

## Heart Test

Isaiah 39:1-8 (2 Chronicles 32:27-31)

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Do you remember that at the end of June, I had an issue with high blood pressure? After that incident, as I had told you, the doctors ran me through all kinds of tests. One test the cardiologist ordered was a stress test. Specifically, it was a nuclear stress test. It was one of the weirdest tests I have ever had done.

They to put a small amount of radioactive fluid in my veins so that it would produce imaging for the scope they hooked up to me with a bunch of electrical wires. Then when they pressed a button, it caused my heart to feel like it was under the stress of exercising. It felt like everything in my body was wide open. Well, while this was happening, they were getting images of my heart while under stress. It helped the doctors to detect any blockages and measure blood flow. When I finished this test, I felt like I had run a marathon.

This stress test is an excellent indicator of your heart's condition under physical stress. However, this is not the only test that will tell the condition of your heart. It is also important to know the condition of your heart when it is at rest.

This past week I had another strange test done, a sleep test. It measured the status of my heart at rest. Lo, and behold, they found the problem with my high blood pressure. While my *stress test* was excellent, my *rest test* was not. They discovered that at night, while I am sleeping, my blood oxygen level drops to 67%. This means that while I am sleeping and my heart should be resting, my heart is actually not resting. Instead, my heart is working really hard to get enough oxygen from the red blood cells. So, the rest test for my heart revealed the problem.

Friends, just as the condition of your physical heart is very important, what is even more important is the condition of your spiritual heart. The Lord will put us through *stress tests* and *rest tests* to enable us to see the condition of our hearts.

That's what He did with King Hezekiah. Hezekiah's spiritual heart did pretty well under the *stress test*, but the Lord revealed that he had a heart problem when it came to the *rest test*.

This morning we are going to look at Isaiah 39:1-8 and also bring in 2 Chronicles 32:27-31 to help us see Hezekiah's heart problem. His heart problem will help us evaluate our heart problems. So, let's walk through the narrative, and then we will make application at the end.

In Isaiah 36-39, we have three stories about Hezekiah. The previous two stories about Hezekiah were Hezekiah's *stress test*.

When we look at Isaiah 39 and 2 Chronicles 32:27-31, we find Hezekiah getting the *rest test* done on his spiritual heart. 2 Chronicles tells us that *Hezekiah became rich and succeeded in everything he did*.

Have you ever succeeded in everything? I hope not. Failure is as not as bad an experience as we think. It is really a gift from the Lord because it is a wonderful instructor of the heart. Failure will teach us how to depend on the Lord and model for others how to respond to failure in godly ways.

However, think about this. What kind of person do you think you would be if you succeeded in every area of your life? My guess is that no one would want to be around you. How do you think you would view yourself if you were always successful? You would most likely be so arrogant that people would avoid you. You would begin to think that you are all that and a bag of chips.

2 Chronicles 32:31a says that Hezekiah had so many incredible things happen for him as king that the ambassadors from Babylon came to visit him. They had heard of his miraculous healing and his defeat of Assyria. Hezekiah looked like a man who succeeded at everything.

Let's look at the timeline of where things were. Assyria had been defeated outside the walls of Jerusalem, but Assyria was still a threat. They were still a world power because, at this point, Sennacherib had not been killed by his sons. So, because Assyria was still a threat and Hezekiah had defeated Sennacherib in Jerusalem, Babylonian envoys came to Hezekiah to congratulate him for his miraculous healing and defeat of Assyria.

They also brought letters from the King of Babylon. Now, these letters were not "Get Well Soon" cards or "I'm Glad You are Feeling Better" cards. These letters were letters of flattery telling Hezekiah how great he was. They were also letters encouraging Hezekiah to be in a military alliance with Babylon against Assyria. While Assyria had been defeated outside the walls of Jerusalem, Sennacherib and Assyria were still a threat. Babylon wanted Judah and King Hezekiah on their side.

