

“HEZEKIAH – A POSITION OF TRUST” 31-Mar-2019

Introduction [Slide 1]

King Hezekiah was a great king of Judah – one of the greatest. His father, King Ahaz, had sold out to the Assyrians, agreeing to make Judah a vassal state to Assyria and formally recognising the Assyrian gods. Hezekiah sought independence for Judah and broke his father’s agreement. This required a huge degree of trust and dependence upon the Lord – and Hezekiah was the man for the job! He was also a very generous man and a practical leader who oversaw great engineering and architectural projects. At the end of his life, he had an issue with pride, that rather spoiled the story of his life. But the fact remains that he trusted God like no other king – before or afterwards! How did this happen?

2 Kings 18 [Slide 2]

In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, Hezekiah son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. ² He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother’s name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. ³ He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done. ⁴ He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)

⁵ Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. ⁶ He held fast to the LORD and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. ⁷ And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. ⁸ From watchtower to fortified city, he defeated the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory.

His father Ahaz – a terrible ruler – followed pagan practices, worshiped the false gods of Canaan and had actually sacrificed one of his sons in the fire to the Ammonite god, Molek. It was amazing that Hezekiah, at the age of 25, was so committed to the Lord, rather than following in his father’s footsteps. Perhaps his mother was the main positive influence on his early life – a key ministry for Christian mothers the world over! God was also gracious in giving him Isaiah the prophet as a companion and mentor all his life.

He was a reformer. Compared to his forefather, David – what an honour! He cleansed Judah of all the idols and pagan worship places. The nation was obsessively idolatrous – even that bronze snake of Moses had been treated like a god. ‘Nehushtan’ means ‘bronze... snake’.

[Slide 3] **“Trust”** – “A firm belief in the reliability, truth or ability of someone or something”. Putting the whole weight of your life upon the Lord. *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” (Prov. 3:5-6.)*

How does it feel to be *distrusted*? God feels the same way! *“Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.” (Numbers 20:12).* Moses showed contempt for God’s character, his command and his power to act. Adam and Eve made the very unwise decision to trust in the words and character of the devil rather than in God’s.

Hezekiah was unique in this respect – of *all* the kings of Judah – since Solomon’s death. What an honour! He ‘held fast to the Lord’. Do we trust God sufficiently? Do we hold fast to him? Trust is not a theoretical virtue: it must be shown in real life examples and encounters. Let’s read some more of Hezekiah’s life story...

2 Chronicles 29 [Slides 4, 5 and 6]

³ *In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of the LORD and repaired them. ⁴ He brought in the priests and the Levites, assembled them in the square on the east side ⁵ and said: “Listen to me, Levites! Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the temple of the LORD, the God of your ancestors. Remove all defilement from the sanctuary.*

¹⁷ *They began the consecration on the first day of the first month, and by the eighth day of the month they reached the portico of the LORD. For eight more days they consecrated the temple of the LORD itself, finishing on the sixteenth day of the first month.*

²⁷ *Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the LORD began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel. ²⁸ The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the musicians played and the trumpets sounded. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed.*

²⁹ *When the offerings were finished, the king and everyone present with him knelt down and worshiped. ³⁰ King Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to praise the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness and bowed down and worshiped.*

2 Chronicles 31

⁵ *As soon as the order went out, the Israelites generously gave the first fruits of their grain, new wine, olive oil and honey and all that the fields produced. They brought a great amount, a tithe of everything. ⁶ The people of Israel and Judah who lived in the towns of Judah also brought a tithe of their herds and flocks and a tithe of the holy things dedicated to the LORD their God, and they piled them in heaps. ⁷ They began doing this in the third month and finished in the seventh month. ⁸ When Hezekiah and his officials came and saw the heaps, they praised the LORD and blessed his people Israel.*

⁹ *Hezekiah asked the priests and Levites about the heaps; ¹⁰ and Azariah the chief priest, from the family of Zadok, answered, “Since the people began to bring their contributions to the temple of the LORD, we have had enough to eat and plenty to spare, because the LORD has blessed his people, and this great amount is left over.”*

It was 715 BC and Hezekiah had received full control of the nation's affairs. His first act was to reverse the vandalism that his father Ahaz had done to God's temple – and to reinstate the true worship of the Lord. He began with the doors, that had been locked, and then had the temple cleansed of idols, removing them and re-consecrating the building for holy use – set apart *for* the Lord. He showed leadership in reinstating the priesthood and full-time workers, training them in the tasks they should have been doing all the time.

We are God's temple today. What state is it in now? Does it need a bit of a spring-clean? Does it need re-dedicating to the work of the Lord? Idolatry is doing things *we* want in the *way* that we want to; perhaps we need to re-commit to doing what *Jesus* wants in the *way* that he wants things done!

Hezekiah then prioritised the proper worship of God – including sacrifice, singing and praying. All worship should involve sacrifice in our lives! It *should* cost us something. It is not normally *easy*. For us, it is the most wonderful and normal thing in the world, but that demands the closest *attention* in the world. How are we doing? Have we become lazy in worshipping God? Are we tempted to give ourselves a Sunday off? Have we stopped thirsting for Him? Are we so spiritually dehydrated that we don't even realise how thirsty we are? Worship *defines* us. It is fundamentally a matter of *trust*. *“By faith we believe that God exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6)*. By beginning all this in the first month of the first year of his reign, Hezekiah was making it top priority.

