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## The Language of Faith: Sermons On Prayer

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

### *“A Prayer that Destroyed an Army”*

July 14, 2013

Sermon Text: 2 Kings 19

Scripture Reading: 2 Kings 19

#### Introduction-

2Ki 19:14-20 Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD and spread it before the

LORD. (15) And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said: "O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. (16) Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. (17) Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands (18) and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. (19) So now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone." (20) Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Your prayer to me about Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard.

Prayer is the language of faith, and this morning we come to still another wonderful example of this, this time from the life of King Hezekiah. The events of 2 Kings 18-19 occurred during Hezekiah's reign, around 700BC.

Have you noticed that largely the great prayers of the Bible have originated in times of great testing and trial? Last time we heard Daniel's prayer as he was oppressed and ended in the lions' den. The prayers of Moses, of the Apostle Paul, and of the Lord Jesus Himself so often were offered in connection with intensely trying circumstances. Think of the prayers of David so frequently recorded in the Psalms:

**Psa 22:1-7** To the choirmaster: according to The Doe of the Dawn. A Psalm of David. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? (2) O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. (3) Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. (4) In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. (5) To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. (6) But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the

people. (7) All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

And again:

**Psa 27:1-3** Of David. The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (2) When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. (3) Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

And of course we could give many other examples. We should pray at all times, not just when we are in difficulties and trials, but surely one of the reasons the Lord permits trials to come to us is so that we would cast ourselves upon Him in faith, and prayer is the means of doing just that.

**2Co 1:8-9** For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. (9) Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

Hezekiah was in a very, very tight spot. A fearsome spot. Let's go back and review it.

### **Hezekiah: A Godly King**

The account opens with refreshingly unusual words:

2Ki 18:1-3 In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. (2) He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. (3) And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done.

The kingdom was divided during this era into the Northern kingdom, Israel, whose capital was Samaria, and the Southern Kingdom, Judah, the capital of which was Jerusalem. Israel never had a single godly king. Judah had a few, and Hezekiah was one of them. As you can see, his reign was a lengthy one – 29 years.

Hezekiah did was was right in the eyes of the Lord. He took action. He was a reformer in an era of apostasy:

2Ki 18:4 He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut

down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan).

Just think of how many “waves” this must have made and how many enemies Hezekiah would have had as a result. He destroyed idolatrous worship centers. And perhaps (this is speculation) one of his most controversial religious reforms (at least controversial in the opinion of its adherents) was his destruction of the famed bronze serpent Moses had made and which had come to be known as Nehushtan.

*Nothing arouses more hatred than the destruction of man's devoted traditions and objects.*

Think of how, practically, this thing was venerated. Where was it kept? Who guarded it? What traditions had developed surrounding it? Perhaps they had built it its own little shrine and some kind of priesthood to care for it. We do know that people came and made offerings to it. So we see the same practices today in man's religions.

Num 21:8-9 And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who

is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." (9) So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

So this thing had been around for perhaps some 700 years! Incredible. And by Hezekiah's day, it had become the centerpiece of a false religious cult.

***Now just consider what courage it took for Hezekiah to destroy this thing!***

This tells us what kind of man he was.

2Ki 18:5-6 He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him. (6) For he held fast to the LORD. He did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses.

Isn't this the kind of Christian WE want to be? And yet think of the enemies within his own nation that Hezekiah made because of his zeal for the Lord. The adherents of the Nehushtan cult would have hated him. And sometimes that needs to be the case with us. We need to tear down man-made religious relics – traditions – that plague Christ's people today. (I just met a pastor and his wife from

New York this last week, Dale and Faith Ingraham. They wrote a book called "Tear Down this Wall." Dale and Faith have found that Pharisaical walls exist in the visible church that are hindering Christ's truth and harming Christ's people. The Nehushtan is still with us today!

That is not all that Hezekiah did –

2Ki 18:7-8 And the LORD was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. (8) He struck down the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.

Now this sounds like the end of the story. But oh no, Smaug has been aroused. There are rumblings in the enemy stronghold, and its armies begin to march. First, they wipe out the Northern Kingdom (ca, 722 BC) –

2Ki 18:9-12 In the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it, (10) and at the end of three years he took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken. (11) The king of Assyria carried the

Israelites away to Assyria and put them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, (12) because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God but transgressed his covenant, even all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded. They neither listened nor obeyed.

And then the “eye” of the enemy turns on Hezekiah and the kingdom of Judah. This is a tight and fearful spot. Ten years after the fall of Samaria, the Assyrian armies invade Judah and begin to take its cities.

Now, listen as it seems Hezekiah goes through a real crisis of faith, AND as we hear some very, very common tactics of our own enemy:

2Ki 18:13-25 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. (14) And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; withdraw from me. Whatever you impose on me I will bear." And the king of Assyria required of Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. (15) And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the

king's house. (16) At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD and from the doorposts that Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria.

