

SERMON

PREACHED BY MR L S B HYDE

AT

'SALEM' CHAPEL, CARSHALTON

Text  
Isaiah 38, verses 4 - 6

Thursday evening  
14th June 1979

Then came the word of the Lord to Isaiah, saying, Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city.

It is a great blessing for any people to have words transmitted to them from God. We therefore find in the opening verse: 'Then came the word of the Lord to Isaiah.' Every sent minister of God will know this experience, and sometimes it will be with a particular purpose that the word comes from God to the prophet. A very mysterious experience it may be, incomprehensible to the majority of people. But nonetheless, if the word is to be profitable, if the word is to come into your soul as a word from God, then surely the servants of God to be used in this respect must have the essence of what we have in this first verse. 'Then came the word of the Lord to Isaiah.' If the word comes in this way, we may say concerning it that the word will be a true word. It will also be an essential word, and furthermore, it will be an apposite word. Maybe some of you have enjoyed the experience of a word of the Lord coming to you through the ministry when each of these three points have been remarkably outstanding, and not least the last one - an apposite word.

We may attempt to speak words of comfort or instruction to our friends, to our relatives, to our children, to our parents; and we may be wide of the mark in speaking those words. How much, then, must we value the word of God sent through the medium of His own prophets and servants; this being marked by the profitableness of the word to your soul, to your case. 'Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.' And this is one aspect of this remarkable witness that the Lord is God. He speaks through His servants.

We must not, however, miss this important point - that the word of the Lord came to Isaiah. He did not seek it, he could not seek it. He had to quietly wait until that word came. He may sit for days; on the other hand, he may sit but for a short time. But the word of the Lord came unto Isaiah, and the word that came was with a definite purpose and for a certain person. 'Go, and say to Hezekiah.' How many people there were in Judah in the days of Hezekiah, yet to none of those was the word of God sent on this occasion. 'Go and say to Hezekiah.' Why was it necessary that the prophet should have this special message to give to Hezekiah? He had already been to him. As we read in the first three verses, his first words to Hezekiah on this occasion were solemn words. 'Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die and not live.' So different from when we may take it upon ourselves sometimes to try to put people right. Often the consequences are very sad and we wish that we had never touched the matter. But this word came with divine power, because it came from God. 'Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.'

If we should think that this applied to Hezekiah in his outward deportment in the manner of his ruling the kingdom, in his office of being king over Judah, we may well be mistaken. If we read his prayer we may then understand that what God was speaking to him about through the prophet was not his natural circumstances but his spiritual condition. A spiritual condition is often described by a man's prayer. It may be that you would be astounded if one of our brethren here was to pray as Hezekiah did in a public prayer-meeting. 'Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.' Here was a man, whatever teaching he may have had, who was now depending upon his own life, upon his own works. We could well imagine the Apostle Paul speaking to him as he wrote to the church at Galatia, when he said: 'O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? ... Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.' Hezekiah had fallen, as we might feel, into a sad reliance upon his outward fleshly works. 'How I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.' How quickly the power of the Spirit came upon Hezekiah. No sooner were the words out of his mouth than we read: 'He wept sore.' We are not told the details of the soul exercises of Hezekiah from the first visit of the prophet to the second visit of the prophet, but it is very clear that the Lord looked down from heaven, as He looks down upon His children, to discover the work of the Spirit in their souls as they are brought rapidly, deeply, to a spirit of repentance.

It is a solemn and yet blessed experience in the fifth verse here. We may consider what is involved in repentance. 'Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears.' We may often feel concerned because of the lack of repentance in the present day. It is a point very rarely touched upon, as I would judge, in the preaching of the word; and yet how essential it is that it should ever be before us. That place in which Hezekiah was in is typical not only of those of Judaea and Israel, and also of the Jewish rabbis and the Pharisees that lived in the Lord's time. The Lord Jesus went forth to preach after He had been baptized and had been led, or driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil; then it was that the Lord Jesus went forth to preach. And this is the manner of His preaching, a manner which deserves our considered attention. 'Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying: The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.' These words spoken by the Lord Jesus were to those people that were bound by the law; and those words spoken to Hezekiah may well be said to have referred to his being bound by the law. There is a spirit in man which is bound by the law; in which case there is ample opportunity and need for us to listen to these words of our Lord Jesus Christ, for Hezekiah to listen to these words. 'Repent ye, and believe the gospel.'

