

This morning we're going to be looking at Isaiah, chapters 36-38, as we continue in our series. So, if you're not there in your bible or app yet, now is the perfect time to do that. I'll be reading from the ESV.

Practiced & Prepared

Have you ever been in a building when an alarm went off—like an emergency alarm? Wherever you were, the alarm was blaring, lights were flashing, people may have been yelling at you to get out of the building, and the intensity of the situation might have freaked you out.

Maybe you were at home and your security or fire alarm went off in the middle of the night. That happened to me this week! You pop up out of bed, heart racing, trying to figure out what to do next. Are we safe? Do we need to get out of the house? Call 911? Is this really an emergency or does it just feel like one?

We're usually not prepared for those situations. They're always inconveniently timed and typically adrenaline-inducing because we're caught off guard. In the surprise of it all, it's hard to think straight; to slow your mind and heart down enough to put good thoughts together. What's my next step? What do I do now?

Those experiences are scary and frenzied because we haven't prepared for them. We haven't practiced what we're going to do when the alarm sounds. We're not prepared for the crisis.

But people in emergency services practice that stuff all the time. They train for scenarios that include blaring alarms, flashing lights, smoke and

crowds. So, when the crisis comes, they're not freaked out. They've practiced. They're prepared.

Even kids in school do fire drills. When they're little, the first few times they hear the alarm, they may be scared. But the teachers and administration walk them through the process and guide them to a safe location. By the time those kids are in junior high or high school, they're like, 'Not this again...' They're not afraid. Their adrenaline isn't pumping. They know what to do and where to go. They've practiced. They're prepared.

If there was a *real* fire, they may freak out a bit. But at least they have some history and muscle memory to draw from to know how to get to safety. They've practiced. They're much better prepared than someone who's never done a fire drill.

What we're going to see in today's text is how the daily habit of trusting God and seeking to obediently please Him prepares us to trust Him when crisis hits.

About King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:2-8, 2 Chronicles 29-31)

One of the featured people in today's text is King Hezekiah. He's the King of Judah. You may remember that God's people broke into two kingdoms. In the north was (Israel), and in the south was (Judah). Israel had how many good kings? (0) And Judah had how many? (8) Hezekiah was one of the good guys. In fact, there was no king in Judah, either before or after, like Hezekiah. (2 Kings 18:5)

Hezekiah actively sought to obey the Lord and trust Him each day. When he became king, he cleaned house and got rid of everything that dishonored God. 2 Kings 18 (v 2-8) says he removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. He broke into pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made because the Israelites made offerings to it. So, he got rid of all the pagan and idol worship, reopened the Temple and reinstated the kind of worship that pleased God. He knew what God wanted and was obedient. He kept all the commands the

Lord gave Moses. He even rebelled against the king of Assyria, refusing to serve him like his father, Ahaz, did. Isaiah's message all along had been to trust God and His promises, even when things get tough. And this king took it to heart.

Hezekiah was fully committed to God and actively sought to trust and obey Him in every way. He practiced trusting God. He made decisions based on what would please God. He led the people in ways that set them up to honor God. Hezekiah was all-in and that's critical as we look at today's text.

The Assyrian Threat (36:1-37:7)

When Hezekiah had been king for about 14 years, the king of Assyria, Sennacherib, invaded Judah and systematically captured every city—except Jerusalem. So Sennacherib sent his top commanders, along with an intimidating army, to Jerusalem to tell Hezekiah that the Assyrian king was about to unleash fury on Jerusalem. Just like he'd done with every other Judean city, Sennacherib, the 'greatest king ever,' was going to stomp Hezekiah and his people into the dirt.

We're going to move quickly through the text this morning, so make sure you've got your bible open to follow along. Look at chapter 36:4-7. Notice how the Assyrian commander speaks to Hezekiah's top three leaders, and everybody listening in, and how many times he uses the word 'trust.' [READ 36:4-7]

And the Rabshakeh [*the commander*] said to them, "Say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you rest this trust of yours? ⁵ Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? In whom do you now trust, that you have rebelled against me? ⁶ Behold, you are trusting 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. ⁷ 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"?

