

Isaiah 38

Living for Public Worship in a World of Sickness, Sorrow, and Death

Wednesday, December 27, 2023 • Read Isaiah 38

Questions from the Scripture text: What happened to Hezekiah in the days of Israel's peace (38:1)? Who went to him? On whose behalf did he speak? What did he tell the king to do? Why? To where did Hezekiah turn (v2)? What did he do? What did he ask YHWH to do (v3)? What did he ask Him to remember about his walking? About his heart? About his doing? What came to whom in v4? To whom did God send him (v5)? How did God identify Himself? What two things did He say that He had done? What did He say that He would do now? How many years would He add to the king's days? What would God continue to do in that time (v6)? What did He give Hezekiah to strengthen his faith in this (v7)? What sort of sign (v7-8)? What does Hezekiah do in response (v9)? How had he felt about the timing of his death (v10)? What did he desire to do in this world (v11)? But Who was bringing him to his end (v12-13)? So how did the king respond (v14)? How does v17d help us understand the attitude of Hezekiah's prayer? How does he view his recovery (v15)? How does he view the source of his renewed/ongoing life (v16)? What was the purpose of the illness (v17)? What is the purpose of his recovery (v18-19)? Where is this psalm to be sung (v20, cf. Hab 3:19d)? What did Isaiah prescribe as the Lord's means to heal the king (v21)? What had the sign in v7-9 told Hezekiah to do (v22)?

What ought we learn from being sick and near death? Isaiah 38 prepares us for the first serial reading in public worship on the Lord's Day. In these twenty-two verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **life in this world of sorrow is a limited-time opportunity to praise God in circumstances that will never be available to us again.**

Difficult disciplining providence. Hezekiah was sick and near death (v1), due to sin (v17). Whether there was a recent/specific sin that instigated it, or whether it was just the "all my sins" of v17d, he was in a place where the Lord would bring him "great bitterness" (v17b) "for peace" (v17a).

Turning attention to the Lord. When Ahab turned his face toward the wall in 1Ki 21:4, it was to give undivided indulgence to his own feelings. But when Hezekiah does it here, in v2, it is to give his undivided attention to YHWH Himself. There's a huge difference between getting alone with yourself and getting alone with God. The believer's distresses ought to provoke him to prayer and meditation.

Laying hold of grace. As v17 makes clear, v3 is not an appeal to merit. Whether here, Neh 13, or many Psalms, the Scriptures often teach this sort of prayer. The instances in the Psalms help us, because we know that we sing and pray them in union with Christ. It is the logic of Rom 8:28. There, "for those who love God," does not mean "those who have merited, by love, that things would work out for their good." It means, "those who have been called according to God's purpose, because that is the only explanation for their love."

And that's the explanation for the characteristics in v3, where Hezekiah walks in "truth" (emmet) and maintains his heart "loyal" (kessed). These are the words for faithfulness and covenant love that often function as a summary for God's character. What Hezekiah is asking is that God, Who has begun a work of grace in Him, would treat him in accordance not with the king's sinfulness but with God's own character, and with the work of grace that He had begun in him.

Being laid hold of by grace. v21 obviously coincides with the delivery of the message in v4-6. And v22 precedes v7-8 (cf. 2Ki 20:5-11). So, even by the selectivity of the narrative, v4-8 emphasizes the grace of God. He hears the prayers (v5). He sees the tears (even Hezekiah's weeping was unto the face of YHWH!). Not only does He extend Hezekiah's life, but the peace and safety of Jerusalem along with him (v6). In addition to giving grace, the Lord gives assurance of that grace by the sign.

The purpose of life in this world. In 2Ki 20:5, Isaiah had delivered the message in a way that reminded him of the purpose of life in this world: worship, and especially public worship—at "the house of YHWH" (cf. v22). Being sick and near death had been difficult enough on account of the timing (in the prime of life, v10), but it was the deprivation of seeing YHWH among men (v11) that most troubled him. Such a discipline from the Lord's hand (v12-13) was cause for great mourning (v14).

