

The King Over Your Crisis

Isaiah 36-37

Michael Felkins

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

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The title of our sermon series is *Isaiah: In the Eye of the Storm*. One of the things I have learned about living in Iowa is that we can have some really strong storms in the Midwest. Iowa State is called the Cyclones for a reason. We live in tornado alley, and tornadoes come through here pretty regularly, and they do a lot of damage. We even have Derechos. I had never heard of a derecho until 2020. They called it an in-land hurricane. That's just crazy!

We may get Derechos, but we don't get full-blown hurricanes. That is a good thing. I've never lived on the coast, but when we lived in East Texas, we lived close enough to the coast that we got more than outlying rain bands and strong winds from the hurricanes that hit the Texas gulf coast. Sometimes the whole hurricane would stay together and pass right over us.

In September of 2005, hurricane Rita hit the Texas gulf coast. It is still in the top ten of the most intense hurricanes to ever make landfall. It hit the Texas-Louisiana border. Then it made its way up the state line to northeast Texas. I had always heard about being in the eye of a hurricane, but I had never experienced it.

This hurricane was so strong that the eye of the hurricane held together until it passed directly over where we lived in Pittsburg, Texas. When the eye passed over, we were receiving very strong horizontal wind and rain that blew from west to east. Then the eye of the storm passed over, and everything went dead still. It was not silent because you could hear the storm outside of the eye-wall, but it was completely calm in the eye of the storm.

When the eye of the storm came over, Stacy, Sam, Alex, Mac, and I all went outside and marveled at the calm skies and even sunlight peeking through at times. Then the south wall of the storm passed over, and this time the wind and rain blew from east to west. It was one of the most remarkable weather events I have ever experienced.

I know that our experience of Hurricane Rita in northeast Texas was different from those on the coast. They caught the full force of the storm. We got a weakened version of it, but it was still quite scary.

Those that heeded the storm warnings and left southeast Texas and southwest Louisiana weathered the storm better than those who ignored the storm warnings died.

The Bible uses the weather events of storms to illustrate the crises that come into our lives. Jesus concluded *The Sermon on the Mount* with the illustration of storms. He said that those who obeyed His teaching were like those who built their houses on the Rock of His Word and, by extension—Himself. So, when the storms of life hit those who have built their lives on Christ, their lives stand firm. However, those who ignored the storm warnings are like the ones who built the houses of their lives on the sand. When the storm hit with its wind, rain, and floods, those lives collapsed like a house of cards.

This morning as we work through Isaiah 36-37, we are going to find out if King Hezekiah heeded the storm warnings that Isaiah had been giving for the past thirty-five chapters. Everything in the book of Isaiah has been leading up to this point. King Hezekiah and Judah are at a fork in the road. Will they heed the storm warnings and take refuge in their faithful God, or will they trust in themselves and their clever political maneuvers?

Let's walk through the story in these two chapters, and then we will make application at the end.

In Isaiah 36:1, we learn that Sennacherib, King of Assyria, attacked Hezekiah in the 14th year of his reign as king. Remember, Hezekiah, followed his father, Ahaz as king. Ahaz was a wicked king. He made an alliance with Assyria to keep the Arameans from attacking Judah.

However, when Hezekiah became king, he trusted God, so he broke that alliance. Not only did he break that alliance, but he also tore down the high places of pagan worship throughout the nation. Hezekiah wanted to be faithful to God. Yet, now in the fourteenth year of his reign, Assyria was looking for payback.

In Isaiah 36:2-3, we see the Assyrian army is camped outside the walls of Jerusalem. So, Hezekiah sent a delegation to parlay with the royal spokesman of Sennacherib, aka The Rabshakeh. This parlay turned into a war of words, with The Rabshakeh doing all the talking.

In vv. 4-7, the Rabshakeh's question is the point of these two chapters: *Who are you going to trust?* As The Rabshakeh stood outside the walls of Jerusalem and basically preached a sermon to the people who stood on the wall of the city he tried to destroy their faith in God.

First, he said that they couldn't trust Egypt because they were a broken staff. He said to trust in them for deliverance is like leaning on a broken staff with a sharp point on the end. It will pierce your hand. This is true and was never really an option.

