne and reigned for 29 years. Hezekiah relied on God as his exclusive hope in every situation. One of the first reforms Hezekiah made was to bring Judah back to the Lord by removing the places of idol worship. He then reopened the Temple and began to centralize worship in Jerusalem once again. Finally we have a king who is seeking God, eradicating idol worship, and following the commands of the Lord!

Although Hezekiah is good, that doesn't mean everything around him was good. Hezekiah encountered a crisis caused by the king of Assyria. Let me sum up chapter 18. The city of Samaria, located in the Northern Kingdom, was conquered by Shalmaneser, King of Assyria. Thousands of Israelites were deported, taken into captivity and made slaves. This was a tragedy for Israel. About eight years later another King of Assyria, Sennacherib, attacked Judah. As the Assyrian army approached Jerusalem, Hezekiah first tried to negotiate and sent a large sum of gold and silver; if we calculate the price of just the gold Hezekiah sent we're looking at around 38 million dollars to pay off the king of Assyria.

Even though he paid him, the bribe didn't work. The king of Assyria began to lay siege to Jerusalem. We have to understand, 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. Sennacherib also began to attack the emotional state of Jerusalem by sending letters of intimidation. Essentially the letters said 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.

### **Responding to a Bully**

Having a good historical context of what Hezekiah is facing, let's see how he responds.

**When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the Lord (19:1).**

Let's stop there. The first thing Hezekiah does is follow the customary action of a person in mourning. As an act of humility, mourning, and supplication, Hezekiah puts on sackcloth and goes directly to meet with God. Although this is contrary to what

we've seen from the other kings, this is in line with the character of the good king.

In addition to this, Hezekiah goes on to send a number of his leading officials to Isaiah the prophet to intercede with God on behalf of the people of Judah. Now you have to know that this is a new thing; sending people to the prophet for help. Usually it's been the other way around; usually it's been the prophet going to the king, but this case is different. Most of the kings of Israel have avoided the prophet because they wanted to live their life apart from God. Look at the request the men bring to Isaiah.

**They told him, "This is what Hezekiah says: This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the moment of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. It may be that the Lord your God will hear all the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the Lord your God has heard. Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives" (19:3–4).**

Do you see how dire the situation has become? Hezekiah is discouraged, humiliated and downcast. If the first couple of years of Hezekiah's reign was like being on a cruise ship, the tide has changed and he is in a dark time now. Hezekiah has the men graphically describe the day as a day of great humiliation. He goes on, in verse 4, to make sure Isaiah knows that the Assyrian is mocking God. The arrogance of Sennacherib is revealed, his pride is beginning to take over. Hezekiah wants to make sure Isaiah clearly understands how dire the situation is for Judah. After it's been explained the request comes from the king: pray for us.

It was early in my marriage when a close friend called me. He was in tears and told me that his wife had left him. He was the sole bread winner and they had two kids; he didn't know what to do. I suspected they were having problems but I didn't think it was this bad. I suspected they were struggling but I didn't realize their marriage was in a crisis. He turned to his friends and asked for prayer in the midst of the crisis he was facing, but eventually it was too much. His marriage fell apart and eventually he walked away from the Lord.

Do you have people in your life you can turn to for prayer or do you keep matters hidden thinking they will work themselves out in due time? Some people are great at revealing what's going on in their life while it seems like this is more difficult for others. Sometimes you walk into church and someone asks you, "How are you?" You respond with, "Great!" and give a big smile. Unfortunately you lied. In reality you're not great. You just found out your daughter has been sleeping with her boyfriend and she thinks she is pregnant. There was a heated discussion at the house and last night you blew up at your wife and haven't talked since.

All too often we put on our "church face" and keep our problems to ourselves. Hezekiah models a valuable lesson here as king. He models the need to be open and share the real problem: it's safe to ask for prayer. One of my favorite verses in the New Testament is from the book of James where he says, "*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective*" (James 5:16). Now that Hezekiah has made the request, will God act on behalf of His people?

**When King Hezekiah's officials came to Isaiah, Isaiah said to them, "Tell your master, 'This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard—those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Listen! When he hears a certain report, I will make him want to return to his own country, and there I will have him cut down with the sword'" (19:5–7).**

The response from the prophet Isaiah is positive for the good king. One thing I find interesting here is that Isaiah never asks for time to hear from God. It's almost as if God had prepared Isaiah for the visit and had given him the words to speak. I've even wondered to myself, "Did the men have a chance to make the request of the King?" Either way, it doesn't matter. Isaiah responds with a great line, "do not be afraid."

