

We come today to the end of our series of talks exploring the life of Hezekiah, the most godly of the twenty kings of Judah who followed Saul, David and Solomon. His name means ‘Yahweh is (my) strength’ and, as you may remember, he most certainly knew the strength of his God in the year 701 BC:

- that was the year in which Hezekiah fell seriously ill – so very ill, indeed, that he “was at the point of death.” (2 Kings 20:1) But, in answer to his prompt and earnest prayer, God promised not only to heal him but also to grant him fifteen more years of life (2 Kings 20:2–6; 2 Chronicles 32:24).
- that was also the year in which the Assyrians invaded Hezekiah’s territory, the tiny kingdom of Judah. They claim to have overwhelmed nearly fifty “strong walled towns, and innumerable small places around them” and to have taken more than 200,000 people into captivity (Taylor prism, British Museum; cf 2 Kings 18:13). The Assyrian king, Sennacherib, then turned his attention to Jerusalem and sent “a great army” to the city (2 Kings 18:17a). But, again in answer to prompt and earnest prayer,

the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib king of Assyria and from the hand of all his enemies, and he provided for them on every side.”²³ And many brought gifts to the LORD to Jerusalem and precious things to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations from that time onward. 2 Chronicles 32:22,23; cf 2 Kings 19:32–36

Truly God proved Himself to be Hezekiah’s strength – his strength in private, in relation to his health; his strength in public, in relation to his kingdom. Thanks to the strength of God, Hezekiah the man survived infection and Hezekiah the king survived invasion. In the year 701 BC, at least, he would have been able to echo the words of David, the king in whose steps he walked:

Blessed be the LORD! For he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. ⁷The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. / ⁸The LORD is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed. Psalm 28:6–8

I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress. ¹⁷O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love. Psalm 59:16,17

If the record of the life of Hezekiah were a work of fiction, we might now expect to read “and so he lived happily ever after” or words to that effect. But it is not a work of fiction, and the Bible never hides the failings of the men and women of faith who populate its pages. So today we learn of the sad failure of Hezekiah in his mature years. The verdict we read in his mini-biography is correct – “he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done” (2 Kings 18:3). But, just like David, he did not *always* do what was right in the eyes of the Lord; he had faith, but he was fallible; he was not perfect. We know this from the evidence of two passages of Scripture:

At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. ¹³And Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armoury, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them. ¹⁴Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say? And from where did they come to you?” And Hezekiah said, “They have come from a far country, from Babylon.” ¹⁵He said, “What have they seen in your house?” And Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.”

¹⁶Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁷Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. ¹⁸And some of your own sons, who shall be born to you, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” ¹⁹Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?”

²⁰The rest of the deeds of Hezekiah and all his might and how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah?

²¹And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and Manasseh his son reigned in his place. **2 Kings 20:12–21**

In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death, and he prayed to the LORD, and he answered him and gave him a sign. ²⁵ But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem. ²⁶ But Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.

²⁷ And Hezekiah had very great riches and honour, and he made for himself treasuries for silver, for gold, for precious stones, for spices, for shields, and for all kinds of costly vessels; ²⁸ storehouses also for the yield of grain, wine, and oil; and stalls for all kinds of cattle, and sheepfolds. ²⁹ He likewise provided cities for himself, and flocks and herds in abundance, for God had given him very great possessions. ³⁰ This same Hezekiah closed the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them down to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works. ³¹ And so in the matter of the envoys of the princes of Babylon, who had been sent to him to enquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.

³² Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and his good deeds, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz, in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. ³³ And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the upper part of the tombs of the sons of David, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death. And Manasseh his son reigned in his place.

2 Chronicles 32:24–33

the problem of pride

Remarkable things had happened in Jerusalem. Hezekiah, the ailing king of Judah, recovered dramatically from a near-fatal illness; Sennacherib, the aggressive king of Assyria, returned suddenly to Nineveh. News spread quickly, and soon Hezekiah was welcoming envoys from the king of Babylon – that large and ambitious kingdom, already challenging the Assyrians, that would eventually become the dominant world power.

