

Lessons from Hezekiah—The Test of Success
Bethany Chapel
September 23, 2012

- I. Intro. Modern Lessons from an ancient Scriptures.
- A. How the mighty have fallen:
1. Welcome to Illinois—where our Governors make our license plates. Blagojevich—was he indeed an legend only in His own mind?
 2. What about Bernie Madoff and the gigantic ponzi scheme?
 3. Both successful with outsize egos, both failures. And they remind me to a certain extent of Hezekiah in the later part of his reign.
- B. Background to Hezekiah—setting the stage
1. One of the later Kings of Judah, about 716 BC and contemporary of Isaiah.
 2. Became king at 25 and inherited a kingdom in spiritual disarray (his father Ahaz was approximately 13 at Hezekiah's birth!).
- Hope for people coming out of dysfunctional backgrounds!
3. Hezekiah was clearly different than his father!
 - a. Restored the Temple and worship. (Like coming to Christ!)
 - b. Re-established the Passover – communion with God
 - c. Tore down the high places. (The high places were like having spiritual mistresses on the side in addition to a wife)
 - d. Stopped paying protection money to the bully nation of Assyria.
 - e. Since David, probably one of the best Kings of Judah—but not without his weak points.
- C. The three spirituality tests of Hezekiah
1. First week: **Relationship**— Getting his life and the life of Judah back on track.
 - a. Purifying the Temple—making a difference personally
 - b. Restoring the Passover—making a difference in the Church
 - c. Cleansing the Land—Making a difference in the Nation.
 2. Second week: **Adversity**— Dealing with the Assyria.
 - a. Cutting Ties – forsaking the World
 - b. Facing Consequences – The Empire Strikes Back
 - c. Confronting the Enemy – Allowing God to deal with the Problem
- D. Morning Map: Unpacking the Test of **Success**: Another parable of Christian maturity!
1. Hezekiah's Physical Sickness and recovery—the model of **faith**.
 2. Hezekiah's Spiritual Sickness and recovery—the model of **failure** and **forgiveness**.

II. The test of **Success**. Another parable of Christian Maturity.

Corrie Ten Boom used to tell the story about a proud woodpecker who was tapping away at a dead tree when the sky unexpectedly turned black and the thunder began to roll. Undaunted, he went right on working. Suddenly a bolt of lightning struck the old tree, splintering it into hundreds of pieces. Startled but unhurt, the haughty bird flew off, screeching to his feathered friends, "Hey, everyone, look what I did! Look what I did!"

This old woodpecker reminds me of people who think more highly of themselves than they should. Usually they are so busy bragging about their achievements and their greatness that they fail to recognize God as the source of all their abilities. They are suffering from spiritual delusions of grandeur. Without the Lord no one amounts to anything, and in our own strength we cannot please Him.

A. Hezekiah's Physical Sickness and Recovery—the model of **faith**.

2 Kings 20:1-11 In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the Lord says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." 2 Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and

prayed to the Lord, 3 "Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: 5 "Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, 'This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the Lord. 6 I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.'" 7 Then Isaiah said, "Prepare a poultice of figs." They did so and applied it to the boil, and he recovered. 8 Hezekiah had asked Isaiah, "What will be the sign that the Lord will heal me and that I will go up to the temple of the Lord on the third day from now?" 9 Isaiah answered, "This is the Lord's sign to you that the Lord will do what he has promised: Shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or shall it go back ten steps?" 10 "It is a simple matter for the shadow to go forward ten steps," said Hezekiah. "Rather, have it go back ten steps." 11 Then the prophet Isaiah called upon the Lord, and the Lord made the shadow go back the ten steps it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz. NIV

