

When it came to the verbal and written insults that Hezekiah and the people of Judah had to endure, Hezekiah was tempted to give up and throw in the towel. How could he argue with what the Assyrian field commanders were saying? From all outward appearances, the case of Judah was a lost cause. But, instead, Hezekiah **"spread it out before the LORD."** And God heard and answered his prayers in a most spectacular and resounding way.

The devil doesn't have to write letters of insult to us today, does he? In so many ways and using so many siren songs in our society, he repeatedly asks, "Can God really get you out of this problem?" "Do you really think your faith can get you through this situation?" "Can't you see that you're going down, and going down fast? If God hasn't helped you before this, why do you think he'll help you in the future?" And the list goes on.

May Hezekiah serve as a model for us today. Hezekiah did not despair. This king, whose faith was unlike that of any other king, took the matter to God in prayer. He **"spread it out before the LORD."** God heard his humble prayer of faith and promised that the mighty Assyrian king would be struck down with the sword. And God made good on his promise. God will also hear our humble prayers of faith. When we call out to him, when we seek comfort in our sorrow, when we seek strength and direction from his Word, when we long for his assurance of forgiveness and love, we'll never be disappointed. For God promises us, **"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me" (Ps 50:15).** And God always keeps his promises.

And just as the Angel of the Lord won a resounding victory over blasphemous Sennacherib, so has the Lord Jesus won a resounding victory over slanderous Satan by his perfect life—even withstanding Satan's temptations in the wilderness, his atoning death on the cross, and his glorious resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, **"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Ro 4:25).** With God at our side, we can respond to all the insults of our enemies and sing:

*Satan, I defy thee; death, I now decry thee;
Fear, I bid thee cease. World, thou shalt not harm me
Nor thy threats alarm me while I sing of peace.
God's great pow'r guards ev'ry hour;
Earth and all its depths adore him.
Silent bow before him. Amen (CW 349:3).*

2 Kings 19:14-19 – *Prayer Is Powerful* – 249, 459, 408
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The story is told of a pastor who thought he detected a hypocritical spirit among the members of his flock. So one Sunday he instructed them to read through the biblical book of Hezekiah the next week. The following Sunday he asked them if they had done so. A whole slew of hands shot up into the air. With a frown on his face and disdain in his voice, he informed them that there is no book of Hezekiah in the Bible. Hezekiah is an Old Testament king, whom we find at the heart and center of today's account. As we hear his story, keeping in mind that we're studying the Lord's Prayer under the theme *Prayer Is Powerful*, we hear him take this prayer to the Lord:

Listen to These Insults

Hezekiah was the thirteenth king of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He ruled about 700 B.C. and was a sincere believer in the Lord. God describes him this way: **"He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD. He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses" (2 Ki 18:3, 5, 6).** What makes this description of Hezekiah so striking is that he didn't learn any of these things from his father, Ahaz. Ahaz is described by God this way: **"He did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD. He sacrificed his own son in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops, and under every spreading tree" (2 Ki 16:2-4).** It's almost as if Ahaz was the poster child for gross idolatry and Hezekiah for exemplary faithfulness to the Lord. The contrast is that great.

Hezekiah destroyed the idol shrines that his father had erected in the hills. He tore down the wooden poles that glorified, even deified, sexual perversion. He repaired the temple and restored the furnishings that had been removed during his father's reign. Above all, he reinstated the worship of the true God and the all-important observance of the Passover. Once, when he became seriously ill, he showed his trust in the Lord and was rewarded with fifteen years added to his life. Today, despite exposing a sinful streak of fear and worry, which causes him to act unwisely when besieged by King Sennacherib's strong Assyrian army from the north, we see him wisely taking his concerns to the Lord God in prayer.

Six years into Hezekiah's rule, in 722 B.C., the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel are captured by Assyria and carried off into captivity, never to be heard from again. Eight years later, King Sennacherib attacks the two southern tribes of Judah and is poised to decimate the city of Jerusalem. In a moment of weakness, to protect his beloved city and save his people, Hezekiah offers to pay tribute money to Sennacherib. Sennacherib isn't shy and demands eleven tons of silver and a ton of gold from the temple treasury. Sadly, Hezekiah chooses to deplete the temple treasury to buy off the king, which makes me wonder how often today we take money that should be given in our thankofferings to the Lord and use instead it for our own personal pleasure. God says in Malachi, *"Will a mortal man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse, because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse"* (Mal 3:8-10). We rob God when we don't give him the offerings he deserves. Sennacherib doesn't care where the money comes from and, because he isn't a man of his word—even though he receives the money he demands—he moves forward with his plan to take Jerusalem.

As part of his tactics, Sennacherib instructs his field commanders to ridicule Hezekiah and the people of Judah with words that are full of arrogance and blasphemy. They tell them that it would be foolish to rely on Hezekiah or to trust in any foreign power (in this case, Egypt). They suggest that Hezekiah can't supply the horsemen necessary, even if the Assyrians were to provide the horses, and that Judah's entire army is no match for a single squadron of Assyrian soldiers. Insult follows after insult, culminating with the blasphemous accusation that not even the God of Judah can defend the people against Assyria. And, if that weren't enough, Sennacherib sends a letter of insult and ridicule against God to Hezekiah and the people. In this letter *"they spoke about the God of Jerusalem as they did about the gods of the other peoples of the world—the work of human hands"* (2 Ch 32:19). All this leads to the prayer Hezekiah offers to God in our text today.

Before he goes to the Lord in prayer, however, Hezekiah does a number of things. He tears his clothes and puts on sackcloth, signs of sorrow and repentance—for himself and for the sins of the people. He goes into the temple, which is his church, his house of worship. And then he sends a messenger to the Prophet Isaiah to let him know what has happened. It is only then that Hezekiah takes the blasphemous letter and *"spreads it out before the LORD."*

And this is his prayer: *"LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God. It is true, LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, LORD, are God."*

What a prayer! What eloquence! What boldness! A prayer like this God cannot refuse to answer. And answer he does. His answer comes through Isaiah, who says, *"This is what the LORD says: 'Do not be afraid of what you have heard—those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Listen! I will have him cut down with the sword'"* (2 Ki 19:6, 7). Isaiah further predicts, *"He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant"* (2 Ki 19:32, 34). That very night the Angel of the Lord slaughtered 185,000 soldiers in Sennacherib's mighty Assyrian army.

In the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches us to pray, *"Lead us not into temptation."* Martin Luther asks, *"What does this mean?"* and then goes on to answer, *"God surely tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins; and though we are tempted by them, we pray that we may overcome and win the victory."* When we pray this petition of the Lord's Prayer, we are asking God to keep temptations from us or, if he chooses to allow them to come, to give us the power to withstand and overcome them.

Hezekiah was faced with a number of temptations. In regard to the tribute money King Sennacherib demanded, he was tempted to compromise and pay him off. He hoped the problem would go away. Sadly, whenever we compromise in regard to temptation, we're giving the devil what belongs to God. When we don't spend time in prayer, we're giving God's time to Satan. When we withhold our firstfruits offerings we're giving God's money to Satan. When we're sexually immoral, we're giving the bodies and minds that belong to God to Satan. When we let our temper get the best of us and use it to hurt and humiliate others, we're giving God's vengeance to Satan. Whenever we compromise, we give Satan what belongs to God.