

King Hezekiah.

Text: 2 Kings 20:1-6

Suggested Hymns:

409T191, 325T148, 543, 289, 402

1) His affliction

2) His recovery

3) What he learned from that experience

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Kings 20:1-6, ¹ *In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.’”* ² *Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying,* ³ *“Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.*

⁴ *And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying,* ⁵ *“Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord.”* ⁶ *“And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David.””* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Nobody reading the Gospel lessons of the past few Sundays with an observing mind will have failed to discover that they were about the treatment of life's ills, its sufferings and its sorrows.

Last Sunday it was the matter of care, anxiety, and worry on which our Lord gave us instruction. The Sunday before we heard about the ten lepers. The picture of intense bodily affliction appeared on the scene. Previous to that we heard of the deaf-mute and of the Good Samaritan administering his work of love.

In today's Gospel lesson, as if it was the climax, we observe a young man, under circumstances the most pathetic, being carried out to his burial-place. Let us wisely follow the line of thought indicated so far.

There are three things we would note from our Scripture text. Firstly, King Hezekiah's affliction; secondly, his recovery; and thirdly, what he gained from his experience. May the Lord bless our meditation as we learn the comforting and practical truths given by our text today.

1. King Hezekiah's Affliction

The verses before us tell us that just after the destruction of the army of Sennacherib, which had been laying siege to Jerusalem, King Hezekiah was overcome with a deadly disease. It may have been the result of the fatigue and anxiety in connection with the defence of his capital city.

At first it would seem that he had little worry as to the issue of his illness, but when the Prophet Isaiah told him that his disease was fatal, and told him to set his house in order, his heart sank within him.

He was still a young man, possibly forty years old and in the prime of his life. He had just escaped a great peril. The Lord had given him a marvellous, yes, a miraculous deliverance, from the hands of the Assyrian oppressor. Generally speaking, King Hezekiah was a good man, a pious king, who, more than any other since the time of David, was zealous for the honour of Jehovah among the people.

But now all these hopes were dashed to the ground. The cherished purpose of his heart frustrated, his life's work promptly cut short, and as he thought over these things, he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly.

He could not understand God's dealings with him. Why had he been delivered from the Assyrian king if he was now to die? To what end had all his efforts in the interest of true religion been if he was to be cut down before they could be carried through?

It was like the gardener plucking the flower before it was opened, like the builder destroying his own structure before it was finished. It was not Hezekiah's case alone. There have been and are many others since. It is an old problem and

a constantly recurring problem. Why does God deal in such a way, and why does He deal so with those who are His people?

In reply, we would say that a full answer to that problem has not been given to us, and yet there is some light cast upon it by this and other accounts in God's Word.

First of all, we should ward off the rash conclusion, so commonly heard and everywhere repeated, that because we are afflicted, we cannot be the objects of God's love. Many people wrongly think that, if a person is sick and suffering, he must have done something wrong, committed some sin or sins which have brought upon him such an affliction.

How frequently does this lamentation reach a *pastor's ear*, "*What have I done that God should deal in this way with me?*" The Saviour distinctly warned His disciples against such a conclusion, that a particular suffering is always the consequence of some particular wickedness.

It is clear that all such reasoning in the case of Hezekiah was unwarranted. He had done no special sin. He was not a sinner above all other sinners. His ailment came in the course that all bodily ailments come. Why, then, make such conclusions regarding ourselves and others?

No, God's Word offers a different explanation. The Saviour, on one occasion, speaking of the sickness of His friend Lazarus, said, "***This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God.***"¹ Let us take note of that statement. The purpose of God in the affliction of His people is to show forth His glory. In what respect? And how?

In two respects, in the afflicted one himself and upon others. God's glory is advanced by the afflicted person, if the person afflicted is helped by the affliction in his spiritual growth, is made firmer in faith, and established in Christian character.

Luther listed trials as among his best instructors. The Psalmist records the experience of multitudes when he says, "***It is good for me that I have been afflicted.***"² When afflictions have this effect, they are to the glory of God.

Then, again, the afflictions of God's people also contribute to His glory in the effects which they may have upon other people, to silence the person who criticises, convert the careless, or educate the weak believer into stronger faith.

An instance of that is Job. The calamities came on him to prove the utter falseness of the assertion made by Satan that Job was only serving God because God had blessed him with many material goods. No doubt that even in our days many Christians have been greatly afflicted just to show the unbelieving, scoffing people, by whom they are surrounded, how firm and abiding their faith is, and how lovingly God can sustain them in their deepest distress.

Sometimes, too, through the sufferings of a believer the indifferent and careless are awakened and led to the Lord. The affliction of a parent has been a blessing to a son or daughter. The illness of a wife, borne with Christian submission, has led many a man to Christ, while all of us are strengthened in our faith by the sight of the calm and simple trustfulness of a dear one on whom God's hand has been laid.

Afflictions are often to the glory of God. These reflections may not, indeed, fully explain the mystery why God lays low His people, but it lessens it. In any case it ought to keep us from that rash and altogether too common conclusion that because we are afflicted we are particularly at fault.

The contrary seems really true. When the teacher desires to demonstrate his own excellence as an instructor, he takes not the poorest, but the best pupil and subjects him to the severest examination. So sometimes, the Lord exposes His dearest people to fierce trials, just because He knows their strength and would thereby commend that faith by which they stand to the acceptance of their fellow-men.

That is the first consideration that we would direct attention to. Hezekiah, the loved, pious, God-praying King of Judah, was laid low with a serious sickness. And so, as the Apostle Peter expresses it, ¹² ***Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.***³ The very best of people are often the greatest sufferers.

