

Sermon Notes & References

Sennacherib's Threats, God's Deliverance (... on Prayer)
Isaiah 37:8-37

May 9, 2010

A. Scripture reading – Isaiah 37

1. Its context in book of Isaiah

2. 1-5 – Response to the Rabshakeh's threats

3. 6-7 – God's answer through Isaiah

4. 8-10 – God actions begin to show

5. 11-13 – Sennacherib's renewed verbal attacks

6. 14-20 – Hezekiah's prayer

7. 21-25 – God answers Sennacherib's words

8. 26-29 – God answers Hezekiah's concerns

9. 30-35 – God gives a sign and a promise

10. 36-38 – God carries it all out

B. Introduction – Hezekiah a Man of Prayer

- C. Prayer His Immediate Response^A 37:14

- D. His Prayer Recognizes Who God Is 37:16
 1. 'YHWH'^B

 2. 'of hosts'

 3. 'God of Israel'

 4. 'enthroned above the cherubim'^C

 5. 'God alone'^D

 6. 'Creator'^E

- E. Some Elements of Hezekiah's Prayer
 1. 37:17, 20 – God's honour^F

 2. 37:18-19 – Facing the facts

- F. God's Response
 1. 37:21 – in word

 2. 37:36 – in action

- G. My conclusion is that ...

^A 1 Kings 8:38-39, Mark 11:17, Romans 8:26, 34

^B Matthew 18:19

^C Matthew 28:20

^D Daniel 3:29

^E Matthew 28:18

^F Genesis 18:25, Deuteronomy 9:28

✧ Isaiah 37 is the 2nd of 4 chapters forming a transition between the first and second sections of this book

☆ Isaiah 1-35 form a record of Isaiah's public ministry

- they cover the reigns of the kings of Judah: the good Uzziah and Jotham; the unbelieving Ahaz; and the godly and faithful Hezekiah
- he speaks to both king and commoner
 - messages of warning and encouragement
 - messages of promise of the coming Messiah
 - messages of God's coming punishment
 - messages of God's coming deliverance
- but also messages of judgement addressed to the nations of the world; nations both near and far from Jerusalem

☆ at that time, there were two great world powers

- one, Egypt, was finding its power diminishing
- the other, Assyria, was rising rapidly, expanding its influence and control; conquering nations
- when, in the days of Ahaz, the nations to the north allied against Judah, then it was to Assyria that Ahaz turned, rather than to the Lord
- but the helper became an adversary,

demanding tribute from the kings of Judah, which at first they paid, but later rebelled against Assyria

- so Sennacherib, king of Assyria, sent Rabshakeh his army commander, to Jerusalem, to threaten the people there with siege and defeat, scorning them for trusting in Hezekiah and in the LORD
- this takes place in chapter 36 which we looked at last week, and then the three Jewish envoys bring Assyria's message back to king Hezekiah
- Isaiah 37, verse 1, records Hezekiah's response

✧ ¹ [¶] And when King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the Lord. ² Then he sent Eliakim who was over the household with Shebna the scribe and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. ³ They said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah, 'This day is a day of distress, rebuke and rejection; for children have come to birth, and there is no strength to deliver. ⁴ Perhaps the Lord your God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke

the words which the Lord your God has heard. Therefore, offer a prayer for the remnant that is left." ⁵ So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah.

☆ Hezekiah's staff along with the elders of the priests carried out his commands, and went to Isaiah, a man who had been demonstrated to be the prophet of God, from whom they could hear God's word

☆ ⁶ Isaiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to your master, 'Thus says the Lord, "Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. ⁷ Behold, I will put a spirit in him so that he will hear a rumour and return to his own land. And I will make him fall by the sword in his own land.'"

☆ that was God's answer to Hezekiah and the people: very simple; no unneeded detail; God says just this: 'I have heard and I will act!'

