

Trusting in Hard Times

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 May 2024

Preacher: James Burnett

- [0 : 0 0] I see a few new faces, so if you've not had a chance to meet me, my name's James, ministering training here at the church. Please do hang around at the end if you're able to give us a chance to speak to you, to get to know you.
- As Ali said, we've been going through the book of the prophet Isaiah. It's a huge book, but we've kind of had this big theme in our heads as we're going through that Isaiah is teaching us just how big our God is, how holy he is, how great he is.
- And so as we drop into these chapters here, we'll continue to see more of that theme. We'll see that God is great. We'll see particularly that he is big enough, he is great enough to deal when we face tests or trials in our faith, that he can cope with them, he can meet us in them and deliver us from them.
- And so if you've got your Bible, please do have it open at Isaiah 36 and 37 as we work through those chapters together. In life, we often hear the phrase that actions speak louder than words.
- And of course, the idea behind that being that it's fairly easy to just say things, but to back them up with our actions, that's where the real test comes.
- [1 : 2 3] Now, the phrase is true also of our faith. It's one thing for us to say with our mouths what we believe, that we trust in the living God. But when something happens in our lives, would we really hold fast to that faith that we claim to have?
- When that thing comes, would our actions back up what we claim we believe? Maybe in relation to losing your job, an important relationship in your life breaking down, losing a loved one, would you hold fast to your faith in God?
- And well, that's a similar question that's being asked in these chapters of King Hezekiah. That's one thing for God's chosen King Hezekiah to claim that he trusts wholly in the God of the Bible.
- It's one thing for him to say that with his mouth, that his faith is rested in God alone for deliverance. But what about when that faith comes under testing, comes under attack?
- When Assyria, the great power of the day, was knocking at the door, had hemmed in his city where he ruled.
- [2 : 4 0] What was he going to do? How was he going to respond to this Assyrian war machine? That's exactly what's going on in these chapters of Foras.
- Faith is put to the test. And we see in these chapters that faith in God's promises, it does bring deliverance to his people. We're going to work through the chapters in three main kind of headings.
- We're going to think firstly about Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, then Hezekiah, the king of Judah, and then thirdly, Yahweh, the God of the Bible, the great king.
- And so firstly, we see that King Sennacherib, he brings the test of faith. King Sennacherib brings the test of faith.

We read in verses four and five of chapter 36, and the Rabshakeh, he said to Hezekiah's men, say to Hezekiah, thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, on what do you rest this trust of yours?

[3 : 44] Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? In whom do you now trust that you have rebelled against me?

Now at this point, Hezekiah, he's been called out for trusting in Egypt, but also in Yahweh, in the God of the Bible, both of which the king of Assyria makes clear are foolish to trust in.

He says in verse six, that to trust in Egypt, that is like trusting in a broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans upon it.

But he also makes clear the foolishness of trusting in the God of the Bible. He says a bit later in verse 18 to 20, that no other God, none, has delivered their nation from the hands of Assyria.

But what he's saying here, he's saying that gods don't win wars against Assyria. At the end of the kind of first 10 verses of trying to show the foolishness of trusting in such things and trusting in mere words, Hezekiah's men, they're becoming afraid.

[5 : 00] And so they call themselves the Rabshakeh's servants. They now say that we're your servants, that's the word they use. And they ask him, please speak in Aramaic, so the people on the wall that can hear what you're saying, they'll no longer understand what you're saying.

They're afraid that the people will become terrified of these words. But the Rabshakeh, he doesn't show any mercy to them. Instead, he adds threat and the hearing of these people on the walls.

He says in verse 12, has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you and not to the men sitting on the wall who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and drink their own urine?

The gist of the rest of the speech is him telling the people and Hezekiah's men, do not let Hezekiah deceive you. Don't let Him lead you to trust in the Lord because He will not deliver you.

And he uses the example of many other nations and their gods to say that no other nation, no other god has been able to stand against this Assyrian war machine and there will be no different here.

[6 : 20] You have no reason to think that your God will deliver you. And we have every reason to be certain that our army will conquer you because it's conquered every nation that we've come up against.

Don't be deceived by your king, by Hezekiah. Don't be misled. Don't be deceived. Don't be deceived by your king. Don't be deceived by your king. Instead, place your trust in the great king of Assyria.

Turn an allegiance to him. Make your peace with Sennacherib. And you'll no longer be doomed to eat your own dung or drink your own urine.

