

Because You Prayed to Me – Isaiah 37:8-38

Introduction – We pick up the story of Hezekiah as told by the prophet, Isaiah, where we left off, in the middle. It was the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign as the king of Judah. Sennacherib had levelled the fortified cities of Judah and set his sights on Jerusalem. Threatening a siege and destruction, the Rabshakeh mocked Hezekiah's defiant stand and refusal to surrender for peace. Hezekiah, with clothes torn over the threats and blasphemy sent word to Isaiah asking for prayer. Isaiah responded with the Lord's promise of deliverance by turning the heart of the king of Assyria elsewhere by means of a rumor (Prov 21:1), which He did. But the threat was renewed and the Rabshakeh sent a letter to Hezekiah: they were coming back and they would destroy everything.

The Provocation of Assyria (vv9-13) – Before, the Rabshakeh had warned Judah not to listen to Hezekiah. Now in a direct letter to Hezekiah, he warns the king not to trust in “*your God*” (v10). Terrible things had happened to the kings and nations that Hezekiah may have known personally even though they had called on their oracles and gods. Hezekiah's theology was about to be tested: would he stake his life on his faith? Are we willing? “*Unfortunately for most of us, the question is never as clear-cut as that. Instead, in a host of little battles where the outcome does not seem important, we succumb to the temptation to opt for the flesh, for self-preservation*” – Oswalt.

The Prayer of Hezekiah (vv14-20) – Hezekiah goes straight to the temple, to the house of prayer. He spreads the letter out before the Lord and prays. What God did because of this prayer rocked the world, preserved Judah, and teaches us much about prayer. Prayer does not work like magic words in a book; but we are invited to learn from the prayers of faithful men and women how to pray. Why did God answer that prayer?

Hezekiah Addressed God as God – This was no prayer to a generic god. This was *Yahweh* (a new covenant address might better be rendered “*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*” but clearly the personal God Who had made covenant with Israel), Who alone is God, and God of all the nations of the earth (v16, cf. Phil 2:9-11).

Hezekiah Entrusted It All to God – The act of laying out the letter before God was like a legal petition, bringing evidence of the blasphemy against God. But we should also see that Hezekiah is turning nowhere else and to no other help. The entire problem is all being laid out before the only One he knows can ultimately do anything about it.

Hezekiah Prays Scripture-Saturated Words – Again, this is not a call to magic-words and sayings. But Hezekiah reveals that he knows the prayers of King Solomon made in this very temple (1 King 8:22ff) and God's promises to Solomon (1 Kings 9:3). This is Scripture-informed praying.

Hezekiah Appeals to God's Reputation (v20) – This is the climactic ending to his request and it is that “*all the kingdoms of earth may know that You are the LORD, You alone.*” Hezekiah reveals this heart of faith and devotion to God (i.e. Psalm 67). Nothing was more important to him than that God's name be magnified, honored in every corner of the earth.

Summary – Hezekiah's prayer was a prayer fashioned in the fire of trials by a man who knew God's hand could not and would not be thwarted because he knew the promises of God. “*God has ordained in His all-encompassing foreknowledge and His infinite wisdom to respond to the pleading of His people and perform great triumphs through prayer. God has decreed to make the prayers of His people the cause of His triumph in many battles*” – John Piper.

The Prophecy of Isaiah (vv21-31) – Isaiah sends a word from the Lord to Hezekiah “*because you have prayed to Me*” (v21). The Lord laughs and mocks Assyria for thinking she can stand against the Holy One (vv22-23). He mocks her arrogant naiveté, thinking that she controlled her victories when actually these were from the Lord Himself (vv24-27). Assyria is like a beast and at any moment the Lord will put a hook in her nose and turn her back (vv28-29). Those who think they could kill the Lord's Anointed had already been warned in the same way (Psalm 2:1-4), and the greater Son of David, the Seed of Judah, would show forth His ultimate victory when it looked like his enemies had surrounded him and won (Acts 4:27-28).

The Passover of God (vv32-38) – Isaiah has a prophecy and the Lord brings another Passover-deliverance, and all because Hezekiah prayed. It is as though the Lord also says, “*Because you prayed to Me, 185,000 enemy soldiers lie dead on the plains of Judah.*” It is as though He says, “*Because you prayed to Me, Sennacherib will be murdered by his own sons while praying in the house of his god.*” It is as though He says, “*Because you prayed to Me, the testimony of the zeal for My name (v32) and my love for David (v35) has spread to all the nations.*”

The Purposes of God and the Purpose of Prayer – Assyria fades away, the great enemy, never to bother Judah again. Because one man prayed. But in a strange way, you are here because of this one man's prayer as well: “*that all the kingdoms may know...*” Hezekiah's prayer was not based on possibilities; it was founded upon inevitabilities. And we do not create this reality; this reality created us. God makes promises like, “*all ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord's and He rules the nations*” (Psalm 22:27-28), or, “*But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children,*” (Psalm 103:17). And then, to some, He grants faith to believe these promises (not as possibilities, but as inevitabilities), and to pray according to them in the midst of trials that look as though He has forgotten them. And then – “*because you prayed to Me...*”