The Lord taught Hezekiah how to respond to the bitterness that comes in God's good providence (v15, 17): to remember that we exist by the Lord's goodness (v16) in order to praise the Lord's glory (v18-19). This praise aims to be more than just individual.

As Hezekiah waits the three days to go up to public worship in the house of YHWH, he pens this Psalm to be used in public worship (n.b. "we" and "stringed instruments" in v20b and "the house of YHWH" in v20c). It is especially in this public worship that the praise of God is taught from one generation to the next (v19c). Public worship, in an assembly of the redeemed, is the great privilege of this life. While we will worship in perfection forever and ever, the opportunity to worship in this land of sorrow and sickness and death is a limited time offer.

What trouble are you going through? When and where do you get alone with the Lord and pour your heart out to Him? What evidence do you see in your life of His grace? How does acknowledging it as His grace thus far encourage you to hope for grace in the future? What evidence is there that praising Him in the public worship is the great reason for you still to be alive in this world?

Sample prayer: Lord, just as with Hezekiah, our great need is for You to cast all our sins behind our back. Any walking in faithfulness, or any covenant love in our hearts, has come from Your grace. Forgive us for when we have acted as if any good that is in us has come from us. And forgive us for missing the opportunities that come in the bitterness of our souls—opportunities to walk carefully and turn back to You. Grant that, by Your Spirit, we would turn back to You in Christ, we ask through Him, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP51B "From My Sins, O Hide Your Face" or TPH130A "LORD, from the Depths"

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Isaiah 38. These are God's words. In those days, Hezekiah was sick and near death. And those are the profit. The son of amos went to him and said to him. Thus says yahoo. Set your house in order. For you shall die and not live. Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall and prayed to Yahweh and said, Remember now.

Oh y'all. Hey, i pray. How i have walked before you in truth. And with a loyal heart and have done. What is good in your sight. And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And the word of yahweh came to isha saying, Go and tell Hezekiah thus says, yahweh god of david. Your father.

I have heard your prayer. I have seen near tears. Surely, i will add to your days 15 years. I will deliver you in this city from the hand of the king of issiria. And i will defend the city. And this is the sign to you from your way that your way will do this thing.

Which he has spoken, behold. I will bring the shadow on the sundial, which has gone down. With the sun on the sundial of Ahas, 10 degrees backward. So, the sun returned, 10 degrees. On the dial by which it gone down. This is the writing of Hezekiah king of judah.

When he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness, I said, And the prime of my life, i shall go to the gates of sheol. I am deprived of the remainder of my years. I said, i shall not see y'all. Y'all play in the land of the living.

And so observe man, no more among the inhabitants of the world. My lifespan is gone taken from me like a shepherd's tent. I have cut off my life. Like a weaver, he cuts off me off from the loom. From day until night, you make an end of me. I have considered until morning like a lion so he breaks all my bones.

From day until night, you make an end of me like a crane or a swallow. So i chattered, i mourned like a dove, my eyes fail from looking upward, Oh y'all. Hey, i am oppressed. Undertake. For me. What shall i say? He has both spoken to me. And he himself has done it.

I shall walk carefully, all my years in the bitterness of my soul. Oh lord, by these things, men live and in all these things. Is the life of my spirit so you will restore me and make me live indeed. It was for my own peace. That i had great bitterness.

But you have lovingly delivered, my soul from the pit of corruption. For you have cast all my sins? Behind your back. For sure. All cannot thank you. Death cannot praise you. Those who go down to the pit, cannot hope for your truth. The living the living, man. He shall praise you as i do this day.

The father shall make known your truth to the children. Yahweh was ready to save me. Therefore, we will sing my songs with stringed instruments, all the days of our life in the house. Of yahweh. Now isaiah had said let them take a lump of figs. And apply it as a poultice on the boil.

And he shall recover. And Hezekiah had said. What is the sign that i shall go up? To the house of yahweh. So far, the Reading of gods inspired and An errant word. Hezekiah is sick and near death, and Verse 17. Lets us know. Um, The reason for this, if not specifically, at least generally When he says for you have cast.

