

Isaiah 38-39:1-8

"The Power Of Prayer"

Every now & then you watch a movie that opens w/a real nail biter... Then suddenly it cuts to something more subdued & a caption comes up, "6 months earlier" (or something like that). That's essentially what we have here in these next couple of Ch's. We just witnessed the dramatic deliverance of the city of Jerusalem from the onslaught of Assyria. In one night, the angel of the Lord swept through their camp and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, forcing Sennacherib to retreat & remain in his own land.

Ch's 38-39 back up & find us still in the throes of the Assyrian siege. — Let's remind ourselves that the book of Isaiah is not (by any stretch) a strictly chronological rendering of the events that transpired during the prophet's life. It jumps around from time to time & this is one of those times.

We get a little insight as to what was happening on the other side of the walls (w/in the city). Hezekiah had become critically ill at a pivotal point in the nation's well-being... So many times (it seems) that when it comes to the seasons of our lives, when it rains, it pours. & Such was the case for king Hezekiah.

Vs 1

Wow... this isn't what we'd typically like to envision as "pastoral" (or in this case) "prophetic" care! ☺ Can you imagine? There you are, you're sick, you're lying on your hospital bed & in walks your pastor. You're thinking, "Praise God, he's going to pray for me." But he doesn't anoint you, he doesn't greet you, he doesn't pray for you at all! Instead, he looks you in the eyes & says w/all the conviction of his heart, "I have a word for you from the Lord, you're going to die." ☺ You're thinking, "Wait. What!?" As your heart hits the pit of your stomach!

Now. There are a few things we want to consider right here in this very 1st Vs. #1 (I'm just going to throw this out there, not to linger on it too long). * Contrary to what some want to teach, God allows people to get sick & it's not necessarily indicative of sin in their life, a lack of faith or anything like that. We see people falling ill throughout the scriptures & it's not always some deep lesson they need to learn (though at times it can be). It's not always because of sin (though at times it can be). W/Job it wasn't that he was doing something wrong, it's that he was living his life *right*! So God allowed him to become a model of true trust *in* the Lord & love *for* the Lord for others around him, to the angels of heaven & even the spiritual hosts of wickedness, up to & including Satan himself!

You never know when God may be staking His reputation upon how you're going to handle a trial or a test, or an illness that comes your way. Hey, though He *slay me*, yet will I trust Him (this is where we want to be). Paul came to learn that when he was weak *physically*, the power of Christ was at rest upon him *spiritually*. He couldn't lean upon his own sufficiency but had to trust in Christ entirely. So he said, *"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*¹

So, when some infirmity, or distress, or affliction befalls us. It can be a losing proposition to wrestle w/the "why" of it all. We don't always know. In the end we resolve, "God, my life belongs to You. Be it through my life or my death, be *glorified* in me." *

The next thing we need to see is this, * God is both the giver & the *taker* of life. The Bible is clear, *"To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, And a time to die;"*² There is a time, to which we've all been appointed (outside of the rapture of the church) by which each of us are going to die. The mortality rate among human beings is 100%. Again, the Bible says, *"...it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,"*³ You & me, we have an appointment w/death. & It's one appointment that we won't miss.

So there is a sense in which this is a word for each of us today. The question isn't one of, "Are we *going* to die?" This issue is, "Are we *ready* to die?" Is your life in order? Have you set your *house* in order? Have you established a reliance upon the Lord in your home? Have you done what you can to set your family up to *follow* Christ, to *walk* w/Christ when you're gone? Very few people ever experience the luxury of knowing *when* they're going to die. My recommendation is, don't delay. Begin today (if you haven't) establishing a household that honors the Lord, looks *to* the Lord & trusts *in* the Lord. *

Finally, let me say this (& we'll touch on it a little bit later). This would seem (to me) to be the "perfect" will of God for him. God shows him kindness, lets him know his time is at hand. He can set a godly heir in his place, ensure that the kingdom is on a trajectory of trusting in the Lord after he's gone... (Btw, from other passages we know that he's 39 yrs old at this time).

Vs 2-3

He's weeping, he turns to the wall (not so he could sulk, but that he might pray, he's on his bed, people are around him.

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [2 Co 12:10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ec 3:1-2]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Heb 9:27]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He's looking for an edge of privacy, perhaps he faces the temple (1 Kings 8:30) & he begins to cry out to the Lord. & We don't fault him, he's crying out that God might spare him, I doubt that many of us would differ in this at all. Skin for skin, all that a man has will he give for his life. Self-preservation is our natural *inclination*, to *want* to live...