Are we dependant upon the same things that Hezekiah speaks of here? 'I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart.' How right, how good, to be such. How right, we may say, are those desires and confessions. But what about the spirit? Is this looked upon, this walking in truth and with a perfect heart, this being good in the sight of God? I say - are these looked upon as the works of the flesh or as the fruits of the Spirit? Now, if they are regarded in God's sight, whatever they may be regarded as in your sight, they will need to be repented of. It would appear that Hezekiah had become deeply entrenched in those thoughts, and let us not think that we shall be otherwise. We need continual reminders that we are saved by grace. We need continual reminders that there is no other way by which we can be saved but by grace. And yet, because our nature is carnal and our nature is such that it is more attracted to legal works, obtaining salvation by the works of the flesh, we can so easily become addicted to this without knowing it. This was virtually the situation which applied to Hezekiah here. But we see the kindness of God to Hezekiah. Can you see the kindness of God to you in looking down from heaven, His holy place, seeing you wrapped up in this, even in the face of death, almost developing a smugness - a smugness which will so deceive us that we shall have the brazenness to come before God with these words: 'Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee.' How different from the words of the Psalmist: 'Remember me, O Lord, with the favour which thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation.'

Now it was necessary that the word of God should come unto the soul of Hezekiah, that he might repent and believe the gospel. We cannot begin to repent without first of all being shown that we are wrong, that we are depending upon something that is base, that we are depending upon something that will fail us in the end. Will you not bless God for ever and ever if God delivers you from false resting places, from false props, from pursuing a false religion, even if it means coming into the bitter experience that Hezekiah came into, when God said to him: Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live. In just a few words the Lord tells this generation following - that is ours - and the generations that have succeeded from Hezekiah: 'I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears.' Would it not be worth something for us to have this kind of religion? Are we so often prayerless? Are we so often tearless? Will it be necessary for God to bring us to the brink of the grave before we shall become really serious about repentance? See the necessity of it, for a deep sense and feeling of it also. So it was with Hezekiah, and may it not be said, must it not be said with perfect truth that it is that which is needful for you and for me if we are to live before God.

Now we should bear this point in mind, that the prayer which God heard and the tears which God saw would appear not to have been heard or seen by anybody else. Where there is a true repentance it will be between God and the soul. Have you brought prayers and wept tears when no-one else has been aware of it? Sometimes it may be in the night season. Others know nothing about it. The wife or the husband may know nothing about the prayers and the tears in the night season when God brings the spirit of repentance, because of their dependence upon something base instead of trusting sovereign grace. 'I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears.' How can we know what this is all about? How can we know anything about the prayer of Hezekiah that was so secret between himself and the Lord? Well, it pleased the Holy Ghost to record this in retrospect, as we have it in the ninth verse and the following. 'The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness.' Now he deals with himself very severely. 'I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living; I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.' How closely did Hezekiah come to the pit of despair, to get to such a place as to feel he was utterly lost. 'I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living.' "That can only mean my destiny is hell, because hell is where God is not and never will be seen in His glory and in His mercy and in His majesty."

This was the work which God began. It is not a work which you can begin, or myself, in respect of ourselves or of other people. It is God Who begins, it is God that carries on and it is God that completes. 'I have heard thy prayer, I

have seen thy tears.' How much instruction was sealed upon the heart of Hezekiah during this period. Job tells us that He sealeteth the hand of every man. Hezekiah's hand was completely sealed here. Death was very close to him, and here he was cut off from trusting in himself. Think of it in respect to the present day worship. We might well think of the chapters that we have read, the hymns that we have sung: 'My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.' Do our actions go with the words we say? Well, being faced with death will prove it. God may well have to say to us: Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live. Then it will prove what our singing of those lines that we have referred to really means. Or are we trusting in ourselves? Are we thinking that because of our regular attendance on the services of God's house, our regular reading of the Scriptures, our regular presentation of our prayers before God will get us to heaven? These are fruits of righteousness, but they are never to be considered as giving us any commendation when we get to heaven's gate. We should never forget the case of Ignorance portrayed by John Bunyan in the Pilgrim's Progress.

