

BIBLE BRIEFING

“Near Death Experience”

Second Kings 20:1-11

2 Kings 20:1 In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.' "

2 Kings 20:2 Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying,

2 Kings 20:3 "Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done *what was* good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

2 Kings 20:4 And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying,

2 Kings 20:5 "Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD.

2 Kings 20:6 And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David." ' "

2 Kings 20:7 Then Isaiah said, "Take a lump of figs." So they took and laid *it* on the boil, and he recovered.

2 Kings 20:8 And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What *is* the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD the third day?"

2 Kings 20:9 Then Isaiah said, "This is the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing which He has spoken: *shall* the shadow go forward ten degrees or go backward ten degrees?"

2 Kings 20:10 And Hezekiah answered, "It is an easy thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees; no, but let the shadow go backward ten degrees."

2 Kings 20:11 So Isaiah the prophet cried out to the LORD, and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down on the sundial of Ahaz.

We don't know what Hezekiah's illness was. We only know it involved some kind of skin eruption, called a **boil**; and that it would have been fatal without God's direct, divine intervention.

In the end the cure seemed simple enough – just put **a lump of figs** on it.

Did the physicians earlier try this remedy to no avail? We can't know what they tried – only that they failed.

So what do we make of this episode? In its simplest form it is a story that shows a man suffering under a death sentence whose life is extended for a brief period of time.

You and I are men and women who every day suffer under a sentence of death. As Greg Laurie is fond of saying, the statistics on death are very impressive: One out of every one person is going to die (up until the Rapture of the Church).

In Hebrews you read,

[Heb 9:27](#) And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,

We are not only under a sentence of death but to some extent we all are suffering. You may enjoy great health. You won't if you live long enough! Your body and its systems are falling apart a little more each day.

Others among us live with tremendous physical suffering – some acute, but others chronic.

Then there is the whole realm of emotional suffering and pain.

Every day you live through is a day in which God has extended your life. You may be glad He did; you may be sad He did. He is in control of the times and seasons of your life.

Let's explore our day-by-day commuted sentence of death a little further as we work through these verses.

[2 Kings 20:1](#) In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.' "

Hezekiah's illness is recorded three times in Scripture (Second Kings 20; Second Chronicles 32; and Isaiah 38). Each account adds a little something to the total picture.

It must have been a difficult task for Isaiah to deliver a death sentence to Hezekiah, the king. Still it had to be done.

We need to remember just how serious life can be. Things change in a moment for ever.

Set your house in order. It's good advice to follow each and every day.

2 Kings 20:2 Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying,

2 Kings 20:3 "Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done *what was* good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

The timing of this illness, and these events, is a matter of some scholarly debate. It is generally believed that this illness occurred before the famous siege against Jerusalem by the Assyrians in which an angel of the Lord slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. Hezekiah may have been around forty years old.

It never seems fair to die before you reach old age. Hezekiah's prayer is a comfort to any who have ever doubted God because death came suddenly to themselves or someone they loved.

His prayer was sincere. He really was a good king, walking just as he said. Why would God allow him to be ill? Or to die?

Once and for all we need to understand that our relative health usually has nothing to do with how spiritual we are or aren't. I said 'usually' because there are rare cases where God inflicts illness or even death as a discipline.

1. The apostle Paul described some of the Corinthian Christians as ill and dying because of their deplorable behavior at the Lord's Table.

2. Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead, one after the other, for lying to the Holy Spirit.

But for the most part illness and death are a reality that seem to not discriminate based on spirituality. Spiritual people die when they are young and when they are old. So do nonbelievers.

Hezekiah was sick. He was going to die. He was a good king, and a good man. God is no respecter of persons.

[2 Kings 20:4](#) And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying,

[2 Kings 20:5](#) "Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD.

We don't want to make too much of this. Read Hebrews chapter eleven. It records the careers of certain believers and is sometimes referred to as the Hall of Faith. The first group of saints were miraculously preserved from dangers. The second group of saints were not! They had to go through the dangers. They suffered cruelties. They were killed.

Then there is the example of the apostle Paul. He suffered from some sort of ailment. He sought the Lord to remove it from him. Jesus said "No!" It was designed to show Paul, and others through him, the sufficiency of grace.

Prayer is conversing with God. He always answers it, just not in the affirmative. If you only prayed because it was effective that would be awful. It would be like the children who only talk to their parents when they want something. Though it is common, it is sad.

God decided to heal Hezekiah. It is a mystery to us who He heals and who He does not heal. In the Book of Acts the Lord springs Peter from prison just prior to his being executed. He leaves James in prison to be executed.

2 Kings 20:6 And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David." ' ' "

During the additional fifteen years God would deliver and defend Jerusalem from the Assyrian Empire. If you are looking at things from the perspective of God, that is a fantastic spiritual blessing! If you are Hezekiah, it means that you would be attacked and besieged by the most fierce warriors of that period. You and your people would suffer loss, shame, ridicule, and deprivation.

You always have a choice of how you want to see the events of your life. You can see them as God sees them, in their outcome. Or you can see them as they will affect you on a daily basis. Look to the outcome and you can overcome.

2 Kings 20:7 Then Isaiah said, "Take a lump of figs." So they took and laid *it* on the boil, and he recovered.

Throughout history figs have been used as:

1. An anti-inflammatory.
2. An analgesic.
3. An antibiotic.
4. A skin-softening lotion.
5. An expectorant.
6. And a laxative.

The ancient king Mithrydates proclaimed figs a health tonic in 1551BC.

