

Title: I've paid my dues
Text: Isaiah 38-39
Theme: Entitlement does not understand grace
Series: Isaiah #31
Prop Stmtnt: I cannot "pay dues" when all I have is in Christ.
Aim: I aim to help my people understand that the only fitting response to grace is faith-fueled joyful surrender.

Read Text:

What are you entitled to? Oh my, that's a loaded question isn't it? Are you entitled to a job? Are you entitled to health? Are you entitled to respect? Are you entitled to being viewed as important? Are you entitled to your chair in the band? Are you entitled to "your place" on the track relay team? Are you entitled to your parking spot, your pew in church? Are you entitled to children who obey? Are you entitled to health insurance? Are you entitled to a long, care-free retirement? Are you entitled to college scholarships? Are you entitled to a boss who is competent, sympathetic, supportive and generous? Are you entitled to a baseball team that scores more than 2 runs per game?

Entitlement is so easy to spot in others, while being blinded to its presence in us. If you exist, it is easy to feel entitled. Entitlement affirms my selfishness. But if you are in a position of influence, or if you have been successful, you have all the more opportunity to feel entitled, especially if you are a king.

Here is the assumption:

- 1) The world owes me. "I am, therefore, I deserve." (God owes me.)
- 2) If I have performed well, then I am owed more.
- 3) If I have a title, degree, reputation, position, money then I am owed even more.
- 4) If I have endured under pressure, then I am owed even more than that.
- 5) If I have suffered, then I am owed anything that I want. I've paid my dues.

Here is what entitlement looks like:

- 1) I have earned the right to be selfish.
- 2) I have earned the right to say whatever I want.
- 3) The rules no longer apply to me.
- 4) Everyone must respect me, listen to me, agree with, love me, affirm me and coddle me.
- 5) "I get because I am."
- 6) I deserve a long life, good health, plenty of money and a family with no issues.

Entitlement resides in all of us. It sits just under the surface waiting for the opportunity to express itself. But entitlement sets you up for bitterness. God will not cooperate with and support your spirit of entitlement. What you think is unfair, is a kindness from God. He is

either weeding something out; preparing you for something that is coming, or is using you for his purposes in the lives of others.

I bring that up, because these two chapters bring it up. Whenever you are reading the Bible you need to ask yourself, “Why did the Spirit of God put this in here?” These two chapters show some of the greatness and some of the failure of Hezekiah. They show both his faith and they show his pride. He is both hero and goat all at the same time. He is a good king. No other king in the history of the Old Testament is given as much attention as Hezekiah is, except for David. Hezekiah, the text says, “walked before God”, he possessed a loyal heart and he did right in the Lord’s sight. But he is not a perfect king. As a king, his struggles are simply more public than the rest of us. Thankfully, this attitude of entitlement is not all that there is to Hezekiah, as we saw from last week. But, neither is Hezekiah a perfect picture of faith. God used him to bring about a temporary deliverance from the Assyrians, but only the Messiah can bring about a permanent deliverance from our greatest enemy.

Since these two chapters come after the amazing story of God’s deliverance in chapter 37, it would be easy to assume that these events took place after that threat was dealt with. Probably not. Hezekiah was 29 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for 25 years. He died about 4 years after the Assyrian invasion, so these events took place 11-12 years before that. When you read the account from 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles along with Isaiah we discover that Hezekiah lead the nation through a series of wonderful spiritual reforms. As a result, his kingdom was blessed and he prospered. Then Hezekiah became sick. Isaiah the prophet came and the word that he brought was not good. “Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall not recover.” Here is the test:

Test #1 – **Whom do you trust in crisis?** (38)

Trusting God is not an automatic response. In view of all the good that Hezekiah had done, it would have been easy to become bitter. It would have been easy to point out how so many bad kings lived so much longer. And now, before he is 40 years old, he is supposed to set his house in order? Well, that reveals the problem! His house was not in order. There was no heir. All of this seemed monstrously unfair. Now, Hezekiah did not say that. He may have thought that, but he did not say that. As a reader, I think that. The guy is in his upper thirties and he is a good one! We need good ones! We don’t need bad kings to live long – know what I mean? Why are you taking him God? If you want, I could give you a list of people that I think we would all be a bit better off without. Notice this. Hezekiah hears the word of the Lord and instead of resigning himself and simply giving up, he takes this as a test from God and he goes to God and begs him for life. That is great! That is commendable! I also believe that God orchestrated this event in the life of Hezekiah to show him that the same God who could save him from death is the same God who could save his nation from certain destruction. At any rate, Hezekiah prays “like there is no tomorrow.”

