

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 428

Hezekiah's Deliverance (1)

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 21st February, 2021**

Text: *"What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" (2 Kings 18. 19).*

Hezekiah knew the answer, and it is a wonderful mercy if you and I also know the answer – where our confidence rests, both in the difficulties that come across us as they did with Hezekiah, and also like him with our great concerns about a never-ending eternity.

"What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" I wonder if any of you have noticed that when we come to this godly man, this godly king, Hezekiah, there is a tremendous amount of Scripture devoted to him. Some people, there is just a passing reference, even good people. But there are three whole chapters in the Kings, and four whole chapters in the Chronicles, and four whole chapters in the Book of the prophet Isaiah. That does mean one thing: if the Word of God, written by inspiration, spends so much of its space on a certain subject or a certain man, then it is something of great importance. Of course, beloved friends, the chief instance of it: the many chapters we have in the four Gospels concerning the sin-atoning sufferings and the glorious resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Now some of our young people may wonder, what really has a king who reigned in Judah so many years ago got to do with you and me today? Well, the simple answer is very clear. The difficulties, the problems, the sins, the sorrows that Hezekiah met with, are in spirit just the same as you and I are meeting day by day. And blessed be His name, Hezekiah's God who dealt so favourably with him is the same God with whom you and I have to deal now, today, tomorrow. "The Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear."

Hezekiah was the son of a very wicked father, but it is made very clear that from the first day of his reign, the very beginning, he sought in the fear of God that things might be different. There was the cleansing of the temple, the casting out of the idols, the restoring of the priesthood, the keeping of the Passover for the first time in many years; and also many natural reforms – fighting against the enemy, winning back some of those lands which had been surrendered to the enemy.

We have it put very, very beautifully at the very beginning. “He did that which was right,” and there were three things especially, and they are three things we need. “He trusted in the Lord God of Israel.” That is where his confidence was from the beginning, long before that wicked Rabshakeh threw that blasphemous question at him. “He trusted in the Lord God of Israel.” “Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust.”

And the second thing: “He clave to the Lord.” That is it! Not just to trust, O but to seek to be close.

“Nearer, nearer, to Him clinging,
Let my helpless soul be found.”

And the third thing is that he “departed not from following Him.” If our religion is real, we are followers of the Lord. Sadly, solemnly, sometimes like Simon Peter we follow “afar off.” But may we not depart from following the Lord.

So what a beginning! And we are told, “The Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth.” What a difference from our rulers today, from our country today! O that the Lord would provide us with godly rulers like King Hezekiah.

But trouble came. Even though he was so prospering, and even though the Lord was with him, and even though he was walking uprightly, this did not save him from trouble, and it will not save us from trouble. However tenderly the Lord’s people walk before Him, they still have their troubles. But in these chapters, we have a wonderful example of the Lord’s love and mercy, His divine, almighty power, the way He is with His people, the way He is able to help them along, the way He answers their prayers, the way He delivers them. There is a glorious deliverance at the end. I remind you again: “This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our Guide even unto death.”

So we have this terrible invasion of the Assyrians. Let me remind you in passing that it was at this time that the Assyrian army completely conquered the kingdom of Israel and destroyed it, and took it into captivity, leaving only the kingdom of Judah, and now Sennacherib’s evil intent was to overthrow Judah also, especially his desire to capture Jerusalem. And so we have these records in all these chapters of this evil man, Rabshakeh, coming with these terrible threats and blasphemies of what Sennacherib the king of Assyria was

going to do, how he was going to triumph, how God had no power against him, and so on.

Just for your interest in passing, these names we have of these rulers in Assyria – Rabshakeh would not be his personal name, like you and I have a name; it was the office he held, his office in Sennacherib’s army – probably something like the chief general, or a field marshal. But he said some dreadful things, and of course the word I read to you this morning was said in sarcasm. It was a threat. “What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?” – suggesting that that confidence meant nothing whatsoever.