All my sins behind your back. Hezekiah knows that this. Uh, nearness to death. In which? Perhaps, he has already been praying. That he might not die. That this is for his sin. Now, this is true generally speaking. All of us, die for our sin. And our first father, autumn.

And for our, Both original sinfulness and actual transgressions. Uh, in our own life, the wages of sin is death. Um, We do not die. Now, if you're a believer as A judgment, but still as a consequence. Of your sin. And so when the prophet comes and says to him, thus says yahweh Set your house in order.

For you shall die and not live. Um, We understand. Uh, in part, by Hezekiah's response in verse 17 when he is writing and reflecting upon it. That it was. Uh, due to some Sin and perhaps some specific sin, but notice at verse 17 just says all my Sins. It is a mercy of god and his providence when He lays us, slow.

Some terrible. Injury. Or Illness. Or perhaps some economic catastrophe. Some great difficulty. To make us consider again that we are sinners before him and deserve. No better. And yet. The cause of this. Sickness and nearness to death in. Verse 1 is not the purpose of the illness. So we can see what the purpose is because of what comes to pass in.

God's mercy and god's grace. Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall. And prayed to y'all. That is He engaged, not the lord through his prophet who was before him. But he turns and he engages the lord's directly. Um, There is. A turning of the face to the wall.

That is a solid temper, tantrum that have happens a couple times in scripture. But he was not turning to be all up in his own feelings as the present colloquialism goes and is actually very useful front for Uh, explaining what turning to the wall sometimes is But here. He was directing his attention away from others, not to be into himself.

Put to address his lord. He turned his face toward the wall and prayed to yahweh. Her to use another. Collocally as colloquialism, that Um, we might Um, We might caution ourselves to use only. With due, reverence. He got alone with god. Uh, i think often When people use that about themselves or to others, you need to get a loan with god.

They are not. Thinking and speaking with the new reverence. And so we must be Careful not to use buzzwords or phrases. In a way. That by repetition or commonness of use. Turn into a common or profane way of speaking about God, but he turns his face to the wall.

And praise to your way. And so already, we see. The providence. Of the lord in his life and the word that the lord sent by the isaiah, who is as his mouth to Hezekiah. Taking their effect. Turning hasakaya's attention. Directly and fully to the lord and throwing him upon god's grace.

Uh, in verse 3. And restoring him. Uh, to repentance. As we'll find in verse 15. So turning him upon god's grace. Um, if we read verse 3 in a fleshly way, And this is one of the reasons why we pray for. God, the holy spirit to help us. When we read his word.

Help me when i preach and help us and we sit under preaching, so that we will not read a flight in a fleshly way. If we read verse 3 in a fleshly way, We will read this, as Hezekiah telling god that he has earned better from god. Um, similar with nehemiah.

Asking the lord to remember. Uh, what he has done in many times in the psalms Which teach us to? Ask god to deal with us, according to our uprightness. And that last is really helpful because the psalms in particular, we know, That we sing in union with christ. But it's not just in a union with christ in which Um, Where in which christ's walking before god in faithfulness and In emit and with a hassed heart.

Uh, in verse 3 and you can hear the character of god there and Um, and Hezekiah's description of his walking. It's not just that christ's walking is counted for us as our walking, but also that if we have come to bear, some resemblance to god in the character of our walking, obviously, not perfectly.

And certainly not meritoriously. Although genuinely It has been by god's grace. And so what, uh, what what Hezekiah is saying, is, remember me, according to the grace in which you have produced a character like your own? Oh, lord. Behold the, the fruit of your work in me and do to me, not according to what i deserve, although, sins in verse 17 that i'm asking to have caught cast behind your back and that god does here cast behind His back as it were but don't do to me according to what i deserve due to me, according to your character, due to me, according to your character, which has been demonstrated already by some gracious work in my life.

And we know that the spirit teaches us to think that way, not just, from the psalms as we've been saying, but even from that wonderful verse and Romans 8, we know that all things work together for good. For those who love God, not because we could say see how i have loved you.