But there is something we need to talk about here & that is this. Hezekiah asks God to show mercy to him (that's implication here) by way of his *walk* & his *works*. He's essentially saying, "God look at how I've honored You. The things I've done for You. Surely, I've lived good enough (in Your eyes), & done enough good to merit more time."

& We think, "Wow, that's bold! Asking God to extend your life on the basis of how you've lived..." But we need to remember that Hezekiah is living under the Old Covenant, & under the Old Covenant, this was a completely appropriate & valid way to pray. –

Just read Leviticus Ch 26, or Deut 28. God had covenanted with the people of Israel, blessing or cursing, predicated upon obedience or disobedience to His word. David prayed by this principle on the regular, "*I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.*"⁴ That entire Psalm (101) is all about what he will do & won't do, the idea being that God can look upon him, bless him because he's leading a life of righteousness before Him.

Nehemiah would often pray this way, "*Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.*"⁵

However, under the *New Covenant* this is not how we pray, nor is it the basis upon which we are blessed. Today (as believers) we are blessed on the principle of faith in Jesus (Gal 3:13-14) & we come to God in the *name* of Jesus. Not by merit of our own ways & works, but by merit of the perfect righteousness of God's own Son imputed to us through *faith*. Of course that doesn't mean that we don't need to walk in obedience to God's word. The Bible is clear that *love for* God is evidenced through *obedience to* God. But that's not what gains me access to God's good favor. I gain an audience w/God by His grace through faith in J.C.

One more quick observation. Hezekiah heard God's word. But He didn't want to receive it. Today (though self-preservation is natural) sometimes we come to a place where we're like, "Lord take me home!" But Hezekiah lived under the O.C. & Though there were hints of the resurrection & an occasional pointer, perhaps a glimpse as to what happens when we die...

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 101:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ne 5:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

By & large, it was a mystery. There wasn't the same assurance of glory in the life beyond. There's a very important passage concerning the revelation of immortality found in **2 Timothy 1**. Let's look at it together (Vs 8-10).

This is why Paul could say, "For me to live is Christ & to die is gain!" Because "life & immortality" was brought to *light* through the gospel of J.C. So, as to where today, we understand death as a "graduation" of sorts. Hezekiah would've perceived it as God being displeased w/him.

So he prays. He's heard God's word, but He doesn't want to receive or accept it. & Again, I'm not faulting him in that. We'd probably all pray for a pass in a situation like this. But I'd point you to the model of Jesus for a more excellent way... There He is in the garden of Gethsemane, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. *Nevertheless*, not as I will, but as You will." *It's ok to say, "Father, I would love to be healed. I want to live. I don't want this lingering injury, (or whatever the case may be). But ultimately, You see what I can't see, You're moving w/an eye toward eternity, You know what's best for me, Your will be done."*

Vs 4-6

When you read through this account in 2 kings 20, you discover that Isaiah had didn't even make it into the middle court before God turned him around w/this word...

Now, before you say, "Wait a minute! God said that he was going to die, now He says that he is going to live. Does that make Isaiah a false prophet or was God gas lighting him, bamboozling him or what?" *How many of you have ever heard of a conditional clause? Meaning, you enter a contract w/someone (perhaps the bank to buy a house) & there are certain contingencies built into that contract. "You make your payments; the house will be yours. You default on X number of payments; the house will be ours." There are conditions in the contract that make for how things will turn out. You do this, it goes this way, you do that, it goes another way.*

God often does the same thing w/His covenants, His contracts. In the book of Jeremiah, He makes it plain. *"The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it."*⁶

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Je 18:7-10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We see this most readily in the book of Jonah. Jonah goes to Nineveh (which btw was the capital of Assyria) & says, “40 days, judgment is coming.” They all took to repentance in sack cloth & ashes, God relented. Implicit w/in the decree of judgment is the invitation to repentance.

Same kind of thing here. Had Hezekiah *not* prayed, *not* cried out to God. He would’ve died. But for whatever reason, God had determined that should Hezekiah cry *out* to Him, *turn* to Him & seek to *align* himself w/Him that He would spare him at this time & give him more time (15 yrs) upon this earth.

Which leads us to our next observation (point for consideration). * Can prayer really change things? Can prayer alter the route that God would take if otherwise left untouched? Clearly, scripturally, the answer is, “Yes.” & This is a real difficulty for some people.

