

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

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Sermon Text: 2 Kings 20:1-7, 11-19

Sermon Title: "Gain Pride, Lose Focus" (Need for Repentance Lenten Series)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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**{SLIDE 1}** Last week we visited King Josiah and his need to repent for the sin of ignoring God's word for such a long time. Now we go back a few chapters and visit with another king, Hezekiah. Hezekiah is the 12<sup>th</sup> king to rule over Judah. 2 King 18 tells us that he was 25-years-old when he took the crown, as opposed to Josiah who was only 8-years-old.<sup>1</sup> King Hezekiah ruled 29 years in Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah, and he did what was right in the sight of God, just as his ancestor David once had done.<sup>2</sup>

So we have to good kings, Hezekiah and Josiah. Two good kings who still were not perfect. Two good kings who still needed to repent of their sin.

**{SLIDE 2}** Before we talk about Hezekiah's sin, we should go back to the beginning of 2 Kings 20, in which we discover that the good king is sick. He is so sick that he is at the verge of death. He is so sick that the prophet Isaiah goes in and says that he should

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. 2 Kings 22:1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 2 Kings 18:1-3.

give his last commands and then wait death to arrive.<sup>3</sup> We don't know what makes Hezekiah sick. Skin diseases were not uncommon during Hezekiah's time, so the king might have contracted one so deadly that his young life would soon end.<sup>4</sup> By doing some math, we can hypothesize that Hezekiah was nearly 40-years-old when he was close to death.

Needless to say, the good king is overly distraught by the news. He doesn't want to die. Who would at the age of 40 or even at any age? Hezekiah is so panic-stricken that he turns his face to the wall – we may assume it is the wall next to his bed. He hides himself from everyone and cries out to God in prayer. “Remember now, O Lord, I implore you, how I have walked before you in faithfulness with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.” This is the king's heartfelt prayer. He pleads with God for his life, and he backs up his urgent prayer with great weeping.<sup>5</sup>

**{SLIDE 3}** King Hezekiah does have a point. He has been a really good king, an exceptional king, compared to many before him. He put his full trust in God from the very start. He tore down the pagan temples and images, so that nobody would worship them. The

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. 2 Kings 20:1.

<sup>4</sup> August H. Konkel, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Kings*, cf. 604.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Kings 20:2-3.

commands of God that he knew, he stuck close to – he would not veer from them and bring down God’s wrath upon the nation. Hezekiah even fought against the Assyrians, who had a treaty with Judah to be their domineering nation. Assyria had invaded Judah and forced the people and the leaders to bow to their will. If the people of God obeyed the Assyrian law, not the law of God, the leaders of Assyria would not punish them. King Hezekiah said, “Forget that!” and rebelled. He put God’s law above any law of any foreign nation, and said that God’s people would not stand for Assyria to oppress them.<sup>6</sup>

King Hezekiah inquired of the Lord the entire time.<sup>7</sup> He did not rebel because he thought it was a good idea, but because he believed it was God’s will. Hezekiah consulted with the prophet Isaiah, and Isaiah was able to communicate with him everything God wanted him to do. The good king was under a lot of pressure. The Assyrian armies were strong. They had the power to take over lands and persuade the people to obey the Assyrians. Hezekiah did not back down. He prayed to God, worshipping the God who made heaven and earth. He listened to every word that God would share with Isaiah. And he stood fast. Hezekiah was able to remain the king over a nation

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. 2 Kings 18:5-8.

<sup>7</sup> You may find the story in 2 Kings 18 & 19.

that was learning what faithfulness to God is all about.

