

Do Not Be Afraid – Isaiah 36:1 – 37:7

Introduction – It's on our currency and is the national motto. But it is a mockery of the living God when you consider what it is we really trust. This is the state of our nation because it is the state of our churches, our pulpits, our centers of education, and our homes. Isaiah 36 is an ancient story, but the taunts of the Rabshakeh are the same taunts of today from the world of unbelief: *"Silly Christian, in whom do you trust?"* (36:5)

Overview – The king of Assyria sacked all the fortified cities of Judah (v1), and sent his official (the Rabshakeh) to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem, who sent his officials (vv2-3). Refusing to call Hezekiah by the title, "king," the Rabshakeh mocks Hezekiah for a poorly placed confidence (vv4-5). To trust in Egypt is to trust in a broken reed (v6). To trust in Yahweh is inconsistent with having taken down all the high places to worship him in those cities that have now been trounced (v7). To trust in horses or chariots is ridiculous; you couldn't stop us if we gave you two thousand (v8). Again, so how could Egypt help you (v9)? Sennacherib goes so far as to say that Yahweh commanded him to go up and destroy Jerusalem (v10).

Hezekiah's officials ask that the Rabshakeh speak in the diplomatic language of Aramaic so that the common soldier on the wall not be able to understand this debate (which they are quickly losing – v11), but the Rabshakeh speaks cruel words that would cause these men to tremble with fear (v12). Lifting his voice, he calls to those guards to not let Hezekiah deceive them: he cannot deliver Jerusalem (v14), nor can Yahweh (v15). Instead, surrender and you are promised a life of peace, comfort and bounty (vv16-17). He goes on saying that Yahweh could not deliver them, proven by the fact the gods of all the other lands could not stop Assyria (vv18-20). The officials write down the words and go to Hezekiah with their clothes torn (vv21-22). Hezekiah receives the report, tears his garments, enters into the house of Yahweh and sends for Isaiah, beseeching him to pray for the remnant, all that is left of Judah (37:1-4). The message is taken to Isaiah who replies *"do not be afraid; Sennacherib will fall"* (vv5-7).

Hezekiah – It is the year 701 B.C. Hezekiah has watched Assyria destroy Israel, the northern kingdom and now most of his own Judah, even though for a time, Hezekiah himself had sent tribute. He had been warned not to turn to Egypt for help; doing so anyway has proven disastrous. Jerusalem is surrounded even if the siege has not yet been laid. But Hezekiah is known as a king who did right in the sight of the Lord (2 Kings 18:3). He restored the temple (2 Chron 29), led the people away from the idols of their fathers (2 Kings 18:4-5, 2 Chron 31) and even reunited the worship of all Israel for a time (2 Chron 30). This prepared Hezekiah to be the most David-like king since David, ready to battle the Goliath-bully Sennacherib. *Faithfulness does not necessarily promise peace; faithfulness does prepare you for great and greater trials.*

Isaiah and the Rabshakeh – Rabshakeh speaks to Hezekiah (through his officials) at the aqueduct at Fuller's Field (Isaiah 36:2) just where Isaiah, thirty-four years earlier, had met with Ahaz (Isaiah 7:3). He even sounds like Isaiah, repeating warnings about trusting in Egypt, and saying that Yahweh had sent the Assyrians. Isaiah had warned Ahaz to trust in Yahweh; the Rabshakeh makes it look like Hezekiah is not trusting in Yahweh (you've taken down all His places of worship – places in Judah which had been relished by the people). It is certain that a substantial number of Israelites felt the same way. *There are always any number of arguments, half-truths, spin and intimidation, to be used against living by faith in God – and they can be very effective.*

The Tactics of Blasphemy – Liars do not declare themselves to be liars; they are like their father. The father of lies comes dressed as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

Making Peace with the Devil – One of his tactics is to make following God look miserable and like a dead-end (36:12, Gen 3:1), while promising enlightenment and pleasures if we will make peace with evil (36:16-17, Gen 3:4). Astute Christians beware of the tempters strategies towards compromise.

The Study of Comparative Religions – Also beware of thinking, as the Rabshakeh declared, that all religions are the same, that all gods are the same, that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is just another, albeit bigger, god. This is the liberal fallacy of applying genus and species to religion and considering Yahweh as just another species.

The Response of Faith – The tearing of robes was not just of mourning (*"Yikes! We're in trouble!"*). It was a sign of blasphemy (37:3) and this was the deliverance of Jerusalem. When the Rabshakeh says that Yahweh is just another god like the gods of the nations, he seals Sennacherib's doom (36:18-20). Evil eventually overplays its hand. Hezekiah turns to the house of the Lord, this time not for gold to appease, but for Yahweh to answer (37:1, 4). *When enemies slander and sins besiege, leaving you helpless, your life has become a site for God's war against the false gods. He hears and you can be sure of His victory.*

"Do Not Be Afraid" – In that moment the Word from Isaiah is sure because the people, when it looked impossible, turned and trusted in God. We should look so crazy in the eyes of our enemies, trusting in the promises of God in the midst of impossible odds, powerful empires, persuasive atheistic rhetoric, and temporal-gains-from-"easy"-compromise. We should be a people who, because of the way we live in the midst of troubles, are asked to give a defense for the hope that is in us (1 Pet 3:15).

Words – Finally, notice that this whole passage is about words, rhetoric, debate, doubt, spin, promises and false-promises, presuppositions, lies, and remembering God's unchanging Word.