

Faithfulness Tested

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 May 2023

Preacher: Lewis MacDonald

[0 : 0 0] So tonight we're finishing our series on Isaiah and we've been following on with God as he has proved himself to be a merciful God and as he has shown mercy to Judah.

And at the same time we've been following with Judah as they have more and more expressed the whole that pride has taken in their hearts.

And God would make great promises to them, the people of Judah have been very quick, continually, to give themselves over more and more and to show in some way that they want to be the boss.

God has very clearly set the standard and called this nation to uphold it. But the man of Judah we need is pleased to call good evil and to call evil good.

He is pleased to build up his own name and do as he wishes and he takes pride in it. Judah takes pride in their name and what they have made for themselves. And so we come to the end of this book one and we come back to meet Hezekiah.

[1 : 0 7] And when we meet this man from chapter 36 onward from what we read about him last week till now we've got to ask what is this man going to do with Judah's pride?

As far back as Isaiah 1 we're told that the Babylonian spirit is the sin that is taking over their hearts. Pride is taking over their hearts and further and further down the generations this is going on but Hezekiah the king arrives and we ask is he going to fix it?

Is he going to make better the nation that is destroying itself? Will he bring the nation back? Will he turn them around? If he is faithful will the nation follow after him and be faithful to the test for this king as with every king that we read about in this book is the test of faithfulness.

So just to split this into a couple of points tonight just two simple points. Firstly we see Hezekiah's faithfulness in suffering.

His faithfulness in suffering. Verse 38 and 39 in historical order come before what we heard last week about the Assyrians.

[2 : 2 4] So where the Assyrians try to attempt Hezekiah to open the gates and to let them in and they offer him the world that doesn't happen until after Hezekiah has been terminally ill and until the Babylonians have approached.

So the king is sick to the point of death and the first sign of faithfulness that we read of in Hezekiah's life is the sign of faithfulness in his suffering.

For him physical and isolated suffering. Isaiah comes to him in verse 1 and tells him he's going to die. He tells Hezekiah he's going to die and Hezekiah's response is to turn to the wall.

I shot the world out. This isn't national suffering and uncertainty like we've read about but this is personal suffering for Hezekiah. This is pain and trouble that comes to him alone and if in his pain and in his suffering he is if he is destroyed in that then where does that leave the nation?

Where does that leave Judah? Look where he turns, you see clearly where he turns in his psalm. He turns and he directs his thoughts to God.

- [3 : 48] This man whose second chronicles tells us already that he has proven to be faithful in some way and the greatest sense of suffering he remains faithful.
- He cries, he despairs, he tells us that he's been brought down by this one who's like a lion he says, breaking his bones all the day long but he's still faithful.
- He cries out to him and God sends Isaiah back to tell him his prayers have been heard and his tears have been seen. God sees the faithfulness of this king.
- So a couple of things that we can say about Hezekiah's faithfulness and suffering and what builds our faithfulness in suffering. One thing from this psalm is understanding that our suffering is for our benefit.
- It's for our benefit. That's made clear in verse 17 probably the key verse of this passage verse 17. Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness although he is sick to death and although he groans all day because of it, he says it's because of his welfare.
- [5 : 05] It's for his benefit. And we today are told, we know we're told, Paul tells us many times that our suffering is for our benefit as well and yet when you look at what worries us, when you think about what brings you pain, when you think about what troubles you, do we go along with Hezekiah and do we say that this is for our welfare?
- We know what Paul says. We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. We know he says that but it's not easy to say that and to make it personal.
- This word welfare, it literally translates to fulfillment and wholeness. And when we're going through trouble, do we say it makes us whole?
- Do we say it makes us more fulfilled when we are struggling? Do we agree with Hezekiah, a man who looks back on his sickness and says, this is for my fulfillment?
- If you struggle to say that, if you struggle to say that, it's for your welfare which I think we all do. I think at some stage we all struggle to say that. Here's just the start of what he says in verse 19 and 20.
- [6 : 22] The living He thanks you as I do this day, the Lord will save me and we will play music on stringed instruments all the days of our lives at the house of the Lord.
- Our welfare is us being brought close to God. If we know Him, if we have believed then we are reminded of our need often.
- The spirit of Babylon is gone. The prideful heart is pushed out because we know deep down in our suffering and deep down in our trouble, we know that we need someone to come and save us.
- We need someone as Hezekiah says to come and lift us from the pit. How can suffering and bitterness be for our welfare?
- How can it bring fulfillment? Trouble tells us, uncertainty tells us that we need someone to save us. And it urges us to go after the Lord who deals with us in love.
- [7 : 22] Spurgeon when he's preaching on Romans 8 he says this just in relation to what we've been saying. He who said all things work together will soon prove to you that there is a harmony in the most discordant parts of your life.
- I know that it is for my good that I should hold fellowship with Christ, that I should have communion with Him. Hezekiah is faithful in his suffering.
- And how is he faithful? How are we meant to be faithful? We need to know that it's for our welfare. And we are more fulfilled in our suffering.
- And in what troubles us? And only when the Babylonian spirit, that prideful spirit is pushed out and we say with Hezekiah we need someone to lift us from the pit.
- One more quick way in which our faithfulness in suffering is encouraged. God commands everything that happens in this world and outside of it for our sake.

