

Isaiah 36:1-11 (NKJV)

¹ Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah *that* Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them.

² Then the king of Assyria sent *the* Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. And he stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller's Field.

³ And Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came out to him.

⁴ Then *the* Rabshakeh said to them, "Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: "What confidence is this in which you trust?

⁵ I say you speak of having plans and power for war; but *they are* mere words. Now in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me?

⁶ Look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So *is* Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him.

⁷ But if you say to me, 'We trust in the LORD our God,' *is it* not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar?'" '

⁸ Now therefore, I urge you, give a pledge to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses--if you are able on your part to put riders on them!

⁹ How then will you repel one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen?

¹⁰ Have I now come up without the LORD against this land to destroy it? The LORD said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.' "

¹¹ Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to *the* Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in the Aramaic language, for we understand *it*; and do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people who *are* on the wall."

Does faith work? Does faith in God work? Does faith in Christ work? Does it really do anything? Can it really be counted on when our world appears to be crumbling? Can our God really be relied upon to save us in the here and now? Every single one of our lives is a test. And what it is testing is **what do we really believe? Who** do we really believe? Do we believe what God says? Or do we believe what we see, what our flesh tells us?

I know that I am hard at times on this question. I am hard because I know this is where I fail. This is where **you** fail. This is where we teach the world around us

that Christ cannot really be trusted to save us. Oh we have our creeds. And we have our spiritual statements. We have what we tell fellow church people. We are well informed people. But how do we respond when the things most at our core are challenged? What do we do in our points of desperation? What do we do when we feel like **screaming** or we feel like **giving up** or we feel like **panicking**? That is us. That is what we really believe. That is who we really are.

What happened to you this week? Or maybe this month? Where did you have a desperate moment or a severe temptation or a point where you felt like giving up? What did you do? Did you persevere? Did you tell the devil to hit the road because your God has provided everything you need, like Jesus did when He was tempted? Did you trust your Father to deliver you, even though you were pushed to your limit like Jesus was? Did you decide to pay a price for those you love even though it cost you something that was very hard to give up, like Jesus did?

What we are going to see in our text in the next several weeks is **what is open to us** as believers. In fact what we will see is the response of real Christianity. We will see how faith responds to crisis. If it doesn't look like our lives, it should. I am tired of hearing my excuses for behavior that shows that I really don't believe what God says. I am tired of counsel that buys more into psychology books than the word of God. I am tired of our belief of the world's so called sciences outweighing the word of God in our lives. I pray that the Holy Spirit convicts us all this morning by the example of what God will do in the lives of the people who simply believe God's promises.

Isaiah 36 turns a corner in Isaiah. Up until now Isaiah has been a very poetic book. But in 36 it turns into a history book for a chapter. It tells us an inside story of what happened in a political event based on the movements of a world power in a pursuit of conquest. We see human pride at its truest. And we see behind it to the prince and power of the air. Government power is unmasked and we see who is pulling the puppet strings.

Our friend, Mr Ortland gives us a lot of insight into this text. He says this.

If you always have to know where and what and when and how and so forth, all in advance, before you obey God, then you are not living by faith in God. Living by faith in God accepts ambiguity without getting nervous, because God is the one in charge. "Not knowing where, I know whom"—that's Christianity.

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

Have you ever had a point where all you had was God? Where the only one you could cry out to is God? You saw that all your other go-to's had failed you? All of your efforts let you down? Your way of making yourself happy failed. Do you remember what that was like? Let me ask you. How did that work out for you?

Maybe for some of us it is too soon to answer. But if it has been a while, I can pretty well guess what the report will be. God came through for you, didn't He? It was shocking how He provided wasn't it? He gave you more than you would have ever expected. Didn't He? This story is told over and over again by His people. And do you know what the most surprising thing is? We seem to be always surprised. We seem to always be amazed. As if we are the first of God's people to ever be loved by our Savior. Why is that? We are the densest people in the universe.

Ortland also says

We come inevitably to those moments in life when nothing will suffice but what is directly and immediately of God. After we've done all we can and should, and life demands of us still more, nothing but God himself will suffice. Whatever your challenge may be right now, God is with you in it. Trust him. Look for him. He will not fail you.