He then encouraged generous giving to God. He began with himself to be an example. Judah responded by bring their first fruits offerings of *all* their income, and they heaped them up in vast heaps around the temple. It took them five months to complete that task! This greatly encouraged the leadership and resulted in praise and blessing. In fact, this generosity was contagious and even God himself joined in! *“The Lord has blessed his people and this great amount is left over”*. This reminds me of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, a miracle of super-abundancy. For us also, as we give generously and even sacrificially, God opens his wallet too!

For many years now, the total giving in TCF has decreased year on year, as has the giving *per member*. The Holy Spirit is calling on us to reverse this trend and to plant seeds of generosity that will become a harvest of miraculous provision. God is *already* blessing us with his abundance, but there is so much more that he wants to do. For us, it is a matter of *trusting* in God's provision as we pursue a lifestyle of generosity.

Back to Hezekiah's life story...

2 Chronicles 32 [Slide 7]

After all that Hezekiah had so faithfully done, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah. He laid siege to the fortified cities, thinking to conquer them for himself. ² When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and that he intended to wage war against

Jerusalem, ³ he consulted with his officials and military staff about blocking off the water from the springs outside the city, and they helped him. ⁴ They gathered a large group of people who blocked all the springs and the stream that flowed through the land. “Why should the kings of Assyria come and find plenty of water?” they said. ⁵ Then he worked hard repairing all the broken sections of the wall and building towers on it. He built another wall outside that one and reinforced the terraces of the City of David. He also made large numbers of weapons and shields.

⁶ He appointed military officers over the people and assembled them before him in the square at the city gate and encouraged them with these words: ⁷ “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. ⁸ With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people gained confidence from what Hezekiah the king of Judah said.

2 Kings 19 [Slides 8 & 9]

¹⁴ Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. ¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: “LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. ¹⁶ Give ear, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.

¹⁷ “It is true, LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands.

¹⁸ They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. ¹⁹ Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, LORD, are God.”

²⁰ Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria. ²¹ This is the word that the LORD has spoken against him:....

²⁹ “This will be the sign for you, Hezekiah:

“This year you will eat what grows by itself,
and the second year what springs from that.

But in the third year sow and reap,
plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

³⁰ Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah
will take root below and bear fruit above.

³¹ For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant,
and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors...”

³⁵ That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all

the dead bodies! ³⁶ So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.

One of Hezekiah's political actions was to declare 'independence' from the totalitarian Assyrian empire that had swallowed up the Northern territory of Israel, and all the surrounding nations too. Judah was a small nation 'on the edge' – half in and half out. They paid 'protection money' to the evil empire to avoid being totally overrun. Hezekiah decided to trust in God alone and to stop trying to buy peace with money.

Trusting God does *not* mean that we just do nothing. Hezekiah realised that Jerusalem suffered two weaknesses – an unreliable water supply and insufficient defences – and he also realised that he could do something about these. By an amazing feat of engineering, an underground spring *partly outside the walls* was channelled by underground tunnel 530m long into the Pool of Siloam within the city. This ensured a plentiful water supply to Jerusalem and prevented *any* of the spring water making its way outside to supply the attacking armies. Hezekiah also reinforced the city walls considerably. In other words, he did what he could and trusted *God* to do what he *couldn't*. God will *not* do miracles for us when we are capable of helping ourselves in certain areas of our lives. E.g. Venezuela and healings.

But Hezekiah *certainly* needed miraculous intervention as far as the Assyrian army was concerned. They had incredible expertise in siege warfare, a large ruthless well-equipped professional army, and a deserved reputation for sheer unadulterated terror. They *always* made public examples of those enemy kings and commanders who had resisted them, using horrific physical punishments and tortures, such as impaling alive on poles, flaying alive and walling up their victims. The common people were then exiled hundreds of miles away from home. The only way out of all this was to surrender without a fight.

Yet Hezekiah still trusted in the Lord to rescue him and to rescue his countrymen. Trust *has* to be tested – sometimes with your very life! What does this say about his relationship with God therefore, that he didn't even *contemplate* surrendering? *Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. ⁸ With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles."*

Hezekiah was trusting, but *not* complacent. He realised that trust and prayer go hand in hand. In his prayer he includes the following:

- His primary concern was not *his* safety, but God's supremacy, reputation and glory.
- He was realistic and acknowledged that, humanly speaking, Judah had no hope
- He recognised it was a *spiritual* battle and that God was superior in every way

Let's examine *our* prayer lives to check that we are genuinely trusting God and not being passive and fatalistic. Prioritise God's glory. In Isaiah 60:22, God's reputation is on the line.

