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Peninsula  
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

*The Beginning of the End (of the Kingdom of Israel)*

2 Kings 18–20

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*series: The Story*

We all know the saying, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Many of us were raised to believe that to be true. As a young kid growing up without a father and a mother who battled drug addiction, I lived by that mantra. I learned early on only to rely on myself to get things done. Life was filled with one storm after another and the way I managed to survive was to suck it up, deal with it, and move forward. Now, as a follower of Jesus, I’m constantly having to unlearn and unravel years of self reliance. My “suck it up” mentality has been an issue in my relationship with Jesus, my marriage, my parenting, and several other areas of my life. Compassion and empathy are not my strong points.

Jesus said, *“Come to me, all who are weak and burdened and I will give you rest.”* Jesus doesn’t just help those who help themselves; Jesus helps anyone who comes to faith in him and learns to trust him. Self reliance is one of the greatest enemies to faith in Jesus. He wants us more than anything to rely on his strength and power and not our own. But it’s not easy to do. We’ve seen this time and again in the 15 weeks we’ve been in *The Story*. Those who relied on their own intellect, power, and strength usually failed. And those who trusted in the Lord and depended on his help rose victorious.

This morning I want to look at one of the greatest and most godly Kings of Judah, whose kingdom faced a major state of emergency and yet was able to fulfill God’s mission. Hezekiah was forced to look destructive fear right in the eye and decide: Will he trust in an alliance with the kingdom of Assyria or will he trust the Lord? It’s the same question we all face every day. Who will we trust? King Jesus or King Self? When a crisis hits, who or what do you depend on?

Let me first set up the context for Hezekiah’s life. Despite all that God had done for his people, their thankless and hardened hearts had led them into spiritual, moral, and social corruption and finally to their own demise. The nation of Israel split into two smaller, weaker nations and during the time of the divided kingdom there were 38 kings in all. Only 5 were good kings. The other 33 kings did evil in the eyes of the Lord. God sent 9 prophets to the northern kingdom over a span of 208 years and still the people refused to hear and obey. God’s patience was wearing thin.

Today we are going to look at the life and prayer of one of the good kings of Judah—Hezekiah. This was a king who was very familiar with the dangers of self reliance. His reign would be

defined by a national emergency caused by the King of Assyria. Hezekiah’s name means, “the Lord is my strength.” And we’ll see how he lived up to that name. Hezekiah was the thirteenth king of the southern nation of Judah. He was only 25 years old when he took the throne and would reign for 29 years. 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 were places of idol worship. He also reopened the temple and began to centralize worship in Jerusalem again. Politically, he set out to reunite northern Israel, who had fallen into enemy hands. A small remnant of exiles joined Hezekiah in Judah. Hezekiah was off to a great start.

Meanwhile, Israel, the Northern Kingdom, was a mess. The city of Samaria, which belonged to Israel, was conquered by Shalmaneser, King of Assyria. Many Israelites were taken into captivity, made slaves and carried off to Nineveh. Assyrians were a ruthless nation of people hell bent on conquering the Ancient Middle East.

Several years later, another King of Assyria, Sennacherib, wanting to control the Mediterranean sea ports and squelch a rebellion Egypt was leading, starting invading. He laid siege and conquered several cities in Israel and Judah’s territory. As the armies of Sennacherib approached Jerusalem, Hezekiah first tried diplomacy and sent a large sum of money, the modern equivalent of \$1.5 million dollars, 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 also didn’t work. Hezekiah was not a perfect king. Like us, he too tried to take matters into his own hands. The King of Assyria had enough and 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.

As if this weren’t enough, Sennacherib began to attack the emotional state of Jerusalem and its leaders by sending his chief of staff with a letter of intimidation that would be read at the city gate. This happened 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. You are helpless and no one is coming for your rescue, not even your so called

god. Oh and by the way, we have a really good track record of getting our way! Hezekiah was facing the defining moment of his leadership as king. Let's read how he responds to this crisis.

## Hezekiah's Response

When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the Lord. He sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. 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."

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.'"

When the field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left Lachish, he withdrew and found the king fighting against Libnah.

