

“Hezekiah, III: Finishing Stronger”

2 Chronicles 32:24-33

So far in our series on the good kings in Chronicles there have been many of these good kings who didn't have great finishes. A few finished poorly, some of whom served God faithfully as long as they had a close spiritual mentor. Hezekiah stayed pretty strong with the help of Isaiah but even Hezekiah proved to be less than perfect. Which means Hezekiah is a good life lesson for those of us who are less than perfect.

Hezekiah didn't fall away from God. He didn't commit any great sins. He just got careless about his relationship with God and focused on himself more than the people God gave him to lead. As a result he didn't finish as strong as he could have.

Most likely at Hezekiah's funeral the eulogies spoke well of all his accomplishments and even of his faith in God but I'm guessing most of it had very little to do with the last 5-10 years of his life. Think about that for a minute. Think about your funeral and what people might say about you. Will they talk about how we were serving God now or will they only be able to talk about the way we used to serve God? Or will they have to say things like, 'I know they made decision for Christ when they were young?' This really means 'I can't think of anything to say about the way they lived for Jesus.'

Hezekiah could have finished stronger. He wasn't bad. He was a good king who served God for much of his life but he could have finished stronger. I think of all of us would say 'I want to finish this life with a stronger testimony for Jesus' even if we're doing a pretty good job of serving Jesus. What can we learn this morning about having a stronger spiritually satisfying, God glorifying, Jesus-centered finish?

Back when we were first introduced to Hezekiah in 2 Chron. 29:1 we learned that he took the throne when he was 25 and reigned for 29 years. So he only lived to 54. In what we read here in Is. 38:5 is Hezekiah was mortally ill, he prayed to God, God answered his prayer and gave him 15 more years. That means he was 39 when Isaiah told him to get your house in order, you're going to die. When Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came to Jerusalem and threatened to flatten it but God miraculously spared Hezekiah and Jerusalem, we read in Is. 36:1 that Sennacherib came in the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign. So do the math. After God miraculously spared Hezekiah and Jerusalem from the Assyrians all because Hezekiah trusted God by faith, he got sick and Isaiah told him God said that his life was going to end. Again Hezekiah prayed to God and again God did a miracle in his life. Praise the Lord! He even told him how long he would have, 15 years. But he didn't use those 15 years wisely. He didn't wake up every day for the rest of those 5475 days 'Thank you Lord that I'm still alive, that I can still serve You in some way.'

If we're going to finish stronger what do we need to do?

We Need to Seek God Consistently not just During Difficulties **(Is. 38)**

Ch. 38 records Hezekiah's response and prayer to God before and after he was healed. In v.2 we read,

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, 3 "Remember, LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Up until this point what Hezekiah said was true. We've read about it. He wasn't bragging. He had served God well. Serving God consistently shows up in different ways.

Wholehearted Devotion (38:2-3)

Both the Old and New Testaments are filled with the phrase serve God or love God with all your heart or your whole heart. When Hezekiah says in Is. 38:3 that he served God with wholehearted devotion the Hebrew uses the phrase a *shalom heart*. Shalom means more than peace on the outside, it means peace inside. Content, whole, full. Hezekiah had given God full attention. He knew that shalom hearted devotion means being content inside because you trust God for whatever's going on outside.

Here's a simple test if we're striving to serve God wholeheartedly. When our circumstances go sour do we get upset, worried, anxious or depressed? Or even if we briefly go in those directions do we just as quickly go, 'Okay Lord. You're in control. This isn't surprising You. Help me not be anxious or let my mind worry about all kinds of outcomes that aren't true because they haven't happened yet. Give me shalom, calmness of heart because I trust you for the outcome.

Wholehearted means content and committed. We're in this for the long haul. Hezekiah served God consistently. This also isn't the first time he prayed. He turned to God in prayer quite a bit. Consistently seeking God shows itself by

Prayerful dependency (vv.2-5)

The first thing Hezekiah did when he took the throne was restore the temple to its central place in the life of Israel. The temple was the center for prayer and worship. When Hezekiah lay ill on his bed and was told by Isaiah he was going to die he turned his face to the wall. Why mention that? The only reason he would mention that is because that's the direction the temple was and Solomon prayed when they dedicated the temple that if Israel was in trouble and they prayed toward 'this place' God would hear, forgive and heal. This was an obvious practice in his life (1 Kings 8:29-30).

