

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR AUGUST 23 & 24, 2020**

In those days Hezekiah became sick and was dying. Then the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came to him and said, "This is what the Lord says. Give instructions to your house because you are going to die. You will not recover."

² Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, saying, ³ "Please, O Lord, remember how I have walked before you in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in your eyes." Hezekiah wept bitterly.

⁴ Isaiah had not yet gone out from the middle courtyard when the word of the Lord came to him:

⁵ Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, that this is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says. I have heard your prayer, and I have seen your tears. I will certainly heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the House of the Lord. ⁶ I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will rescue you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will protect this city for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.

⁷ Then Isaiah said, "Get a cake of figs." So they got it and put it on the infected sore, and Hezekiah recovered.

⁸ Then Hezekiah asked Isaiah, "What will be the sign that the Lord will heal me and that I will go up to the House of the Lord on the third day from now?"

⁹ Isaiah said, "This will be a sign for you from the Lord that the Lord will do the thing which he said. Shall the shadow extend forward over ten more steps, or shall it move backwards ten steps?"

¹⁰ Hezekiah said, "It's easy for the shadow to get longer and cover ten more steps. Instead, have it go back ten steps."

¹¹ Then the prophet Isaiah called out to the Lord, and he caused the shadow, which had gone down on the steps of Ahaz, to go backwards ten steps. (2 Kings 20:1-11 EHV)

I picked up a copy of the Lakeland Times. It was dated February 23, 2021 – 6 months from today. Which means I'm looking at the future. The front page has an article about the warm, dry winter, as we've been getting as much rain as snow even in January/February. The sports page discusses whether or not Big 10 Football will actually take place in the spring, along with articles about local sports teams struggling in the era of COVID-19.

Buried in the back of the paper is an article about some surprising stocks that have taken off during the last six months and a few others that have bottomed out. Good to know – gives me a heads up, I might become a wealthy man knowing this stuff ahead of time. There's the editorial page, which often means pages (plural) – can be longwinded.

And here are the obituaries – a focus of every small town newspaper. Anyone I know? Oh, wait a minute – my picture is here, my brief life story, my obituary appears here six months from now. This changes everything. Suddenly I care a lot less about the presidential race or gaining instant wealth. Those things just don't seem so important any more.

What if that happened to you? What if you received advance notice of your own approaching death in such a stunning way? What difference would it make? Hezekiah, king of Judah, got advance word: ***In those days Hezekiah became sick and was dying. Then the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came to him and said, "This is what the Lord says. Give instructions to your house because you are going to die. You will not recover."***

Hezekiah isn't old and full of years. You wouldn't think his time has come. He's just 39 years old.

How would you respond to such advance notice of your own death? What would you do? Hezekiah prayed: ***Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, saying, "Please, O Lord, remember***

how I have walked before you in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in your eyes.” Hezekiah wept bitterly. He isn’t proud or saying he’s worthy of more time. He doesn’t bargain with God. He’s been faithful, not one of the many who turn to God only in 911 emergency situations. He’d been one of Judah’s greatest kings, a great spiritual reformer.

He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, like everything that his father David had done. He removed the high places, smashed the sacred memorial stones, cut down the Asherah poles, and broke into pieces the bronze serpent which Moses had made, because until those days the people of Israel had been burning incense to it. They called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel, and there was no one like him among the kings of Judah, before him or after him. He held fast to the Lord. He did not turn aside from following him, but he kept the command which the Lord commanded Moses. The Lord was with him. Wherever he went, the Lord gave him success. (2 Kings 18:3-7)

There was a great foreign threat at that time – Assyria – they were on Judah’s doorstep. Hezekiah resisted the aggression, so Sennacherib, king of Assyria, insulted Hezekiah and his God and got ready to attack Jerusalem. Hezekiah prayed, encouraged the people to pray, and God heard and answered. In one night, the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers.

Soon after this, Hezekiah became ill and was informed of his date with the obituary page. He did the only thing he knew to do: he prayed. It wasn’t a selfish prayer, i.e., “I’m too important to die, you need be to still be here and lead the people.” No. In a parallel account, Isaiah gives us some insight: ***“The grave cannot thank you. Death cannot praise you. Those who go down into the pit cannot trust your faithfulness. The living one, the living one, he praises you, as I do today. A father tells his children about your faithfulness.”*** (Isaiah 38:18-19) He simply wants to continue to faithfully lead God’s people and proclaim God’s promises.