We are not told what Hezekiah was thinking. Did he do right? Had his zeal for the Lord run ahead of the Lord in Hezekiah's refusal to continue to serve the Assyrian king (probably through paying annual tributes of some kind)? Did Hezekiah realize now that he had been a bit foolish in this? We don't know. When the Jews were captive in later years in Babylon, God's prophets told them to settle in, live there, submit, and wait out the 70 years the Lord had decreed they be there. But we just are not told. We are provided with a parallel account of this great revival and reformation in 2 Chronicles-

2Ch 29:1-11 Hezekiah began to reign when he was twenty-five years old, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah the daughter of Zechariah. (2) And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. (3) In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and

repaired them. (4) He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east (5) and said to them, "Hear me, Levites! Now consecrate yourselves, and consecrate the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and carry out the filth from the Holy Place. (6) For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God. They have forsaken him and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD and turned their backs. (7) They also shut the doors of the vestibule and put out the lamps and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the Holy Place to the God of Israel. (8) Therefore the wrath of the LORD came on Judah and Jerusalem, and he has made them an object of horror, of astonishment, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. (9) For behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. (10) Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, in order that his fierce anger may turn away from us. (11) My sons, do not now be negligent, for the LORD has chosen you to stand in his presence, to minister to him and to

be his ministers and make offerings to him."

And 2 Chronicles goes on through chapter 32 to describe the reign of Hezekiah, all in very positive terms. It may be that Hezekiah was "buying time" by giving the gold to the Assyrians, because in 2 Chronicles we learn that he was making all kinds of military defenses:

2Ch 32:1-8 After these things and these acts of faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah and encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them for himself. (2) And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and intended to fight against Jerusalem, (3) he planned with his officers and his mighty men to stop the water of the springs that were outside the city; and they helped him. (4) A great many people were gathered, and they stopped all the springs and the brook that flowed through the land, saying, "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?" (5) He set to work resolutely and built up all the wall that was broken down and raised towers upon it, and outside it he built another wall, and he strengthened the Millo in the city of David. He also made weapons

and shields in abundance. (6) And he set combat commanders over the people and gathered them together to him in the square at the gate of the city and spoke encouragingly to them, saying, (7) "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. (8) With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles." And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

Hear then, "Satan" at the gates of Jerusalem, setting up one of those "hopeless" situations which God so often brings His people into for His glory. And look carefully and learn the typical tactics of the enemy used against us:

(17) And the king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rab-saris, and the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway to the Washer's Field. (18) And when they called for the king, there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, who was over the household, and

Shebna the secretary, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder. (19) And the Rabshakeh said to them, "Say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you rest this trust of yours? **(20) Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? In whom do you now trust, that you have rebelled against me?**' (21) Behold, you are trusting now in Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him.

**(22) But if you say to me, "We trust in the LORD our God," is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, "You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem"?** (23) Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them. (24) How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants, when you trust in Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? **(25) Moreover, is it without the LORD that I have come up against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to**

**me, Go up against this land, and destroy it."**

*The enemy mocks our faith and our prayers. We can expect him to ridicule our trust in the Lord. He sets up what appears to be a hopeless circumstance and then works his fiendish psychological warfare on us.*

Expect it. Expect to have your faithfulness to the Lord mocked. And expect something else:

*The enemy will sometimes claim to be a servant of the Lord himself.*

Consider the Pharisees for instance in Jesus' day. What did they claim? To be the Lord's servants. Even in killing the Son of God! They mocked him:

Mat 27:42-43 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. (43) He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

"You believe in the sovereignty of God, Hezekiah. How could I be here at your gates unless the Lord brought me here? God told me to come and to wipe you out because you destroyed His high places and altars." So it goes. And, of course, it is all designed to get

the people incited against Hezekiah – "Look at the mess you've gotten us into with all of your reforms. You never should have destroyed the Nehushtan!"

And do not let this escape your notice: The Assyrians mock prayer as a weapon of war –

(20) Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? In whom do you now trust, that you have rebelled against me?

Mere words. The Rabshakeh and his buddies are about to learn some lessons about "mere words" of a righteous man spoken in faith. Well, listen as the lies continue –

2Ki 18:26-37 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah, said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it. Do not speak to us in the language of Judah within the hearing of the people who are on the wall."

(27) But the Rabshakeh said to them, "Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the men sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and to drink their own urine?"

(28) Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah: "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! (29) Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you out of my hand. (30) Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD by saying, The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' (31) Do not listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make your peace with me and come out to me. Then each one of you will eat of his own vine, and each one of his own fig tree, and each one of you will drink the water of his own cistern, (32) until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey, that you may live, and not die. And do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you by saying, The LORD will deliver us.

(33) Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?

(34) Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? (35) Who among all the gods of the

lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?"

(36) But the people were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's command was, "Do not answer him." (37) Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him the words of the Rabshakeh.

