

Be Careful What You Pray For

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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As we come to 2 Kings 19, I want to remind you kind of the very important time period we are in history in this section of the Bible. As I shared this morning, as we're walking through this section of the Old Testament, it is filled with names that we can't pronounce, places that we've never been to, and oftentimes I'll just be honest on behalf of all of us, it's confusing. We've got all these kings in the north, kings in the south, we've got these guys that are some type of coalition in cooperation with other folks, and Syria, and all these other groups that are coming into the mix. It is hard at times to keep up with what is happening but allow me to kind of bring that real simply to let you know how critical this passage in 2 Kings is, beginning with chapter 17 from this morning through chapter 21 tonight.

There are two dates in the Old Testament that I think are strategic for a grasp and understanding of Old Testament studies: 722 BC and 586 BC. Why are those so important? Because the northern kingdom, what we know as Israel, went into captivity in 722. The southern kingdom went into captivity in 586. Now the northern kingdom was captured by the Assyrians, the southern kingdom by the Babylonians who had replaced the Assyrians as the world power of the day. In both occasions, hundreds of years and dozens of prophets and preachers and priests had been used by the Lord to warn the Israelites of their incoming or the forthcoming destruction. Now Judah was the smaller of the group and on the southern side. They are really without excuse. Not only did they have the same prophets that the northern kingdom had, they had the example of Israel in the north, in other words, it's much like being a younger sibling in a family, if you learn the lessons from your older siblings, it's not near as painful in your own life. But nonetheless, they continued to reject and about 150 years later they found themselves in the same position for 70 years they would be in Babylon.

Now this morning, we talked about the king Hosea who was the king of the north when they rebelled for the final time and the Assyrians would come in. Today we're going to speak about Hezekiah. Hezekiah, if you were to take all the kings of Israel and I know this morning we talked about you can't really grade one compared to another, but if you were to do so, he's one of the good guys. He's one of the ones who took down a lot of the idol worship. He's one of the guys who brought in some faithfulness to the things of the Lord. But he is going to have a very tragic lapse of judgment toward the end of his life.

He's actually going to invite the Babylonians into the palace. He's going to allow them to see what is happening and it eventually becomes the spy mission by which they eventually come back later and destroy the southern kingdom of Judah. So what you and I know as the fall of the northern kingdom and the fall of the southern kingdom, the two principal characters that were involved in that are dealt with in 2 Kings 17 through 2 Kings 19.

Again, here's this passage with names and places that are difficult to understand but events that are absolutely key into understanding the total picture of the Old Testament because not only was the captivity the result of their sin and rebellion, but remember it is a prophetic picture of what you and I know as the Second Coming, of the days when the Lord returns, he uses imagery from this captivity, he uses imagery from this rebellion in this time period to picture what you and I need to, number 1, be looking for, and obviously, number 2, to be avoiding. But in 2 Kings 19, we're gonna begin tonight in verse 14. Hezekiah, as I mentioned, if you'll allow me to use it on a grading scale, he's one of the good guys. He's the king of Judah and he is about to offer a prayer to the Lord in light of the fact that there are those on the outside who are wanting to destroy them, and I want you to hear his prayer and we're gonna look at it as an example of a model prayer, then we're gonna go into chapter 20 and look at a second prayer that he offers and we're gonna see it as an example of a misguided prayer, and hopefully tonight what that will show us is how our future can be miscalculated if we are misguided rather than modelish in our prayer.

Beginning in verse 14 it says,

14 And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. 15 And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth. 16 LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. 17 Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, 18 And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. 19 Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only.

Now this prayer even though it's very short in context, it is a model prayer for us. It gives us an example of what does it look like to pray, shall I say, appropriately.