Pliny wrote of no fewer than twenty-nine different kinds of figs, regarding them as a great aid to strength and swiftness. Pliny also noted that gladiators were fed a diet of figs to bring out their strength and stamina.

Spartan athletes in ancient Greece were said to eat figs in order to improve their performance.

A cough remedy taken from *The Queen's Closet Opened* (1655) by W.M., a cook to Queen Henrietta Maria of England, says: "Take a

handful of Hysop; of Figs, Raisins, Dates of each an ounce, French Barley one ounce, boyl therein three pintes of fair water to a quart, strain it and clarifie with two Whites of Eggs, then put in two pounds of fine Sugar and boyl it to a syrup". Variations of this recipe are still used today, not only for queens.

I mentioned earlier that the physicians probably already tried figs as well as the other common remedies of the day. The difference is that it is the prophet, speaking for God, who suggests the remedy. It is a reminder that everything is essentially spiritual. Though God ordains means, such as medicine and science, we cannot ultimately trust them to extend our lives one day past any boundaries God might set.

The healing was from God – it was a miracle. He could have done it without the lump of figs. Why utilize them?

I think it was to show the physicians that they couldn't 'fig-ure' it out!

Seriously, it seems the use of the figs was an act of faith. If, as some suggest, the boil was really some advanced eruption of cancer, there was nothing figs could do for Hezekiah. Using them was an act of faith on his part.

We live by faith. There is a fine line between taking care of ourselves and knowing that we suffer from a death sentence that could be carried out at any moment. Our world is fascinated by the science of trying to live stronger and longer. Bodily exercise profits for a little while. Take care of yourself but don't become a fanatic about it. Quit looking for the fountain of youth. Spend more time at the fountain of living waters!

[2 Kings 20:8](#) And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What *is* the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD the third day?"

God frequently gave signs. Hezekiah felt a freedom to ask for one. God had just made him a remarkable promise and it seemed OK to ask God to commemorate it with a sign.

[2 Kings 20:9](#) Then Isaiah said, "This is the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing which He has spoken: *shall* the shadow go forward ten degrees or go backward ten degrees?"

2 Kings 20:10 And Hezekiah answered, "It is an easy thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees; no, but let the shadow go backward ten degrees."

2 Kings 20:11 So Isaiah the prophet cried out to the LORD, and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down on the sundial of Ahaz.

Hezekiah would have a choice of a **sign**: whether the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz would abruptly move forward ten steps or backward ten steps.

Hezekiah answered that moving the shadow forward would be easy, so he asked that the shadow move backward. Isaiah prayed, and the shadow did move backward ten steps. These steps are often called "degrees" in English translations of the Bible, but the "degree" in view here is *not* a 180th portion of the measure of a semicircle, but rather one of the steps on Ahaz' sundial. Because no archaeologist has yet found this artifact, we cannot know the size of the angle, and therefore we cannot know exactly how much time God reversed to achieve this effect.

We do know that this was a true miracle. In Second Chronicles 32:31 we read about a delegation from Babylon coming to visit Hezekiah after he recovered. It was said of them that,

2 Chronicles 32:31 ...*regarding* the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, whom they sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was *done* in the land...

The wonder that was done in the land was this reversal of time. The Babylonians were noted astronomers. (Can you say Magi?). They realized from their stellar observations a miracle had been done at the time Hezekiah recovered.

Some of us are still thinking that Hezekiah received preferential treatment. We've prayed for a loved one to be spared or healed to no avail.

We should consider what might happen if life is extended. Hezekiah, for example, made the greatest blunder of his life and career during the fifteen-year extension. The verse I quoted a moment ago, from Second Chronicles 32:31, reads in full,

2Ch 32:31 However, *regarding* the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, whom they sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was *done* in the land, God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that He might know all *that was* in his heart.

King Merodach-Baladan of Babylon visited Hezekiah to inquire into Hezekiah's health and the time reversal and brought vast gifts with him.

At this time Hezekiah had amassed great wealth and was the head of a prosperous nation. Perhaps this wealth and prosperity went to his head. Hezekiah gave Merodach-Baladan a show-off tour of his palace and all his goods.

Isaiah found out about it and was outraged. He then told Hezekiah that a time would come when a future king of Babylon would carry away all that vast wealth and that descendants yet unborn to Hezekiah would be eunuchs in that king's palace.

Hezekiah responded in all humility that he was blessed that this calamity should not befall the kingdom during his lifetime. Still, if he had died, it would not have happened.

Conclusion

We suffer daily under a sentence of death. Whenever we wake to face another day we receive a stay. But we are still headed for death.

Truth is, **we are already dead!**

Romans 6:3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

Romans 6:4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

The outward expression of water baptism by immersion proclaims the inward experience of identifying with Jesus, of being "in Jesus," when you are saved by grace through faith. You may not fully realize it when you are being baptized, but you are signifying that when Jesus died, you died; when Jesus was buried, you were buried; when Jesus

rose, you rose. You may not realize it even today, but it is nevertheless true.

Since you are "in Jesus," what is true of Him is true of you. He was crucified; you were crucified. He was buried; you were buried. He arose; you arose. He walks in endless power and victory; you walk in endless power and victory.

Yet you also walk on earth - in the presence of sin, both within and around you. Paul says that the key to victory over the presence of sin within and around you is to "know" your position "in Jesus" and to realize that, because you are "in Him," you have therefore "died to sin."

Being dead has its advantages – both now and in the future. You are dead and dying; but you are also alive in Jesus Christ.

Set your house in order and live every day on borrowed time.



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