

The Power of Prayer

by Chuck Smith

In 'The Power of Prayer', Chuck Smith emphasizes the importance of trusting God in difficult times and the transformative power of prayer through the example of Hezekiah's faith.

Duration: 33:35

Scripture: Isaiah 37:14, Isaiah 37:20

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing the greatness and power of God when facing difficulties. He calls upon God, acknowledging His ability to overcome any problem. The speaker refers to the prayer of Hezekiah in Isaiah 37, where Hezekiah asks God for help against the enemy who is mocking God's power. Hezekiah acknowledges that the gods of the enemy nations were man-made and powerless, but he trusts in the true and living God. The sermon encourages believers to seek God's help in impossible circumstances, so that His power may be known to all nations.

Transcript

Let's pray. Father, as we have gathered together here today, we rejoice in the fact that we have access to you, that we can call upon you, Lord, in the time of difficulty, in the times of distress, in the times of trouble, and that you are always there, ready to help as we call upon you. Lord, we pray today that your blessing will be upon this service and upon your word as we open now your word.

Let the spirit just apply the truths to our hearts. We bring before you, Lord, our junior high young people who will be going up this afternoon to the camp for this week. Do a marvelous work in their hearts, Lord.

Touch them with the realization of your power and your love. Let them come home, Lord, with renewed desires to serve you with all of their hearts and lives. Bless them abundantly during this week in the mountains.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen. You may be seated. Tonight we will be continuing our journey through the Bible, Isaiah chapters 35 through 37.

I love that 35th chapter. It has ministered to me so many times in the hour of grief over the loss of a loved one. I've found comfort and strength from that chapter.

Pastor Skip will be leading us in our journey through the Bible. I've been enjoying immensely his studies on Sunday evening. We would encourage you to come out, join with us.

I know you will be blessed also, even as we have been blessed in these Sunday evening studies. This morning, I'd like to draw your attention to Isaiah chapter 37, verse 14. We read, And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and he read it.

And Hezekiah went up unto the house of the Lord, and he spread it before the Lord. This was a threatening letter that Hezekiah received from King Sennacherib, telling him that his God was not able to defend him, as were not the gods of the other nations that the Assyrians had conquered. It was a letter that was a very threatening letter.

And Hezekiah took this letter into the temple. He just laid it out before the Lord. He said, Lord, I want you to hear what they're saying.

I want you to see what they're doing. And he sought the Lord's help from the threats that were being made against him by the Assyrian army. It's interesting.

The Assyrians had a portion of their troops. They're setting siege against Jerusalem. The spokesman for the Assyrians, Rabshakeh, had challenged the people.

And he had told them, don't trust in the word that Hezekiah, your king, is speaking to you, telling you that your Lord is going to deliver out of the hands of the Assyrians. For, he said, none of the gods have been able to deliver out of the hands of the Assyrians. We have destroyed these other people who trusted in their gods and don't think your God is going to be any help to you.

And he spoke about how that Hezekiah had actually destroyed the high places, the altars and so forth that were there in the land and that Jehovah would not be of any help to them. But it's interesting how little he really understood the God that Hezekiah served. It's very true today that people who are outside of the church understand so very little about Jesus Christ and the God that we serve.

They have a tendency to lump religions all together. And they can't really see the difference between Buddhism, Mohammedanism or Christianity or the Krishnas or whatever. They have that tendency to just lump them all together because they really do not have an understanding, a true understanding of the God that we worship and serve.

This blasphemer, Rabshakeh said, if you say we trust in Jehovah our God, is it not he whom Hezekiah has taken away his high places, he's broken and his altars? In 1 Kings chapter 18, talking about when Hezekiah came to the throne, the people of Judah have been worshiping false gods. They had built groves unto the sex goddess Asherah. They had built high places to worship Baal.

They had built altars unto Molech and unto Mammon. And as far as the Assyrian was concerned, he couldn't see any difference between Jehovah, the true God of Israel, and these other gods that when Hezekiah came into the position of king, he destroyed the places of worship. In 2 Kings 18.3, we read, Hezekiah did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah.

According to all that David, his father had done, he removed the high places. He broke the images. He cut down the groves.

