

“When Faith Fails”
2 Kings 18:9-37
(Preached at Trinity, September 11, 2022)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verses 1-6** we are introduced to Hezekiah, the righteous king of Judah. He was bold and courageous. He was zealous for God's honor, zealous for His worship. With great energy and determination, he cleansed the land of the false worship that had plagued them for years.
2. In **Verse 7** we find God's great blessing upon his faithfulness.
2 Kings 18:7 NAU - "And the LORD was with him; wherever he went he prospered."
3. Now in **Verses 9-12** the author takes us back over ten years before to the events of **Chapter 17** – the fall of the Northern kingdom and their utter ruin as Shalmaneser's army conquered Samaria and put Israel into exile. But why rehash this catastrophe? Why rehearse the reason for their failure? The writer wants to remind us of the situation that characterized the reign of Hezekiah – the situation he faced as he made the bold changes throughout the land, as he destroyed the idolatry that had permeated the land.
4. Knowing the brutality of the Assyrians we are now being informed in **Verse 13** that Sennacherib had set his sights upon Judah. One by one the fortified cities of Judah fell to his control. What was Hezekiah to do? It was a serious situation. As I shared before, Hezekiah's response marks a failure in his faith. This king who boldly resisted all opposition to his reforms in Judah was now smitten by the fearful threats of the Assyrian king. But it was not an unjustified fear.
5. Most of our fears are unjustified. We invent worries and elevate anxieties, most of which never come to pass. But the Assyrians had already demonstrated their power and cruelty. One commentator writes:
“The king recorded in his annals how he had flayed captive kings alive, dressing pillars with their skins. And he took delight in describing how he had walled up other kings to die of hunger and thirst. Princes had been impaled on stakes. He also had boys and girls burned alive; put out the eyes of the leaders of captive nations; cut off the hands and feet, ears and noses of able-bodied men; and pulled out the tongues of those who dared speak out against him. Sargon and Sennacherib were no less cruel.”¹
6. Hezekiah's heart was smitten in fear. He did what men are prone to do. He trusted in his own resources. He collected the wealth of the Temple in an effort to buy the favor and forgiveness of the king. In his fear he turned his eyes away from his one true source of strength and protection.

¹ Cyril J. Barber, *The Books of Kings: The Righteousness of God Illustrated in the Lives of the People of Israel and Judah*, vol. 2 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 420–421.

7. We find here the reality of our faith. There are times when we demonstrate great faith. There are times when we have great boldness and confidence before God even in the midst of great trial.
There are other times, however, when our faith is small. We are overcome with doubts, worries, and fears. This has been the testimony of all of God's people.
8. Jesus often rebuked His disciples for their weak faith.
Matthew 6:28-30 NAU - "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, ²⁹ yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ³⁰ "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith!"
9. We need to understand that even the greatest of saints may sometimes be disquieted.
- A. The Bible gives us many examples of righteous men falling into spiritual unrest.
1. Although David possessed an inward peace and rest of soul, there were times when his peace was interrupted
Psalms 42:11 NAU – "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me?"
 2. Job was a man described by God as being righteous yet he became weary.
Job 10:1 NAU - "I loathe my own life; I will give full vent to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul."
 3. Elijah the prophet became discouraged as Jezebel sought his life.
1 Kings 19:4 NAU - "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life . . ."
- B. Saving faith can still be a weak faith.
1. We can possess trust in Christ. We can have an absolute confidence in His redeeming sacrifice. We can have assurance in our knowledge of Him and find great comfort in our salvation.
 2. We can have this comfort and see the evidence of Divine grace in our lives and still have times when our faith is quite weak.
 3. Saving faith can start off quite small. In fact, this is the norm. Newborn babies are frail and weak. It takes time to grow to maturity.
Thomas Watson - "True faith is at first nothing but an embryo, it is minute and small; it is full of doubts, temptations, fears; it begins in weakness.
If you have faith, though but in its infancy, be not discouraged. For a little faith is faith, as a spark of fire is fire. A weak faith may lay hold on a strong Christ."
10. What are two of the chief causes of doubting—when our faith fails us?

