

YOUR LAST YEAR ON EARTH

TEXT: ISAIAH 38:1-22

INTRODUCTION:

1. In Isaiah 38, we read that King Hezekiah, the king of Judah, was “sick unto death” (38:1). He was having trouble with a “boil” (38:21) that was about to kill him.
2. The prophet Isaiah told him to set his house in order, for he was about to die (Isa. 38:1). This is a very interesting story, and it is mentioned three times in the Bible – here in Isaiah 38, and in II Kings 20, and briefly in II Chronicles 32.
3. What would you do if you were told, "Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live"?

I. ARE YOU PREPARED TO DIE? (ISA. 38:1).

1. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, “To be familiar with the grave is prudence. To prepare for death, it is well to commune with death. A thoughtful walk in the cemetery is good for our soul’s health.”
2. Isaiah the prophet came unto King Hezekiah and said: “Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live” (38:1).
3. Every day we are reminded of death. This past Thursday night a crazy woman shoved an innocent stranger in front of a subway train.
4. The man has been identified as a 46-year-old hardworking business owner from Calcutta, India. He was pushed into the path of an oncoming 7-train. This is the second time this month an innocent person was killed that way.
5. Every day we are reminded of the brevity of life. The Psalmist wrote, “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10).
6. And then, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).
7. James 4:14 says, “For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”
8. The sentence of death was delivered to King Hezekiah by the prophet Isaiah. How do you think King Hezekiah felt? He was only 39 years old at the time.
9. He was in the prime of life, and he had no heir to succeed him to the throne.

10. The sentence of death was delivered to Hezekiah and the sentence of death rests upon each one of us. David said in I Samuel 20:3, "There is but a step between me and death."
11. The Bible says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27).
12. Most people do not understand what the Bible has to say about any of this. A sinner dies and everyone smiles and says, "Rest in Peace!" But how can they possibly rest in peace if they are in hell? (cf. Luke 16:19-31).
13. That rich man certainly wasn't "resting in peace"!
14. In fact, Revelation 14:11 says those in hell "have no rest day nor night."
15. It is recorded seven times that the Lord Jesus Christ said hell was a furnace of fire where there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. How can they possibly "rest in peace"?
16. Let me ask you: How would you react if you were told, "Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live"?
17. If you were told, "Thus saith the LORD" (not, "Thus saith the doctor," for doctors can be wrong.) But God is never wrong.
18. How would you react if God told you your time was up? Very few people know the time they are scheduled to leave this world.
19. I heard a man say if that if only he knew the place where he was going to die, he would be careful to avoid going there.
20. But God does not tell us where we will die, and we seldom know when we will die.
21. There are a few inmates on death row who know the time, but even that is not always certain (because of the courts, lawyers, etc.).
22. Unsaved friend, consider this: right now you are on God's death row. In fact, you are in worse shape than some of the convicts on death row. Because some of the convicts on death row have repented of their sin and have trusted Christ, and have made peace with God, but if you are not saved you are not ready to meet God.
23. Amos 4:12 says, "Prepare to meet thy God." Are you prepared to meet God? Years ago I saw a card that said: "You may tie your shoes in the morning, but the undertaker may untie them at night. Prepare to meet God!"
24. In Luke 12, our Lord told the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21). The fool was very happy with his great wealth. But the Lord said to him, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:20). He was checking out that night!

25. So the first thing we are struck with here in Isaiah 38 is the cold, hard reality of death.

26. *Oh, what is this I cannot see,
With icy hands taking hold of me?
Oh, I am death, none can excel;
I open the doors of Heaven and Hell.*

*Oh death, Oh death, how can it be;
That I must come and go with thee?
Oh death, Oh death, how can it be;
I'm unprepared for eternity?*

*Yes, I have come to get your soul,
To leave your body and leave it cold,
To drop the flesh off from your frame;
The earth and worms both have their claim.*

27. King Hezekiah was a poet, and in verses 10-13 he describes poetically what happens to the soul the moment it leaves the body (Isaiah 38:10-13).

28. Hezekiah was a great poet and musician (cf. 38:20), as well as a great king, and statesman, and reformer, and soldier, and engineer, and the leader of a great heaven-sent revival.

29. In his poem, King Hezekiah vividly described death. Something happens the moment a man dies. If he is saved, his soul goes to heaven. But if he is lost, his soul goes straight to hell.

30. Many years ago, a young lawyer asked the great evangelist Peter Cartwright if he believed in hell. He asked him if he believed it was a place of eternal torment.

31. Peter Cartwright answered, "Yes, I do."

32. The young lawyer then said, "Well, I thank God I have too much good sense to believe any such thing."

33. General Andrew Jackson stood close by and heard the conversation. He spoke up and said, "Well, sir, I thank God that there is such a place of torment as hell."

