

“The Power of Prayer and the Problem of Pride” // (Hezekiah, pt. 2) // 2 Kings 19–20

Welcome Summit Church... If you have a Bible I'd invite you to open it to...

Last week we looked at the difference that one person's faith can make for a city; a family; a circle of friends. **Hezekiah was a man who “stood in the gap”** between his generation and God, and **because of his faith** God worked salvation in his generation.

In so doing he gave us a picture of Jesus, who was the ultimate “stand in the gap” person for us... and I told you that **God intends for you** to be that for someone else. *Your faith, your obedience becomes the means by which God pours salvation out in your community.*

- **Why don't we experience more outpouring of the Spirit?** The Scripture doesn't present God as unwilling; it doesn't present the world as too sinful; it presents us as unwilling to put ourselves in that “stand in the gap” position of faith and generosity!
- **Think about that... this current generation at UNC students has done shot to experiencing awakening... and it's in the hands of the generation of believing students on campus now.**
 - *If your 4 years at UNC experience an awakening, it's because you got serious about your sin, about prayer, and believing God for your campus.*

Hezekiah was that in his generation. So what happened next, after Hezekiah led them in that revival? You know those stories of “*Where are they now?*” that come on VH1 about the 80's stars? All these people we knew and loved in the 1980's... I love those shows:

- Some of the **stars went on to become great directors**, like Tom Hanks and Robert Redford;
- **Tom Cruise** became a scientologist and a type-A weirdo.
- Sometimes what they did was **totally random**... One guy, I can't remember whom... got out of the movies and started to a dry-cleaning business. (Ralph Macchio, the Karate Kid, started a hair removal business: Wax On, Wax Off.)
- **Arnold Schwarzenegger** became the governor;
- And **Nicolas Cage**, of course, went on to become the greatest actor of our generation

Well, what happened “next” with Hezekiah? It's really interesting, and really instructive for us... because **how Hezekiah's life turns out after a great start**, shows us the potential our lives can have—both for good and bad.

You're going to see **something at the end of this story** that, if you're not familiar with it, is going to blow your mind. I'm serious. If you are not familiar with this story, you are not going to see it coming. Let's get started.

2 Kings 19–20

Turn to 2 Kings 19... 2 Kings 19 records the story of the greatest battle that never happened.

Sennacherib was the wicked king of Assyria... (worst name: snack of ribs). Assyria, which he ruled, was also really terrible place, a place so bad that, according to Veggie Tales, people slapped each other with fishes...

Sennacherib had gone on a mini-world conquest and conquered over 46 city-states and kingdoms. **In 2 Kings 19 he brings** about a quarter million troops to Jerusalem and camps outside their walls. **(This was a huge army**... The entire population of Jerusalem that time was about

10,000 and Hezekiah's mounted soldiers were less than 2000. 250,000 vs. 2,000.)¹

Sennacherib sends a smack-talking letter to Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem that said, “[19:10] Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. [11] Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction. And shall you be delivered? [12] Have the gods of the other nations delivered them?” Then he sent messengers to the people: “Don't let Hezekiah fool you, telling you your God will deliver you. I am 46-0. You're going to be 47.”

[14] Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD... He said to God (vs. 17), “God it is true; Sennacherib has destroyed all these nations and their gods ...but that's because they were not really gods at all; just the work of men's hands... But you, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone.” (19:14–19)

Well, God heard his prayer, and God sent the prophet Isaiah to tell Hezekiah: [32] “Thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city or even shoot an arrow at it... [34] By the way that he came he shall return. [35] For *I will* defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David...” (19:32–34)

[35] That night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. **While Israel was sleeping;** without a single casualty on their side. Sennacherib's **record just dropped** to 46–1 with this one being a total shut out. **And when**

¹ See 2 Kings 18:23. [Finkelstein, Israel](#); [Silberman, Neil Asher](#) (2001). *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. Simon and Schuster.

people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. [36] Then Sennacherib departed and went home and lived at Nineveh. [37] And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, his sons, struck him down with the sword. (2 Kings 19:35-37). Things did not turn out well for ol' S'nax.