[8 : 29] For his glory first and for our sake as well. At the end of chapter 38 Hezekiah asks for a sign that he will be healed. He asks for that while he is sick and look at what God promises to do in verse 8.

Behold I will make the shadow cast by the declining sun on the dial of it has turned back ten steps. So the sun turned back on the dial the ten steps by which it had declined.

What this is is a supernatural event. It's a raid event. It's not happened since Hezekiah is wondering if he will really be healed and while he is still sick God gives him a sign that he will be healed and it's a supernatural movement.

The writers mostly agree that this dial that we're talking about is a staircase. And so as the day goes on and as the sun goes down the shadow grows and grows and grows and on the staircase the shadow is climbing up it.

But God says he's going to make the shadow come back down the staircase. It'll be as if time is going backwards and that's going to be the supernatural sign to Hezekiah that he will be healed.

[9 : 46] And this is a single event or situation. We don't pray and expect to have 15 years added to our lives. We don't pray and look for a sign like this.

But a good thing has happened and it's come about from a good God who's commanding the world for the sake of His people, for the sake of His servant Hezekiah.

And today whatever happens around us, whether we make sense of it or not, whether we see it all or not, it happens for God's people. It happens for the church.

And when you struggle, when trouble comes to you and you can't make sense of it, God is commanding the world for your sake. He's commanding it for our sake. The psalmist, he confirms this, he tells us this in Psalm 107 when he's talking about the storms and he's talking about the waves that come over the people.

And then he says in verse 30, he talks about God and he says, and he brought them to their desired haven. The end is good and God promises that He will command the world even for His people's sake.

[10 : 54] What encourages us to be faithful and suffering? God commands the world and what happens in it for His glory and for our sake as well. Hezekiah is faithful and suffering and the spirit of Babylon is far away.

In his pain, he does not look to himself. But he calls to God and he knows that it's for his welfare, it's for his fulfillment.

And he knows that God is commanding the world for his sake. How do we remain faithful in our trouble? What encourages us to be faithful and suffering?

Know that it's for our fulfillment, it's for our welfare that we would be brought closer to Him and know that God is commanding the world right now and everything that happens in it for us.

And the end of that is perfect. Secondly, we see a different kind of faithfulness, there is this faithfulness and suffering and then there's this faithfulness when life is good.

[12 : 01] Life isn't perfect here, there's not complete peace, but life is good in chapter 39. Things are looking good, things are prosperous. And what we begin to very quickly see is the extent of the king's faithfulness when he's not in need.

Isaiah returns to the scene after the Babylonians have come on behalf of the king with letters and a gift. And what we read of when these men come to Hezekiah says, he welcomed them gladly.

Babylon comes and he welcomes them gladly. This chapter has been called one of the saddest texts in the Old Testament and there's good reason for that.

And Hezekiah has shown how focused on God he can be. In this chapter he becomes completely unfocused on God where he shows how wise he can be, we see very quickly how unwise he can be.

Where we have seen his faithfulness, he is no longer faithful. And what brings about this unfaithfulness? Babylon comes knocking at the door and he lets them in.

[13 : 17] In the past couple of chapters we were thinking about this Syrian who comes and tempts us and says, here is the world and you can have it.

Babylon comes, the Babylonian comes and says, take pride in who you are. And that's the problem, that's where Hezekiah's faithfulness starts to quickly disappear.

And he thinks about who he is and what he has and the renown of his own name. That's when his trust in God starts to fail.

When life is good, that's when pride comes in and his faithfulness very quickly disappears. Whatever the true reason was for this meeting, whether it was to really celebrate his recovery or whether it was to secretly form some sort of alliance, it's most likely the second.

Whatever the reason, we know Babylon comes in, pride comes in and faithfulness is gone. Just one thing about Hezekiah's lack of faithfulness.

[14 : 24] He doesn't consult God and he doesn't consider what God would say. I think what Isaiah asks in verse 3, what did these men say to you?

And from where did they come to you? Isaiah was not consulted. The king knows that Isaiah speaks on behalf of God, but Isaiah wasn't consulted and so God wasn't consulted.

When Isaiah comes on the scene and he doesn't even know what's happened, it's very obvious that the last thing that was on Hezekiah's mind was whether this was really the right thing to do.

The fact that Isaiah even has to ask that shows that Hezekiah is his own man, he's his own man, and by the extent that he goes to welcoming these people in and showing them everything that he has, we see how far he is from the faithful king he was when he is suffering.

When we think about our faithfulness and the good days of our lives and the better days, when things are going well, we see our faithfulness starts to fail.

[15 : 40] When we forget how much we really need God to guide us, it fails when we don't consider what God would say and when we don't consult Him. And we're not talking about small things.