There are those who lean so hard upon the sovereignty of God that they would say that prayer is essentially irrelevant. After all, God is going to do what God is going to do, He has a plan so why even pray? Of course, to assume that kind of position is to rebel against the word of God that exhorts, commands & instructs us in *many* places that we’re to pray. We’re to let our requests be known to God, we’re to stand in the gap on behalf of others. Write it down & look it up later, Ezek 22:23-31. – God was *wanting* to spare the people, but there was no one to pray, so He poured out His wrath... God would have us to be a people of prayer. *

But there’s a great responsibility in prayer as well. Because w/in the context of God allowing us to move His hand, it necessarily brings into focus another question & that is this... Will God allow us to move His hand in ways that may not be the best, but if we insist on our way, He will at times allow the way we want, rather than the way He’d prefer? Again, the answer is, “Yes”. God will at times allow us to operate outside what we might refer to as His “perfect” will.

Now, we know that the Bible says, *“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”*⁷

But that’s not to say that He *never* hears you or will *never* grant you something outside His will. Or let me put it like this (before we chase that trail in a direction beyond what’s appropriate or true). – God has a “perfect” will for each of us.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Jn 5:14–15]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But if you study the scripture you have to conclude that God also has (what we might refer to) as a “permissive” will as well. It’s not what God *prefers* for you, but He will *permit* it if you or I stubbornly insist upon it. **Numbers 22. Balak (the Moabite king) sends for the prophet Balaam to come and curse the children of Israel. Balaam prays about it, God says, “No”. Balaam says, “I’m sorry, I can’t go.” That’s it. That was God’s “perfect” “preferred” will for Balaam’s life. They counter offer w/a ton of money. Balaam prays again, “Please, please, PLEASE GOD! Let me go!” Long story short, eventually God says, “Fine, if that’s what you want... go.” & You can read of the whole thing. God *permitted* him to go. Let him have his way. In the end, it didn’t fair will for him. He should’ve honored what God told him the 1st time.**

Even as it pertains to God’s “perfect” will for mankind, “God’s not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” But if man insists upon his *own* way, God will *permit* man to go to hell if that’s what he insists upon (through rebellion & refusal to repent & believe upon the Lord J.C.).

So, (it seems to me) that God’s initial directive to Hezekiah was the plan. “Set your house in order, you’re going to die.” Hezekiah prays & God hears him, responds *to* him, immediately. Btw, * there are times when we pray & God acts immediately. Other times there may be weeks, months or years of patient waiting involved.

I wish I knew the “why” or “what for” w/all that. There are a # of things that could be in play. Sometimes it’s simple matter of His sovereign timing. (God may share what, but not always when). Other times there’s spiritual warfare involved (Daniel 10). Don’t think that when you’re praying to advance God’s cause & God’s kingdom (you want to gain insight or understanding) that the enemy just sits back & does nothing. He goes to work, seeking to hinder, to frustrate, irritate & exasperate the one who’s praying. If he can convince you to quit then perhaps he can thwart that prayer request... If it’s in your heart to pray for *something*, or *someone*, don’t quit. Jesus said, ask, seek, knock... Keep on keeping on... Until God answers or puts it on your hear that it’s time to stop praying for that. In this case Hezekiah received an answer before Isaiah even got out the door.

He said, “I have heard your prayer”, “I have seen... your tears”. Listen, God is not indifferent to your pain. He hears you; He sees you, His heart is *for* you.

He tells Hezekiah, “I’m going to add 15 yrs to your life. I’m going to deliver you, & defend this city.” What grace. Health, deliverance & defense.

Vs 7-8

No need to really wonder how God did this. He's God. It's a poetic miracle in that He added more time to the day, even as He added more time to Hezekiah's life.

Vs 9-14

What's the take home in this section of scripture? * Life is never a guarantee. You're not guaranteed next year, next month, next week or the next 5 minutes. That's why there's such an urgency about the gospel! "Today" is the day of salvation. If you'll hear His voice, don't harden your heart, open your heart. Don't delay, don't put it off another day... The one thing guaranteed in this passage is that life is temporary, transitory. It can be folded down & taken away like a shepherd's tent. Cut off like a weaver cutting thread from the loom. It's done. Our lives are hanging by a thread. David said, "There is but a step between me & death." (1 Sam 20:3).

