

Our Days Are Numbered

By Ken Wimer

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Isaiah 38:5-9

Preached On: Sunday, December 5, 2010

Shreveport Grace Church

2970 Baird Road
Shreveport, LA 71118

Website: www.shrevegrace.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/shreveportgracech

I'd like to invite you to look with me in Isaiah 38 and speak with you today on this matter of our days being numbered. Our days being numbered. Hezekiah found out something about this, a king whom the Lord had blessed greatly and yet fell sick. He fell sick with an illness that appeared to some to be an illness unto death but the Lord used it to teach his soul something of God's graciousness, something of God's mercy and something of God's sovereignty as far as being immortal until such time as the Lord determines that we should be taken from this world.

Here in Isaiah 38 and beginning with verse 7, remember that Assyria has surrounded Jerusalem, made threats of taking out the city and it was during this time that the Lord appeared unto Hezekiah through the words of Isaiah to reassure him that he would deliver him, the king, but he would also deliver the people that he represented. As we read last time in verse 5, the Lord said,

5 I will add unto thy days fifteen years. 6 And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city. 7 And this shall be a sign unto thee from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he hath spoken; 8 Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward.

Ahaz was a former king of Israel; a very evil king that had set up a sun dial there in the palace and for that time forward it was purposed to indicate to the royal palace the time of day. And here the Lord, again we see his sovereignty. He uses something that a very evil king set up for his own purposes but uses it to his glory here in the life of Hezekiah in turning the dial back ten degrees which would mean the sun would have had to have gone back. It's not just a shadow going to move but that the sun moved.

So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down.

Then we see Hezekiah's response to this. I'm going to read it although we probably will not get too far in this but in verse 9,

9 The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness: 10 I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years.

Evidently thinking he was still too young to die.

11 I said, I shall not see the LORD, even the LORD, in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world. 12 Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent: I have cut off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. 13 I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me.

Some sort of illness that would eventually take him.

14 Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward: O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me. 15 What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul. 16 O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live. 17 Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. 18 For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. 19 The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth. 20 The LORD was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the LORD.

And remember who played those instruments in the house of the Lord, it was the priests so he's looking to Christ.

21 For Isaiah had said, Let them take a lump of figs [some sort of pulse], and lay it for a plaister upon the boil, and he shall recover. 22 Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?

If you look over, keep your finger here in Isaiah 38 but look over to Psalm 90:12 and this also could very well go along with what Brother Lane read for us back with Amanda in our time of prayer and reading before our worship today. These are things for us to consider how our lives are lived, how our days are numbered and here in verse 12, we have something that I would pray the Lord would impress upon our hearts, young or old. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Number our days how? Reflecting on all of them as the Lord gives them and recognizing that

every day that he gives us it is from his hand and it is for his glory and yet our breath is lent to us just like everything we have is lent. We don't own anything. People talk about owning property, owning oil wells and everything else going on. They don't own a thing. If they owned them, they'd take them with them when they went but it's like a borrowed library book. You're going to give it back one day. It's not yours. It's borrowed. Such is our lives and the Lord teach us to number our days.

What I come away from reading here in Isaiah 38 with regard to Hezekiah is a reminder that no detail of our life is outside of what God has ordained for us. Now, if we really believed this, our complaints would be less and yet the Lord has to teach us to number our days. We have good days, what we call good days and bad but in reality if we truly believe what the Scriptures teach, there are no bad days. "Ye though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." That's all it is, it's a shadow of death. "I will fear no evil. For thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." And I believe that here in the height of Hezekiah's glory as a king, because you can look at his life and what he accomplished against the backdrop of all the other evil kings that were raised up and put down, he stood out, if you will, as a shining light and yet even he himself had to be humbled before the Lord. And to know that any kind of prosperity that he had enjoyed, any kind of promotion that he had enjoyed to that point was simply what the Lord had ordained for him.