Clearly the commander doesn't understand how God works because he thinks that God is mad at Hezekiah for tearing down the pagan shrines and altars. But God isn't mad; He's honored and glorified by the way things have been done. The Rabshakeh is trying to intimidate and overwhelm them. He's trying to get them to question their decisions and where they've placed their trust. Check out verse 10. [READ v 10]

"Moreover, is it without the LORD that I have come up against this land to destroy it? The LORD said to me, 'Go up against this land and destroy it.'"

So now the commander is putting words in God's mouth. He's actually using God's name, Yahweh, and telling them that he's there to do the work of Yahweh. Big mistake. You don't blaspheme God. You don't put deceitful words into God's mouth.

He goes on to shout to everyone within earshot that their lives are going to be so bad under Assyria's siege that they'll "...eat their own dung and drink their own urine..." (v 12) Don't trust Hezekiah. Don't let him mislead you. Don't listen to him. Don't believe him when he says the LORD will deliver you. None of the other gods of the people they've conquered could save them. Look at verse 20 [READ v 20] *"Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?"* Sennacherib says the gods of the other nations no longer exist because Assyria crushed them, and the same thing will happen to Yahweh. The King of Assyria is saying that he's stronger than Yahweh and that His people are helpless and hopeless.

Crisis can do that. It [Crisis] can make you feel helpless and hopeless. Hezekiah's guys got to the end of the commander's psychological beating and returned to the king with their clothes torn to symbolize their grief, distress and because they needed God's mercy. Check out the first verse of chapter 37. [READ 37:1]

"As soon as King Hezekiah heard it [what the Assyrian said], he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD."

Application

This is critical. What's the first thing Hezekiah did after he demonstrates his grief and anxiety? He went to God. That's crucial for us to hold onto and to model. When crisis comes, go to God first. Acknowledge that this situation stinks, allow yourself to feel the fullness of the information you've been bombed with, and get close to Jesus. Approach the throne of grace with confidence (Hebrews 4).

Crisis can make you feel overwhelmed but, as we'll see shortly, God is way bigger than your crisis. It doesn't matter what the problem may be. It could be your children, a job loss, your marriage, the diagnosis you received, the death of a loved one, a broken friendship or a thousand other things. God is bigger than your crisis. No matter what it is. The question is: will you trust Him, or will you resort to some other kind of default support or assistance? If your habit is to figure everything out on your own: your best thinking, your best effort, your best plan *and then* go to God when none of that works—like a last-ditch effort—let me urge you to flip it around and *start* with Jesus.

Earlier I talked about the importance of preparing for emergencies and practicing what to do in those situations. So when the real thing comes, you know where to start and have a better idea of what to do.

So let me ask the question: is it your practice to trust and obey God? Do you go to Him first? Do you trust Him in the day-to-day or just with what you call 'the big stuff'? When we trust and obey God in little things it makes it even easier to trust Him with the big ones. Think about your prayer life for a moment. When do you pray? Is it your habit to go to Jesus with all the things, throughout the day, touching base, checking in, listening and adjusting, or is it primarily limited to the big stuff that you can't do on your own? Paul says we should pray without ceasing (1

Thessalonians 5:17) and that's about remaining in constant contact with God. It's not limited to morning or evening prayers (which are both good). It's about being in communication with the Lord throughout the day. If it's your habit to listen to the Lord when you're not in crisis, then it'll be easier to discern His voice when you are in crisis.

Maybe it's easier to look at how we trust God from a different angle. It might be easier to see where our trust rests by highlighting where we *fail to be obedient and trust Him*. Maybe you say the right things but your behavior says otherwise. For example: You might say that you trust God as your healer, but you've never asked anyone to pray over you to ask God for healing. You might say that you trust God as your provider, but you don't give generously because you can't afford it. You could say that you trust God to lead and guide your children, but you try to control your maturing kids because you're afraid to let them fail or fall. You might say "God's got it" (whatever *it* may be), but your behavior suggests that you don't expect Him to come through at all and you're just resigned to the fact that your life is going to suck and it'll never change. That's not trust. That's passive resignation. Too often we live like we're in charge and God has to run His plan past us. But that's backwards. If you trust Him, you'll do what He says; you'll follow *His* plan. He loves you. You can trust Him.

