

Lessons From the Life of Good King Hezekiah

We're not here to live as we please, nor to pursue life by our own understanding of things. God has given us revelation, the Scriptures, by which to guide us thru life. We ignore His Word at our peril. Precious lessons for us are narrated in the Hebrew Bible, and one of the most important comes from the life of King Hezekiah. It's an incident that's recorded three times in separate places, it's that important. So let's look at it. It's in 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and the narrative of 2 Kings is repeated in Isaiah. I'll begin in 2 Chronicles Chapter 29. These several chapters, 29-32, are one of the high points of the Old Testament.

Hezekiah was a good king, actually, he was a *very* good king. He evidently knew thoroughly the Mosaic Law. And he was filled with zeal for the honor of Israel's God. He had the Temple purified and restored to allow the worship prescribed in the Law. He understood that what previous generations had done was evil and he was determined not to repeat it. He understood that God had disciplined Israel for that neglect, and he sought instead to please God. Hezekiah's faith was genuine: he himself led the worship at the dedication of the restored Temple. But the people also responded with zeal for God, worshiping as God intended for them. The people did it willingly in faith and love.

Chapter 30 narrates how Hezekiah restored the celebration of the Passover at Jerusalem. Couriers were sent throughout the land inviting all Israel to participate as a demonstration of their returning to the Lord and showing their faithfulness. For the many Israelites who attended but hadn't consecrated themselves, Hezekiah interceded and God heard his plea and forgave those people. On that special occasion, there was much rejoicing and praising of God. **"There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the days of Solomon son of David king of Israel [that is, almost three centuries] there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem"** (30:26). In chapter 31, the story of Hezekiah's faithfulness to God continues. He destroyed the pagan worship places that previous generations had used to worship alien gods. He restored the priests and Levites to their offices and roles, so that they would serve as prescribed, offering sacrifices, singing praises and giving thanks to God. He saw to it that the Levites devoted themselves to the study of the Law. And, again, the people responded to Hezekiah's faith with a genuine faith of their own, imitating their good king's generosity. The people of Judah were wonderfully blessed. The author concludes these several chapters saying that Hezekiah did **"what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God. In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered"** (31:20-21). And the people of Judah prospered.

2 Chronicles Chapter 32 narrates an episode too glorious to fully grasp. It's this story that appears in 2 Kings Chapters 18 and 19, and again in Isaiah, chapters 36 and 37. The powerful and brutal King Sennacherib of Assyria, with an absolutely massive army, invaded Judah, attacking and capturing almost all the towns and cities. He then laid siege to Jerusalem. An Assyrian field commander went up to the city's wall and taunted with ridicule and dire threats Hezekiah's officers, the king, the people of Jerusalem, as well as God Himself. He spoke eloquently, telling outright lies and blasphemies. Unfortunately, his threats were real. Sennacherib's army had the ability to utterly destroy Jerusalem and all its inhabitants.

A desperate Hezekiah sought the Lord. **"He tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the Lord"** (37:1). Hezekiah's fervent prayer is recorded in vv.16-20, **"O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O Lord, and hear . . . Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God."** He also sent for Isaiah the prophet to hear a word from God. And Isaiah's prophecy was a long poetic response that ended with, **"This is what the Lord says, 'He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here . . . I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant.'" And what happens next (in the very next verse!) is breath-taking. "Then the angel of the Lord went out and put to death 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning – there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Ninevah and stayed there."** A bit later, two of Sennacherib's own sons assassinated their father the king while he was worshipping his god in his temple.

The story of good king Hezekiah continues by recounting his illness unto death, and how God not only granted him another 15 years of life, but gave him a sign, one of the most astounding miracles in the Bible. It was a reversal of the path of the sun as evidenced by the sun's shadow going backward on a staircase. The story of Hezekiah ends with the king doing something he ought not have done. He revealed to Babylonian envoys Judah's vast wealth. His boast should have been of their great, wonder-working, loving God, not of the massive wealth He had blessed them with. Israel's great blessing was not their prosperity but the God who loved them. (And who had commanded them to testify of Him to the Gentile nations.) A good life, sadly, ends with failure. He's not the promised King.

What lessons do we find in this narrative that apply to us today? I suggest the following, not in any specific order.