The envoys followed normal diplomatic procedure and carried “letters and a present” (2 Kings 20:12a). The pretext of their visit was that Merodach-baladan had “heard that Hezekiah had been sick” (12b), but the letters would have comprised much more than ‘get well soon’ messages:

- according to 2 Chronicles 32:31a, the envoys had been sent from Babylon “to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land” – that is, the miraculous sign of the sun’s shadow moving back ten steps (2 Kings 20:8–11). The Babylonians were interested in this, suggests Matthew Henry, because “The sun was their god; they came to enquire concerning the favour he had shown to Hezekiah, that they might honour him whom their god honoured”;
- “According to Josephus (*Ant* x.2.2) the purpose of the visit was to secure Hezekiah as an ally in an anti-Assyrian coalition, but this is not stressed here....” (Prof. Wiseman)

Hezekiah would have known the mix of motives that there was for the envoys’ visit, and that his kingdom was tiny by comparison with those of Assyria and Babylon. But he “welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armoury, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.” (2 Kings 20:13)

From Hezekiah’s point of view, it was all very flattering: a remarkable recovery from illness; a remarkable sign from God; a remarkable delivery from Assyria; a remarkable overture from Babylon; a remarkable accumulation of wealth. How wonderful that *he*, at the age of only 39 or 40, should have experienced all of this!

Now, of course, all of these things – and Hezekiah’s personal righteousness, religious reforms, engineering feats and much more – were a tribute to God. It was God who had protected him, provoked him and prospered him; it was God who had helped him and healed him; it was God to whom he should have given all the credit. “But,” we read, “Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud.” (2 Chronicles 32:25)

The Bible makes it clear that pride is a mark of unbelief, so is the very antithesis of faith: “In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, ‘There is no God.’” (Psalm 10:4) It is little wonder, therefore, that God hates pride and will bring His judgement to bear on those who are proud: “The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. ¹²For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up – and it shall be brought low.” (Isaiah 2:11,12) There you see the issue in a nutshell: that pride lifts up what *man* has done rather than what *God* has done; it puts man rather than God at the centre of things; it celebrates human plans rather than God’s purposes; it magnifies human achievements and progress and says little or nothing about God’s enabling and power. So pride is a sin (see Proverbs 21:4).

It is the voice of pride that says, amongst other things, *I did this!* That is exactly what Nebuchadnezzar said when looking out from the roof of his palace: “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:28–30) We know that Nebuchadnezzar was a godless man until he was brought low, because of his pride, by the One he later called “the Most High God” (Daniel 4:1–3). But the example of Hezekiah is a salutary reminder that *even those of us who have spent years in a life of faith can succumb to the sin of pride*. In fact, pride often raises its ugly head more obviously when we are older and are tempted to say, “Look at me! I did this! Look at the qualifications I have earned; look at the work I have accomplished; look at the position I have achieved; look at the title I have been given; look at the salary or pension I have secured; look at the possessions I own; look at the respect I have earned!”

How keen we are, like Hezekiah was with the envoys, to boast, to brag, to try so hard to impress! How we need to beware of this, for the great danger is that we shall start to take credit – and then believe that we *deserve* the credit – for what God has done. Truthfully, what is there that you are or that you have that is not a direct result of His power and provision? As one modern commentator notes, “The special evil of pride is that it opposes the first principle of wisdom (the fear of the Lord), and the two great commandments. The proud man is therefore at odds with himself ([Proverbs] 8:36), his neighbour (13:10) and the Lord (16:5).”[†] In relation to pride, therefore, you need constantly to be on your guard. As Solomon noted, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”¹⁹ It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor that to divide the spoil with the proud.” (Proverbs 16:18,19) In the Magnificat, Mary noted that God “has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts” (Luke 1:51, NIV). “What Mary is saying is that in the course of history God’s mighty power has repeatedly punished these arrogant people. He has dispersed them, dethroned them, deprived them of their riches, and driven them away empty.” (Hendriksen) And that He will do to you if you persist in your pride and do not recognise Him. Beware!

[†] Kidner, Derek (1964, repr.1978; *Proverbs, an Introduction and Commentary*; Leicester, IVP p.120

the humility of Hezekiah

What then, are we to do when we are convicted by God of pride, and the Holy Spirit reveals to us that we make too much of ourselves, pay too little attention to other people and make too little of God? *If pride is the evil we are to avoid, then humility is the antidote we are to adopt*. Three hundred years ago, the Scottish theologian Thomas Boston noted that “Humility is part of the image of God; pride is the masterpiece of the image of the devil.” In saying this, he was reflecting the clear teaching of Scripture.

- God requires humility

God told Isaiah, who was contemporary with Hezekiah, that He would not be fooled by religious hypocrisy but looked for the one “who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.” (Isaiah 66:2) The message was given even more clearly to another contemporary, the prophet Micah: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8) It was later a sign of the spiritual declension of His people that God said, “They have not humbled themselves ... nor have they feared, nor walked in my laws and my statutes” (Jeremiah 44:10).

