

God Listens
October 18, 2020
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Isaiah 37:14-20; 30-35

Opening: Why is it important to say “I love you?” If the people you love already know you love them, why repeat it over and over?

We all need reminders. Human beings need reminders and reassurance of things like love, safety, and security. One of the reasons we read and study scripture passages more than once is to be reminded of the promises of God. Today’s passage in Isaiah 37 is a great reminder for followers of Christ.

Several months ago I wrote something on my prayer list. I don’t even recall what prompted the thought but here is what I wrote: *“Lord help me to feel Your presence, to remember that You are FOR me, that You are working for my good, and You have complete power over every situation.”* Do you ever need reminding of those things in your relationship with God?

When I wrote that it was not in the context of Isaiah 37, however my thoughts could almost be an outline for these verses if I restated them this way:

- Our Heavenly Father...
 - ...is powerful
 - ...is present
 - ...is our protector
 - ...(and He) will prevail

Big Idea: When we come to God in prayer we can be confident of His presence, His power, His protection, and that He will prevail.

- Isaiah 37 is really the “sequel” to last week’s study of chapter 31.
- Hezekiah the King of Judah was facing attack by the Assyrians and he was tempted to turn to Egypt for protection instead of turning to God.

- We said, “When a follower of Christ is in crisis or under attack, our Heavenly Father shouldn’t be our last resort; He should be the first place we run.” Hezekiah came to His senses and turned to God and not men.
- This week we get a closer look at just HOW Hezekiah came to God in faith and how God came through.
- Hezekiah’s actions and prayer are a great reminder for all of us that our Heavenly Father is present, powerful, our protector, and He WILL prevail.
- Before the text, some context. In Isaiah 36, we read that King Sennacherib of Assyria and his army had destroyed a number of cities in Judah and had basically surrounded the walled city of Jerusalem ready to attack.
- Sennacherib sent his field commander to Jerusalem to publicly demand that King Hezekiah and the people surrender to the Assyrian army.
- This general said some really nasty things to Hezekiah’s representatives:
 - You guys have no army! Egypt can’t help you!
 - Then he got really nasty: “...when we put this city under siege, [the people] will be so hungry and thirsty that they will eat their own dung and drink their own urine.”ⁱ
 - He turned to the bystanders saying, “Don’t let Hezekiah deceive you. He will never be able to rescue you.”
 - Then he went too far. He not only insulted King Hezekiah, he insulted God Himself: (36:18-20) ¹⁸ “Don’t let Hezekiah mislead you by saying, ‘The Lord will rescue us!’ Have the gods of any other nations ever saved their people from the king of Assyria? ²⁰ What god [little “g”] of any nation has ever been able to save its people from my power? So what makes you think that the Lord can rescue Jerusalem from me?”ⁱⁱ
- The people stood in stunned silence, terrified at these threats.
- Hezekiah’s representatives “tore their clothes in despair” and delivered the message to him. He tore HIS clothes and sent for the prophet Isaiah.
- Isaiah had a reassuring message from the Lord (37:5-7): ‘This is what the Lord says: Do not be disturbed by this blasphemous

speech against me from the Assyrian king's messengers.

⁷ *Listen! I myself will move against him, and the king will receive a message that he is needed at home. So he will return to his land, where I will have him killed with a sword.*' ⁱⁱⁱ

- But the Assyrian general wasn't done with his psychological warfare. He sent a letter to King Hezekiah taking his blasphemous threats up a notch: (37:10-12) *"Don't let your God, in whom you trust, deceive you with promises that Jerusalem will not be captured by the king of Assyria. ¹¹ You know perfectly well what the kings of Assyria have done wherever they have gone. They have completely destroyed everyone who stood in their way! Why should you be any different? ¹² Have the gods [little "g"] of other nations rescued them...?"*^{iv}
- What was King Hezekiah to do? Isaiah said God would handle the Assyrians but their nasty letter was casting doubt on that.
- What Hezekiah did next is a lesson and reminder for us.

Isaiah 37:14–20 (NLT)

¹⁴ After Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it, he went up to the Lord's Temple and spread it out before the Lord. ¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed this prayer before the Lord: ¹⁶ "O Lord of Heaven's Armies, God of Israel, you are enthroned between the mighty cherubim! You alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You alone created the heavens and the earth. ¹⁷ Bend down, O Lord, and listen! Open your eyes, O Lord, and see! Listen to Sennacherib's words of defiance against the living God. ¹⁸ "It is true, Lord, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these nations. ¹⁹ And they have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire and burned them. But of course the Assyrians could destroy them! They were not gods at all—only idols of wood and stone shaped by human hands. ²⁰ Now, O Lord our God, rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O Lord, are God."