'I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears.' What an exercise went on in those dark hours, because they were dark hours. It includes the well-known passage: 'O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me. What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul.' So Hezekiah learnt that God had done it. Now, we pass through many adversities, we pass through many trials; we pass through many afflictions; can we say it, because we ought to say it, that God hath done it? God hath done it. 'Whatever cross lies at thy door, it cometh from the Lord.' It can only be good. How good it is to have cause to kiss the cross! Surely Hezekiah would have every reason to bless God continually for such an occasion when God stopped him in a downward religious trend. 'I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears.' But it did bring out some good things, because this instruction was sealed upon Hezekiah's heart. 'O Lord, by these things men live; and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live.' Live before God, live and walk before Him as we are required to do. You will remember the word spoken to Abraham by the eternal God, where He says: "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." We should say that God will never ask you to do anything that is not possible, that is not possible by the grace of God given. But what does it mean to walk before God perfectly? Hezekiah says here: 'I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart.' What had Abraham to do if he was to walk before his God to perfection? It meant leaning upon the righteousness of Another, depending upon the holy blood of the Son of God to cleanse him from his sin, the holy life of the Son of God to provide for him a robe of

righteousness. Hence, Hezekiah says: 'The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day.' Walking before God is walking in dependence upon God, also praising God for His wonderful mercies. 'O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.'

Then we go on to observe the next point: 'Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.' Now this was no whim or fancy. No such things ever obtain with God. 'I will add unto thy days fifteen years.' There was that which had to be accomplished in those fifteen years. If God should bring us to the gates of death and add unto us a specific time, if we are the people of God then it is for a specific purpose. And that specific purpose is that the glory of God may be revealed, that the purposes of God may be observed. One of the points is mentioned in the last verse of our text this evening. 'I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city.' Now you see, Hezekiah had already had dealings with Sennacherib. Hezekiah was a man of prayer, undoubtedly. He was a man that walked before God and in many respects we might even go so far as to say that Hezekiah was quite justified in presenting the prayer that he did. But there was something wrong in it and he felt there was something wrong in it. Even though we have been upright before men, and that should be carefully considered by us, nevertheless we need to die upon the merits of Christ. We need to come to lean wholly upon Him for our salvation. Fifteen years wasn't just to satisfy the fleshly part of Hezekiah. Fifteen years was to be used up in further demonstrations of the Lord's mercies, of His mighty acts, of His wonderful working, of His wonderful counsel. 'I will add unto thy days fifteen years.'

These words have sometimes had their application to some of the children of God. Where it has been so, how those years have been watched! 'Fifteen years.' What is to happen in those fifteen years? There is to be a ripening, the power of grace being more and more magnified. The hymn puts it like this: 'Thou shalt see my glory soon, When the work of grace is done.' We may wonder sometimes why some live to a great age. We can only conclude that the work of grace, where those people are gracious, has not been completed. We cannot begin to go into details in this respect, but surely if the work of grace is done, then there is no further purpose in their remaining upon the earth. The work of grace! What is the work of grace? 'He must increase, I must decrease.' How difficult it is for us to get in a decreased situation! O the power of that great 'I'.

Are our visions of Christ in His glory in a cloud? Hezekiah was receiving the word of the Lord from a man, Isaiah, who had seen the glory of the Lord. This is described to us in the sixth chapter. I think it is in the Gospel according to John where the commentary on this sixth chapter is this: 'Which the prophet spake when he saw the glory of the Lord.' Here again it was an experience connected

with death. In Hezekiah's case he didn't die, in Isaiah's case he didn't die. But someone died. 'In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.' What did Hezekiah see? Would he not have seen this? Is this not what made him pray as he did? Is this not that which made him cry as he did? Listen to what Isaiah sees and what he said: 'Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.' We may pause here just to mention this point. How many people are looking for an occasion still when that Scripture will be fulfilled: 'And the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.' Now Isaiah had it just at this time. 'The whole earth is full of his glory.' We may therefore ask ourselves this evening: Has that experience come into our soul, when the glory of the Lord has covered the earth as the waters cover the sea? Isaiah's soul was filled with the glory of the Lord. 'And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.' When this took place, Isaiah's confession was this: 'Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.'

