
Day 191 - July 10

Judah after Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE)

Last Years of Hezekiah's Reign

Readings: *2 Kings 18:13-37; 19:1-36; 20:1-21; Isaiah 36:12-22; 37:1-37; 38:1-22; 2 Chronicles 32:1-34*

Reflections:

- Hezekiah's past faithfulness opens God's heart to perform a miracle and a sign. The miracle is his healing and life extension. And the second is a sign that demonstrates God's ultimate power of the universe. These demonstrations of God's grace and power do not change the reality that Israel is not walking in faithfulness. Not only does Judah have to pay tribute to the Assyrian King, Sennacherib, but a new political power sends envoys and introduces a new threat that will one day take Judah captive, Babylon!
- **Hezekiah says to the King of Assyria that he has done wrong. Here we see Hezekiah doubt his confident position before God. Hezekiah had not turned to trust in Assyria but had trusted in God alone. Hezekiah in a moment of weakness tries to appease the King of Assyria by suggesting that he should have been paying tribute all along. When we are afraid, it is easy to doubt God. When we give in to doubt, it is easy to say that the very thing that was right and God honoring is wrong and should never have been. God's response to such open denial of him leads him to judge Hezekiah.**
- The tribute paid to Assyria reminds us that often to pay our debts for the wrong things we do, we ultimately rob what legitimately belongs to God. To pay Assyria the temple had to be stripped of its gold. The church over the years has been stripped of the donations of her people because they are paying for their own money mismanagement or selfish indulgent. The church should not be adorned with gold-plated doors but with the beautiful decoration of serving the poor and bringing grace to the needy.
- Hezekiah's faithfulness, humility and tears move God to extend his life by fifteen years. "I have heard your prayers and seen your tears; I will heal you." It is interesting that a God uses a combination of something that looks like a medical treatment to work with his miraculous power. God's supernatural intervention does not compete with but works in harmony with the natural remedial order he has established within his creation.

- The sign of the sun going backwards on a step sundial seems completely impossible to us. As we have witnessed in the past, God's control of the universe and manipulation of the natural laws is by definition very easy for him. It is as simple as a clock maker changing the time on a clock he has made. This should remind us that nothing is too difficult for God. When he speaks, we can trust him completely.
- Isaiah's song of testimony in Isaiah 38:9-20 fits well within the tradition of the Psalms. It follows almost an identical pattern of many of the Psalms. We see again the mercy and grace of God in response to the humility of his servant. Forgiveness of sins, loving relationship and healing all came to Hezekiah not because he was religious but because he humbled himself.
- Yet is his heart ultimately changed for good? No! This kindness of God does not sustain Hezekiah's humility. With restored health, Hezekiah becomes proud again. This pride leads to judgment before Hezekiah humbles himself again. It is almost like the experience of the Old Testament is like a spiritual yo-yo. **This is a good reminder to us when God fulfills a promise or surprises us with something good. This happens over and over in Israel's history. It is easy to get caught up after the initial praise you give God and then take it for granted. It is something we have to always guard against.**
- When the envoys come from Babylon, Hezekiah does a proud and foolish thing by showing them all of the blessings God had given him and Israel. As he shows off his wealth, he places the nation in a position to be the target of a new, increasingly powerful foreign nation. God used this situation to reveal what was truly in Hezekiah's heart. This reminds us that it is not an outward religious appearance God seeks but a true inner heart of humility and submission.
- Assyria invades again and Hezekiah organizes to stand against them. He affects repairs on their defenses and organizes the army. "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh (human strength) but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles." One of the greatest ways Hezekiah equips his people is helping them arm themselves with truth. A well armed and defended person who is filled with fear will still run away from perceived danger. It takes trust in God to stand strong when things get tough and it takes leaders speaking the truth in love to help people trust God. "The people gained confidence from what Hezekiah ...said."
- The field commander from Assyria makes his first attack. It is an attack, not of arrows and swords and spears, but an attack of lies. He assaults the people with lies to cause them to doubt God and fear for their lives. Our spiritual enemy does the same. He often doesn't try to undermine our lives with practical problems. He attacks us through lies that can potentially defeat us before the battle even starts. The lies cause us to give up before the struggle even begins. We run when nothing has gone wrong yet. It is a brilliant strategy we must identify and reject. When fearful thoughts and doubts come in

our minds, beware. It may be the enemy trying to cause you to give up before you even get started.

- The people listened to Hezekiah's **command** and said nothing. Even in this small act, they demonstrate faith and submission. The palace administrator and secretary approach Hezekiah with their clothes torn, a sign of brokenness and humility. Hezekiah tears his clothes and puts on sackcloth as well. All of the leadership are broken and humble before God. They send a message to Isaiah, crying out to God. The first part of the plea is significant: "This is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the point of birth and there is no strength to deliver them." This simple comparison contains good insight for the journey of faith. God's work often takes a long time, like a mother expecting a child. It is born in the secret place and takes a long time for it to come to maturity. When the time approaches for it to be realized, often the hardest work is at the end of the journey. It is at this point, in the journey of faith that we must not give up. When it is most difficult and painful and the struggle is the greatest, this is when we must remain strong and push through to claim the promise God has given.
- Hezekiah's humble prayers are received by God. Isaiah's prophecy contains an interesting passage: "This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant in vineyards and eat their fruit. Once more a remnant of the house of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above. For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion, a band of survivors. The Zeal of the Lord Almighty (literally: Lord of Armies) will accomplish this." Here we see again an emphasis on the unfolding nature of God's work. In the first phase of God's work, we are just responding to the existing opportunities and waiting for something better. Then in the next phase we see that obedience has opened up another new means of God caring for our needs but it is still just subsistence living. It isn't until the final phase that we see God open everything up and we can actually pour ourselves completely into the fruitful and joyful work or blessing he has promised to us. This process tests our faith and cultivates within us a humble dependence so that when God ultimately does bless us, we still delight in God and not just in his blessing. The passage concludes with a promise of a future, faithful remnant. As we will see, Israel will not remain faithful but out of Judah, led by the Messiah, a remnant will emerge – those who walk by faith through the power of the Spirit.
- God does a completely unexpected miracle in slaying the Assyrians. For all of the enemy's threats and boastings, he runs in retreat completely disgraced. This is the lot of any who would try to defy God. This confrontation that at one time looked terrifying and impossible was transformed by God into the very means by which he established Hezekiah's honor before the nations. Another good lesson: When you are following God and everything goes wrong, hang on. What looks like a disaster may actually be used by God to complete his plan of blessing for your life. As Paul discovered, his power is made perfect in our weakness. Hezekiah dies and is honored. He was a man far from perfect but still used by God during a season when most other leaders succumbed to the pressure and temptation of idolatry. **His life is a reminder that honoring God**

first in our heart position and living humbly is of ultimate importance to God.