

HEZEKIAH AND THE AMBASSADORS OR VAINGLORY REBUKED NO. 704

A SERMON
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“At that time Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armor, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not.”
2 Kings 20:12-13

AND what of that? Was it not the most natural thing in all the world to do? Who among us would not have shown the strangers over our house, and our garden, and our library, and have pointed out to them any little treasures and curiosities which we might happen to possess?

And what if Hezekiah was somewhat proud of his wealth? Was it not a most natural pride that he who was a monarch of so small a territory should nevertheless be able, by economy and good government, to accumulate so large and varied a treasure? Did it not show that he was prudent and thrifty, and might he not commend himself as an example to the Babylonian ambassadors, by showing what these virtues had done for him? Exactly so, this is just as man sees, but God sees after another sort, “Man looketh at the outward appearance, but God looketh at the heart.”

Things are not to God as they seem to us. Actions which apparently and upon the surface, and even so far as human judgment can go, may appear to be either indifferent or even laudable, may seem to God to be so hateful that His anger may burn against them.

We look upon a needle, and to our naked eye it is as smooth as glass, but when we put it under the microscope, it appears at once to be as rough as an unmanufactured bar of iron. It is much after this manner with our actions. They may seem in our own judgments, and in the judgments of our fellow creatures, to be as bright and smooth as the needle for their excellence, but when they come under the inspection of the all-seeing God, they are full of all manner of roughnesses of sin. Our lilies may be the Lord’s nettles and our gardens nothing better than a wilderness in His sight.

Yet another reflection which strikes one at the very first blush of this affair, namely, that God has a different rule for judging His children’s doings from that which He applies to the actions of strangers. I can believe that if Hezekiah had sent *his* ambassadors to Berodach-baladan, that heathen monarch might have shown the Jewish ambassadors over all his treasures without any sort of sin. God would not have been provoked to anger, nor would a prophet have uttered so much as a word of remonstrance or of threatening. But Hezekiah is not like Berodach-baladan, and must not do as the Babylonians may do.

Baladan is but a serf in God’s kingdom, and Hezekiah is a prince. The one is an alien, and the other is a dear and much-cherished child.

We have all different modes of dealing with men according to their relation to us. If a stranger should speak against you in the street you would not feel it, you would scarce be angry even though the statement might be libelous. But if it were the wife of your bosom it would sting you to the heart, or if your child should slander you it would cut you to the quick.

When we admit persons into intimacy and reveal our hearts to them, we expect them to act toward us with a tenderness and a delicacy which it were utterly unreasonable to expect in strangers, and we judge

of their actions by a peculiar standard. We weigh, as it were, the actions of ordinary men in the common rough scales which would not turn with an ounce or even a pound, but the doings of our friends we weigh in such sensitive balances that even though it were but a feather from the wing of a fly the scale would turn.

It is a solemn thing to be a favorite of heaven, for where another man may sin with impunity the beloved of God will not offend without grievous chastisement. If you lie in the bosom of heaven, you must take care that your soul be chaste towards God. If you are favored with the secret of the Most High you must peculiarly be among them that fear Him, for if not, He will say unto you as He said to His favored Israel, "Thou only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities."

It might be treason in a courtier to speak of the king as a stranger might safely do, and he who is admitted into the cabinet must not only be beyond fault in his loyalty, but even beyond suspicion.

We remark then, that the act of Hezekiah here recorded is not upon the surface a sinful one, but that the sin is to be found, not so much in the action itself as in his motives of which *we* cannot be judges, but which God very accurately judged, and very strictly condemned.

And again, we remark that this sin of Hezekiah might not have been sin in others at all, that even with the same motive if done by others it might not have so provoked God. But seeing that Hezekiah, above even most of the Scriptural saints, was favored with singular interpositions of providence, and distinguished honors from God's hand, he should have been more careful.

His sin, if little in others, became great in him, because of his being so beloved of God. A man with a worn and stained garment may walk without spoiling his robe where another clothed in white might not venture. A spot might not show upon a filthy garment, but the cleaner the robe, the more readily is the spot discovered, and from the very fact that Hezekiah was so superlatively a holy man, and a man favored of God, his sin showed itself, and God visited it at once with chastisement.

I. In order to bring out what Hezekiah's offense was, it will be best for me to begin by describing his CIRCUMSTANCES AND STATE AT THE TIME OF THE TRANSACTION.