1. Hezekiah's situation.
 - a. Physical challenge
 - (1) 14 years into reign. Terminal Illness.
 - (2) No male offspring. Hezekiah is in the line of Christ.
 - (3) Still trusting the Lord.
 - b. Spiritual response
 - (1) Took Isaiah seriously. He believed God.
 - (2) Prayed directly to the Lord
 - (3) Appealed to God's promises
 - c. God's Answer
 - (1) Miraculous healing
 - (2) Miraculous signs
 - (3) 15 extra years
 - (4) (by extension) a male heir—Manasseh
 - d. Summary—What's wrong with this picture? Absolutely nothing! This is indeed a picture-postcard of the way things ought to happen. Hezekiah trusted the Lord exactly like he had trusted the Lord in the past. Everything turned out roses. No asteriks. No caveats. No if's, and's or but's.
 - e. So how does this apply to us?
2. Our situation.
 - a. Like Hezekiah— **Physical** challenge. We sometimes have physical issues that are overwhelming. Or it could be some other challenge.
 - (1) Financial Crisis?
 - (2) Health Crisis (like Hezekiah)?
 - (3) Occupational Crisis?
 - (4) Academic Crisis?
 - (5) Family Crisis?
 - (6) What should we do?
 - b. Like Hezekiah— **Spiritual** response. Let's learn from Hezekiah's 3-fold response.
 - (1) Firstly, **Take the Word of the Lord seriously**. This is a matter of **belief**. What does that mean?

Question: Are we listening to God this morning? Have we quieted our hearts to hear his voice? Have we regularly immersed ourselves in His word? Have we asked the Holy Spirit to be our teacher? Is the Lord trying to speak to us this morning—from this message, from the elders? Are we believing God?

Is there unconfessed sin in our lives? Is Christ speaking to us about something—and are we putting Him off?

Illus. Dad going to market—getting everything except what Mom asked him to get.

Have you accepted Christ yet? Have you accepted your part to assist in the work of the Assembly?

- (2) Secondly, **Like Hezekiah— Pray directly to God.** This is a matter of **relationship**. What does this mean today? Clarify with the elders, check it out with your friends, but at the end of the day, it is just you and the Lord Jesus Christ in earnest conversation. James: You have not, because you ask not.

Illus. Reading and Following the directions. Trinity applicants—frustrating because they simply don't do what we ask them to do.

Jesus invites us to pray directly to Him. "Whatever you ask in my Name." What more of an invitation do we need?

- (3) Lastly, **Like Hezekiah— Appeal to God's promises.** This is a matter of **trust**. Hezekiah appealed to God's nature. This is appropriate for us as well. We pray, not because we deserve something, but because Jesus deserves it. We receive, not because God owes us anything, but because God promised it.

Illus. Cash Station—an appeal to my bank balance. Trinity—an appeal to our financial aid, something that was promised.

This is an incentive to **know** God. Do we know Christ well enough to pray, appealing to His promises? If not, please allow me to encourage all of us in this respect.

- (4) Quick summary
 - (a) Believe the Word
 - (b) Pray to God directly
 - (c) Know Him well enough to appeal to His promises.
- (5) What happens next?
 - c. **God's answers**—this is when miracles happen. [*Phys. to Sp—to God*]
 - (1) This is not a formula. If you do these things miracles are not necessarily guaranteed.

Illus. Lottery story. I won't win the lottery because I don't buy a ticket.

- (2) On the other hand, miracles can and will happen—to you and for you!

Illus. George Mueller, ran the orphanage by faith.

Illus. Ken and Patty—New York apartment by faith.

3. Summary: Hezekiah approached the physical problem (his sickness) with a spiritual solution (faith worthy of emulation) and witnessed the glorious answer of God.
4. That was the test preparation! God gives him exactly what he prays for. Now, how will he respond?

B. Hezekiah's Spiritual Sickness and recovery—the model of failure and forgiveness.

This is the story of the Woodpeckers response.

2 Kings 20:12-19 At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of Hezekiah's illness. 13 Hezekiah received the messengers and showed them all that was in his storehouses — the silver, the gold, the spices and the fine oil — his armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them. 14 Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, "What did those men say, and where did they come from?" "From a distant land," Hezekiah replied. "They came from Babylon." 15 The prophet asked, "What did they see in your palace?" "They saw everything in my palace," Hezekiah said. "There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them." 16 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the Lord: 17 The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up

until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. 18 And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood, that will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." 19 "The word of the Lord you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?" NIV

1. Hezekiah's situation—straightforward.
 - a. Miraculous recovery
 - b. Word gets to Babylon
 - (1) Babylon vs. Assyria
 - (2) Babylon looking for political alliances
 - c. Visit from Babylonian emissaries—Hezekiah flashes his wares. This visit was the actual test of Success. Hezekiah was strutting with the big boys.