We need to keep our heads because other forces cloud our vision of God and complicate our thinking and pressure us not to take him at his word but to shave the radical edge off our faith. There is always some voice whispering to us that God is not a resource, he is a problem. So the question before us is both profound and urgent. Whose voice will we believe, whose wisdom will we follow, whose hope will we cherish and live for? In whom do we now trust?

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

This was all about to be put to the test in our text.

Our text tells us the historical background of this test. Hezekiah, a historical figure, the King of Israel, had been, in time and space, leading for 14 years consisting of the earth rotating all the way around the sun. This isn't myth. It is history. It was then that Sennacherib, a real king in a real country of Assyria, came into Judah and started conquering cities. And he made it look easy. The enemy of God was sweeping the people of God. What were the people of God to do?

What we see is a **real threat**. All of the commentators of news shows would have told us exactly what was going to happen. Assyria was going to wipe out Jerusalem. No worldly thinker would have had a single doubt.

Verse 4 gives us the great question for Hezekiah. And it gives us the real question about we who call ourselves Christians.

⁴ Then *the* Rabshakeh said to them, "Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: "What confidence is this in which you trust?"

We have learned from Isaiah that this is the million dollar question in any follower of God. Who do we really trust? Really? There are times when simply ascribing to a certain doctrine will not cut the muster. There are times when the forces against us, whether internal or external or both, challenge us to really put our

money where our mouth is. And those who are closest to us will see the truth of our beliefs. They will see if we really trust God. Or if we are just believing our own lies about ourselves. In the face of our greatest temptation, our greatest desires, our greatest compulsions, our greatest fears, what really holds up? What do we really really believe? What confidence is this in which you trust?

This was the first challenge that Rabshakeh gave. He didn't ask, what is your tradition, or what is your doctrine. Those are things of the head. He asked, "what do you really have confidence in?" And he was about to tell these people that their trust was mistaken. It was badly placed. Isn't that what the devil is always about in our lives. He will say, "Look, you trusted God to protect you from such and such. You trusted God to give you such and such a thing. You gave up so much, and for what? Did God make it easy for you? Did God make it pleasurable for you? Did God reward your trust with all the things your flesh craves? The devil will point to God and say, He is holding out on you. He doesn't want you to have the best." In our text Rabshakah appeared to have the keys of life and death in his hands.

Carla and I recently watched a movie about Churchill. And in it you could see why the leaders wanted to sign a peace treaty with Hitler. Hitler was threatening England with death and destruction. He appeared to hold all the cards. Well, in our text, Jerusalem was facing an enemy that was even more threatening than Hitler was to England. To understand the text we must put our imaginations to good use. Imagine the strain these people were under. Imagine the threat they were facing. It makes many of our strains look puny. These people would have traded their worst fear for ours in a heartbeat.

⁵ I say you speak of having plans and power for war; but *they are* mere words. Now in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me?

Rabshakah was attempting to demoralize these Judeans. He was saying you have a theoretical plan. You have ideas. You have your songs and your words on paper. But open your eyes. I have over 150,000 trained troops at your walls. You can have all your songs and beliefs. You have a God that you cannot see and cannot prove. That is all well and good for fairy tales to tell the kids at bed time. But open your eyes this is reality. Are you really going to trust that which you cannot see to deliver you from the threat right in front of your eyes?

Isn't that often the threat we face? Isn't that often the lie we believe.

Oh yes, I could trust God to give me a mate. But I look around me and see what works. I can accomplish this for myself with the world's methods.

Oh yes, God says He will take care of me. But look at everything that could go wrong. I am going to build up the funds so that I will be safe and secure.

Oh yes, God says that He will protect me, but I am not sure he will do it the way I want it so I must worry.

