

Title: Don't just do something, stand there!
Text: Isaiah 36.1-37.7
Theme: No kidding, Our God Saves!!
Series: Isaiah #29
Prop Stmt No way out reveals the fact that God is your only hope.
Aim: Until you realize that you have no other hope, you will never realize how great of a hope you have in Christ.

We love it when people tell us that we can have everything that we have ever wanted, (our best life) right now. But, the voice that tells us that, said the same thing in Genesis 3 and, as Ligon Duncan said, it always comes with a hiss. It's the same voice that questions, then challenges, and then seeks to replace what God says.

Read Isaiah 36.1 – 37.7

God said, my ways are not your ways. Neither is God's view of history our view of history. Isaiah 36-37 describe an event that is, in essence a giant hinge in world history. The Assyrian Empire became the undisputed powerhouse of the world because her army was one of the most ruthless, efficient, devastating forces in all of human history. They introduced a scorched earth policy. Tiglath-Pileser III was held in awe. His organization and training was masterful. He was feared and he was hated. Those who dared to defy him often suffered a long, torturous death. His son, Shalmaneser V was king while Samaria (capital of N. kingdom Israel) was under siege for three years and eventually fell, marking the destruction and dispersion of the N. Kingdom. But Shalmaneser V died that year so Sargon II reigned in his place.

Hezekiah comes to the throne in Judah around the time of the fall of the N. Kingdom. In a startling contrast to his father (King Ahaz) he leads the nation of Judah in some major spiritual reforms. Not only that, but instead of continuing the policy of being a vassal state to the Assyrian Empire, Hezekiah rebels against Assyria (2 Kings 18.7), which means he stops sending him money. In fact, Hezekiah, it seems with the encouragement of Babylon, led a mini-revolt of the western countries. Judah, Egypt and a couple of others had joined in, but not the Philistines. Now, initially, this seems to be working out. In spite of Isaiah's warning, Hezekiah put his faith in Egypt. And part of the reason why it appeared to be working out was because Assyria had some internal issues to address plus a threat from the pesky Babylonians that demanded a response.

You know, it's not easy being the king of the empire of the world. Your friends want your throne and your enemies want you dead. So, after Sargon II dies in battle, Sennacherib takes the throne and must immediately deal with a number of rebellions including the Babylonian problem. After subduing that, he turns his sights on Judah and Egypt. If you let one kingdom get away with rebellion, it will only encourage others to do the same, like wac-a-mole. It is around 701 BC. Anticipating this response, Hezekiah launches a pre-emptive strike against the Philistines who had been allies of Assyria. This will at least reduce some of the threat. The Philistines had been a problem ever since Israel took over the land 700 years earlier, hence the importance of the fortress city of Lachish. As

Sennacherib makes his way down the coast, Egypt rises to meet him and is decimated and sent running home. Hezekiah appears to be in really deep weeds. I remind you that the Assyrians ruled through fear. Kings caught rebelling against them were known to be skinned alive, then slow-roasted, impaled and mutilated for maximum crowd-control effect. So, here is Hezekiah wondering, "Is God able to keep me from that?" Am I willing to cast myself upon him and risk all of that? What about my wives and children? They would be marked for special abuse. And my people, do I know for sure that God will come through for us? Hezekiah was not sitting in an Old Testament history class in school, he was living it. He could smell the collective breath of the Assyrian army and it was rancid. As we witnessed last week, this is not theory. This is our reality.

Sennacherib is not in a good mood. His armies look like the armies of Mordor (Lord of the Rings) and so, when Hezekiah hears that his ally Egypt caves in, Hezekiah panics. He sends an enormous amount of money to Sennacherib in an effort to persuade him to leave. Hezekiah admits, "I have done wrong; withdraw from me. Whatever you impose on me, I will bear." (2 Kings 18.14) Now, stop the story for a minute. When you read this account in 2 Kings 18, don't you grieve? I want to say, "NO!" Stop groveling at the feet of the Assyrians. They will not last. You are bowing to a temporary, finite, bag of wind. But, at the same time, we need to have mercy on Hezekiah. It is easy for us to say that now, but if we had been there, we would have been tempted to do the same.

