

Isaiah 38:1-39:8 Lessons from the Life of an Ordinary . . . No, Spectacular . . . No, Ordinary King (part 1)

Today, we come to the end of Isaiah's historical section right in the middle of the Book. And the topic, of course is God the sovereign King. But, the story is about Hezekiah. He was a man whose heart was genuinely moved towards the Lord, but whose was fickle under the pressures and temptations of life. This is why I have titled the message: Lessons from the life of an ordinary, no, spectacular, no, ordinary, king. And, at some level, his life represents all of us. How often do you find yourself UP, then all of a sudden, DOWN in your walk with the Lord? How often does the sinful flesh win the battle of godliness and morality in your life? How many times have you seen the great power and work of God in your life one week, only to find the week that follows to be disastrous in faith? I believe we see this with the Apostle Paul in Rom. 7:18-21: **"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand."** And, this is what we see with Hezekiah. Therefore, this Word is for us! Oh, how we need to this Word! I will divide this sermon into 3 sections where I hope to reveal truths about God, about us, and then, hopefully apply them to our lives. And there is so much here I will only have time for section 1 today (2 truths and applications).

1. Hezekiah's Sickness and Recovery. (38:1-8, 21-22) From what I have studied, I do not believe these verses follow the destruction of the Assyrian army, but instead predate what happened in cp. 37. Either way, Isaiah's purpose always goes deeper than chronology. He wants to teach truth. And his placement right in the middle of the book, especially of Hezekiah's fatal choice to side with Babylon, provides the stage for the rest of the book, and even the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon, which by the way, was determined long ago by the secret decrees of God. See 37:26: **"Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass . . ."**

In vv. 1-8 Hezekiah gets sick, real sick, and it is terminal. Isaiah says, *"Get your house in order."* And Hezekiah doesn't want to die. So, what does he do? (what any of us would do) He goes to the ONE who holds life and death in his hands. He prays like any ordinary man who sits under the curse of sure death. **"For the wages of sin is death."** And God hears him and decides to give him 15 more years as king. And he repeats what He has said before. **"I will deliver Jerusalem from Assyria."** And then God gives Hezekiah a sign, one I believe to be a miracle. The shadow from the sun on the "dial of Ahaz" goes back "ten steps." I've always thought this was a sun dial, much like the one we used to have in downtown Kannapolis. A sun dial functions like a clock. It is round with some kind of object built in the middle at just the right angle so that the shadow from sun shows what time it is. Well, the Hebrew for this verse is difficult at best. The literal translation for "dial" is "step" or "accent." And if we go back to 2 Kings 23 we see that King Ahaz had built some kind of stairway going up to his roof where he had built an altar to foreign gods, probably the sun god. And we know that King Josiah will destroy this stairway and the altars later. And best I can tell, it was here that God told Hezekiah the shadow on this stairway will go back, or travel in the opposite direction.

Now, I am not sure the details of this sign. But, I know this. It was a miracle! Time didn't just stand still, but instead went backwards. Think back for a moment. What did God say to the wicked King Ahaz back in cp. 7? He says, **"Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test."** Ahaz was at a time of great crisis in his life and God is willing to move heaven and earth for the king and for Jerusalem, even as idolatrous as he is, shown by his special stairway leading to his idols. But, it is different with Hezekiah as God gives him 15 more years and confirms this with a miracle. So, what do we learn from Hezekiah's sickness and recovery? (2 truths: one short, one long, then apps.)

1. Life and death are in the hands of God. Whether it be the King of Judah, the king of Assyria, the President of the USA, the 100-year-old lady, or the child killed in a car accident, life and death are in the hands of the sovereign hand of God. And this must bring comfort to our lives. And it is not that sickness or physical difficulties are easy. They are not! I cannot come up with a word that describes adequately the effects of sin in this world. Nobody can! This world is fallen. And this world is "cursed" by the righteous hand of God. God said to Adam, **"Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."** And no matter how hard we try to cast it off with our efforts, we CANNOT. However, the very ONE who cursed creation because of Adam's sin (and ours), is the ONE who can and will take care of this curse. Gal. 3:13: **"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."** 2 Cor. 5:21: **"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."**

2. The ground of answered prayer is not human faithfulness (at least not our own), but the promise of God to keep his covenant. Notice what Hezekiah says to God. Look at v. 3: **"Please, O Lord, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight."** He is saying, *"Look at me and my deeds and my heart as you consider my prayer. Lord, I'm a good person, a good king, look at all my reforms. Surely these must count for something."* He is appealing to his works (which are VERY GOOD). And notice God's response. In v. 5 we read: **"Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer."** You see, God had already promised his faithfulness to David and his sons and the kingship of Israel. And this promise went back to Moses to Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, Noah, Adam, EVEN before the foundations of the world. GOD IS FAITHFUL! And when God answers OUR prayers, it is not because of our works. It is because of his faithfulness to keep his promise.

Now, let's stop for a moment and think about this truth further. Hezekiah had God's promise, as did Isaiah, and all the other generations of people from Adam to Seth to Noah to Abraham to Moses, to David, etc. And I ask, *"Was the promise of faithfulness enough to bring comfort and help to Hezekiah's soul?"* Absolutely, Yes! And this hope Hezekiah and Isaiah and others had was by faith. They believed God and his word of promise to save! It was the same with Abraham. **"Abraham believed God and he counted it to him as righteousness"** (Gen 15:6).

