

Ending Well

by Erlo Stegen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of watching and praying to ensure a good ending in life, using the example of king Hezekiah's tragic turn.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 29:2, 2 Chronicles 32:7-8, Proverbs 1:7, Proverbs 16:18, Isaiah 37:14-20, Isaiah 38:1-5, Matthew 26:41, Philippians 3:14, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Finishing Well", "Vigilance in Faith"

Description

Erlo Stegen emphasizes the importance of finishing well in his sermon 'Ending Well', using the life of King Hezekiah as a cautionary tale. Hezekiah started his reign with great zeal for God, cleaning the temple and trusting in God's deliverance against Sennacherib. However, pride crept in towards the end of his life, leading to poor decisions and ultimately a prophecy of destruction for Judah. Stegen warns that it is not enough to start well; one must also remain vigilant and faithful to the end, urging the congregation to 'watch and pray' to ensure a good ending. The sermon serves as a reminder that our spiritual journey requires continuous commitment and humility before God.

Transcript

2Chron 29-32; Is 37-39

What is better, to start well and end badly or to start badly, but end well? It is terrible to start well and end bad.

In these chapters we read of king Hezekiah, who was 25 years old when he became king. He did well in God's sight according to all that his father David had done. He served the Lord with all his heart. Of other kings we read that they did well in God's sight, but not as David. Those who were heroes of the faith should be your fathers.

When we read Hezekiah's story, it seems like he and Isaiah were the only revived people, but the nation was just following him, without the same fervant desire to serve God. When he died, all the good that had been done came to an abrupt end.

As soon as Hezekiah came to power, he commanded God's house to be opened and cleaned. Unfortunately, some went in, cleaned the temple, but forgot to clean their hearts.

When Sennacherib besieged the city, Hezekiah trusted in God. The enemy spoke blasphemous things against God, but it simply made Hezekiah more steadfast in God. There were unbelieving people who trembled because of the enemy's words, and Hezekiah had to encourage them.

Hezekiah and Isaiah met and cried to God because of the blasphemies of Sennacherib. Then the Lord sent an angel which destroyed Sennacherib's army, and he returned home where his own sons killed him.

God is to be feared, not only loved. Love without the fear of God is foolish. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Sennacherib did not know the fear of God and so he blasphemed him, and got his due reward.

After these victories, Hezekiah fell ill, and God sent Isaiah to tell him to put his house in order, for he would die. Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and "cried bitterly" and prayed. He reminded God of all he did for Him and how zealous he was for His glory. Then God spoke to Isaiah to go tell king Hezekiah that he has heard his prayer and will lengthen his life by 15 years. And God did another miracle by causing the sun to move backwards, as a sign that He has heard his prayer.

When the different nations heard what God had done, they came with wonderful gifts to king Hezekiah, even from Babylon. The Babylonians served the stars and the sun, so when the sun moved back, they realised that this which happened to king Hezekiah affected even their god.

Towards the end of Hezekiah's life pride came in and caused this man, who was so sharp in the past, to become blunt. God sent these people from Babylon to test Hezekiah to see what was in his heart.

Shortly after they left, Isaiah the prophet came to Hezekiah and asked him concerning them and what they had seen. Hezekiah told Isaiah that he showed them his whole house and armoury and riches. Isaiah answered the king that, because of what he showed them, Babylon will come and destroy Judah, take all the riches, and Hezekiah's very offspring will serve in Babylon's palaces. When Hezekiah heard this, he answered that the word Isaiah spoke was good, for he would still enjoy peace and prosperity in his own life.

Previously Isaiah warned Hezekiah not to trust the people from Babylon, but in God alone. However, Hezekiah trusted them and showed them everything. What did Isaiah have to do with the king's visitors? Isaiah was the person Hezekiah knelt with when he was in need. So Isaiah was right in asking who they were. Hezekiah should have contacted Isaiah immediately when these ambassadors from Babylon arrived. It seems that Hezekiah was not only out of touch with God but also with the prophet Isaiah.

Why did things go so tragically wrong? Jesus said, 'watch and pray'. Watch in the first instance, and then pray. Many pray and pray, while they're heading in the wrong direction. God commanded us to set a watch before our lips, lest we speak a wrong word. May God be gracious to his church that they will watch and live according to His Word. Engrave this into your heart and soul indelibly - to 'watch'.

Watch and pray that your life would be one with a good ending.

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