Not long ago Brad Hunsanger received a call from the hospital. His wife, Marcie who, at the time was in ICU, was declining rapidly and he was told to come, she was not going to

make it. As he drove, he prayed fervently. He thought of this very account. He told me this story on Thursday, and if I remember it correctly, he had only recently read the Bible through for the first time in his life and this particular story gripped him. So, when he was in a crisis, it was this portion of the Word that came to mind. That is one of the points that I was trying to get across last week. You cannot rely upon the promises of God in a crisis, if you do not know what they are. Now, I grant you that this text is not promising an additional 15 years of life for everyone who gets sick and prays, but for Brad, it made him aware of the fact that God is certainly capable of doing it, should he choose. So Brad is driving and praying. Meanwhile, a doctor, who was visiting the hospital from another state, “happened” to become aware of Marcie’s condition. He suggested a treatment that her physicians had not tried, nor were aware of, and when they tried it, her turn-around was remarkable. It saved her life. Now, did it save her life, or was it God? Yes.

Isaiah leaves the king in great distress. Hezekiah is praying and before Isaiah gets past the middle court, God tells him to go back and tell Hezekiah that he is going to get better and will live for another 15 years. In fact, he is going to get better and on the third day he will go to the house of the Lord. Wonder why he said that – eh? Isaiah then instructs the physicians to apply a treatment to a boil that Hezekiah is suffering from, illustrating the wonderful marriage of God and medicine. Hezekiah asks for a sign (in contrast to his father Ahaz who refused a sign when offered, but was given one anyway), so Isaiah gives him a choice. Do you want the shadow on the sundial to go forward or go backward? Hezekiah asks for it to go backward. It does, by ten degrees and Hezekiah is healed.

This account is told in two other portions of the Bible, but only here do we have the song that Hezekiah wrote in praise to God (10-20). This song is heart-grabbing. He describes what it is like to live under a terminal diagnosis in the prime of life. This song takes us face to face with death. It makes us feel very mortal. You read this and you feel like the final wisp of smoke from a recently snuffed candle. Death is real, and is not our friend. It is like (12) thinking that you had a place to live, only to realize that you have to leave. It is like watching a rug being woven, only to discover one day that it is gone. Notice the last line of v.12. *“from day to night you bring me to an end.”* Who is this referring to? It is God. He repeats this line at the end of v.13. But notice the final line of v.14!

“O Lord, I am oppressed; be my pledge of safety.” This one line absolutely overwhelms me. Does it you? Do you see what Hezekiah is praying here? He knows that it is God who is breaking his bones (it feels like). But, the one who is oppressing him is the same one and the only one who can deliver him. Who does that sound like? That sounds like Jesus on the cross. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus knew that he was experiencing the wrath of his Father against your sin, which had now been imputed to Christ. Christ was being treated as if he had committed every sin that you and I committed. And yet, even in his dying, he did not lose faith. He was being oppressed and yet he expressed full faith in his oppressor and in the end said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Hezekiah viewed God as both prosecuting and defense attorney all at the same time. God is Judge and Priest, King and Sacrifice, Creator and Savior, all in Christ. This one

statement that Hezekiah said in faith is a picture of a reality that was fulfilled in Christ on the cross. Hezekiah prayed this in the valley of the shadow of death. He prayed this before Messiah came and died in our place. So, the question that we must ask ourselves in the midst of the crisis is this:

Question: Is the God who “oppresses” you worthy of your faith?

Will you trust God, will you praise God, will you thank God, and will you rest in God, even though He “oppresses” you? People who say that Jesus died so that we will never be sick again, or say that if you have enough faith, you will be protected from all ill are ignorant and misguided at best, dishonest with the text, harmful and destructive to so many, and rob people of the opportunity that this truth provides. God’s greatest act is not salvation from the fire, but salvation through the fire. Trusting the one who brings the pressure, and not just so that he will remove the pressure, but trusting him because he is good enough, wise enough, glorious enough, gracious enough, merciful enough and sovereign enough to work all things according to the counsel of his will, demonstrated by Christ Jesus is what brings him infinite glory, but only possible by means of his Spirit at work in us. If you are in the valley, you might not be able to say “Your will be done.” But you can say to the Spirit, “Help! Help me! I can’t even pray right now. And the Spirit who knows, because Christ has been there can pray for you and his interceding before the throne is like you are there praying as well. Hezekiah passed this test of weakness. But it showed something, didn’t it? Even our heroes need to be rescued. The one, who saved Judah, had to be saved. No, not even a good king is worthy of your trust. Only God.