The point is, our faith must be more than words. It must be more than creeds. We really must trust this God we say we believe in to do those actual things **He says** He will do. Our creeds and belief cannot be mere words to us. Our beliefs cannot be mere doctrines. We must cling to our God as if He is our only resource. It is then that we will see our God show off. It is then that we will see the amazing happen. If we trust ourselves and our plans, we may actually get some of the things that flesh can gain. But it will never be amazing. It will never be breathtaking. It will never be satisfying. But when you trust an omnipotent God, all bets are off. You never know how He might show Himself off in your life. When the Israelites did it, the neighboring countries told stories about it for 40 years. And they would shudder each time they thought about it.

⁶ Look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him.

Have you ever, as a Christian, tried to use a worldly strategy to get what you wanted, only to have a non believer point out to you that **you** are just like **they** are? Have you ever tried an earthly strategy to get what you want only to be embarrassed by how ineffective it was?

That is what these Judeans did. They tried their hand at being worldly. And they were just foolish buffoons, paying a tremendous price and receiving nothing of value. That is a blessing. We should all thank God when we fail at being worldly. If we were successful, that would be the worst possible thing that could happen to us. But when our Egypt lets us down, when our earthly strategy to take care of ourselves falls flat, that is a severe and wonderful mercy to believers.

Think about it. If Egypt would have come through for Jerusalem, what would have happened to Jerusalem? They may have completely abandoned God. And if our worldly strategies had worked at giving us what we craved, we may have done the same thing. Praise God our foolishness and faithless strategies fail. And the more horrific they fail, the better.

⁷ But if you say to me, 'We trust in the LORD our God,' is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar'?"

Look at this carefully. The world never understands true worship. Their critiques are rarely well placed. I remember a man who told me that our church does not stand a chance because Mike doesn't stand at the back of the church and shake everyone's hand when they leave. Rabshakah's criticism was that Hezekiah had removed the real worship of God. When we know that removing the high places was the removal of **false** worship.

Our world today does the same thing. When Christians stand for what God says, the world will criticize us as standing against God for so called hating people who

cling to the sins that God condemns. And it is the devil who is heading this charge. Nothing has changed. The devil, after all, was **for** the idol worship. Rabshakah would not have known this. He was just a patsy. But that is how the devil works. Nothing has changed.

Hezekiah was calling people to **true worship**. And the world was going to attack that at every front. It was going to pin the reason on their hatred to that very thing. They would have loved the church if they weren't so restrictive.

Now there is also something else at work here. Rabshakah probably knew that not everyone was happy with Hezekiah removing idol worship. What Rabshakah was saying was likely an attempt to foam some discontent with the idol worshippers that missed their idols. Maybe it was a veiled offer to them that things would change if Assyria was in charge. He was trying to create division in the ranks.

⁸ Now therefore, I urge you, give a pledge to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses--if you are able on your part to put riders on them!

Here is what the world always offers. Self salvation. Follow the enemy and you will get the thing that will save you. What is it that you feel you must have in your life? Just surrender yourself to the king of this world and you will get your heart's desire. That is the lie. The price for this deal always comes later. It is never advertised in advance. It is in the small print. It is the car payment one can't afford that comes a few month's after one gets the car of their dreams. It is the regret one carries for relationships that should have never been entered. It is the penalty one pays for temporary pleasure of many kinds.

Just give in, the enemy says, and all kinds of wonders will be yours. You can have what you want right now. "Just eat the fruit", the snake says, "and you will have the knowledge of good and evil." "Just worship me", the devil says to Christ, "and I will give you this world."

What Rabshakah was offering would be the equivalent of fighter jets in our modern day. He was offering political security. He was appealing to the appetite of the populace. And he was doing it where everyone would hear him. This was going to put a lot of pressure on the leadership. The people's heads were being filled with a **less costly** alternative to **trusting God**. It had the appearance of freedom, but it wasn't freedom at all. Again, that is so much like what the devil continually offers us. There is no freedom to be found in submitting to the devil. It is always slavery. And it is a slavery that leads to destruction. Believers in Christ are slaves, but it is a slavery that leads to reward and the freedom from sin.

⁹ How then will you repel one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen?

