

## EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #53

Isaiah 38:1-22

When a key leader is sick or injured or dies, it affects everyone. There have been instances in the history of our own country when our country has been brought to a standstill because of it. For example, when Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, the entire nation was affected and many in the east got involved in a 12 day manhunt for John Wilkes Booth.

But the truth is, the greatest loss to any society is when a powerful man of God dies. You no longer have their presence, you no longer have their prayers and you no longer have their passion. When great men of God die, you do not get them back and you do not replace them.

Hezekiah was a great king and a great man of God in Judah's history. He had turned the nation back to God. He had destroyed false idols and restored true worship. He stood for God in the midst of a great threat. In fact, we may notice that this all happened "in those days" (38:1), which refers to the days of the Assyrian threat. If Judah lost him in the midst of the Assyrian threat (v. 6), it would be completely devastating.

As far as we may determine, to this point Hezekiah had no son who could sit in the Davidic line as king, so when in **verse 1** we learn that he became sick to the point where he was about to die, it became a major dilemma, not just for Hezekiah, but for the whole nation.

Hezekiah was not only burdened with a huge political problem, but now he was hit with the ultimate personal problem, his own death. What Hezekiah did, when he learned about his terminal condition, was go to God in prayer. This is exactly what God wants His people doing when threatened. He wants them coming directly to Him. The point to see is this:

**WHEN A GODLY PERSON FACES SERIOUS PERSONAL LIFE-THREATENING CIRCUMSTANCES, HE HAS EVERY RIGHT TO GO TO GOD IN PRAYER AND ASK FOR HIS DELIVERENCE.**

What Hezekiah did personally is what Israel should do nationally. During the final 3½ years of the Tribulation, she will find herself under a death sentence of the Antichrist. She needs to remember that she can turn to the Lord and ask for His help and intervention. That is precisely what Hezekiah does here. Now the text breaks down nicely into six main parts:

**PART #1** – The news Hezekiah receives from Isaiah. **38:1**

In **Isaiah 38:1**, the prophet Isaiah went to Hezekiah to inform him that he needed to get things in order because it was time for him to die. Hezekiah had become very sick and one reason for sickness is that God uses sickness to take a person into eternity. That was precisely the case with Hezekiah. The words "you shall die and not live" show the hopelessness and helplessness of the situation. You can join health clubs and nutrition programs but in the end, these words will be applied to us all - "you shall die and not live." God knows date of birth and date of death.

I want us to see that God uses His prophet to communicate His word to Hezekiah. I think this point is being missed. Hezekiah certainly would have had access to many Old Testament books of the Bible, but it was God's prophet who was able to accurately communicate God's Word and will. God's prophet told him to "set his house in order." The verb "set in order" means to command, commission and delegate matters in regard to your house and family. In view of the fact that Hezekiah was going to die, he was responsible to organize and make necessary appointments and preparations in regard to his house (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 704). Getting things organized in view of our near death is very Biblical. It is the custom of those nearing death to try and organize their domestic matters.

Truth is, when a believer realizes his days on earth are ending, things that matter and don't matter begin to come into clear focus. J. Vernon McGee told the story of a young minister who was told by his doctor that he had terminal cancer and only a few days to live. The minister sent out a letter to some of his close friends and asked them to pray. Here is a quote that Dr. McGee used from the letter:

"One thing I have discovered in the last few days. When a Christian is suddenly confronted with a sentence of death, he surely begins to give a proper evaluation of material things. My fishing gear and books and orchard are not nearly so valuable as they were a week ago" (*Isaiah*, Vol. 3, p. 280).

#### **PART #2 – The prayer of Hezekiah to God. 38:2-3**

When Hezekiah learned that he was dying, the **first thing he did was turn to the Lord to pray**. Hezekiah was a man of prayer. We have already seen evidence of the fact that when he was threatened by Sennacharib, he went to God in prayer (Isaiah 37:14-15). Now he did the same thing when threatened by his own death. He was a man of prayer.

It is interesting that he turned his face "to the wall." He did this for privacy. He did not want everybody in the world to know about this. This was personal business between him and God. He didn't put this on a prayer chain, or get on the phone and unload on any who would listen, nor did he send out prayer support letters; he just privately went to God in prayer. He doesn't get mad, he doesn't argue with God, he just turns to the Lord in prayer.

