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## Of Prayer And Pride II Kings 20:1-21

**Intro:** Ch20 is our last look at King Hezekiah and though the chapter is short, it is not without a few surprises. Some are mundane, some are miraculous but the most important spiritual principle is hidden within the passage we just read and almost always goes unnoticed. But, ch20 isn't just 1 look at Hezekiah, it's actually 2 looks or, should I say, a look at the 2 sides of the Hezekiah coin. In this first section, King Hezekiah, as Yahweh's servant is walking in faith and as such, he enjoys Yahweh's compassionate word. In the next section, Hezekiah is not walking by faith, rather, he is walking in foolishness and as such, he receives Yahweh's severe word. Let's see what truths can be gleaned from this very important chapter.

**1-11** – The first thing we must say about ch20 is that it is not in chronological order (6b). It is clear that the events of ch20 actually occur before the events of 18:13-19:36. V6b shows that Jerusalem's deliverance from Assyria is yet to happen and we'll see in v13 that Hezekiah's treasury is still full so this must be before he empties them as tribute to Sennacherib in 18:15-16. This is not so unusual in Scripture; chronology rarely holds biblical writers hostage. The account of the decimation of the tribe of Benjamin in Judges 19-21 actually took place early during the period of the judges. Isaiah gives 5 full chapters of prophecy before he explains in ch6 how he was called to be a prophet. The writer is doing more than just recording information. He's making a point about Hezekiah's spiritual walk and does so by using comparison as his literary device.

We're not told how Hezekiah became sick or even how someone could die from a boil but this appears to be his last illness. It seems the grim reaper will get Hezekiah before Sennacherib can. The initial word from Yahweh to the king was pretty direct and clear. It was also very kind! Yes, God was being remarkably kind to Hezekiah, telling him that his death was near. Not many people are given the opportunity to set their house (affairs) in order before they pass. If we compare 18:2 and 20:6, we know that Hezekiah was only 39 yrs old when he learned he would die soon. Again, we can't see God's purposes in this news but what we can see is that the news goads Hezekiah to prayer.

When Hezekiah turned his face to the wall he did 2 things: he dismissed Isaiah from his presence and he directed his prayer privately to Yahweh. Here in this solitary confinement, Hezekiah pours out his heart to God (3). At first glance it seems as if the king's prayer is a bit selfish, as though he was tooting his own horn trying to gain points with Yahweh; but that's not the case. Under the Old Covenant, one's covenantal obedience was a valid principle on which one could approach God in prayer. Lev 26 and Deut 28 show that under the Old Covenant, blessing and cursing was sent by God on the basis of obedience or disobedience. It was this principle that allowed David to write things like Ps 15 (and others) about himself with a straight face.

Of course, it's different for us under the New Covenant. Believers living under the New Covenant are blessed on the principle of faith in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:13-14). Hezekiah's principle of prayer isn't fitting for a Christian today. We pray in the name of Jesus, not in the name of who we are or what we have done. We have pointed out Hezekiah's close parallel with David. His prayer here follows the Psalm-pattern of appealing to one's faithfulness as a reason to be heard or delivered (Ps 7:3-5; 17:1-5; 18:20-26; 26:1-7; 44:17-22). These prayers are only found in the OT but never in the NT because the believer bases their plea on the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

So, there is no thought of sinless perfection in this prayer only covenantal obedience. Also, under the Old Covenant, Hezekiah would have taken this news of his early demise as evidence that Yahweh was displeased with him. The OT saints didn't have a confident assurance of the glory in the life beyond the grave. When Jesus came; He brought eternal life and this immortality was finally and only revealed through the preaching of the gospel (II Tim 1:10).

Now, you might be thinking, "What's the big deal? Hezekiah prayed and God answered. The same thing happened in ch19." I'll grant you that we've seen this before but there is a huge difference between Hezekiah's prayer in 19 and his prayer here in 20 and it's this difference that makes our text so vastly important for us today. In 19, Hezekiah was facing threats from a pagan king that he could not handle or even hope to resist. But here, Hezekiah's not given idle threats; he's been given the sure word of Yahweh.

What's so amazing about this passage is that Hezekiah has the gall to ask Yahweh to reverse His clear word! God has just told him, in no uncertain terms, that he was going to die.

If you upset someone and they tell you you're going to die, you can take that with a grain of salt. If your Dr. tells you this, you may take it a little more to heart but still... If God says it, pack your bags! Right? It's God's Word!

We don't know if Hezekiah was acting solely on instinct here or partly through reason. This is by no means a one off occurrence in the OT. There have been others who apparently thought that Yahweh's hard word may not necessarily be His last word but rather, it is a call to prayer for new mercies ([Ex 32:7-14](#); [II Sam 12:13-22](#)). Could it actually be that sometimes what might sound like a final decree is really a subtle invitation to intercessory prayer? This principle is not just surprising and amazing; it's also very appropriate for the day in which we live.

