

One time my brother Phil, my cousin Bruce and I were all carpooling to work while in bible school. It was a wintery day as we entered the six-lane highway in Minneapolis. All three of us were holding our coffee mugs – long before covered thermal mugs. We were in the middle lane and there was a lady in a blue van to my right, Bruce was driving. Phil was in the back seat. There was a white sedan to our left and it was mildly heavy traffic. Bruce accelerated and the back end decided to lose its grip and spin clockwise. I heard Bruce pray, ‘Oh God.’ We spun around 3 times. I know because I counted the ladies’ surprised face in the blue van go by me. We did not hit any other car and wound up gently nudging into the 4’ high snowbank in the median. We all thanked God for protecting us and then realized that we were facing the right direction and that none of us had spilled a drop of coffee.

There are times in our lives when we just have time for an ‘Oh God’ prayer. However, most of the time we have plenty of time to approach God with thanksgiving and reverence.

Today, the Lord led me to Hezekiah’s story. The author recorded the events in Hezekiah’s life to highlight that he was a good king of Judea, that he was a reformer, and to preserve the history of the Assyrian threat. But what stands out to me is that God answers Hezekiah’s prayer for the nation and for himself.

### **Hezekiah’s Prayers**

God said to Hezekiah, ‘I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will ... (2Ki 20:5 NLT).’ God will hear your prayers and respond to your situation, whether it is big or small.

Let’s jump right in.

#### **1. Background.**



Hezekiah's Prayer

Hezekiah was ‘the most David-like king since David.’<sup>1</sup> ‘He did what was pleasing in the Lord’s sight, just as his ancestor David had done ... <sup>5</sup>Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after his time. <sup>6</sup>He remained faithful to the Lord in everything, and he carefully obeyed all the commands the Lord had given Moses. <sup>7</sup>So the Lord was with him, and Hezekiah was successful in everything he did (2Ki 18:3, 6-7 NLT).’

His Father, Ahaz, had encourage the worship of Canaanite gods.

But Hezekiah was a reformer ...

- Removed the pagan shrines, smashed the scared pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles (v. 4).
- Broke up Moses’ bronze serpent (they started to worship it, v. 4).
- Conquered the Philistines (v. 8).

The majority of today’s message is about a national threat and Hezekiah’s big prayer that will affect millions.

## **2. Assyria’s Threat.**

Like David standing up to Goliath, Hezekiah stands up to Assyria. Initially,<sup>2</sup> he refused to pay tribute.

But then the ten tribes of Israel were taken captive and forced to walk to Assyria because ‘They refused to listen to the Lord their God and obey him. Instead, they violated his covenant—all the laws that Moses the Lord’s servant had commanded them to obey (2Ki 18:12 NLT).’

Israel is down to two tribes – Judah and the half tribe of Manasseh. King Hezekiah believes that resistance if futile and sends word to king Sennacherib: “‘I have done wrong. I will pay whatever tribute money you demand if you will only withdraw.” The king of Assyria then demanded a settlement of more than eleven tons of silver and one ton of gold. <sup>15</sup>To gather this amount, King Hezekiah used all the silver stored in the Temple of the Lord and in the palace treasury. <sup>16</sup>Hezekiah even stripped the gold from the

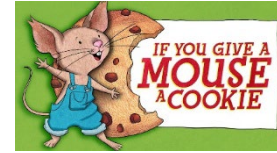
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<sup>1</sup> ‘Is the most David-like king since David, ready to battle the boasting and blaspheming Goliath-bully Sennacherib and to subdue Philistia’, Peter J. Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), p. 254.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Perhaps the knottiest of all chronological problems in the Scripture ... the harmonization of these data remains a thorny problem’, Richard D. Patterson & Hermann J. Austel, ‘1 & 2 Kings’, in Tremper Longman III, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary 3, 1 Samuel – 2 Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), p. 903.

doors of the Lord's Temple and from the doorposts he had overlaid with gold, and he gave it all to the Assyrian king (2Ki 18:14-16 NLT).'

But *If You Give A Mouse A Cookie* he will want more. King Sennacherib comes back for more. He lays siege to Jerusalem and calls for negotiations at an aqueduct.



Most of the chapter is the dialog between Hezekiah's representatives and an Assyrian official.<sup>3</sup> Two long speeches 'alternate between promises of blessings from the Assyrian king and warning that Judah should not trust Yahweh or Hezekiah.'<sup>4</sup>

I want to take a quick look at one segment of a speech because it highlights how Satan twists things.