☆ let's read on and see what happened next

☆ ⁸ ¹¹ Then Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that the king had left Lachish. ⁹ When he heard them say concerning Tirhakah king of Cush, "He has come out to fight against you," and when he heard it he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, ¹⁰ "Thus you shall say to Hezekiah king of Judah,

☆ God has already begun to work

☆ in Sennacherib's campaign against Egypt a new

factor has entered: Tirhakah, who was from Upper (or the southern part) of Egypt, has entered the war

☆ Sennacherib wants the situation with Jerusalem to be cleaned up so he has no diversions behind him

☆ he sends a further message to Hezekiah to gain his surrender and to subdue this rebel Jerusalem

☆ 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." ¹¹ Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, destroying them completely. So will you be spared? ¹² Did the gods of those nations which my fathers have destroyed deliver them, even Gozan and Haran and Rezeph and the sons of Eden who were in Telassar? ¹³ Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, and of Hena and Ivvah?'"

☆ Sennacherib seeks to impress Hezekiah with all that he and his fathers have done, the nations that they have conquered, the kingdoms that have fallen

☆ what use were the god's of those nations?

☆ what use will the god of Judah be against his forces?

☆ read on to see how Hezekiah responds to this:

☆ ¹⁴ Then Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord.

¹⁵ Hezekiah prayed to the Lord saying, ¹⁶ "O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, who is enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. ¹⁷ Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see; and listen to all the words of Sennacherib, who sent them to reproach the living God. ¹⁸ Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have devastated all the countries and their lands, ¹⁹ and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. So they have destroyed them. ²⁰ Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, Lord, are God."

☆ Hezekiah responds in prayer and we shall look at that prayer more closely in a few moments.

☆ Next we read how God answers prayer this time

☆☆ ²¹ ¶ Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent word to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria, ²² this is the word that the Lord has spoken against him:

☆ here is how Jerusalem will answer Sennacherib:

☆ "She has despised you and mocked you, The virgin daughter of Zion; She has shaken her head behind you, The daughter of Jerusalem! ²³ Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? And against whom have you raised your voice And haughtily lifted up your eyes? Against the Holy

One of Israel!"

- ☆ then God has a direct message to Sennacherib:
- ☆ ²⁴ "Through your servants you have reproached the Lord, And you have said, 'With my many chariots I came up to the heights of the mountains, To the remotest parts of Lebanon; And I cut down its tall cedars and its choice cypresses. And I will go to its highest peak, its thickest forest. ²⁵ I dug wells and drank waters, And with the sole of my feet I dried up All the rivers of Egypt.'
- ☆ God has seen Sennacherib's pride, that no obstacle has stood in the way of his conquests; but, he says:
- ☆ ²⁶ "Have you not heard? Long ago I did it, From ancient times I planned it. Now I have brought it to pass, That you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps. ²⁷ Therefore their inhabitants were short of strength, They were dismayed and put to shame; They were as the vegetation of the field and as the green herb, As grass on the housetops is scorched before it is grown up."
- ☆ yes, says God, you have conquered, but it was all according to my plan; your enemies were defeated because I made as frail as the grass before a Sirocco
- ☆ I have some words for you, Sennacherib, says God:
- ☆ ²⁸ "But I know your sitting down And your going out and your coming in And your raging against

Me. ²⁹ Because of your raging against Me And because your arrogance has come up to My ears, Therefore I will put My hook in your nose And My bridle in your lips, And I will turn you back by the way which you came."

☆ Then God turns to give a sign for encouragement and comfort to Hezekiah and to Jerusalem

☆ ³⁰ Then this shall be the sign for you: you will eat this year what grows of itself, in the second year what springs from the same, and in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ³¹ The surviving remnant of the house of Judah will again take root downward and bear fruit upward. ³² For out of Jerusalem will go forth a remnant and out of Mount Zion survivors. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

☆ the sign God gives to them is very practical: the emphasis is on their eating: though the countryside is devastated by Assyria's passing, food will be provided by the God's power until things return to normal.

☆ Furthermore, concerning this great king of Assyria:

☆ ³³ "Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, 'He will not come to this city or shoot an arrow there; and he will not come before it with a shield, or throw up a siege ramp against it. ³⁴ By the way that he came, by the same he will return, and he will not come to this city,' declares the Lord. ³⁵ 'For I will defend this

city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'"

☆ Sennacherib, says God, is finished attacking you

☆ ³⁶ Then the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead. ³⁷ So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home and lived at Nineveh.

³⁸ It came about as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons killed him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son became king in his place.

☆ and God carried it all out according to His promise.

