

The Lump of Figs (Isaiah 38)

by Dick Hussey

Dick Hussey's sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer, God's gentle healing, and living with eternal values through the story of Hezekiah in Isaiah 38.

Scripture: Isaiah 38:1-2, Isaiah 38:8-9, Isaiah 38:21, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Mortality Awareness", "Divine Intervention"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of a young king who is given a message from God through the prophet Isaiah. The king is told to set his house in order because he will soon die. This experience shakes the king and makes him realize the importance of eternity and the afterlife. The preacher then shares personal anecdotes about his own life and how he has relied on God despite not having much formal education. He concludes by referencing a story from the Bible about Joshua and the sun standing still, emphasizing the power of God to intervene in difficult situations.

Transcript

The following ministry, entitled, The Lamp of Figs, is subject to wonder of God setting the clock back, and the explicit love of Christ, were given in this Rola Summer Conference in August 1991. Isaiah chapter thirty-eight. In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death, and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amos, came unto him and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.

Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall and prayed unto the Lord, and said, Remember now, O Lord, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore, for as the margin puts it, wept with much weeping. Then came the word of the Lord to Isaiah, saying, Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears.

Behold, I will add unto thy life fifteen years, and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city. And this shall be a sign unto thee from the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing that he hath spoken. Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sundial of Ahaz ten degrees backward.

So the man, sorry, so the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down. And from here we move on to verse sixteen. O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.

So wilt thou recover me and make me to live. Behold, for peace I had great bitterness, but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption, for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee.

They that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day. The father to the children shall make known thy truth.

The Lord was ready to save me, therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord. For Isaiah had said, let them take a lump of figs and lay it for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover. Hezekiah also had said, what is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord? This morning we had some very excellent ministry.

I'm sure we were all blessed, and it was what I'd call deep, may I say advanced and blessed stuff. It blessed me an awful lot by what I'd call a brilliant senior lecturer, in the spirit, of course, in the spirit. Now tonight, in contrast to that, you're going to get a first-form teacher, even in the old-fashioned style, 45, 50 years ago, without computers and all the modern things that come these days, if you can envisage a blackboard and a white chalk, and the teacher just making one, two, three basic points, just as it was done in the old days.

I feel what I have, and what I give is so simple, so basic, but I know one thing is what God told me to give, and I can only obey it. So it's three things then, and the first one is how this young king, for he was only 39, he began in the kingdom at 25, and 14 years later, when, as I say, he was 39, he was suddenly jolted and shaken. Obviously a sore, perhaps an incurable disease, had come to his body, but it was God coming by his prophet Isaiah to tell him he was to set his house in order, because shortly he was to move to the other side for eternity.

What a solemn thing this is. I wonder if any of you has ever been jolted and even shaken by God in such a way that eternity, the afterlife, has seemed so imminent. The end at hand, and how such an experience awakens us to the eternal values of God, when we can so often be absorbed in earthly things, even obsessed by tiny, puny things down here, and there is an eternal fate at stake, and there are burning values, and there are souls that are being lost, and there is our one and only life, and then at the other end it will all be written, all finished, and it will either be that we have burned for God, and God has managed to outwork in us the highest he had, or that there's been loss and waste for our eternal grief and shame.

This man reacted like we should all react in the circumstances, that which I mentioned yesterday in the crisis Elisha had to face with that dead young boy in front of him. Just prayer to God, that praying in the Holy Ghost, that praying when from deep inside of your manhood and your womanhood there comes a gushing in the spirit, a crying unto God with supplications, oh hallelujah, beseeching God in the most tender terms, in ways that you never thought you could pray, and you poured out before God, and at the end of this prayer we're told that he wept with much weeping. His bowels gushed out unto God in the spirit, and he poured it unto God, and bless the name of the Lord, there came a very prompt reply, God heard his prayer.

How wonderful it is when you and I can really either get on our knees or stand on our feet, and lift our hands and our heart and lay hold on God, and hallelujah, one way or another there comes a blessed answer that makes you know I, this tiny little insignificant being, have cried unto that eternal omnipotent King of Saints, ancient of days, and he has stooped to hear me and to answer. Bless the name of the Lord, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears, they were not crocodile tears of sentiment, of

self-pity. I don't believe even that Hezekiah was in the fear of death, I believe there was something else much more important.

He was a man that had given himself to God, and he just mashed up idols and broke the people of God with a firm hand against anyone that might have risen against him to a mighty reformation that restored order and worship, and God to the right place he was to have among his people. But the fear in this man's heart was to get to the other end without having run his full course. If you, or if I can make it understood better, it's as though the clock of his health had gone round and round fast and reached 11 59, and the clock of the outworking of the purpose of God was behind, far behind, and he was in serious danger of that 12 hour calling him to eternity unfulfilled.