This isn't whether you should go and buy coffee tomorrow morning or not, but when we're talking about what we are going to do with our lives and where we want to go and who we want to be, we fall to the same problem that Hezekiah fell to when we say it's our decision and we're going to do as we please because we know who we are.

That's not what faithfulness looks like. Real faithfulness is knowing that it's the Lord who's in charge and that even when life is good and there is no reason to fear for tomorrow, knowing even then that our lives aren't worked out by ourselves, but they are worked out by us going to God and considering what he would say and knowing his will, what we promise ourselves and what we tell ourselves is absolutely no certainty.

Only what God comes and tells us and what God promises has certainty. That's what goes wrong in the peaceful days of Hezekiah. Babylon comes to the city and he lets them in.

Pride comes in and it takes over. And he thinks he's the boss, but he doesn't understand what he's done because he hasn't considered what God would say.

[17 : 10] This is where his faithfulness fails and this is where ours will fail. If we don't pray what the psalmist prays, that we would know the way we should go.

In a few verses we see how a person's faithfulness can be completely ruined. And Hezekiah's suffering, he remains faithful because he learns and he trusts that it's for his welfare.

And he knows that God commands the world for his sake, but in peace and good living he turns and he decides that he's the boss.

He takes pride in who he is and what he has. You can almost hear him when Isaiah comes and asks him who these people were. He says they're people from a far off country. He's so happy that these people have come to see him and then he asks, well, have they seen?

They've seen everything. They've seen all that I have. When peace comes, his faithfulness very quickly fails.

[18 : 15] And it's on our minds, I think, to pray more and to come nearer to God when things aren't going well. When we're suffering and when we don't know what the future looks like and we're in trouble, it's more on our minds to pray and it's more on our minds to ask God to guide us and help us.

But then when life is good, it's not always the case. For Christians, the temptation is to be resentful when we're suffering.

The temptation is to be angry when we're suffering. And then when good times come, the temptation is to be complacent, it's to be idle. And life's not easy either way.

So we need to be faithful to God who promises to hold us in all of these days. When you look at Hezekiah, you see his faithfulness is tested and so is ours.

So whether you're suffering or life is good, be faithful. Trust in him and be faithful. Consider him however life would look.

[19 : 25] We asked at the start about what this man would do with Judah's great sin. What is he going to do with pride as it takes over this nation and it pulls them further and further from God.

And this chapter shows that though he is supposed to defeat it, though he is supposed to conquer it, he doesn't. And he falls to it himself. This king who should remain faithful, he doesn't and he falls.

And I think the saddest thing about this is how we are set up for the rest of the book of Isaiah. Because though he deals well with the Assyrians who are soon going to appear, we heard that last week he deals well with the Assyrians.

And we read in other accounts how he is faithful. But it's too late because the Babylonians have already come and he's already let pride in.

And his faithfulness is gone and it's too late. His failure is so great that by the end of the chapter when judgment is promised, when Isaiah comes to him and tells him that he secured the fate of Judah, he's out of his mind almost.

[20 : 31] He's just pleased that he's not going to see it. That's how far his pride has taken him. He doesn't care about his own sons. He's just happy. He's supposed to be the faithful king, but no matter how well he does for the last 15 years of his life, he has failed the people and he will not save them.

If you haven't believed in what we share here, if you can't make sense of what the sin of Judah has to do with you and Hezekiah's lack of faithfulness has to do with you, the Bible says very clearly that our pride, our thinking that we are in charge, our sin has set us up for judgment, which means that someday we are going to be apart from God's goodness forever.

But the difference for us today and the difference for you if you haven't believed this is you're not relying, you're not meant to rely on an unfaithful king, but there is a faithful king who came and Jesus, this faithful king who John tells us in Revelation is the ruler of kings on earth.

This faithful king is alive now in heaven and he did deal with your sin. He dealt with Babylon and he dealt with it by dying so that this Babylonian spirit would not ruin us, so that we would not face judgment.

Jesus remained faithful in suffering. He remained faithful in suffering, even dying for us and he remains faithful in life, in resurrected life, promising to hold us and not lose any who believe.

[22 : 17] If you haven't believed in Him, if you haven't called out to Him, He is the faithful king who you need to deal with Babylon, who you need to deal with sin and the promise is that He will do it.

He will do it if you confess your need and call out to Him. If you do know Him, if you believe tonight, remain faithful, whether you're suffering, whether life is good, remain faithful to Him until you're at last with Him.

Let's pray. Our Lord, we thank You for these two chapters. We thank You for what we learned from Hezekiah's life.

We thank You for His faithfulness and suffering and we pray that You would teach us from that. We are sad when we read about His unfaithfulness when life is good and when life is well and we pray that that would teach us to be faithful to You and to call it to You and to consider Your ways even when our days are good.

And for those here who maybe don't know You who haven't believed in You or we pray that they would understand that we don't rely on an unfaithful king but we rely on a faithful king who is now enthroned in heaven, who prays for us and who welcomes all who would believe in Him.

[23 : 35] So help us with these things and guide us. We pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.