The Assyrian negotiator speaks Hebrew and knows Israel's religion enough to twist it for his purpose. The Assyrian's lies ...

- He starts with a truth – politics in this case: 'What are you trusting in that makes you so confident? <sup>20</sup> Do you think that mere words can substitute for military skill and strength? Who are you counting on, that you have rebelled against me (2Ki 18:19-20 NLT)?' This is true, Egypt was unreliable.
- Then he moves onto Israel's God: 'But perhaps you will say to me, "We are trusting in the Lord our God!" But isn't he the one who was insulted by Hezekiah? Didn't Hezekiah tear down his shrines and altars and make everyone in Judah and Jerusalem worship only at the altar here in Jerusalem (2Ki 18:22 NLT)?' He equates Israel's God with the false gods and idols of the Canaanites that Hezekiah tore down.
- Then he goes even further by equating Assyria's god with Jehovah: 'What's more, do you think we have invaded your land without the Lord's direction? The Lord himself told us, "Attack this land and destroy it (2Ki 18:25 NLT)!"' All gods are the same?
- He then encourages them to surrender and 'I will arrange to take you to another land like this one—a land of grain and new wine, bread and vineyards, olive groves and honey. Choose life instead of death (2Ki 18:32 NLT)!' The gods of other nations have not been able to save them, 'So what makes you think that the Lord can rescue Jerusalem from me (2Ki 18:35 NLT)?'

Satan speaks your language and is good at twisting words or stating half-truths. When you are tempted, do what Hezekiah recommended to Judea - do not listen or respond.

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<sup>3</sup> Officially known as 'the Rabshakeh', Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 255.

<sup>4</sup> Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 255.

Instead of pillaging the Temple for more gold, Hezekiah prays in the Temple.

### 3. Prayer for the Nation.

‘When King Hezekiah heard their report, he tore his clothes and put on burlap and went into the Temple of the Lord (2Ki 19:1 NLT).’

- He puts on burlap - God hears the cry of the humble. Humble yourself, turn from evil ‘then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land (2Chr 7:14 NIV).’
- Hezekiah dispatches messengers to the prophet Isaiah; he desires a word from God. He calls for help. Many times, we are too proud or private to ask God or others for help.
- ‘He now uses the Temple the way it is designed to be used – as a house of prayer.’<sup>5</sup>

‘And Hezekiah prayed this prayer before the Lord: “O Lord, God of Israel, you are enthroned between the mighty cherubim! You alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You alone created the heavens and the earth. <sup>16</sup>Bend down, O Lord, and listen! Open your eyes, O Lord, and see! Listen to Sennacherib’s words of defiance against the living God. <sup>17</sup>“It is true, Lord, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these nations. <sup>18</sup>And they have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire and burned them. But of course the Assyrians could destroy them! They were not gods at all—only idols of wood and stone shaped by human hands. <sup>19</sup>Now, O Lord our God, rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O Lord, are God (2Ki 19:15-19 NLT).”’

- The Assyrian messenger lumped all the gods together, but Hezekiah’s God is different: ‘You alone are God (v. 15) ... you alone, O Lord, are God (v. 19).’ ‘Yahweh is unlike all the other gods, the only real God, the only God with power, the one who governs all nations, to whom all nations must submit.’<sup>6</sup> He only has two petitions ...
- First petition – bend down, listen, open, listen (v. 16) – this is a real and interactive God.
- Second petition – rescue us (v. 19). So simple. God, you have skin in the game, too. This will show your authority over all other kingdoms.

Isaiah sends word back to Hezekiah: ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer about King Sennacherib of Assyria (2Ki 19:20 NLT).’

Hezekiah took Sennacherib’s letter and spread it out before God.

- He knew that God’s love was unchanging – ‘his compassions never fail. <sup>23</sup> They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness (Lam 3:22-23 NIV).’

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<sup>5</sup> Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 258.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), p. 507.

- He knew God's plan was unchanging – 'For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future (Jer 29:11 NIV).'
- Perhaps you may need to spread out a legal document before God. I have a dear friend who refused to sign divorce papers. He carried them around in his Bible and prayed for restoration at every opportunity he could.