Instead, we read that you'll eat of your own vine, your own fig tree. You'll drink water of your own cistern until the point that you're taken away to a land of grain and wine, of bread and vineyard.

I mean, isn't that a pretty great promise? If you just turn from your king and from your God, you'll have this wonderful life of abundance.

[7 : 33] Instead of being forced to eat your own dung and drink your own urine. I mean, if I was offered to drink water and eat of a vine rather than my own dung and urine, I'm thinking that's a pretty reasonable offer.

I'm going to be saying to Hezekiah, this Rabshakeh, I think he's onto something here. Let's take the peace deal. I'm on board with this. But what's the obvious problem?

That's completely untrue. This brutal Assyrian empire. They don't deport people and then give them these lovely, lavish lives.

They deport people and they give them awful lives. They always treat those they conquer horrendously. And so now they're the ones, actually, who are trying to mislead God's people.

They're the ones who here are making false promises. Trying to drag God's people away from trusting in the promises of Yahweh, which never fail.

[8 : 39] They're the ones doing the misleading. But isn't that what the world always does? Things in the world. They promise everything.

They say whatever they think we want to hear. But they deliver on almost nothing. On paper, the world tells us that chasing a life of success, getting the best job, making the most money, great car, great house.

It tells us that all these things will leave us satisfied, content, happy, accomplished. But actually, what really happens? When our hope and our trust is in material things, tangible things, we're never satisfied.

We can never have enough. On paper, it promises that it will give us all we need. Makes these great promises. But in reality, the things of this world are empty promises, leading us astray, like the Assyrians are trying to do here.

We see that truth come in from someone who really has it all. An interview by Tom Brady, a famous American football player, when he'd just won his third Super Bowl at the peak of his game.

[9 : 58] Something he had strived for, dedicated his life to. And after achieving it, he was left saying in that interview, there's got to be more than this.

There's got to be more than this. He wasn't content. He wasn't satisfied. The world had made these promises to him. And when he got what he thought would bring them, those promises alive in his life, he was left with money.

He was left with fame. He was left with material possessions. But he was left with no satisfaction. He was left seeing the emptiness that the world offers.

And so the big challenge in this test is whether God's people are going to trust intangible things that they can see, that they can touch.

Or whether they'll trust in the words of the promises made by Yahweh, by the God of the Bible. It's okay to have faith when small, unimportant things are going on in our lives.

[11 : 07] But when the big things come, the question that the world asks us is that, is your God enough in the face of them?

The world asks us that every day in the small things. But also when the big things come, when that awful diagnosis comes, the world says, is your God enough?

When your bank balance heads towards the red, the world says, is your God enough? When your faith comes under testing, is your God enough?

Well, the Bible calls our God Jehovah Jireh. It's saying the Lord will provide. And he does that in all sorts of different ways. But he demands our allegiance and our trust.

And he will show us, he will show us in the midst of the most testing and the most trying times, that if we trust in him fully, he'll always show himself to be all that we need, whatever it is that we face.

[12 : 16] So King Sennacherib, in the beginning here, he brings the test of faith. And next, we're shown the right way to respond when that test comes.

So secondly, King Hezekiah, he responds to the test of faith. In chapter 37, as a whole, we see there how Hezekiah responds.

And at the heart of his response is his recognition that he is completely helpless. He sees his own helplessness here. And he demonstrates that he knows he's utterly powerless to do anything about the threat brought by the Assyrian Empire.

He could have responded by accepting that the king of Assyria was right. He could have tried to bargain with him in relation to the peace deal that he had offered, that he suggested.

He could have offered to serve him. These are all things he could have tried to do. But instead, he does what is right.

[13 : 18] He does the right thing. He doesn't forsake his allegiance to the Lord. He doesn't follow the example of King Ahaz, who back in chapter 7, when he comes under a threat of invasion, rather than turning to the Lord and looking to him.

He does as he pleases. Here, Hezekiah recognizes that his only hope, his only resource in the face of this test of faith, in the face of this threat, is to turn to the God of the Bible and appeal to him for help.

And this is what true faith does. George Muller, he famously said that faith begins when man's power ends. And it's when Hezekiah recognizes his powerlessness that his faith really begins.

And we see him throwing himself at the mercy of the living God. We don't know exactly what was said when Hezekiah tore his clothes and covered himself in sackcloth before going to the house of the Lord.