1. The absolute necessity to trust in God despite the most dire of circumstances. Hezekiah was not only at risk of being cruelly executed by the Assyrians, he put at risk all of the people of Jerusalem by refusing to surrender to wicked Sennacherib. But his trust in the Word of God that came to him from the prophet Isaiah was vindicated. Trust in God's Word is trust in God. We live not by sight (i.e., how we suppose we should deal with circumstances) but by faith in the wonder-working God of Israel. We must know His Word in order to know how to live by faith.

Probably the most dire of all circumstances is, What happens to us after death? We all know we're sinners and that, in justice, sin must be punished. In the Gospel, we trust Christ to save us from deserved punishment and to give us, instead, blessing and life. Just as Hezekiah really had to trust God to save them from certain death, so must we trust Christ to save us from deserved justice.

2. Hezekiah's commitment to the Lord was essential for him and for his people, and it was wonderfully rewarded. God demands of us not just trust, but a deep and profound life-changing commitment. The commandment to love the Lord with all one's heart, soul and might means committing ourselves to Him, giving ourselves to Him in a way that controls our thoughts, our will, indeed, our very lives. As we read the text, what comes through is Hezekiah's deep relationship with God. He sought to honor God, to please God, to obey God. He must have loved God, although the text doesn't say that. We don't usually include commitment to Christ as part of what it means to believe in Him, but I suspect that it's integral to the meaning of *pisteuo* (normally translated into English as meaning "believe.")

3. God is faithful to those who love Him and will deliver them as needed in a way that glorifies Himself. We are in awe of Hezekiah's zeal, but the Hezekiah text is really all about God's faithfulness. God loves His people, and when they repent, as did the king and his people in our text, He is compassionate and merciful and responds with love. But sometimes, God doesn't deliver us in the way we think He should, for example, in situations of persecution. That's because God knows that it's what's on the other side of death that really matters, and He will then reward a love for Him that glorifies Him.

4. The absolute necessity of demonstrating our faith in God. Hezekiah had to actually do all that he did, requiring knowledge of God's will and his very deliberate efforts. Faith isn't just a warm, happy feeling, nor is it mental agreement. Faith is love in action. No mental gymnastics gets around it: faith (or trust) is really obedience to God's revealed will. There are lots of "gospels" circulating in our land, alleging this or that about salvation. Our salvation depends on God's grace, and our response to God is loving, trusting obedience. A refusal to obey is really a refusal to trust.

5. Intimate fellowship with God is really on offer in our walk of faith. Hezekiah knew God, and God was instant in responding to him. There was a relationship between the two that transcended mere intellectual awareness of God's existence or His attributes. Although it's not explicit in the text, it's between the lines of every verse: The fellowship was based on Hezekiah's obedience. Obedience reflects trust and love. Without these, there can be no relationship. The goal of the Gospel isn't merely eternal life. It's intimate fellowship with our loving Creator God who seeks to bless us with His infinite Person and have us participate (in some way not revealed) in the love, joy and peace of the Godhead.

6. There is a corporate unity, a common identity between the king and his people. When there's a good king, the people are good too, and they are blessed. The people prosper when they have a good king, because that's how God has ordered things. We're *in Christ*, which means we are one with Him, we identify with Him, we participate with Him in His death and resurrection and His work. We take His title, Christian. His resurrected life is our life. We are His Body, His Bride, and His Spirit dwells in us. When we're glorified, we'll be just like Him. And when He returns to earth, we'll return with Him. The Father loves the Son. So the love God extends to us, indeed, all blessing, is by being identified with the Son. The Son became incarnate so that, as human as well as God, He could take us who are in Him to the Father. Jesus stated (John 14:6), **"I am the true and living Way."**

7. The text is proleptic of a similar but vastly greater salvation in the future through a greater Son of David. Some future day, a greater deliverance and greater restoration will occur. That will be when Christ returns to save His people, the Jews, from the Anti-Christ, someone far more deceptive and murderous even than Sennacherib was. That day will be more glorious than that day when the angel delivered Jerusalem from the Assyrian army. King Hezekiah anticipates King Jesus, whose faithfulness to God, whose trust and obedience, and whose love for God and His people transcend anything any mortal could possibly have or even imagine. Our text exalts Christ, who is altogether lovely and glorious.