Back to Hezekiah

What we rehearse each day is what we'll repeat in crisis. That's why we want to make it our daily practice to actively trust and obey God. That's why it's so cool to watch Hezekiah's knee-jerk response after getting horrible news: go to God. Get close to Jesus. Make it your daily, constant, with little-and-big-things habit, so that when crisis comes you run to Him without thinking. And, you know His voice so you can hear Him amidst the chaos.

Judah has no allies. Nowhere to run. They can't fight and defeat the Assyrian army themselves. And if they believed that Yahweh was just like the other little 'g' gods of the nations around them, then surrendering to Assyria is the only way to survive. But Hezekiah trusts God. He's practiced

trusting God. So he sends his guys to talk to God's man, Isaiah, to ask him to pray for the remnant of Judah that remains because only God can save them.

I love this next part because we don't see anything about Isaiah interceding for them because God is already on the move. The LORD saw Hezekiah's posture. He knew the king's heart. And God already had Isaiah cued up. Check out verses 6-7 of chapter 37. [READ 37:6-7] *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 young men 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."*

God's got them. They didn't know how they would be saved, they just trusted that God could do it. Do you trust Him? Does it show through your obedience? If that's your daily habit then, when crisis comes, you're already poised to trust Him again.

No Contest (37:8-38)

Picking up the rest of the story in Chapter 37, King Sennacherib is a little distracted because he heard a rumor (the rumor that the Lord promised) that another army was preparing to come against him. The King had to change his plans for coming straight at Jerusalem because he was chasing down that other threat. Wanting to keep the pressure on Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem, the Assyrian king sends a letter that basically says, 'Don't think I've forgotten about you. Your day is coming...' But this time the Assyrian tells Hezekiah not to trust God because God can't save them from King Sennacherib. Look at verses 10-11. [READ 10-11]

"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?" Sennacherib thinks he's superior to God.

Hezekiah's Response (37:14-20)

Now skip down to verse 14. "*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.*" What's the first thing Hezekiah did after reading the letter? *He went to God!* That's his habit and it's a good one. And the next thing he did was pray. He knows where help is found. It's not in his army. It's not in allies. His help comes from the one true God. Hezekiah's cultivated a lifestyle of obediently trusting the Lord and he's not going to stop now.

His humble prayer in verses 16-20 focuses on the fact that there is no other God. He alone made the heavens and earth and everything belongs to Him. The little 'g' gods Assyria talks about were made of wood and stone—made by men to be destroyed by men. But Yahweh is different. Look at verse 20. [READ v 20]

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

Application

When you pray, just talk honestly with God. That may sound obvious but it needs to be said. You don't need flowery language or a bunch of words. You don't need to try to convince or manipulate God to get what you want. Just pour out your heart to Him. He's in charge. It's His plan and He knows what's best for us. The challenge[:] for most of us is to trust God so deeply that we're okay if He doesn't give us what we want. Will I trust Him?

Hezekiah's heart comes through in this prayer. His biggest concern is the honor and glory of the LORD. Yes, he wants to be saved, but so the world will know that Yahweh is the one, true God. Judah's rescue will put the true God on display for all to see. If Judah is going to get past Assyria, the whole world will know that Yahweh did it, because there's no other way!

Whether it's God saving Judah from Assyria or God saving you & me from the power and penalty of sin, when someone is genuinely saved, people see God at work.

God's Response (37:21-38)

Hezekiah makes his humble request. And God has a lot to say about it. In verses 21-29, the Lord makes it clear that Sennacherib's fight isn't against Judah—it's against God Himself. The king isn't in control of anything—God is. Assyria's victories are because they were part of God's plan (v 26). And, as the sovereign Lord, Yahweh is going to demonstrate His complete control over Sennacherib by sending him home before ever making a move against Jerusalem.