In 2 Chronicles 32:31b, we learn what the Lord was doing in Hezekiah's life. He had experienced the *stress test*, but now he was going through the *rest test*. The Lord wanted to show him what was truly in his heart when everything was going his way.

Isaiah 39:2 says that Hezekiah was *pleased* with the Babylonian letters. The Hebrew word for *pleased* means he was flattered. So as a result, his chest popped out, and he showed the Babylonians everything in his kingdom. He showed them everything he had done, all of his wealth, all of his military might, and all of his storehouses filled with grain and spices. He let them know he was rich and powerful.

Then Isaiah came to Hezekiah to learn what these visitors said and from where they came. Isaiah told Hezekiah they were from a far-off land called Babylon. After that, Isaiah wanted to know what he had shown them. Hezekiah told him that he had shown them everything.

Here's the deal, Hezekiah didn't humbly show the Babylonians everything. He arrogantly showed them everything. Think Russian or Chinese military parade that ended up at the First National Bank of Jerusalem, beholding all the gold in the vault.

Bottom line: Hezekiah failed the rest test. He may have passed the stress test, but he failed the test of wealth and success. He didn't give God glory or credit but instead took credit for himself.

Now, we get the Lord's prognosis from Isaiah in vv. 5-7. Isaiah basically says this:

*"Hezekiah here is what God says: In the future, Babylon will invade and nation they will destroy everything you have built and carry off all your wealth. They will strip Judah bare and then they will carry off the people of Judah. Hezekiah, the king of Babylon will even carry off your descendants, and then He will humiliate them so that they serve him as slaves."*

Isaiah 39 closes in v. 8 with Hezekiah's incredible response. The Lord's verdict was very severe. Yet, Hezekiah didn't even flinch. He foolishly said:

*"The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good," for he thought: There will be peace and security during my lifetime.*

Success, wealth, and power had gone to Hezekiah's head. He had become so self-centered and so callous that he didn't care about the future. All he cared about was himself. He tried to sound super spiritual and that he was trusting in God, but there was nothing spiritual about it.

Hezekiah laid the groundwork for the failure of the next generation. He cared nothing for the people for which he was responsible. He cared nothing for his own family. His only concern was himself and peace in his days.

Let's make some application to our own hearts by examining four of Hezekiah's heart problems. We will conclude with the cure for these heart problems.

**Heart Problem #1: Pride.** At the root of Hezekiah's heart problems was pride. We have been watching Hezekiah stumble as a king for three chapters. The Lord, in His grace and mercy, delivered him in spite of his stumbling as a king, but now it finally caught up with him.

Now, Hezekiah was a successful king, and while he initially he gave glory to God, eventually, he failed to do that. Over time Hezekiah began to believe he was a great king. Sure, he gave God credit in the beginning, but over time he believed he was really the one who delivered Judah.

Pride was his downfall. Proverbs 16:18 teaches us that:

*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

Friends, we are probably most vulnerable to being blindsided by pride when we have experienced a spiritual victory. Our spiritual victory often begins in humility and brokenness; however, if we are not careful, over time, we will begin to see our victory as if we are the heroes. Then what used to be a story about God's greatness gradually becomes a story about our greatness.

Pride is a subtle enemy. It hides in our hearts until we think we are safe and secure. Then, like a lion seeking someone to devour, it pounces on us when we least expect it.

Friends, we must guard against pride. We must be vigilant and not give pride a foothold. Fight it and pray against it. Strive to be humble by thinking more highly of others and by serving others. Be vulnerable with your failures and own your sin.

However, be careful because even your humility can become a source of pride. I had a good friend in college who used to jokingly say, "I am getting ready to write my first book. It is called: *Humility and How I Achieved It.*" He and I laughed at that, but the truth is pride can even raise its ugly head even in our humility.

**Heart Problem #2: Flattery.** Closely associated with pride is flattery. When the Babylonian ambassadors showed up with letters to congratulate Hezekiah, I'm sure it was like throwing gas on the small fire of pride. All of a sudden, what was a smoldering spark of pride exploded when the gas of flattery was thrown on it. The more gasoline of flattery they threw on the fire, the bigger the fire became until it consumed Hezekiah. Hezekiah walked around Jerusalem with his chest stuck out and bragged about everything he had accomplished.