I wish the story of Hezekiah ended there. He passed, it seems, the most difficult test. Now comes the other side of the coin. This is the test of prosperity.

Test #2 – Whom do you trust in prosperity? (39)

This also took place before the Assyrian invasion. Babylon was attempting to stir up a rebellion and the Babylonian king, whose approval it seemed everyone wanted, sent envoys to see Hezekiah. What happened then is simply embarrassing. Hezekiah does everything he can to gain their approval. He wants their admiration and flattery. Frankly, he is flattered that they would even come and their visit gave him the impression that he was a major player on the world stage. So, he shows them everything. Here is an anatomy of the fall: Hezekiah’s pride was present (under the surface) awaiting an opportunity to be expressed. The visit of the ambassadors from Babylon was the occasion. Their visit said, “They must think that I’m important.” (I like that.) Therefore, I will prove to them how important and powerful I am by showing them all of my wealth. But, how had Hezekiah become successful? It was God! Here he had a great opportunity to demonstrate something that kings were not known for; and that was humility.

Now watch this. When Hezekiah was in the crisis, God spoke to him and he responded with fervent prayer. Now, when God spoke to him, he responded with apathy. (2 Kings 20 fills in the rest of the details.) Hezekiah became full of pride. God judged that pride and he repented, but later he reverted to pride again. In fact, this response of apathy to the

word of God is not only a sad commentary on the end of his life but his apathy becomes the soil that his young son is raised in and the result is disaster.

Here is a king who generated a religious turn-around, endured a serious brush with death, and who now thinks that he is entitled to ease. I did my time. I fought my battles and now it is time for me to enjoy the fruit of my work. I do not want to work any more. Here is where entitlement is on full display. Entitlement cares only for itself. This is what is so shocking! Hezekiah who was so concerned about his own life is completely unconcerned about the lives of his grandchildren. He is told that some of them are going to be castrated and serve the very kingdom that he tried to impress! The Word of the Lord came to him in a statement of judgment. He, right there, had the opportunity to repent, to humble himself and go before God, but instead he figured that as long as there would be peace in his day, he wouldn't sweat it. That attitude is what ultimately destroyed Judah. Unchallenged, it will destroy this church. But, you say, "I've done my time. I'm entitled to rest. I'm entitled. I've paid my dues. Let the others figure it out."

"The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good." (8) It is NOT good!!! But it would not affect him. At what age can you stop relying upon God? At what point in life can you live for yourself and be concerned only with self-indulgence? At what point have you earned the right to coast and lose your edge, and stop fighting sin, and stop being humbled by the gospel? This attitude is not just about age, it is about ministry as well. Go on a mission trip, teach a class, serve in MCREST, or preach a sermon and what? Somehow it is easy to think that I have paid my dues. Things went well while I was there, now I can rest. Now I can coast.

Romans 16.25-27

Hezekiah died when his son was twelve years old, meaning that he was born three years after Hezekiah's brush with death and after the visit of the envoys. Hezekiah, it seemed was living on the fruit of trees that he had planted earlier, but was not finishing what he had started. On the whole, he was a good king, but as good as he was, his failure to finish strong set the stage for a boy who became a king who took Judah so far into sin that she would never fully recover. The worst thing that happened to Hezekiah (crisis) was actually the best thing. The best thing that happened to him (prosperity) was the worst thing.

Question: Is God worth more to you than the approval and comfort?

Even though Hezekiah would face an enormous challenge from the Assyrians, I am convinced that Isaiah and the other Old Testament writers put this story at the end of Hezekiah's life because it does several things:

- 1) It explains the context for Manasseh.
- 2) It shows that Hezekiah is definitely not the Messiah.
- 3) It reveals the heart attitude of Judah that resulted in their defeat and deportation at the hand of the Babylonians.

What was that heart attitude? Prosperity produced pride and pride produced apathy.

Conclusion:

- 1) Our best is not good enough.
- 2) Even our success is a failure.
- 3) We need a perfect King and a perfect Savior.
- 4) We always, always, always need the gospel.