

Sermon 65, Salvation and a Son: Hezekiah Given Life instead of Death, 2 Kings 20:1-11

Proposition: God tests and saves and hears His Anointed King when he cries out to Him.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have already looked at four major tests in the life of Hezekiah, king of Judah. The text has reserved this story of his illness, which took place before the Assyrian siege, until last, in order to contribute to the narrative structure of the book as a whole. We've seen God's saving work in the previous two chapters, but here, we see the continuing threat of exile. Judah, and Hezekiah, were both given reprieves — but those reprieves were temporary.

What we'll see tonight is that our God tests His Anointed, saves His Anointed, and hears His Anointed. And, then, we will see how we ought to respond when God tests us.

I. Another Test from God, vv. 1-7

Hezekiah had already been tested by invasion and by Assyrian threats. Now the text records for us another test.

A. A Hard Word, v. 1

This test is an abrupt announcement of impending doom. Hezekiah will die! Why? When? How? The word doesn't say. It simply tells him to make his last will and testament, to set things up in

the light of his own certain demise. Assyria, from what we can tell, is knocking at the gates. And, depending on how you read the chronology, Hezekiah may not have even had a son yet. (Manasseh, after all, was only 12 years old when he became king.) This is indeed a hard word.

B. A Broken Heart, vv. 2-3

Hezekiah responded to it with a broken heart. He wept bitterly; he sought privacy — not, I think, sulking like Ahab (who was the last person to turn his face to the wall in Kings) but rather seeking to be alone with his Creator so that he could express the cry of his heart.

When God tests you, how do you respond? By crying out to Him from the heart?

But what about the content of Hezekiah's prayer? Why did he simply list all his achievements? Brothers and sisters, you can't lie to God. Not really. You may not remember all the relevant details, but you cannot tell Him something you believe to be false. Hezekiah, in the moment of hearing this word about his death, could only remember one thing: "God, I've walked with you!"

Is this the cry of your heart when you receive a hard providence from God? It's the cry of mine. "God, I thought we were friends! God, I thought we enjoyed being together! I thought I was doing what you wanted!" And then, the tears. Brothers and sisters, if you haven't experienced this in your own walk with God, then you may not understand this passage very well. When you are alone with God, sobbing to Him about the pain His providence has caused you, you can feel betrayed. You can feel lost. You can and probably will feel like the bottom has fallen out of your world, like the thing you trusted in has just proven to be unreliable. That is where Hezekiah was. And if you haven't been there, you may yet get there.

What can we say to a man in this condition? We could try to tell him that God is not obligated to give him a long life. We could try to point out that God hasn't changed, and that God often afflicts those closest to Him who please Him the most. We could tell Him not to be surprised by the fiery trial that comes upon believers in this life. But brothers and sisters, would those truths comfort him? Apply them to your own soul before you dare to dump them on this afflicted king. Are you calm and patient and unsurprised by suffering? Are you just as confident in God when you're suffering as when you're anticipating some great blessing? Yes, Hezekiah should have said, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of Yahweh!" But he processed his pain simply by saying, "God, I walked with you in faithfulness. My heart was everything it should have been toward you! I obeyed you!" And it's true; he did, according to 18:5-7. But that didn't exempt him from testing and suffering and it won't exempt you either.

C. An Answered Prayer, vv. 4-6b

But though our God tests, He also hears our cries. Within seconds, God responded.

1. God Hears, vv. 4-5b

God almost immediately, basically in the time it took Hezekiah to utter his words and burst into tears, responded. He told Isaiah to turn around and deliver the new message — and God used the Messianic title "Nagid," "prince" or "leader," a title that hasn't been used since Jeroboam I in 1

Kings 14:7. Clearly, Hezekiah is being complimented, and he is also reminded of his Davidic ancestry.

When you're crying out to God, does this comfort you? He hears! His response is rarely as dramatic as it was to Hezekiah, both here and in the previous chapters. But He is the same, still full of compassion on His suffering people.

2. God Heals, v. 5c

Even though Hezekiah had not asked for healing, God promised to heal him. Brothers and sisters, again, we need to address the looming question: If God was going to heal him, why did He threaten to kill him? Why does God test His people like this? The answer is to show us what's in our hearts, and to strengthen our faith, and for various other just and holy ends. If you are not okay with God both wounding and healing, announcing Hezekiah's death and then giving him another fifteen years, the problem is not that God is fickle but that you are unsubmissive.