But it was clearly a sign of his complete and utter dependence upon the living God. And as he sends his men to Isaiah, his plea with Isaiah is that he would lift his voice up in prayer for the remnant of God's people that is left.

[14 : 48] We read that in verse 4 of chapter 37. And it's only fair to say that whatever reliance on Egypt that Hezekiah was called out for in chapter 36, he no longer looks to that.

He now looks solely to the Lord. The large part of the concern that he has isn't just for his life or for the lives of those who are serving him, but it's for the honor of the Lord's name.

In verse 4, there we read that Hezekiah says to the rabshake that he was sent to mock the living God. And again, you see that in verse 17.

He prays to the God of the Bible to bring deliverance. And you read there that he tells God to hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he sent to mock the living God.

And so as he prays that God would act, he's also praying that God would defend the honor of his name. And he also declares the reality that although these other nations and their gods, they all fell to this Assyrian army, he says that there were no gods at all.

[16 : 01] He says they were the work of men's hands. That's why they were destroyed. And so now, O Lord, save us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the Lord.

That is the response of faith. The person of faith, they recognize their own helplessness, but also the power, the immense power of our great God and King.

And the person of faith desires his name to be honored. You see, Hezekiah doesn't just want God to simply deliver his people, but he wants all the kingdoms of the earth to know that the Lord alone, he is God, that Yahweh is not to be mocked and that there is none that compare to Yahweh.

So when our faith comes under testing, this is an example of what we ought to do. We ought to turn to the Lord our God, recognizing that He is God and that we are creatures, recognizing that He is powerful and we are weak.

And it's in those moments when we're struggling to make ends meet that we turn to the living God and we recognize dependence upon Him and ask for His provision in our lives.

[17 : 27] or when you are a loved one, receive that hard diagnosis. Turn to the Lord, cast yourself before His throne of grace, asking for His healing, but also asking that in the midst of hardship, He would sustain.

One of the most God-honoring things that we'll see in this life is when a person of real faith is faced with a terminal diagnosis and they face it with a sense of peace that the Lord has given in the face of even death itself.

That provision comes from the Lord as He meets the needs of His people, even in the most difficult of situations. I saw this very thing in our previous church.

A lady, just in her 50s, she was healthy, she was starting to feel unwell and she was given this terminal diagnosis and it shook, shook the entire church as many of us struggled with it, struggled to come to terms with it and yet, the peace that she had as she faced the last months of her life was miraculous.

The Lord provided all that she needed in that moment. she remained joyful in the midst of this huge trial. She offered comfort to so many of us who struggled with it.

[18 : 57] She smiled and she laughed and cried with her friends and as she saw that day approaching, when she'd be at home with the Lord, she looked forward to it in the face of this terrible trial in her life and as I saw that, one of the questions I kept asking myself was, how do we prepare for such a test of faith to come in our lives?

And it seemed to me that because she was always working on her relationship with the living God, through reading His word, through praying, through serving Him, but through also trusting Him every single day for the little things in her life and those little tests of faith came.

And then when this huge test of faith came, it was only natural for her to continue doing what she had been doing because she had seen so many times the Lord provide all she needed and so she could be certain here that He would continue to provide for her even in this horrendous time, horrendous trial.

The Lord, He provides for His people, not always how we expect or hope, but when the test of faith comes and we look to Him, He provides all that we need.

Hezekiah, in these verses, responds to a huge test of faith in the living God. Even though this response of faith from King Hezekiah seems completely foolish to Sennacherib, it seems foolish to the Rabshakeh, we see in our third point that it is the right thing and that it is in Yahweh that real power lies.

[21 : 02] So King Sennacherib, he brings the test of faith. King Hezekiah, He shows us the response of faith. And then thirdly here, we see Yahweh, the great king, delivers His people.

Yahweh, the great king, delivers His people. It seems to me that the biggest mistake that Sennacherib made was of thinking that Yahweh was just like those other gods whom He had conquered.

but He found out the hard way that Yahweh is nothing like these other gods of the other nations who were made by men's hands. Yahweh is entirely in a league of His own.

God makes clear His righteous anger against the king of Assyrian, verse 23 and 24 of chapter 37. We read there God saying, He hasn't mocked Hezekiah, He hasn't mocked the people of Judah, but He has mocked the living God.

He's accused them of being like these false gods of other nations. He's accused them of being unable to deliver His people.