Now I want to begin with the attitude that Hezekiah has. You notice it's an attitude of great humility. He comes before the Lord, he's humble, he comes before the Lord and you almost get the image when he spreads the letters out that he is prostrate on the floor;

that he is in a very what we might call compromised position from a physical strength position, and his attitude is such of, "Lord, your name is at stake." It's very reminiscent of the book of Acts 4. The very first wave of persecution that the early apostles were experiencing after what we know as Pentecost, they come out of this first imprisonment and they literally pray to the Lord, "God, your name is at stake." I want you to notice that his attitude wasn't on what was best for him but what would honor the Lord. It's not necessarily for his own physical protection, though that would be a byproduct of it, but when you look at the very end, he said, "Save us out of his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you are the LORD." His desire to be saved wasn't just so he could live an extra amount of time, that'll come up in just a moment; his desire to be saved wasn't just so he could have the comforts of life versus the opposite; he was more concerned with the reputation of the Lord than he was his own life. That, my friends, is the attitude of a model prayer.

Now I can look back in my own life. When I was in fourth grade. Some of you have heard this illustration, just work with me because it's true. When I was in fourth grade, I remember being in Sunday school one day and someone coming in and teaching us something about prayer that has stuck ever since. Now if I can remember almost 40 years later, it must be good, right? It was a little acronym, many of you are familiar with it, that when you pray employ the ACTS methodology, a-c-t-s. It stands for adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. In other words, the very first thing that we do in our prayer life is to honor the Lord, recognize him for who he is, his greatness and such. The last thing we do is ask him for something. Can I ask you rhetorically how many times do we have that model backwards? How many times do we come running into our proverbial prayer closet saying, "God, I need this. I need this. I need this. Oh, by the way, you're a really good God." How many times do we beg and we plead for the "saving" before we've ever spent any time with the acknowledging or the adoration?

Notice that when you look at this prayer, the first half of the prayer is all about how good God is, how great he has been, his excellency and how he has been seen, and how he dwells between the cherubim. You know, one of the exercises that I have tried to do when it comes to adoration because I will be transparent with you, this is the hardest part of prayer for me, it really is. It's not hard to confess if you're honest with yourself. It's not hard to be thankful to God if you'll just look around at what the Lord has allowed you to have, and it's not hard to ask for stuff, is it? But to honor the Lord and to acknowledge him, one of the things that I've tried to do is just walk through the alphabet. What is something about the Lord that I can honor that begins with A, with B, with C, with D? Now I'm gonna warn you, when you get to Q and X, it gets a little rough and a little narrow, but nonetheless when you walk through it's nothing biblical about that, it just kind of helps me acknowledge him for a myriad of his attributes because I'm one of those, I'll get stuck saying, "You're this, this, and that," and I'll say the same things every time, but it kind of forces me to dwell and to think. One of the other methods that I use is I'll just walk through the Bible. In Genesis I see you as Creator. In Exodus I see you as Deliverer. In Leviticus I see you as one who has my best interest at hand even though I don't realize it. And I'll walk through the books of the Bible.

Again, though, we see Hezekiah with this attitude of understanding that the Lord must be adored and you don't see a specific confession of thanksgiving here but you notice that in verse 17, 18, he talks about the sins of those and those false idols that had been reckoned with. There's an underlying understanding of what is appropriate with the Lord and what is not.

Then, of course, finally he says, "Save us that the kingdoms of the earth may know that you are the LORD God." His model prayer was that it was all about the Lord's name and his reputation and not about his own physical preservation. I promise that's gonna come back later in his life.

So how does the Lord answer his prayer? Will the Lord answer his prayers differently than you would answer them? That's why we speak to him and not each other. You know, the Lord says in Isaiah 55 his ways are not our ways, his thoughts are not our thoughts. I want you to notice what happens in verse 20. It says,

20 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard... 25 Hast thou not heard long ago how I have done it, and of ancient times that I have formed it? now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities into ruinous heaps.