{SLIDE 4} This might be why King Hezekiah was so panic-stricken, when he heard the news that he might die. He didn't want to die, because he wanted to continue to be the king who stood up against Assyria. He wanted to be the leader who would stick closely to God, and teach the people to do the same thing. It would all fall apart if Hezekiah died. Who knows what the next king might do? He might give in to the Assyrian's demands, and everybody would forget about worshiping and serving the one true God. So Hezekiah prays... {SLIDE 5} and his prayer is answered.<sup>8</sup> Isaiah communicates to the good king that he will be given 15 more years of rule. 15 more years to tell Assyria, "Forget you!" 15 more years to teach the people faithfulness to God. 15 more year for both king and people to watch their God protect them from danger and save them from their enemies. All is right with the world. The Assyrians will not bother them – God will see to it that Judah is delivered from the hands of oppression.

{SLIDE 6} Now we address the sin that needs repentance. Here is where King Hezekiah messes up royally. He receives visitors from the nation of

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. 2 Kings 20:4-6.

Babylon. The Babylonians are the other nation that will soon turn into a superpower. Assyria is the superpower right now, the big bully on the block. But they will lose to the Babylonians who will take over everything. Babylon will become the bully.

But for now, Babylon is smaller. The king of this smaller nation of Babylon introduces himself to King Hezekiah by sending envoys to Judah.<sup>9</sup> These envoys probably bring gifts for Hezekiah to admire. They also bring a letter from the king of Babylon, words of hope that the Hezekiah is well, because he had heard that Hezekiah was sick. The good king seems to be flattered, so he welcomes the letter and gifts and envoys from Babylon with open arms.

It happens in every action movie; it doesn't matter if the characters are 007 or Batman or the Avengers: There is always someone in the movie who is super rich and he has to show off his wealth by inviting people to see his home. We must take a tour of the person's vast mansion, and we "ooh" and "ah" at the crystal chandeliers, the wood floor and walls, the leather sofas and chairs, the silverware and gold-plated ornaments. King Hezekiah has guests in his palace, and so he must show off his vast wealth to impress those guests. He feels the need to let them

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. 2 Kings 20:12.

gaze at his silver and gold, his spices and precious oils, his armory and other rich objects.<sup>10</sup>

**{SLIDE 7}** The prophet Isaiah intervenes.

Remember him: he was the one that King Hezekiah would speak with, and Isaiah would share God's word with him. The prophet was the one who told the good king that he would live 15 more years, because God heard his prayer. Now Isaiah comes forward to share a word, but it is not a word of counsel. It is a reprimand: "What did these men say? From where did they come to you? What have they seen in your house?"<sup>11</sup>

King Hezekiah seems to speak nonchalantly, as though he did nothing wrong. But he will soon realize the depth of his sin. "The days will come," the Lord says through Isaiah, "when all that is in your house, and that which your ancestors have stored up until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the Lord."<sup>12</sup> Hezekiah's nation will have no wealth. They will have nothing. All that the king owns and all that the people own will be wiped out.

Isaiah prophecies that Babylon will grow to be a superpower, and they will not come to Judah with

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. 2 Kings 20:13.

<sup>11</sup> 2 Kings 20:14, 15.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Kings 20:16-17.

letters of well-wishes. They will come with fire in their eyes and sharp swords in their hands. They will take over and plunder and lay everything to waste. These Babylonian envoys and their king do not come to please King Hezekiah right now. They come to butter him up. They come to win his allegiance, so that King Hezekiah will give them what they want. And then all the kings that follow will also be buttered up and give Babylon all they have, and then the people of God are under oppression. They cannot live in their own homes and worship their God freely anymore.

**{SLIDE 8}** “Pride goes before destruction,” Proverbs 16:18 says, “and a haughty spirit (an arrogant spirit) [goes] before a fall.” We might act cocky. We might have great pride in ourselves and we want others to notice. We might think we are “all-that,” but what soon follows is bad news, bad circumstances, a bad end. Cocky people soon get their comeuppance. People who are full of pride find themselves not so prideful. They are soon shocked and miserable by the misfortunate that comes their way.