God, you owe me better than this. But because the loving of god comes not from the sinner. But from god, who has given the effectual calling, Um, in the center's heart. By god's sovereign, grace by god's power. According To god's loving electing plan. The called according. To his purpose.

And so, Both the illness and the nearness to death on the one hand and then on the other hand, Uh, the lord addressing him by his word. With a hard word. Set your house in order for you shall die and not live. Uh, was sent to Hezekiah. Not in order to kill him.

But in order to turn him. Uh, to this attending upon god and verse 2. And this laying hold of grace in verse 3. And purposing for Repentance. That we'll see later. In verse 15. And so we should. Um, We should learn from this. Uh, first not only like we said before, to take Uh, difficulty as an opportunity to Uh, consider remaining sin, confess it before, god remember what we deserve.

But second, especially to identify that Um, the character of god in his gracious work already in our lives. Now, there's grieving and weeping here. Uh, because sickness and death are. Actual, griefs and sorrows that continue in this age. Um, The bitterness. That is described in. Verse 15 and verse.

Uh, 17. Um, it was read in here by our translators, it just says and has weeping has hezekiah wept Are weeping he wept Hezekiah. Um, The. Pouring into weeping, but notice it's not a weeping of feeling sorry for himself. It's a weeping of expressing before, god. The greatness of his sorrow unto the lord, how do we know?

Because when God answers him in verse 5, he says not only i have heard your prayer but i have seen your tears. Uh, it is. Sweet. To us or it's sweetens grief. When we

have someone else to mourn with us to grieve with us more and with those who mourn, Where we can?

Take our heavy weeping. And embrace someone. And weep almost into them. And with them. How much more? When we can take that to god himself and not weep by ourselves. Don't ever grieve alone. Not even if you are humanly alone. Because humans are not the only ones are not even the primary ones.

That there are And so, we have the praying to the lord. And the Weeping. To the lord. And so, Lord sends his prophet in verse 4. And he says, go and tell Hezekiah and notice what the lord does. He answers according to his own character. Thus says, yahweh. Common introduction to.

Uh, prophetic word. We see it. Also in verse 1, thus, as yahweh But now he adds in order to bring out the covenantal. Aspect of the covenant name. The god of david. Your father, not just Yahweh, your god. Although surely. Uh, hezekiah had prayed and faith to the lord and Yahweh is god.

But the lord is reminding him. That there is a covenant here that has Hezekiah has been brought into that is greater than he is. In fact, it's in greater than david is When he says y'all play the god of david, your father He is using covenantal for me, he's using language that reminds Uh the affirms direct attention to the promise, the covenant promise that was made to david of the son of david who had come.

And so he's he's saying here, thus says yahweh your god in christ. Now, christ hasn't come yet. The blood of the new covenant hasn't been spilled yet, but we can hear at the table every week. Can't wait. Can't we when we hear The servant of christ and dancing in christ's name, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

And we can know that the god who has joined us to himself, not just in ourselves. But in his covenant of grace, Not just even in david. But in jesus christ himself. That this god, here's our prayers. He sees our tears, he intends everything for our good. It is this knowledge of the character of god, and the covenant of god, that enables hasakia to see in retrospect when he writes this psalm for the public worship of israel.

Indeed, it was for my own peace or Indeed, for peace. I had great bitterness. So that we can see the lord's turning us back to himself to rest upon him. In christ. And so, Hezekiah is given. 15 more years on earth. 15 years that he remembers. Now, what he's supposed to do with them.

He's supposed to spend them praising god. He's supposed to spend spend them especially coming to and leading the public worship of god or participating in as the king of israel, not the priest who Provides over and mediates, the worship. But certainly, as far as the state goes being, Um, worshiper in.

In chief. Um, Of the nation not just commander. Uh, in chief. He remembers his purpose in life. He's going to do this for 15 years. And then what's he going to do? Is going to do it forever. And yet he remembers what the point of life is. And what those who are alive on the earth.

Are to do. Especially since, if praise for god is going to rise from the earth. Those who have departed from the earth are not going to be able to be the ones. To do it. And so this is why. Uh, the lord gives him the 15 years and the lord even promises to continue the deliverance that we saw.