We shall want a rather lengthy description, and in the first place, we may remark that *he had received very singular favors.*

Sennacherib had invaded the land with a host reckoned to be invincible, and probably it was invincible by all the known means of warfare of that age. He had ravaged every state and taken away innumerable prisoners, besides despoiling every city to which he laid siege. But when he came near Jerusalem he was not able even so much as to cast a mound against it, or to shoot an arrow at it, for God singularly interposed, and the host of Sennacherib, smitten by the sudden breath of pestilence, or by the deadly air of the simoom, fell dead upon the plain.

This was a memorable deliverance from a foe so gigantic as to be compared to leviathan, into whose jaw the Lord thrust a hook, and led him back to the place from whence he came.

Beside this, Hezekiah had been restored from a sickness pronounced to be mortal. He had been granted a singular escape from the gates of death. Where another man must have died, he was enabled within three days to go up to the house of the Lord.

Added to all this, in connection with his recovery, God had seen fit to do for him what He had only done for Joshua before, namely, to interrupt the order of the heavens, and to make the sun go back ten degrees upon the dial of Ahaz as a token by which His servant's faith might be comforted. This was no mean thing when death from below and heaven from above were both stayed in their courses for the favored child of heaven, when the shades of the grave and the brightness of the sun alike were moved for him to prove the lovingkindness of the Lord.

In addition to all this the Lord gave Hezekiah an unusual run of prosperity. Everything prospered. If you read the statement given in the Chronicles, and also that in Isaiah, you will find that he was enriched both by presents from the neighboring kings, who were probably overawed by the fact that Sennacherib

had been destroyed in the country of Hezekiah, and he was probably also enriched by trading as Solomon had done before him.

Hezekiah, though but a little prince, suddenly found himself a wealthy man, having moreover one thing in his treasury which could not have been discovered among the riches of any other living man, namely, a writ from the Court of Heaven that he should live fifteen years. What would not some monarchs have given, if they had been sure that their lives would have been preserved from daily jeopardy during that length of time? No weight of coral or of pearl would have been considered too great a price for such a boon.

Hezekiah was in all respects a prosperous monarch, the man whom the King of kings delighted to honor. This great prosperity was a great temptation, far more difficult to endure than Rabshakeh's letter, and all the ills which invasion brought upon the land.

Ah friend, that is a much-needed prayer, "In all times of our wealth, good Lord deliver us." Many serpents lurk among the flowers of prosperity. High places are dangerous places, it is not easy to carry a full cup with a steady hand, a loaded wagon needs a strong axle, and a well-fed steed requires a tight rein.

We must not forget that Hezekiah, at this time, *had become singularly conspicuous*. To be favored as he was might have been endurable, if he could have lived in retirement, but he was set as upon a pinnacle, since all the nations round about must have heard of the destruction of Sennacherib's host.

Sennacherib was the common foe of all the smaller potentates, and even the great kings, like the king of Egypt, stood in mortal dread of the power of Assyria. It was therefore sure to be known far and wide, that the tyrant's wings had been clipped in the land of Judah.

The going back of the sun must also have struck all nations with astonishment. It appears that the Babylonian ambassadors came to inquire about this wonder, for they were a people much given to observe the heavenly bodies. The world's mouth was full of Hezekiah. Everybody heard of him. Everybody spoke of him. His cure, his victory, and his wealth were common talk in every place where men met together. What a temptation is this!

When many eyes are upon one, they may, unless grace prevents, act like the eyes of the fabled Basilisk, which fascinated their prey. To walk before the Lord in the land of the living is happy and safe walking, but to walk before men is full of peril. To be saluted with applause, to bask in popularity, is always dangerous. A full sail needs much ballast, or the vessel will be overturned. Much grace was needed in the case before us, but this the king did not seek as he should have done.

Hezekiah had remarkable opportunities for usefulness. How much he might have done to honor the God of Israel! I scarcely know of a man, except he were an inspired prophet, who had so noble an opportunity of declaring the greatness and goodness of the Lord, for while everybody spoke of him, it was in connection with two wonders which God had wrought, which should have brought to the Great Wonder-working JEHOVAH a revenue of praise.

Why, Hezekiah, had you been in your right senses, and had grace kept your wits about you, what a sermon you might have preached with death beneath you and heaven above you for the text, and the eternal power and Godhead for the theme!