The apostle Paul said in 1 Thes. 5:18-20,

⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray continually, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Pray continually means to have a prayerful dependency that quickly goes to God in prayer when needs arise. In Col. 4:2 Paul commands us to

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Watchful or alert to pray; developing a proactive approach to prayer that you are looking for things to pray about and depend on God for. When Hezekiah was told he was going to die his first response was prayer. He tells us what he prayed in vv.10-14,

I said, "In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?" ¹¹ I said, "I will not again see the LORD himself in the land of the living; no longer will I look on my fellow man, or be with those who now dwell in this world.

¹² Like a shepherd's tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me. ¹³ I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me. ¹⁴ I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am being threatened; Lord, come to my aid!"

Seeking God consistently also means having

A mind to praise (38:15-22)

The temple was foremost on Hezekiah's heart when he first took the throne which means prayer and worship was on his mind. He restored the sacrificial system. He celebrated the Passover for twice as long as normal. Even here in his prayer for healing you see praising God is central to his thinking.

¹⁵ But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul. ¹⁶ Lord, by such things people live; and my spirit finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live. ¹⁷ Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back. ¹⁸ For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. ¹⁹ The living, the living—they praise you, as I am doing today; parents tell their children about your faithfulness. ²⁰ The LORD will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the temple of the LORD.

Once Hezekiah was told God would heal him he turned to praise. 'How can I praise you when I'm dead Lord'? We will praise God when we die of course because we'll be with Him for eternity but I believe Hezekiah was concerned about the people under his leadership. Not all the kings were righteous. Not all wanted to praise God. Hezekiah's son Manasseh will not go in that direction initially. Maybe he already saw this coming as he prayed 'parents will tell their children about your faithfulness'. Lord, how can I tell my kids about Jesus if I'm not around? While God has that covered, we see where Hezekiah's mind was at; praising and teaching about God. He looked forward in v.20 to praising God in the temple soon.

So God would heal Hezekiah – the second miracle he ever received in his life, confirmed by a 3rd miracle. The sign of his healing was that God would make the sun go back so that the shadow on the stairs of Ahaz would go down (as if the sun were coming up) instead of go up when the sun would normally go down. What happens when you give a godly person a miracle that extends their life 15 more years allowing him to lead a country and his own family? He follows God even closer right? Not always.

Gradually over time Hezekiah forgot life is a gift from God and didn't use it for God the way God intended. God gave Hezekiah many blessings, not just the miracle of healing which included the miracle of the sun going backwards. How else could a shadow reverse? Other people wanted to hear about it. What a great opportunity to tell them what God did for you! But not Hezekiah.

^{2 Chron. 32:24} In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. He prayed to the LORD, who answered him and gave him a miraculous sign.²⁵ But Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore the LORD's wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. ²⁶ Then Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the LORD's wrath did not come on them during the days of

Hezekiah. ²⁷ Hezekiah had very great wealth and honor, and he made treasuries for his silver and gold and for his precious stones, spices, shields and all kinds of valuables. ²⁸ He also made buildings to store the harvest of grain, new wine and olive oil; and he made stalls for various kinds of cattle, and pens for the flocks. ²⁹ He built villages and acquired great numbers of flocks and herds, for God had given him very great riches. ³⁰ It was Hezekiah who blocked the upper outlet of the Gihon spring and channeled the water down to the west side of the City of David. He succeeded in everything he undertook. ³¹ But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.

What was this test? The same test we all have. Whether or not we will . . .

Use God's Blessings as Opportunities to Glorify God **(Is. 39:1-4)**

The Chronicler doesn't tell us why Hezekiah got proud although he does tell us he repented. Some suggest this is why he was deathly ill because there was sin in his life that God wanted to deal with. Perhaps this was also the repentance. Unfortunately he had a relapse and got careless again.

The Chronicles' account lists all the things Hezekiah did and how rich he became. He was like another Solomon. So blessed was he that people from other parts of the world were coming to see him and hear about this miracle. God blessed him and blesses us so that we use those opportunities to tell people what God has done in our life. 32:31 says they came because they wanted to hear about this sign. The Babylonians were the astrologers. We see that in Daniel 2 and from the magi in Matt. 2 who came to see the new king because they saw the His sign in the star. But God said this was a test for Hezekiah. This is why God blesses us:

God uses blessings to test our hearts (39:1)

. . . .to see if we will give Him the glory or ourselves. Did Hezekiah pass the test?

²Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses—the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine olive oil—his entire armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.