He broke in pieces the brass serpent that Moses had made. For unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it. He called it nehushtan, just a thing of brass.

He trusted in Jehovah, the God of Israel, so that after him there was none like him among all of the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clung to the Lord, and he departed not from following him, but he kept his commandments. And the Lord had commanded Moses, and the Lord was with him and prospered him, whethersoever he went.

So this getting rid of the false gods, in the mind of the Assyrians, he was just getting rid of their gods. They didn't discern the difference between the true and the living God and the false gods that were being worshipped by those in Jerusalem prior to the reign of Hezekiah. The world has a tendency to classify all religions as just that, religions.

They lump them into one category. They say, oh, he's just religious. Whether or not you are worshipping Muhammad or you are worshipping Buddha or any of the other gods, they have just a tendency to classify you all in the same category.

In reality, I do not believe that Christianity is properly classified or should be as a religion, because it is an antithesis to most religious beliefs. Religious beliefs and religion is man's attempt to reach up and touch God. Christianity is God's attempt to reach down and touch man.

Religion declares that you must do good works that you might appease God. Christianity says there is not a good work that you can do that will please God. That it is your faith and trust that God is pleased with.

Without faith, it's impossible to please God. Many religions require that you offer your sons and sacrifice your sons for your God. Christianity tells us that God sacrificed his son for us.

Religions tell you the sacrifices that you must make in order to appease God. Christianity tells you of the sacrifice God made to redeem you. Religion emphasizes what you must do for God.

Christianity emphasizes what God has done for you. So we see how that Christianity is really opposed and opposite to religion as far as the belief systems of Christianity. But the world cannot see this difference.

They have that tendency to just classify them all together. Unfortunately, many churches have made a religion out of Christianity, but that is a great mistake. Rabshakeh was totally ignorant of Jehovah, the God of Israel, and he just classified him with the other gods.

Now Rabshakeh had said, don't let Hezekiah encourage you to trust in Jehovah to deliver you. None of the other gods of the other lands were able to deliver their people out of our power. So you see, he classified Jehovah with all of the false gods that were being worshiped throughout the world.

The world just can't seem to see the difference between our worship of Jesus and those who worship Buddha, Muhammad, or Krishna. But there is a world of difference. Rabshakeh then declared that Jehovah actually sent me here to conquer this city, speaking blasphemously concerning Jehovah.

Now when they brought the words of Rabshakeh to Hezekiah, they were disturbing words. Hezekiah took off his royal robes, he put on sackcloth, and he went into the house of the Lord. And there he declared, this is a day of trouble, a day of rebuke, a day of blasphemy.

For the children have come to birth, there's no strength to bring them forth. A day of trouble. The siege against Jerusalem had done its work in that food supplies were very scarce.

People were weakened because of the lack of food. And in this weakened condition, those ladies who went into labor, they just didn't have the strength to go through labor to deliver the children. A time of real trouble.

As far as Hezekiah was concerned, it's about as bad as it can get. Only God can help us at this point. We must put our trust in him.

It's interesting how that so often, when all other agencies have failed, and that there is only one recourse for help, and that is God, people often at this point begin to panic. You mean only God can help me? Oh, you know, and I mean, like, that's the worst thing in the world. You're going to have to trust in God.

The doctor said there's nothing that medical science can do. You're just, oh, no, you know, like, that's something terrible. But in reality, what's so bad about having to trust in God? Surely, we should trust in God daily for our help and for our strength and for our sustenance.

There's an old saying that man's extremities are God's opportunities. And many times God allows us to get to that place where we have exhausted every human resource, where there is nothing that any man can do for us. That we realize that we have only one recourse at this point, and that's just to call upon God and put our trust in him.

God allows us many times to get to that place so that he then can work. And as he works, we can only then give glory to God. We can't say, well, I was going through that and I found this new diet or I found this new, you know, medicine or this new drug or herbal substance, and, oh, my, I'm doing great now.

And we're praising, you know, the ginseng or something, you know, because it made me feel young and vibrant again, you know. And it's so easy to give credit or give glory to some thing rather than God. And that is why God often has to let us get to the place where there is no place that we can call upon for help but him, that we are forced to trust in him.