34. The young lawyer said, "Why, General Jackson, what do you want with such a place of torment as hell?"

35. Andrew Jackson said, "To put such wicked rascals as you are in, that oppose and vilify the Christian religion."

II. DON'T WAIT TO START PRAYING (ISA. 38:2, 3, 14b).

1. "Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD" (38:2).
2. We can say this about King Hezekiah: he was a praying man. He knew how to pray. Hezekiah prayed and God answered his prayer (38:4-6; 37:14-20).
3. But many people only pray when trouble comes -- especially sickness and death. There's an old song...
4. *How long has it been since you talked with the Lord? And told Him your heart's hidden secrets. How long since you prayed? How long since you stayed on your knees till the light shone through?*
5. Maybe as we are heading into a new year some of you can make up your mind you are going to get serious about praying.
6. The Bible tells us God answers prayer (Luke 18:1-8; 11:1-13).
7. God heard King Hezekiah's prayer, and God answered King Hezekiah's prayer. And He will answer yours too if you mean business. James 4:2 says, "Ye have not, because ye ask not."
8. Matthew 21:22 says, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."
9. King Hezekiah believed God answers prayer. He was a godly man, and he wanted to live because he wanted to continue serving God. His was not a selfish prayer.
10. Furthermore, King Hezekiah was burdened for the safety of Judah. He had no heir and the kingdom was threatened by the Assyrians.
11. The LORD identified Himself to King Hezekiah as "the God of David, thy father" (38:5). This refers to the sacred, unconditional covenant that the Lord made with King David.
12. Second Samuel 7:16 says, "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever."
13. But if King Hezekiah was to die without an heir, the Davidic dynasty would come to an end, God's covenant with David would be abrogated, and the Messianic line would be cut off.
14. But God always keeps His promises, and God kept His promise to King David. We know from Matthew 1:10 that our Lord was descended from King Hezekiah through his son Manasseh.
15. But Manasseh had not been born yet. So Hezekiah had to live a little longer. God gave him fifteen years (Isa. 38:5).
16. Hezekiah was given a sign to confirm his answered prayer (cf. II Kings 20:8-11).

17. The LORD offered him a choice as to whether the shadow on his sundial would miraculously go backward or forward. King Hezekiah asked that it go backward. This was a greater miracle (Isa. 38:7, 8).
18. The sundial is referred to as “the sun dial of Ahaz” (38:8), perhaps because King Ahaz (Hezekiah’s father) brought it back from a trip to Damascus.
19. Second Chronicles 32:31 refers to this miracle as “the wonder that was done in the land,” suggesting that the miracle was a local miracle not seen in Babylon or the other surrounding countries.
20. King Hezekiah was a godly man and so God answered his prayer – which brings us to my final point.

III. MAKE SURE YOU ARE GOING TO HEAVEN

1. First John 5:13 says, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." Do you know that you have eternal life?
2. King Hezekiah knew. He was a saved man. He knew his sins were forgiven and he was going to heaven (Isa. 38:17).
3. A preacher said to a sinner, "The time to get right with God is the day before you die." The man replied, "But I may die today."
4. "Yes, that's right," said the preacher, "Therefore the time to get right with God is today."
5. Hezekiah's mortal sickness dramatically connects sin with sickness and death (cf. 33:24).
6. Matthew 8:16 and 17 says, "When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."
7. Start in the book of Genesis and you can trace it all through the Bible – sin brought sickness and death into this world.
8. Every time an ambulance races by; every funeral procession that moves down the street; every news report we hear about a famous person sick or dying -- we are reminded of what Romans 5:12 says, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”
9. Every time you walk by a hospital or a cemetery, remember sin brought sickness and death into this world.
10. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” “The wages of sin is death.”

11. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).
12. It was the love of God that delivered Hezekiah’s soul “from the pit of corruption” (Isa. 38:17). This love was demonstrated at the cross (John 3:16).
13. “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).
14. King Hezekiah looked forward to the cross, as we look back to the cross as the basis for our redemption (cf. Isa. 53:3-6).
15. King Hezekiah rejoiced that the LORD had cast all his sins behind His back (Isa. 38:17).
16. Thank God, the Bible tells us that God “in love” forgives our sins, and pardons our sins, and cleanses us from the very stain of sin.
17. Micah 7:19 says, God casts all our sins into the depths of the sea.
18. Psalm 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.”
19. Hebrews 10:17 says, “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”
20. King Hezekiah did not have the New Testament. King Hezekiah lived 700 years before the cross. But King Hezekiah understood this much – that when God saves us from sin, He literally goes down “in love” to the very pit of corruption and He delivers our soul, and cleanses our soul, and purifies it.
21. And then He takes all our wicked sins and puts them in a place where no one can ever see them – “for Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back” (Isa. 38:17b).

CONCLUSION:

1. We have been considering the message given to King Hezekiah: "Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live" (Isaiah 38:1).
2. In I Samuel 28:19, the prophet Samuel came back to earth and warned King Saul, "Tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me." King Saul had only 24 hours left to live.
3. In Jeremiah 28, the prophet Jeremiah delivered a message to a man named Hananiah -- "This year thou shalt die" (Jeremiah 28:16). Hananiah died three months later.
4. But I will conclude with the last recorded words of the apostle Paul (II Tim. 4:6-8). Paul was "ready." Are you ready?