Even as I'm saying these words, I'm speaking to my own spirit, I'm building myself up, I'm challenging myself, not to waste time like I've sometimes done it, to burn for God, to love like I've never loved, to serve like I've never served. And I hope it's challenging you, my brother, I hope it's challenging you, my sister. The day will come when all this will be over, and we'll stand in spirit before the judgment seat of Christ, and we'll be accountable to him for what we've done with our one and only life for him.

Hallelujah. Now let's jump from the first verse to the last but one, the second last verse of the chapter. For Isaiah had said, let me read it again, let them take a lump of figs and lay it for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover.

First form teacher now proceeds to point second. And here I want to speak to you about the lump of figs. Many years ago, nearly 49 years ago, I was born of the fire of God.

That fire burned within my bosom in two or three omnipotent successive waves. I didn't understand at the time what was happening. It took me many years to understand.

And as I did, and as I do now, that in a very gracious way, God was branding me for himself. He was kindling a fire of holiness and of love that was to burn up sin and lust and the world, and that he expected me not only to keep burning brightly right up to the end, but to use it as a means of kindling other men and women so that they too should burn passionately with love and holy zeal for the God of eternity, for the Lamb of Calvary. And I must say that I'm most at home when in the movings of God I feel and I know this fire within me.

I'm like a fish in the water, really in my element, because I was born, I came into the gospel that way. But however, in later years of life, God had to take me in different ways and paths by which I was to learn that it is not always the fire, and it is not only the fire, that the ministrations, the flowings and the movings of God change from one to another, and to another dimension or wavelength. Use the word you like.

It's not for God, a one-track God. His ways are eternal. There's no contradiction in him, but his love and his grace are, shall I use the word, a many-splendored thing that opens up wider and wider as we go on with him.

Last night, the way I spoke, I felt in my heart there was a lot of that fire which sometimes goes to, bless the Lord, with the hammer of the word of God that is able to crumble the stone heart, or with the sword of the spirit that makes the flesh bleed and die, and ministers all life to the spirit, or to the surgical knife that speaks of the circumcision of heart. And all these are precious things, but I feel we have to learn increasingly to be adaptable, and to know that there is a moment and an occasion for each wavelength.

So to speak, we should be able to switch on with God to his frequency, and tune in exactly to his wavelength to know just what he's saying, and how he wants it said, blessed be his name.

Sometimes, and it's happened to me, I must admit it, we can become so set in our ways, and we minister, and we say, and it's spirit and life, and yet it's becoming without us realizing spirit and knife, and we're knifing dear ones without any intention perhaps, but we're doing it. And this has drawn me to this simple matter of the lump of pigs. I know that these blessed truths are wonderful, but I know that there are hearts, and situations, and backgrounds, and souls of men and women that somehow can't come this way, that can't take this language, or this wavelength of God, and yet God would not write them off.

God would not discard them, and for such God has what I'll call very simply the lump of pigs. You see, if they just tried to use the knife with it would appear that he had gangrene, or something very serious in his feet, surely it would have meant amputation. And God didn't want a lame king short of one foot, or perhaps both.

So God found a way, and the way was the lump of pigs. I find it striking, I think my memory is right, there isn't one other instance in scripture when God resorts to this particular way of doing it, because he's not the God of the carbon copy, the God of imitation, the God of fat answers. He's the God of freshness.

His love is ever creative, original, fragrant, renewed. He's a great genius that doesn't copy scientifically, but creates and creates out of his heart of love, inexhaustible and wonderful. And to me, the lump of pigs just means that in that place where that man was so, so hurt, right inside, there wasn't to be any tight bandaging, certainly no surgical knife, but just a gentle lump of pigs, a cluster of pigs put together, that emblem of Israel, God's chosen people, and simply like a poultice, like a plaster as the word gives it, surrounding, gently embracing all that sickly, all that diseased area, and moment by moment, oozing sweetness and sweetness and sweetness, and beginning to draw out all the pus and all the infection in a slow, gentle, but sure process, till there isn't any of that awful disease left, and Hezekiah is all restored, and standing on his feet, he goes to the temple to praise and sing to the God who has done this wonderful thing for him.

And again, we move into the parable of the spiritual. How many of us, no doubt through our own fault, but also through the malice of Satan, life with its knocks that is given us, and perhaps we've been battered and bruised and kicked about. I don't want to in any way feed thoughts of self-pity, but simply these are realities.

If we want God, our attitude has to be to see our side and our blame, and very often there is a part that we cannot explain, and others don't understand, but God does, and it's that exquisite, tender, delicate, like none other love of Jesus. For as I say, we've been so battered and bruised, we've put our big foot into it so many times, and there is something that's sore, something that's wounded inside, something that smarts with pain, something that often has to withdraw, because it can't even take looking at others and seeing them praise and rejoice in God, because inside there is a deep inner hurt to which there seems to be no answer. Perhaps we've gone from ministry, we've cried to this brother, to this other one, and there's been love, and there's been prayer, there's been faith exercised for us, but still the answer hasn't come.