We are currently going through the Book of Revelation in our mid-week Bible studies (Tue/Thu). The book is full of harrowing prophecies of coming judgment. The judgments and world-wide catastrophes revealed there are going to happen. They're going to happen because God has decreed it to be so. Of course, there is one seminal event that must take place before The Revelation unfolds and that is the Rapture of the Church. And, unless you've been lining in a cave, all contemporary signs point to a Rapture in the not-too-distant future. Again, it's going to happen! Jesus has declared it; the Father has affirmed it. But, it hasn't happened yet!

What is the purpose of the Book of Revelation? Clearly, for the unbeliever, the horrors revealed in it are meant to drive them to repentance and seek forgiveness through Jesus Christ. When God announces judgment it's almost always an invitation to repent and receive mercy. What then is the purpose for the believer? Could it be a subtle invitation to spend some quality time seeking God's face, on the basis of Christ's righteousness for a continued stay of final judgment to give more sinners a chance to come to Jesus for salvation? There's no stopping God's judgment but we can ask for new mercies and intercede for those around us who will likely face that judgment if they fail to repent and accept Christ's gift.

Hezekiah prayed, Yahweh heard and Isaiah was stopped in his tracks and turned on his heels to go back and give the king Yahweh's revised word.

Instead of death there will be recovery; instead of a funeral, worship; instead of defeat, deliverance. What an answer Hezekiah received to his prayer! God's hearing, healing, adding and defending! He not only agrees to heal the king but tells him He will deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians to boot! The closeness of the 2 promises indicates that one would confirm the other. Hezekiah's restored health would assure him that God would also deliver his kingdom from the Assyrians.

Divine healing doesn't exclude human means (7). Apparently, Yahweh used this medical treatment of a poultice of figs to effect Hezekiah's healing. God can, and often does, bring healing through medical treatments and apart from an unusual direction from God, medical treatment should never be rejected in the name of faith. Yahweh's promise was a bit staggering. Hezekiah would go from death's door to fully recovered and attending church within 3 days! So, Hezekiah asked for an immediate sign to assure him of that promise (8).

We may think the king is being forward here, presuming to ask Yahweh for a sign to "confirm" His word. But that's not what's going on here. Hezekiah doesn't doubt God's word, he's merely asking for assurance and he's quite proper in asking for a sign. Remember, his hypocritical father, in false modesty, refused to ask for a sign but God gave him one anyway (Is 7:14). God gives Hezekiah a sign here and in doing so, shows him even more mercy. God was in no way obligated to provide this sign to the king but in real love, He gave Hezekiah more than he needed, deserved and even prayed for. God demonstrated His love for Hezekiah by providing a sign to Hezekiah.

Now, before we begin to feel slighted by this apparent special treatment of God towards Hezekiah, just know that God shows the same mercy to us – in an even greater way. It should be enough for God to simply say to us, "I love you." His word should be more than enough to convince us and hold us to Him in faith. But, God didn't just tell us He loves us; He demonstrated His love for us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). Not to throw shade on Hezekiah but I believe we got the better end of the deal!

Isaiah gives the king 2 options for the sign and he chooses the hard option – make the shadow go backwards on the sundial. How God accomplished this

is not recorded, only that it happened. Whether by reversing the rotation of the earth or simply refracting light, the shadow went backwards, Hezekiah was healed and Jerusalem was delivered. Alls well that ends well! Right? Not so fast...

**12-21** – At that time – This was after Hezekiah’s miraculous healing but before Jerusalem’s deliverance. Yahweh was good enough to grant the king 15 more years of life but it was up to Hezekiah if those years would be lived in wisdom and for the glory of God. At first glance, this just looks like a simple congratulations-on-your-speedy-recovery visit; from Babylon no less, so we might not get the full gist of Hezekiah’s foolish failure here in this text. But, this was more than just a courtesy call from Berodach-Baladin. This was clearly a poorly-disguised attempt to bring Hezekiah and the kingdom of Judah into an alliance with the Babylonians against Assyria.

The real reason for this visit was political; Babylon desired to throw off the yoke of Assyria and they sought to secure Hezekiah as an ally. It doesn’t take much imagination to see how all this could be flattering for Hezekiah. Babylon wasn’t yet a world power but they were a much larger nation than tiny Judah so all this attention and recognition from the king of Babylon made Hezekiah feel important. The letters they brought weren’t get-well-quick cards but a hidden agenda. And Hezekiah wasn’t just giving them the grand tour – he was trying to impress them with his resources, all that he could bring to the table in an anti-Assyrian alliance.