You see, if we are secretly prideful about something we have done or who we think we are, and then someone flatters us, then these two combustible agents explode. Then we do something really foolish; we begin to believe our flatterers, and then we begin to flatter ourselves. We will begin to say things in our hearts like:

- *You know I am an expert in this field.*
- *I deserve this because I earned it.*
- *I am smarter than most people.*
- *I do work harder than most people.*
- *I am a superior to most people because I am \_\_\_\_\_.*

Then before you know it, our inward flattery becomes outward flattery. Then we begin to tell others how great we are. We can't help but tell others about our resumes. We tell others where we went to school, how many degrees we have, how smart we are, how much money we have earned, how people want to work with us, look at my nice house, and all that we have accomplished.

The final step is idolatry. This is when we begin to crave the flattery and the affirmation of others. When this happens, we become a god unto ourselves, and we want people to praise us.

Are you tracking with me? Do you understand what has happened? Flattery feeds pride. When flattery feeds pride, it becomes a huge monster in our lives. Then all of a sudden, the monster is our god, and we worship it. We are a god unto ourselves. We are this monster.

This monster has to be fed, and it feeds on flattery. We are hungry for flattery, and we crave affirmation. If we don't feed the monster, then our self-worth starves. We feel like we are dying. So, like a drug addict, when we do not get our fix, we become anxious, irritable, worried, critical, and even angry.

The late Biblical counselor, David Powlison, has some amazing insights into the monster of pride and flattery:

*Pride is not just about me. It's also about you. I must look down on you in some way. Our absorption in judgmental opinions runs very deep. Pride says, "I'm right in myself." Haughty eyes say, "I'm right compared to you" Have you noticed that even people who feel lousy about themselves are judgmental toward others? When you feel inferior to others, you don't respect them or treat them with mercy. Instead, you envy, hate, grumble, and criticize. Even self-belittling tendencies—"low self-esteem," self-pity, self-hatred, timidity, fear of failure, and rejection—fundamentally express pride failing, pride intimidated, and pride despairing. Such pride, even when much battered, still finds someone else to look down on.<sup>1</sup>*

Friends, beware of flattery because it is the food that feeds the monster of pride. Starve the monster of pride with the humility that comes from the cross of Christ. Philippians 2:5-8 says:

<sup>5</sup> *Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,*  
<sup>6</sup> *who, existing in the form of God,*  
*did not consider equality with God*  
*as something to be exploited.*  
<sup>7</sup> *Instead, he emptied himself*  
*by assuming the form of a servant,*  
*taking on the likeness of humanity.*  
*And when he had come as a man,*  
<sup>8</sup> *he humbled himself by becoming obedient*  
*to the point of death—even to death on a cross.*

We starve the beast of pride and flattery by looking to Jesus, who had more reasons to be filled with pride and flatter Himself than anyone who has ever lived. Yet, He was a servant and laid down His rights in order to save those whose sins nailed Him to the cross.

**Heart Problem #3: Unfaithfulness.** Hezekiah's third heart problem was his unfaithfulness. When we examine Hezekiah's life, we find a man who seemed to take two steps forward and then one step back.

Hezekiah is a man that just struggled. He struggled to trust the Lord when he was ill. He struggled to trust God when Assyria was at Jerusalem's front doorstep. However, he eventually trusted God. Now that he has successfully come through the stress test, his faithfulness begins to fade.

During this period of rest and peace, the Babylonians show up and offer some letters of congratulations. These letters amount to Judah making an alliance with Babylon against Assyria. Hezekiah was flattered, and then he fell for it.

Remember, Hezekiah had done this before. Early on, Hezekiah tried to make an alliance with Assyria, but it backfired. He sent them gold, silver, and all kinds of treasures, but Assyria attacked them anyway. Then the Lord steps in, and, as a last resort, Hezekiah humbles himself and seeks the Lord's guidance, and they are delivered. By grace, he came through the stress test.

