

“Songs of Deliverance”

August 10

The Lord be with you

May our Lord, who has delivered us from sin and death, be gracious to you today and bring peace to all of us.

We welcome all of you this morning, whether you are here or watching online. If this is the first time you are here at our church, we are so glad you are here and we invite you after the service to have some coffee and allow us to get to know you a little better.

My name is Ryan McGregor and I'm a ruling elder here at Tampa Covenant. This summer we have been discussing the prayers of the Old Testament Saints. The different ways they interacted with God in prayer and their examples for us. In our reading today, King Hezekiah was in a very desperate situation. We can all relate to that. We encounter desperate situations almost daily. Is there help for our trouble? There is, and it is so close.

Let's pray together.

INTRODUCTION

Long ago, the nation of Israel was divided. The nation of Israel split and formed two distinct nations with two distinct rulers. Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see that Judah had a mix of good and bad kings - good kings lifting up God and bad kings lifting up themselves. Israel had no good kings at all. Every king of Israel lifted up foreign gods. They despised the things of the Lord and abandoned everything He had told them to do. So God raised up Assyria and led them into exile. It happened during the sixth year of Hezekiah, king of Judah's reign. He was an eyewitness to it.

Throughout the next eight years, the Assyrian empire began harassing the kingdom of Judah. The Assyrian commander, a man named Sennacherib, started demanding tribute. While Hezekiah tried to fend them off politically, that appeasement was short lived. Eventually the Assyrians decided to take the city of Jerusalem. Sennacherib sent warnings to the city, and finally, through his representative, sent this message to Hezekiah.

“Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah: “Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction. And shall you be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my fathers destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, and the king of Ivvah?”

Sennacherib said, “I've destroyed everyone else, and their gods did not deliver them. Don't be so foolish to think that your God will deliver you.

The Assyrian conquest reminds me of World War 2. Before June of 1944, the Axis Powers seemed to roll over Europe. Nation after Nation surrendered. Hezekiah had seen it himself. God had looked at the northern kingdom of Israel and was not pleased. The northern

kingdom was gone. Was there any difference between Judah and Israel? Was there hope for his people, his kingdom? Hezekiah tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth.

Who could a king appeal to for help? Hezekiah took the message, and went up to the house of the Lord. He did not have anywhere else to go. He spread the letter out before him and prayed. Prayer was all he had.

Hezekiah in his prayer acknowledged three things. First he acknowledged who God is

WHO GOD IS

“O Lord of Hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the GOD, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the Earth, you have made Heaven and Earth.”

The word “mayor” or “governor” makes you think of a certain type of ruler. But when we say the word “GOD”, what comes to our mind?

Hezekiah called God the Lord of Hosts. Lord Sabaoth. Lord of Armies. Sovereign Creator and Ruler of all the Earth, on his throne. What do we call GOD? God isn't someone who lives at church. God isn't a Norse legend or a childhood memory. He's GOD. Capital all the letters.

But he also says “God of Israel.” This title is personal to him and it is no less true than the other titles. The All powerful Lord of Hosts has taken care of Israel.

That's why he can say “Incline thine ear and hear, Open your eyes and see.” Hezekiah here, respectfully asks God to do something for him. Like you do with your family. We have access to ask a parent or a sibling for help that those outside of our family don't. The commentator Matthew Henry says, “Liberty of Access to the throne of grace and liberty of speech are the unspeakable privilege of the LORD's people at all times.”

God is the LORD OF HOSTS and your GOD.

THE NEED

The prayer continues, with Hezekiah acknowledging his need. Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands and cast them into the fire.”

Have you ever seen something laid waste? One time I had one of those huge Lego projects and then dropped it. All my work was wasted, but even that is better than the Assyrian conquest, because LEGO projects can be rebuilt.

Hezekiah here acknowledges that Assyria is powerful, the southern kingdom of Israel has no chance against him. He also acknowledges the reality of the situation.

“For they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed.”

All of the gods that fell before Sennacherib weren't even real. How can a god be the work of men's hands? How can a god be made of material things? It's like looking at wood. See this piece of wood is a tree. This piece is a ladder. This piece of wood is the god who will deliver us.

Compared to God, Hezekiah is saying these Assyrian victories were not even legitimate.

No matter what the Assyrians had done, no matter what great things you have done, it doesn't even compare to God.