- I. The first cause of doubting is when we focus our attention only upon the outward situation.
- A. Hezekiah zoomed in on the threat of the Assyrians
1. He knew their reputation. He saw what they had done to Israel. The Assyrians defeated them and carried them off into captivity. They were no match for the Assyrian army.
 2. Now the Assyrians were marching through Judah. One by one the fortified cities were falling.
 3. Hezekiah saw that the Assyrians were on the march towards Jerusalem.
- B. When we look upon the outward circumstance as our ultimate focus, we'll also look upon the outward circumstances to find a solution.
1. Hezekiah sought a way to reach a truce with the king of Assyria. His demands were exorbitant:
2 Kings 18:14 NAU - "So the king of Assyria required of Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold."
 2. In order to raise this amount Hezekiah had to resort to stripping the Temple. The king who purified God's worship was now stripping the Temple of the beauty that represented the glory of God.
 3. Hezekiah could see no other solution.
- C. When we look only upon what our eyes can see we will not be able to see beyond what our eyes can see.
1. When Peter saw the waves that is all he could see.
Matthew 14:28-31 NAU - "Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." ²⁹ And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"
 2. When the disciples were in the terrible storm all they could see were the waves. They completely ignored that Jesus was with them.
Matthew 8:23-25 NAU - "When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. ²⁴ And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. ²⁵ And they came to *Him* and woke Him, saying, "Save *us*, Lord; we are perishing!"
Matthew 8:26 NAU - "He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?"
 3. We often do not believe unless we see.
 - a. We want to see the results of the tests the doctor ordered.
 - b. We don't want to believe our church will grow until we actually see the new members.
 - c. But the nature of faith is believing even before we see the evidence
Hebrews 11:1 – "Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"
John 20:29 – "Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed."

- D. Faith often means trusting God when there is no visible evidence.
1. We trusted in Christ for our salvation based upon the testimony of Scripture and the witness of the Spirit in our hearts.
 - a. Based upon this we believed.
 - b. You know these things to be true because God has confirmed them in your heart
 2. In like manner we know we can trust God in life because His testimony is true and He proves Himself faithful.
 - a. The patriarchs believed the promises of God even while they were far off.
Hebrews 11:13 NAU - "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth."
 - b. This is the nature of faith – believing God because He is faithful

II. The other cause of doubting is failing to take into consideration God's sovereign hand upon every event.

A. Hezekiah was a man of faith.

2 Kings 18:5 NAU - "He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor *among those who were before him.*"

1. He walked with God. Honoring God was his passion.
2. And yet, during this fiery trial he blinked. He took his eyes off God. He looked to Egypt for his assistance. God was not pleased.

Isaiah 30:1-3 NAU - "Woe to the rebellious children," declares the LORD, "Who execute a plan, but not Mine, And make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, In order to add sin to sin; ² Who proceed down to Egypt Without consulting Me, To take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh And to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt! ³ "Therefore the safety of Pharaoh will be your shame And the shelter in the shadow of Egypt, your humiliation."

B. Were the Assyrian kings moving without Divine design?

1. This is a question we need to consider daily. Is there design behind the events of this world?
2. The Assyrians thought they were in control of their actions. They thought their victories were all their own.

2 Kings 18:19 NAU - "Then Rabshakeh said to them, "Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, "What is this confidence that you have?"

2 Kings 18:32-35 NAU - "But do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you, saying, "The LORD will deliver us." ³³ 'Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? ³⁴ 'Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria from my hand? ³⁵ 'Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their land from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?"

3. The truth is, the Assyrians were merely tools in the hand of God.
Proverbs 21:1-2 NAU - "The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes. ² Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts."
Isaiah 10:5-7 NAU - "Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hands is My indignation, ⁶ I send it against a godless nation And commission it against the people of My fury To capture booty and to seize plunder, And to trample them down like mud in the streets. ⁷ Yet it does not so intend, Nor does it plan so in its heart, But rather it is its purpose to destroy And to cut off many nations."
 4. After God was through using Assyria to punish the wickedness of Israel He then turned His wrath upon Assyria.
Isaiah 10:12 NAU - "So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *He will say*, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness."
- C. Hezekiah briefly turned his eyes away from the all-encompassing sovereignty of God.
1. Sometimes God's sovereign actions can appear terrifying. They make man tremble. But this need not be the case with us. Is He Lord of the cancer? Did the hurricane form without His design? What about the armies of the world?
 2. Instead of stripping the Temple of its golden treasures Hezekiah should have placed his confidence in the living God. His behavior was as if God did not exist.
 3. Isaiah rebuked Judah's failure to consider God.
Isaiah 22:11 NAU - "And you made a reservoir between the two walls For the waters of the old pool. But you did not depend on Him who made it, Nor did you take into consideration Him who planned it long ago."
 Alec Motyer wrote of this text: "Why bother with faith when you have walls, water, and weapons? Why look to God when you can look to your own resources."²
- D. Along with this failure to focus on God's providential rule over all things is our failure to patiently wait upon God to bring our situation to a close. God works according to His timing—and it is always perfect.
Isaiah 40:31 NAU - "Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up *with* wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary."
1. Hezekiah's situation seemed desperate. It demanded immediate action. But God is never in a hurry.
 2. Our situation is never so desperate that we can't look to God who determines all things.

² J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 185.

Conclusion:

1. God's desire is that you trust Him. This provides a powerful testimony to those who are lost. It brings glory to God.
2. This requires that you trust not in what you see but in what you don't see. It means having a confidence in our great God who is working all things for His good pleasure. No one will ever do anything to you that God has not directed. No plan of God can be thwarted. No one can reverse it. God does as He pleases.
Are you confident of this? Doesn't this confidence bring you comfort?
3. And are you confident in His love for you and confident that He is working for your good?