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A Prayer Of Desperation II Kings 19:1-19

Intro: I'm sure we've all heard of bumper-sticker theology. You know, those short quips of "truth" that are meant to encourage the car behind you while you cut them off in traffic or blow past them in the passing lane. Some of the more common quotes are "Jesus loves you;" "God is my co-pilot" and "Prayer changes things." The problem with bumper-sticker theology is that space is so limited that the theological statement presented goes unexplained or is dangerously inaccurate. There's absolutely nothing wrong with telling someone that Jesus loves them because that is completely true but there's no room to explain why Jesus loves them or how that love is revealed.

"God is my co-pilot" is derived from the book of the same title written by Col. Robert I. Scott about his time flying with the Fighting Tigers in South East Asia during the 2nd World War. But if you've walked with the Lord for very long you should know that God better be your Pilot or you're going to end up crashing and burning more times in life than you will care to. The statement "Prayer changes things" can be encouraging but it's not completely accurate; or even remotely. Yes, James tells us that the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (5:16) but how many times have you prayed and nothing has changed? What the Bible teaches, in principle and by example, is not that prayer changes things but that prayer grabs a hold of a God who can change things. We will see this truth revealed in our text today.

1-5 – King Hezekiah is visibly upset. If you recall; the better part of **ch18** was made up of a nasty message the king of Assyria sent to King Hezekiah by 3 of his officials. The message was harsh as it was full of Assyrian swagger, ridicule and threats. It was designed to produce despair in the hearts of the rulers, disgruntlement in the hearts of the elites and abject terror in the hearts of the people of Judea. Assyria, by this threatening message hopes to demoralize Judah and convince them to give up without a fight. Hezekiah's representatives have just brought him the report of the message and it appears to be having the desired affect on his royal psyche! He receives the report seriously, knowing how dedicated Assyria was to

completely conquering Jerusalem.

All is distress and anguish in Jerusalem and probably some repentance as well. Tearing of garments and putting on sackcloth usually signals agony and grief and is often a sign of repentance. Be that as it may, Hezekiah's words and actions express his repentance more than his wardrobe. His first reaction was good in that he saw the situation for what it really was. Many times when we are in a trial or difficulty, we handle it poorly because we don't perceive the situation accurately. But Jerusalem's situation was desperate and Hezekiah knew it.

Hezekiah's 2nd reaction was even better. He didn't allow his morning and grief to spin him into a rejection of God's power and help. He knew it was more important than ever to seek the Lord at this time. Many times when we find ourselves in the midst of a difficulty, the enemy tries to convince us that it's a punishment from God that we deserve and so we just foolishly sit back and endure it when God means for us to draw closer to Him in prayer and fellowship. Hezekiah didn't allow feelings of guilt to prevent him from seeking the Lord; he got up and went into the house of the Lord, to seek God in the place that was open to him as a man of Israel.

The 3rd thing Hezekiah did was also good: he sought out the word of the Lord as given by the prophet of the Lord. He sends Eliakim and Co to go see Isaiah, lamenting that this was a day of distress, punishment and contempt. The Hebrew word translated rebuke does mean that but passes over into chastisement and punishment. The Hebrew word for blasphemy also means contempt and relates to the contempt God holds toward His unfaithful people. The metaphor he sends to Isaiah was a proverbial expression of a disaster: a woman so exhausted by labor that she can not complete the birth, so it's likely that both mother and child will die. Hezekiah is saying: the crisis is so dire and yet we have no strength or resources to face it.

Yet, for all his agony and misplaced guilt, Hezekiah put his finger squarely on the major matter: the king of Assyria had sent the Rabshakeh to ridicule (reproach) the living God! It's not a stretch to say that Sennacherib has placed himself in the unenviable role of Goliath. If you remember, Goliath wasn't just a big man, he had a big mouth on him too and with it he ridiculed both Israel's army and Israel's God – and got a rock in his head for all his

trouble. The root word for defy, mock or ridicule occurs 6 times in the David and Goliath story and is the key to interpreting the narrative. That same root word occurs 4 times in [ch19](#).

Even though Sennacherib has unknowingly painted himself into a very dangerous corner, Hezekiah feels no such certainty about the matter. In his message to Isaiah he can only muster a timid “perhaps” (It may be...). Yet, even this perhaps carries with it a glimmer of hope. In [1 Sam 14:6](#) we see the same perhaps offered by Jonathan. In both cases, the speakers didn’t know what God would do in their situation but they knew Who God was and what He was like. Hezekiah knew that the only hope Jerusalem had was if Yahweh would take offense at the blasphemies of the Rabshakeh and rise up against him. Who knows, maybe He will! Either way, Judah has been devastated by this Assyrian invasion and the king asks Isaiah to pray for the remnant that is left standing in Jerusalem.