However, the *rest test* is a different story. He wasn't humble. He didn't consult the Lord. He didn't give God glory as he showed them around. He wasn't cautious about what he showed the Babylonians. Hezekiah failed the *rest test*.

Do you ever feel like Hezekiah? I do sometimes. You have this spiritual high or spiritual victory, and then over time, the embers of that fire grow cold. The next thing you know, you are living on the memory of a spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> David Powlison, *Resources for Changing Lives: Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*, 79.

high instead of daily fellowship with the Lord. The next thing you know, you are blindsided, and your spiritual victory becomes spiritual defeat.

Do you ever feel like Hezekiah and you have taken two steps forward only to take one step back? I don't know how the Lord judged Hezekiah in the end. However, I do know how He treats His children who struggle. Look in Isaiah 42:3:

*A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;  
he will faithfully bring forth justice.*

Likewise, the Apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:13:

*If we are faithless, he remains faithful—  
for he cannot deny himself.*

What Isaiah and the Apostle Paul mean is that if you really belong to Jesus, then He will not deny you. The Lord will not crush your spirit. You may struggle and even stumble, but He will not forsake you. He will complete the good work He has begun in you. That is a comforting thought.

We must remember what the gospel teaches us. Jesus was forsaken so that I would never be forsaken. While we may feel like we are up and down, Jesus does not treat us that way. He is steady and faithful, and He keeps moving us forward.

I want to refer to David Powlison one more time. Dr. Powlison tells the story of what the Christian life is like. *He says that the Christian life is like a man spinning a yoyo who is walking up a flight of stairs. Here is what he means. The yoyo is your life, and it feels like it is up and down, but the good news is that the Lord is holding on to you. And He is gradually moving forward and up.*

I don't know about you, but it is so comforting to me. It is comforting to know that when I have blown it that the Lord holds me and never lets me go. He does not deny me, and Jesus still calls me His brother.

**Heart Problem #4: Self-Centeredness.** The final verse in Isaiah 39 is a stunner. Hezekiah finally falls flat on his face and bloodies his nose. Look in v. 8:

*Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good," for he thought: There will be peace and security during my lifetime.*

What a wretched thing to say. What a selfish and self-centered response to the Lord's word. Why didn't he break down as he had in the past? Do you know why? It was because the monster of pride had devoured him. He was blind to his sin.

Hezekiah cared more about his own comfort and peace than that of future generations of his people and of his very own family members.

Have you ever been like Hezekiah? Have you ever sought your own comfort and pleasure at the expense of others and even your own family members?

If we are honest with ourselves, at some point, we have all pursued our own agendas at the expense of others. It is an ugly and painful revelation when we see that we are self-centered.

You may evaluate your heart and realize that you have failed both the *stress test* and the *rest test*. Now what? How can my heart be changed and healed? From where does that kind of healing come?

There is only one place where the spiritual heart can be healed, and that is by the Holy Spirit of God taking out the old, rotten heart of flesh and giving you a new heart.

You see, Jesus is the True King who passed the stress test and the rest test. Jesus never faltered when the stress of the cross was placed on Him. He never sinned and never looked back when He underwent the stress of being tempted in the wilderness for forty days and nights.

Neither was Jesus fooled by Satan's *rest test*. When Satan offered Him the whole world, Jesus refused it. He turned down all of the pleasures of this world in order to save His family and thousands of generations of His family who would follow Him.

Jesus is the King who humbled Himself and was obedient to His death on the cross. He is the King who died in our place and for our sin. Then He rose from the dead on the third day and defeated death, removed the guilt of our sin, and purchased new hearts for His people.

Your response to this gentle and lowly King is to humbly ask for forgiveness of your sin and begin to follow Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Then He makes you part of His family. Finally, He wants you to join a local church filled with other sinners, who Jesus calls His saints, and we all follow our King together.