And you expect that God to look upon you and condemn you and throw it at your face and rebuke you for all the many times you failed to be what you should have been. But hallelujah, you find that he comes with that great bosom of love, and he begins to pour sweetness upon sweetness and sweetness into your soul. He begins in this slow but sure, wonderful process to draw out and to drain away from you every bit of fuss

and infection and gangrene, determined, hallelujah, that you shall be made completely and entirely whole, that all that battered and bruised and wounded area shall become young and healthy and strong, and you'll be able to face others with a big smile.

You'll be able to open up to the love of others without fear of being wounded or knifed again. You'll be able to stand on your own feet and lift up your hands to your God and praise him, because he's done it for you too, hallelujah, with that undying, eternal love of God. I think of those words of Paul in Ephesians chapter 3, when he's taken on into tremendous realms in intercession, and after saying that Christ may dwell within your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in love, he goes on to say that ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Oh, hallelujah, here's a man that knows that the fullness of God is not in spectacular miracles, is not in signs and wonders, but it's in the love of that God whose supreme essence is love, love eternal. This is like trying to know the unknowable, trying to fathom the unfathomable, trying to rise to the heights and peaks that are unattainable in that love of God for which words are totally insufficient. I want to say that although God dealt with me in many, many other ways, bless his name, there were times when the only thing that worked was this blessed lump of things just brought into that blessed place which we know as the holiest of all, driven by an inner gentle and yet irresistible force that cries within you to go to your God, to go to your Jesus, sometimes at the end of your tether, sometimes feeling you have no more strength to go on, sometimes giving up hope in despair, and yet there inside finding Jesus, Jesus.

In those words of that hymn, I wish I knew them all from memory, but oh the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast and measured, boundless sea, and then as it goes on underneath and all around me, and not just singing it in the hymn, just not just reading it in the word, but being literally immersed and baptized into that love so that it's rolling over you, it's rising in your depth, and it's telling you again and again like the Holy Ghost can only tell you that God is love, and that Jesus is the supreme lover of mankind. Hallelujah. Oh how I needed that love.

My dear wife knows what I'm saying. She joined me at that stage in life, and oh my, how I needed God. If I'd gone on straight on this line on the fire, without God just deflecting me for a time, because he had to teach me much more about his ways, I would have been a much poorer man, perhaps a one-track mind, and I would have killed and knifed and brought into condemnation many, instead of learning to love them, and to switch to the wavelength of what I'm calling tonight the lump of figs.

We'll say a little more on that in a few minutes, but now first form teacher proceeds to point number three. And let's read again verse eight. Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees which is gone down in the sundial of Ahas ten degrees backward.

So the sun returned ten degrees by which degrees it was gone down. I wonder if you've heard about an American man who was a scientist. He had a great problem in life.

He was an alcoholic. His name Harold Hill, I believe. No one's heard about him, have you? No.

A man that was a brilliant scientist, and I've read a most fascinating account of how that in an organization within the United States to do with policy concerning the launching of satellites, decided before launching a series of further satellites to do a special preparatory work. The idea was to work with computers. It's all done in computers these days.

I must say I haven't a clue as to how they function. Bless you all, but I've lived 63 years without computers, and I intend to live the rest of my life without them. But be as it may, these clever computer brains began to work the computer so that it moved back in time, just tracing the orbits of all the planets of the solar system.

How they do such a thing, I don't know. But anyway, they got it going, and the computer made excellent progress. It was all plain sailing, all smooth running, until at a certain point in time they ran into trouble, and computer got stuck.

And they checked in case there was a technical snag, something in the electronics, but it was all right. And yet computer was stuck. It wouldn't move one step further.

And it was then that one of the scientists who'd been to Sunday school in his childhood said, Oh, just a minute. I remember there was a man called Joshua who fought a battle, and as he was running out of time, before the end of the day, he stood up and said, Son, stand still. And the Bible says, but the sun went on shining for nearly a whole day.

At first he was mocked. They laughed, these clever scientists. But he insisted.

He said, Let's give it a try. So they moved it. They fed that information into the computer.

And sure enough, the computer went on working, and tracing the orbits, moving always backwards in time. But yet there was something not quite in its right place. There was a slight irregularity.

There was something that didn't quite coincide. And this puzzled them. And they stopped for a moment, or for an hour.

And this same man who'd been to Sunday school, what an encouragement this should be to those who labor with children in Sunday school. Bless the Lord. You never know what God might turn out of that little boy and girl, you teaching about Christ and giving them Bible stories.

He said, I remember another one. Not another one. Yes, King Hezekiah.