The prophet Isaiah continues to let the men know that the king of Assyria will hear a certain report and flee; once he returns home he will be devoured by the sword. Keep both of these in mind because we need to see if this actually comes true. Hezekiah has a decision to make: will he trust God or will he fear man? All too often it's easy to fear man because we can see them. We feel their breath on our neck or sense their eyes watching us. If you're having trouble trusting God, listen to what Corrie ten Boom says: "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." It's a great quote, but too often we don't trust God with our unknown future. The reason we don't is because we think we can do it better, we think God will take too long and we want solutions right now. We want to be in control so instead of trusting God we take matters in our own hands.

In chapter 18 we saw how Hezekiah trusted in the Lord. Will he continue to in this crisis? Isaiah's words come true, at the least the first half does, immediately.

**When the field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish, he withdrew and found the king fighting against Libnah (19:8).**

The Assyrians depart from Judah, for a time. While they are gone the arrogance of Sennacherib is elevated. He sends a letter to Hezekiah detailing out the other kings who he has conquered. He slanders the God of Israel and encourages Hezekiah not to trust in God, claiming the God of Israel is unable to assist them. So in one ear Isaiah says "don't be afraid" and in the other ear

Sennacherib says "be very afraid." In just a minute we're going to see how Hezekiah responds to the crisis but first I want to share a story.

When I was in seminary I had professor, Dr. George Haraksin, who shared a compelling story to illustrate how we respond to tense situations. In his early 20's, while attending college, George worked at Disneyland as a server in a very nice restaurant. It was just another night at work serving tables and taking peoples' orders. He had a table where one of the customers felt he wasn't receiving the service he deserved. Maybe it was a rough day or maybe it was one too many beers for this customer but at some point in the meal the man stood to his feet and began yelling at George at the top of his lungs. The tone was deafening and the whole dining room silenced to watch the scene.

Instead of responding how we might have expected, George simply said, "I'm sorry, can I help you" with his lips only, no words. The man was in shock, he didn't know how to respond so he yelled again. This time, in a whisper, George said, "I'm so sorry, what can I do to help you." The man expected him to respond in a louder tone and with aggression, but his humble response defused what could have been a volatile situation. This reminds me of how we just saw Hezekiah respond. When Sennacherib was boasting in his letter, defaming God and mocking him, Hezekiah was unwilling to respond in the same type of manner.

## Turning to God

The response Isaiah gives is reassuring but the timing is vague. We know Sennacherib retreated but he continued to defame God by sending another letter. Look how the good King responds once again.

**Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord (19:14).**

Take notice of what Hezekiah did with the letter he had received. He brought it with him to the Temple. He spreads it out before the Lord to make certain God sees it. It's an interesting tactic. It's nothing we haven't seen before. Dads, think about this. It's almost like when your child brings you a broken toy to fix. They want you to put the head back on or change the batteries or just fix the problem. They bring it to you so you can see it and fix it. Hezekiah brings his problem to the Lord.

Once in the Temple of the Lord Hezekiah proceeds to pray. Notice this time he doesn't ask Isaiah to pray for him, but he approaches the Lord himself. Hezekiah's prayer follows a format typical of the most common Psalm. We're going to take some time to study his prayer and see how we can apply it to our lives. Let me tell you the three parts of his prayer and what we're going to study: First, Hezekiah recognizes the greatness of the Lord. Second, he explains his problem to the Lord. Finally, he asks God for assistance.

The first thing Hezekiah does is recognize the greatness of the Lord.

**And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: "Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, Lord, and hear; open your eyes, Lord, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God" (19:15–16).**

Hezekiah affirms there is no one like the Lord God. Hezekiah defines where God sits. God is not one of many gods. God is not "a" god in any temple. God is the **only** God, the one God. Hezekiah is confessing God is in a class all by Himself; there is no one greater than He. When he asks God to "see, hear and listen," Hezekiah is confessing He is the living God. An idol cannot see or hear or listen because it is quite simply not living. But the Lord God, who Hezekiah is petitioning, He is living. Hezekiah also makes sure to mention the dominion God possesses and His creative nature. God has not been created, but God **is** the creator God. God is one who deserves His greatness to be recognized.