6-7 – Well, it appears that Isaiah is not about to entertain a spirit of “perhaps.” His response to Hezekiah is brief and dogmatic: (Do not... Surely... I will...). Isaiah is aware that he speaks as a prophet of God so we can be sure that he didn’t take this responsibility lightly. The fate of the nation and his credibility as a prophet was riding on what he said. Speaking for the Lord, Isaiah makes some bold predictions and his prophecy would be entirely provable. It would either happen or it wouldn’t; Isaiah would be known as a true prophet or as a false prophet soon enough.

There may be a slight rebuke in the Lord’s admonition against fear: It’s good for you to seek Me so passionately, Hezekiah but the words of the Rabshakeh are just words. Don’t be afraid of them. Of course, the Lord goes on to point out that it was those very words that blasphemed Him. How these words must have cheered Hezekiah! Before, he could only hope that God would hear and take offense at the words of the Rabshakeh but now his hope had been confirmed: God had heard and it was clearly evident that He has taken this offense personally.

Of course, Isaiah makes no mention here of the devastation and defeat of the Assyrian army by the angel of the Lord but, he had already prophesied this in [Isa 14:24-27](#). This word was focused primarily on the king of Assyria and his errand boy, the Rabshakeh. The Lord assures Hezekiah that He has heard his blasphemy and would indeed bring judgment against him.

8-13 – It didn't take long for the prophecy to start to come to pass. The pieces were beginning to move on the board. Sennacherib had finished off Lachish and had moved on to take Libnah. Tirhakah's army moving against him might not have alarmed him much; he simply redoubled his efforts to reduce Jerusalem by psychology rather than fighting because fighting was such an inconvenience. So, Sennacherib sends a scathing letter to Hezekiah in hopes that he will capitulate and turn over Jerusalem to him without a fight.

In his message, Sennacherib advises Hezekiah against religious naïveté - don't let your God...deceive you. Back in 18:29 the residents of Jerusalem were warned not to let Hezekiah deceive them. Now Yahweh has become the deceiver! Sennacherib goes on to press all the force of his historical argument on Hezekiah (**11-13**). You've heard the reports, you know what we have done; the facts of history cannot be denied. It's all well and good to prop up the national religious faith but you know better! What makes you think that you're special, Hezekiah? Did any of these other deities deliver their people from the onslaught of Assyria? Can you name even one Hezekiah because I can name about a half of dozen kings off the top of my head that are now pushing up daisies!

The interesting thing about this section of **ch19** is that nothing's changed. Isaiah has declared Yahweh's assurance that Sennacherib will leave but he's still very much there! The pressure's still on Jerusalem. Nothing's changed since **ch18**. Assyria's arguments are the same; Assyrian arrogance is the same. Judah has Yahweh's word promising relief but it's still night in Jerusalem. This is the danger zone where faith often fails. When Jesus called Peter out of the boat and onto the water, he was fine until he saw that the wind was boisterous (**Mt 14:30**). Hezekiah has Yahweh's word but he can still see the Assyrian army camped just outside the city.

This is exactly the situation that of God's people face repeatedly in their spiritual walk. Some trouble besets them, some distress pulls them down and, though they know all the biblical assurances of God's faithfulness, still nothing changes and they go on and on in their trouble. This is when we employ those "how long" prayers (**Ps 13:1-2**). We are assured of the glory which shall be revealed in us and yet find ourselves still wading through the sufferings of this present time (**Rom 8:18**). This has been and continues to

be the reality of the Christian experience for every believer at some point and for many believers on a regular basis.

If Sennacherib can awaken us to this truth then his life will not have been in vain. But, I don't want you to despair over this as though there is no relief, no recourse. Believers in this situation definitely have an effective recourse and Hezekiah is quick to take advantage of both the privilege and benefit of prayer. Prayer is where the believer collects themselves; it's where we get our bearings.

14-19 – Wisely, Hezekiah drops his spiritual anchor in the midst of this storm – he goes again to the house of the Lord and prays. His prayer is delivered in 3 parts: invocation (**15**), complaint (**16-18**) and supplication (**19**). Before we dive into his prayer, let's put it into its proper context. This latest message from Sennacherib was delivered in written form. This letter provides Hezekiah with Exhibit A; hard evidence of Assyrian blasphemy in their own hand-writing!