Many of the things the world constructs or accomplishes are nothing. How many of you have built a house? Or a car? Compare that to a thunderstorm, or even the life of an animal. You can't To hold our accomplishments up to God is laughable at best.

As John Calvin said, "Let the whole world collect all its strength into a single man, he will not even be able to create a flea."

THE REQUEST

Hezekiah saw the might of the Assyrian army, but knew the LORD OF HOSTS was on his side, so he offered his request.

"So now O LORD our GOD, save us from his hand." Do what only you can do. Why does Hezekiah want God to do this? "That all the kingdoms of the earth may know that YOU ALONE ARE THE LORD."

Sennacharib and the Assyrians were conquerors. If they were stopped, it would be front page news. It would be trending all over social media. The story would be told throughout the known world - to all the kingdoms of the earth.

THE ANSWER FOR HEZEKIAH

Isaiah was a contemporary of Hezekiah, and since it's his name on the book, he gets a part to play. Hezekiah receives a message from Isaiah with an answer to Hezekiah's prayer0 "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel. Because you have prayed concerning Sennacharib..."

Hezekiah, Isaiah and the nation of Judah were not going to solve this problem, but God clearly acknowledges in this message that praying had a huge part to play. Yes God is sovereign. Yes, God is the LORD OF HOSTS. But here God says, Because you have prayed.

We have access to God in the same manner. What if God told you He was going to do something because you have prayed? Prayer is powerful. God listens to us like he listened to Hezekiah. He is our God too! We call the God of the universe, "Father" (Just as Jesus did by the way) because we have that special relationship, that unspeakable privilege. You have the same standing before God that Hezekiah did.

Isaiah answers in a poem. You can see here that the response is published in a poetic form. Regular language up top, poetic language in the response. Robert Alter, a Hebrew professor and Bible translator, remarks that "If we would actually hear God talking, making His will manifest in words of the Hebrew language, what would He sound like? Since poetry is our best human model of intricately rich communications, it makes sense that divine speech should be represented as poetry." Isaiah could have even sang it. It's a song of deliverance. However it's not a nice song, it's a rebuking one aimed at Sennacharib.

Look at the language and what God is saying

God says "Do you know whom you have mocked?" vs. 23
(on screen)

“Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes to the heights? Against the Holy one of Israel!

God says, “You were never in control here. I have always been in control.” vs. 26

“Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should make fortified cities crash into heaps of ruins.”

God says, “I know everything about you.” vs. 28

“I know your sitting down and your going out and coming in, and your raging against me.”

God says, “I will show you who is in charge.” vs. 29

“I will put my hook into your nose and my bit into your mouth, and I will turn you back on the way by which you came.”

Then God said to Hezekiah, “He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it. By the way he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city.”

And that’s what happened. The angel of the Lord LAID WASTE to his army, striking down 185,000 soldiers. Sennacherib departed, by the same way he came, back to his home in Nineveh. Stopped by the Lord.

REMINDERS FOR PRAYER

It’s an impressive story. You are probably thinking, “Well now I know what to do if I’m surrounded by Assyrians.” That’s true. The chances of that are low, but they are not zero.

God doesn’t just sing songs of deliverance in the Old Testament, He does it every day. This story shows us what we can do when we pray. If the king of God’s people did it, why wouldn’t we?

Now desperation has historically been a very good motivator for prayer. When the going gets rough, that tends to draw us to our knees. When there is an issue that only God can solve, I pray. But if there’s an issue that I can solve through hard work and grit, then I don’t pray. I need to be reminded to go to him in prayer, in all my desperate situations. I believe there are things that can help me turn to Him more often. Three takeaways we can all use. We need to remember Who God is, What He has told us and What He has done for us in our lives.

REMEMBER WHO GOD IS

Hezekiah started his prayer by giving God the glory due unto His name. We have to remember that God is THE GOD. The creator of Heaven and Earth. All things are in His hands. He is the Alpha and the Omega, He was there at the beginning and he will be there at the end.

Everything that God said to Sennacharib, he says to your trials and to you. God knows everything about you. God has always been in control and God will show you that He is in charge.

That might not always be what we want to hear.. Sometimes, struggles are there to remind us of who God is. That He is in control and that we are not. So it would be foolish for us not to go to GOD -with EVERYTHING. If you want something done at work, don't you go to the person who can make it happen? In a court of law, who does the lawyer appeal to? Not the defendant, not the audience. He appeals to the judge or the jury. Stop messing around with middle men when it comes to your problems.