You History Channel nerds will find this interesting: Archaeologists have uncovered Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh, and **they found a wall where Sennacherib had inscribed** all his victories. He lists out the cities he conquered and details about each conquest. **When it comes to Jerusalem** all it says that he had Hezekiah trapped “like a bird in a cage.” Strangely, though, he never says what happened after that, which he does with all the other cities he conquered.

In a book called *What If?* military historian William McNeill called this “*the most important battle that never happened.*”

- **Had Sennacherib been victorious**, McNeill says, **Judah** would have **been destroyed**, and there would have been **no continuing nation**; no Israel for Jesus to be born into; therefore no church; human history would have been fundamentally altered and you and I wouldn't be sitting here today.
- He called it **the most fateful “might have been”** in all recorded history.
- And **what makes it so remarkable** to him, he says, was there was **no natural reason** for the people to defy Sennacherib. **Jerusalem was nothing** in military terms; cities much bigger and more powerful than Jerusalem had just surrendered to Sennacherib to try and escape total annihilation. McNeill says:

“The inhabitants of the small, weak, and dependent kingdom of Judah had the (audacity) to believe that their God was the only true God, whose power extended over all the earth... For me, pondering how a small company of prophets and priests in Jerusalem (inspired so many to believe), and how their views (about their God) came to prevail so widely in later times (defies) imagination. Never before or since has so much depended on so

*few, believing so wholly in their 'one, true god', and in such bold defiance of common sense."*²

The kings of Israel were supposed to lead the people to trust in God despite the fiercest opposition, and that's exactly what Hezekiah did. **He led Israel to have confidence in God** in the face of overwhelming odds. **And because of his faith, Israel won a great victory**, a victory that **preserved their nation** from destruction... and than **connects in an incredible way** to you and I sitting here today.

In so doing, Hezekiah gives you a picture of prayer done right. 4 quick things. We'll call this:

I. Stand in the Gap Prayer 2 Kings 19:1–34

1. Hezekiah prioritized God's glory and purposes (vs. 35)

- In his prayer, he put God's glory and purposes foremost. Vs. 19, *"Show these people (both the Israelites and the attacking Assyrians), that you are God alone."*
- **Hezekiah knew that was God's purpose**; Scripture told him that was God's purpose, and when he discovered the **purposes of God** and **prayed them back to God**, he saw an **outpouring of the power of God**.
- I told you last week that **"Effective prayer is discerning what God wants and then asking him for it."**
 - **Prayers that start in heaven** are heard by heaven.
 - If you are experiencing unanswered prayers, the 1st place I'd look is to **whether my prayers are grounded** in God's revealed purposes in Scripture.
 - Is your prayer filled with the promises of God?

² *What If? The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been?* William H. McNeill. Parentheses indicate my paraphrase.

- Where do I learn them? Scripture! 3000 of them. On every page.
- **Open your Bible, get on your knees, and pray these back to God.** It's why I say **don't read your way through the Bible; pray your way through.**
- Jesus said that something that **confuses a lot of people**: he said that if we had faith like a mustard seed we could move mountains. People say, "Well, **I've prayed lots of times and the mountain didn't move.** Most of my requests were **not even mountain-sized**; they were the size of lil' old anthills... and yet they still didn't happen."
 - So they think "Well, **there must be something wrong with me...** I don't have enough faith" or "maybe this prayer thing doesn't work," or even "maybe God doesn't exist."
 - **"Faith as a mustard seed"**: In the Bible, *faith*, is never a just **positive emotion** toward God (VS. OUR CULTURE!)_ that we work up, a **presumptuous optimism** that God will give us what we want if we just believe it enough; ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE, **faith is a response to what God has revealed.**
 - **SO In order to have faith, we have to first know what God has revealed.** Faith is not just a hopeful optimism, it is a direct response to the revelation. *Where there is perception of the revelation, there can be no faith.*
 - **God reveals himself primarily** through his Word and **secondarily** through his Spirit, and in those things he shows us **what mountains** he wants to move, and then we ask him to move them... and he does.
 - Remember, **in the model prayer Jesus gave us to pray**, one of the 1st things he taught us to say is "Your kingdom come, your will be done..." And we learn his will from Scripture and from his Spirit.
- **I'll say it again: If you are experiencing unanswered prayers**, the first place I'd look is to whether my prayers are grounded in God's revealed purposes in Scripture.