Isaiah sends a second word back to Hezekiah: 'Because of your raging against me (Assyria) and your arrogance, which I have heard for myself, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth. I will make you return by the same road on which you came (2Ki 19:28 NLT).'

- Amazing. One moment Hezekiah is frightened, but Isaiah's prophecy bring courage.
- It reminds Hezekiah that 'Assyria's power is completely dependent on Yahweh's'<sup>7</sup> plans and will.
- Hezekiah encouraged his people. I want you to imagine that these words are for you and your situation: 'Be strong and courageous! Don't be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria or his mighty army, for there is a power far greater on our side!<sup>8</sup> He may have a great army, but they are merely men. We have the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles for us (2Ch 32:7-8 NLT)!'

God answered Hezekiah's prayer: 'That night the angel of the Lord went out to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. When the surviving Assyrians woke up the next morning, they found corpses everywhere. <sup>36</sup>Then King Sennacherib of Assyria broke camp and returned to his own land. He went home to his capital of Nineveh and stayed there (2Ki 19:35-36 NLT).'

Wow. God did it.

God will hear your prayers and respond to your situation, whether it is big or small.

Most of us are not in the position of king or business owner and face Goliath-sized threats, most of our needs are for our family or ourselves. Hezekiah's life is an example of prayer for the little things as well.

#### **4. Prayer for Himself.**

'About that time Hezekiah became deathly ill, and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to visit him. He gave the king this message: "This is what the Lord says: Set your affairs in order, for you are going to die. You will not recover from this illness (2Ki 20:1 NLT)."'

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<sup>7</sup> Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 259.

Hezekiah knows this is serious.

'When Hezekiah heard this, he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, <sup>3</sup>"Remember, O Lord, how I have always been faithful to you and have served you single-mindedly, always doing what pleases you." Then he broke down and wept bitterly. <sup>4</sup>But before Isaiah had left the middle courtyard, this message came to him from the Lord: <sup>5</sup>"Go back to Hezekiah, the leader of my people. Tell him, "This is what the Lord, the God of your ancestor David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will heal you, and three days from now you will get out of bed and go to the Temple of the Lord. <sup>6</sup>I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will rescue you and this city from the king of Assyria (2Ki 20:2-6 NLT).'

Wow. 'I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will ... (2Ki 20:5 NLT).'

But God uses medical science as well: 'Then Isaiah said, "Make an ointment from figs." So Hezekiah's servants spread the ointment over the boil, and Hezekiah recovered (2Ki 20:7 NLT)!'

God granted him 15 more years and gave him a sign: the shadows on the steps moved backwards ten steps.

Today's message is simple: God still answers prayers, big prayers and little prayers.

## **5. Hezekiah's Secret.**

Here is the secret to Hezekiah's success: 'In all that he did in the service of the Temple of God and in his efforts to follow God's laws and commands, Hezekiah sought his God wholeheartedly. As a result, he was very successful (2Ch 31:21 NLT).'

- Purified the Temple (2Ch 29).
- Restored worship and sacrifice to the Temple (2Ch 29).
- Returned to celebrating the Passover (2Ch 30).
- Restored financial support for the Levites (2Ch 31).
- His prayers delivered Judah from the Assyrian threat.

He was not perfect, but his heart stands in contrast to many generations of kings who did evil and followed in the way of their father.

You can break the cycle of sin in your family legacy – seek God wholeheartedly. You can be a reformer.

## **Conclusion.**

When we lived on Mansion House Lane in Southbury, a big hot air balloon landed on our little Nissan. He got caught in the trees above the car and had few choices – after all how do you steer a balloon? Hot-air balloons cannot turn. Sometimes we feel like our personal situation is out of control, we are just blown along by circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

When a change is called for, the only thing a balloonist can do is change altitude. At a higher or lower altitude, a balloonist can usually find a crosswind blowing in a different direction. In our case, he went up a hundred feet or so and managed to land quite nicely in our neighbor's yard.

In the same way, when you feel you are being blown along by life's circumstances. You should lift your hands and lift up praise and prayers to God, like hot air filling that balloon. Let the warm breath of your prayers fill heaven and earth and lift you up.

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<sup>8</sup> Bertrand Piccard, a man who has tried sailing a balloon around the world says, "In the balloon you are prisoners of the wind, and you go only in the direction of the wind. In life people think they are prisoners of circumstance. But in the balloon, as in life, you can change altitude, and when you change altitude, you change direction (Adapted from Larson, 30)."