

"Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love You have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast my sins behind Your back!" (Isaiah 38:17)

Last week, in Isaiah 37, we saw how Hezekiah "tore his clothes, covered himself in sackcloth, and entered the temple to seek the Lord" after he heard from his officials the words of Rabshekeh, threatening him and the people near the wall of Jerusalem; asking where their confidence was, and on whom they relied! And if it was their God that they were trusting, it was to no avail, he said, because He was the one who had called them to go up against the land of Judah and destroy it! And, besides, had any of the gods of the other nations been able to deliver them from the hand of the king of Assyria? Don't be deceived by the God in whom you trust (he said in utter blasphemy), who promised to deliver you!

With that, and the letter he was given from the messengers, Hezekiah returned to the house of the Lord and "spread it out" before the Lord--then offering one of the greatest prayers to God in all of Scripture! Focusing on "the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, the Lord God alone, who created the heaven and the earth! Deliver us, O Lord our God (he prayed), that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone are God"!

You remember what happened! How "an angel of the Lord during the night struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians"! And how Sennacherib and those left in the Assyrian army woke up to find all the dead, and returned to their home, never to threaten Jerusalem again! And how Sennacherib himself, some years later, was assassinated by two of his son, while he was worshiping in the temple of his pagan god!

Isaiah 38 records the dramatic events leading up to and, apparently, close to the time of the Assyrian siege! Verse 1 says that "in those day Hezekiah became mortally ill, and Isaiah the prophet came to him and said: 'Thus says the Lord! Set your house in order for you shall die and not live!' (What a time for him, and the "people of God," not only to face the threat from Sennacherib, but also the prospect for him to die on a sickbed, watching the fall destruction and fall of Jerusalem! Talk about "stress!" As Mark Wever did so strikingly in our session last night!)

"Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord... weeping bitterly"--noting, with "great bitterness," how he had "walked before Him in truth, and with a whole heart, and done what is good in His sight"! (This is confirmed by what's written about him in II Kings 18:1-8!)

Verse 4 says that, "Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, saying: 'Go and say to Hezekiah that I have heard your prayer...and seen your tears; behold I will add fifteen years to your life! (And) I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria, and defend this city"! (II Kings 20:6 says, "for My own sake and for My servant David's sake"!)

Wow! (Also confirming that this incident preceded the deliverance described in chapter 37! And of the "double blessing" awaiting!)

How did Hezekiah respond? II Kings 20:8 says he asked for "a sign that the Lord would heal him!" (Indicating, sadly, that it wasn't enough for him to trust in the words of the Lord alone!) But the Lord then gave him a sign that He would "cause the shadow on the stairway of Ahaz (in the palace) which has gone down with the sun, to go back ten steps"! And so it happened! (Constable writes that "the passing away of daylight on the stairway, that Hezekiah could see from his sickbed, suggested the passing away

of his life, while the return of sunlight, and the lengthening of the day, symbolized the restoration of life"! Motyer calls it "a cosmic act of God in demonstration of His sovereign intentions"!)

So Hezekiah had his life restored, for another 15 years (as well as the promise of deliverance from the hand of the king of Assyria)!

And then, in verses 9-20, Hezekiah records some personal, and insightful feelings, and understanding, he had about facing death--and the restoration of life (with which we can all identify)!

Hezekiah first "lamented" (with "great bitterness") about how "in the middle of his life he was to enter the gates of Sheol...be deprived of the rest of his years (he was only 39 years old at the time), and not see the Lord in the land of the living"! He didn't want to die! And he pictured death as "a shepherd's tent being pulled up and removed from him...and as a weaver's life cut off from the loom...like a frail animal being attacked, at night, by a fierce lion... and, during the daytime, like a helpless bird twittering and moaning"! (Motyer writes that "death is the great invader compelling the vanquished to move their fragile home...and cutting us off from the loom we are weaving"! Also noting, with all candor, that "this life has its own peculiar preciousness which not even the illumination of immortality takes away"!)

Motyer further asserts that Hezekiah was "fully aware of his peril...that he would die under divine wrath, with his sins unforgiven, making the end of him"! But he also came to recognize how he was rescued: by prayer (verse 14), the divine response (verse 15) and the disposition of the Lord to save (verse 20)"!

And so, beginning with verse, Hezekiah's lament turns to words of thanksgiving and praise to God who "has kept his soul from the pit of nothingness, by casting his sins behind His back" (verse 17)--and "saving his life" (Verse 20)! Giving him a new appreciation for life, and prayer, and opportunities for service! (Wiersbe notes that there was a "new humility in his walk, a deeper love for the Lord in his heart, and a new song on his lips...with a new determination, and commitment, to praise God all the (rest of the) days of his life... for now those days were very important to him"!)

See the applications for us?

God hears and answers prayer! And He's totally aware of what's happening in our lives and in our world!

Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good!"

Our life is in His hands!

"So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom!" (Psalm 90:12)

Thanks be to our Lord, who has "delivered us from the pit of destruction"!

Praise Him!

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