Now Sennacherib received a report that Tirhakah, the king of Cush, was marching out to fight against him. So he again sent messengers to Hezekiah with this word: "Say to Hezekiah king of Judah: Do not let the god you depend on deceive you when he says, 'Jerusalem will not be given into the hands of the king of Assyria.' Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries, destroying them completely. And will you be delivered? Did the gods of the nations that were destroyed by my predecessors deliver them—the gods of Gozan, Harran, Rezeph and the people of Eden who were in Tel Assar? Where is the king of Hamath or the king of Arpad? Where are the kings of Lair, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah?" (2 Kings 19:1–13).

Here's what's happening. Upon hearing the second devastating letter, Hezekiah immediately goes to the house of the Lord, the temple. Why the temple? Because it was the place where heaven and earth intersected. The place where God's name dwelt, his presence. A holy place. Hezekiah needed to be alone with the Lord. After some time in the temple, Hezekiah comes out and dispatches a few men to meet with the prophet Isaiah so that he too might pray and hear from God. Hezekiah was a godly leader who knew that there were deeper spiritual issues at work in this

event. He needed the wisdom of Judah's chief spiritual advisor, Isaiah, and he needed to hear from the Lord. Hezekiah's request to Isaiah was simple, "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 those dark times we face in life, 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. But, it's not. I can't tell you how many times in my own life I've gone through something hard and the last thing I did was ask people to pray for me. My pride and ego often get in the way. I'm a pastor and I'm not supposed to have problems. I deal with your problems, not mine! That's messed up thinking! Think about your own life. How often do you hide from others what is really going on? Do you ever put on a "church face" on Sunday and say to people who ask, "Hey, how you doing?" "I'm doing fine, praise the Lord!" We've all done it. But, what if CPC was a place of vulnerability and authenticity? So when someone asked, "Hey, how are you doing?" people actually said, "You know what, I am not doing good, can you pray for me?" That's the kind of community we want to be. Do you have a few trusted people who love Jesus who are committed to pray for you? All of us need a few godly and trustworthy friends who we can simply ask face to face, on the phone or in a text, "Hey, pray for me. I'm going through a tough time right now." Our elders, my wife and a few friends do that for me. Hezekiah believed in the power of prayer and wanted his trusted friends to pray for Judah.

Isaiah, soon after praying, gets a word from the Lord. Isaiah tells the messengers to tell the king, "Do not be afraid." How sweet did that phrase taste to Hezekiah once he heard it? Do not be afraid. How often do we hear an encouraging word from a friend that is just what we needed to hear, right when we needed to hear it? Isaiah tells the king, "Do not be afraid, God is at work and he has a plan." King Hezekiah needed that assurance big time. His nation was on the verge of collapse. Maybe some of you need to hear those words from the Lord today, "Do not be afraid." All throughout Scripture the Lord encouraged men and women with those words, "Do not be afraid." I've been told that the phrase is mentioned 365 times in the Bible, one for every day of the year. Isaiah explains to the men what will eventually happen to Sennacherib. He will return to Assyria and die by the sword.

Isaiah's reassuring words would soon be eclipsed by the return of the King of Assyria's chief of staff yet again. This is now the third letter sent to King Hezekiah. In this letter, the King of Assyria attacks King Hezekiah and 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.” What word will Hezekiah believe?

One thing I’ve learned about life is that trials and tribulations have a way of revealing our deepest fears. At the core of all our problems lay idols we have not dealt with, idols we worship in place of God. So, we lose our job and we are crushed with worry and anxiety wondering why God let that happen to us. Underneath that fear is the idol of security. Either we will trust in a big God who will provide for us in his time and in his way, or we will trust in our own efforts to find a new job. Hezekiah, in the midst of a severe trial, prays. Prayer offers a way to voice our fear and anxiety to a God who cares deeply about us. The temptation for Hezekiah was to fear man, and that man had a name—Sennacherib. And things were not looking good. It was only a matter of time before Jerusalem would be invaded and Hezekiah murdered. But, Hezekiah was a righteous man who instead chose to fear God and we will see that in his prayer. But before we get to that, the second principle this story 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**

This is precisely why Isaiah encouraged Hezekiah with, “Do not be afraid.” This was a reminder not to trust in Egyptian power, the security of an alliance, or the riches and powers of a kingdom. 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, *“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”* To fear God is to have a healthy respect and reverence for who he is and what he can do. I’ve said this before, 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 and so do we when life throws us a nasty curve ball. We can fear man or fear God. Hezekiah chose to fear God. It shows in how he prayed.

