

Title: Don't just do something, stand there! Pt.2
Text: Isaiah 37.8-38
Theme: Our God Saves
Series: Isaiah #31
Prop Stmtnt: Our God saves but not by your strength
Aim: I aim to call my people to total reliance upon God for salvation (through Christ), for grace (for trials), for surrender to his purposes.

You can't tell the players without a program – the old saying goes. So, before I read the text this morning, I want to remind you of the setting and who the players are.

The setting (700 B.C.) (Judah)

The Assyrian empire has conquered most of the Ancient Near East with the exception of Jerusalem and the Cushite Kingdom (south of Egypt). (map) Have you ever played the game of Risk? The subtitle is, “the game of global domination.” That is what Assyria has essentially accomplished. The army is massive and spread out. But as it turns out, conquering the world is easier than ruling it. At this point, which is virtually the height of power for the Assyrian empire, the little city of Jerusalem stands like an island in a sea of Assyrian domination. Surrounded, choked off from the world, the people in Jerusalem are now awaiting the strangulation of a siege. Lachish was a sister fortress city that had just fallen. Jerusalem appeared to be out of friends, out of resources and out of time. But, Jerusalem had a king (Hezekiah), who finally realized what his dad (Ahaz) did not. God could be trusted. In fact, God had to be trusted, because “our God saves” and only our God saves.

The players

Sennacherib – King of Assyria, leader of the army
Hezekiah – King of Judah (what's left of it), still ruling in Jerusalem
The Rabshakeh – trusted advisor to Sennacherib
Isaiah – prophet of God, advisor to Hezekiah

The bigger picture

Intro and call to ministry	Isaiah 1-6
Test of Ahaz – Whom will you trust?	Isaiah 7-9 (Ahaz failed)
Word from God – “Don't trust anyone but ME!”	Isaiah 10-35 (summer school)
Test of Hezekiah – Whom will you trust?	Isaiah 36-39

But, this text is not given so that we will simply learn the outline and theme of the book, and be aware of some ancient near eastern history (as fascinating as it may be). You are, right now, in a pressure cooker and there does not seem to be a way out. Who are you going to trust? Some of you are girls, who would like to get married, but it seems that most of the young men these days are more young than men. They live with momma;

they watch sports, play sports, play fantasy sports, video games and are in no rush to settle down. They want “intimacy” but not commitment. If you don’t give in, they will find someone else who will and you may miss your “only chance.” You feel trapped in guilt, in giving in, in settling for less than God’s best. Is God worthy of your trust?

For others of you, you are in a class. If you don’t cheat, you won’t pass. If you don’t pass your transcript will be a disaster, you won’t get in the right grad school, you won’t get the right job, and you won’t get the right life. Is God worthy of your trust?

Some of you feel trapped in a lousy marriage. Your husband does not really even seem to like you or want to be with you or even have a thoughtful conversation with you. Your wife continually finds fault with you. Even when you sacrifice for her, it is never good enough. You are trapped. You know that divorce is wrong, but honestly it seems as if it is your only way out. Is God worthy of your trust?

Read Text:

Assyria defeats Lachish, which presumably clears the way for Sennacherib to finish off Jerusalem and call it a day. But, before he can do that, he has to address another problem (9). Sennacherib knows that Hezekiah is seeking to rally the people of Jerusalem. Fear is one of Sennacherib’s great weapons, and he does not want Hezekiah to have any hope at all. Frustrated that he cannot wipe out Jerusalem and prove himself right, he sends this letter to let Hezekiah know that he is still marked for destruction. The scene is set for a showdown. On the one hand, you have the written promises of the puppet king, the mere mortal, posing as a king, called Sennacherib. On the other hand you have the true King, whose throne is from everlasting. Both of these make promises. Hezekiah is in the middle. Both call for him to believe and respond to what has been written.

1. **How do you respond when you are threatened?** (8-13)

The initial threat is from the Rabshekah (36.4-20), but this threat is from Sennacherib himself. The Rabshekah directed his threats against Hezekiah while Sennacherib directs his threats against God. The Rabshekah attempted to create distrust between Hezekiah and his people. He wanted the people to believe that Hezekiah was deceiving them while Sennacherib attempts to create distrust between Hezekiah and God. He wanted Hezekiah to believe that God was deceiving him. Sennacherib’s assault upon God (v.10) is dripping with arrogance. What is he saying here? He is calling Hezekiah an idiot for trusting in God. Hey! At least he knows that Hezekiah is trusting in God – right? This is a major upgrade from Ahaz.

