

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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### **The Christian's Armor: All Prayer (Part 3)** **Hezekiah's Prayer: Seeking God's Glory**

**W**e must, declared the Puritan George Swinnock, "use argumentative prayer, as Moses did (Exod. 32:11-13) and get a holy impudence, as that widow did (Luke 11:8). God loves to see us fervent, when it is for his glory and his church's good."<sup>1</sup> Hezekiah, in this regard, serves as an excellent example. This godly king is considered, next to David, to be one of the most faithful to reign in Judah. He did a remarkable job of establishing the nation in its worship of God. Note his zeal for the *house* of Jehovah (II Chron. 3:19), and for the *worship* of Jehovah (verses 20-36), and his strict adherence to the Davidic pater (verses 25, 27, 30). Clearly, his delight was in the word of Jehovah. And, further, II Chron. 31:21 speaks of the 'work' which he commenced 'in the *Law and in the Commandments.*' Nor is this all; he formed a *guild* of men for this devout literary work. A reference to Proverbs 25:1 will show that these 'men of Hezekiah' had a good hand in shaping the Book of Proverbs into its present form. Their work would scarcely begin and end with that one book! It has been well said that in Hezekiah's age 'Israel reached its golden literary prime' with Hezekiah himself as the royal patron of piety and letters. Isaiah and Shebna and Joah were leaders among these 'men of Hezekiah' (II Kings 18:18, 19:2).<sup>2</sup> Hezekiah also stands out on the pages of the Old Testament as a man of prayer. Two of his prayers are recorded in II Kings. The first has to do with the defeat of Sennacherib's army (II Kings 19:15-19). The second prayer occurs after Hezekiah learns that he has a sickness that will prove lethal (II Kings 20:1). This particular prayer has troubled a lot of Christians, some have even said that it is characterized by its self centeredness not with faith and should not serve as a model for how we are to pray. One writer suggests that Hezekiah's sickness was part of God's chastisement for his unfaithfulness.<sup>3</sup> How are we to understand this prayer? Should we pray like this or not? What does Hezekiah's prayer teach us?

#### **I. THE PROBLEMS CONFRONTING HEZEKIAH**

One thing we must not conclude from this text is that it is *always* God's will to heal His people from sickness. The Bible nowhere promises perfect health to God's people. J.I. Packer comments, "Again it is true: salvation embraces both body and soul. And there is indeed, as some put it, healing for the body in the Atonement. But, we must observe that perfect physical health is promised, not for this life, but for heaven, as part of the resurrection glory that awaits us in the day when Christ will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself. Full bodily well-being is set forth as a future blessing of salvation rather than a present one. What God has promised, and when he will give it, are separate questions."<sup>4</sup>

- A. His Condition: Hezekiah is not just ill, he is miserably sick. He has contracted some sort of disease that produced boils or ulcers on his body (cf. 20:7). He was a relatively young man of 39 and had only been King 14 years.
- B. The Prophet's Pronouncement: Hezekiah's state of mind only worsened when he is told by Isaiah to put his house in order because this sickness will soon bring about his death. No hope here. The finality of Isaiah's words must have been devastating to the young king.
- C. Hezekiah's Theological Quandary: He must not only deal with the physical pain his sickness brings but the king finds himself psychologically and emotionally perplexed as well. Godfrey observes, "As we look more closely at this story of Hezekiah, we begin to see that his sickness is only a part and expression of a deeper problem that he wrestles with in prayer. It is not just his sickness that worries Hezekiah and drives him to prayer. At a deeper level, he is worried about

what this sickness says about the faithfulness and reliability of God and his promises.”<sup>5</sup> There is also the nagging problem of an heir. Hezekiah, at this point in his life, has no son to sit on the throne of David. Did not God promise that the Messiah would come from the house of David? What will happen to this promise if Hezekiah dies childless?

## II. THE PRIORITIES OF HEZEKIAH’S PRAYER

Hezekiah’s situation is one of desperation. Yet he does not vent his anger at God or fall into despair—he turns to God in prayer. He seeks comfort in the promises of God (cf. Ps. 34). Hezekiah, contrary to what some read here, is not resting in his righteousness as the grounds for God granting his requests. Hezekiah knew he was a sinner. He also knew that left to himself, there was no good thing in him. But Hezekiah likewise knew that he had been redeemed by the grace of God; that he had been forgiven and renewed by the grace of God; that he had been made a part of God’s covenant family. He knew that in the covenant family, by the grace of God, he was a covenant keeper. When he turns to the Lord and says, “I have loved your truth; I have walked in your covenant; I have devoted myself to you,” he is contrasting himself with Sennacherib. He is saying, “I have not been a covenant breaker like Sennacherib. I have not blasphemed against you. I have sought in all my life to serve you. So Lord be merciful to me. Lord, show me your goodness in prolonging my life.” Hezekiah prays very much in the spirit of Psalm 26:1-6. “When Hezekiah prays as a covenant-keeper for healing, he is not praying selfishly and self-centeredly for himself. He is not saying, “O Lord, I have been good, so you owe me something.” Rather Hezekiah is reasoning with the Lord in prayer at a very profound level.”<sup>6</sup> The old Scottish commentators got it right when they wrote, “The course of Hezekiah’s thought was evidently directed to the promise made to David and his successors on the throne (I Kings 8:25). He had kept the conditions as faithfully as human infirmity admitted; and as he had been all along free from any of those great crimes by which, through the judgment of God, human life was often suddenly cut short, his great grief might arise partly from the love of life, and the promise of long life and temporal prosperity made to the pious and godly, which would not be fulfilled to him if he were cut off in the midst of his days; partly from the obscurity of the Mosaic dispensation, where life and immortality had not been fully brought to light; and partly from his plans for the reformation of his kingdom being frustrated by his death, and from his having as yet, which was most probably the case, no son whom he could leave heir to his work and his throne. He pleaded the fulfilment of the promise.”<sup>7</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** If we would pray as the Bible instructs us, we must, like Hezekiah, pray with our minds saturated with Scripture. Godfrey exhorts us when he says, “Hezekiah’s prayer flows out of his profound knowledge of God’s purpose and the ways in which God glorifies himself. Hezekiah’s mind was clearly filled with the Psalms, and ours should be too. That is why it is so important that we sing the Psalms. We need those rich and deep roots of piety out of God’s own Word to fill our hearts so that we might glorify him. Sing Psalm 30 and unite with David (and Hezekiah) in celebrating the deliverance of the Lord. May God encourage us to reason with him in prayer to seek his own glory and to glory in his will. Amen.”<sup>8</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of George Swinnock IV* (rpt. The Banner of Truth, 1992), p. 292.

<sup>2</sup> cf. J.S. Baxter, *Explore the Book II* (Zondervan, 1962), p. 146-147.

<sup>3</sup> Irving Jensen, *II Kings with Chronicles: A Self-Study Guide* (Moody, 1968), p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> J.I. Packer, “Poor Health May Be the Best Remedy” *Christianity Today* (May 21, 1982), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> W.R. Godfrey, *Leaders at Prayer: Messages by the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary in California Given During the Fall of 1990 Week of Prayer* (WTS, 1990), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> R. Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, D. Brown, *A Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testament II* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1961), p. 435.

<sup>8</sup> *op. cit.* p. 8.