### **Hezekiah’s Prayer**

**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. 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.**

**“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. 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” (19:14–19).**

Hezekiah prays this prayer because he is completely vulnerable and has exhausted every other available resource. He is a desperate man who has no where else to turn. This is where the rubber meets the road for us and our faith. Desperation always reveal who we trust. How we pray and what we pray do the same. That’s principle #3.

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

A time of crisis always presents a great opportunity to identify the foundation on which we construct our lives. What can Hezekiah do in the face of such raw Assyrian power? He can pray. He can trust.

Desperate prayers are common when we are at the end of our rope, but Hezekiah’s prayer is marked with maturity. I want you to notice a few things about this prayer. First, he declares God’s power, *“you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth.”* He affirms that God is the one who actually rules and reigns over the earth, not Assyria, Egypt or Babylon. There is no God like him. Hezekiah is encouraging and reminding himself about who he is praying to. Unlike the other pagan nations of his day, gods made of wood and stone, Hezekiah is praying to the right God, the living God. Prayer should always begin with God and be about God. Jesus himself taught us to start our prayers focused on God the father, *“Our Father who is in heaven hallowed be your name.”*

Second, Hezekiah mentions the problem. It’s so interesting to me that he takes the letter and spreads it out before the Lord. It’s a great visual. By doing that I think 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 Hezekiah does reminds me a little bit of being a dad. One of the job descriptions for a father 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. Or I’ll break it and have to buy them a new one! Hezekiah is doing the same thing. As a child brings his broken toy to his father for repair, Hezekiah laid the issue in God’s hand for him to fix. What papers do you need to lay out before the Lord and bring to his attention? Hospital test results? A few bills? Divorce papers? Financial statements? An angry email or letter? In humility and with a posture of surrender, Hezekiah lays out the letter before the Lord and says, “Daddy, will you deal with this please?”

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, "**Now, Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, Lord, are God.**" Hezekiah wants the Lord to answer this prayer for the sake of the Lord's own name and reputation. He's saying, don't just answer this prayer to save us from enemy hands (we'd really appreciate that though), do it for **your** name and reputation. The Scriptures make it clear that God will not be mocked. God is zealous for his name and reputation. The Story, that we've been studying, continues to teach us that God's desire is for the world to look at us, Christians, and see the glory of God. God wants us to represent him well so that people look to how we live and see God. God answered Hezekiah's prayer to show the world that he reigns and is fully in control of nations. What happens next is pretty incredible.

Instead of relying on his own army or worrying about the mighty army of Assyria, through prayer, Hezekiah taps into the mighty power of God. God sends an angel to deal with the arrogant Assyrians and in the morning over 185,000 soldiers lay dead on the battle field. God delivered Judah without them ever having to pick up a sword or an arrow! Romans 8:31 reminds us, "**If God is for us, who can be against us?**" What trouble are you going through? What do you need to be delivered from? Bring it to the Lord. Confide in a godly friend who will pray for you. Remember to fear God and not man in your situation. And trust him with the outcome. Here's the bottom line: Dependence on God in prayer will carry us through the darkest of times.

As we celebrate God's faithfulness to us these past 6 years, and to CPC as a whole for well over 40 years, the one area that I want us to do better in is prayer. What would it look like for us, as followers of Jesus, to make prayer a priority in our lives in 2015? After I came back from Sabbatical this summer, one of the things I sensed the Lord impress upon me is the need for us to pray

together as a church more. Someone once said, "A church only moves forward on its knees." And really that is the challenge I want to leave you with. How can you turn up the fire in your own prayer life? Maybe it's spending your commute time in prayer. Maybe it's shutting off the TV a little early and praying before bed. Would you consider that this week?

Corporately, another way we want to focus on prayer is to have a monthly gathering, where we spend an hour together praying. Towards the end of February, we are going to have a Night of Worship and Prayer and that will kick off our monthly prayer gatherings. I hope you'll join us. God has been so good to us and I'm so thankful that you've joined us to celebrate his goodness. Let's continue to seek his face this year. "**Not to us Lord, not to us, but to your great name be the glory and the honor because of your faithful and steadfast love.**"

In his book, *Thoughts in Solitude*, Thomas Merton wrote 15 lines that have become known as "the Merton Prayer." I'd like to end praying this prayer for us:

*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. In Jesus name, Amen.*

*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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