

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: 2 Kings 20:12-19

Sermon Title: "Failure to Stay Out of the Spotlight" (Misuse of Funds Series)

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Arrogance. Flattery from others. Believing that we are most important of all. These are attitudes that don't match up with God's will. These will cause us to lose focus on God, and possibly cause us to lose relationship with God. King Hezekiah is such a man whose swelled head gets him into deep waters.

King Hezekiah is the fourteenth king to occupy the throne of Judah after King David once did. He is 25 when his reign begins, and he rules in the city of Jerusalem a good 29 years. He does what is right in the sight of God, which is a rare thing for many kings of Judah and Israel.¹ He removed all the idols and temples that the children of Judah would use to worship other gods.

At the start of 2 Kings 20, we discover that King Hezekiah is sick. Deathly sick. He isn't going to last much longer. By our estimates he is around 39 years old, not very old to be deathly sick. But the king is.

¹ 2 Kings 18:1-3.

The prophet Isaiah tells him to get his house in order, because he is not going to last.² So King Hezekiah prays. He prays urgently for God to heal him. He cries tears of sorrow as he prays. He does right in the sight of the Lord, and it is right to pray with God about anything. God's word comes to Isaiah, and it is good news. The king will live. God has heard his prayer, and will answer it, adding 15 more years to his life and sparing him from the powerful Assyrian army that surrounds his borders.

Let us shift focus for a moment and talk about this foreign country, Assyria, on the borders of Hezekiah's kingdom. Assyria is the powerhouse country of the time. They can have their way with any country, especially with Babylon. Both Babylon and Assyria hate each other, and they've been in several battles against each other. Assyria has won all the big battles, and has been able to disrupt the political system of Babylon by sending their king into exile. The Babylonian king would have to regain his throne somehow, someway, and go after Assyria again. Babylon keeps coming back. Like the Atlanta Falcon, they keep risin' up, rebuilding their country and getting stronger.

² 2 Kings 20:1.

Now we can go back to King Hezekiah. He is healthy. He's got 15 more years to live. He has God's holy protection from the powerhouse country of Assyria. Life is good for the king. But King Hezekiah is just as sinful as any human being can be. Although we may choose to do right in the sight of the Lord, we are prone to trip up, to do the wrong thing, and to get in trouble.

We talked about Babylon having problems with Assyria, and how Assyria is able to kick the king off their throne without much effort. Babylon needs allies. They need other countries to help them fight against Assyria. The king of Babylon, Merodach-Baladan, discovers that King Hezekiah was sick. He sends a get-well card to him, along with expensive presents, in order to show his sympathy to the king of Judah. Or, does the king of Babylon send cards and gifts to show he can be friends with King Hezekiah? Maybe as "friends," King Hezekiah could help King Merodach-Baladan with fighting against their hated enemy, Assyria. King Hezekiah takes the bait. He is so thankful to the king of Babylon for showing such compassion and kindness (supposedly), that he invites the king's envoys to visit his country as honored guests.

The king's envoys are such honored guests, that

King Hezekiah shows them everything he owns. Every silver coin and golden goblet. Every expensive spice and ointment that a king would cherish. Every chariot and spear and piece of armor. The envoys see it all, because King Hezekiah gives himself over to flattery and arrogance. “Look at me, look at me,” he says to the king of Babylon. “Look how great I am with all the stuff I possess.” King Hezekiah is going to pay for this conceited display of wealth.

Isaiah comes to him and says that the Lord has seen it all. God watched how the king displayed his castle and treasury and armory to foreign envoys, trying to impress them. Isaiah says that all the king of Babylon saw will be his one day. “The day is coming when everything you accumulated over the years, and everything your kingly fathers accumulated, will be taken away to Babylon. Nothing will be left in Jerusalem. Babylon will owe it, including some of your own sons. They will be turned into eunuch, their masculinity cut from them, and they will be like robots serving the king of Babylon.” King Hezekiah was faithful to the Lord, generally, but this time he royally messes up.

What can make us arrogant? What can cause us to fall for the flattery of others, and turn us into show-

offs and know-it-alls?

Money is an obvious culprit. Too much money makes people stupid. Every year we read on the Internet about some football player or some basketball player running wild and breaking some law, because he thinks he is above everyone and everything with the millions he makes per year. Every time a Pittsburgh Steeler enters our state of Georgia, they end up in the news doing some foolish thing. Thank goodness, their foolishness doesn't wear off on Steelers fans, so you don't have to worry about me doing anything stupid. You would think that having money makes a person more responsible when, in fact, young kids – when anybody – comes across new-found riches it makes them arrogant.

Possessions make us arrogant. A new car. New job. New clothes. There is Coldwater Creek commercial (a women's apparel store), in which a woman strolls elegantly into a restaurant and approaches a table of her friends. This woman is decked out in Coldwater Creek blouse and slacks and jewelry, and her friends are silently jealous. All conversation stops at that table of five to look at the woman wearing Coldwater Creek, the women's apparel that every woman should desire. Possessions make us arrogant. Something as silly as headphones can make

our heads swell. I have passed two individuals at two different times, walking around with headphones on that look as though they were made of wood. These headphones have some oak or mahogany shell on them, which make them look very expensive. Maybe they are made of wood, or maybe the “wood” is just shiny plastic. We cannot wear earbuds that the manufacturer provided for us. We have to show-off, so we buy \$300 Dr. Dre Studio Hi-Fi headphones, or something similar, and we strut around as smug show-offs.