This is a great example for us to start out our prayers. It's easy to come to God rushed, with a list of what we want Him to do and usually there is a timeline attached of when we need to act by. The next time you approach the living God try following this approach. Come to God but before you ask for anything, before making a single request, no matter how simple it may sound, recognize God's greatness. Take some time to declare how amazing God is. Stand in awe of His creative ability and know He is the only God. Once you've recognized God's greatness you can move on to explain your problems to God.

**"It is true, Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands" (19:17–18).**

The problem Hezekiah encountered is what Sennacherib wrote was true. The Assyrians had laid waste to the other nations. They had cut off their water supply. They had caused them to starve. He had killed their kings and burned their gods in the fire. There is a difference: their gods are made of wood and stone; they really aren't gods at all.

Let's make this practical. After you've recognized the greatness of God take some time to explain your problems. Freely tell God how you're struggling as a parent. Tell God you don't want to get a divorce but you know your spouse does and this is a problem for you. Remind God about the foreclosure notice you received in the mail. Remind God about your last semester of school and how you're stressed on what's next in life. Remind God how you've been out of work. Remind God that you're having a tough time paying your bills this month. No matter what the situation is, explain your problem to God. We all have problems, and it's

biblical to explain those problems to God. After Hezekiah explains his problem he asks God for assistance against the Assyrians.

**“Now, Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, Lord, are God” (19:19).**

If you're in a dark time this morning will you leave here knowing you can ask God for assistance? Hezekiah was in a dark time and he knew the only one who could help him was God. Growing up on the bottom end of the middle-class, there were times we had to ask for help. My mom used to always say to me, “You never know unless you ask.” It's true, you never know unless you ask. You never know if God will assist you unless you ask for assistance. If you take one thing from this message will you remember: Dependence on God will carry us through the darkest times. Hezekiah has modeled his dependence on God. He trusts God. He depends on God to carry him through the darkest time of his life.

In the New Testament we see time and time again where men and women depended on God to carry them through dark times. In the book of Acts, chapter 12, we see that King Herod began killing Christians. Once he saw that this made the Jews happy he had Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, arrested and thrown in jail. Night after night Peter sat in a cold jail cell awaiting execution. He was the most heavily guarded, non-violent, prisoner the jail had ever seen. He knew Herod had killed his friend James on account of Jesus. While sitting in the cold cell he had a decision to make: would he depend on God or would he allow his mind to wonder as he anticipated his coming death? Peter chose the prior, he chose to depend on God in the darkest time he had encountered. One night, while he was sleeping, an angel of God came and punched him in the side saying “wake up now!”

The chains on Peter's wrist fell off like sweat in the Sahara Desert. Peter got dressed as quickly as he could, hopping to get his pants on and slipping on his sandals. He followed the angel through the jail. They went past one set of guards and... nothing, past another set of guards and it was like he was invisible. The next thing Peter knew he was standing in the open streets, in the middle of the night, alone. God had freed him from that cold cell because Peter chose to depend on God no matter what the situation. Listen to what A.B. Simpson says: “When we dare to depend entirely upon God and do not doubt, the humblest and feeblest agencies will become mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds.”

## Answer Received

After Hezekiah finishes praying the prophet Isaiah sends word letting him know that God has heard his prayer. We don't have time to go through Isaiah's entire prophecy concerning Sennacherib but I would like to look at how the story ends.

**That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.**

**One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisrok, his sons Adrammelek and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king (19:35–37).**

God sends the angel of the Lord as a direct response to Hezekiah's prayer. The angel puts to death 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Some scholars think the number is inflated, but I think the number is correct. With how large Assyria was, it is totally possible for them to have multiple detachments of soldiers in different locations. This one detachment was totally annihilated. Finally Sennacherib returns home where he is murdered, by his own son, in the temple of his god. His god was unable to save him from the Lord God! And both of Isaiah's prophecies come true.

This morning we saw that life isn't always a cruise and we're reminded that we all encounter dire situations. It was refreshing to see how Hezekiah chose to place his trust in God instead of following the evil practices of the kings who reigned before him. Some of you are in the middle of the darkest time you've ever faced. You feel like things couldn't get any worse in your life and you feel like life has become too difficult. Instead of focusing on how big your problem is, will you turn your focus to God? Will you remind your problems how big **God** is? Will you take a step of faith and depend on God to carry you through this dark time?

There are also those of you who aren't in a dark time; life is going pretty good for you. Can I encourage you to depend on God? When you depend on God for the things that seem small or insignificant, right now it will be a natural reaction to depend on God to carry you through the dark times. We are all going to face dark times in our life. What matters is who we depend on in those times.

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

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