

Is. 38 (WCF 5:5-7) “Keeping Us from the Pit of Nothingness”

For the Children: Have you ever wondered why the Lord doesn't stop you from sinning completely? Why you can sometimes pray for help, but then find that you are still doing the same old sins? One reason is because we sometimes don't want to stop sinning. So we ignore the help He gives (like the armour of God). Another reason is that the Lord wants us to learn more about how sinful we are and how we need to use His help more to resist sin. This can also make us more thankful that our sins are forgiven because of the Lord Jesus. This is no reason to keep on sinning. It is a reason to praise and thank God – and to be more watchful against sin. **Questions:** What were Hezekiah's sins? What did he learn about himself and the Lord? What is the difference between the way the Lord deals with sinful believers and the way He deals with sinful unbelievers?

Introduction:

First Point: Hezekiah's Complaint

- 1) Hezekiah's Sin: Is.36-38, with 2 Kings. 18-20 and 2 Chron.29-32, indicate that Hezekiah was one of Judah's best kings. But he sinned in becoming proud (2 Chron.32:25-26). This is no doubt why the Lord sent a mortal illness upon him.
- 2) Given Over to More Sin: Initially, the king did not respond well. He could not understand why a faithful believer could die in his prime (Is.38:10). Or why a good king who was reforming Judah so well might suddenly be removed without a successor. He became very bitter (v.17), which blocked his understanding of the situation.
- 3) But the Lord Showed Mercy: Despite this, the Lord had mercy, promised an extra 15 years of life and deliverance from Assyria. He gave a sign to back it up. This did not undermine the original warning: for it was true that Hezekiah had a mortal illness and would soon die – *unless the Lord intervened!* Putting the warning as He did in v.1 was designed to bring Hezekiah to repentance. This reminds us also that we don't know all the Lord's purposes, or the future. We should not expect an immediate explanation when we suffer physical or spiritual set-backs.

Second Point: What the Illness Taught Him

- 1) A List of What the King Learned: After the king humbled his pride (2 Chron. 32:26), he wrote a Psalm (Is.38:9-20). There he acknowledged both his struggle and what he finally learned, both from the illness and his backsliding: that he was not in a position to complain (v.15); that he had sinned (v. 17); that God had graciously forgiven him (v.17); and that the whole thing – the illness and the backsliding – was for his welfare (also v.17).
- 2) The Basis of Recovery: In vss.18-20, Hezekiah pleads for his recovery – not on the basis of personal merit, but so that he can continue to praise God in the land of the living; and by so doing encourage his sons and his people to see God's faithfulness and worship Him. In other words, the basis for the plea is God's own glory. See Phlp.1:21-26. We can see from this that the Lord can teach us a great deal from both physical suffering and spiritual struggles – though that is not an excuse for sin.

Third Point: Why the Lord Permits Temporary Backsliding

- 1) His Glory and Our Good: This passage demonstrates the truth that God, in His Providence, permits us to suffer physically and even to backslide for a time. But it is always for His glory and our ultimate good. For He has a special care for His people (Rom.8:28, WCF 5:7).
- 2) Not So for the Wicked: Although the Lord does grant many common gifts to the wicked, He does not confer the special grace needed to lead the reprobate to repentance and faith. They are given over to Satan's power and to their own desire to sin. The very experiences that lead the godly to seek the Lord, occasion more bitterness and unbelief in the ungodly. See WCF 5:6.
- 3) Specific Things to Learn: WCF 5:5 sums up the things we can learn from spiritual struggles: about our own sin; humility before the Lord; greater dependency on Him; more alertness to the danger of sin; and, we could add, greater thankfulness that we have forgiveness through the Lord Jesus.

Conclusion: