

**Isaiah 38:1-3 (NKJV)**

**1** In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.' "

**2** Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD,

**3** and said, "Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done *what is good* in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

I would like to start, this morning, with a story of a Christian. This is from our friend Mr. Ortlund

**Thomas Cranmer is a name you might not know offhand. Maybe you've heard his voice echoing in *The Book of Common Prayer*: where he says this-**

*Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men, we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness... The remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father.*

**As Archbishop of Canterbury, Cranmer bravely advanced the gospel during the English Reformation. But when Mary became Queen in 1553, she had him arrested. From his prison window, he watched his fellow-reformers Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley burn at the stake. It was unforgettable, with Latimer encouraging Ridley, "*Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall on this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.*"**

**Cranmer did not play the man. He caved in. Government agents brainwashed him into recanting the gospel. He was set free and for several weeks enjoyed a comfortable life again. But they put him back in prison, and he signed more recantations. But when he realized that they were going to kill him anyway, his old courage returned.**

**On the day of his execution in Oxford, he sat through a two-hour sermon at the Church of St Mary denouncing him as a heretic. Then he was**

expected publicly to admit the error of his ways. But he stood firm: He said the following-

*And now I come to the great thing, which so much troubleth my conscience, more than anything that ever I did or said in my whole life, and that is the setting forth of a writing contrary to the truth.... And forasmuch as my hand offended, writing contrary to my heart, my hand shall first be punished.*

The remembrance of his sins was grievous to him and the burden intolerable. In fact, he walked from the church to the stake so quickly, his guards could hardly keep up with him. An eyewitness described his death:

*Fire being now put to him, he stretched out his right hand and thrust it into the fire, and held it there a good space, before the fire came to any part of his body, where his hand was seen of every man sensibly burning, crying with a loud voice, "This hand hath offended." As soon as the fire was got up, he was very soon dead, never stirring or crying all the while.*

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

We all like to read of the heroes of the faith when they do well. Don't we love the words of Latimer to his friend- *play the man; we shall on this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.*"

Isn't that inspiring? Doesn't that make you want to pay the price with them to glorify and honor our Savior? But we don't really want to hear about Cranmer, the failure. Do we? But the truth is, we need to see it. We need to know what is in mankind. Because we don't live life like life is portrayed in the movies. We never do **everything** we know **we should do** for God. We never obey perfectly. And even worse, sometimes we chose to do **exactly the opposite of what God wants** because we become absorbed with self. We may **one day** stand up, like Elijah, against all the prophets of Baal. And then the **next day** run for our lives from a woman's wrath, like Elijah did with Jezebel.

There is no one but Christ who honors God perfectly. So we must be prepared to minister to and with people **as they truly are** and we need to be quick to **see ourselves** as one of these flawed people.

Our story this morning is about a man of faith. Hezekiah had just stood up, as instructed by God, to the whole Assyrian army, the greatest military power on the face of the earth at that time. He stood strong. Once He determined that

no other resources would work( and he had to learn that first) then He stood strong for God and God delivered the people of Jerusalem. This happened. This was a high point for Hezekiah. He could stand up strong in the face of **that particular challenge** to His faith. But this morning we see a challenge to his faith that he was not prepared to stand up to.

Isn't that like our lives? Aren't there some events in our lives that we are really pleased with ourselves. We replay how we did those faithful things in the face of big challenges. Those who are close to us may know what those things are because we have a tendency to talk about them, maybe over and over again. And that isn't bad. But **past** faithfulness is never enough. Present faithfulness is what we must focus on most. We never retire from the battle in the Christian life. It will rage every day until we die.

It should make us nervous when our testimony of Gods grace and power in our lives is always in the distant past. The victory must be experienced today and every day. We need to be quick to talk about the mercy and grace that was new today. Where have you experienced a victory in the faith this week? Where have you stood up to temptation this week? Where have you done what God wanted you to do that was very hard this week? Where did you believe Him in spite of your flesh screaming to do something else this week? **This day** is where the victory is won. **This day** is where the battle is lost. Faithfulness **today** is what is required. What challenge to your faith are you continually facing now, today? That is your opportunity to make much of God today.

Let's look at our text.

**1 In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.' "**

Here is the test. Hezekiah was about 40 years old. Soon after the wonderful victory over Assyria Hezekiah got sick. And the prophet Isaiah came to visit him and tell him that he just needs to claim healing in Jesus name and speak the word and he will have it. No. That is not what he said. In fact, if you are seeking people to comfort you in a hospital, you might not want to ask for a prophet.