Brethren, he ought to have made the courts of princes ring with the name of JEHOVAH. He should have placed himself in the rear of the picture, and have filled the earth with his testimony to the glory of his God. How well he might have exclaimed in the language of triumphant exultation, "Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? Which of these delivered the nations from Sennacherib? which of these could raise up their votaries from mortal sickness? Which of these could say to the sun's shadow, Go thou back upon the dial of Ahaz? But JEHOVAH rules over all. He is king in heaven above, and in the earth beneath."

My brethren, it seems to me that if like Moses he had composed some triumphal ode, if he had made the people sing, and bidden the women dance like Miriam, while the exultant shout went up to heaven,

“Oh, come let us sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously!” it had been far better work for him than to have been showing these ambassadors his treasury, and exalting his own name among men.

He, above all men, *was under obligation to have loved his God, and to have devoted himself wholly to Him*. All life is sacred to the Giver of Life, and should be devoted to Him. But life supernaturally prolonged, should have been in a special manner dedicated to God. He whose breath is in his nostrils, wherein is he to be accounted of? Why should he boast of himself? but he whose breath has been given back into his nostrils by miracle must not spend it in magnifying himself. Unto God be the glory of our life though it is but given to us once, but oh, with what emphasis should God have all the glory of it if it is given to us twice!

But it is written of him in the Chronicles, that “he rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him for *his heart was lifted up*.” He enjoyed the blessings, but bowed not before the Giver, he remembered the fruit, but he forgot the tree. He drank of the stream, but did not enough regard the fountain. His fields were watered with dew, but he was not sufficiently grateful to the heaven from which the dew distils. He stole the fuel from the altar of love, and burned it upon the hearth of pride.

My brethren, we must not too hastily condemn Hezekiah. It is for God to condemn but not for us, for I am persuaded had we been in Hezekiah’s place we should have done the same.

Observe now wherein his loftiness would find food. Here he might have said to himself, “Within my dominions the greatest of armies has been destroyed, and the mightiest of princes has been humbled. He whose name was a sound of terror in every land came into my country, and he melted away like the snow before the sun. Great are you, O Hezekiah! great is your land, for your land has devoured Sennacherib, and put an end to the havoc of the destroyer.”

Remember also that he had this to try him above everything else—he had the certainty of living fifteen years. I have already given you a hint of the danger of such certainty. Mortals as we are, in danger of dying at any moment, yet we grow secure. But give us fifteen years certain, and I know not that heaven above would be high enough for our heads, or whether the whole world would be large enough to contain the swellings of our pride. We would be sure to grow vain-gloriously great, if the check of constant mortality were removed.

The king might in his self-complacent moments have said to himself, “Not only am I thus immortal for fifteen years, but the very heavens have been disturbed for me. See what a favorite of heaven I am!” He did not say with David, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars which thou hast ordained, what is man, that thou art mindful of him?” but he heard a Satanic whisper in his soul, “How great are you that even the sun itself, light of the day, and eye of heaven, must go back to do you pleasure!”

Besides, it is not so easy to have life spared, and yet to feel that we ourselves personally are of little consequence. What are any of us to God? He could do without us all. The greatest men in the world, if they were wiped out of creation, would involve no more loss to God than the loss of a fly to the owner of empires. And yet, if life be spared, we are very apt to suppose that we are necessary at least to the church if not to the divine purposes themselves. Then when Hezekiah surveyed his stores, he would see much to puff him up, for worldly possessions are to men what gas is to a balloon.

Ah, my dear friends, those who know anything about possessions, about broad acres, gold and silver, and works of art, and precious things, and so on, know what a tendency there is to puff up the owners thereof. He must have felt, as he walked through his armory, and his spicery, and his treasury, “I am a great man.” Then all the ambassadors came in from the different countries, and cringing at his feet paid him reverence because of his present fortune. It was too much for his poor head to stand, and as the heart was getting away from God, it is little wonder if vainglory took possession of Hezekiah’s mind.

To complete our description of the circumstances, it appears that *at this time God left His servant in a measure, to try him*. “Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that He might know all that was in his heart.”

It seems that through his being lifted up, the grace of God was for a time in its more active operations withdrawn. Not that God left him in such a sense as that he ceased to be a saved soul, but he was left in a measure to try him, to let him see what he was.