- The prayers that are heard by heaven are the ones that start in heaven.

2. He was confident that God's victory would come

- He knew God would establish his kingdom, no matter how bad the odds. A **quarter million soldiers** camped outside his walls, a **letter demanding his surrender** is in his hands; he is in the Temple with it **spread out before God so that God can read it**, because he knows that when God gets involved it doesn't matter if it's a quarter million or 25 million.

3. He knew prayer was the means by which God's victory would come

- **His confidence in God didn't lead him to do nothing...** to sit around and say, "Well, you know, it's all in God's hands."
 - His **belief in God's sovereignty moved him to pray.**
- **We know that prayer is the means by which God has sovereignly appointed to get his work done.** So our confidence in God to get the victory will not lead us to complacency, but compel us to pray!
- **Me with eating: Does God know the day you will die? Why do you eat?**

When you pray, God goes to work...

- **Me in Indo:** friends got caught... never had a bible in that dialect. The Bibles they were giving out we had smuggled in. They were tracing it back to us. I read in the newspaper they had found my contact. I talked to him... I'm going to prison. After that, nothing. Disbanded. God said, "Far enough."

What do you need to spread out before God?

- Bills; Goals; an ambition or dream.
- Maybe a bad report... letter home from the principal about one of your kids...

Do you ever feel like Hezekiah here? Like some impossible army assails what you know to be God's purposes for you?

I think we experience that feeling, in general sometimes, as the people of God. Our world tells us "*You know, you **can't possibly maintain Christian confession** in this age or the age to come. The church is declining in Western society and will continue to... If you take the Bible's teaching on things like sexuality seriously you'll be on the wrong side of history.*" It often feels overwhelming.

- When you feel like that, think of Hezekiah and the size of the army in front of him.
- And realize that **God can do more while you sleep** than we can do in 10,000 lifetimes.

And realize that that feeling, like we are on the brink of being crushed, is not new for us in our day:

- **The Roman Emperor Diocletian in 303 A.D.** went on a rampage and tried to stamp out the church... sent out an order to burn every Bible. Fed whole families of Christians to the lions. **Just a few years later Constantine became a Christian** and established Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire.
- **There is a monument in France erected to a small group of people you've probably never heard of... Huguenots.** Hated group of Christians. Government and religious leaders tried to destroy. At one point thought they had killed them all. But they survived, and they grew. Today, there's an old monument that stands in France commemorating them, that says: "Pound away, you evil hands; the hammer breaks, the anvil stands."
- The French atheist Voltaire said in the 18th century that within 100 years of his death no one would even remember the Bible.
 - Last words: I am abandoned by God and man... I'd give half my fortune for 6 more months!"
 - Today in his house sits a Bible-printing press. **GOD JUST SHOWING OFF**
- The **Chinese Communist revolution** tried to stamp out Christianity in the mid-20th century from China. Today Mao Tse Tung is dead, the Communist wave has subsided, and the church is growing in

China faster than at any place, at any time, in human history. And **some of our people** are there as a part of it.

- *Pound away, you evil hands. The hammer breaks; the anvil stands.*
- God will build his church, and the gates of hell will not be able to stop it.
 - **Islamic terrorists** can't stop it; **secular media** can't stop it; **King Jong Il-in-the head** won't stop it in North Korea... **cynical professors** at your college campus can't stop it.
- **God's glory will cover the earth, Scripture tells us, like the waters cover the sea.** He will redeem people from every tribe and tongue on the planet to worship around his throne.

Do you have things you believe God is working in your family, through your life? Get on your face and confess your belief...