So here's what we've got. When we have the answer to his prayer, the first thing is God says, "I've heard it and I've got it." Do you notice that as you read, there's no time frame that's specifically given. That's that yes, no and wait part. Secondly he says, "I will destroy their fenced cities. They will be in ruins when I am done." It doesn't give the exact details there of how he will do that, the fact is that he will.

You know, oftentimes when it comes to prayer, we struggle not with what God says he'll do but how he does it so I want you to go to verse 35. This is kind of the key of, shall we say, the answer.

35 And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000 men: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.

Yeah, Hezekiah didn't see that one coming. I mean, can you imagine that the Lord promises you he will answer your prayer, he promises you that the fenced cities will be torn down and then you wake up one morning and there's 185,000 corpses. Now by the way, here's an interesting study we don't have time for: that's one angel of the Lord, in one night, with one sword, 185,000 people. What could a whole legion of them do as Jesus spoke of the night before his crucifixion? Angels are not the soft, little, fluffy guys that we often picture them as. But it wasn't answered how Hezekiah had expected and oftentimes it is with the Lord. I know my wife and I have had many conversations when we've prayed for things for a time period and when the answer finally comes, the result is

what we had hoped but we oftentimes say that's not how we thought it would look. Why? Because there's a God and you're not him. There's a God, I'm not him.

So I think what's key about the model prayer is when your attitude is right, that it's not about what you want but about the Lord's name and his reputation being preserved, then he answers it without our refuting how he answers it. At no point does Hezekiah say, "You know, I don't really like how you're answering my prayer." That's gonna come back in just a moment in another prayer. You're gonna see that the second prayer we have of him is very different than this one.

So what's the aftermath? What were the results? What were the consequences of this prayer in the answering of the Lord? I want you to go back to verse 16 of chapter 19. He says, "LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God." Now fast forward to verse 36, chapter 19,

36 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. 37 And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.

Again, Hezekiah didn't see that one coming. You know, what's interesting about verses 36 and 37 is the Lord actually took it a step further than he even desired. Now he was upset about this leader and he was bothered about how he was acting, but his simple prayer was, "God, defend your name. God, come to the defense of your reputation." He didn't say, "I want this guy taken out. I want 185,000 taken out." He didn't give him the how-to, he just said, "God, your name and your reputation is at stake." The proper attitude, a very unique answer and the aftermath was actually more than what he'd even requested of God in the first place.

Now I wish the story of Hezekiah ended there in chapter 19 but it unfortunately does not, so as we walk into chapter 20, we discover that Hezekiah falls sick. There is a physical ailment, there is an illness that comes into his life that he is convinced that his life is soon to end. I'm gonna read the entirety of this conversation that he has with the Lord beginning in verse 1 of chapter 20. It says,

1 In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. 2 Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, 3 I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. 4 And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 5 Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD,

the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD. 6 And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. 7 And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered. 8 And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the LORD the third day? 9 And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? 10 And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. 11 And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.

Just a very simple reading, we notice there's a whole different attitude here, is there not? He is not declaring the goodness of the Lord. He's not saying, "O God, your name is at stake." What does he say? It says in verse 3, "Remember me. I'm the good one. Come on, God, you need me. If you lose me, who are you gonna have?" It almost sounds like Elijah in 1 Kings when he says, "God, if I'm taken out, who else will stand for you," and God says, "I've got 7,000 other folks who have not bent the knee to Baal." It's a completely different attitude, so much so that even when he hears that he will be healed, he questions, he doubts, he even wants to argue and he says, "Give me a sign." In other words, he wants to see something supernatural, "God, I don't trust you anymore. I don't believe you anymore. I know that you took out Sennacherib with 185,000 men dead at the hand of one angel, I know that his own sons killed him, I never saw that coming, but that was them, this is me. This is my flesh that is rotting. This is my life that is hurting and I don't trust you and so I need a sign."