The second thing to remember is

REMEMBER WHAT HE HAS TOLD US

There was an old Spider-man movie where two kids run out into the street to get a toy and run right into the path of a truck. Spider-man swoops in to save the day, then he looks at the kids and says, "Remember kids, don't play in the street." There are many times when God delivers us by intervening, but there are many other times when God has already given us instructions, and following those will deliver us.

The story about Hezekiah and Sennacharib and Isaiah is in the Bible three times. Isaiah, 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. But you could argue it is in there four times. Because way before this story in Deuteronomy chapter 20, God speaks about this happening.

When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt (Remember?) And when you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people and shall say to them, "Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, for the LORD your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.

Hezekiah would have known this passage. The Bible constantly tells us to call on God. "Cast your cares upon Him." (1 Peter 5:7) "In every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Philippians 4:7) "Continue steadfastly in prayer." (Colossians 4:2) How much unnecessary anxiety do we have because we don't follow what God has told us to do?

The third idea is to remember what God has done for us in our lives, You don't have to look far to see God's evidence around you, but sometimes we forget.

REMEMBER WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US IN OUR LIVES

In the winter of 2013, my brother Rick was driving home from work. Living in Rural Michigan means that sometimes you can get home faster if you take the back roads which are mainly gravel and dirt.

On his trip, his truck hit a loose bit of gravel and slid through a guard rail – on a bridge. The truck flipped over and into a very deep drainage ditch. The truck instantly filled with very cold water. It was dark and disorienting and my brother moved around in the cabin and managed to find a pocket of air, up near the floor boards. So for 30 to 40 minutes my brother was almost completely submerged in very cold water upside down in a truck in a deep river on a back road, screaming for help with nobody around. I have travelled those back roads and they are really only used by people who live on them. His body temperature was going down.

God saved my brother that day. A man named Gordon came along and noticed the guard rail was gone. He got out of his car and he didn't know how to swim, but he went into the river, got the door open and pulled Rick out by his feet. My brother was hospitalized for a few hours to get his core temperature back up.

That story happened 20 years ago, and sometimes I forget that God did that. Even though God saving his life is one of my favorite songs of deliverance. I've visited many times with him and never even recalled it.

Do you write down all the things God has done for you? Just jotting down a note that we can remember later on. Our phones certainly remind us of that one selfie we took by a river. Isn't it more important for us to continually bring to mind God's care for us.

Some of us are in the middle of our songs of deliverance. Those songs can be so long that we cannot possibly see the last verse of the song.

When President Lincoln lost his son Willie, Franklin Pierce wrote him a letter. Willie died from Pneumonia and typhoid fever. But Benjamin Pierce (Franklin's son) died in a horrible train accident ON HIS WAY to his father's inauguration. Pierce and Lincoln were political enemies, but in Pierce's letter he said, "There can be but one refuge in such an hour, but one remedy for smitten hearts, which is to trust in Him, "Who doeth all things well."

When Lincoln needed comfort, God gave him a very meaningful letter from a friend. A reminder that he was struggling, others were praying for him and there for him.

Even in the midst of deliverance, while we are walking through the valley of the shadow of death. God comforts us. The Psalm says the shepherd's rod and his staff comforts you. 1 Corinthians 1:5 notes, "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too."

When you need help, I don't think you have to look very far to see where God is helping you. Your church family is here to help, friends come alongside you, someone you never expected is suddenly there for you. That's what we are called to do for each other. Sometimes God provides in really small ways. My wife can't eat bread because of a gluten sensitivity, but

she can eat sourdough bread. Like God provided relief in such a small way. Remember how God has delivered you and look closely to see what He is doing now.

THROUGH CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION

What God has done for us in our individual lives is amazing, and praise worthy, but it pales in comparison to the big thing.

Our Catechism tells us that about our ONLY comfort in life and in death. It is so singular, that all other comfort, all other deliverance falls underneath it. If you belong to Christ, then you are not your own. Christ has paid for all your sins with his precious blood and set you free. When Christ rose again, He assured us of eternal life.

Hezekiah's deliverance from the Assyrian enemy points to what the Gospel has done for you. The gospel is the power of God that delivers us from sin and eternal death.

Listen to the words of Colossians 2

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This, He set aside nailing it to the cross.

Remember who God is. The Lord of Hosts. Who loves you.

Remember what God has told you. He wants you to come to Him

Remember what He has done for you. Through Christ's death and resurrection.

Everything.

Let's pray.