- When Martin Luther made his famous stand for the gospel at the Diet of Worms he was immediately put into hiding because people were trying to kill him. **Church leadership immediately tried to gather up all Luther's books** and burn them: Luther, in hiding, wrote these words we still sing today:

"A mighty fortress is our God; a bulwark never failing... our helper he amidst the flood, of mortal ills prevailing... And still our ancient foe, doth seek to work us woe! The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still. His kingdom never faileth!

THAT WAS TRUE THEN; IT'S TRUE TODAY; IT WILL BE TRUE TOMORROW; YOU ARE NOT ON THE WRONG SIDE OF HISTORY, BECAUSE HISTORY IS HIS-STORY, AND IF YOU'RE WITH HIM, YOU'LL ALWAYS BE OK.

4. After praying faithfully, he planned fervently

- If you go to Jerusalem one of the places they'll always take you is "the Siloam tunnel." It's this big, underground channel that Hezekiah built. **I've actually walked through part of it. When Hezekiah found out Sennacherib was coming,** he knew the first

thing Sennacherib would do would be cut off the water supply (that's how a siege works), so he dug a secret tunnel that rerouted the water into Jerusalem underground and into the city so that during the siege they'd have plenty of water. **They had to figure out how** to meet, under the Assyrians... It's really cool.

- The tunnel was discovered by archaeologists in the 19th century and it matches up perfectly with the details recorded in this story.³
- **But I only point this out to make the point:** Praying does not preclude prepping or visa versa.
- I've heard it said: "Get on your knees and pray like it's all up to God; and then get up and work like it's all up to you."

WHY WE GIVE!

So, this was an awesome moment... Hezekiah did exactly **what kings and leaders** were supposed to do... he led the people to believe God **IN THE FACE OF OVERWHELMING ODDS...** But **look at the next story.**

(II. Self-preserving prayer: 2 Kings 20:1–21)**

2 Kings 20 opens with Hezekiah getting sick with a life-threatening disease... and [1] The prophet Isaiah came and said to him... "Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover." It says that Hezekiah then **turned his face toward the wall, and wept bitterly** and pled with God to take away his sickness. I read this, and, **I'll be honest... It feels a little whiny...** there is nothing wrong with praying for healing... but the **despondency; turning toward the wall: he's pouting...** Watch how this unfolds. God answers him, and says, [5] I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. **Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.**

³ *Journal of Archaeological Science* 33 (2): 227–237

[8] And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me?” So Isaiah says, the sundial will jump forward 10 steps (which was about 20 seconds) all at once. [10] But Hezekiah answered, “It is an easy thing for the shadow to lengthen ten steps. Rather let the shadow go back ten steps.” **This seems a little demanding...** There is a **tone that the writer is giving** to Hezekiah’s life. He turns his face to the wall and pouts and cries; he gets pushy with God about signs.

Well, God **gives him his sign**: he makes the shadow go back; and, just like God promised, he recovers.

Well, **vs. 11: The king of Babylon hears that Hezekiah has gotten better**, so he sends some envoys from Babylon with a letter and a present for him. This is a **PRIME** opportunity for Hezekiah to give glory to God; to **boast to the nations** about how God saved him from Sennacherib; how God delivered him from his sickness... but when the Babylonians show up,

“Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.” (20:13)

Do you see what is missing? No glory is given to God. No explanation of how God saved him; how God did it all. Only, “look at my riches and my power. Look at how much I’ve accomplished!” He never even takes them into the Temple. The author of 2 Chronicles says that this was a manifestation of Hezekiah’s pride.⁴

Well, after the Babylonians leave, the prophet Isaiah comes to confront Hezekiah. He and tells him, [17] Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house... shall be carried to Babylon.

(While they were there the Babylonian officers made a note in their travelogue: “We have to come back some day and steal all this stuff.) Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. [18] And some of your own sons, who shall be born to you, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs (which involves castration; the end of his line) in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

[19] Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?”

What? After God had richly blessed him, he’s demanding and needy and proud and selfish. **It became about him, to the point he says**, “Who cares about others, as long as it is good for me.”

The next verse says he lived for those 15 years and then he died.

