



In our section of scripture this morning a problem is presented and two alternate solutions are offered: one solution that works and one that doesn't work. The problem is a universal problem of self-reliance. C.S. Lewis wrote: "The moment you have a self at all, there is a possibility of putting yourself first - wanting to be the center - wanting to be God, in fact. That was the sin of Satan: and that was the sin he taught the human race ... what Satan put into the heads of our remote ancestors was the idea that they 'could be like Gods' - could set up on their own as if they had created themselves - be their own masters."

He's talking about self-reliance. Every world religion is based upon it. Some so-called enlightened people say we move beyond religion to an enlightened way to connect to the truth within ourselves; expressions of self-reliance.

The message of the Gospel and our scripture today is this: self-reliance won't work. In fact, it destroys you. In contrast, living a God-reliant life brings supernatural resolutions. Imagine that! Wouldn't that be amazing! Supernatural resolutions.

In the 1950's Brother Andrew started delivering Bibles to Eastern European and Communist countries by smuggling them in. On his first trip into Romania he drove his car, filled with Bibles, up to the border crossing. There were six cars in front of him. He considered himself lucky. This would be a quick crossing.

Forty minutes passed and the same car was being inspected. The guards were removing everything from the cars: luggage was unpacked and spread out, hub caps removed, seats removed, parts of the engine were taken apart.

Brother Andrew was accustomed to unsolvable problems like this. He prayed, "Dear Lord, what am I going to do? Any serious inspection will show up those Romanian Bibles right away. I know that no amount of cleverness on my part can get me through this border search. Dare I ask for a miracle? Let me take some of the Bibles out and leave them in the open where they will be seen. Then, Lord, I cannot possibly be depending on my own stratagems, can I? I will be depending utterly upon You."

He inched his VW up to the officer who was standing on the left side of the road, handed his passport and travel visa over and started to get out of the car for his inspection. But the guard's knee was against the door, holding it closed. The guard scribbled on his visa, shoved his passport back to him and abruptly waved him to drive on.

Andrew inched forward slowly, unsure of the next step. He wondered if he'd been selected for a special inspection but none of the guards were paying attention to him. In his rearview window he saw the guard waving the next driver up indicating he had to stop and open his hood.

Andrew's heart was racing with excitement at seeing God's supernatural power at work. He drove into Romania with his car filled with Romanian Bibles.

This is what living a God-reliant life looks like, a life filled with supernatural resolutions. But I'm getting ahead of myself. As we read through the scriptures this morning, I'll be answering three questions:

- » What was the problem?
- » What does a self-reliant response bring?
- » What does a God-reliant response bring?

Open your Bibles to 2 Kings 17. As we come to our section of scripture today, the nation we've known as Israel is now divided into two sections, surrounded by massive empires. To the southwest there is Egypt, an empire over 1,000 years old. To the southeast there is Babylon, an empire on the rise. To the northeast there is Assyria, the biggest bully of them all.

In the middle sits the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. After King Solomon died, the prestigious, strong, prosperous nation, led by the wisest man in the history of the world, was divided into two nations: Israel in the north with ten tribes, and Judah in the south with two tribes. Both of these nations were unable to match their military numbers; unable to match their military weaponry; unable to defend its cities because the walls aren't tall enough; unable to leverage treaties because they have nothing to offer.

The logical survival strategy for small nations like this was to form alliances. This has been the survival strategy of the Northern Kingdom of Israel for generations—self-reliance. By the year 721 BC, the Northern Kingdom, Israel, has had 19 idolatrous kings in a row. They have defied God's covenant in every way imaginable and God's patience has been fully exhausted.

Let's read 2 Kings 17:3–6 to see their problem, their self-reliant solution and the result of the Northern Kingdom.

Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up to attack Hoshea, who had been Shalmaneser's vassal and had paid him tribute.

But the king of Assyria discovered that Hoshea was a traitor, for he had sent envoys to So king of Egypt, and he no longer paid tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year.

Therefore Shalmaneser seized him and put him in prison. The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites (the Northern Kingdom) to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes.