Now, go back to verse 8. The language here makes it clear that fighting against Libnah was not in the original plan. And now, that Tirhakah, king of Cush was rumored to be on his way up to fight, Sennacherib was delayed in making good on his promise to destroy Jerusalem. You can tell that he is angry, because this delay may make it appear that God was indeed delivering Jerusalem, and of course, he knows that is certainly not the case (he hopes).

Sennacherib's letter could be summarized like this: *"In spite of the fact that I am circumstantially hindered from coming and destroying Jerusalem like I promised to, don't you dare think that God is going to rescue you from my hand, even though that is what appears to be happening right now. Nothing has really changed. You are still dead-meat! I am still going to get you. I am still coming for you. You are going to die!"*

Hezekiah and others knew what Sennacherib did to kings and nations who rebelled against him. His threats (v.11) were not idle words, but now his words and threats were now directed at God. Sennacherib was out of his league. He figured that the God of Judah was just like the gods of the other nations. He figured wrong! And yet, accusations are powerful. Even if they are not true, they feel true. When they feel true, we often respond as if they are true.

This part of the account is easy to overlook, but I think that it is the most intense part. It is well known that some of the most effective psychological and physical torture comes from intense persecution, followed by a reprieve, even friendliness, only for the persecution to resume, perhaps even greater. If you can give a prisoner hope, and then crush it, you can crush him. That, it seems is what broke Elijah. He faced multiple threats from Ahab, ran for his life, stood calm in the face of danger, confronted 750 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel and experienced an enormous victory. The victory was a reprieve! For the first time in years, the pressure was off. Elijah had been vindicated. Elijah had experienced a major public victory. But hours later his life was threatened by Jezebel the queen and he broke. His spirit broke, he ran for his life and he never recovered. For Hezekiah, the scene was very similar. Finally, it looks like his faith has paid off, only to be faced with another threat. "I thought that this was going to end! I thought that God was going to deliver me!" Finally, you get a job offer, only to have it fall through. Finally, your husband admits his apathy and asks forgiveness, but the next day, he doesn't change. Hezekiah heard that the Assyrian army wasn't coming after all, only for this letter to show up! It would have been very, very tempting to say, "I can't do this any more. I cannot bear up any more. I cannot lead these people or rescue these people. I believed in God. I tried. I really tried, but it just doesn't seem to do any good." But, the easy, convenient, natural way is NOT what Hezekiah did. He did what his father failed to do. Hezekiah took this threat to God! This is huge!

2. **Take God up on His Word!** (14-20)

I love this! Do you see what he does in v.14? He goes to the house of the LORD and he does not merely tell God about the letter, he shows him the letter. He lays it out before God because He believes that God can read it and that God ought to know what this arrogant windbag has been saying about God. The Rabshekah was talking a lot about Hezekiah, but Sennacherib is talking all about God and his inability to save. Your God cannot save! Here is the good news for Hezekiah and the really bad news for Sennacherib: God sees. Idols cannot see. But God sees and God reads. So, Hezekiah lays out this letter for God to read it. And as he does, Hezekiah prays to God and his prayer

reveals to us, that finally, God has given to Judah a king who gets it! Here is a king who trusts in the KING. Here is a leader who is willing to take God at his Word. Here is a leader who obviously knew some things about God! You can't claim promises you don't know. Hezekiah prays God's Word back to God and in so doing; he clearly answers the question of: Whom do you trust?

- A. We trust in the LORD of hosts. (16)
- B. We trust in the only God. (16, 18-19)
- C. We trust in the Creator (16)
- D. We trust in the One who hears and sees. (17)
- E. We trust in the only One who saves. (20)
- F. We trust in the One who puts his glory on display. (20)

This statement reveals, perhaps more than any other that Hezekiah understands what is at stake. He does NOT say that because I believe in you, that now you have to reward me. He says, the gods of the other nations could not save because they are not. You are! You are God! If you save, then the kingdoms of this world will know that you alone are God! Even our rescue, even our salvation was ordained by God as a means to show his glory!

- G. We trust in the One who does not need us. (20)

This had to be hugely encouraging to Isaiah. All of these truths about God, were things that he had been preaching about and writing for forty years. Finally! Finally, someone believed! One man, believing God, changed the world!

Take God up on His Word and then wait for him to act. He will. His speaking is linked in an unbreakable chain to his acting. First comes his Word, then his response. In between is the time for you to believe.

