

# Reading Letters in Front of God

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala's sermon highlights the power of prayer through the story of King Hezekiah's faith and God's miraculous deliverance from the Assyrians.*

**Duration:** 18:48

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 32:7-8, Psalm 50:15, Psalm 86:5, Ecclesiastes 3:1, Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 6:33, James 5:16

**Topics:** "God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher addresses the challenges and attacks that the church is currently facing. He emphasizes the need to pray with all our hearts and seek God's help in times of trouble. The preacher shares his personal experience of relying on God in difficult situations and encourages the congregation to do the same. He then tells the story of King Hezekiah from the Bible, who faced opposition and mockery but chose to trust in God's deliverance. The sermon concludes with a call to prayer as the highest and most powerful action that any human can take.

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## Transcript

So in a second, I just want to put up a little story. It's a long story, and I've tried to condense it, but I want to see God quicken our hearts to pray. Because when you pray, you've done the highest thing that you can do on the earth.

Singing is one thing, athletics is another thing, preaching is great too, but when you pray, when we pray, when we call on God, that's the highest thing any human can do. And it's open to all of us, not just ministers or famous evangelists. So there's a man in the Bible who's very interesting, his name is Hezekiah.

And Hezekiah ruled as a king in Jerusalem, in the southern kingdom of Judah. Hezekiah's father was a morally corrupt person by the name of Ahaz. And this king Ahaz led God's people away from God and set up idols, and he followed the practices, the filthy practices of the idolaters that were around him.

And then Hezekiah comes on the scene, and this is one of those examples where it's not, the apple fell very far from the tree, praise God. If your parents weren't nice and didn't serve God, you don't have to be like your parents or your ancestors. Hezekiah becomes king, and he's a great king.

He seeks the Lord, he wants to please God, he cleans up the mess that he inherits from his father, their idols around the temple, just, it's a disaster. And he really gets to seeking the Lord and wants to please the Lord. The Bible says, in fact, in 2 Kings, that there was never a king before, anyone like him before or after.

He had some unique qualities. So while he's king, the northern kingdom of Israel, the cousins, the 10 tribes, they've departed from God for hundreds of years. And God has sent prophets, but nobody's listening.

So now God is gonna bring judgment as He promised on them. So He sends Sennacherib, the ruler of the Assyrian Empire, and they move in on Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. So the southern kingdom is watching this.

Wow, if you serve idols, you don't seek the Lord, this is what can happen to you. Just like the prophet said. So Assyria comes and they lay waste to the northern kingdom.

They conquer Samaria, and this, by the way, is the origin of what we call the Samaritans in the time of Jesus. What happens, they take all the Israelites who live, all the Jews who lived in the northern kingdom, and they shipped them, after they conquered them, they shipped them all over the Assyrian Empire, which was huge, they were the big guy on the block at that time. And then they brought some of their people and mixed them with the few Jews that were remaining.

And as time went on, they formed their own religion, part heathen, part Israel, and it was called the Samaritan religion. You remember in the time of Jesus, no one had anything to do with Samaritans. So they're watching all of this.

Ah, but the plot thickens, because Sennacherib, while he's in the neighborhood, says I just don't want the northern kingdom, I'm gonna conquer the southern kingdom. So he starts and defeats the cities that protect Jerusalem, the armed cities of Judah. I don't know what happened, but Hezekiah must have lost his nerve, his faith in God, and what he does is he tries, as he sees how strong they are, this would be like Russia or China attacking Poland.

There would be no chance for you, militarily. What happens is he takes money, and he says to the head of the Assyrian empire, the ruler, the king, he says, my bad, I should have never even stood up to you. And he tries to pay them off.

He even takes the gold off the doors of the temple to try to buy them off. But ladies and gentlemen, it's a good reminder to us, when the devil's after you, you can never buy him off. Whatever you think you can give somebody something to stop the evil, you'll never pay it off.

It keeps coming, it keeps coming. So what happens is, even though he pays them off, the king of Assyria says, no, no, I'm coming after you. So he sends some leaders to Jerusalem.

King Hezekiah doesn't receive them, but he sends out leaders to receive them, and listen what happens. The king of Assyria sent his supreme commander, his chief officer, and his field commander with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. They came up to Jerusalem and stopped at the aqueduct of the upper pool on the road to the Washington's field.