I find it interesting that he does not ask God for more life, although that certainly is the implication of the prayer; what he does do is ask God to analyze his life.

In **verse 3**, he appeals to God by asking Him to remember his life and leadership, and he lays out three key facts about some good things that were part of his character:

**(Fact #1) - He has lived his life before God in truth. 38:3a**

**(Fact #2) - He has live his life before God with a whole heart. 38:3b**

John Calvin said what this Hebrew word "whole" (shalem) means is that Hezekiah had an integrity of heart to his holiness, not some deceptive hypocrisy that impresses men (*Isaiah*, p. 156).

**(Fact #3)** - He has done what is good in the sight of God. **38:3c**

Hezekiah obeyed the Scriptures. He tried to do what was right according to the Word of God. His spirituality was real. He was real.

As Hezekiah was praying he also started weeping. There is certainly nothing wrong with shedding personal tears when privately praying.

Dr. McGee said that when his doctor told him he had three months to live, he wept and he prayed. He said he also realized how unimportant certain things were.

**PART #3** – The answer from God to Hezekiah's prayer. **38:4-8**

I want us to observe from **verse 5**, that the LORD (Jehovah) is identified as “the God of your father David.” One reason for this is because it is One from David's line who can take the sting out of the death sentence. In the aftermath of the prayer that Hezekiah made, God sent Isaiah to him with the following five messages:

**(Message #1)** - I have heard your prayer. **38:5a**

This is the whole basis for us praying - Almighty God hears our prayers.

**(Message #2)** - I have seen your tears. **38:5b**

Oftentimes private prayer is careless prayer, but private prayer made with tears is very sincere prayer that can move the heart of God. Praying and crying don't necessarily accomplish anything, but when God sees one praying whose life has been lived with integrity and whose tears are very real, it moves Him.

**(Message #3)** - I will add fifteen more years to your life. **38:5c**

Since Hezekiah died in 686 B.C., this illness took place about 701 B.C. Hezekiah became king at age 25 and reigned 29 years (II Chronicles 29:1), which made him 54 when he died. If we subtract 15 years, he was 39 years old when this all happened.

**(Message #4)** - I will deliver you and this city from the Assyrian king. **38:6**

Here are two amazing comforting messages that God gave which all stem from prayer -  
1) You will live; 2) Assyria will never win. When we pray we never know what God will do.

**(Message #5)** - I will give you a sign that I will do these things. **38:7-8**

The sign that God gives to Hezekiah is a sign related to time. God controls the time of a person's life. He controls the hours of the day and the years of a person's life.

Back in Isaiah's day, time was told by a sundial and apparently a special double set of stairs had been built as some form of time device. As the shadow hit various places on the steps, one was able to determine the time.

We don't exactly know what God did in moving the shadow backwards. It is possible He reversed the earth's rotation or it is possible that He diverted or refracted the sun's rays, but regardless of how God did it, He did do it as a sign to Hezekiah.

Hezekiah could turn from the wall and apparently look at the sundial and actually see time moving backwards, down the same steps it had gone up.

When you find yourself threatened and you pray, you can expect God to do some great and amazing things.

**PART #4** – Hezekiah writes about his experience. **38:9-22**

Hezekiah was a king who was very focused on the written Scriptures. He personally wrote God-honoring songs (**Isaiah 38:20**) and he was a king who actually supervised the writing of inspired Scripture (**Proverbs 25:1**). When he had recovered from his sickness, he informs us specifically what happened. There are four facts Hezekiah gives us about this event:

**Fact #1** - What Hezekiah actually said to God. **38:9-14**

What initially appears to be kind of sad about this is that Hezekiah actually seems to be more focused on physical life in this earthly world rather than eternal life in the heavenly world. Instead of Hezekiah groaning to get out of this world, he is groaning because he had to leave this world. It would appear that Hezekiah initially believed his death was a judgment of God, in which God was cutting him off of the world in wrath. There are seven realities that he points out to God:

**Reality #1** - I am in the middle of my life. **38:10a** - He was 39 years old.

**Reality #2** - I am about to enter Sheol. **38:10b** - The abode of the dead.

**Reality #3** - I am about to be deprived of living a long life. **38:10c**

**Reality #4** - I will not be able to see the LORD or His work in the land of the living. **38:11a**

This phrase means that he would not see the glorious work of God in the Promised Land.