He was getting so great, priding himself so much upon the favor of God, that self-righteousness probably had crept in, and he began to say to himself, "I am not as other men are. Surely I have walked before the Lord with a perfect heart." Some degree of self-righteousness is we think manifest in his prayer when he turned his face to the wall. He was diseased we fear at that time with two diseases, not merely a swelling boil, but a swelling self-conceit, and God left him to let him see that he was a poor silly sinner after all.

Here, dear friends, is quite enough to account for his folly, for if the grace of God should leave the best of us, the all-knowing God alone could foretell what we should do. You who are warmest for Christ would become like Laodicea for lukewarmness. You who are sound in the faith would become rotten with error. You who now walk before the Lord in excellency and integrity would be so weak that the first temptation would remove you from your steadfastness. It would be said of us as it was said of that once bright but now fallen star, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning." Bright as we are when grace shines on us, we are nothing but darkness itself when the Lord withdraws Himself.

It was said by the old makers of metaphors that in the soundest pomegranate there are always some rotten seeds, and the whitest swan has a black bill, to which we may add that there are worms under the greenest turf, and dead men's carcasses at the bottom of the calmest seas. In the best Christian there is enough of sin to make him the worst of transgressors if God should leave him. One who knew himself but little wrote that he was so full of Christ that there was no room for the devil, but I thought I saw the cloven foot peeping out even in that boastful speech.

Dear brethren, I hope we may not need to be taught our own emptiness in the same way as Hezekiah learned it. I would willingly know doctrinally that in me, that is in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing. And I would know it too by the teaching of God the Holy Ghost, but I pray for you and for myself, my brethren, that we may never know your depravity experientially by being left to see it work itself out.

Perhaps there may be no way of teaching us so thoroughly the baseness of our heart as by leaving us to its devices. Perhaps we shall never know our folly, unless suffered to play the fool, but oh prevent it, Lord! prevent it by Thy grace! Better to be taught by suffering than to be taught by sin! Better to lie in God's dungeon than to revel in the devil's palace.

You now see the circumstances clearly. Here is a prosperous man, in a proud state of heart, with grace at a low ebb in his spirit, he is now ready to be the prey of temptation.

II. We must now turn to consider THE OCCURRENCE ITSELF AND THE SIN WHICH AROSE OUT OF IT.

Babylon, a province of Assyria, had thrown off the Assyrian yoke, and Berodach-baladan was naturally anxious to obtain allies in order that his little kingdom might grow strong enough to preserve itself from the Assyrians. He had seen with great pleasure that the Assyrian army had been destroyed in Hezekiah's country, and very probably not recognizing the miracle he thought that Hezekiah had defeated the host, and so he sent his ambassadors with a view to make a treaty of alliance with so great a prince. The ambassadors arrived.

Now in this case the duty of Hezekiah was very clear. He ought to have received the ambassadors with due courtesy as becomes their office, and he should have regarded their coming as an opportunity to bear testimony to the idolatrous Babylonians of the true God of Israel.

He should have explained to them that the wonders which had been wrought were wrought by the only living and true God, and then he might have said, in answer to Isaiah's question, "What have they seen in thine house?" "I have told them of the mighty acts of JEHOVAH, I have published abroad His

great fame, and I have sent them back to their country to tell abroad that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

He should have been very cautious with these men. They were idolaters, and therefore not fit company for the worshippers of JEHOVAH. When they came to him he should have felt, “I am in danger here,” as we should do if we wandered among men stricken with plague.

He should, moreover, have taken care to make no boast about his own power, since it is clear that the wonders which had been wrought were not to his honor, but to the glory of the Lord alone. *He* had not slain the host, he had not made the sun go back, he had not by his skill restored himself from sickness, it was unto God and to God alone that he ought to have ascribed all the honor.

He should not have been vain of his riches, for this led him to show those thievish gentry where there was ample plunder to reward their exertions. His course of action was clear enough. He should have told them of JEHOVAH, should have proclaimed to them the true God, have treated them with courtesy, and then dismissed them, thankful to be rid of such a temptation. We may now perceive wherein his sin was found. I think it lay in five particulars.

First, it is evident from the passage in Isaiah thirty-nine, that *he was greatly delighted with their company*. It is said, “Hezekiah was glad of them.” In this chapter it is said, “He hearkened unto them.” He was very pleased to see them.