Verse 8 and 11, what does he say? Isaiah says, "Well, here's the deal, the shadow can go either back or forward 10 degrees." Now we're talking a sun dial here. We're talking about time and I don't want to get into all of the science and the physics of what that could potentially mean, but the last I checked if the Lord started it, he can change it, he can fix it, he can add to it, it's his. And he says, "Do you want it to go forward or backwards 10?" You know what he says? "Ah, going forward is easy. How about we bring it back?" And when's the last time anybody went forward 10 degrees? No, no, never. You know, we sing songs and we hear things and we have movies about turning back time, that's exactly what happens in this story.

So what is his attitude? It's an attitude of selfishness, it's an attitude of desiring nothing but his own skin to be saved. Nowhere in this prayer does he say, "God, your name's at stake." Nowhere in this prayer does he say, "Alright, God, they're not gonna believe in you unless you answer." It's all about him.

So what about the answer? What does the Lord say? Well, if we go down to verse 5 and 6, he says, "Okay, I've seen your tears and you'll be healed. Three days from now you'll be well and I've added 15 years to your life." Now on the surface that sounds incredible, does it not? But would it surprise you if I told you that those 15 years at the end of Hezekiah's life were some of the worst years Judah ever had in their existence?

You know, we go back up to verse 1 and 2 and the prophet of God said, "It's time. It's time to die." And he said, "Nope. I would rather be here than with the Lord. I would rather experience the limitations of this life than the limitlessness of the next." So he cried out to God and God said, "Okay, three days you'll be healed, 15 years before you hit the grave." You know, sometimes we need to be careful what we pray for not because there's anything that's not beyond the Lord's capacity but I think it's more about our attitude than it is his answer. There is nothing in the second prayer that is honoring to the Lord. There is nothing in this prayer that is humble of spirit.

So what's the aftermath? What happens because of this? Go to verse 12 of 2 Kings 20 and there is a list of a whole bunch of names that I'm not even gonna try to pronounce in verse 12 but in 13....oh please, tell me you do the same thing when you're reading. You say, "I can't pronounce it, I just believe it." It says verse 13,

13 And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them [this is all the people from Babylon] all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not. 14 Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon. 15 And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. 16 And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD. 17 Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. 18 And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. [I want you to listen to verse 19.] 19 Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?

Isaiah just said, "Because of your sin, you're not even gonna have grandkids." He said, "That's okay. The next 15 years are gonna be fine. There's nothing to worry about." How many times are we experiencing the same thing in our life, we sacrifice future generations for the next 10-15 years? We say it doesn't matter what happens after I'm gone as long as it's okay while I'm here.

It says in verse 20 and 21,

20 And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 21 And Hezekiah slept with his fathers: and Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

There may not be a sadder passage in 2 Kings than that last statement in verse 21. You see, in chapter 19 we have a model prayer, we have a proper perspective, we have a humble heart saying, "God, I just want you to be honored." When you get to chapter 20, we have a very misguided prayer. We have a man who doesn't care about the name of the Lord, the reputation of the Lord, all he wants is to live a little bit longer and he doesn't care who it hurts, who it impacts, who it affects, as long as his life goes the way he had hoped and desired it would. He questions even the ability of God to answer. He demands of him a sign, and ultimately his selfishness turns into narcissism where he asked the future enemy to come in and see the route by which he will take all of the goods of the Lord's house.

Notice what the Lord said, that all of your forefathers, everything that they've done, all that they've built, by the way that's about 400 years worth of time, about the same amount of time that they were in captivity during the exodus experience in Egypt but much the opposite, all the blessings, all the benefits, all the accomplishments, all the victories will be laid waste because rather than the Lord's name, you wanted your own name to be preserved. Hm, it's a much misguided prayer. At the end of verse 21 it says Manasseh his son reigned in his stead. What I want to address in conclusion tonight is his misguided prayer led to a very miscalculated future. He said, "As long as it's good in my day, I don't care what happens to my kids, I don't care what happens to my grandkids, I don't care what happens to anybody else as long as my life is comfortable for 15 years." What was his attitude? Arrogance and narcissism. It became all about him.