Hezekiah gets a response – faster than FedEx, UPS, or Amazon; more instantaneous than an email or text message: ***“Isaiah had not yet gone out from the middle courtyard when the word of the Lord came to him: ‘Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, that this is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says. I have heard your prayer, and I have seen your tears. I will certainly heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the House of the Lord. I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will rescue you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will protect this city for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.’”*** (vv. 4-6)

Wow, just wow! 15 more years! The Lord had Isaiah apply some sort of medical remedy that led to Hezekiah’s miraculous recovery. Hezekiah asked for a sign that he would indeed recover – that the shadow on a sundial would defy the laws of nature and go back 10 steps/degrees instead of forward. That the sun would, in effect, go backward. It was done.

So, we’re talking about second chances at life – what lesson are we to take from this account? Pray like Hezekiah, pray Hezekiah’s prayer exactly and you will be healed? There’s a problem with this, isn’t there? Some of you are already struggling with this. Every one of us has prayed hard for something and not gotten the answer we wanted. In some cases, we’ve prayed for this very thing – for health to be restored, for the life of a loved one to be extended – even for someone like Hezekiah: devout, God-fearing, faithful. But the person died. You were left wondering – was there something wrong with my prayer? Is there something wrong with my faith?

The answer is not found in the quality or quantity of prayer, but in the will of God; deep within his hidden will. His revealed will in Scripture tells us to pray. His revealed will in Scripture tells us that God can do anything. But how and when he chooses to answer prayer, he keeps close to his vest, so to speak. He assures us that he always has our best interest in mind, even when it hurts, even when it makes no sense. God is present. He is at work.

So what lesson can we take from this account? We’re not looking for prescriptive lessons which would apply exactly to us today – like putting fig leaves on an infected sore or taking a regimen of pills every 8 hours

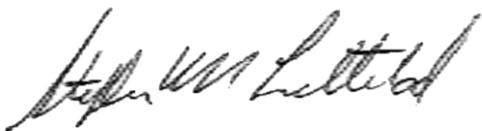
until gone and then get refills. There are descriptive lessons here, which means we can learn from the truths and principles that we find here:

- 1) We don't deserve 2nd chances at life or even 2nd chances with God, much less even an audience with God. You could be a cat with nine lives and escape death time and again, but in the end everyone dies. The soul who sins is the one who will die. You and I are souls who sin and who will die, deserve to die – not just physically, but spiritually, separated forever from God. But God gives 2nd chances – not mulligans or do overs. It's called grace in the person and work of Jesus Christ. ***"This is how God's love for us was revealed: God has sent his only-begotten Son into the world so that we may live through him. This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."*** (1 John 4:9,10) Added to this gift of forgiveness, at no extra charge, is the gift of faith which clings to this grace, as well as eternal life guaranteed by Christ's resurrection from the dead.
- 2) Remember God is in control of all things. He adapts every situation to work for our good. All things are possible with God.
- 3) Pray boldly, fiercely – then accept God's answer, God's will.
- 4) Each day is a second chance at life. If you or a loved one has ever gone through a serious illness that took you close to death's door and God granted recovery, you know this: how precious each day is, what a gift each new sunrise is, how important each moment spent with loved ones is. If you've ever gone through difficult financial struggle and broken through or an emotional ordeal and endured, you know how precious is each new day of grace.

God loves to give 2nd chances – at life, with family, with him. How will you use this day, this 2nd chance, another 24 hours under grace? Should God grant it, what will you do with your next 2nd chance at life – tomorrow? Whatever you do, do it to God's glory. Live to please him, to draw near to him through Word and Sacrament.

And when your time does near the end, when there are no more 2nd chances at life here but you are on your way to be with Jesus in heaven – where 2nd chances are never needed, think of dying this way. Remember as a kid when you played hard all day and fell asleep on the couch or on the floor in front of the TV or wherever you ended up? That wasn't where you belonged, but in the morning you'd wake up where you did belong – in your own bed. Mom and Dad carried you up the stairs, into your room, and tucked you in your bed where you belonged.

That's what death is like for the Christian. It's like waking up some morning and finding oneself in another room, no longer in a place of struggle and hardship and sadness and tears, but in the place where we belong, the place of eternal joy, safe in the strong, loving arms of Jesus, where the best is yet to come.



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