You know, this life is a stage. We enter right and exit left and it's according to the Director's determination as to what we say, how we perform, and then we move on. If we could just but see things that way. But here in this time of tears, because we're going to know sorrows and let's just face it, being in this flesh. It's like when we were kids we'd get into wrestling matches with each other and you'd hook your legs around the other's stomach and just squeeze as hard as you could and wouldn't let up until they cried "Uncle." I don't know if you ever did that but we had a few kids pass out, they just were not going to cry "Uncle." You just had them in the old lock and if it wasn't the stomach, it was the head. Just lock and go. But there were some tears and the Lord brings us many times in our lives to this point where he will pin your ears to the mat and it's not to hurt you, it's not to destroy you, but it's to humble you.

I believe that's why here in verse 5 the Lord said to Isaiah, he spoke through his prophet Isaiah, "Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father." So again when that expression is used, it's a way of telling that individual, "This is for David's sake. This is for Christ's sake that I am showing you mercy and I have heard thy prayer for Christ's sake. I have seen thy tears. You can't detach this from the God of David thy father. The covenant mercies of God in Christ. For that reason I have seen thy tears." And he said, "Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years." Now, this is where I believe some people get it wrong. God didn't change his mind nor did he change his eternal decree. It was always determined that Hezekiah would live as long as he did. The adding of the days of fifteen years from a human perspective as far as Hezekiah viewed it. So great was this illness and this sickness that word had already traveled, "The king is sick unto death." And as we read in verses 9 and beyond, initially that's what Hezekiah thought. He thought that he would never, ever get up off that bed, that this was it. And

when the Lord revealed otherwise, it was an adding in his mind and heart of fifteen years to his life.

I think about that myself just having celebrated a birthday. I never dreamed I would live as long as I have. You say, "Well, you're still pretty young." Well, it's longer than any sinner deserves and I marvel when I look back over time at different instances where the Lord could have taken me out but didn't but for his mercies to me in Christ. But I know this: I'm immortal and so are you until such time as it is God's time to remove you. These things are already written in his book, the days of our lives. Even our tears he has determined down to the drop and there is purpose in it all. If we're just living in a world of random happenings, man, can you imagine how distraught we ought to be?

But the Lord comforted Hezekiah through the word of his prophet and we saw that as we read the change from laying wakeful every night and yet never taking his eyes off of Christ. This is how I know that he was one of the Lord's. Verse 14 is an interesting way of putting it, "Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter." Have you ever gone down by the bayou and listen to the that crane just chatter when there's danger? Or a little bird? You hear the birds, the cry is a little bit different than the normal chirping, there is danger. Or he says, "mourning as a dove." But look at the rest of that verse 14, "mine eyes fail with," what? "Looking upward." In other words, this got to such a point where if the Lord hadn't been keeping him, it was certain he could not continue to look to the Lord. Have you ever been in that place? I have. That's how I know that it's not us, it's not our faith that keeps us, it's the Lord who keeps us. He said, "I am oppressed," and then his cry was, "undertake for me." If the Lord does not undertake for us, we're far too weak in this flesh to do anything for ourselves. It's the Lord keeping us.

So we see the Lord graciously giving a sign to Hezekiah here in verse 7. He didn't have to. Wouldn't it have been enough just to hear the word of Isaiah and cause him just to rest in what Isaiah had told him? But the Lord gave him an additional sign. To me that shows the mercy of the Lord. We don't rest in evidences but we can see God's providential hand in turning situations that cause us to wonder why we ever worried in the first place even though we have the word. Yet he knows our frame. He remembers that we're dust and so he gives us these signs, if you will, of his gracious providence. It might be other than an illness type oppression but suddenly we see the pressure being removed. We see the enemy being taken away. Your spirit lifted and then you remember the word of the Lord. It's hard to remember the word of the Lord when you're so distraught that you can't even think on him but if you're the Lord's and he is gracious and merciful, he'll hear your cry for Christ's sake and he'll give you that sign. He'll give you that measure of evidence that the heart needs to assure you that indeed this is of him.