We cannot go into great detail here about all the tactics being used here by the Assyrians, but please carefully note them and learn them. They are the very same things used against us in our day by the devil and his minions:

1. Satan works to instill hopelessness and fear ("who are doomed to eat their own dung"),
2. The enemy works to alienate us from godly people and genuine shepherds serving Christ. (see this tactic also in Paul's ministry:

2Co 11:4-6 For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you

received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. (5) Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. (6) Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

Here is a remarkably godly king, king Hezekiah, fervent in serving the Lord, blessed by the Lord – and the enemy hates him. *Hezekiah – don't listen to him. Hezekiah – he has gotten you into this mess. Hezekiah – he has alienated your God from you.*

3. The enemy makes false promises. (see vss 31-32),
4. The enemy works to convince us that our God is no different than any other god. That we are fools for trusting in this religion business, and that we will go down just like all the others. That in the Day of Judgment we will find out that the whole thing was one big hoax.

I find the response of Hezekiah's people to be remarkable. It shows that the Lord had really worked a revival among them (see vss 36-37). Though

very frightened, they still trusted in Hezekiah, which means that they trusted in the Lord.

### Isaiah's Word

Hezekiah seeks the Lord's instruction by consulting Isaiah the prophet –

2Ki 19:1-7 As soon as King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD. (2) And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz. (3) They said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the point of birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. (4) It may be that the LORD your God heard all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the LORD your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left." (5) When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, (6) Isaiah said to them, "Say to your master, "Thus says the LORD: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard,

with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. (7) Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land, and I will make him fall by the sword in his own land."

### The Assyrians Experience a Delay

2Ki 19:8-13 The Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he heard that the king had left Lachish. (9) Now the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Cush, "Behold, he has set out to fight against you." So he sent messengers again to Hezekiah, saying, (10) "Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah: '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 nations delivered them, the nations that my fathers destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? (13) Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the

king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?'"

So here then is this letter. A letter from the enemy. A promise to return and a warning for Hezekiah not to think that they won't.

### The Prayer of Hezekiah

And now here is perhaps Hezekiah's greatest moment. His faith begins to speak as he begins to pray:

2Ki 19:14-19 Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD and spread it before the LORD. (15) And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said: "O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. (16) Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. (17) Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands (18) and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. (19) So now, O LORD

our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone."

Notice that this prayer is a statement of *truth* that counters all the lies of the Assyrians. HERE are the facts for us to recount in those perilous times, and at all times:

- God is the only true God, the Creator of heaven and earth,
- God is able to see and hear the lies of the enemy,
- God will not be mocked,
- The Lord is not just any "god." The Bible is not just another Koran or Book of Mormon, or other product of man.
- The Christian faith is the only true religion because we worship the only true Christ. All other religions are the product of man's hands.
- God desires to be glorified in us and He is jealous for His glory. We may confidently call on Him to act so that all the earth might know that He is the living and true God.

So there is Hezekiah, the letter spread out before the Lord in the temple.

And so the Lord hears. The Lord is roused. The Lord acts:

### Isaiah Gives the Lord's Answer and the Enemy is Destroyed

2Ki 19:20-37 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Your prayer to me about Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard. (21) This is the word that the LORD has spoken concerning him: "She despises you, she scorns you-- the virgin daughter of Zion; she wags her head behind you-- the daughter of Jerusalem. (22) "Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes to the heights? Against the Holy One of Israel! (23) By your messengers you have mocked the Lord, and you have said, 'With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of the mountains, to the far recesses of Lebanon; I felled its tallest cedars, its choicest cypresses; I entered its farthest lodging place, its most fruitful forest. (24) I dug wells and drank foreign waters, and I dried up with the sole of my foot all the streams of Egypt.'

(25) "Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should turn fortified cities into heaps of ruins, (26) while their inhabitants, shorn

of strength, are dismayed and confounded, and have become like plants of the field and like tender grass, like grass on the housetops, blighted before it is grown. (27) "But I know your sitting down and your going out and coming in, and your raging against me.

(28) Because you have raged against me and your complacency has come into my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will turn you back on the way by which you came. (29) "And this shall be the sign for you: this year eat what grows of itself, and in the second year what springs of the same. Then in the third year sow and reap and plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. (30) And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward. (31) For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD will do this.

(32) "Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it. (33) By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall

not come into this city, declares the LORD. (34) For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David."

(35) **And that night** the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. (36) Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh. (37) And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword and escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

Wouldn't you like to experience something like that? Do you feel like your life is surrounded and hemmed in by the enemy? That your faith is being constantly assailed by the taunts and lies of the evil one?

Perhaps then there is a "letter" that you could spread out before the Lord and say, like Hezekiah did, "Lord, here is this evil one and his taunts. Here are his threats. And looking at the circumstances, it all seems hopeless. But for your glory and by your might, please act."