Then he got nasty and called their faith in God into question. He basically said that you couldn't trust in Yahweh because Hezekiah tore down all of the high places of worship.

When it came to trusting God, The Rabshakeh misunderstood what faith in God was and what it meant to worship God. Yahweh was pleased that Hezekiah had torn down the high places of pagan worship. Hezekiah led the nation to repent, and he called the people to worship God alone.

Next, in vv. 8-10, we see that The Rabshakeh taunted Hezekiah by saying he wanted to make a deal. He told the delegation that they couldn't defeat Assyria. He said that even if he gave them two thousand horses, they did not have enough men to ride them into battle.

Finally, he told the people that the LORD told Sennacherib to attack and destroy Judah and Jerusalem. Basically, they had no hope of deliverance.

To make matters worse, The Rabshakeh was preaching to them in the Hebrew language. Everyone on the wall could understand his message. His goal was to create fear and chaos in the hearts of the people of Jerusalem.

In vv. 13-17, The Rabshakeh called Hezekiah a liar. He told the people that Hezekiah was deceiving the people. Then he called for complete surrender.

He told them that if they surrendered, they would be taken to a new land where they would flourish and have all they needed to live. The Rabshakeh's promise sounded a lot like 1 Kings 4:25. This passage described the golden age of Israel when Solomon was king. The Rabshakeh was a master of weaving truth and lies together.

Do you see what's happening here? The Rabshakeh told them Yahweh told them to attack Jerusalem, and now he weaves the words of 1 Kings 4:25 into his speech to make his point. It is a lie with a bit of truth woven into it.

Then he concluded his sermon by driving home the point: Hezekiah is a liar, and Yahweh will not save them.

In vv. 21-22, we see how the king's delegation responded. They tore their clothes in despair and returned to Hezekiah.

Then in Isaiah 37:1, when King Hezekiah heard the report, he tore his clothes in despair. But he did one more thing; he went directly to the temple to worship God. He also sent Eliakim, Shebna, and the leading priests to Isaiah to ask him to intercede for Judah.

Isaiah responded in vv. 6-7. He told the delegation to tell Hezekiah not to be afraid because of the blasphemous words that the Rabshakeh had spoken. Then God told Hezekiah that he was going to put a spirit in Sennacherib so that when he heard a rumor, he would return to Assyria.

Sennacherib was a king who enjoyed singing his own praises. In vv. 8-13, he reminded them of all the cities, nations, and kings that he had destroyed and then renewed his call for them to surrender because God was not going to save them.

Now, we come to one of the most remarkable prayers in the Bible. Hezekiah's prayer in vv. 14-20 is a beautiful prayer of faith in the face of a massive storm that had blown into his life and the life of the nation.

Look at what King Hezekiah did. He spread the words of the Rabshakeh out before the Lord, and then he called on the Lord of Armies to deliver them. We will look more at this prayer later in the sermon.

Then in vv. 21-35, the LORD promised that He would destroy Assyria and defend Jerusalem. Isaiah 37 closes with God's promise being fulfilled. In v. 36, the angel of the LORD killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Then Sennacherib left and went back to Nineveh. Finally, in v. 38, two of Sennacherib's sons killed him when he went into his temple to worship.

Isaiah 36-37 records one of the most amazing stories of deliverance in the Bible. Hezekiah and the people of Judah were in the direct path of a sovereignly designed divine storm. However, it was this intense storm that God used it to produce beautiful and even fearful faith in God that resulted in miraculous deliverance.

I want to make two observations about our text and then make an application as we unpack these observations.

I. The intense pressure of storms in our lives can cause us to doubt God

The intensity of a hurricane is created by low barometric pressure. The lower the barometric pressure, the more intense the hurricane.

Likewise, when a crisis hits our lives, it puts great pressure on our faith in Jesus. We may begin to wonder if He will hear and answer our prayers. Will He abandon us? Will He do what we are asking? Does He even care that we are suffering? When will it all be over?