Rabshakah circles around to the idea that the desperate measures of Judea are not

panning out. They are not having a good outcome. He is taunting the ineffectiveness of the leadership and the hopelessness of their situation. He is appealing to sight, what you can see and touch and reason. But He is not taking into consideration the fact there is a powerful God that we cannot see and cannot touch and is beyond reason.

Fleshly speaking, Rabshakah was correct. But speaking in reality, he was completely and utterly and eternally wrong.

¹⁰ Have I now come up without the LORD against this land to destroy it? The LORD said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.' "

Now he turns the corner of ignorance and arrogance. He starts talking as if he is God's buddy, like he has God in his pocket. He talks like he has the inside corner on **who God is** and **what God wants**.

Again there is nothing new. Our world is telling us all the time about how what we believe isn't representing God very well. We believe a Bible that talks about a God who hates sin so much, and loves His people so much, that destroying a whole community of people is no big deal in comparison. We see a miniature picture of that in the old Testament. And we will see it, on steroids, on the final judgment day. God will ultimately destroy sin and all those who love it. The world tells us that this is not like God. They form a vision of God that is for humankind and anything that humankind wants to do. They tell us that God would not pronounce judgment on anything that would make humans happy temporarily.

And we hear those taunts and we know that the speakers know nothing of God. The people overhearing Rabshakah and who knew God would have thought the same thing. Anyone can imagine what God should be like. But know what God is like and it is based on what God has clearly said about Himself.

It is quite likely that God inspired the King of Assyria to attack Jerusalem. But it was only so that the God of the universe could show off His power. God did not send Rabshakah to destroy Jerusalem. That truth would be displayed just hours from the time this was spoken.

¹¹ Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to *the* Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in the Aramaic language, for we understand *it*; and do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people who *are* on the wall."

Do you remember what David said when he heard the taunts of Goliath?

1 Samuel 17:45-47 (NKJV)

⁴⁵ Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

⁴⁶ This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all

the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

⁴⁷ Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD'S, and He will give you into our hands."

Those who have faith in God do not need to silence the sneers of the enemy. Because they do not see them as having any weight. They are just words from impotent worldlings. Those who have faith are content to pronounce what God will do and why He will do it.

There are plenty of godless people proclaiming godless ideas even on the little campus at Garrett. Christians don't have to shrink back there or anywhere else. Our God will one day settle the score. And He will do that because He does exist and He rewards those who please Him and will punish those who reject Him. God is not reliant upon the things that the devil offers. And His people should not be either. Why would we need man's horses when Christ will ride a heavenly white horse into battle. Why do we need man's chariots when God has chariots of fire that fly? Why do we want the tokens that the devil will throw at us to win our allegiance and steal our attention, when God has pleasures that last forever and know no regret? Why would we need 2000 horses when one angel can kill 180,000 men in one evening? Really?

Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah tried to silence the threats of the enemy. That was futile. It actually gave the enemy more credibility than he should have had. David would not have asked him to please be more polite and considerate. David would have told Rabshakah that he had better prepare to meet his maker.

Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah gave a political response. But what they needed was a faith response. We sometimes wish the enemies of God would just shut up. That would make us a lot more comfortable, wouldn't it? But God isn't real interested in our temporary comfort. He is more interested in the mission He gave His children to do. Maybe the enemy's taunts were given to us so we would stand up like David and represent our God. Maybe they are in our lives for a very specific purpose. Don't pray that the taunts will end. Stand up and proclaim what God says. Be confident in Him. Stand for Him. That may be what the taunts are there for. God may just want to show off again.

We are going to take this text up again next week. But this week we really need to answer the question, who am I really trusting in my life? What am I really trusting in my life? When my life looks like it is about to fall apart, when everything I love is threatened, when panic and fear and dread seem to be the logical reaction, where do I look? When you answer that question, you have found your operational savior, no matter what your doctrine says. Is your operational savior an Egypt, a worldly answer, a worldly strategy, something you can accomplish with your own 2 hands? Or is it spiritual? Is it God? Is it something you cannot see or feel or

touch but you know is real and you trust it with your life? That is our real doctrine.
Who do we trust?