- In the New Testament, Jesus gave His disciples and us the model prayer.
- This prayer of Hezekiah is also a model of praying when under attack.
- Let's look at the elements of this great prayer for deliverance.

- Hezekiah immediately went to the Lord's temple. He ran to God.
- I love the imagery of Hezekiah spreading the letter out before the Lord. He didn't deny the reality of the situation; he placed it before the Lord.
- When we're under attack we need to place our problems before the Lord.
- He began by acknowledging God's power and sovereignty: "*O Lord of Heaven's Armies, God of Israel,^v You alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You alone created the heavens and the earth.*"^{vi}
- The lesson for us: God is POWERFUL!
- When he prayed, "*you are enthroned between the mighty cherubim,*"^{vii} Hezekiah was acknowledging God's PRESENCE. In Old Testament times God's presence hovered over the Ark of the Covenant
- The lesson for us: God is PRESENT and He hears our pleas!
- Verse 17: Hezekiah asked God to "*Bend down, O Lord, and listen! Open your eyes, O Lord, and see! Listen to Sennacherib's words of defiance against the living God.*"^{viii} *rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O Lord, are God.*"^{ix}
- The lesson for us: God is our PROTECTOR!
- Hezekiah also addressed the blasphemy of the Assyrians.
- Yes, he was praying for deliverance from the military invasion, but more importantly he was asking God to defend His own honor: "¹⁸ *It is true, Lord, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these nations.* ¹⁹ *And they have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire and burned them. But of course the Assyrians could destroy them! They were not gods at all—only idols of wood and stone shaped by human hands.* ²⁰ *Now, O Lord our God, rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O Lord, are God.*"^x
- King Hezekiah knew that God controls everything in the universe.
- The lesson for us: God will PREVAIL!
- We don't use the word "prevail" much. The dictionary defines it as: "*to...exist everywhere...the more important or frequent feature or element; predominate...to be or prove superior in*

strength, power, or influence (usually followed by over): They prevailed over their enemies in the battle...to succeed; become dominant; win out: to wish that the right side might prevail.”

That sounds like the “Lord of hosts, the God of Israel!”

- God will not only deliver His people, His glory and honor will PREVAIL.
- I’m reminded of that line from Longfellow in the great Christmas carol, “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” In the midst of the Civil War he wrote:

“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, With peace on earth, good will to men.”^{xvi}

- God always prevails and He prevailed over Assyria. In verses 33-35, God spelled out that Assyria would “*not even shoot an arrow at Jerusalem.*”
- As we said last week, 2 Kings 19:35 tells us “the angel of the Lord...struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians.”
- Evil Sennacherib would return the way he came. “*Twenty years later...Sennacherib died in political revolt...smashed over the head*”^{xvii} with his own false idols.
- God not only promises deliverance from our crisis, He promises hope for the future.
- In verses 30 to 32 God gave a “sign” of hope for the future to Judah:

³⁰ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Here is the proof that what I say is true: “This year you will eat only what grows up by itself, and next year you will eat what springs up from that. But in the third year you will plant crops and harvest them; you will tend vineyards and eat their fruit. ³¹ And you who are left in Judah, who have escaped the ravages of the siege, will put roots down in your own soil and grow up and flourish. ³² For a remnant of my people will spread out from Jerusalem, a group of survivors from Mount Zion. The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies will make this happen!

- “*The Assyrian siege had destroyed the crops. God would provide enough food through what came up wild for two years. Then the normal agricultural activities could resume. This would be a symbol of growth for Judah, even though the nation appeared as dead as the farm crops.*”^{xviii}

- After a terrible crisis, God was promising to restore what the attackers had destroyed and return Judah to a sense of normal life.
- During these days of COVID-19 everyone is craving a return to “normal.”
- It’s doubtful that everything will go back to exactly the way it was but those of us who trust in our Sovereign God are confident He will deliver His people to once again “grow up and flourish” when this crisis is past.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- If we’re followers of Christ we KNOW our Heavenly Father loves us.
- Still, we human beings need reminders. Hezekiah’s prayer is a great example and reminder of some important things, especially in a crisis.
- Our Heavenly Father...
 - ...is powerful
 - ...is present
 - ...is our protector
 - ...(and He) will prevail
- When we come to God in prayer we can be confident of His PRESENCE, His POWER, His PROTECTION, and that He will PREVAIL.
- That reminds us of another “p” word: all of this is His PROMISE for us.

ⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱ ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ ibid

^{iv} ibid

^v ibid

^{vi} ibid

^{vii} ibid

^{viii} ibid

^{ix} ibid

^x ibid

^{xi} https://hymnary.org/text/i_heard_the_bells_on_christmas_day

^{xii} Butler, Trent. Holman Old Testament Commentary - Isaiah (p. 204). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

^{xiii} *ibid*