How his life ends should serve as 2 things for us: a warning, and a promise:

Warning

It is so easy to receive the blessings of God and make them all about you! God blesses you with **life and prosperity and family and salvation and a good church**... and it just becomes **about you**: your **comforts**; your **needs**; your **glory**. You’re not worried about how well this church reaches others, but only how well it meets your needs.

- *Are you using your success to give glory to God?*
 - If you are a **prospering athlete**, are you **using your success** to lift up God’s name or yours? Are you asking, “How can I use every ounce of my success to direct glory to Jesus?”
 - If you are a **successful businesswoman who overcame all the odds to get where you are**: Are you **thinking more** about how much people admiring you for your success, or are you **using your success to direct** attention to God, saying, “*I am what I am because of God’s grace. I was dead in sin when God saved me.*”

⁴ 2 Chronicles 32:25. See R. D. Patterson, *1 and 2 Kings*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, 275–276.

- **Hezekiah's evil was not immorality or murder or idolatry...** it was simply not leveraging his success to give glory to God.
- *So... are you using your success to give glory to God, and are you leveraging your health, or your resources, for the mission of God?*
 - **Have you been blessed by God**—with salvation, and family, and resources—and **people all around you perish...** but you think, like Hezekiah (you might never say this, but) **“Who cares? As long as my needs are taken care of and I die happy, it will be ok. Sure, kids right here in my own city are growing up without mothers and fathers... people all around the world are dying with no chance to hear about Jesus... but it's ok. Me and the people I love are blessed.”**
 - And so you spend **all your money and all your time** on personal comforts, personal pleasures, personal ambition.
 - Here's **why I can never pile up luxury** in my life. **Not now; not when I retire...** Because we get **one shot** to bring salvation to a world around us dying... **Can we really look** at that and say, “Who cares? I am saved. I am going to heaven.”
- **The warning: This is how many of God's people end their lives.** The pass the test of adversity, and fail the test of prosperity.
- **In the moment of adversity, we turn to God;** in the moment of prosperity, we turn back into ourselves.

Promise

- Hezekiah's tragic end, like the end of every king in the Bible, points us to the **need for a greater king...** One who would **not think of his own interests**, but the people's and God's.
 - **King David, Israel's greatest king, the king after God's own heart, ended his life in failure**, using his position of power for sexual conquest and murdering those who got in his way.

- **Solomon, the wisest Jewish king who ever lived**, ended his life in failure, **leveraging his great wisdom and power** to please himself.
- **Hezekiah, arguably the most faith-filled king who ever lived**, ended his life in failure... **thinking of his own welfare** and no one else's.
- **But one day another king of Judah would come.** Like Hezekiah, he would trust God in the face of impossible odds. When the armies of Satan came against him, even to the point that they put him on a cross, he never stopped trusting God.
- But, **unlike Hezekiah, when death came to him, he didn't ask God to extend his life and say**, “Who cares about future generations, as long as I'm ok,” **he laid down his life** so that future generations could live.
 - He said, “Father, if there be any other way, let this cup pass from me... **not my will but yours** be done. If this is the only way they can be saved, I'll gladly drink this cup of death so that they don't have to drink it.”
- **The irony:** Hezekiah asked God to extend his life because he could care less about the death of his children; **Jesus eagerly laid down his life and tasted death** so his children would never have to.

Conclusion

Paul would say: We who then live by his death should no longer live for ourselves, but for the one by whose death we live. Not for a season, but for our whole lives.

We are here at the end of All-In. Been about taking what we have and leveraging it not for ourselves, but for him and to reach those who died to save us.

- **Don't make Hezekiah's mistake;** he had a long season of faithfulness and then started making it all about him. Don't you do that... oh, I sacrificed for a while, now it's back to being all about me.

So here's my question: For whose benefit are you living? Your own, or for Jesus and his kingdom's sake?

- In John 12:24–25 Jesus compared life to a seed...
- Are you doing that with your resources? Seeing them as seeds?

I am convinced Paul says, that if Jesus died for us all, then we who live by his death should no longer live for ourselves but for him who died for us and rose again and by whose death we now live.

And remember... 2 Cor 8:9

Have you trusted Christ? Before God asks anything from you, he has something for you.