- Christ demonstrates humility

Writing his wonderful hymn of praise to Christ, and lifting Him up as our great example, Paul noted that “Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he [Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him... [Philippians 5b–9a](#)

Do you want to know what humility looks like and how it is manifested in a human life? Then look at Jesus, who is “the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrew 12:2,3). Look at Him, “humble and mounted on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9); look at Him as He dealt with His family, as He dealt with the crowds and their many needs, as He dealt with His opponents; look at Him as He dealt with His disciples – and even washed their feet (John 13:1–17); look at Him as He dealt with your sin and mine on the cross. Look at Him because *the spirit of humility is the spirit of Christ*.

- Scripture teaches humility

Jesus said, “unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3,4) Jesus said, “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 14:11, 18:14) The apostle Paul urged the Christians in Ephesus “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love...” (Ephesians 4:1–3) Or listen to the apostle Peter: “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility towards one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:5b–7)

If I am to “pour contempt on all my pride”, I must keep clearly in sight the Son of God and reflect much on what He has done for me and in me. If I am to “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant” than myself, I must look to Him, His interests and the needs of His people (Philippians 2:3ff).

At this point, I can imagine someone saying, “But does this mean that I can take no pride in any academic, musical, professional, sporting or other achievements?” No, it doesn’t mean that, but it does mean that we should not forget for a moment that we owe all of our achievements to God! So listen to His message through Jeremiah: “Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practises steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 9:23,24) The apostle Paul picks up this thought when, in each of the canonical letters he wrote to the church at Corinth, he noted ““Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:31; 2 Corinthians 10:17) And he did not deny this principle when he wrote of the pride that he took in his work, for it was pride permeated with the recognition that what he had achieved had been achieved by the power of God. So, he said to the Romans, “In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.” (Romans 15:17)

“But,” you still might say, “how should I react if someone says to me, “Well done!” because of some achievement or other? Should I deny immediately that I had anything to do with it?” Well, certainly you might respond like that:

- Remember what happened when Joseph was brought out of prison to appear before the Pharaoh: “And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” ¹⁶ Joseph answered Pharaoh, “It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favourable answer.”” (Genesis 41:14–16; cf 40:8)
- Or, in rather similar circumstances, think of the occasion when Daniel was brought before Nebuchadnezzar. “The king declared to Daniel ... “Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?” ²⁷ Daniel answered the king and said, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries...” (Daniel 2:26–28a)

The key thing is not to allow ourselves the dangerous ‘luxury’ of self aggrandisement – the sort of pride that so dangerously and so quickly inflates our ego and, in the process, belittles other people and denies God. Many of you will know the story of Corrie ten Boom. In the Second World War, she and her family in Holland helped many Jews escape from Nazi persecution by hiding them in their home. Eventually she was caught and, ultimately, was sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, where her beloved sister Betsie fell ill and died. Corrie survived the war, wrote a book about her exploits and soon – from her mid-fifties at least to her mid-eighties – was travelling the world to speak of her experiences and her Christian faith. And, inevitably, people complimented her and poured praise on her. And it is very revealing how she responded to all of this. She said once in private, “When people come up and give me a compliment – ‘Corrie, that was a good talk,’ or ‘Corrie, you were so brave,’ I take each remark as if it were a flower. At the end of each day I lift up the bouquet of flowers I have gathered throughout the day and say, ‘Here you are, Lord, it is all Yours.’” That is humility.

We shall end, as we started, by remembering the life of Hezekiah. We read that he “humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.” (2 Chronicles 32:26) Let us be reminded that God hates human pride, which supplants Him and our faith in Him, but He responds in mercy to those who repent of their pride and come to Him in humility. That is what David discovered when, having been confronted with his sin regarding Bathsheba, he turned to the Lord for forgiveness: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17) May God teach us the perils of pride and the wisdom of humility. As Calvin noted, “Humility is the only response we should have towards a God who has given everything for our sake.” May that be your response, and mine.

Let us pray.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts
And see if there be any grievous way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting! (Psalm 139:23,24)*

Thank you, Lord, for the record of the life of Hezekiah.

Thank for the encouragements that it gives and the warnings that it provides.

Help us, we pray, to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord, to pour contempt on all our pride and to follow the example of humility given to us by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We pray this for His name’s sake.

Amen