Now I want to push pause for just a moment. You do realize back in chapter 19 things were going well, right? Back in chapter 19, he was a true servant of the Lord. Back in chapter 19, everything was going the right way. He's humble before God. Why is that important? Because I think it's easy to look at Hezekiah and say, "Well, that would never happen in my life." Well, if it happened in his, it easily can happen in ours. It was an attitude of arrogance and narcissism and everything revolves around me.

What was God's answer? What ended up taking place? Captivity. In fact, back in verse 17 of chapter 20 he said, "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD." You know, Hezekiah could have never imagined back in chapter 19 how God would have answered his humble prayer. He could have never imagined an angel of the Lord taking out 185,000 men in one night. He could have never imagined his arch-enemy being taken out by his own kids. He could have never imagined on the opposite of how bad this was going to be when the Babylonians eventually came in. All of that history, all of the blessings, everything that had been built

for 400 years came crumbling down because one man showed another group all that the Lord had blessed in a time period that if we are to be honest with ourselves, he should have already been deceased. His prayer for 15 years wasn't so that God would receive more honor. His prayer for 15 years wasn't because so he could tell more people about the one true God. His prayer for 15 years we read at the end of chapter 20, he wanted to build pools, he wanted to build his estate, he wanted to build on his legacy. He wanted everybody to know what Hezekiah had done.

The aftermath. Manasseh, his own child in verse 21 reigns in his stead. I want you to go to chapter 21, verse 1 and I want you just to think about math for a moment. Hezekiah begged God to live 15 years before he would die. In verse 1 it says, "Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign." Manasseh is absolutely one of the most despicable kings in the history of Judah's history. He was 12 years old when he began to reign, and if I do my math right, that means that Manasseh was actually conceived and born after his prayer in chapter 20. It's not as if Manasseh was this misguided soul for 15 years. No, Manasseh if we want to look at it just from a mathematical perspective would not have been born if Hezekiah had died there in chapter 20, verse 1 and 2. The absolute one of the worst kings that the southern kingdom ever had was the child of a man conceived and born during a time period that he begged God for in spite of what was needed.

I want you to turn in conclusion over to 2 Chronicles 33. By the way, as we go through our Bible reading plan, you're gonna discover that as you go into 1 and 2 Chronicles it's very much gonna imitate 1 & 2 Kings. You're gonna get a lot of the color commentary on some of these characters and see some of these stories from a unique perspective, and I want to close with 2 Chronicles 33 tonight because I want you to hear what happens in Manasseh's life. This is the next generation if we live like Hezekiah in chapter 20. This is what we can expect 10 and 20 and 30 years down the road if we're Hezekiah in chapter 20 saying, "It's all about me. I want to be preserved. I want pools. I want conduits. I want buildings. It's about me, me, me." What's going to happen in our lives, what's going to happen in our culture? Listen to chapter 33 of 2 Chronicles,

1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem: 2 But did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. 3 For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. 4 Also he built altars in the house of the LORD, whereof the LORD had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever. 5 And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. 6 And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

I'm not even gonna continue. All of that for 15 years. Wow. What Hezekiah did in chapter 20 is he set the Israelites on 150 year crash course to captivity.

In just simplistic conclusion, let me tell you what the difference in chapter 19 and 20 is: in chapter 19 it was all about the Lord, in chapter 20 it was all about himself. It's really that simple. And so tonight when we say, "Be careful what you pray for," you need to ask yourself are you wanting the Lord to be honored or are you just wanting to be preserved? Are you wanting the name of the Lord to be acknowledged or are you just wanting your reputation to be preserved? Last time I checked when the Lord is the focus of our prayers, he answers in amazing ways. When we're the focus of our prayers, it never works out well. We have been warned to be careful what we pray for.