They called for the king, and Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah, the palace administrator, Shebna, the secretary, and Joah, son of Asaph, the recorder, went out to them. The field commander said to them, tell Hezekiah, this is what the great king, the king of Assyria says, on what are you basing this confidence of yours that you can stand up to us? You say you have the counsel and the might for war, but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending that you rebel against me? Look, I know you're depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff which pierces the hand of anyone who leans on it, such as Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to all who depend on him.

But the mocking doesn't stop there. But if you say to me, we're depending on the Lord, our God, isn't he the one whose high places and altars Hezekiah removed, saying to Judah and Jerusalem, you must worship before this altar in Jerusalem? He doesn't understand what's happening and what Hezekiah has accomplished. Come now, make a bargain with my master.

Look at the mocking. The king of Assyria, I will give you 2,000 horses, if you can put riders on them. How can you repulse one officer of the least of my master's officials, even though you are depending on Egypt for chariots and horsemen? Furthermore, have I come to attack and destroy this place without a word from the Lord? The Lord himself told me to march against this country and destroy it.

Oh, that's the ultimate. Not only do you have no hope, not only don't believe the king when he says trust in the Lord, not only have I defeated everyone else and the gods they depended on, but I want to tell you something more to frighten you. The Lord himself told me to come and destroy you.

He lies and says, God is on my side, not yours. What a devil, right? This is the day that we're moving into spiritually now with Satan in our country. So there's a lesson here for us.

The Bible says these messengers come back. They went further, by the way, I left it out. It's a little rough reading.

They went on, the officers that King Hezekiah sent out said, shh, shh, don't talk like that in front of the people that are listening on the walls. And they went, oh, don't talk out? And they start yelling at all the people. You're gonna eat your own excrement and drink your own urine.

That's what we're gonna do to you. So don't believe this stuff, trust in the Lord. Hezekiah tears his clothes when he hears what's going on, and he sends a message to Isaiah, and he says, pray.

We're between a rock and a hard place. I'm so happy that when you're between a rock and a hard place, there's a God that we can call on. Can we say amen to that? Down through the centuries, what we're doing tonight is the most sacred fraternity, sorority, that has ever been known to man.

We're in this great company of people who say, pass me not, O gentle Savior, hear my humble cry. Isaiah sends a word back to him and says, listen, don't believe these lies. See, it's not only that he are attacking and they're mocking, now they're mocking and saying even God wants you dead.

God is against you. Not just I'm against you, don't believe in prayer, don't believe that God's gonna get you out of it, but I'll add something to you. God told me to destroy you.

Boy, you talk about intimidation, right? Sure enough, God begins to work, and the king of Assyria hears that there's some trouble back home, and he thinks I might have to leave, but he says, no, I'm not leaving. Hezekiah will think that God intervened. So he sends a letter, and he puts it to some messengers.

He writes a message, a letter, and he says, bring this to Hezekiah, and here's what the letter said. The letter says all that nasty stuff. Don't believe, don't believe in God, don't believe anything good is gonna happen because I'm gonna come and kill you.

Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and he read it, and then he went to the temple of the Lord and he spread it out before the Lord. Can you see him? He takes the letter, and he doesn't just read it, he lays it before God, and he says, look, God, look at this filthy, lying enemy that I have, and Hezekiah prayed to the Lord. 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, notice how bold he is. Give ear, Lord, and hear like God's not listening.

God, listen up, listen to what I'm saying. Open your eyes, Lord, and see. Listen to the words that 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. They were 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, our Lord, are God. Then Isaiah, son of Amos, sent a message to Hezekiah. Just as he prays it, Isaiah gets a message and says, send it to the king.

This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. I have heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, and when God hears your prayer, it doesn't matter how big the mountain is, how big the enemy is, how bad and big is the king of Assyria. Come on, let's say amen to that.

Almighty God says, I've heard your prayer. No, I have heard your prayer. You prayed with your whole heart.

You cried out to me. You appealed to me to defend you. Well, I have now heard your prayer.

And then after Isaiah sends another word of encouragement to him, along with this message of the Lord wants you to know he has heard your prayer, listen how the story ends. Last few verses. That night, the angel of the Lord went out and put to death 185,000 in the Assyrian camp.

And when the people got up the next morning, there were all those dead bodies. So Sennacherib, king of Assyria, broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh, and he stayed there.

One day while he was worshiping in the temple of his God, Nisroch, his sons Adremalek and Cherezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esauhardin, his son, succeeded him as king. Everything God said he would do, he did because he said, I've heard your prayer, Hezekiah.

I have heard your prayer. I've heard your prayer. This church is here because God answers prayer.