It is an ill sign when a Christian takes great solace in the company of the worldling, more especially when that worldling is profane. The Babylonians were wicked idolaters, it was ill for the lover of JEHOVAH to press them to his bosom. He should have felt towards them, “As for your gods I loathe them, for I worship the God that made heaven and earth, neither can I receive you into close familiarity, because you are no lovers of the Lord my God.”

Courtesy is due from the Christian to all men, but the unholy intimacy which allows a believer to receive an unregenerate person as his bosom friend is a sin. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” applies not only to marriage, but to all other intimate unions which amount to yoking together.

I would not, as a Christian, link my name in the same firm with an ungodly man, because, whether I choose it or not, however high my integrity may be, if my partner chooses to do doubtful actions I must be held responsible in a measure for his sins both before God and men. It is well when those who are yoked together both pull the same way. But what communion has Christ with Belial?

Here was Hezekiah’s first sin—just the very same sin that Jehoshaphat fell into when he made ships, in connection with the idolatrous king of Israel, to go to Tarshish for gold. The ships were broken at Eziongeber, and very justly so, for when God’s servants go into connection with God’s enemies, what can they expect but a frown from their Master?

The next sin which he committed was that *he evidently leaned to their alliance*. Now Hezekiah was the king of a little territory, almost as insignificant as a German principality, and his true strength would have been to have leaned upon his God, and to have made no show whatever of military power. It was by God that he had been defended, why should he not still rest upon the invisible JEHOVAH? But no, he thinks, “If I could associate with the Babylonians, they are a rising people, it will be well for me.” Mark this—God takes it hard of His people when they leave His arm for an arm of flesh.

O lover of the Lord Jesus, if you leave the arm of your Beloved, if you cease to lean on Him and begin to lean upon your own craft or policy, or upon your dearest and best friend, you will smart for it. “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”

It was this getting away from God, this ceasing to walk by faith, this wanting to depend in a carnal manner upon the king of Babylon, which provoked the Lord to anger.

His next sin was, *his unholy silence concerning his God*. He does not appear to have said a word to them about JEHOVAH. Would it have been polite? Etiquette, nowadays, often demands of a Christian that he should not intrude his religion upon company. Out on such etiquette! It is the etiquette of hell. True courtesy to my fellow man's soul makes me speak to him, if I believe that soul to be in danger.

Someone once complained of Mr. Rowland Hill that he was too earnest, and he told them in reply the following story. When walking at Wootton-under-Edge he saw part of a chalk pit fall in upon some men. "So," said he, "I ran into the village, crying, Help! Help! Help! and nobody said, 'Dear me, how excited the old gentleman is, he is much too earnest.' why," said he, "and when I see a soul perishing, am I not to cry help, and be in earnest? Surely souls are yet more to be cared for than bodies."

But nowadays, if one cares about fashion, one must be gagged in all companies. You must not intrude, nor be positive in your opinions, if you would have the good word of fashionable people. O sirs, when disease is abroad in the land, the physician is never an intruder among dying men, and so you that have Christ, the true medicine, will never be intruders in God's eye, if with prudence, but yet with boldness, you speak concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Shame on your dumb tongues! Shame on your silent lips, if you speak not of Him! Oh, by the love which Jesus manifested on the cross, bear some such love to your fellow men, and as He broke through all things, even through the bonds of life and death that He might save you, break through some of these flimsy ties, if by any means you may save some.

Meanwhile, mark that Hezekiah sadly made up for his silence about his God by *loudly boasting about himself*. If he had little to say of his God, he had much to say about his spices, his armor, and his gold and silver. And I dare say he took them to see the conduit and the pool which he had made, and the various other wonders of engineering which he had carried out.

Ah, brethren, etiquette lets us talk of men, but about our God we must be silent. God forbid we should defer to such a rule. He did as good as say, while he was showing them over all these, "See what a great man I am!" He would not have said it in words, but that was the spirit of it—self-glorification, and self-glorification too, before the very people who would take advantage of it.

Surely also his sin lay in his *putting himself on a level with these Babylonians*. Suppose he had gone to see *them* what would they have shown him? Why, they would have shown him *their* spicery, *their* armory, *their* gold and *their* silver. Now, they come to see him, and he is a worshipper of the invisible God, and he glories in just the same treasures as those in which they also trusted.