3. God Gives a Sign, v. 5d

God not only promised healing, but He also promised a sign. Hezekiah would worship Him, in His house. Standing in God's presence in worship was a signal to him that God's other promises would be kept and that he would live for another 15 years. Notice, too, the "third day" theme. The third day is the day of resurrection, the day of coming back into the life-giving presence of God. This sign was in some ways the opposite of the sign given to Ahaz. That sign was "God with us." This sign is "Us with God." Hezekiah will be able to stand before God in His presence. Remember, when he heard the bad news all he could think of was how close he had been with God. Now, the good news involves a promise of being with God once more. This is the kindness of our God.

4. God Grants Hezekiah a Reprieve, v. 6a

But not only does He grant Hezekiah life in His presence once more; He promises him 15 years of earthly life. It seems likely that if Hezekiah had died, Judah would have simply fallen to Assyria. But instead, Hezekiah's life is lengthened.

5. God Grants Judah a Reprieve, v. 6b

So is Judah's. Rather than falling to Assyria a mere than 20 years after Samaria's destruction, Judah would endure for another century and more. God's test was simply an opportunity for Him to reaffirm His commitment to His king and His people.

Do you see the suffering in your life that way? Do you recognize that it is one of God's ways of highlighting His care for Christ and for you? If you can truly absorb this fact, I guarantee that it will change the way you experience unpleasantness. You will start looking for the ways God is using the unpleasantness to show you His glory.

D. An Inexhaustible Passion, v. 6c

After all, why did God hear Hezekiah's prayers? Because He has an overriding concern for His own glory and for His promises to David and David's Son, Jesus Christ. God had an inexhaustible passion for Jerusalem, and He determined to save it because that's who He is. Do you call upon Him and ask Him to do things for His own sake, and for Christ's sake?

Think of it this way. If the chronology here is perfectly straightforward, then Manasseh would not be born until 3 years into Hezekiah's extra time. It's almost as though God's warning of impending doom had been a way of saying, "I'm done. I am cutting off Judah and David's line right here, right now." Hezekiah was about to die childless — until God intervened for His own sake, and for the sake of the coming Messiah.

Brothers and sisters, can you trust the God who saved you for Himself and who keeps you for Christ's sake? He spared Hezekiah, and in sparing him, He spared the world. Because Hezekiah's life was prolonged, the Savior of the World came in the fullness of time.

E. A Due Use of Ordinary Means, v. 7

But Isaiah didn't just stop once the miraculous was done. He also recommended some medical care, which was duly done. God does marvelous things, things for the salvation of His Anointed, His people, and even the world — but He often does them through normal medical care. God's large-scale plans to save the world are not only compatible with, but even work through, the due use of ordinary means. In short, when you're sick, pray and see the doctor!

II. Another Sign from God, vv. 8-11

Yet Hezekiah, though we already know that the prophecy came true and he recovered, was not yet content.

A. Hezekiah Requests a Sign about the Sign, v. 8

God had given him a sign that would mature in three days. But he wanted something that would come faster. "God, how will I know that you won't change your mind before the three days are up?"

Again, doesn't this sound like us? We were just presented with incontrovertible evidence that God heard our prayers, and then we turn around say, "God, what will you do to show me that you're trustworthy?" What more does He need to do? Hasn't He already proven Himself over and over?

B. God Signifies His Salvation, vv. 9-11

But God, amazingly, grants another sign to Hezekiah.

1. God's Revelation, v. 9a

He reveals Himself as the dispenser of signs, as the one who keeps His promises. God is willing to give a sign that indicates that He does what He said He was going to do.

2. God's Graciousness, v. 9b

And not only that — He is so gracious that He asks Hezekiah what form the sign the should take. Brothers and sisters, how gracious are you to people who keep asking for guarantees that they can trust you? At some point, aren't you ready to just say, "Look, if you don't trust me, find someone else to harass"? But not our God. He, the ultimate one with nothing to prove, was willing to prove Himself to Hezekiah. He not only answered prayer; He was even willing to reveal Himself in a way that pleased Hezekiah.

3. God's Power, vv. 10-11

And what a way it was! The way Hezekiah chose presupposes that God is able to control time, planetary rotation, and even the motion of the Sun itself. The God who heard the prayer of His Anointed is the God who controls the stars. The God who listened to Hezekiah is the God who can change the length of shadows. Brothers and sisters, can you trust this God? Can you recognize Him as the one you walk with, the one who tests you, and as the one who hears your cries? You see, these signs were not just given for Hezekiah; they are for you too. God has shown you who He is. How will you respond to this all-powerful, all-compassionate Father? Will you seek His healing, His gift of life, His blessings on the church? He is more than willing to give them, for His own sake and for Christ's. So when you suffer a hard providence, when you hear a hard word, cry out to Him. He hears. He heals. Amen.