Now, we must push this further. If we read through the covenants of the OT we find there are some requirements on our part. God told Abraham, **“I am God almighty, walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you . . .”** (Gen. 17:1-2). In other words, be obedient. *“Do what I command. And if you do, blessing will come.”* Well, when we think about Hezekiah, he was basing his prayer for healing on his obedience, wasn’t he? *“God look at my works.”* And his resume of works was impressive. Let me read what 2 Kings 18 says about Hezekiah: **“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. 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). ⁵ 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.”** Here we see the “spectacular” king. But I still must ask *“Did God answer his prayer because of his works?”* We must answer emphatically, *“No!”* In the very next chapter we will see Hezekiah make a horrible decision, one of unfaithfulness as he looks to Babylon for help (just as he had done with Egypt earlier). He breaks the covenant by his lack of obedience.

So, where does he find comfort? Think about history. Noah obeyed God, built the ark, was saved. God sent his rainbow and He promised never to flood the earth again. And Noah built an altar and God spoke to him about great blessings. And almost immediately we read that Noah sinned. He got very drunk, passed out, and lay nude in his tent. Abraham, what a man of faith. He was blessed with God’s promise to save his people and give him a land and an inheritance. Yet, over and over again, He tried to bless himself and bring about God’s plan as he lies about his wife’s identity, as he tries to bring God’s blessing through Ismael, his son from the slave girl Hagar. We see the same with Isaac and Jacob. And with Moses, we see a man who also has great faith, but he fails over and over and is not even allowed to enter into the “land” of promise. What about David? In the story of Bathsheba, we see an adulterous, lying, murderer. At every point in the history of God’s people this is what we see.

So, when we think of the OT saints, what do they have, if they don’t have their righteousness? They have a promise. And there is great hope in the heart of faith that looks to the promise of God. But, what were they missing? We must not stop with the promise. We must move to fulfillment! Children, what if I promise to give you a \$50,000 gift card to buy anything you want at Concord Mills? How excited would you be? Well, as long as you know I’ve got the money, and you can trust my word, you have great hope. What if I say, *“You will get your money in one year. But, there is one condition. You must be obedient to your parents and always be good to your siblings. And, you must also be obedient in your heart. And if you fail even once you won’t get the money.”* Well, what do you think? Will you ever get your money? No.

Do you see the dilemma? Do you see the impossibility on the part of the OT saints (or us) to work hard enough to earn the fulfillment of God’s promise, which is salvation? You see, they

were waiting for the fulfillment. Those with faith knew they were not good enough. They knew that God, and ONLY God, must do SOMETHING. Isaiah said, **“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts! Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar, And he touched my mouth and said: Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”** Here we see the work of God to bring forgiveness of sins. And though Isaiah did not know exactly how this would happen, he did know that it would happen through the Messiah. For he says, **“To us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this”** (Is. 9:6-7).

So, back to my truth. Why did God answer Hezekiah’s prayer? Why does God answer our prayer? It is because righteousness has been established in the universe. It is his own righteousness! You see, the blood of bulls and goats was not enough. The punishment for our sins must fall upon ONE who is perfect, ONE who is faithful %100 of the time. The fulfillment of God’s promise to save Hezekiah and the OT saints came completely in the person and work of Christ. *“This is the blood of the new covenant.”* Children, brothers and sisters, YOU WILL NEVER BE GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE GIFTS OF THE PROMISE. But Christ is! And this is why He came! This is why the grounds of answered prayer is not our good works, but the works of another, the works of Christ. This is why we pray: **“In Jesus’s name.”** This is new for those of the new covenant in Christ. The ground of answered prayer is Jesus! He is the fulfillment of the promise.

Application: We are like Hezekiah. We appeal to our good works. (Really this is all the world has. But, even as Christians, we feel good when we do something good. Kids, have you ever cleaned your room when your mama or daddy didn’t even tell you too? Have you washed the dishes just because you want to make mama or daddy happy? How do you feel? It feels good. Of course it does! They come and see and they are smiling. And from one perspective, God does the same. One day He will say, **“Well done, good and faithful servant”** (Luke 19:17). **“Those who endure to the end will be saved”** (Matt. 10:22). But, we must ALWAYS remember, our works are not good enough. We are not faithful enough. (Look at your life and your heart this week.)

Thought: Do our works please God? Yes, but only if they are in Christ. This is why James can say, **“the prayer of a righteous person works greatly”** (James 5:16).

Application: People will let you down. How many times in the month has someone not met you’re your expectations of how think they should act, or do what you think they should do? Do not put your faith in men and women; ultimately. People do not have the faithfulness to satisfy your soul. Your ultimate comfort and peace must be in the ONE who is faithful. This is why Jesus says, **“In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you”** (John 16:23).

Truth: God looks upon the heart. Another way of saying this: God loves to answer those who have faith. Let's not be mistaken. On this side of the cross, to have faith is to believe in Christ, to look upon Him, to believe in Him, to follow him, to find him the most beautiful trophy in the universe. This is faith! And faith always includes a repentant heart. Notice God does not commend him for his good works, but for his heart of faith and repentance. V. 5: "**I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.** How is your heart? Where is your heart?

God never answers our prayers begrudgingly. He delighted in the heart of faith and repentance from a very ordinary, spectacular, ordinary king. And, He does the same today for you and me.

By God's grace, we will continue this next week.