Hezekiah goes to the temple and solemnly hands over the documented blasphemy to Jehovah. Now, his desperation is heavy with hope because Yahweh doesn't stand by passively when someone publicly mocks His name and character. For Hezekiah, this is an OT instance of letting your requests be made known (**Phil 4:6**) and of casting all your care upon Him (**1 Peter 5:7**) and that's because there's nothing else he can do. Hezekiah's prayer flows from a position of helplessness. If we're honest, that's where all effective prayer stems from. Helplessness becomes prayer the moment you go to Jesus and speak candidly and confidently with Him about your needs. Sennacherib's letter has invariably provided Hezekiah with the most eloquent and effective means of fellowship with his God.

Invocation (**15**) – We may not give much thought to how we address God but Hezekiah does an amazing job here. He addresses his prayer to the God of Israel – a title meant to remind himself (and Yahweh) that He is the covenant God of Israel and as such, He should not forsake His people. Hezekiah also acknowledges that he is approaching a God of intense presence (who dwells between the cherubim); who holds sovereign sway (of all the kingdoms) and massive power (made heaven and earth). Yahweh's especially present with Israel in His temple but that doesn't mean He's unconcerned with the other nations of the world. In one sentence Hezekiah

confesses that he is approaching a God who is near, vast and mighty. His is a God who is accessible, sovereign and able. He packs a 3 point sermon into the opening line of his prayer!

The twist in all of this is that it is not only true but it is helpful. Is this not exactly what Hezekiah needs to remember in his present distress? What better way for Hezekiah to encourage his own faith than to rehearse Yahweh's majesty as he requests Yahweh's help? The benefit of speaking truth about God to God is that it can stir up our assurance in God. Is this an admonishing for us to take more care in the way we address God in prayer, about the way we begin our prayers? If it is, it's only for our benefit and our blessing!

Complaint (16-18) – Here Hezekiah begins to appeal to Yahweh's senses: hear...see... Then the king declares 2 undeniable truths. 1) The kings of Assyria really have laid waste to many nations and their lands and have cast their gods into the fire. 2) Those weren't real gods but merely the work of men's hands – that's why they could destroy them. The 1st truth is neutralized by the 2nd. In all her conquests, Assyria has never come up against a real deity. So, in the midst of his plea for help, Hezekiah confesses the important truth: the gods of these other nations didn't rescue them from Assyria because they were not gods. This truth makes all the difference in the world.

The burning question of the moment is what will happen to Assyria when Assyria picks a fight with "something" (or Someone) she has never met before: like Yahweh? That's a very interesting consideration that had to bring some level of encouragement to the king. Notice what's happening here – in his prayer Hezekiah confessed undeniable truth and in doing so he edges closer to hope. Prayer often does that. Through prayer we are able to get a fresh glimpse of the Hearer of prayer and in doing so we are able to get our bearings again.

Supplication (19) – Hezekiah's acknowledged his helplessness; accurately described the God he's approaching and identified the true reality of his situation. Now it's time to make his request and it comes in 2 parts: emergency and testimony. "Save us" nothing elaborate or profound; prayer requests tend to be fairly simple and direct when the terror of the world is right outside your walls. Hezekiah prays for deliverance; obviously. He

would be a fool not to. But, there's another aspect to his petition beyond salvation; in fact, this 2nd prayer indicates the ultimate result Hezekiah desires to see if Yahweh actually chooses to save Jerusalem (19b).

Hezekiah is praying that Yahweh's deliverance of Jerusalem would magnify Yahweh's reputation throughout the world. Dozens of deities have proven to be helpless against the mighty Sennacherib and his lord; Assur; but when Assur meets Yahweh and gets creamed he will go and join all the other loser gods. Hezekiah's prayer has its eye on both his trouble and God's glory and when we are honestly concerned with God's glory then we are more likely to be heard and responded to.

In [John 14:13-14](#) Jesus promises to respond to any prayers that are offered in His name. This has prompted many a Christian to think that if they just tack Jesus' name to the end of their prayer, they should expect a favorable response in short order. That's not what this passage means. When Jesus talks about His name he's referring to praying by His authority and, of course, in order to pray by His authority, you must first be submitted to His authority, which implies that you are committed to seeing His will accomplished by and through your life. He even states that bringing glory to the Father is the main focus of His answering our prayers.

So if our prayers are not concerned with bringing glory to God then God's not concerned with answering our prayers. On the other hand, when the driving passion of our prayers is God's honor then a strange confidence begins to seep into them. It's like what Pastor Sandy Adams said last week in his introduction to Pastor Zack's testimony. He said he and his wife had decided that they were not going to trust in an outcome, they were going to trust in a Person! They were still going to pray for an outcome but the outcome wasn't going to determine their faith. Their faith was going to remain on a God who has been faithful to them for so many years. They prayed the way they've lived their lives – for the ultimate glory of God.

Prayer is often unnerving because it's the activity we engage in between catastrophe and deliverance. But if we pray truth, as Hezekiah did, we will find that it not only reaches God but anchors us too! 😊