In God's providence, Sennacherib takes the money, but not the deal. He is going to finish what he has started. Hezekiah and Jerusalem must be destroyed. I do not have time to tell you all of the archaeological data that has been uncovered about this very military campaign. It is fascinating. The actual siege ramps have been discovered. But I want to tell you one account. Hezekiah knew that this invasion was probably going to happen and he attempted to be prepared for it. One of the most amazing engineering feats in ancient history took place at this time. Outside of the city of Jerusalem was the Gihon spring. It was a wonderful source of water, but it was outside the city, which meant that in the case of a siege, the spring would be useless to the people inside the city and would be very helpful to the army outside the city and you certainly do not want to help your enemy! So, two teams of workers set out to tunnel toward each other through the solid rock (Jerusalem is built on a mountain). The goal was to create a tunnel through the rock in order to divert the spring to the pool of Siloam. They did. The tunnel is 1,750 feet (1/3 of a mile) long. In 1880, the Siloam Inscription was discovered that described the final moments of the two teams meeting.

So, while the fall of Lachish appears to be imminent, Sennacherib sends 3 top officials along with a major military force to Jerusalem. Hezekiah defied the gods of Assyria, the gods of the N. Kingdom, and the gods of his father. Ahaz closed the doors to the temple; Hezekiah opened them. Ahaz stopped the Passover; Hezekiah started it back up. Ahaz built altars to his gods all over the city and the nation and Hezekiah tore them down. Now, don't forget that Ahaz had adopted the gods of the Assyrians. So, Hezekiah's "defilement and destruction" of these idols added even more provocation to the situation. It is difficult to imagine how much more angry Sennacherib could be, unless Hezekiah called his momma a bad name or something like that. Sennacherib is raging, he is trying to hold the empire

together, he is expending valuable time and resources on this problem (a long way from home) while Egypt is re-grouping and preparing for another battle. But, as much as this background is helpful for us, we see in the text how little emphasis there is on all of the military and political history. God sees history in relationship to his dealings with his people and their faith (or lack thereof) in him. So, when the Rabshekah says "In whom do you now trust?" he, unwittingly addresses the very heart of the issue. This is what Isaiah has been preaching about for years! And this account captures that so well. This is not about whose army is greater, whose strategy is more effective, which side has better intelligence gathering, or whose king is stronger. ***This is about whose God is true and whose god is false.***

The Assyrians, the former nation of Israel, the former king of Judah and many of the people of Judah were completely given over to the worship of idols. Idolatry is simply a covert attempt at worshiping ourselves. Many do not think that deeply about it, but it is. Think about what happens with most idol practices. The idol sits in one place and cannot move unless someone moves it. The idol does not do a thing. The idol cannot speak, hear, taste, smell or feel. The idol has the same expression that it was made with. And yes, the idol was made. It was made by a human. It was brought into being by a human. So, in order for anything to happen, the idolater is the one who has to do all of the work. The idol does nothing!!

Illus. Chair (idol). This is your god to which you ascribe power over rain. You sacrifice to the chair, and it does not rain. What do you do? You then make a statement on behalf of the chair. You project. You speak for the chair. You assume that the chair wants more sacrifice, or a different sacrifice. The chair is not doing a thing! You are doing everything. Now, substitute (for the chair) the god, the idol of having a perfectly neat home, or well-behaved children, or the respect of your wife, or the adoration of your husband, what are you doing? You are giving a voice to your idol. You are projecting on to that god, what you think that god is saying about you. Well-behaved children, a respectful wife, adoring husband "SAYS" you are great. So, you are now committed to serving that idol. But, that idol cannot save you. You will never get from your idol what you think you want.