When a Christian man constantly acts like a worldly man, can it be possible that he is acting rightly? When the two actions are precisely the same, and you discern no difference, is there not grave cause to suspect that there *is* no difference? For by the fruit must you know the tree, and if two trees bear precisely the same fruit, is there not cause to suspect that they are the same sort of trees?

Dear friends, may you and I shun this sin of Hezekiah, and not try to match ourselves with sinners as to the joys of this present life. If they say, "Here are my treasures," let us tell them about the "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God," and say, "Our treasure is above." Let us imitate the noble Roman lady, who when her friend showed her all her trinkets, waited till her two fair boys came home from school, and then pointed to them and said, "These are my jewels."

Do you when you hear the worldling vaunting his happiness, drop in a gentle word and say, "I too have my earthly comforts, for which I am grateful. But my best delights are not here, they spring neither from corn, nor wine, nor oil, nor could spices, and gold, and music render them to me. My heart is in heaven, my heart is not here. I have set my soul upon things above. Jesus is my joy, and His love is my delight.

"You tell me of what you love, permit me to tell you of what I love. I have listened patiently to you, now listen to one of the songs of Zion. I have walked with you over your estate, now let me take you over mine. You have told me of all the good things which you enjoy, do lend me a few minutes of your

attention while I tell you of still better things which make my portion.” The Lord takes it hard on the part of His people if they are ashamed of the blessings which He gives them, and if they never boast in the cross of Christ they have good cause to be ashamed of themselves.

This then, we think to be his sin. Putting it altogether it was a delight in worldly company, beginning to lean to an arm of flesh, saying little of his God, making much of himself, and putting himself on a level with worldly men by making his boast where they made theirs.

III. The third matter we will handle very briefly, namely, THE PUNISHMENT AND THE PARDON.

We may generally find a man’s sin written in his punishment. We sow the thorns, and then God flogs us with them. If Jesus loves you, my dear brother or sister, if there be anything in the world that keeps you from Him He will take it away. It may be a favorite child, it may be your health, it may be your wealth, but God hates idols, and He will never suffer anything to stand between our heart’s love and Himself. It may be a very painful operation, but it will be a needful one for you that God should grind your idol in pieces, and make you to drink of it with bitterness and sorrow.

Moreover, mark you, He threatened to make the same persons the means of his punishment who had been the means of his sin. “You were so pleased while you showed these Babylonians your treasures, these very men shall take them away.” And so, brethren, the things in which we confide shall be our disappointment. If we take our hearts away from God and give them to any earthly things, that earthly thing will be a curse to us. Our sins are the mothers of our sorrows.

Judgments being therefore threatened, Hezekiah and the people humbled themselves. If you and I would escape chastisement we must humble ourselves. The child who bares his back to the rod shall not be very hardly smitten. Submission more easily averts blows from God’s hand than anything else.

Yet although God removed the punishment as far as Hezekiah was concerned, *He did not remove the consequences.* You see the consequences of showing the Babylonians the treasures were just these, they would be sure to go back and tell their king—“That little prince has a vast store of spice and armor, and all sorts of precious things, we must before long pick a quarrel with him, and despoil his rich hive. We must bring these choice treasures to Babylon, they will repay us for the toils of war.” That was the certain result of Hezekiah’s folly, and though God did forget the sin and promise to remove the punishment from Hezekiah, yet He did not avert the consequences from another generation.

So with us. Many a sin which the believer has committed God has pardoned, but the consequences come all the same, you may have the guilt forgiven but you cannot undo the sin, there it remains, and our children and our children’s children may have to smart for sins which God has forgiven to us.

A spendthrift may be forgiven for his profligacy, but he sends a stream of poverty down to the next generation. Some sins are peculiarly mischievous in this way, and I doubt not but that all sin inevitably brings mischief upon the man committing it, and upon all around him in a measure, and that God who forgives the sin leaves the consequences to work themselves out. That is a very solemn matter, is it not?

You let loose the river, it will flow on forever. The action of today will affect all time. More or less remotely it will affect every coming age, for you tell upon another man, and that other man on another, and even eternity itself shall hear the echo trembling along its halls of your momentary action which you, perhaps without thought, committed against the living God. This should make us very careful, surely, in our walk.