[22 : 38] And although perhaps on the face of it you can see why Assyria thought that their victory was certain, they defeated everyone else. So they thought it was foolish that this nation now would think they could conquer them.

And yet in the end what we see is that the fools were those who mocked Yahweh. The fools were those who questioned, who accused the God of the Bible and compared Him to false gods.

God tells them that He's nothing like the other gods that they've conquered. He tells them that all of their victories that they've had they were determined by the God of the Bible in verse 26 and 27.

He tells them that He knows everything about them. Verse 28, He says, I know you're sitting down and you're going out and coming in. And because they have raged against Yahweh, He says, I will put my hook in your nose and will turn you back the way you came.

This is a cruel way that the Assyrians are believed to have led those they captured away, not to a land of abundance but with a hook through their nose. And so God is using this same language to tell them that they are now going to receive a taste of their own medicine.

[24 : 08] And actually, this defeat of the Assyrian army that happens here, this is prophesied back in Isaiah, chapter 14. We read there, chapter 14, verse 24 and 25.

The Lord of hosts has sworn, as I have planned, so it shall be, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand, that I, he's friend to himself, I the Lord, I will break the Assyrian in my land and on my mountains trample him underfoot and his yoke shall depart from them and his burden from their shoulder.

This was all part of God's sovereign plan. This is him here keeping his word as Hezekiah came humbly before him in faith.

And the Lord, as he said he would do, himself secured the victory here in emphatic fashion. He doesn't decide here to raise up an army or to provide men to go and to fight.

Instead, he simply sends an angel of the Lord into the camp of the Assyrians and strikes down 185,000 people and their army.

[25 : 38] And by defeating them in that way, the Lord says to Sennacherib, to the Rabshakeh and to the surrounding nations that He is the one true God, that His power knows no bounds.

This seemingly unstoppable war machine known as the Assyrian Empire was no match for Yahweh, for the great king.

And you can actually go and you can visit the British Museum in London and in it there's an area dedicated to the Assyrian Empire and there's a ceramic tapestry around the room depicting different nations and their main city at the time whom they conquered.

And so after reading these chapters it comes as no surprise that Jerusalem doesn't appear on this tapestry. What can be found are letters between Sennacherib and Hezekiah where Sennacherib is making threats outside the Jerusalem walls that he's going to come and he's going to conquer and destroy Jerusalem.

But there's no more than that. There's no follow-up news of this great victory that are planned over Jerusalem. All the other victories are there but that one doesn't feature because he was conquered because Yahweh the great king delivered his people from his hands.

[27 : 15] The main threat at the beginning was in verse 4 and 5 of chapter 36 when the words came from the Rabshakeh on what do you rest this trust of yours?

Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? Hezekiah he led his people not to trust in other nations not to trust in an army or horses or chariots but to trust in the words of Yahweh to trust in the promises that he had made to his people and they were delivered.

and it's striking for us today as sinful people that to have our sin dealt with to have our rebellion against the living God resolved to come back into a relationship with him we don't trust in anything that this world has to offer we don't even trust in ourselves but just like the strategy in this passage to be delivered was to rest their trust in words well so it is for us but we rest our trust today in the word who became flesh and who dwelled among us and he did that all for the purpose that he would go to the cross and die in our place taking our sin and our shame dealing with it conquering sin and death so that he could be crowned as the great king

Jesus Christ the great deliverer of his people we don't earn that deliverance we don't contribute to that deliverance we don't trust in anything else we merely trust in the word become flesh who dwelled among us and who died in our place that is where we are ultimately delivered from sin and from death he did that so that we can share in his victory so that we can be delivered from death to life and so for us when the test of faith comes in our lives let us look to Christ let us look to the word that became flesh to our great king who's already delivered us from the punishment our sins deserve and who therefore will always provide for his people who will always sustain us when we journey through the dark valley promising that whatever happens we'll one day dwell in the house of the

Lord forever so when that test of faith comes we respond by trusting wholly in the Lord and we know that he'll provide for us because he promises that he'll do that and we can trust that especially by looking at the cross when he died in our place if he did that for us then of course he'll provide for us when we face times of trial times of testing and in the midst of all those hard times as he's with us we also have one eye at that final day when he comes and he takes us home to dwell with him forever not because we're good or we're great but because he's the great king and he is our great deliverer let's pray together let's pray