So, here is the pattern: Idolatry is the exhausting and unsuccessful pursuit of pleasing a god that is never satisfied. True worship trusts the reality that God is satisfied because of Christ! This account here in Isaiah along with the entire Old Testament is pointing to this truth. Our God saves! Your idol cannot save you. And only our God saves! But, he does not save by your strength or ingenuity. He calls you to rest in him. Trust him. Read his promises and take them to heart and dare to believe them. Don't just do something, stand there! I will do it! I will save you! What is Hezekiah going to do? Whom will he trust? Whom do you trust? Really? You can discuss and debate theology all that you want, but when your job is on the line, or your life is being threatened, or your family is in peril, or your dream is threatened, that's when you find out what you REALLY believe. This is the worst moment and the finest hour in all of Hezekiah's reign.

1. **Threats against your life are God-given opportunities for faith.** (36.1-20)

A. God already knows (1-3)

Look at verse 2. Does that sound remotely familiar? It should. Go back to Isaiah 7.3. What happened at that very same spot? God told Ahaz, king of Judah to relax and trust God. Israel and Syria would not succeed. In fact, they are going to be wiped out. Did Ahaz believe God? No! Instead of trusting God, he put all of his faith in Assyria. Now, look at what is happening. Assyria, that he trusted, is invading Judah and, just like God had said, Syria and Israel are wiped out.

So, let's try this test again. This time it is with Hezekiah. The exact same location almost 40 years speaks of God's absolute control over this whole scene. This is what first part of Isaiah is all about. Whom are you going to trust? Ahaz shows you what NOT to do. Isaiah preaches about this for 40 years and now Hezekiah has a chance to demonstrate that he gets it. What is he going to do? Whom is he going to trust?

B. Man's ego blinds him to his own folly. (4-10)

The Rabshakeh (trusted advisor and representative of the king) delivers an excellent speech. This is classic psychological warfare. Keep in mind that when the Assyrian army started coming in, every one in the villages and towns headed for the fortified cities. They are all wiped out except Lachish (which is about to fall) and Jerusalem. That means that the city is packed full of people, with limited resources. Starvation, disease, stench, violence, animalistic behavior is rampant. This is a great time to panic and the Rabshakeh knows it. So, he has this conversation where what he says can be heard by the people, whom he is hoping will rebel against Hezekiah because he is obviously leading them to destruction. If the citizens will rebel against Hezekiah, it will save the Assyrian army a great deal of trouble.

In this speech, he refuses to refer to Hezekiah as king, but he certainly calls Sennacherib king and he essentially makes four points.

- 1) You trusted in Egypt and now they failed you. He's right.
- 2) Your God is angry with you because you tore down his altars. He's wrong.

But, he doesn't understand true worship. To an idolater, the more places where you make altars and statutes, the greater honor you give to the god. But God gives explicit commands about how He is to be worshiped. Hezekiah tore down altars in obedience to God.

C. Man's ego reveals his true belief. (11-20)

At this point, the officials from Judah appeal to the Rabshakeh to speak in Assyrian, the official language of the world, and not in Hebrew. This only makes the Rabshakeh speak even louder and his words, tempered by the translation, are as crude and crass as you can imagine (12). But here is where the real heart is exposed. The Rabshakeh dares God to act. This is man's natural heart. Just give him some money, some power and he thinks that he is God.

This week, the Lakers' Matta World Peace, (formerly known as Ron Artest), dunked a ball in a game and then elbowed an opponent in the head. Kevin DeYoung (pastor in Lansing) fittingly tweeted, "If you are going to change your name to Matta World Peace, don't elbow an opponent in the head." You can call yourself word peace, but look at what happens when you get a little success. Pride is ugly. This speech is ugly.

- 1) Even if Judah's God wasn't angry with them, he couldn't save Judah anyway. He's wrong!

Look at all of the other countries that Assyria has destroyed. They had their gods and their gods did not work for them, so your god will not work for you. What he does not know, is that all of those other gods were imposters and he just signed a check that he can't cash.

- 2) The great king Sennacherib will give you what you want.

