

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

2 Kings 19

The King of Assyria is threatening to take on the King of Judah and the people themselves. And not just “take on” as a game of chess. This Assyrian king, Sennacherib, has not been stopped yet and has not really had any people hold strong or show much force against him – and so because of this he now sets his sights on Judah. And since the king himself isn’t going to do much of this campaigning and threatening himself he sends his supreme field commander before Hezekiah’s people, the people of Judah, and warns them of this impending military doom. He taunts, he yells, he speaks to all those are listening – he even does so in Hebrew which makes it that much more scary for the people listening! He is making a case for them to stand down...and open their doors and allow them to enter.

So while all this is happening, and the people are silently shaking in their boots (because nobody has stopped these Assyrian invaders yet) the palace secretary is busily scrawling notes and recording all that is happening – and takes this to the king. And so our text today is the response of the king of Judah hearing about this threat that literally stands before him. It’s a threat to the people of God, to the appointed king of God’s people...and a blaspheming threat to the *living* God.

So with all that said...let’s read **2 Kings 19**

Why is Hezekiah so distraught? We read at the beginning of **2 Kings 18** that Hezekiah is a wonderful man of God – so why is he so grief stricken and scared? Where is all this fear coming from? These actions he takes, tearing his clothes and putting on sack-cloth in this outward display of despair – but it’s more than that because you are self-afflicting this grief. And the king not only does this but he gets others to do it too – and then he gets up and leaves to go pray. To seek God in this time of grief. Again, the first question that comes to my mind is why? God’s got this – he surely would have realized this – right?

Well, this is why context and backstory becomes important.

Hezekiah became king when he was 25 years old and he reigned in Jerusalem for 29 years. And scripture tells us that he did what was “*right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done.*” (**2 Kings 18:3**). That he removed the high places, smashed sacred stones and not only removed Asherah poles but he cut them down and that snake Moses had made had become an idol to the people – so he had *that* smashed to pieces too. Hezekiah had the people focusing on God and praying to him and him alone. And we get this line in verse **5-6 of 2 Kings 18** that “*Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. (That) there was no one like him among the*

kings of Judah, either before him or after him. HE held fast to the Lord and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses.”

So we get *that* information – then when we read a little further, starting at verse **13** of **chapter 18**, we see that the king of Assyria marched against them and sacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them (so this is BEFORE our chapter today). And it is during this time that Hezekiah, seeing what happened to all those cities around him and the might and the strength and the power of the king and battle-strong Assyrians...pays off the Sennacherib, king of Assyria with 300 talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. Seeking peace - Hezekiah pays them off. And not with some paltry amount of promises – but with an amazing amount of money.

So how much is all of that? Well, the way payments worked back then was it was done by weight... and a “talent” was equal to about 75 pounds – it’s the heaviest amount of weight one could have. So if we take the 300 talents and multiply that by 75 we get 22,500 POUNDS of silver and then thirty talents of gold would have been 2,250 pounds of gold. Silver today is worth \$211.06 per pound and gold is worth \$1,319.80. Add that all up... and we have \$2,969,550 dollars worth of gold and \$4,748,850 dollars worth of silver – or just over 7.7 million dollars. Now, that may not seem like much now as we have billionaires and countries that can pull that amount in a breath – but imagine *that* amount back then. But then here’s the real atrocity of all of this – the gold and silver, yet again, does not come from the king’s personal treasures. He doesn’t go down into his basement and open up his personal vault and count out the 330 talents. He doesn’t go down to the bank or ATM and withdraw the amount. He doesn’t even write a check – and not because none of those things existed (they obviously didn’t)...but he goes into the temple of the Lord, strips all the silver and gold off the door posts and doors and hands it to the Assyrian king. 24,750 pounds of treasure...taken from the temple of the Lord.

Think about that for a minute. Here is the king of God’s chosen people, the one who is in an intimate relationship with the God who protects, the God who leads, the God who guides, the God who has enclosed his people with safety, wrapped his arms around in protection, fortified them with his love and guidance, might and strength...and Hezekiah *steals* from him. Takes from God what was not Hezekiah’s to give. And honestly, I’m not sure what’s worse. The stealing from God to pay off a king or the simple fact that the king never went to God for protection, guidance, and help from the beginning. He doesn’t seek God’s council, he doesn’t pray, he doesn’t seek a prophet or wise man of God...and you, Hezekiah are supposedly one who does “*right in the eyes of the Lord?*”

And can you blame the Assyrian king for coming back again? Yeah – who wouldn’t! You got all this gold and silver, and you didn’t have to do TOO much work. Sure, you had to take over other cities but you’re already doing that to other nations anyway – you’re the superpower of the day.... So why not go back to Jerusalem and take even more – their handing it out like

Halloween candy!! Their king was easily manipulated into handing over the goods to begin with, the chance he'll do it again is pretty high! So they do. And FINALLY Hezekiah does what is right. Finally he responds the way he SHOULD HAVE RESPONDED originally.

We aren't too sure if when realizing what he had originally done that he tears his clothing, or if he tears his clothing because of the blaspheming going on against God, or maybe some combination of the two – either way the magnitude of this sin is deep. So deep that this grief and despair comes over him and the only thing he can do is show this all-out public display of pain by ripping his clothing at his chest. Exposing that which should not be exposed. And after he does this he FINALLY GOES TO GOD IN PRAYER. Asking God what he should do. Asking God to take over. Begging God to respond with might and strength and take out these invaders – these blasphemers. And in their distress they seek out Isaiah, a man of God, for a word of God.