Good looks make us arrogant. Some girls and women look like clowns with all the make-up they try to put on. Pants below the butt make us arrogant. I watched a guy walking down the sidewalk with an arm full of stuff, and the other arm holding up his pants. He looked like he was struggling with trying to balance all the stuff in one arm. Here’s a novel idea: wear a belt, and you can use both arms to carry all your stuff. But that doesn’t make you look cool, whatever “cool” is. Almost anything we possess can make us overfill our heads with condescending thoughts of “I’m better than you.”

God might not come to us one day and tell us that all those things we possess will be gone. Unlike King

Hezekiah who was told all his stuff would go to Babylon, God may never declare some holy decree from heaven, telling us that we will lose our stuff because we have been so arrogant. We might not lose our stuff, but we will become lost in our stuff. We will lose ourselves, if we remain arrogant and complete show-offs.

We lose any compassion for people who don't have anything. We don't think much of those people, and we may criticize them or make fun of them, calling them Hobos, parasites, worthless, unimportant. We lose any compassion for anybody, no matter how young or old they may be. If they don't have what we have, they don't impress us. We shut off our ears and our hearts from being friends. We close our hands to offer any help at all. We are too important to roll up our sleeves, get down on our knees, and struggle with others as equals. We stand on the sidelines with arms crossed, and expect somebody else to step forward.

We turn into hard people, while we remain arrogant. Nothing impresses us, so we become bored, ungrateful, sorry individuals, while we remain show-offs. That's what we lose: ourselves, the special children that God has created us to be.

Did King Hezekiah, who knew how to do right in

God's sight, try to change his behavior? Did he repent of his sin of showing off his wealth? I submit to you that he did not.

After the prophet Isaiah tells him that all his stuff and his nation's stuff are going to exile in Babylon one day, King Hezekiah says this: "The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good! For he said, 'Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?'"³ King Hezekiah was more concerned about his own hide than the hides of his children and his nation. All he wanted was peace and quiet in the last years of his reign, so he sounds happy to hear that all his stuff wouldn't be taken away until he is dead and gone. Let somebody else suffer – God is good to me.

There are many perspectives that I have read from a number of commentaries, and they all say different things about King Hezekiah's response to Isaiah. We cannot go into all of them right now. However, I humbly submit that King Hezekiah did not do right in God's sight by what he said. He did nothing, and added to the sin of his nation.

Remember when we talked about the king being deathly sick. What did he do? He prayed, and he prayed, and he prayed some more. He drew himself closely to God, and pleaded for his life. God gave him

³ 2 Kings 20:19.

15 more years of life. A wonderful blessing, indeed. What did King Hezekiah do when Isaiah told him that his possessions, including his own children, and all of Judah were going into exile? Nothing. He just gave into it. He never prayed for forgiveness of his own arrogance. He never asked for forgiveness for being swayed by King Merodach-Baladan's manipulative flattery. King Hezekiah never prayed for God to save his nation, let alone his stuff and even his children. He just said, "The word of God is good," and left it at that.

King Hezekiah added to the sin of Israel that eventually landed them in a foreign country under a foreign leader.⁴ Even we, who try to do right in God's sight as much as we are able, will add to our sin if we remain over-bloated, callous, and unfeeling toward others.

So the solution seems to be: repent. Ask God to help us reverse our arrogant opinions. Ask God to help us view all that we have as gifts from God. Understand that we are only holding on to those gifts temporarily, because God trusts us with them to use them for his greater glory. God never gives us a gift

⁴ August Konkel says, "Hezekiah does not fall into the category of the wicked, but his faithlessness in the matter of the Babylonian embassy is one more example of why Judah goes into exile" (*The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Kings*, 606).

that he doesn't expect a return from. Like any bank, in which we deposit our money and expect some sort of interest, God gives us blessings of money or time or good looks or intelligence or athleticism or whatever it may be, and God expect interest from us. God wants something in return for that which God has granted us. We didn't earn it on our own – God gave it to us. God is the One lifted above us as great and honorable.

I witnessed a competition this last summer, in which teenage girls were supposed to dress up in fancy costumes, and tell something about themselves, and compete in various sports. It was something similar to a Miss America pageant. At the end of those days, the judges voted on who was the best dressed, and the prettiest, and the most creative with her costume. But then the teenage girls voted on who was the most congenial: the friendliest girl, the most sympathetic girl, the one girl they liked hanging out with. The girl who won that prize won the greatest prize of them all. The prettiest girl or the best-dressed girl prizes are rubbish compared to the most congenial girl, because it was the competitors themselves who voted for that one person. It was those 15 girls who hung out with each other, who played, who danced, who laughed together, voted for that one girl they would want to be friends with. It wasn't the best looking or the best

dressed who won that great prize. It was another girl, who knew how to use the God-given gifts for the good of others.

It isn't what we have; it is what we have to offer that blesses another person. It is what God gives us to bless him as our true God and Father. When the spotlight finds us, we must step away from it like we are running from a burning building. When the spotlight tries to fall on us, we fall to the side and let God shine.

Assurance of Pardon:

In Christ, we are offered a new design for living: open hearts, abundant forgiveness, yearning to serve others, desire to be one with God. The old is gone, and a new life has begun. Accept Christ's sacrifice, and be healed of your sin. Through him you and I are forgiven - thanks be to God. Amen.