God used the Assyrians, the empire to the northeast, to wipe them out. All of the people of Israel were either killed or scattered and resettled through hundreds of different cities. Friends and family members will never see one another again. The people who formed the nation of Israel will never regather as a nation again.

The people living just to the south in the Southern Kingdom, Judah, have been watching this transpire. They have been watching the Northern Kingdom form alliances for protection. Watching them enthusiastically plunge into idol worship. And watched the destruction of their cities and their deportation.

Hezekiah is the king of the Southern Kingdom, Judah. He's very aware of practices of the North. He's seen the smoke rise from smoldering cities under siege. He's personally known people who have been killed and the so-called "fortunate ones," departed in long caravans of people walking like livestock roped to one another, beaten and whipped.

How will they respond to their problems? Will they try a self-reliant response too or a different path? Let's get some background on Hezekiah before we look at the problem he faced.

**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 (18:5).**

Hezekiah held fast to the Lord; he kept the commandments given to Moses; he rebelled against the King of Assyria and did not serve him. The Lord was with him and gave him success in his leadership and gave him military victory over Philistine cities.

The Assyrian King wouldn't allow such a tiny nation to rebel. So, 14 years into Hezekiah's reign, the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, attacked and surrounded all of the fortified cities of Judah. This is a Problem.

Hezekiah sent a message to Sennacherib offering payment if the Assyrian armies would withdraw. Hezekiah paid all of the gold and silver from the temple. He gave all the treasures from the royal palace. 2 Kings 18:16 says he stripped the gold plating off

the doors in the temple. There was **no** gold left. **No** silver. **No** royal treasures.

Now Hezekiah is facing an Unsolvable Problem. The Assyrian King is reneging on the alliance. After receiving payment, he sent an envoy to Jerusalem to deliver a message.

**The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah:**

**"This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: On what are you basing this confidence of yours? You say you have the counsel and the might for war—but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me? Look, I know you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces the hand of anyone who leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him. But if you say to me, "We are depending on the Lord our God"— isn't he the one whose high places and altars Hezekiah removed, saying to Judah and Jerusalem, "You must worship before this altar in Jerusalem"?"**

**"Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses—if you can put riders on them! How can you repulse one officer of the least of my master's officials, even though you are depending on Egypt for chariots and horsemen? Furthermore, have I come to attack and destroy this place without word from the Lord? The Lord himself told me to march against this country and destroy it!" (18:19-25).**

As this point the representatives from Judah request the Assyrians speak in Aramaic, not Hebrew, so the Hebrews nearby can't understand the dire nature of the Assyrian threat.

**But the commander replied, "Was it only to your master and you that my master sent me to say these things, and not to the people sitting on the wall—who, like you, will have to eat their own excrement and drink their own urine?" (18:27).**

Then the envoy continued with their threats telling the people three times, "do not listen to Hezekiah." Hezekiah was telling the people in Jerusalem, "we will trust in the Lord's deliverance."

This envoy is thoroughly insulting the Lord and every other deity they've faced so far in their conquests. The Assyrian army was an all-consuming fire. For over 20 years they had defeated every army they've faced. No city has been able to stand up against their might. They have faced countless cities like Jerusalem, filled with people of sincere faith in their god to rescue them. And every time, the Assyrians have broken down those walls, destroyed the images of deities and killed the inhabitants. This army of 200,000 was encamped outside the walls of Jerusalem.

As Hezekiah is facing an Unsolvable Problem, will he be self-reliant or God-reliant? A self-reliant response would be: take the offer. They were offered surrender as the option to save their life. And this would involve being scattered throughout the Assyrian

Empire, never to see their family or friends again. But more importantly, they would lose access to God's presence! If they left Jerusalem, they left the temple where God dwelt. God's temple would be destroyed. Would they trade access to God's presence in exchange for life?

A God-reliant response would be: turn to the Lord (not knowing how this will work out). Hezekiah, consistent with who he has been, chose a God-reliant response. He sent this message sent to Isaiah the prophet.