Nobody can be prideful, especially after having been healed from a deadly disease. Have we ever been sick, and prayed to God for healing, and were cured? Have we ever found ourselves in a terrible situation,

prayed to get out of it, and God answered the prayer? We thought the sun would never shine on us again, and yet God caused the sun to shine and warm our hearts. We were full of joy, were we not? We were full of thanksgiving and praise for the God who cares for us. We might have even said that it was all God's doing. There is no way we could get out of it without God's powerful hand. We give God all the credit for our good fortunes.

Now, what if we were cured or rescued, and then we turned around and didn't give God the credit? What if we told others, "Ah, it was nothing. I knew I'd get through it. I knew I would do the right things, make the right choices, and get myself through." Have we ever done that, taken God out of the equation and taken all the credit? What if we were so prideful to think that God loves us more than others, that God has a special blessing on us and nobody else? We have to be more special than others, we might think, because God answers all my prayers as I want. That is pretty arrogant. That is pride speaking through us, causing us to lose focus on the God who gives us everything.

**{SLIDE 9}** We are not called to be prideful. We are not called to fill ourselves up with arrogance and strut

around like selfish people. C.S. Lewis once said that pride “is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or common sense.” Pride also eats away at the faith we have in God through Christ. It eats away at the need to be vulnerable before our God, open to God overwhelming us with mercy and courage. If we have pride, then we do not see God, we do not hear God, we do not feel God.

For a moment King Hezekiah lost focus on God and allowed pride to speak. He lost that relationship with God that he had built up for so many years. All the times he listened to God and resisted the Assyrians, all the times that Isaiah told him that God was pleased and that the nation of Judah would prosper under him: all of that was lost when the good king had to show off in front of others. Did he even remember who healed him of his deadly disease, or were the flattering words from the Babylonian king ringing in his ears and drown out that excellent memory?

**{SLIDE 10}** We are called to faithfulness to God through Christ. We are called to let go of all our pride and arrogance, all our sin, and be filled with the life that Christ gives us through his righteousness. If we ever boast, we boast in the Lord, Paul once told us in 2

Corinthians 11 and 12.<sup>13</sup> We boast in the Lord, because we know we are weak and only Christ can make us strong. We boast because we are so imperfect, and only Christ can make us perfect. Only Christ may heal us. Only Christ may rescue us. Only Christ may walk with us through every difficult time. Only Christ may lead us to a place of complete joy.

If we are prideful, we have this season of Lent to think about it. We have a time for reflection, allowing God to show us the pride hidden in our hearts. We have a time for feeling the pain of losing focus on God, and yet realizing that we have a second chance to refocus on God. We have a time for admitting our sin and receiving the salvation, the reconciliation, the absolution that we need.

**{SLIDE 11}** What is frustrating about the end of our story today is that King Hezekiah doesn't seem to repent from his sin. He mildly accepts the fate of his nation, being thankful that if all the treasures and lands of Judah are going to be stolen away by the Babylonians, none of it will happen during his lifetime.<sup>14</sup> That doesn't sound like he is remorseful; it doesn't sound like he repents of his pride. That pride is still there, even after God speaks through Isaiah

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 and 12:1-10.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. 2 King 20:19.

directly to him.

King Hezekiah still may not be categorized with all the other wicked kings of Judah, but we do wish he would have gone back to his older self. We wish he could have gone back to the faithful, good king he was in 2 Kings 20:1-7, and also in 2 King 18-19. The king who did not assume anything but asked God for all the help he could get. The king who would not trust foreign nations and their powerful kings but would only set his heart and mind on the God of all power and love and grace. The king who would not let pride dictate his action but welcome God to show him the way to go every time.

This is the king we would like to lift up as our example. This is the Hezekiah we want to be like. During this season of Lent, we may search our hearts for any pride we may have. We may give our pride over to God, because we don't want it anymore. We may refocus on our God we fully trust for everything. We may receive life in all abundance through Jesus Christ.

## **Assurance of Pardon:**

Hear the Good News from Psalm 103: the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. God does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. As far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our transgressions from us. Friends, believe this news: we are forgiven - thanks be to God! Amen.