IV. I have now to conclude by asking you thoughtfully to GATHER UP THE LESSONS OF THIS NARRATIVE, for I find I have not time to do so except in hints.

This narrative is very full of instruction. It needs half-a-dozen sermons instead of one. The lessons, however, which come uppermost, are just these. *See then, what is in every man’s heart.* This was in Hezekiah’s heart—he was one of the best of men, the same is in your heart. You are humble today, you will be proud as Satan tomorrow if left by God’s grace.

You little know, my dear brother, even though you are a renewed creature—you little know the villainy of your old nature. Perhaps it is not possible for any one of us to know our full capacity for

guilt. Only let the restraining hand of providence and grace be taken away, and the wisest of us might become a very madman with the rage of sin. O God, teach us to know our hearts, and help us, while we remember how black they are, never to be proud.

In the next place, *tremble at anything that is likely to bring out this evil of your heart*. Above all, be afraid of prosperity, be thankful, but do not be overjoyed. Walk humbly with your God. Let there be a double guard set over your heart. A pirate very seldom attacks a ship that is going out unloaded, it is the vessel that is well stored that the buccaneer will seek to gain, and so with you. When God loads you with mercy the devil will try to take you if he can.

Set a double watch, and keep your bark as far out of his course as may be, and when you must be thrust into temptation, and must mix with worldly men, be then watchful above all other times, lest by any means you be taken in the net. Riches and worldly company are the two cankers that eat out the very life of godliness. Christian, be aware of them!

Should we not be taught by this narrative *to cry out every day against vainglory*? Ah, it is not those standing in prominent spheres who are alone in danger of it, but all others. I recollect firing a shot once with much greater success than I knew of. A certain person had frequently said to me that I had been the subject of her earnest prayers lest I should be exalted above measure, for she could see my danger. And after having heard this so many times that I really knew it by heart, I just made the remark that I thought it would be my duty to pray for her too, lest she should be exalted above measure.

I was greatly amused when this answer came, "I have no temptation to be proud. My experience is such that I am in no danger whatever of being puffed up," not knowing that her little speech was about the proudest statement that could have been made, and that everybody else thought her to be the most officious and haughty person within ten miles.

Why, do not you believe there may be as much pride in rags as in an alderman's gown? Is it not just as possible for a man to be proud in a dust cart, as if he rode in her Majesty's chariot? A man may be just as proud with half a yard of ground as Alexander with all his kingdoms, and may be just as lifted up with a few pence as Croesus with all his treasure. Pray against pride, dear friends, wherever you may be. Pride will grow on a dunghill, as well as in the king's garden. Pray against pride and vainglory, and God give you grace to keep it under!

And then supposing that you should have given way to it, *see the sorrow which it will bring you*, and if you would escape that sorrow *imitate Hezekiah, and humble yourself*. Down! man, down! "God resisteth the proud," as long as you are up He resists you, "but he gives grace to the humble." When God is wrestling with man's pride, let the man struggle as he will, He will throw him. But when the man is down God lifts him up.

None so ready to lift up a fallen foe as our God. Bow yourself, then, Christian, and if you are not conscious of any particular pride, be humble because you are not so conscious, for pride is very likely there. It is when we think we are humble we are most proud, and perhaps when we bemoan our pride it may be then that we are truly humble. Let us go unto God by Jesus Christ, and ask Him to search out this pride if it be there, and to lay us low at the foot of the cross.

Lastly, *let us cry to God never to leave us*. "Lord, take not Thy Holy Spirit from us! withdraw not from us Thy restraining grace! Hast Thou not said, 'I the LORD will keep it, I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day'?" Lord, keep me everywhere. Keep me in the valley, that I murmur not of my low estate! keep me on the mountain, that I wax not giddy through pride at my being lifted up so high! Keep me in my youth, when my passions are strong! keep me in my old age, when I am conceited of my wisdom, and may therefore be a greater fool than even the young! Keep me when I come to die, lest at the very last I should deny Thee! Keep me living, keep me dying, keep me laboring, keep me suffering, keep me fighting, keep me resting, keep me everywhere, for everywhere I need Thee, O my God."

The Lord keep us looking unto Jesus, and resting alone upon His finished work. If we have never trusted Christ at all, may the Lord bring us to rest upon His dear Son now! O sinner! there is but one door of hope for you, and that is open. Trust Jesus and live.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 KINGS 20

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.