2 Chron 32:25 But Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore the Lord's wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. **2 Chron 32:31** But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart. NIV

- d. Isaiah grades the test: F
- e. Hezekiah repents.

2 Chron 32:26 Then Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the Lord's wrath did not come upon them during the days of Hezekiah. NIV

- f. Things to notice:
 - (1) How quickly Hezekiah goes from hero to zero.
 - (2) The real test comes from an unexpected place and in an unexpected way.
 - (3) When he failed, God did not keep it a secret.
 - (4) When he repented, God restored and forgave him.

2. Our situation. Can we fall into Hezekiah's trap?

Illus. Pride—Flea on a leaf, floating on the Chicago river, flexing his muscles and shouting “open the drawbridge.”

- a. What is our miraculous recovery?
 - (1) Promotion
 - (2) Pay raise
 - (3) Healing
 - (4) Good grades, graduation.
 - (5) Olympic Medals or winning other competition.

Illus. Shawn White—two time Olympic Gold Medalist Snow Boarder. Arrested in Nashville for public intoxication and vandalism. Michael Phelps—smoking marijuana two years ago.

- (6) Any amazing success bestowed upon you by God.

Principle: God's blessing does not necessarily indicate God's approval. I.e., Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Al Qaeda, etc.

- b. Who are our Babylonian Emissaries?
 - (1) Christians or non-Christians
 - (2) Co-workers
 - (3) Family
 - (4) Press.
 - (5) Anyone who congratulates us for a job well-done.

These are not people who are necessarily thinking that they want to trip you up. On the other hand, we are most vulnerable when being flattered.

Illus. Chief of Chaplains: “Forgive them Lord for these wonderfully inflated things they are saying about me. Forgive me, Lord, for enjoying it!”

Mark Twain “The best way to get someone to cough something up is to slap him on the back”
Anatomical connection between the head and spine. Slap someone on the back and watch their head swell!

Praise is like perfume. Sniff it, don't drink it!

- c. How do we sin? By taking credit for God's blessing. Hezekiah treated his riches as if he owned them—an act that was emboldened by his miraculous recovery.

Illus. Ken and Dissertation. Miraculous finish. More grace is needed—to handle the success.

Has God richly blessed us in some way? Have we passed the test—or does God need to deal with us?

- d. How do we repent? The good old-fashioned way.
 - (1) Confess heart attitude to God.
 - (2) Ask forgiveness.

Illus. Student caught plagiarizing—taking credit for another's work. Sincere apology. She'll live to fight another day.

- e. Is there forgiveness? As much as there are miracles for us, there is also forgiveness when **we abuse God's grace**. 1 Jn 1:9
3. Summary—Hezekiah's Spiritual Sickness and Recovery. The Model of failure and forgiveness.
 - a. It starts with success.
 - b. It continues with congratulations.
 - c. We fail at the point when we take credit for God's success.
 - d. We find forgiveness when we confess our pride, and tell the truth about our success: It was Christ all along!

III. Conclusion—Hezekiah's test of Success. Like Blagojevich, Madoff, and the woodpecker. Failures with the test of success. It is truly a parable of our own Christian lives.

- A. It comes in two parts:
 1. First, God grants to us an amazing success—many times as a result of an equally daunting challenge. The success is real, and the exhilaration is heady stuff.
 2. Second—God tests us to find out what is in our hearts.
 - a. The test comes unexpectedly
 - b. It involves pride
 - c. We, like Hezekiah often fail.
 - d. Yet, by God's grace we also find forgiveness.
- B. What should I leave you with today?
 1. Good news: God loves you—you will have your successes.
 2. Learn to celebrate responsibly. This is the real test of Christian maturity!
 3. If you haven't been tested, you will be.
 4. If you have been tested—and failed, God loves you. There is forgiveness.
- C. Hezekiah's three tests:
 1. Relationship. Restore the Temple. Pass.
 2. Adversity. Confronting the Enemy. Failure—then Pass.
 3. Success? When it came to success, Hezekiah was a Failure. However,
 4. Repentance. Pass.
- D. Next week: we return to Moses. The test of Deliverance.