

A PROMISE OF DELIVERANCE

How many of you remember the Western films that were so typical of the late 1940s and early 1950s? A lot of them all had a similar theme. There were the good guys and the bad guys. The good guys were usually the families that were crossing the vast open spaces in a wagon train or the struggling ranchers or farmers that were trying to carve out a new life for themselves. The bad guys were the renegade Indians or the ruthless land barons that were trying to gain control of the territories. It would seem that near the end of the movie that the good guys would be surrounded by the bad guys and that the good guys were going to all be killed. But just in the nick-of-time the cavalry would come charging in with the bugler tooting the charge and the good guys would win. This is sort of the same theme as the A-Team -- the good guys win by some unlikely event or series of events. We see this happening and we feel good about it, because this the way things ought to work. A lot of the time, however, it just doesn't work that way. A lot of the time, it seems that the "good guys" get wiped out. Nevertheless, we need to believe in the potential of help being there no matter how remote it may seem.

We hear stories of faith about a family that has given up their job to "do the Lord's work" and they find themselves not knowing where their next meal is coming from. There they are with no money and no food in the house and as the time for the evening meal approaches, someone knocks on the door and leaves a basket of food. Yet there are other families that go to bed hungry and no food comes to them.

We must be careful about generalizing about such situations and what makes the difference in such cases, but we can see incidences in the history of Judah where the difference in victory or defeat was dependent on faith in God and a willingness to rely on what He promises. We have seen where King Ahaz was given an opportunity to put his trust in God and to even define a miracle for God to preform as proof of God's sovereignty and yet he was unwilling to cooperate with God. In contrast to such lack of faith we are going to be looking now at King Hezekiah who went to God in simple child-like faith to lay his problems before God trusting that God would help.

II KINGS 19:14-19 That must have been "some letter" to have caused Hezekiah such distress. The Assyrians had defeated the Northern Kingdom (Israel) some 15 to 20 years earlier and they had demanded and received tribute from many of the other nations in the Middle East. Judah was one of those nations that was paying tribute. When their king, Sargon II, died, Judah stopped paying tribute as did many other nations in that area. The new king, Sennacherib, saw that such loss of revenue would hurt the economy of his nation and went about the task of reestablishing control. Judah as well as most of the nations were forced to start paying tribute again. Sennacherib was not satisfied with that, he demanded that Jerusalem completely surrender to him. Hezekiah did not surrender and the oral demand was followed by a written demand. In the first demand, the Assyrian king ridiculed Hezekiah and accused him of deceiving his people that they could survive an attack from the Assyrians. In the letter Sennacherib ridiculed God and accused Him of deceiving both the king and the people of Judah. That's when Hezekiah went to the Temple and spread this message out before the Lord and, in fact, read it to Him.

Hezekiah did not have illusions of greatness as many people in positions of authority do. He realized that only God could provide deliverance from the situations that life throws at us. He started out recognizing that God is the Creator of heaven and earth. If you want to get an idea of the greatness of God, that is the place to start. When we consider the vastness of the universe and minute detail of even the simplest of life forms, then we stand in awe of the One that created it. The next

thing that Hezekiah did was to acknowledge that God cares. Hezekiah did not hesitate to ask the God of Creation to stop and listen to his problem. Hezekiah did not minimize the magnitude of the problem, but acknowledged the power of his enemy. Sometimes we fail to realize that we have enemies and consequently fail to seek God's help in life. Next, we see that Hezekiah recognized that salvation comes from God and he asked for the Lord to save them. Finally, the importance of using whatever that happens to us in life as an opportunity to point others to God and away from ourselves is the necessary humility that can open up the power of God in the life of a person.

II KINGS 19:20,32-34 God was quick to respond to the leader of the people of God when he sought the Lord's help. The message from God came to Isaiah and Isaiah sent it on to Hezekiah. The first part of the message was assurance that God had heard the prayer. This was not just an acknowledgment that God was aware that Hezekiah had prayed, but it was a statement that God had paid attention and had accepted Hezekiah's petition as a valid concern. If Hezekiah had prayed, "Lord, I want you to make me rich and famous," the answer may have come back, "I have not heard you." In other words, I will not pay attention to such a request and I simply don't accept that as a valid request. But Hezekiah had prayed a legitimate prayer that was in line with God's will and God was ready to move on behalf of the king and the people of Judah. God made some very specific promises to Hezekiah regarding this situation and events were already underway to ensure that these promises would come true.

Problems for Sennecherib were heating up on another front where the Assyrians were trying to assert their power near the city of Libnah. However, Sennecherib had left a considerable force outside the walls of Jerusalem with the intent of moving against them at the appropriate time. However, God intervened by sending an angel among the Assyrians and as a result 185,000 were killed. This devastated the forces of Sennecherib and he pulled out of the area and returned to Ninevah. He did not shoot an arrow or any of the other things he had threatened to do.

The lesson for us is that God is capable of dealing with any of our problems, no matter how large or how small. Not only is He capable, He is also willing to do so. The real lesson is that we need to learn is that nothing or no one else can be the saving power in our lives.