**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 (God) will rebuke him for the words the Lord your God has heard. Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives" (19:3-4).**

Notice that as Hezekiah faces an Unsolvable Problem and trusts in the Lord, he is appealing to the Lord on the basis of two things: the reputation of the Lord, and the survival of the Lord's people. The priority here is important. Hezekiah is aware that the Lord loves to display his glory and power and faithfulness and righteousness and goodness. The Lord is offended when people mock and ridicule him. And Hezekiah primarily bases his appeal for deliverance on this. He only adds one line at the end that relates to himself and the people of Judah. *"Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives."* Isaiah's message back to King Hezekiah is the best news possible!

**Do not be afraid of what you have heard—those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me (19:6).**

Do not be afraid! What great news! But consider the faith involved for Hezekiah to trust this message. The Lord hasn't changed the circumstances. There's still an Unsolvable Problem facing Hezekiah and the people of Judah.

To keep turning up the pressure, Sennachrib sends another threat to Judah. He tells them: Do not let the god you depend on deceive you. Surely you have heard what my army has done to other nations who depended on their weak gods. I destroyed all of them, completely: Gozen, Harran, Rezech, the people of Eden, King of Hamath, King of Arpad, Kings of Lair, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah.

Isaiah the prophet said, "don't be afraid." King Sennachrib is saying, "be very afraid."

King Hezekiah's heart is still deeply troubled. And rightly so. He's living "in-between." He's facing a dire situation and he's waiting for its resolution.

In-between. So much of life falls into this category—the time between the start of a hardship and deliverance. The time between the beginning of facing a problem and seeing a resolution. Sometimes we wait days but sometimes years or a lifetime.

Faced with his in-between King Hezekiah models for you and me a God-reliant response. He goes directly to the Lord in prayer. He laid the written message King Sennachrib sent him before the Lord, bowed before God and prayed.

**"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" (19:15-19).**

He concludes his prayer by appealing again to the reputation and glory of God. *"So that all the kingdoms of the earth may know ..."* This is the same kind of prayer he made earlier.

It's the same kind of prayer and approach of Brother Andrew. God primarily wants to show his glory because humanity is most satisfied when we see it and respond in a life of worship. The best thing for anyone is to truly see the brokenness of this world and the transcendent glory of God.

Think of a problem you're facing right now. Don't play it safe; think of an Unsolvable Problem. Use this prayer as a model of prayer for facing your Unsolvable Problems. When you do, we reveal that we are God-reliant and supernatural resolutions start occurring.

The Lord's answer to Hezekiah concerning his problem, the king of Assyria and his army, is:

**"He will not enter this city  
or shoot an arrow here.**

**He will not come before it with shield  
or build a siege ramp against it.**

**By the way that he came he will return;  
he will not enter this city,  
declares the Lord.**

**I will defend this city and save it,  
for my sake and for the sake of  
David my servant."**

**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 (19:32–36).**

In one night God annihilated the Assyrian army. Whereas the Northern Kingdom responded in self-reliance, which resulted in their complete destruction, the Southern Kingdom responded in God-reliance, which resulted in supernatural deliverance.

When God's people respond in God-reliance, God shows his supernatural power. God loves to display his power. And he does so when his people acknowledge their weakness, get out of the way and let God take the credit and glory he deserves. God is ready to bring supernatural resolutions to your problems. But he won't do it if you continue in self-reliance. In fact, the failures of our self-reliance are used as megaphones to get people's attention.

Why do you hesitate to trust the Lord with your Unsolvable Problems?

» You are too satisfied with worldly resolutions. How would your prayers change if you shifted your perspective to a supernatural resolution instead of a worldly one?

» You are concerned with approval of others, acceptance and popularity.

» You want credit and glory for the good outcomes in your life.

» You are stubborn.

» You are afraid of giving control of the outcome away to God. He might not bring the deliverance you want. And I've found that most of these situations involved a difference in timing. The illness might end in death. The hardship might continue. "That doesn't seem like much of a supernatural outcome," you conclude.

Let me remind you here that God is **always** working circumstances for his good and his glory.

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