

Lessons from Hezekiah–The Test of Adversity
Bethany Chapel
September 16, 2012

I. Intro. What happens when we do everything right and still face unbelievable conflict?
Illus. Libya—we liberate the country, and they kill our ambassador. What gives? While we now know that there is much more to the story, there is still a feeling of betrayal, or at the very least saying “What’s the use?”

- A. Examples
1. Asaph in Ps 73
 2. Job
 3. Yes, Hezekiah.
 4. Even Peter weighs in:

1 Peter 3:13-18 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." 15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

- B. Map: OT Sandwich. A healthy slab of Hezekiah between two slices of Moses
1. First week– **test of Dependence**, as illustrated by Moses at the Burning Bush–On Fire with Christ, not for Christ, in any available bush.
 2. Last week – **test of Relationship**, as illustrated by Hezekiah’s early kingship
 3. Today– **test of Adversity**, as illustrated by Hezekiah’s middle kingship
 4. 9/23– **test of Success**, as illustrated by Hezekiah’s late kingship
 5. 9/30– **test of Deliverance**, as illustrated by Moses and the Bronze Snake

- C. Background to Hezekiah–setting the stage
1. What truths does Hezekiah illustrate? Living the Christian life. Part-saint, part sinner. Not unlike some of Jesus’ disciples. At one point they leave everything to follow Him, at another point they are arguing who will be the greatest in the Kingdom.
 2. One of the later Kings of Judah, about 716 BC and contemporary of Isaiah.
 3. Became king at 25 and inherited a kingdom in spiritual disarray (his father Ahaz was approximately 13 at Hezekiah’s birth!).

Hope for people coming out of dysfunctional backgrounds!

4. A truly remarkable king from the start.
 - a. Restored the Temple and worship. (Like coming to Christ!)
 - b. Re-established the Passover – communion with God
 - c. Tore down the high places. (The high places were like having spiritual mistresses on the side in addition to a wife)
 - d. Stopped paying protection money to the bully nation of Assyria.
 - e. Since David, probably one of the best Kings of Judah–but not without his weak points. See 2 Kings 18:3, 5-6.

- D. The three spirituality tests of Hezekiah
1. Last week: **Relationship**– Getting his life and the life of Judah back on track–making a difference personally, corporately, and nationally.
 2. This week: **Adversity**– Dealing with the Assyria.
 3. Next week: **Success**– Dealing with his own pride.
- E. Morning Map: Unpacking the Test of **Adversity**: A parable of Christian maturity!
1. **Cutting ties**: The Rebellion with Assyria.
 2. **Facing consequences**: The Assyrian Response.
 3. **Confronting the enemy**: Reaching back to relationship.

II. The test of **Adversity**. A parable of Christian Maturity.

A. **Cutting ties**: The Rebellion with Assyria.

2 Kings 18:5-7 *Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. ⁶He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. ⁷And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.*

1. **Setting the scene: Judah and Assyria.**
 - a. The rise and fall of empires.
 - (1) The place of Judah and Samaria (Ephraim)
 - (2) The rise of Empires
 - (a) Pax Americana/Britain/Byzantium
 - (b) Pax Romana
 - (c) Greece
 - (d) Persian
 - (e) Babylonian
 - (f) Assyrian
 - (g) Phoenician
 - (h) Egyptian
 - b. The protection racket.
 - (1) Invade countries. “Boots on the ground.”
 - (2) Tribute—to keep countries in line. [1776 taxes]
 - c. The consequences of rebellion, Assyrian style:
 - (1) Siege
 - (2) Slaughter
 - (3) Deportation
 - d. Summary: Cutting ties—The impact of Hezekiah’s rebellion. Either really brave—or really foolish. It was, however, the most tangible sign that his reforms were not just on paper—they were for real.
2. **Cutting ties in the 21st Century.**

¹ Peter 4:1-4 *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. ²As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.*

- a. When we become Christians, or get our life back on track, we no longer pay “protection money” to our old masters.
 - (1) Breaking addictions/Stopping vices.
 - (2) Move away from old friends or acquaintances.
 - (3) Life is for the Lord, not for the World! Old things have passed away—all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:20).
- b. Does the world know in some tangible way that we are a Christians? Do our relatives, friends, neighbors or co-workers know?
 - (1) How? Does our life bear evidence of the supernatural?
 - (2) What ties have we severed because of relationship to Christ?