Hezekiah, with his fifteen years added, was being deeply and more deeply prepared to see the glory of the Lord in its fulness. Do we feel that we can remember such a time when God's indictments were so heavy upon us that we felt just like Hezekiah? 'Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter; I did mourn as a dove: mine eyes fail with looking upward.' Some people's eyes wouldn't fail with looking upward because they don't look upward enough. But it was so with Hezekiah. Would it be so with us? When we are looking upward, then it is that we are ripening for glory. We can't lay down any hard and fast rule particularly as to time, as to how long it will take in God's purposes to ripen you for glory. But one of the points to be considered is this: Are we looking upward to such an extent that our eyes fail sometimes with looking upward? Let us remember that other passage of Scripture which says: 'Look up, for your redemption draweth nigh.' Then again there are those cheerful words, encouraging words, to those who are looking for His appearing.

Can we say that a period has been added to our life, when spiritual experience has brought us to the brink of the grave, and that has made us to say: 'I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living. My sins now are greater than they have ever been before. Not only have I the sins of unregeneracy, but I have the sins of my religion, sins against light and knowledge. I should have known better. I have heard the gospel directing me to faith in Jesus

Christ. But now I am in this miserable situation of trusting in what I have done and the manner of my living." Fifteen years for God to work, for God to do this, to perfect that which concerneth me. O, how emphatic is the Psalmist when he says: 'He will perfect that which concerneth me.' Then again: 'This God is our God; He will be our guide even unto death.' 'I will add unto thy days fifteen years.' In Hezekiah's position he was to see God working and putting down his enemies. 'I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city.' Did this look possible? There had been so much desire from the king of Assyria and the Assyrian people to bring Judah to nothing.

Now we may look to a parallel in our spiritual experiences. Are we oppressed from certain quarters? Are we oppressed by ourselves, by the sin in our nature? Are we oppressed by the deceitfulness of sin, and shall we say it will never be any different? Well then, what a mercy for fifteen years to be added to our life in which we shall see the power of sin put down by the death of Christ; wherein we shall see that He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification, see our enemies dead upon the sea shore. So it was promised to the Israelites. 'The enemies which thou seest today thou shalt see no more for ever.' It doesn't seem possible. It didn't seem possible to the Israelites, it didn't seem possible to Hezekiah that the Assyrians would be vanquished; and it doesn't seem possible to you and to me that our enemies, the enemies of our souls, can ever be vanquished. Fifteen years are added in which, by the mercy and favour of God, we can see deliverance for Jacob, the mighty power of God being revealed, an opportunity to observe that He is indeed excellent in working and wonderful in counsel; culminating in deliverance. It is well said that must we wait until the day of death before the Canaanite no longer dwells in the land? Indeed, we may well have to wait till the day of death. What a glorious end! Fifteen years gradually being prepared for eternal victory, gradually being prepared, seeing this overcome and that overcome, continually having to say: Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake; until we come to the end. Not to speak as Hezekiah speaks here, but to speak with those words so full of faith, so full of glory, spoken by Job when he said: 'For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand in the latter day upon the earth.'

How different was this confession of Job in the midst of his affliction, to the confession and prayer of Hezekiah when the Lord brought this situation of dying before him. 'And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.' What a good end to fifteen years of extended life, wherein there has been spiritual preparation and by the power of grace a development of a longing for Christ. 'For to me to live



is Christ, and to die is gain;' so that we may die in a right way, die in the Lord, die trusting in the Lord. I like those lines of the hymn-writer: 'I hope to die shouting: the Lord will appear.' You see, he died in faith, and every one of God's children will die in faith. It will be nothing wavering, nothing wavering.

Stephen died in faith. He said: 'I see the heavens opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.' What faith, what a sight was soon to come upon him. He was then to enter into the glory of the Lord that he had loved, that he had preached, that he had faithfully defended. He saw the Lord standing. There is something to my mind quite important about this. He was standing. If you have a visitor come to your house and they entered your room, if you were a man then it would be right for you to stand up immediately to receive your visitor, not to remain seated. See the condescension of the Almighty God, that He should be standing ready to receive His bride, and every member contained in that name, unto His holy and felicitous habitation. 'Come, thou blessed of My Father, enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' 'O, may I live to reach the place where He unveils His lovely face.'

May it be our blessed privilege, favour, and mercy, by the hand of God, by the power of God, by the grace of God, to come to the end of our journey with these words before us: 'So he bringeth them unto their desired haven.'

Amen.

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