Isaiah shows up and gives Hezekiah very important information. Your prognosis is not good. You will die. This will give you a chance to line up your will and prepare them for your death. The prophet was very blunt and to the

point. There's nothing wrong with that, especially when you are delivering a message from God. But I think most of us would prefer more empathy than is portrayed here.

Christians all over the world face this very same test. Now it is usually a medical doctor and not a prophet who delivers the news. But the news is the same. You have stage 4 cancer. It is spread throughout your body. This is something that could happen to any of us. How would we respond to this news?

While Hezekiah may not be our best example I want to make something clear here. Failure to a test is not imminent. Failure is not a certainty. Failure is an option, just as success is. We decide. There is no trial we face where God does not hold out an option of success for us. No matter how hard it is to be faithful in a trial, faithfulness is always an available and attainable option.

### **1 Corinthians 10:13 (NKJV)**

**<sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.**

### **James 1:2-4 (NKJV)**

**<sup>2</sup> My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,**

**<sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.**

**<sup>4</sup> But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**

The devil's message to us is always- give up. You cannot win. You cannot be faithful. You cannot stand up to a real test of your faith. No one does. If the really hard test comes you will fail. Then it is easy for us to imagine all these scenarios where we would fail. But that is not the message that comes from Christ, from His Spirit or from His Word. The message from His word is always an encouragement to stand up to the trial by faith and win. Really. Find any scripture that says that a believer must fail a trial or give in to a temptation. There are none. The trials are intended to produce good things in our lives and they should be faced by an unshakable faith in God that they are so.

That is what Hezekiah **should have** been thinking. He had a grand opportunity to glorify God here. So let's see what he does.

**2 Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD,**

**3 and said, "Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done *what is good* in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.**

I think maybe all of us look at our pasts with idealized versions of ourselves. We are always the heroes in our daydreams and we are often the heroes of our pasts. And when the facts of our history intrude by telling a different story, well, we just forget the facts.

I think it is funny how Hezekiah represents himself to God. There is some truth here. But it is a bit of "pick and choose". Hezekiah doesn't mention calling for Egypt to save him from Assyria, or trying to bribe the enemies of God. Nope. He appeals to God to remember the good things he did. The problem with God is that he doesn't really remember anything in the way we do. He knows everything. He is the ultimate of total recall. So when He sees Hezekiah's life, God sees it all. Just like He does with our lives. And that is the very thing that allows us to face the truth about ourselves as it really is and was. While **we** may not be able to accept ourselves as we really were, **God** already has. He never accepts what a person **thinks** they are. He always accepts His children for what they **really are**, whether they know themselves or not. If He can love us in spite of who we really are or were, we should be free to readily examine our lives for the truth and only the truth.

Hezekiah did walk before God in truth and with a loyal heart. Scripture regards him as one of the good kings.

**2 Kings 18:4-6 (NKJV)**

**4 He removed the high places and broke the *sacred* pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan.**

**5 He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him.**

**6 For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses.**

This is very high praise for Hezekiah. He did very well most of the time. There were exceptions, which Hezekiah passed over. But up to this point he had been a good king. But 2 Chronicles 32 gives us a picture we don't see in

the other narratives. We get an inside look at the heart of Hezekiah at this point.

### **2 Chronicles 32:24-26 (NKJV)**

**24 In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death, and he prayed to the LORD; and He spoke to him and gave him a sign.**

**25 But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favor *shown* him, for his heart was lifted up; therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem.**

**26 Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.**

What we see in Chronicles is where Hezekiah was headed. Hezekiah could have died at the point in today's text. But he **did not want to die**. He may have had all kinds of reasons. We don't know. He may have thought he was doing God's kingdom a favor by staying alive. We don't know. But what we do know is what fate awaited Hezekiah **after** God extended his life. Success was about to get to Hezekiah. We also find in Chronicles how much wealth he had built up for himself. It looks like maybe his treasure began to be placed in the wrong place and his heart followed his treasures, as our hearts always do in our lives. Things would go badly from here on in.

There is a point here that we cannot miss. I know I have made it before, but I think it is important. We have a tendency to think that when a young person dies that they have been robbed of a lot of good things. We tend to immediately ascribe any future that person would have of being primarily **good** things, **positive** things, **enjoyable** things, **useful** things. I wonder if God gets tired of hearing that. Why can't we ever first assume that God really knows what He is doing? Why does He never get the benefit of the doubt in those situations in our minds?

Maybe God was rescuing them from something much more horrible than death. Maybe what they had waiting for them would have been incredible suffering. Maybe it would have been devastating spiritual failure with far reaching consequences. Maybe it would have been a replay of what happened when God gave Hezekiah what Hezekiah wanted.