God says, in verse 32, "The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." God is going to make it happen. It's like God is saying, 'Keep trusting me and watch this...' And here's what God promised Hezekiah. Look at verses 33-35. [READ v 33-35]

"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.³⁴ By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the LORD.³⁵ For I will defend this city to save it, for **my** own sake and for the sake of **my** servant David."

Every threat from Sennacherib has been tossed aside: God will not let it happen. God will be honored and His plan to bring the Messiah through the line of David will not be thwarted.

God wasn't kidding! He sent the angel of the LORD to put to death 185,000 in the Assyrian camp (v 36). But wait! There's more. Sennacherib went home, was hanging out in the temple of his little 'g' god and his own sons came in and murdered him.

Hezekiah developed a habit of trusting God, seeking to obediently please Him at every opportunity and he led his people in that same direction. So when God promised to save the remnant of Judah (37:32), they believed Him. God can be trusted and His plans can be trusted even when things get tough. That's what Isaiah's been saying all along! Don't trust the nations...trust God!

Hezekiah's Healing (38:1-22)

So, we've seen Hezekiah trust God in a national crisis as the king of Judah. But, as we close this morning, I want to take a quick look at how Hezekiah trusts God when the crisis is personal. In chapter 38 we learn that the king was sick to the point of death—and God told him, through Isaiah, that he was not going to recover and was going to die. Imagine someone coming to you to say that when you're super-duper sick. Despair, depression, fear, and anxiety could wash over you in a heartbeat.

BUT, when you have practiced obediently trusting God in the little things, you're prepared to trust Him when the big things come because you know He's faithful. Watch this! Chapter 38:2-6. Isaiah just delivered the news. [READ v 2-6]

² Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, ³ and said, "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." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

⁴ Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah: ⁵ "Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life. ⁶ I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city.

What's the first thing Hezekiah did when he got the diagnosis? He went to God in prayer. Go to God first! Start there. Are you sensing a pattern? Hezekiah was too sick to go to the House of the Lord, so he just rolled over in bed and prayed. That's what I want you to see. Hezekiah's response to the bad news: go to God and pray. That was his habit. And

when crisis hit, seemingly without thinking, it was the first thing he did. We need to hold onto this. Trust God each day. Obediently trust Him with the small things so you're prepared when the alarms go off and the big things hit. Go to God and pray.

His words were simple and few. I'm fully Yours. I've been faithful and only wanted to please You with my life. And then he cried. So human. So fragile. So normal. He didn't even ask for healing!

God heard and saw Hezekiah. And He reminded the king that God's faithfulness to His promise to bring the Messiah through the line of David is why the king would be healed. The healing was because of God's faithfulness, not Hezekiah's. So the Lord added 15 years to Hezekiah's life. He even gave him an (unnecessary) sign that the Lord was truly going to heal him (38:7-8).

Wrap

So what are you going through? What struggle? What problem? What crisis? Whatever it is, it's not too big (or small) for God. Please, trust Him to give you exactly what you need because He loves you. You've practiced being obedient and trusting Him each day, certainly you can trust Him in this. But if it's not your habit to be obedient and trust God, and you're in crisis, go to Him. Start there. Confess your resistance to be obedient. Repent of your unwillingness to trust Him. And pour out your heart. He knows what you need. Talk with Him. Choose to trust the One who made you for Himself. All He wants for you is His best. He's not trustworthy because of you decided to trust Him. He's trustworthy because of who He is. It's about His character, lovingkindness, grace and mercy. His strength, His purpose and His plan. If you've committed your life to Him, He's got you. Will you trust Him even now? When we genuinely trust God, we can stand in quiet confidence no matter how desperate the circumstances around us may seem. That's Romans 8, right? Nothing. Nothing! No problem, no issue, no crisis can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Trust Him. He's got you.