A. Introduction

1. Niagara falls

- a. most of us here live close enough that we have been to the Falls at least once in our lives; have heard, and felt, the roar of the waters as they tumble to the chasm below; have seen the arm of Lake Erie that is diverted through the huge turbines, before it reaches the frothing gorge.
- b. turning at a tremendous speed, these turbines crank out day and night, week in, week out, tremendous power to be channelled through high voltage lines, hanging from great towers, heading in all directions.
- c. a visitor to a hydro plant once asked the engineer, 'Where do you store the electricity'?
- d. 'We don't store it,' he replied, 'we just make it.'
- e. when you turn on your stove here in Aurora, a demand is created at the plant, prompting greater output.
- f. in the same way, power and grace from God cannot be stored. There is an inexhaustible supply. However, it is doled out as required, in the moment of need. But you have to have to be plugged into the system.—{3}.
- g. that plug is prayer

2. Hezekiah was a man of prayer

- a. when the Rabshakeh's first visit took place, Hezekiah's response was to go to the house of prayer
- b. realizing his own failures, for good measure, he sent to Isaiah, asking that he, too, a man in close relationship with God, would go to prayer for Jerusalem
- c. and now, Sennacherib has sent a further message by his messengers
 - (A) probably delivered in an oral form
 - (B) but also delivered in a letter in the form of a scroll
 - (C) a letter of Satanic thrust, questioning the truthfulness of Yahweh, the God of Israel
 - (D) urging Hezekiah to forsake believing in that God
 - (E) pointing out the well-know facts of the case that the gods of none of the countries had been able to deliver their lands from the conquering hosts of Assyria
- d. Hezekiah response is as before: prayer
- e. let us this morning consider that prayer

- B. Prayer is His Immediate Response 37:14
1. Then Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD.
 - a. there is very little time lost in Hezekiah's response
 - b. he took, he read, he went
 - c. there is no calling together of a cabinet of advisers
 - d. he doesn't even, this time, send a message to Isaiah
 - e. he goes with the letter, to the house of the LORD
 - f. at its dedication, Solomon prayed concerning this house, the temple, saying, "³⁸ whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man *or* by all Your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart, and spreading his hands toward this house; ³⁹ then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, ..." (1 Kings 8:38-39)
 - g. that this would be so was confirmed by God to Solomon, as also by Jesus, who, quoting Isaiah, says in Mark 11:17'... "Is it not written, '**My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations**'? ..." ' (Mark 11:17)
 - h. Hezekiah went to the place of prayer
 2. Hezekiah spread out his problems before the Lord
 - a. unrolling the scroll was not so that God could read it – Hezekiah knew that God already knew what it said
 - b. it was a symbolic act; an act of faith
 - c. it was a way of saying, 'here is what Your enemies and our, Your people's, enemies are saying – and we, we cannot do anything about it ... so we bring it to You'
 - d. have you ever felt that way about a problem you have been facing – you know that it is beyond you – so, as it were, you take it and simply lay it before the Lord – '**Lord, you deal with this; I cannot!**', remembering that
 - (A) "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words;" (Romans 8:26)
 - (B) "who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." (Romans 8:34)

- C. His Prayer Recognizes Who God Is 37:16
1. O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, who is enthroned *above* the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.
 - a. in our adult Bible class this morning we consider this verse to identify the fact about God on which Hezekiah was relying for an answer; facts that assured him that his God, the LORD, would not deceive Hezekiah
 2. the very first word by which Hezekiah address God is the sacred, 4-letter name represented by the letters **YHWH** – once pronounced Jehovah but now thought to be Yahweh
 - a. for many centuries Jews have feared to speak that name; lest they mispronounce it or inadvertently say it vainly and so break the fourth commandment
 - b. but in the OT God’s saints loved to speak this Name of God, for it was by this Name that God revealed Himself to Moses as the Deliverer of His people
 - c. He is the God who delights to answer His people’s prayers
 - d. Jesus said, “... **that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.**” (Matthew 18:19)
 3. He addresses God as **Yahweh Ts^ebaoth** – the LORD of hosts – the God who commands heavenly armies – the God of all might; the Almighty who can answer prayer
 4. He addresses Him as the ‘**God of Israel**’
 - a. because He is the God who possesses Israel
 - b. but, and this is truly marvellous, He is the God that Israel possesses; He is their very own God
 - c. think of the enormity of what is conveyed when, for example, Thomas said concerning Jesus, ‘**my Lord and my God;**’ of our receiving, accepting, Him as our own
 5. next, He is the God who is enthroned above the cherubim
 - a. there is a heavenly aspect to this expression, of God dwelling exalted in heaven above and surrounded by His heavenly messengers, who are servants sent forth to do His bidding