Do you realize how good a record Hezekiah's life would have had if he had died when God said he would? He would have probably had one of the best records of faithfulness of all the kings. He would have been seen as a

wonderful example of faithfulness. Not a **perfect** example, but a **wonderful** example. But that was not to be. Why? Because God gave into Hezekiah's plea for more time to do all the wonderful things that were awaiting in Hezekiah's life. It's too bad. An early death is better than a life that is faithless.

Now when you hear the name Hezekiah what do you think of? I asked Carla this question last night. She said, isn't he the king that God extended his life? That is often how he is thought of. He is the guy that outlived his faithfulness. He is the guy that lived too long. He is the guy that thought He knew better than God, but He did not.

I know that we at Ferndale have suffered a disproportional share of sudden deaths of young people. What I seek to show this morning is not that we should not grieve or suffer the loss as loved ones always do. What I am trying to say is that God is trustworthy. God knows what He is doing. He has good reasons for what He does. But they are way above our pay grade. And if we **knew the future** like God does, and we **had the courage to choose the best thing**, we would find that what God arranges ends up being the best thing. Fortunately God does not wait for us to agree with Him. He does not share what He knows. We do not know what future His people are saved from when He takes them early. But we do know that we can trust God. The character of God is what we have to trust in. We don't know the facts that God knows. But we know God. And that has to be our encouragement through the hard times we face.

Now at the end of verse 3 we see that Hezekiah wept bitterly. The word for bitterly is great. The word emphasizes the importance, size or significance of something. So this is telling us that Hezekiah wept with great intensity. Now, I doubt that anyone would greet the news of their upcoming demise by saying, woohoo, I get to die now. This news is not something you blow off and go to the next thing on your to-do list. This news redefines your to-do list. No, a certain amount of grieving is called for. Very few of us are instinctively pleased to give up the life we have come to know for a life that we expect to be good but we have never experienced it. Tears are certainly appropriate and necessary and normal and expected. But what we see with Hezekiah shows something about Hezekiah that was a problem. He was not prepared in His faith to trust God with his death. He felt the need to cling to this life, in spite of what God had said.

Now ask yourself, how **could** Hezekiah have responded? Could he not have arisen by faith to accepting this next event from God's hand? Could he not have said, like Mary, "Let it be to me according to your Word"? Isn't that the ultimate statement of receiving God's word from God's hand? Why the bitter tears? Was that not a distrust in God and His plan?

Look at this closely. This is what happened. Hezekiah's failure to fully trust in God's wisdom, His love, His provision led to Hezekiah disgracing himself and God.

Wow. Isn't that always the case? A death in God's plan is better than long life in ours. Suffering from God's plan is better than pleasure from our plan.

Everything from God's hand is better than anything from ours. Every single one of our lives proves this. Every one of us can make this point by truthfully retelling the story of our lives. Where did the good things come from?

Trusting and obeying God. Where did the bad things come from? Following our hearts.

We are going to take this text up again next week. But we already have much to apply from Hezekiah's example. And again, as in all of the book of Isaiah, the crux of the matter comes back to who we will trust with our lives? Will we trust God with all His wisdom and grace and love? Or will we trust ourselves with all.....what? foolishness and selfishness and unbelief? What will it be?

We are all facing these issues in our lives right now. We are all making choices of who and what we will believe. What will we do? Do we want to follow Hezekiah's lead to disgrace? Or do we want to trust God's plan for future grace and pleasure forever? What will it be?

It is good to have a testimony of wonderful things God has done to us and in us and through us years ago. But it is necessary that we have a story today of the wonderful things that God is doing to us and in us and through us. Do we have such a testimony? What is God teaching us? Where are we growing? What is going on spiritually in our lives? If we look at our lives and say, "not much", then there is something Christ said that we might want to consider.

### **Luke 11:9-13 (NKJV)**

**<sup>9</sup> "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.**

**<sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.**

**<sup>11</sup> If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a**

**stone? Or if *he asks* for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?**

**<sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?**

**<sup>13</sup> If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"**

If we want to see spiritual things happen in our lives, this is a prayer we can pray by faith. We can pray it expectantly. We can ask and know we will receive. God will give more of Himself to any of His children who ask for it expectantly. Is that what we want? Let's do this. Let's all of us pray this prayer for a week and see what happens. Let's test God in a way that He invites testing.

We can pray Father, give me more of you, more of your Spirit, more of your fellowship and presence in my life. Then we will see how our testimony changes.