There are one or two interesting things. “The people answered him not a word.” They had been counselled by their king not to answer him a word. There is a point here in our lives. There is a time to speak, and there is a time to keep silence. We need wisdom from the Lord to show us which time is which. But there are some times when the Lord’s people are bitterly assailed and the Lord’s counsel is that they should keep silence. But they did not keep silence to their God; they poured out their hearts to Him in prayer. And the Lord did not keep silence!

And then there is another thing. Rabshakeh came back a second time, and this time, not only with his dreadful ravings and blasphemies, but he sent a letter to King Hezekiah, and when King Hezekiah received it, he took it up to the house of the Lord, and he brought it before his God. Now there is much wisdom there for us. We do receive letters – not so much nowadays; it is more emails – but the importance of answering a letter aright! It is our wisdom if we have a letter, or a message in any other form, to lay it before the Lord in prayer. There is no need – that was the old dispensation – no need like Hezekiah to go up to the house of the Lord literally. Sometimes it is wise when you have laid the letter before the Lord, not to answer it till the next day. You may decide then not to send it, or you may decide to send it as it is, or you may decide to leave a little piece out, or put a little piece more in it. O but the blessing that the Lord has given in answering the letters His people have received, or the letters they have written. It is both ways: if you write a letter, to spread it before the Lord, or if you receive a letter, to spread it before the Lord.

Then we come to perhaps the most gracious part of it all. “Hezekiah prayed before the Lord.” It is what some people might, rightly or wrongly, call a pattern prayer. But we know what they mean. Let us consider it just for a moment. He said, “O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the

cherubims.” That was where the mercy seat was, where the blood was sprinkled, where a holy God said that He would meet a guilty sinner. It is from the mercy seat we receive answers of peace. It is to the mercy seat we need to go in the time of need.

“Approach, my soul, the mercy-seat,
Where Jesus answers prayer;
There humbly fall before His feet,
For none can perish there.”

And then, “Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: Thou hast made heaven and earth.” He had believing views. This crisis in which he was, was not too hard for Almighty God. For let us be clear, beloved friends, it was an impossible case: one-hundred-and-eighty-five thousand trained soldiers round the walls of Jerusalem. It was an impossible case, and Hezekiah knew it, but he knew also that with God nothing was impossible. O what a view of divine, almighty power! We need to be reminded of this continually, that our God is almighty. It is,

“With heaven and earth at His command,
He waits to answer prayer.”

And then the simplicity, the shortness, the reality of his prayer. “Lord, bow down Thine ear, and hear: open, Lord, Thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.” Hezekiah saw it was not only his own concern; it was the honour and glory of his God. “Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our God” – this is real prayer – “I beseech Thee” – the vital point – “*save Thou us out of his hand*, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art the Lord God, even Thou only.”

So he seeks the honour and the glory of his God, and that was prayer heard; that was prayer answered, a miracle performed. “And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.” What a deliverance!

But that is not the end. Think of Sennacherib’s blasphemies against the God of heaven and his blasphemies concerning his own gods. “So

Sennacherib king of Assyria departed.” Mysteriously he was not killed with the multitude, but the Lord reserved him for a greater judgment. He “went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass” – listen – “as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword.” That was the end of Sennacherib. So let all the enemies of the Lord perish. “And they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esar-haddon his son reigned in his stead.”

Now having gone all the way through Hezekiah’s great trial, his almighty deliverance, let us now come more personally as it concerns you and me, to this question: “What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?” Because by nature every one of us has a false confidence – everyone, whether religious or not religious. Many have that false confidence: they do not believe there is any eternity, any heaven or hell. There are some religious people. They have a false confidence. They believe that everybody is going to be saved. And so many people have a false confidence. It is something, somehow, some way that they themselves might do.