That's what he did here in verse 7 and 8. He caused the shadow on the sun dial, he could have caused it to go forward or backward ten degrees but it's interesting, if you'll look over in 2 Kings 20 and to me this is also a lesson in just how the Lord intermingles means with his sovereign purpose. You know, I get people asking me all the time, "Well, why pray if God has already preordained these things?" Well, God is going to cause his own to cry out to him. He'll bring you to pray. He'll bring you to seek him. Then he'll even

cause you to ask for that which would settle your heart the most. It's as if you're trying to reassure somebody of your love and you say, "Well, what will it take for you to know that I love you?"

That's what we see here in 2 Kings 20:8, "And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah," and you can read the rest of the context here concerning his illness, "What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me?" So the Lord giving him a sign was actually in response in the request for it. To me this shows the unconditional love of God because we might look and say, "Well, he shouldn't have asked for one." But you know your own heart and you know how it is that in the weakness of the flesh often we ask the Lord for an evidence even though he has declared it.

"And that I shall go up into the house of the LORD the third day?" Again, where was his desire? Toward the house of the Lord. Toward those sacrifices. Toward the priesthood, that type of Christ.

"And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken." Then he asks the question, he says, "What is it going to take, Hezekiah? shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees?" So this isn't just God summarily saying, "I'm going to move back ten degrees. Go ahead, which way do you want it to move?" How true is the word of the Lord.

"And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees." You can see his reasoning mind. It's logical because on a sun dial, it is not precise so if it's going forward, it might be just the sun, as we say sometimes, "It looks like the sun went down pretty quickly today." You see it up there on the horizon and all of a sudden...actually it's not moving, the earth is, but this is language, Scripture for us.

"And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD," you see, even in that, Isaiah was humble before the Lord. This wasn't something he could do himself so Isaiah returned with this request unto the Lord, "Is this something, Lord, that you would be pleased to do to comfort and encourage one of your own?"

"And he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz." You know, the Lord doesn't have to give evidences but everywhere we see, even in nature we can see his hand. I think about the time where Joshua was fighting the battle and the Lord caused the sun to stand still, s-u-n. But we know in the history of redemption there was a time also that he caused the S-o-n to stand still, to do something that was completely contrary to nature. When you think about God becoming a man, that was contrary to nature but he did it. He did it. A whole Roman army couldn't stop the Lord Jesus Christ, just like a whole army of Assyrians could not thwart God's purpose for Hezekiah and his people but you think about the cry of a blind man who cried unto the Son of God and said, "Son of David, have mercy upon me!" The Son stood still. He didn't have to. He could have passed by and continued. I think about on Calvary the day that our Lord was crucified, the sun was darkened. Something, again, that took place beyond

nature. You say, "Well, it may have been an eclipse." Not for three hours. There was something there in his death that the Son at that time at a time when the world could not see dealt with his Father and justice satisfied before he cried, "It is finished." You could say then, even the sun dial was turned back.

There are many things that we can see in that but every detail of life is predetermined. I did a little research on sun dials and I got more confused by the time I finished than when I started because it depends on whether you're in the northern hemisphere or southern as to how far apart each of these degrees are and how you would read it. You can't use the same sun dial for the northern hemisphere as the southern. All this stuff. But I just know that in this, the Lord's hand was precise so that in the end when he did it, there was no question but what it was the Lord.

You say, "What was the purpose of all of this?" coming back to our Scripture in Isaiah 38. I believe that with regard to Hezekiah, it was to recover Hezekiah as the Lord was not yet finished with him. That it was to, again, raise him up and teach him something of God's purpose whether it was for nothing more than to strengthen that faith that the Lord had already given him, not to put any confidence in himself but to rest wholly in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we read there in 2 Kings 20, his whole desire was that the Lord might strengthen him and raise him up that he might go again into the house of the Lord. You know, that's been my prayer. I don't know what your prayer as far as why you would desire for the Lord to extend your days or some days. You get to feeling like, "Let it be today. Just take me on out of here." But I think ultimately our prayer is as the Spirit directs the heart that, "Let me live so long as it will be to your glory. Let me live so long as I can rejoice in your Son and the Gospel of Christ and him crucified and truly that be my rest and that be my hope."