Illus. If you were accused of being a Marine (Christian), would there be enough evidence to convict you?

3. **Summary:**
 - a. Hezekiah stopped paying protection money to Assyria. An ungodly nation would no longer sap the resources of Judah. This was decision fraught with difficulties—and took great courage to enact.

b. Any decisions we make to sever our ties to the world system are likewise fraught with danger—and take great courage to enact. Yet God is calling us to go in a decidedly different direction. We **must** cut the ties.

4. Transition. Anyone who has read the rest of the story is literally waiting for the other shoe to drop. There are consequences to be faced.

B. Facing Consequences: The Assyrian Response.

2 Chronicles 32:1 *After all that Hezekiah had so faithfully done, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah. He laid siege to the fortified cities, thinking to conquer them for himself.*

1. The Empire Strikes Back.

a. The historical record of Hezekiah's reign:

(1) 6th year—Assyria captures Samaria (Israel) after 3 year siege. Deportation followed. Beginning of Samaritan nation.

(2) 14th year—Assyria invades Judah. Captures all but Jerusalem. It was time for payback Assyria was going to collect with interest.

b. How real is this? Hezekiah does everything right. He repaired the temple, restored the Passover and tore down the high places? Shouldn't that guarantee that everything is going to come up roses? Not necessarily. Remember, he stopped paying God's money in taxes to Assyria. And they sent the tax collector.

Paul alludes to something similar in 2 Timothy 3:

¹⁰You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹²In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

2. The test and its modern incarnation: When we get our life back on track, the devil doesn't sleep. We will be tested! There will be consequences. It will cost us.

Illus. The Cross and the Switchblade: "I liked you better as a junkie!" (Similar to Alcoholics)

Illus. Coast Guard lay leader. Active persecution. / Missionary friends: Conversion costs livelihood.

Conversion costs--both us and them. Assyria lost its extortion money. Your friends lose their cover. They can't excuse their behavior by ours. Yes, people do that. Check with your kids!

3. The **problem**: Adversity really looks like a terrible way for the Godly to be rewarded. Some incentive!

4. The **solution**: Adversity is **not** a reward. It is a **test**—the best preparation for which is Godliness—and the previous tests of Relationship!

Illus. Hurricane Katrina. We failed that particular test. Okinawa typhoons—houses made of concrete!

Lessons learned. We survived Hurricane Isaac better because of Katrina—tests passed.

5. Summary of Facing Consequences:

a. (Review) Hezekiah got Judah on track—and **Cut Ties**. However, there are consequences.

b. Hezekiah **Faced the consequences**—He realized that **adversity** is not perverse *reward* for faithfulness—a kind of cosmic joke. It is a *test*, for which the best preparation is Godliness!

6. Transition: So how did Hezekiah **confront the enemy**?

C. Confronting the Enemy—face to face with Assyria.

Illus: Separating the Men from the Boys: Airborne! [joke]

1. The historical record: Hezekiah's three fold response:

a. Response #1: Capitulate. 2 Kings 18:

¹⁴So Hezekiah king of Judah sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish: "I have done wrong. Withdraw from me, and I will pay whatever you demand of me." The king of Assyria exacted from Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. ¹⁵So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace. ¹⁶At this time Hezekiah king of Judah stripped off the gold with which he had covered the doors and doorposts of the temple of the LORD, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

- (1) An unfortunate, but understanding response by Hezekiah. He knew the score and attempted to get things back to normal.
- (2) He robbed the temple to pay his Assyrian taxes.
- (3) Problem: It didn't work—it rarely does. The Assyrians weren't going to be bought so easily.

Illus. Black obelisk in British Museum. Hezekiah's failure is memorialized in stone!

b. Response #2: Physical preparations.