Intense crises in our lives can cast dark clouds of doubt and despair on our faith in Jesus. To create doubt in the hearts of God's people, the mouthpiece of Sennacherib, The Rabshakeh began a war of words. His job was to preach fear and sow seeds of doubt. Listen to his words in Isaiah 36:4:

The royal spokesman said to them, "Tell Hezekiah:

The great king, the king of Assyria, says this:

What are you relying on?

[or as the ESV reads]

(On what do you rest this trust of yours?)

Then he told them that they could not rely on Egypt, and they most certainly could not rely on Yahweh. He told them that Yahweh would reject them because Hezekiah had destroyed the high places of worship.

After that, he told them that no one was coming to their rescue and that they couldn't even defend themselves. He said that even if he gave them two thousand horses, they couldn't put enough soldiers on them to go into battle.

Finally, The Rabshakeh goes for the kill shot of the faith. He said that it was Yahweh who told him to destroy Judah and Jerusalem. In other words, it is God's will that they are destroyed.

It seemed like The Rabshakeh's sermon was getting through because Hezekiah and his delegation responded by tearing their clothes in despair.

Do you see what is going on here? The enemy was preaching a sermon of doubt and despair about God's faithfulness and even His ability to save. That was a spiritual war of words. The goal was to get them to doubt God and despair that He would not save them.

Friends, we will most likely never find ourselves standing on the wall of some city listening to the mouthpiece of the enemy preaching a sermon that causes us to doubt the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus. It probably won't happen like this. However, we will hear words that will cast clouds of doubt and despair on our God and our faith in Him and His ability to save.

The message we most likely will hear will be preached by ourselves. It will come from within our own hearts. The sermon we will hear, if we are not careful, will be our own voice telling us that God does not love us, He will not save us, and He will not help us in our time of desperate need.

What crisis are you facing right now? What sermon are you preaching to yourself?

It is possible that there is someone you know who is calling your faith in Jesus into question. We will have those we know and even love cast words of doubt and despair on our faith in God.

However, the sermon of doubt that you hear will most likely be the one that you are preaching to yourself. This will be the one that will do the most damage to your faith.

Bottom line: The question that The Rabshakeh asked the people of Judah is the question that is always before us when storms hit our lives: *In whom do you trust?*

II. Storms can produce beautiful faith in the eye of an intense storm

Friends, storms come into all of our lives, but peace is only found in the eye of the storm for those who are trusting in the Lord of the Storm—Jesus Christ. Let's consider what Hezekiah did when the storm of the Assyrian army hit Judah and Jerusalem.

First: Storms should activate our faith in Jesus, which results in worship. King Hezekiah seemed to despair when he heard the words of The Rabshakeh. But look at how he handled the seeds of despair and doubt in Isaiah 37:1:

When King Hezekiah heard their report, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went to the Lord's temple.

King Hezekiah may have torn his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes to give an outward expression to fear in his heart, but he took his fear to the Lord. Consider what he did. He went into the temple, the place where God's people worshipped, to seek God.

What do you do when storms blow into your life? Do you seek the presence of Jesus in the eye of the storm through public worship, or do you isolate yourself?

Often, when storms hit, we may spend time in private prayer and worship, but then we will neglect the public gathering of worship. We tell ourselves that we feel so bad that we don't want to be with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

King Hezekiah went public with his despair and fear. He did not just hide away in the privacy of his prayer closet. He went to the place of public worship to seek the Lord's help and comfort.

Let's not neglect gathering with the saints of God even when the storms of life are blowing hard. It is our brothers and sisters in Christ who help anchor our hearts in Jesus. Our brothers and sisters in Christ should be preaching words that weld our faith to Jesus. They speak words that help us continue to trust Christ.

Friends, public worship is a powerful means of sustaining grace. There is something supernatural going on when we gather with the saints to worship Jesus. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is in full force when we gather together and sing songs, and hymns, read scripture, spend time in confession, and hear the word preached. It is a unique means of grace that is only given in this context, and it cannot be found in another one.

Second: We should wrestle with God in prayer when storms hit our lives. Hezekiah's prayer is found in vv. 14-20. I want to focus on v. 16 because it tells us what Hezekiah believed about God.

In v. 16, we learn that Hezekiah had a solid knowledge of God, and it informed His prayer. Look in v. 16:

Lord of Armies, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you are God—you alone—of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth.