Man's extremities become God's opportunities. Hezekiah said it's a day of trouble. And it's a day of rebuke.

It's true. This, uh, Rabshakeh have been rebuking them for listening to Hezekiah who was telling them, trust in the Lord. The Lord will deliver us.

You would be amazed at how many times I've been rebuked for trusting in the Lord. Probably you've experienced this too. You're facing a difficult situation, a real difficult problem.

And people say, well, what are you doing about it? Well, I'm just trusting the Lord. Oh, you can't do that. You've got to do something.

Well, I am. Well, what are you doing? I'm trusting in the Lord. And it bugs people uh, if you're just putting your trust in the Lord and trusting him to work things out, they, they think that we ought to take some kind of action and so forth.

And you ought to be, you know, upset. You ought to be worried. You ought to be, uh, you know, just, uh, all nervous and upset, but it bothers people when you just are trusting in the Lord.

Hezekiah declared it was a day of blasphemy. Indeed it was. This Reb Sheka have been blaspheming the Lord that they had been trusting in.

Now this is the situation. The King of Assyria was up in the Northern part of the country and he was setting siege against the city of Libna. He was needing help in taking Libna.

So he sent down to Jerusalem to the Assyrian force that had set siege against Jerusalem. And he commanded that they come North to help him in his siege against Libna. And so Reb Sheka had to leave, uh, the siege and the army of the Assyrians withdrew to the North, uh, to take care of that city up there.

But as they left, they sent a threatening letter to Hezekiah. And basically it was saying, don't think that we're leaving off the conquering of Jerusalem. We'll be back.

And so, uh, the letter said, don't let your God in whom you trust deceive you into saying that Jerusalem will not be given to the hand of the King of Assyria. Behold, you have heard what the King of Assyria did to all of the lands by utterly destroying them. You will not be delivered.

The gods of the other nations were not able to deliver from Assyria. And so here's this threatening letter. We'll be back.

Don't trust in God or think that your God is going to be able to help you. When we get back, we're going to take this city. Hezekiah took this letter.

As we read in our text, he went into the temple and he just unrolled it. It was a scroll and he just rolled it out before the Lord. And, and he laid this letter out before God.

I think that this was probably the wisest thing that Hezekiah could do at this point. It is true that the Assyrian army had conquered the world. It is true that, uh, they did not have the force or the might to deliver themselves from the Assyrians.

And the threat will be back. Don't think that your God is going to deliver you out of our hands. And so he laid it out before the Lord, this threatening letter.

And I think that that's a wise thing to do. If someone threatens you, just bring it to the Lord. If you get a threatening letter, threatening email or something, just lay it out before the Lord and say, look, Lord, look what they're threatening to do.

Uh, and, and just take the problem, the difficulty, the issue, and rather than worrying about it and fretting over it, just set it before the Lord. The Bible tells us to cast all your cares upon him because he cares for you. So Hezekiah set it out before the Lord.

And then in verse 15, there we read and Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord saying, Oh, Lord of hosts, God of Israel that dwells between the cherubims. You are God, even you alone of all of the kingdoms of the earth. You have made the heavens and the earth.

Notice this is his address. Who's he praying to? He's praying to the only true God in all the earth. He's praying to the God that made the heavens and the earth.

I think that in prayer, the most important part of prayer is right at the beginning. Who are you addressing your prayer to? The address. Who are you addressing when you pray? Hezekiah is addressing the only

true God, the one who made the heavens and the earth.

Jesus said, when you pray, say our father, which art in heaven, that's a good address. Our father, you see, that speaks of relationship. It's important that you have a relationship with him, a personal relationship, our father, which art in heaven, a good address for prayers.

When the disciples have been threatened of what would be done to them if they continued to preach in the name of Jesus Christ to the people, they came together and they prayed and said, oh, Lord, you are God. You created the heavens and the earth and everything that is in them. That's who they were addressing their prayer to.

The God who made the heavens and the earth and everything that is in them. You see, if you get the right address on your prayer, then the petition that you're bringing to God doesn't seem to be so overwhelming. Though you're overwhelmed by the circumstances, by the situations, though you can't see any way out.