God made the sun go back. And he found a scripture, I believe, and it was read. The conclusion they came that in the days of Joshua, it must have been 23 hours, 20 minutes.

And the 40 minutes remaining, they traced to this incident we've just read, when this miracle was wrought by God, by the clock moving back. And so, computer went on working to perfection, moving back into the past, and they were able to prepare their satellites to launch them, trying to ensure with all this information that there'd be no possibility of clash, or crash, or loss. And so, the dear, blessed Bible must prove to be right once again.

Hallelujah. But you know, there is again another significant truth in this little miracle. If I may so put it, any fool, like you and me, can move the clock forward in wasting precious time and even precious years of our life.

I speak as a fool who in the past has done this, but only the Eternal, who dwells out of time and space, can work and do this mighty miracle of setting the clock backwards, so that that which has been eaten by the locust is restored. And so, that you and I are able to catch up with the clock of our loving God, and outworking his purpose in our life, with the clock of our time down here on earth. And when we are called

home, we are both exactly at 12 midnight.

This is really what I have to say tonight. It may not be for all of you, but I know, I know there are quite a few who need the lump of figs of that tender, exquisite love of God. No other wavelength will get you through, but this one will.

And some of you too need, like I needed desperately, that God should do this for me. You know, when I was 26 years of age, I think it was, I'd had a bad asthma attack. A sister of mine who hadn't seen me for a few years, saw me after that.

I was looking so pale and unwell. And her remark to my dear mother was, oh, I've seen Dick. How his age, he looks an old man.

That was at 26. To put the cap on it, through a set of circumstances that I could never explain, and I don't fully understand yet, that God allowed me to be plunged into such a situation, such a horror of darkness, that by the age of 29 or 30, I was a finished man. My only hope when my firstborn child came into the world, Father, I have never made the grade, I never shall, but let him be for you what I haven't been able to be.

I was a defeated and a finished man. And I want to tell you, I know I've had to receive all the other light and truth and ministrations. But what really saw me through was that blessed lump of figs of the undying, eternal, sublime and supreme love of God.

The times when I just got on my knees before my Jesus, and found him coming for all my madness and folly, and just coming with utter sweetness, blessed comfort, just surrounding me so, so tenderly, and pouring and pouring waves of blessed heavenly love into my soul, that healed me, restored me, and made me stand on my own feet. And yet, tonight, I'm able to stand before you all in confidence, and in praise, and in love, without any fear of bondage, of bitterness, or hurt. My dear ones, I want to tell you in the most touching terms that I owe it all to that Jesus, who loved me, and found for me the blessed wavelength of the lump of figs.

You know, I have five children. A son and a daughter have an MSc. One in computer science, the other in public sector management, a third one who's got an HND with an above average in his thesis in agriculture.

Number four is to complete this year, all being well, his fourth year in Hispanic languages, and so get a BA. And I won't talk any more about the youngest, because she's waiting for her exam results. But shall I tell you something about yours truly? I haven't got one O level to my name.

It's a real miracle that I've been able to make my way through life like this, in this age and generation. But I have not one O level to my name. I just want to use an illustration to share what's in my heart.

You know, sometimes you get these big exhibitions on tremendous stands of wealthy firms. They have a show of sophisticated equipment, and so on. And then in a tiny little corner, you've got a table of the poor relations that just has one or two little commodities.

Scarcely anyone gives them a second look, because by contrast, it's all so tiny. And yet I shouldn't speak about that, because my commodity, shall I say, is not second rate. It comes from above.

But I feel very much like that. I'm the old school, no O level even, no computer. I wouldn't say on this table, but in my heart.

I've just got two things tonight. One is the lump of things of the love of Christ. The other is the God of the impossible, who can set back the clock of your life, so that when you've wasted years, he can give you a new lease of life, so that you'll be able to fulfill in God all that he has.

I have no diplomas or credentials down here on earth, or earthly-wise, but I have one credential, that this that I brought from the word of God is written upon the tables of my heart, because my Jesus has done it, and is doing it for me. So, so simple, but very true, and very honest. And you know something? When Jesus gives us things like this, it's so that in the flowings and the movings of the Spirit, we shall share them with others, so that others shall receive too.

And this is simply how I want to end. Shall we bow in prayer, and will you listen to me as I tell you that I stand here? Last night, I stood here urging you to come to spew out your sin, and there was a great shout, and I raised my voice. Tonight, I'm asking you, dear one, to come to me, for the lump of figs of the gentle, exquisite love of God to be wrapped all around you, and for the clock of your life to be set back, if necessary, that God will, in his infinite mercy, give you an extended lease of life, for you to end up fulfilled in him.

Will you come? Just be confident. Just come simply to a first-form teacher with no old errors, but come, because you're coming to Jesus. Yes, you're coming to Jesus, and not to a man.

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