Again, we notice the conduct of Hezekiah. His case was hopeless. The prophet had been directed to tell him, ***'Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.'*** What does the king do? The Bible says, ***Then he turned his face***

toward the wall. Was it to conceal his grief at the fatal message he had received from the prophet? Was it so that he would not be seen or molested by the presence of his servants?, or because the wall was on the side of his mansion which faced toward the Temple of God? We are not told, but the Bible says that *he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD.* He had a place where he went in his distress.

When all earthly hopes vanished and all help seems at an end, he addressed himself directly and immediately to God in whose hands alone rests the outcome of life and of death. Pouring out his heart in tearful sobs, he pleads with the Lord. He tells God of his sincerity of life and purpose to serve Him. He reminds God of His promise to His people to give length of days; and recalls the words of the prophet, *Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you.*⁴ Had the Lord's been ears open to his cry?

The Lord is not displeased with the outpouring of their souls to Him, He delights in it, and it has power with Him. Yes, it is by this very conduct that one can test whose they are and whom they serve. To whom they first go in the time of their need, to which refuge they take themselves when calamity is overtaking them, determines, more than anything else, whether they are God's followers or not.

To use an illustration, when travelling on a train there was a little girl who was romping about and was at home with just about everybody. While she was frolicking around it might have been difficult to tell whom she belonged to, she seemed so much the property of every one.

But when the engine gave a loud, long shriek, and went thundering through a long dark tunnel, the little one made one bound and ran to nestle in a lady's lap. Then everyone knew who was her mother.

So in the day of prosperity, it may sometimes be difficult to say whether a person is a Christian or not, but let him be sent through some dark, damp tunnel of severe affliction, and you will see at once to whom he belongs. That will infallibly reveal it. Take note that when affliction comes, observe to whom you flee for help. It is a sure test whether you are Christ's and Christ is yours.

2. King Hezekiah's Recovery

Hezekiah's appeal was not without results. As he lay there tearfully communing with his own heart and with God, Isaiah returned to his chamber with a message of healing assuring him that he should go up to the temple on the third day, and directed him to take a lump of figs and place it upon the boil.⁵

This simple direction goes to refute and correct some errors very common in our day. The one is that old remedies are to be absolutely avoided. Some say that they do no good and that faith and prayer alone are to be resorted to effect a cure. The theory, and the heresy that has prompted it, are set at naught by this one direction, in which God's prophet, under the direction of the almighty Physician, specified the remedy to be used.

And the other error which it sets at naught is, that medical remedies have, in themselves, aside from God, any virtue or value. Suffering humanity relies too much upon medicine. The medicine bottle has become with many people a veritable idol. They think that it is their god who is going to help them.

The application of figs to boils was a remedy known before Isaiah suggested it, in all likelihood it had been tried in Hezekiah's case without result. Now, at the prophet's injunction, it is tried again and effectively. In other words, this time God worked through it, and so it proved of value. All the medicine in the world is worthless if God does not put divine properties into it. And so let us beware of idolising the medicine, and forgetting God who puts the good into it, and when we take it, let us not fail to offer up with it prayer to God who can and must make it efficacious.

3. What King Hezekiah Gained From His Experience.

And so it came about, through the use of the means which the prophet prescribed, that Hezekiah improved, — *improved*, I repeat, only physically, to natural strength and health? Is that all that his sickness was intended for, that is included in his recovery? Is that all that our affliction is intended for, that, having been confined to the sick-room for a while, we return to our work and calling as before?

Hezekiah was a wiser man than that. The song that he wrote after his recovery, recorded in the 38th chapter of Isaiah, shows that looking death in the face had not failed to produce good results. No man, if he is a thinking man, can be brought to the brink of the grave, and raised almost as if from the dead,

without some benefit from the experience. For one thing, it ought to make him a better Christian. This reminds us of the hymn, "*Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee, e'en though it be a cross that raiseth me.*"

Luther often said that his three great teachers were prayer, study, and trial. Any reader of his life can perceive that if it had not been for the experiences that he passed through, he would not have been the sturdy person that he was. What the tempering is to the iron, giving it the toughness and endurance of steel, that afflictions are to the soul.

The wind might shake and uproot the stripling of a tree, but its blasts are harmless to the oak that has passed through many a storm. And so unbelief may give out its miserable twaddle, the faithless world raise its scoffing and deriding tongue, but the man who once turned his face to the wall and prayed will not be upset, because he knows whom he has believed, and what he has experienced in his own soul and life.

And, again, as it strengthened his faith in God, Hezekiah, after his recovery, was a faithful servant of the Lord, using his kingly authority to bring his people back to the true worship of Jehovah. Simply enough, a man who has been in the very grip of the last enemy and has recovered, cannot but reason think, "*What if I had died?*"

These possessions would have been no longer mine. They cannot, therefore, be mine at all in the highest sense. They must have been entrusted to me by God, and I must use them for God. Usefulness, in most cases, is the result of discipline, the trials we have passed through.

Who is the sympathetic person? You will find it to be the person who has passed through similar affliction that you are passing through. Who is the one that is willing to give a helping hand? Not the priest and the Levite, who, if we knew their prior testing, never knew a serious affliction, — but the Good Samaritan, who very likely knew from personal experience what it meant to be waylaid.

And so, to conclude, do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. Learn to look upon it correctly. Go to the right source for relief, and therefore derive from it the spiritual benefit which God designs. May you lay up what you have

heard, for that time when you need it, for there comes a time when you will need it. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 11:4

² Psalm 119:71

³ 1 Peter 4:12

⁴ Psalm 50:15

⁵ 2 Kings 20:7