In chapter 37. He promises to continue that deliverance. Now, In verse 6. Now. Verse 21 is probably spoken. At the time of the promises in verses 5 and 6. When Isaiah had said, let them take a lump of figs and apply it as a poultice on the boil. And he shall recover.

And verse 22 definitely comes before verse 7. Hezekiah had said, what is the sign that i shall go up to the house of yahweh? And, Verse 7 is the answer. This is the sign from yahweh that yahweh will do this thing, which he has spoken. In fact, There is a more extended conversation.

Um, That takes place. In second kings 20.

Hours, i'm not a year.

I think it's in verses 8 through 12.

Morning, some of my notes are missing.

Versus eight through 11. There we find out that There is actually a conversation in which the initial Sign that was offered was for the sundial to move forward. And Hezekiah said, well, that's too easy. Let the sundial move backward. And the lord in his mercy. Um, Condescence to such.

A bolt. And we might even say, Impotent. Uh response. And he changes it to moving the sundial backward. Uh, but here we have the focus. Entirely upon. Uh, the mercy of god and the conversation. Is removed. This is the sign to you from yahweh. That yahweh will do this thing.

What thing, The thing that will enable look at verse 22. Hezekiah to keep going up. To the house of your way to keep attending to that temple. Uh, which is an image. Of christ.

So the lord spares Hezekiah and Hezekiah realizes that the reason he's been spared is so that he can worship. And the reason that he has spared has been especially so that he can participate in the public worship. And that's exactly what we have, then from verses 9 through 20.

We have a psalm that he writes for the public worship for when he is recovered and able to return to the house of yahweh. You see at the end of the psalm in verse 20, he gives it. Um, Uh, A wonderful title yahweh who saves me. Is the name of the psalm.

And he says, therefore, we will sing my songs with stringed instruments, all the days of our life in the house of yahweh. And so you hear how he emphasizes Have the great thing in our life in this world, as the redeemed of god, as those whom yahweh has saved is to gather In the public worship of god and sing.

The scriptures. Not incidentally, just The 150. As. As Hezekiah makes clear. This psalm is for Uh, we for us. To sing. In the house of yahua. And as he writes the psalm he gives us a window into several of the things that made the providence of his sickness and being near death.

Uh, so difficult for him. One was the timing. Verse 10 in the prime of my life. I am deprived of the remainder of Of my years. Another is the deprivation, not just deprived of the remainder of Uh, his years, but deprived of that unique experience of god. In. Or as those who receive his goodness and praise as glory, Even in this land, the land of those who live on the earth.

Yes, when we depart for, from this place, we will continue to see his goodness and praise his glory. But this is our one chance to do it. As partially sanctified redeemed, sinners You know, world that has bound to corruption and decay. That god, may be trusted and clung to depended upon delighted in and praised.

Even and this world, this is our last chance to do that. And that can totally transform how you think about sickness and death and trouble and need. Because we're never going to get to praise him in sickness. We're never going to get to praise him, phasing death. We're never going to get to praise him in trouble.

We are never going to get to praise him in need in eternity because all of those things will have been done. And so here is this land of the living which those for whom god is enough and more than enough. Despite all of the other things can gather together and call upon his covenant name, which he even highlights by giving half of it first.

And then the second half later, i said, i shall not see y'all yahweh in the land of the living. I shall observe man. No more. Among the inhabitants of the world. And so he's not going to have this experience anymore. Of looking around him and seeing All of these needy and still sinful.

And having all of these weaknesses and difficulties and troubles. All of these men. Praising yahweh together. In the land of the living, there is a there's a great privilege. Uh, in the worship that we have lord, stay by lord stay now. Um, That? Yes, we are going to Be so grateful and rejoice.

Uh, to enter glory. And be in that company of the souls of the just made perfect as hebrews 12 says. But there is a limited time blessing. That is precious. Not for The greatness of it as much as for. The limitedness of it limited. Um, time of it and the greatness of god in it.

That he is still enough for us and that he stoops down to join himself. To such as we are. It doesn't wait until he is perfected us by some Um, Some work that he does at a distance. But that even now in our present condition, he has joined himself to us.