I thought they came to hear about the miraculous sign? Instead of glorifying God Hezekiah used their visit not to glorify God but to magnify himself. But God blesses us so we point people to God,

Not to build up our own reputations (39:2-4)

Isaiah comes and confronts Hezekiah.

³Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, "What did those men say, and where did they come from?" "From a distant land," Hezekiah replied. "They came to me from Babylon." ⁴The prophet asked, "What did they see in your palace?" "They saw everything in my palace," Hezekiah said. "There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them."

They came to hear about the sign but Hezekiah says they came to see me and I showed them everything in my palace and all my treasures. Here's the reason why Hezekiah didn't finish as strong as he could have He should have . . .

Focused on Others More than Self **(Is. 39:5-8)**

Hezekiah blew a clear opportunity to talk about what God did in his life. Instead he made it all about himself. So God sends Isaiah to Hezekiah and he asks him what they said. They said they wanted to hear about the miracle but that wasn't Hezekiah's focus. There are times when people have complemented us or asked us about something in our life where we should have given the credit to God but instead chose to make it about our self – even if it was mock humility. Because mock humility is still talking about our self (what we can't do) rather than what God did through us.

None of us are perfect. We've all missed opportunities to glorify God and made it about ourselves instead. These are God's tests to see how we're growing in our dependence on Him. Hezekiah failed here. And when he was confronted by Isaiah Hezekiah should have repented but he failed again. So God judges Hezekiah. All the things Hezekiah boasted in, God was going to take away.

⁵ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD Almighty:⁶ The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your predecessors have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD.

Babylon was growing as a world power. Assyria was still number 1 but Babylon was strengthening. Hezekiah may have been seeking support and making an alliance with them, something God always forbade the kings to do. If that's true then that's really sad because of what Hezekiah saw God do to the Assyrians when he trusted God. Hezekiah was trusting and boasting in his possessions but God reminded him that .

Possessions don't last (39:5-6)

God was going to take all the things Hezekiah boasted in away. Not just his stuff but all the things his predecessors had stored up. Babylon would come and take Judah away from their land and take their possessions and destroy the temple and the palace. And not just possessions,

⁷ And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

People will be taken to Babylon, people like his sons and grandsons. They won't be kings. They'll become slaves to a foreign king instead, all as a result of Hezekiah's selfishness. How did he respond?

⁸ "The word of the LORD you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime."

"As long as I'm okay that's all that matters". Even though God's Word says other people will get hurt, as long as I'm okay that's all I care about.

The reason why we need to focus on others more than ourselves is because our stuff won't last and

People don't know what the future holds (39:7-8)

Hezekiah knew that a future tragedy was going to happen to some of his own family but as long as he was okay he didn't care. Do we sometimes think that way? Yes, my family members are going to hell without Jesus but I'm saved and that's all that matters? Or our neighbours or co-workers. The most important thing being communicated about the hurricanes is warning people to get away from it. Leave your possessions, they can be replaced; but you lives can't.

We need to apply that to the gospel. People matter more than things. Nothing on this earth will last.

2 Pet. 3:11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

We ought to be holy and godly people speeding the return of the Lord along by sharing the gospel. How does that work? Because Rom. 11:25 says when

the full number of the Gentiles has come in, ... "The deliverer will come from Zion;

Hezekiah was a good king. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord for much of his life. But he could have finished stronger. I think if we were all told by a prophet we were going to die in the next 2 weeks we would all say 'I wish I could have finished stronger. I wish I had focused more on people than possessions. I should have been more concerned about the lost who don't know what the future holds even though I know what happens to people who don't accept Christ and could have told them.

The way we finish our life stronger, remaining faithful to God is by finishing today stronger than yesterday. Just one day at a time. By focusing less on possessions and more on people today. By being more sensitive to using God's blessings to point people to God rather than building up our own reputation. By being more consistent in loving God with all our heart, becoming more alert to prayer and being quicker to praise God, and not just going to God when difficulties arise.

You know what that will look like in your life better than I do. The Holy Spirit probably revealed things you need to do more and some you need to do less. This is God's way of testing us, by the Holy Spirit bringing to our minds the things we need to change through His Word. The author of Hebrews warned his readers to be careful about their walk with God, because some he said had drifted away (2:1). But he also said this in 6:9,
⁹Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation. ¹⁰God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. ¹¹We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. ¹²We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

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If you have any comments or questions about his message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net