The prophetic words of Isaiah certainly helped raise Hezekiah's faith levels. Prophecy is given to us for "...strengthening, encouragement and comfort..." (1 Cor 14:3). I was particularly struck by 2 Kings 19:29-31, which I think is also a word for TCF: [Slide 10]

*"This year you will eat what grows by itself,
and the second year what springs from that.*

*But in the third year sow and reap,
plant vineyards and eat their fruit.*

*³⁰ Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah
will take root below and bear fruit above.*

*³¹ For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant,
and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors..."*

In its original context, it meant that the Assyrian army's presence would prevent any genuine sowing and reaping for two years – living off the scraps of the land – but that in the third year, beginning in the September/October, intentional sowing would start again, and harvesting re-commence from the following April. A Jewish 'year' began with the Passover month – normally April – and ended in March. (Like a tax year.)

For us, it is highly significant that TCF started meeting again *here* in our 'spacious place' on 2nd April 2017 – having severed our connections with All Saints. Today is therefore the last day of the second year that we have been back here. We have been rebuilding our foundations – as God has commanded us. Whilst God has been incredibly gracious to us, it has certainly also felt as though we were living off the 'scraps of the land' at times! Tomorrow, our Year Three begins. I have a sense from the Holy Spirit that the intentional rhythms of sowing and reaping, planting and harvesting, need to restart and that a new season of incredible fruitfulness is just ahead. We are a 'remnant' that will take root below and bear fruit above. We have been given some angels *specifically* to fire up a huge revival in this church, this borough and this nation. Aslan is on the move!

For Hezekiah, his trust was amply rewarded: The Angel of the Lord himself came down and miraculously slaughtered 185,000 of the enemy's soldiers. Not surprisingly, the King of Assyria departed for Nineveh, never to return. Jerusalem was given its freedom!
Freedom!!!

One final example from Hezekiah's illustrious life...

2 Kings 20 [Slides 11 & 12]

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover."

² Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, ³ "Remember, LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

⁴ Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: ⁵ “Go back and tell Hezekiah, the ruler of my people, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the LORD. ⁶ I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.’”

⁷ Then Isaiah said, “Prepare a poultice of figs.” They did so and applied it to the boil, and he recovered.

⁸ Hezekiah had asked Isaiah, “What will be the sign that the LORD will heal me and that I will go up to the temple of the LORD on the third day from now?”

⁹ Isaiah answered, “This is the LORD’s sign to you that the LORD will do what he has promised: Shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or shall it go back ten steps?”

¹⁰ “It is a simple matter for the shadow to go forward ten steps,” said Hezekiah. “Rather, have it go back ten steps.”

¹¹ Then the prophet Isaiah called on the LORD, and the LORD made the shadow go back the ten steps it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.

Sickness is a very real test of our relationship with the Lord. Every minute of the day, you are reminded that God has not yet healed you. This can be very corrosive of trust in God’s character, motives and even abilities. Is God *able*? Is he *willing*? *When* will he heal me? Does God even *heal today*? How can I *trust* God in my life if I am not seeing my *healing*?

Hezekiah faced the same challenges. He had a life-threatening disease and his friend brings him a prophecy that he *will* die! Game over! Yet Hezekiah has a deep relationship with the Lord and is not afraid to show his emotions and to plead for a stay of execution. He trusts his God to listen and to act, despite the apparently certain outcome. God is so kind and gracious and actually changes his mind in response to Hezekiah’s prayer: *I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you.* In addition, he reassures him that he will add 15 years to his life – and confirms this by a miracle of creation: he made time go backwards!

For us, we are *not* necessarily stuck with our sicknesses for life! I don’t subscribe to the doctrine that everyone should be healed all the time – or no-one would ever die. But I do think that there is a lot of room for more faith, more expectation, more miracles, more healing and more answers to prayer than we can ever dream of.

A postscript in Hezekiah’s life – and a word of warning for us:

2 Chronicles 32 [Slide 13]

²⁵ But Hezekiah’s heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore the LORD’s wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. ²⁶ Then Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the LORD’s wrath did not come on them during the days of Hezekiah.

³¹ But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.

Having a miracle happen in our lives can make us proud and complacent if we are not careful. Hezekiah must have felt invincible after his healing and God's promises. For a while he allowed pride to sour his relationship with his God and affect his kingly judgements. Not many people are entrusted with the date of their deaths because it can actually *erode* our trust in God. Usually trust is on a firmer foundation when we *don't* know these things:

Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let the one who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on their God. (Isaiah 50:10).

TCF has received some amazing prophetic words from God. I'm sure that many more are on the way too. So, let's watch out for that *pride* as we begin to see more and more incredible miracles and healings in our community. The same Jesus who said "You shall do greater works than me" is also prepared to humble us, just as he did the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 – Paul's Thorn In His Flesh. Far better to humble *ourselves* first.

Finally, some questions for each of us to consider... **[Slide 14]**

- **Do we believe that God is completely truthful, reliable and capable of looking after us, whilst fulfilling his plans for us?**
- **Are we prepared to trust the Lord more than anyone?**
- **Is worship a sacrifice to us? Are we giving generously?**
- **Are we ready to put our lives on the line for Him?**
- **Are we willing to pray and to work hard too?**
- **Are we zealous for God's glory and reputation?**
- **How are we trusting God in sickness?**
- **How do we deal with pride in our lives?**