3. **God is Sovereign!!!** (21-35)

God speaks! There are three talking in this text. Sennacherib talks to Hezekiah about God. Hezekiah talks to God about Sennacherib and God talks to Hezekiah about Sennacherib. God talks in response to Hezekiah's prayer and out of all of the conversations, what God says are the most important. What God says about anything is really all that matters in the ultimate sense. Sennacherib wrote the letter, but God is writing the book, and in this case, he is closing a chapter. God makes it clear that he has not only read the letter, he has seen everything and heard everything that Sennacherib (and the Assyrians for that matter) has done. Their success, which is ultimately from the hand of God (v.26), became the occasion for their arrogance. God planned the Assyrian Empire but instead of acknowledging the sovereignty of God, Sennacherib presumed to be sovereign over God. Sennacherib made promises that he could not keep and revealed that he is no different than every other mortal. He will go back home "*I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will turn you back on the way by which you came.*" Which he does.

God then says to Judah that in a short amount of time, life will return to normal (30). The Assyrian that threatened your very existence will not only be gone, but there will basically be no evidence of them left. The point is clear: Do not trust the nations, trust God.

4. **Our God Saves!!!** (36-38)

The last three verses of this chapter are extremely brief, especially when considering what they say. This makes it clear that even though what happens in history, as humankind witnesses it, is not all that significant as far as God is concerned. The turning point, as God sees it, is when Hezekiah goes to house of God and prays. The story of Sennacherib ends with him going into the house of his god and praying. While Hezekiah is rescued, Sennacherib is killed. It is the anticlimactic ending of a life that started with great success. No enemy could stand in his way, no king could thwart his plans. Then, one morning, Sennacherib awoke in the flat lands of the tiny nation of Judah and discovered that 185,000 of his soldiers had mysteriously died. Not long before he had promised to destroy this land and demonstrate the superiority of his god. His god betrayed him. And now, the “great” king had to slither home and try to explain what had gone wrong.

Meanwhile, Judah awoke the next day to the stunning news of deliverance. Salvation had come. Deliverance had come. But, it did come from within. It did not come from another country, nor another army. Sennacherib had not been bought off; his army was dead. The enemy had been killed by none other than God!

Hezekiah had banked everything he had on the promises of God. It was all that he had. God spoke and said, “I’ll take care of it.” That morning a message was delivered to the king. “The enemy is dead, your honor.” There are 185,000 Assyrian soldiers lying lifeless on the ground. It is no trick, it is no game. Sennacherib was spotted heading north. Our God saves!

God saved Judah not only to show that He is God and that He can and must be trusted, but he also saved Judah as a preview of a greater salvation that He was going to provide through Christ. You have an enemy who seizes upon the weakness of your faith and the sin in your heart and he accuses you and taunts you and threatens you. His words are poison for your soul. When given attention, they will render you useless for the kingdom of God. Satan exploits your sin to convince you that you cannot be forgiven, you cannot be set free, you cannot really trust God because while His promises work for others, they are not true for you. He seeks to distract you from the faithfulness of God in your past and blind you to the mercies of God poured out upon you this very day. But though your enemy be strong, your Savior is stronger still. His life for you and his death on the cross paid your debt, in full. In the death of Christ we live. In his sacrifice for our sin, we are forgiven. In his payment for sin, Satan’s weapon against us has been broken. In his resurrection, Satan’s neck has been broken. But all of this has been done for us, not by us. We are like the citizens of Jerusalem trapped in a city that is marked for destruction, surrounded by an enemy whom we cannot defeat. We have no means by which to rescue

ourselves. Salvation has to come from outside of us because it was our sin that put us into this mess and we have to admit it. The evidence of the siege against our soul is all around. Despair, deceit, hopelessness, self-centeredness and greed give way to cheating, stealing, and death. If the enemy on the outside doesn't kill us, we will do it ourselves. We are out of options. We are dying. Our children are dying and they turn to us for help and we can only look away. And then, one morning, a runner is spotted in the distance. He is running and shouting all at once. "It is finished. It is finished. The battle is over. The enemy is dead. Our God saves. Our God reigns. Our God lives. Would you not want to kiss his feet?"

Do you see it now? The gospel of Christ is good news. It is not a work that you do, it is an announcement of victory that you believe. But it is at this moment that you are confronted with a choice. Will you believe the lies of the enemy who told you that you could not be rescued, and stay locked up behind the walls of your guilt and die, rotting in the consequences of your sin, or will you accept the news of the messenger and believe and enjoy the announcement of victory? 185,000 graves was proof enough that God had saved Hezekiah. An empty tomb is proof enough that He has saved us.

If you have believed the gospel that Christ has paid it all, realize this. You live, surrounded by people who are trapped in the city of sin, self-righteousness and religion. They are in bondage to themselves and no matter what they do, it is not good enough. Will you be the runner? Will you take them the message? It is finished. The penalty is paid. The debt is satisfied. The enemy is dead. Our God saves! Our God reigns!

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." (Isaiah 52.7)