Let's break Hezekiah's prayer down. I want you to notice the four things He knew and believed about God that informed his prayer.

God is the Lord of Armies. He is the Lord of the Hosts of the Armies of heaven. Hezekiah didn't need 2000 soldiers on horses and chariots. All he needed was the *Lord of Armies*.

God is the God of Israel. He is the God of Israel, but He is also the Only God. There is no other god in all the world. All other gods are false gods and saviors who cannot save. However, we trust in the name of the Lord our God, who delivers His people because of His rich mercy.

God is the God of Mercy. When Hezekiah said that *God was the God enthroned between the cherubim*. He was referring to the mercy seat of God on the ark of the covenant. He was calling on the God of Mercy to save them. Hezekiah knew that God was slow to anger and rich in mercy.

God is the Living God. Our God is not a dead god or some god made of metal, stone, or the figment of our imagination. God is the Living God who is not made but instead He made heaven and earth.

Brothers and sisters, this is our God. When we pray, let's pray to this God and not a watered-down version of our God. And let's pray like we really know and believe this is our God. In other words—this is whom we trust.

Our God came in Christ to reconcile us to Himself by displaying His rich mercy when He died on the cross to pay for our sins. Then He rose from the dead on the third day. He is alive by His own power! He conquered death and Hell, and nothing can separate us from Him. This is our God.

Third: Storms push us to seek counsel and godly prayer from our brothers and sisters in Christ. King Hezekiah sought godly counsel and prayer. In Isaiah 37:2-7, Hezekiah sent the delegation to find Isaiah and ask him to intercede for him and the nation. Isaiah did, and then he told him not to fear but trust the Lord because the Lord was going to bring utter ruin on Assyria and Sennacherib.

When the storms of life blow in, do not hesitate to ask others to intercede in prayer for you. So, after you have poured out your heart in prayer to God, ask others to do the same. Then listen and see what the Lord of Armies will do.

Fourth: Storms help us to remember our God's faithfulness in the past. I want you to look at Isaiah 36:2:

Then the king of Assyria sent his royal spokesman, along with a massive army, from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. The Assyrian stood near the conduit of the upper pool, by the road to Launderer's Field [Washer's Field in the ESV].

Does the situation in this verse sound familiar to you? It should because we have seen a similar situation before in Isaiah. Look back at Isaiah 7:3-4:

The Lord said to Isaiah, "Go out with your son Shear-jashub' to meet Ahaz at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, by the road to the Launderer's Field. ⁴ Say to him: Calm down and be quiet. Don't be afraid or cowardly because of these two smoldering sticks, the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah.

Do you remember what was going on in these verses? Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, was out at the same place where Hezekiah's delegation and The Rabshakeh had met. They were at *the upper pool by the road to the Launderer's Field*. Isaiah 7:3-4 was another moment where faith was being tested, and God proved Himself faithful even when his father, King Ahaz, was faithless.

Now, God was visiting His people again with a very similar crisis. Hezekiah must have remembered that God was merciful and kept His word in spite of his wicked father. But, this time, it was going to be different. Hezekiah trusted God in the intensity of his storm. As a result, God produced amazing faith in him and his people.

What was God's answer to Hezekiah's prayer? God sent His angel into the Assyrian camp, and he killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Then Sennacherib left and went back to Nineveh, where two of his sons killed him while he was worshipping his false god.

I want you to notice one more thing about this chapter. Isaiah 37 begins and ends with two men facing fear by going into their places of worship. Both men are in crisis, but only one is saved, and he is the one who trusted in the True and Living God.

So, the question is always before us: *In whom are you relying? Whom are you trusting in the storms of your life?*

Friends, we can have peace in the eye of the storm because the Prince of Peace is with us in our storms. He has gone through the storm of God's wrath for us so that we will never be alone in the most intense of storms in our lives.

All we have to do is remember God's faithfulness. Romans 8:32 says:

He did not even spare his own Son but gave him up for us all. How will he not also with him grant us everything?

God gave up His own Son to save us. So, we can trust that He will always give us Jesus and everything else we need.

Friends, Jesus is our King who is over our crisis. He is still on the throne. Trust in Him.