2 Chronicles 32: 2-8 ²When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and that he intended to make war on Jerusalem, ³he consulted with his officials and military staff about blocking off the water from the springs outside the city, and they helped him. ⁴A large force of men assembled, and they blocked all the springs and the stream that flowed through the land. "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find plenty of water?" they said. ⁵Then he worked hard repairing all the broken sections of the wall and building towers on it. He built another wall outside that one and reinforced the supporting terraces of the City of David. He also made large numbers of weapons and shields. ⁶He appointed military officers over the people and assembled them before him in the square at the city gate and encouraged them with these words: ⁷"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. ⁸With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people gained confidence from what Hezekiah the king of Judah said.

- (1) Hezekiah prepared the city for war, **physically**. Based on the invasion of Judah, He knew that Assyria was not going to be happy unless they had conquered Jerusalem.
- (2) Hezekiah prepared the people for war, **spiritually**.
- (3) The measures were prudent and the charge to the people demonstrated that Hezekiah had recovered from his earlier missteps.

Illus. There is also a monument in Jerusalem to this effort: Hezekiah's tunnel, on most tour stops! A monument to courage.

- (4) Problem: The Assyrians didn't go away. What next?

c. Response #3: Helpless dependence on God. Isaiah 37--

¹When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the LORD. ²He sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. ³They told him, "This is what Hezekiah says: This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the point of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. ⁴It may be that the LORD your God will hear all the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the LORD your God has heard. Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives."

- (1) Hezekiah went to the temple of the Lord.
- (2) He sought the intercession of the Prophet.
- (3) He recognized that the battle was the Lord's, not his.
- (4) The reason he could do all of this—was because he had already passed the test of Relationship. He was prepared!

2. How do we confront Adversity today? Do we respond all three ways? Not necessarily. At least Hezekiah went through all three phases just for us.

a. Response 1: Capitulation. Like Hezekiah, this is the saddest and most disappointing response of all.

- (1) 1 Peter 2:20-22 ²⁰If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. ²¹It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. ²²Of them the

proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

(2) Hezekiah, on the other hand, learned from his mistake.

Illus. Prince in the palace, pig in the poke. Even if we make a mistake—and we will. It's not in the falling down, but in the getting up! Prodigal Son.

b. Response 2: Physical preparations. There is a time for physical preparations in the life of a Christian.

(1) Flee from temptation.

(2) Guard your time.

(3) Create your space!

Illus. Roman Catholic Lay Leader on USS Kansas City. He took charge of his own space!

Take responsibility for your life!

c. Response 3: Helpless dependence on Christ. At some point, the only real answer to the test of Adversity—this is God's battle, not ours. Take it directly to Him. How much easier it is if you are **already in relationship!** [last week!]

(1) The temple is clean

(2) The passover is restored

(3) The high places are removed.

Observation: Is it possible that God allows our problems to be so fearsome that we **must** become helplessly dependent? Seeing God behind the Assyrians may be the key to the whole passage! **The whole episode is Grace from start to finish!**

3. Summary: We confront the enemy in one of three ways:

a. We give up—capitulate. Never a good answer.

b. We prepare physically. Good and right, but insufficient.

c. We take the whole mess to Christ. **We reach back to the test of relationship!** It's OK to skip right to solution #3!

2 Kings 19:35-36³⁵ *That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies!³⁶ So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.*

III. Conclusion—Hezekiah's test of Adversity. It is truly a parable of our own Christian lives. It comes in three parts:

A. **Cutting the ties.** This is a necessary part of our Christian Growth.

B. **Facing the consequences.** We must recognize that the test of Adversity is not a reward gone bad—but necessary preparation. When we cut ties, there will be consequences. *Those who seek to live Godly in Christ, will suffer persecution.*

C. **Confronting the Enemy.** We will have our own Assyria's to face. Whatever your challenge is, the enemy is formidable and unforgiving. **We reach back to the test of relationship!**

1. *Capitulate?* This one never works.

2. *Prepare Physically?* This one helps—but is not the final answer.

Eph 6:12-13 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

3. *Helpless dependence?* The Battle is the Lord's. He is the Victor. He is also behind the problems (Assyrians). The test of Adversity is really **the revelation of Grace—from start to finish.**

D. Next: the Test of **Success!** What happens after God has given us a great victory?