So I'm sure that the Lord purposed it for that in Hezekiah but also to know of how the Lord had raised him up particularly for that hour in which he would live to see the Lord, not himself as the king, but the Lord deliver him from the hand of the Assyrians. So it was a time of trial. And the Lord does that with us. If you will, look with me over in 1 John 5. I could not help but come and read this as I was thinking about how the Lord spared Hezekiah. In 1 John 5, let's begin reading in verse 11. There is a particular way in which the Lord will deal in the hearts of his children, those that he has chosen and that Christ has redeemed, the Spirit called, there is a particular way that the Lord deals with his children that is different from the way that he deals with the world. Now, we all get sick but what a natural mind does while it is on its sickbed is different than one that the Lord has taught by his Spirit of Christ. There is a difference. If you're the Lord's, think back to the last time the Lord put you on your back. Yes, there was the illness. Yes, there was the pain, the suffering. Or put you in any affliction, it might not have been a sickness. It might have been some situation that he put you in. You feel in those situations the same thing as any unconverted natural mind would but the difference is in what's going on in your heart. That natural mind cannot look to Christ. It can only look to self. It can only look to remorse. It can only look to regret which is not an evidence of

grace. I've heard natural minds, mouths open to say, "If the Lord will just get me up off this sickbed, I'll serve him," and then the Lord raises them up and it's like after a storm, they're off right where they began. They don't go unto the house of the Lord.

I can remember my neighbor, still my neighbor today, coming over to tell me his wife had cancer when we first moved into our house over on Chelsea Drive. Tears in his eyes and he said, "We don't have a church. We don't have anybody. Would you preach the funeral?" He knew time was short and I felt led to do it but I can remember during that time after the funeral message that he and his daughter both saying to me, "Expect to see us in worship. We really appreciate the message." That was nearly 15 years ago. They have never darkened the door of this building. Never inquired.

There was a time when she was deeply distressed, the daughter, that she even asked for some cds and dvds at one point and I gave them to her. No interest. It's during the distress that people start thinking religiously but it's all for self. That's the way they think. That's the way they breathe. They can't. How can a person apart from the Spirit of the Lord draw on their heart and ever think upon Christ? But I'll tell you, it's different for one of the Lord's. The Lord will strip away from us every earthly prop, that our eyes beholding upon Christ and upon his mercies and upon his blood shed and upon his righteousness. That's where the heart will be turned and that's where rest is.

So when we read here in 1 John 5:11, "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life." That's true in physical life or spiritual life. You know, even if the Lord should take one of his own out of this world, that one didn't lose his life. Christ said there in John 11, "He that believeth in me shall never die." It's just the physical life that you've seen go away but no life has been lost for those that are Christ's.

"And he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." That means when they're taken from this world, it's because they never had life and if they're condemned to eternal separation before a holy God, they never had life. It's not like they had it and lost it, they never had it according to God's purpose.

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life." Whether we continue to breathe another physical breath or not, it doesn't change the reality that we have life. That's why we don't sorrow as others.

"That ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe," continue to believe. It's not conditional. The fact that you believe is evidence of life and you will continue to "believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us." You know, even if it had been God's will to take Hezekiah at that time, by that sickness, whatever Hezekiah had requested of the Lord, the Lord would have and did accomplish his will. It wasn't that Hezekiah's prayers changed anything like people say prayer changes things. No. I've used this illustration: it's like when we were on the cruise ship, I watched coming

into port and they throw out these huge ropes and somebody down there on the pier takes that thing and wraps it around these things and they pull it in. They pull it in. They have men there especially ready to tie it down. The pier doesn't move. That's like God, he doesn't move. The ropes being cast and pulled on you might compare that to prayer. All that does is draw you closer to him. That's what it is.

