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SERMON TITLE: Faith and Crisis: How Tried is *Your* Faith?

Series: Hezekiah the Reformer

SCRIPTURE: 2 Chronicles 32:1-19

DATE: November 22, 2020

View online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also 2 Kings 19:1-4, 15-19

Recently I heard an interview on Christian radio of the leader of a well-known Christian band. His band was successful, recording music and touring. But he could not find the time to take even a day off. His family time was suffering; his faith and health were suffering because he felt compelled to keep an outrageously driven schedule. Then COVID hit. And everything he was focused on stopped. It was a crisis. His career—and income—were halted without notice. This caused him to assess his life and ask himself some questions like *what's most important to me?* One of those questions was:

'I sing words about God day in and day out...but do I really believe this stuff?'

It's easy to sing about faith when you've got your dream, but in an instant his died and now the days stretched empty before him. What is most important to us when all else falls?

Do I really believe this stuff, in times of crisis?

"I raise a hallelujah, in the presence of my enemies . . . up from the ashes hope will arise."

Hadn't Hezekiah and all the people been doing the very same thing? They had successfully destroyed the idols from Judah. Hezekiah reopened the temple and revived worship. The leaders led the people to reach out to others all over their land, including the northern kingdom which had divided the nation.

Their worship and praise of God had unified the nation. Everyone had come to the temple for worship—divisions had been overcome; idols torn down.

Their success made it easy to say, "God is good." But can you say that when crisis comes?

You heard the Scripture. It was after Hezekiah led the people to get rid of the idol worship. It was after they had opened the temple and people were attending church again. It was after they had reached out to those who lived in the north and invited them to come and celebrate Passover. (We know Passover points to Jesus.) It was after King Hezekiah showed dedicated, consistent faithfulness to God that King Sennacherib attacked.

Crisis tries our faith. Crisis helps us know what we really believe.

When you read this Scripture, know that Sennacherib's attack on Judah really happened. Assyria conquered 46 Judean cities from which many artifacts are on display at the British Museum. But there's no record that Jerusalem was conquered.

Hezekiah did everything humanly possible to prevent that from happening. He built an aqueduct, which is still there today. He built a second wall, which is still there today. He invested in weapons and then inspired his army officers with encouraging words.

The Bible records King Sennacherib's strategy. He tried to intimidate and bully the people of Jerusalem to gain victory over them. **He tried to undermine Hezekiah's reliance on the Lord.** So his challenge to the people was: *Who are you going to rely on—me or God?* You better rely on me because I have conquered every god.

It was the 700 B.C. version of our political ads; a campaign to discredit the opponent and intimidate him and the people who support him. Sennacherib said to the people of Judah:

"What are you trusting in that makes you think you can survive my siege of Jerusalem? Hezekiah has said, 'The Lord our God will rescue us from the king of Assyria.' Surely Hezekiah is misleading you, sentencing you to death by famine and thirst!" (2 Chr 32:10-11)

You must analyze the words and charges of politicians if you want to know the truth. (These two kings were politicians!) When you take their words at face value as truth, without query, you will not see clearly what the politician is calling you to trust in. Ask questions.

You should not simply believe what you want to believe. You need to have grounded faith in order to be strong. Otherwise, you will be vulnerable to manipulation. Those whose belief is shallow are susceptible to being controlled.

In times of crisis you must ask 'is trusting in God valid?' Or, shall this nation cast their trust in a human ruler? In our own crisis—or crises—what will really help us? Your elders studied this passage in our session meeting last week and concluded that the struggle is between human power and God's power. King Hezekiah pointed his nation to God by getting rid of cultural idols, and opening the church, and calling them to come to worship.

So when the crisis comes, how do you react in faith? Is there a policy here for us; a "how to" in a crisis? Here's what Hezekiah did:

When King Hezekiah heard their report, he tore his clothes and put on burlap and went into the Temple of the Lord. . . . “Today is a day of trouble, insults, and disgrace. It is like when a child is ready to be born, but the mother has no strength to deliver the baby. But perhaps the Lord your God has heard the Assyrian chief of staff, sent by the king to defy the living God, and will punish him for his words” (2 Kings 19:1-4).

And Hezekiah prayed this prayer before the Lord:

“O Lord, God of Israel, you are enthroned between the mighty cherubim! You alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You alone created the heavens and the earth. Bend down, O Lord, and listen! Open your eyes, O Lord, and see! Listen to Sennacherib’s words of defiance against the living God. It is true, Lord, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these nations. And they have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire and burned them. But of course the Assyrians could destroy them! They were not gods at all—only idols of wood and stone shaped by human hands. Now, O Lord our God, rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O Lord, are God” (2 Kings 19:15-19).

Then he waited and this is what happened:

“And the Lord sent an angel who destroyed the Assyrian army with all its commanders and officers. So Sennacherib was forced to return home in disgrace to his own land” (2 Chronicles 32:21).

God averted a national disaster.

Faith in crisis: how “tried” is your faith? While this story is about a national crisis, most often they happen in our daily lives. How do we respond? I want to share a personal crisis of a family like yours and mine. Let’s watch this video together.¹

Did you hear the father say, even before he knew the outcome? He said, “He’s Yours, we’re Yours, forever and always.” They trusted in God.

Now, sometimes people die—the father knew that. Regardless, they were going to go with God. In life and death we belong to the Lord. Even in loss, those who trust God get up the next day, we come to church, and we worship the Lord. Do you remember when King David’s baby died? He had prayed and prayed over his ill child, but after the child died, he got up, took a shower, and went to the temple and worshiped.

Like the mother in the video said, “God gives and takes away. But no matter what, “We are the Lord’s.”

*I raise a hallelujah in the presence of my enemies.
I raise a hallelujah louder than the unbelief . . .
I are going to sing in the middle of the storm.
Louder and Louder, you’re gonna hear my praises roar. . . .²*

Ask yourself in our crisis of COVID, *do I really believe this stuff?*

Put away the idols; invite people to come worship, even those you don’t agree with, and let’s give up our idols and ask God to defeat this enemy.

May I have an “AMEN?”

AMEN

¹ 12-year-old Drowns and His Sister Sings Him Back to Life, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdODQH4p9U>, accessed November 19, 2020.

² Listen to the words of the anthem which was sung right before the message, “Raise a Hallelujah.”