And God, in his grace and mercy hears their pleas and cries and God deals with these “underlings” who blasphemed him.

Unable to save himself and his people...what Hezekiah should have realized the first time – he finally does what should have been his first response the *first* time: he went to God. Asking God to lead, guide, step in, protect, and advance. All those things God said he would do for his people long ago.

And God RESPONDS. He takes out 185,000 soldiers in one night! God answered the prayers of his people. When the people of God remembered and lived into their relationship and word with God – God responded. We read in verse 34 that God does this for the sake of himself and the sake of his servant David. God will not allow his name to be blasphemed nor his covenant to not be held up to. God made a promise and he will not allow that to be broken.

The Bible is chalk-full of king after king who was broken, king after king who moves God's people away from him and this is the whole reason the kingdom splits into two and then eventually falls...and yet God still remains faithful. King after king that that didn't hold up as they should have. With some kings being really atrociously bad people, and others, like we see with Hezekiah that we are told are “good” and do “*what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as David had done*” – but again...this still wasn't “good”. The “good” were still not that good!

Here's some stats for our consideration and understanding. Not only to remind us of who these people were and the “goodness” they had – but also the patience, love, commitment, and faithfulness of God!

Of the 20 kings of Judah, 8 of them were considered “good” – those are not good odds! That's only 40% - which is pretty good if you're playing baseball...not much else! And STILL God

says they were “good” and did what was right. And STILL God was faithful to his end of the bargain and loved and served his people – saving them time and time again. Forgiving them time and time again. Responding time and time again when they FINALLY turned to him. And even with those 40% who were “good” – they weren’t as good as they should have been. Hezekiah steals from God. Asa threw his prophet in jail and oppressed some of his own people (**2 Chron 16:10**) and before he dies he seeks help of others instead of God...Joash sought the wisdom and council of wicked advisors even though he did so much good before that (**2 Chron 24:17-19**), Amaziah began to worship some of the idols he took from the Edomites, gets rebuked by a prophet and responds by threatening him and then has his pride puffed up after taking out the people of Edom and he then threatens the king of Israel. Do I need to keep going? Because they’re all the same!

They are human. They are faulty. They are self-centered. They are self-SEEKERS. They are broken.

And so really the question we get is, “what does this all mean”? What are we to get from this story of a broken man and broken people who are scared, terrified, distraught, and worried?

What it means is that God...is still...faithful. It doesn’t mean that God’s a liar when he said that these leaders were “good” and “did what was right in his eyes”, it doesn’t mean that God goes around with rosy-colored glasses on either. It means that people are broken – even the best intended people – and yet God still does not change. Kings come and go, the work of what is “good” comes and goes like the tide – and yet God’s covenantal goodness and love remains constant. It means that even the best intended people, the most faithful and devout stumble and crash and fall – and yet God still, in his eyes, considers them good. It means that you and I make mistakes – and sometimes we make terrible mistakes and unfortunately, as it so often happens, the mistakes we make swirl out of control and affect more than us. It means that in those mistakes, in the aftermath, in the wake of the destruction caused by us, in the rubble that we then find ourselves because of those decisions we made, that we now regret, that when we fall to our knees in pain and tears and don’t know how to respond or what to do...that those impulse decisions...do not make us. They may break us, by our own words and deeds, but they don’t define us.

God does.

But that’s just you and me – and as we all know this isn’t a story about you and me, that’s Hezekiah and the other kings. This is a story about God and HIS faithfulness. So what this means is that while this kingdom was continuously going down the drain in their faithlessness and lack of turning to God – God’s plan to save them, to reign in a right and true king, one who would

seek him before all else, one that would put others above himself...*that* plan...*that* need for them and us – was becoming ever more important and was still going to happen.

Can you imagine what story that would be if it was actually about us? Thank the good Lord that it's not! This is a glimpse and reminder of God's ultimate faithfulness. That even when he cannot find a single person who is faithful to him – he remains faithful to them. That his words of deliverance are bigger and better and more complete than the temporary one given to the people of Judah in our text. That Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords fulfills, for those kings, for those people, for you and I that which we absolutely fail at time and time again – day after day. Of turning to God in prayer, in seeking his council and wisdom before all else, of not rushing on impulse to do our own thing (which I notoriously am bad at), of simply doing those simple things God calls us to do each and every day.

This story is the reminder of God's faithfulness amidst a sporadically-faithful people. And that ultimately he will not allow us to break covenant – even when it means holding up our ends of the bargain. And because of his word, because of his bond, because of Jesus Christ and his atoning redemptive grace-filled work upon the cross we will be, and are already, delivered from the covenant we broke.

Does this mean that we're free to just be and say, "well, it is what it is!" No. Not at all. We still need to be faithful. We still need to seek God in prayer. We still need to bring any and all things to him in petition, request, need, joy, pain, everything. But what it means is that when we fall (notice I said WHEN), WHEN we *fail*...God's faithfulness still reigns.

God will not allow you, nor me, nor anyone else break his word, his bond, the work of his love, grace, and blood.