Verse 15, "And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." He will bring you to bow to his will and he does it mercifully. He does it graciously.

Then we see here, "If any man see his brother sin a sin," as it says here, "which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death." Hezekiah's was not a sin unto death and the Lord raised him up. He says here, "There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it." I've heard various interpretations. They say, "Well, that's the unbeliever," but I think we have to keep it in the context that being sinners we're going to die and there is a day determined that we shall and initially when we begin to pray, we don't know how the Lord is going to respond but when it becomes evident that this is unto death, then we change the way we pray. We bow to his sovereign will.

He says, "All unrighteousness is sin," so it's not that's it a specific sin but it's just we're unrighteous in our nature therefore there is a sin unto death but, "there is," also, "a sin not unto death." Any of us that have been put in that place of deathbed, if you will, not knowing how the Lord would answer and seeing him raise us up, we know it's not for any goodness in ourselves but he purposed it to be so. He purposed it that way.

For the redeemed child of God, sickness or trouble that the Lord brings is often used as a chastening or a humbling but I believe there is a sin unto death even for the Lord's children. Ask Moses. Some might look at that and say, "Well Ken, what's the big deal?" The Lord told him to speak to the rock and he smote it and for that reason the Lord told him he would not enter into the Promised Land or lead the people in and the Lord took him. Sin unto death. Does it mean he lost his salvation? No, but the Lord will not give his glory unto another and there may be a time when he determines and is pleased to take out one of his own rather than in their ignorance in any way be a detriment to the name and glory and honor of the Lord Jesus Christ. Aaron, the same thing, died in the wilderness because in a moment of you can say ignorance or fear for his own life because the people were demanding it, compromise or whatever, built the golden calf and called it Jehovah. You say, "How could a child of God ever do that?" Well, the Lord took his life as a result. Does that mean he lost his salvation? No, because his salvation wasn't in him, it was in Christ. But there again was an example where the Lord purposed to glorify his own name through the death of one of his own rather than as he has done multiple times for us, shown us mercy.

It makes me wonder, you know, whom the Lord loves he chastens, why am I still alive because I know my heart. I know what a sinner I am. I don't deserve even to be up here other than being one sinner telling another sinner about the mercies of the Lord and the

Lord Jesus Christ and that's just how it is. The Lord, if he needs to, he took out Samson who perished with his enemies. You hear people say all the time, "How could Samson be one of the Lord's?" Well, for Christ's sake. The Lord used even his abominable life as a type and picture of our Lord Jesus Christ who identified with sinners and was numbered among transgressors yet without sin. Think about Ananias and Sapphira. I've heard preachers preach them to hell, you know, because they lied and Peter was quite strong about it, "That you have lied against the Spirit." But as I read that portion, I like to believe that they were just one of the Lord's that in order to glorify his name, he took them out in a timely manner because it says as a result of it, the fear of the Lord was upon all the people. He used them as an example and a warning.

I appreciate what Brother Lane said in his last message about that man of God, that's the way he was described, who the Lord told him, "Don't go anywhere but straight home," and he got hooked into going to another prophet's house and he disobeyed the Lord and on the way, a lion met him and killed him. He was called a man of God. Scripture wouldn't have called him a man of God had he not been a man of God but the Lord took him out. There was a sin unto death that is used even to our day as we read it to understand.

You know, as I've heard some say and the Lord at times gives me the grace to say it but it would be better if I could see sinning, if it would cause me to see sinning, the Lord just take me on out because that's the only way I'm going to stop. That's the only way you're going to stop. Even though no one believe and rest in Christ's finished work, I have to deal with the thoughts of this heart and I have to deal with what I am to be a sinner and yet I know that if I'm still here today it's for the Lord's honor and glory. It's for his purpose and I pray he keep me, I pray he keep you so long as he gives us breath to do nothing but own up to our sinner-hood which does nothing then but glorify Christ's Savior-hood, who he is as a Savior. It's not us, it's him.

But we'll stop there and then come back next time and look at Hezekiah's response in the rest of the chapter.