- b. but for Hezekiah, in the temple, another aspect would be impressed on his mind, for there in the temple, beyond his sight in the holy of holies, was the mercy-seat, above which were two cherubim, and where God had said that He would dwell in their midst
- c. the great and exalted God, whom neither earth nor heaven could contain, was there to hear his prayer
- d. about to return to heaven, Jesus said, '[... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.](#)' (Matthew 28:20)

6. Judah's God, our God, is uniquely God – this is emphatic

- a. the next phrase can be expanded without in any way twisting its meaning: '[You are He; not just a but the God; You Yourself, You apart, You only and You alone.](#)'
- b. by these words Hezekiah is abandoning himself, his own and his people's future completely and only unto God
- c. this is the essence of faith in prayer
- d. that is what lay behind the words of Nebuchadnezzar, that pagan king, when he said, "[Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.](#)" (Daniel 3:29)

7. Judah's God is the Creator God – not only is He the God ...

- a. ... who delights to deliver His people
- b. ... who has almighty power to deliver His people
- c. ... who is the special possession of His people
- d. ... who dwells in the midst of His people
- e. ... who alone can deliver His people, but
- f. He is Creator, He has the right to deal with Assyria the enemy, representing the arch-enemy, as He may choose
- g. "[And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'](#)" (Matthew 28:18)

8. it is profitable as we go to prayer, to begin by considering to whom we are addressing our prayers, not only

as a means of giving praise to God, but also to strengthen our faith in God

D. Some Elements of Hezekiah's Prayer

1. God's Reputation – "Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and listen to all the words of Sennacherib, who sent *them* to reproach the living God." (Isaiah 37:17)
 - a. in reading the prayers in the Bible it is instructive to note how often they are based upon this point
 - b. Abraham: 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?'
 - c. Moses, that nations would say that God could not bring them into the land that Had promised (e.g. Deut 9:28)
 - d. this theme is repeated in another form in verse 20, "... deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, LORD, are God."
 - e. God's own honour is the strongest plea we can urge in prayer; it is part of praying in the will of God
 - f. the conclusion we usually add to our prayers is no mere formula: 'in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and for His sake;' rather it is a confession of seeking

2. Hezekiah Faces Facts: Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have devastated all the countries and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire, ... (Isaiah 37:18-19a)
 - a. there is no need to 'pussy-foot' around in prayer to God
 - b. God know the facts, and we should admit them
 - c. we should call sin what it is, sin
 - d. we should confess our own inability and weakness
 - e. but, nevertheless, also recognize theological truth, as in verse 19, '... for they were not gods but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. ...'
 - f. in like fashion, Matthew Arnold, in praying for delivery from failure, identified the true problem ...
From the world's temptations, from tribulations,
From that fierce anguish wherein we languish,
From that torpor deep wherein we lie asleep,
Heavy as death, cold as the grave –
Save, O save!⁻⁽⁴⁾
 - g. ... the problem of our own coldness to God

E. God's Response

1. the Word from Isaiah, verse 21 – Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent [word] to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria, ...' "
 - a. Does prayer matter?
 - (A) Isn't God in charge, sovereign, knowing the end from the beginning, carrying out an eternal plan?
 - (B) yes, that is true
 - (C) but here God's own words
 - (D) 'Because you have prayed to Me ...'
 - b. Prayer, in some way beyond our understanding, changes things – God's people are a praying people
2. the Action of God's Angel
 - a. God's answers not only in words but in deeds
 - b. George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824), was so impressed by the 36th verse of this chapter that he wrote the poem, "The Destruction of Sennacherib"

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

F. Conclusion – God Answers Prayer!

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