**Reality #5** - I will not be able to look on man or this world again. **38:11b**

He would no longer be able to see his family or friends. It has often been asked whether or not believers who die are able to see their family or friends. We do know they are able to remember them (Luke 16:27-28), but there is no text that says they can see them.

**Reality #6** - I will be relocated as my life on this earth will end. **38:12**

Death would remove him from the world like a tent is removed, or cut him off from the world like a cloth being cut from a weaver's loom.

**Reality #7** - I am dying and I turn to God for security. **38:13-14**

Hezekiah was in physical and mental anguish. When you face death, God is your only security.

When we are faced with intimidating things and threatening things, we should have a new, fresh appreciation for prayer.

**Fact #2** - What Hezekiah acknowledged about God. **38:15-17**

Hezekiah was humbled and grateful that God had delivered him from death.

**(Acknowledgement #1)** - God Himself does what He wants with everyone. **38:15a**

God does what He wants with individuals concerning life and death; wise is the person who sets a watch before his mouth in view of this (Psalm 39:9; Job 40:4).

**(Acknowledgement #2)** - God Himself may cause one's circumstances to be bitter. **38:15b**

Hezekiah realized that God is the One who can cause things so sorrowful to happen that one even despairs of life.

**(Acknowledgement #3)** - God alone can restore one to life and health. **38:16**

Hezekiah realized also that God is the One who can cause wonderful blessings to happen in a person's life.

**(Acknowledgement #4)** - God's plan is often bitter for our own welfare. **38:17a**

Grammatically this may mean that God can cause bitter things to happen in times that are positive, or God can cause bitter things to happen to bring positive things out of them for us.

**(Acknowledgement #5)** - God keeps a person's soul from being nothing. **38:17b**

It is God who gives meaning to life. It is God who keeps you from being a zero in eternity.

**(Acknowledgement #6)** - God has cast all my sins behind His back. **38:17c**

Only God can forgive you of your sins, and when you turn to the Lord for forgiveness He casts them "all" away. He casts them all into the depths of the seas (Micah 7:2) and casts them away as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). When He puts them behind His back they are never in front of Him to see again.

**Fact #3** - What Hezekiah acknowledges about death. **38:18-19**

Now one very important reason why Hezekiah wanted to live was for the purpose of being able to verbally testify of the living God and to be able to actually worship God. There are five acknowledgments that he makes:

**(Acknowledgement #1)** - Those in Sheol cannot thank Thee. **38:18a**

**(Acknowledgement #2)** - Those who are dead cannot praise Thee. **38:18b**

What Hezekiah was saying is that when you are dead, your life's work stops.

**(Acknowledgement #3)** - Those who are dead cannot demonstrate a hope in God's faithfulness.  
**38:18c**

**(Acknowledgement #4)** - Those who are living can thank Thee. **38:19a**

**(Acknowledgement #5)** - Those who are living can tell their sons about God's faithfulness.  
**38:19b**

**Fact #4** - What Hezekiah would do in view of God's healing. **38:20**

Hezekiah would praise and worship God all the days of his life. He would play his songs and he would go to the house of the Lord.

It is our job as long as we are alive to testify for God and worship God.

**PART #5** – Isaiah tells Hezekiah to seek medical help. **38:21**

When you are sick it is very right to pray, but it is also very right to go to a doctor.

**PART #6** – Hezekiah asks God for a sign. **38:22**

The reason Hezekiah does this is because his evil father, Ahaz, had refused to ask God for a sign when God commanded him to do it (Isaiah 7:11-12). Hezekiah was not about to make the same mistake. For him, this is not a lack of faith, it is proof of faith.

There are those who believe that Hezekiah was wrong in asking God to grant him more life. In fact, there were some negative things that happened as a result. Three years later his son Manasseh was born (II Kings 21:1), who would reign for 55 years and would be the most wicked king in the entire pedigree. Hezekiah himself actually became somewhat proud in his heart, which ultimately brought great disaster upon Judah and Jerusalem (II Chronicles 32:24-26). It is not wise to ever second-guess God when He decides to take a leader home. God knows what He is doing even when we don't know.

Every person in this world has been given a sentence of death by God. Get your life in order because you will die. The only hope we have is to turn to Jesus Christ for help. He is the only One who can save us from our sins. Believe on Him and you will experience God's amazing power.