In the N.T. vernacular we read it like this, *"For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."*⁸ The idea behind each of these illustrations is the same. Life is fragile & at best temporary. Therefore, we do well to consider carefully our eternal destiny. This life is but for a moment, what happens next is forever. Where should my priority lie? *

Now again, Hezekiah is living w/a cloudy understanding of what happens when he dies. For you (in the light of the cross of J.C.), death has no sting, no victory, death has been swallowed up in the victory of J.C. *over* death through the power of the resurrection! Hezekiah had no concept of *any* of that... So he asks God to let him live, & God says, "Yes".

Vs 15-20

Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together. It is good, it is biblical to render praise unto God in the corporate gathering of the body of Christ. * Here it is. "God has given me His word. He alone has saved me. He alone has delivered me, He alone will restore me. I will walk w/Him, render honor & praise to Him. Walk carefully *before* Him all the days of my life..." God help us to "walk carefully" before Him, *intentionally* honoring Him all the days of our lives. There is no one else who can save you, restore you, deliver your soul from the pit of corruption & cast all your sins behind His back. We owe Him *everything*. *

2 quick observations. #1 Look at Vs 19. "The father shall make known Your truth to the children." I realize there aren't fathers in every home... & God's grace is sufficient. But dad, lead your family. Be the man God is calling you to be. Make known God's truth to your children.

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jas 4:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

#2 Vs 20, “The Lord was ready to save me.” Maybe you’re here, you don’t know J.C. God is ready to save you, call *upon* Him, cry out *to* Him, He will deliver your soul from the pit of corruption & cast all your sins behind His back.

Now, just so you know. 3 yrs after this, Hezekiah would father a son. His son’s name was Manasseh. Manasseh was the single most wicked king that Israel/Judah ever knew. He did repent in the end. But the evil he did in the sight of the Lord was unconscionable. It brings us back; would Hezekiah have been better off to simply go w/what God instructed in the 1st place? Perhaps it’s worthless to speculate. But again, best to simply leave our lot in the hands of the LORD. Nevertheless, not my will, Your will be done.

Now how did God perform Hezekiah’s healing? Did he have Isaiah pray over him? Or did Isaiah lay hands on him so he fell backward in dramatic fashion?

Vs 21-22

God promised a miraculous healing. He did it through a medical procedure. We pray for healing & take our medicine, go to the dr. We don’t despise the gifts of God through medical science.

& God confirmed for him that he would be completely healed through the sign upon the sundial.

Chapter 39

Vs 1-2

If something about this doesn’t sit well w/you, that’s because it shouldn’t. Babylon (at this time) wasn’t a superpower, but they were up & coming. Judah was seen as a little Podunk, backwoods kind of kingdom. Hezekiah, being flattered that news of him had reached as far as Babylon & that they had even sent ambassadors (including the king’s son) to give him a gift & congratulate him on his recovery, was all too eager to show them just how significant his kingdom was.

Much of Solomon’s wealth was still in Jerusalem & Hezekiah (being inflated in his pride) was eager to impress them w/it... & he did. He showed them *everything*. – This is the difference in wanting to serve men (mankind) which is good. & Wanting to be pleasing to man, which is bad. We’re to be God pleasers, Hezekiah is being a man pleaser.

Hezekiah isn’t looking to bring honor & glory to God w/this. He’s looking for the praise & recognition of man...

But what's going to happen is that these guys will go back to Babylon & tell their king of all the wealth they've seen in Jerusalem. So when they need money to finance their campaign (their war against the nations), guess where they're going to go...

Vs 3-4

He's clueless. "I showed them everything! You should've seen how impressed they were!"

Vs 5-7 Close

& One of the descendants of Hezekiah whom the king of Babylon would take & have him serve in the palace of Babylon? Daniel.

Vs 8

I don't know that there's a good way to look at this. He essentially wipes the sweat from his forehead & says, "Whew, at least it won't happen in my lifetime."

Let me leave you w/this. * Hezekiah had said that he'd honor God w/the time He gave him. But that was only going to happen if Hezekiah was *intentional* about it. You're not going to mature in godliness in some magical way over time. All time is going to do is come & go... What matters is what you do w/it, how you use it. Put in the work, study God's Word. & May God help us to serve Him, honor Him, give glory & praise to Him... all the days of our lives. *

Prayer Points

Father we acknowledge You as the Giver & Taker of life. Our lives are in Your hands. Fill us w/Your Spirit, empower us & embolden us to live *for* You, that we might bring glory *to* You all the days of our lives. May we be a people of prayer, & may Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God's will for you is that you be saved. If you're not walking in the reality of that, call upon Him today. Don't leave here w/out getting your heart in His hands. There's no guarantees beyond this moment. Turn from your sin, believe on J.C. today.