Now, “What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?” Have you and I been delivered from a false hope, a false ground of confidence? Some people just trust because they have godly parents praying for them, they are sure to be answered. Now I knew one old man. He was from a very godly family, but he spent his life in sinfulness, carelessness; he spent his time in the public house. He said he had a most godly wife praying for him, and she did. She wrestled in prayer year after year. He said it was impossible those prayers would not be answered. One day – he must have been well in his seventies or perhaps in his eighties – she very solemnly said to him, “I have come to a place that I am never going to pray for you again as long as you live.” It went like a dagger into his heart. It drove him in repentance and humble confession to the mercy seat. He found forgiveness. He was abundantly blessed. I remember him being baptized down at Cranbrook. I think he was about eighty-three years of age. O but the danger of resting on other people’s prayers!

And one of the worst grounds of confidence: thinking there is plenty of time. There is not. But most of us, when we were young, we did not discount religion. We thought the Lord’s people were right, but we did not want it yet. It was *not yet*, and there was plenty of time. There was one man brought up in all the details of the Westminster Confession. He said he knew every detail. He said he could make his peace with God in less than a minute.

The Lord struck him down one Lord's day when he was breaking the Sabbath. He did not have a minute to make his peace with God.

O but to be delivered from all this freewill teaching. One of the great dangers of it, surely – of course, it is unscriptural – but if we have a free will to turn to the Lord, to accept Him, and to be saved on the spot, why do it today? Why not do it next week, or the coming year?

There are many false grounds of confidence. But, "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" And the Lord brings that word home personally: "Thou." It is the Holy Spirit's work, to show you that no confidence in yourself or what you have done, or what you may have done, or taking it for granted will do. That is a good prayer:

"Let no false comfort lift us up
To confidence that's vain;
Nor let their faith and courage droop,
For whom the Lamb was slain."

So the work of the Holy Spirit is to strip you of every vain, false ground of hope, false ground of confidence, but not to leave you there; to bless you with that sweet confidence in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in *Him* alone, in what *He* has done, in His righteousness, in His precious blood. "None but Jesus."

"In Him, and Him alone, confide;
Still at the throne of grace abide;
Eternal victory thou shalt gain,
Nor shalt thou seek His face in vain."

So I would just say this. When we speak of confidence in the Lord, it does not necessarily mean feeling very confident. Some of the Lord's people when the Lord is dealing with them, they are favoured to feel very confident. But what it really means: "In Him, and Him alone, *confide*." It is *confiding* in the Lord. It is trusting in the Lord. We think of that beautiful word: "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." It is a beautiful word and there is a lot in it. "In returning" – that is repentance, returning from the world, from your false religion, from your vain hopes, and in returning to the Lord Jesus, the Saviour. "And in rest" – that is faith; repentance and faith together – resting on the merits of the finished work of Christ. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved."

And then this quiet confidence. It is not a lot of talking, not a lot of boasting. It is certainly not speaking of what we can do or what we are going to do. It is speaking of what the Lord has done in love and mercy. “In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.” In that well-known third chapter of Philippians, the Apostle Paul says that if any man might have had confidence in the flesh, “I more,” and he gives a long list of all that he had as a Pharisee. “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I” – a sinner – “may ... be found in Him” – the Saviour.

This is the ground of confidence, Paul’s confidence, the ground of confidence you have right through the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, all the Epistles: “That I might be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God.” “That I” – a sinner – “might be found in Him”; “that I may win Christ,” that I may know Him more, whom to know is eternal life. “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.” Beloved friends, there is solid confidence here for “the vilest sinner out of hell, who lives to feel his need.”

“What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?” May each of us be able to search our hearts and give a right answer before the Lord.

If the Lord will, the evening sermon, from Isaiah 38. 14, will be published next month.

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My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every rough and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.

His oath, His covenant, and His blood,
Support me in the whelming flood,
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.

I trust His righteous character,
His counsel, promise, and His power.
His honour and His name's at stake,
To save me from the burning lake.

When I shall launch in worlds unseen,
O may I then be found in Him,
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.

E. Mote