How great is the grace? And the mercy. Of god. And so, The greatness of the difficulty was first, the timing of it. He felt too young verse 10 that greatest part of life of which he would be deprived verse 11 and then the personal and Um, chasing in nature.

Of the of the providence, personal judicial nature, the providence, verse, 12 and 13. The fact that it is god himself, who is doing this, like a lion. Uh, breaking all his bones, keeping him up all night. Uh, so that he stresses over it until morning first part of verse 13.

And, Um, This is. Uh, making Um, Wordless kind of. Uh, sounds first part of verse 14. Uh grieving moaning like a dove second part of verse 14. Praying when it feels. Uh, like it's not making a difference and you start to lose your physical capacity to do. So my eyes fail.

Uh, Upward. Uh, next part of verse 14, Uh, Doing these things to god. And Uh, in In fellowship with god. But then at the end, He's running out of even ability to pray, even ability to grieve decries out for god to take over. Um, For him. But then, there's this.

Break between verse 14 and verse 15. In which he Assures with doctrine and perhaps it comes. This is the point at which in the The poetic retelling of the song that Isaiah had come. Uh, with the The word of promise. To him. But god has spoken to me. God has done it.

I saw walk carefully all my years and the bitterness of my soul. In other words, The lord has shown me in this experience of bitterness. How i should always respond to my bitterness. And we already mentioned how he picks up on that language in verse 17, indeed, for peace, i had Uh, great bitterness.

Um, and you confesses That it is by the lord that men live. And so for the lord, That men should live by the lord that men live verse 16 and for the praise of the lord. That men live verse 18 and not only would he Um, Would he praise the lord?

And as anyone who is living? Should the living the living men? He shall praise you. Uh, there's a form of praise that god is ordained or seen from this world. That only those in this world can give And that as they do. So they are not only to do so for themselves, but look at the end of verse 19.

The worship and the assembly is one of the primary ways that fathers teach their children. That goddess faithful. And that this is what we live for. Is to praise him together. How blessed is the child? Whose father wants him? Always to be at public relationship whose father wants himself.

Always to be at public worship. Whenever it is available. And once his child to be with him in public worship, whenever it is available. So that not only by what the father says to the child, but what by but but by what the father does alongside of the child does the child live that learned, this is why we are alive in this world.

Is to praise god and especially To praise him in an assembly. An assembly that would continue until the one day that child is the father. And he is making known the faithfulness of god. To his children. And one generation. Tells the next. So, what a wonderful mercy from god, the sickness.

And near death turned out to be and Hezekiah's life as the lord addressed. It addressed him in the midst of it, by his word, turned Hezekiah's attention to the lord himself in prayer. Made Hezekiah to lay hold of that grace that had so far been done reminded hasakaya of his purpose of life and renewed his resolved to do.

So And that is the last thing whenever we have trouble. And the lord brings us out of it, whether a little one or a big one. That we would come out with renewed resolved to live for our purpose. To live for the praise of god. And may the lord's.

Help you my dear children not to have no trouble in your life? But may his spirit and his word. By his word produce any. These good fruits. That may come from the trouble in your life. Let's pray. Our grace is god and our heavenly father. How he thank you for This chapter in isaiah and particularly this chapter as it were in Hezekiah's life.

And lord, we pray that you'd help us. We confess that we often do not do well. With our Uh, easy times. Which is why we need the trouble in the first place and your mercy to us. That we might have peace through bitterness. Let lord, we even don't do well many times with our difficult times.

And so we pray that your spirit who wrote this. And your spirit. Um, Who has helped us just now in considering it, Would be with us to help us. And times of trouble producing. The fruit of this truth in our lives, make us to remember it. Make us to remember you make us to live for your praise.

Make us to walk with you. Make us to enjoy the evidence of your grace. Even in the godliness of our life that comes from the lord jesus and makes us to Appear to be your children. As you have made us, Uh, make us o lord's to live according Uh, to your instruction in this portion of your word.

We ask in jesus name Amen.