Now, the hissing is in full throttle. Your king and your God will not provide the blessings that you need. You need a new king. You need a new God. You need a god who will really take care of you. What a lie!!! Sennacherib is claiming to be more trustworthy than God. What a fool! God is not simply the greatest of all of the other gods. The truth is, there are no other gods. He has no match. He has no equal. He is not of this world, is out of this world. If God is just another god, then biblical Christianity is just another one of the many religions of the world. This issue is huge! Is what we believe unique? Is God unlike any other god, or, is our religion simply our own version of all of the "great religions of the world?" Does it really matter what you believe, or, as you hear so often, "we all basically believe the same thing anyway." You call him God, you call him Jesus, you call him Allah, you call him the great Spirit, you call him the Force, you call him Buddha, whatever – right?

If Jerusalem is going to be saved or destroyed, does not, in the ultimate sense depend on Sennacherib. Sennacherib is a tool in God's hand. Assyria is the means that God uses to put Hezekiah to the test. Whom will you trust? If you trust me, Jerusalem will be saved. If you trust another god, you will be destroyed. Our God saves. Don't just do something, stand there! Stand there because our God will come.

2. **The bluster of man is no match for the Word of God.** (36.21 – 37.7)

Is God just another God or is God the One and only true God and worthy of absolute trust? Will Hezekiah throw himself and his nation completely upon God, holding nothing back, or will he sue for peace and surrender to Assyria? What had Isaiah been preaching for forty years? Try Him! He can be trusted! His ways are sure! Bank on him! Frankly, you really do not have too many other options, (which is a kindness of God), so trust him! And what happens here is NOT politics as usual. What happens here is a confession of complete surrender and total dependence upon God. It is the king, Hezekiah who admits that he is confronted with a catastrophic problem that he cannot fix. His response to this screams to us, it calls to us; it beckons to our hearts, beloved. Here is what you do when you are faced with a problem that you cannot fix. Here is what you do when you realize that your sin is so

serious before God that you cannot save yourself. Ironically, what you “do” is acknowledge that you cannot do anything. That is why the gospel is not rules to be obeyed but news that is announced and believed. (More on this next week) Here is humble wisdom.

A. Humble Wisdom! (36.21-37.4)

- 1) Don't argue.
- 2) Humble yourself before God.
- 3) Admit your weakness.

You cannot do this. You do not have the strength. The imagery of a woman who is in labor and the baby is breeched was very real. Before modern medicine, women who went through labor and delivery went into the shadow of the valley of death. Many died in order to give birth. They had no strength left to push. That is what Hezekiah feels. We are spent. We have no strength, no answers, no resources, and no plans. Beloved, that is the actual truth about us. That is why Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the poor in spirit.” You are not prepared to trust Christ until you stop trusting in yourself. You cannot truly trust in what Christ has done for you, until you stop trusting in what you have done or try to do. His humble response is a faith-driven response. Hezekiah sends to Isaiah to see if God has spoken! WOW! He gets it! He anticipates God speaking.

- 4) Listen to God's word.

What do they find? God has already spoken.

B. God already knows (37.5-7)

Oh God knows all right! He heard every word that was said. And when his people turned to him and looked to him, God responded. I love what he says here. He calls the three amigos from Assyria “young men”, literally, “lads” or “little boys.” In essence, God says, “relax; I've got your back.” This guy is such a nothing, that a mere rumor will send him running back to momma, and he won't return.

So, God speaks, but Assyria is still near. We will finish this part up next week. But I want you to understand something. It is already done. When God speaks, it's done. The course of human history changed because this man humbled himself before God. He represented his people (gospel).

Hezekiah believed. He did not believe perfectly, and God was gracious to back him into a corner, where he really had no other logical choice. But, he was still responsible to believe, and his royal humility was a delight, to the heart of God. And next week, we will see what God does through humble servants. But I want to leave you with this. Your “perfect” faith in an imperfect go (Ahaz) will betray and destroy you. Your imperfect faith in a perfect Savior will save you. Our belief is not in our belief, buy in the One who lived and believed perfectly, who died substitutionally, who rose victoriously, who ascended triumphantly, is returning gloriously and he save completely all who come to him by faith. Trust Him!