Flattery can be fulfilling and political plots are thrilling – but all of this is idolatrous! If Isaiah were forced to spell it out he would tell Hezekiah that you can’t truly lean on Yahweh’s arm if you’re also leaning on Babylon’s arm ([here](#)) and Egypt’s arm ([Is 30:105; 31:1-3](#)). You can’t claim to trust wholly in your God while hedging your bets with pagan kings on the side! It can’t be Yahweh and Babylon or Yahweh and Egypt. It must be Yahweh or someone else. You can’t have it both ways; God brooks no rivals for our faith and obedience. He will share His glory with no one. So now, because Hezekiah wants to rely on his own resources, both the very resources he bragged about and the sons he fathered will be carried off; both possessions and people are destined for Babylon.

Lest we be tempted to cut the king some slack here, understand that his actions were nothing less than the result of a proud foolishness. He found



himself in the dangerous position of wanting to please and impress men, especially ungodly men. This wasn't the spiritual pride of his great-grandfather Uzziah; it was worldly pride – the pride of life. Note that it was his precious things, his armory, his treasures, his house, his dominion that he showed to these Babylonians. Hezekiah faced – and failed under – a temptation common to many, especially those in ministry – the temptation of success. Many men who stand strong against the temptations of failure and weakness fail under the temptation of success and strength (Peter).

Think of the extent of Hezekiah's success: he was godly, victorious, healed. He experienced a miracle, had been promised long life, was connected to a great prophet; had seen a remarkable sign. He was wealthy, famous, praised by his people and honored by God. Yet, he sinned greatly in this instance in at least 4 ways: Pride – he was proud of the honors the Babylonians brought. Ingratitude – he took honor rightly belonging to Yahweh. Carnal confidence – trusted in his alliance with the king of Babylon. Missed opportunity – he had a chance to testify to these envoys of the greatness of Yahweh and His blessing on Judah. Why didn't he show these pagans God's house? He could have explained the meaning of the brazen altar and the sacrifices offered on it. Who can tell what may have transpired in the souls of these idolaters upon hearing the truth of Yahweh?

Isaiah quizzed the king on his actions to allow Hezekiah to answer honestly (which he did) and to see his error for himself (which he apparently didn't do). It almost sounds like Hezekiah is proud to answer Isaiah's questions! His pride and inflated ego has made him blind to his sin and his precarious situation. His intention was to impress Babylon with all of his possessions and he did just that. Assyria would defeat Babylon in battle not to long after this and she would slink back to her own country to lick her wounds and the anti-Assyrian alliance would never get off the ground. But, Babylon would never forget what they saw in Judah. They weren't just extending an invitation – they were casing the joint!

So, **v16-18** control the rest of the book. They summarize Judah's eventual fall. In **ch21**, Manasseh will drive Judah beyond the point of recovery but **ch20** shows us that the road to Babylonian exile began with the folly of godly king Hezekiah. He also takes some heat for his response to Yahweh's word delivered by Isaiah. Most commentators point to this as reflecting Hezekiah's crass self-centeredness: "At least the disaster won't hit under

my watch!”

I'll admit that it sounds selfish but there is another alternative light to see this in. Did we not just learn that Yahweh's hard word is often an invitation to pray for mercy? Is it possible that the king calls Yahweh's word good because he recognizes the mercy and restraint present in that word? It could have been much worse – the judgment could have been immediate; He could have given Hezekiah over to the Assyrians after all. By calling Yahweh's word good, he's saying it is kind - the judgment's been postponed; there's time for repentance, prayer and for mercy to be extended.

In 12-19 we see a king who finds it hard to be steadfast; who seems to do better in sickness than in health; who handles blight better than blessing. Here's a king who trusted Yahweh and yet seemed to think He needed a little help from Babylon. How fragile is our faithfulness; how changing is our consistency, how easily our faith can fade.

This passage means to impress us with that because this isn't a failure unique to royalty but is common to all God's people. But, if we see how quickly we contradict our commitments and how easily we can fall, maybe the Holy Spirit will work in us a holy fear that will make us cry out for God to keep us (Peter at Lord's breakfast).

Hezekiah was given more time but time or age doesn't automatically make us any better. Time does nothing but pass away. We sometimes hear people say “time will tell” or “time will heal” or time will bring out the potential in me but time will do no such thing. Time will only come and then go. All that really matters is how we use the time we have. Hezekiah didn't make good use of the extra time Yahweh gave him. He missed the opportunity to witness to the Babylonians; he missed the opportunity to train up his sons in the nurture and admonishing of the Lord; Hezekiah is leaving and Manasseh is on his way. 😊