You're turning it over to him who created the universe and all of the life forms in it. And though it is impossible for you, it is divinely simple for him. Difficulty must always be measured by the capacity of the agent that is doing the work.

If God is the agent doing the work, then talk of difficulty is absurd. I'm asking, I'm calling upon God. I'm addressing my prayer to the God who created this universe and all of the life forms within it.

That helps me, you see, to focus upon the greatness of God and the power of God and the ability of God. And seeing then my problem in the light of God's greatness and God's power and God's ability, all of a sudden my problem dissolves into nothing in the light of God's power and strength. In verse 17, as Hezekiah is praying, he said, Hear, Lord, what they're saying about you.

Lord, they're saying some pretty mean things about you, that you're not able to deliver, that you are powerless against their power. He then acknowledged the facts. He said, It is true, they have defeated all of the other nations and they have burned their gods in the fire.

But the gods that they destroyed were not true gods, but they were the creation of man. And that is why they could not help the people. And then he called in verse 20 for God's help, O Jehovah, our God, save us from His hand, that all of the kingdoms of the earth may know that you are Jehovah and you alone are God.

So Lord, help us, help us to have victory over them so that all of the nations of the world will know that you are the true, the living God, the God who is able to deliver even in impossible circumstances. And we read that God answered his prayer in verse 29, that God in the answer addresses Himself to the Assyrians. He said, Because you have raged against me, that is the Assyrians, and your tumult has come up into my ears, therefore will I put my hook in your nose and my bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came.

It's interesting, the archaeologists have uncovered pictures that were made during the time of the Assyrians' power. And in these pictures from Nineveh and all, they show the Assyrians leading their captives away by big hooks through their nose or big hooks through their lips. And this was the way by which the Assyrians led their captives, by hooks through the nose.

God said, I'll put my hook in your nose and I'll lead you away, even as you have led other peoples away, I will lead you away. And then in verse 33, Therefore thus saith Jehovah concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, Jerusalem, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a mount against it. But by the way that he came, by the same way he will return and shall not come into this city, saith Jehovah, for I will defend this city to save it for my own sake and for my servant David's sake.

The beautiful assurance, he's gone to prayer, he's taken this problem to God, too big for me. And you know, I don't have the ability or the strength to defend the city, but Lord, I'm calling upon you for your help. And God now gives him assurance that the Assyrians will not be able to build a mount or they won't shoot an arrow into the city.

What God did to the Assyrians, as they say, it's now just a matter of history. What happened? Well, the Assyrians came against Jerusalem with a whole army to set siege against it. And we read in verse 36, Then the angel of Jehovah went forth, and he smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and eighty-five thousand men.

And when the men of Israel awoke early in the morning, behold, all they saw were the dead corpse. So Sheneqereb the king of Assyria departed and went and returned and dwelt in Nineveh. The angel of the Lord went into the camp of the Assyrians, and in one night he destroyed a hundred and eighty-five thousand of those soldiers of the Assyrian army, wiped out the army in one night so that the rest of the Assyrians fled back to Nineveh.

And Assyria no longer was a world power. It was soon conquered by Babylon and totally defeated. As Hezekiah, I would encourage you today to place all of the troubling issues in your life before the Lord and let the Lord fight your battles for you.

The Lord can do a much better job in defending you than you can do for yourself. It may be that the issues that you are facing seem to be overwhelming. You can't seem to see any way out.

It looks like it's a hopeless kind of a situation, the same as was with Hezekiah. From a physical human standpoint, it was a hopeless situation. But by putting his trust in the Lord, God delivered and gave him victory.

And by you putting your trust in the Lord, God will deliver you and give you victory in whatever difficulty you might be facing at this time, whatever problem or trouble you might be going through. Just spread it out before the Lord and say, Lord, here's what's happening. Here's what's going on.

Help me, Lord, that your name might be glorified as others see what you can do for a person who puts their faith and trust completely in you. Father, we thank you for the help that you've promised to give to those that would put their trust in you. And Lord, we just pray that today those that are going through some real deep water, those that are passing through the fiery trials, Lord, that they this day might just cast all their cares upon you because you do care for us.

Help them, Lord. Come to their aid. Deliver them, Lord.

Be their defense. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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