I'm here in the ministry because God answers prayer. The choir is a blessing to people around the world, not because of their musical talent or my wife's gifting, it's because God answers prayer. There are people visiting here from other churches to a Tuesday night prayer meeting, come all the way from Jamestown, New York, I believe, and also somewhere in Maryland, because they believe also that God answers

prayer.

You yourself don't even know how much you're here because someone prayed. Some prayers you know about, but other prayers you don't even know about, but God heard them and brought you here tonight. Come on, can we say amen to that? So I love that picture.

I love that picture. King Hezekiah goes into the temple of God. No plan B, no counseling is gonna help.

No PowerPoint, no talent, no music, no instruments, no smoke and whistles. No. He lays it before God, says look at this filthy threat.

Look at this intimidation. Just like some of you have in your heads, the devil comes, he lies to us. He says you're not gonna make it.

Your daughter's never coming back, your son's not coming back. That will never work out, it's a pipe dream. And don't even bother praying, and don't say you trust in God because it's not gonna work.

In fact, on top of that, God ordains you to fail. God ordains you to be defeated. That's how far he'll go in his lies.

But I'm so glad Hezekiah didn't listen to any of that. He just brought the thing and laid it before God. And he said there it is, God.

I can't overcome him, but you are God. You're almighty God. Now listen, God.

Now listen, listen to my prayer, God. See what's going on here, look at this stuff. Look at this stuff that's come against your servant.

Now God, move so people will know you're alive. And you're the true and the living God. The king was saying I don't want the glory, I want you to get the glory.

But you gotta stretch out your hand and deliver me. And that very night, look what God did. That's what I wanna do tonight before we do anything else.

Yes, we got some things facing our church now. Things we gotta work through. They're a blessing from God, but there's like attacks of the enemy and things.

You know how the devil, he never gives up. Devil, devil. He's the devil, he's Satan.

And we're in a fight. We wrestle not against flesh and blood. Listen, Senator Carib, the king of Assyria, is a piece of cake compared to principalities and powers.

But Paul says when he says put on the whole armor of God, he says and pray at all times with all kinds of prayer. One sentence prayers. Prayers that are nothing more than a tear.

Crying out to God prayers. Intercession prayers. Petition prayers.

Pray at all times with all kinds of prayers. And pray in the Holy Spirit. Let the Spirit make you alive in prayer.

And God will hear and he will deliver you. Close your eyes with me. If you're here today and you need to lay out something before God like King Hezekiah did.

The mess you're in, the attack that you're in. Some besetting sin, some financial dilemma, some family mess, some broken heart. Whatever the thing is, you gotta lay it before God.

And then you gotta call on God. You can't do some mamsy-pamsy prayer. You gotta be real about it.

You gotta pray with all of your heart. You will seek me and you will find me when you seek for me with all your heart, the Bible says. I want those of you that needed to hear this word tonight.

I don't care if you're visiting or regularly here or a deacon or a pastor. You needed to hear this. Like I needed to hear.

What do you think, I'm preaching to you? I'm preaching to myself. That's all I've ever known is, Jim, your back is against the wall. Cry out to God, he'll help you again.

He'll do it again. He will do it again. He did it for the Brooklyn Tabernacle before.

He will do it again. He will do it again. There's a time for everything under the sun.

Every eye closed, there's a time for everything under the sun. But right now is the time for only one thing, not Bible study, not prayer and worship, not fellowship. We'll do all of that later.

Not even communion. Now's the time to call on the Lord for he is rich in mercy to everyone who calls out to him. In a day of trouble, call upon me, God says.

See what I will do. Don't be depressed, don't be down, look up. Cry out to me, I want to see my name glorified.

I've waited till the situation got this bad for you so that I could show you how awesome I am. Hallelujah, hallelujah. Excuse the emotion, but I am happy that God answers prayer.

Are you happy God answers prayer? If you're here today and say, I needed to hear that, get up out of your seat and get up here. Right at the altar, around the communion table. Get out of your seat from the balcony and come down.

No, pastor, that was for me. Para me, for me. I'm gonna lay the thing before God.

Come on, come out of your seat. When you get here to the front, lift up your hands like you were holding a letter. Lift up your hand and just present it before God.

And lift your voice and begin to pray. Say, God, look at the mess I'm in. Look at the situation I'm in.

You helped King Hezekiah, you're gonna help me. He could pray only in the name of the God of Israel. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, the son of the living God.

Hallelujah, hallelujah. Look down from heaven and help us, God. Help us, honor your word, honor your people.

Honor your promise.

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