

In Whom Do You Now Trust?

Isaiah 36-37

October 20th, 2019

Big idea: Trust in God when you feel completely helpless, broken, and defeated.

Intro –

Isaiah 36-39 is like the continental divide of Isaiah. From 36-37, all the water flows west down to chapters 1-35, from 38-39 all the water flows east down to chapters 40-66. 36-37 is the climax of the argument in chapters 1-35, will you trust God or men? God or Egypt? God or Assyria? 38-39 sets the stage for the next challenge, Babylon.

The pivotal question come on the mouth of the enemy. He asks in 36:7, “In whom do you now trust?” “who do you rely upon now?” Your God? Hmph.

This is THE great question for us also – In whom do you now trust?

Ray Ortlund - We always live on the cutting edge of faith, either faith in God or faith in something else. And yesterday’s faith in God belongs to yesterday. In whom do you now trust? In the struggle you are facing now, in whom do you trust?

There is always some voice whispering to us that God is not a resource, he is a problem. So the question before us is both profound and urgent. Whose voice will we believe, whose wisdom will we follow, whose hope will we cherish and live for? In whom do we now trust?

We call it living by faith. What do we mean by that? We mean living as if God really exists and really rewards those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6). We mean living by God’s promises as the bedrock under our feet while everything else is shifting around us.

Everything changes in ch 36. You can probably see the difference just in the typography of your Bible. Up until this point Isaiah has been mostly prophecy in poetry form. The lines are arranged in formats to show the poetic development. For four chapters here in the middle of the book, we have not poetry but historic narrative. It can come like a sudden jolt from the glorious vision of the end to the very inglorious and frightening world of the here and now of Isaiah’s day.

Barry Webb: True religion is always like that; it leads us not away from reality, but more deeply into it. It arms us with the knowledge of what will be, so that we can confront what is (however frightening it may be) with renewed courage and steadiness of purpose.

1. Judah was **reduced** to complete helplessness. (Isaiah 36)
 - a. Assyria had overwhelming military **strength**. (36:1-3)
 - i. 14th year of Hezekiah was 701 BC. Sennacherib was king of Assyria from 705-681 BC.
 - ii. We know a lot about Sennacherib from other sources in addition to the Bible.
 1. A 6 sided prism was found dating from 689 BC that recounts 8 military campaigns, including the siege of Jerusalem.
 2. One of the cities he sieged was Lachish.
 3. Sennacherib has huge reliefs that were 8 feet tall made to forever capture this assault. They lined one wall of his palace and were eventually abandoned and found 2500 years later by British archeologists in the 1850s where they were moved to the British Museum.
 - a. SHOW PICS

1. Hezekiah's representatives ask Rabshakeh to speak in Aramaic, language of the Assyrian Empire west of the Euphrates and would have been understood by the educated Judean royal officials, though not by the ordinary people on the city wall.
2. No, he wants the people on the wall to hear it. He speaks louder to them! The goal was to terrify the people and convince them to put pressure on their leadership to surrender.
3. Even describes the brutality of a siege using the crudest language – they would be eating their own human waste before it was over if they don't yield.

iii. Trust the **King** of Assyria not the **Lord**. (36:14-22)

1. The challenge was very pointed. It's the critical statement that sums up this whole section, the whole first half of the book of Isaiah.
 - a. Can God be trusted? Is He strong enough? Is He good enough? Is He faithful enough? If not, who are you going to trust?
 - b. Rabshakeh says, "He's not powerful enough to stop us. None of the "gods" have been strong enough. Your God can't be trusted. Trust us! We'll let you go back to your fields for a while and then we'll take you away to a great land!"
 - c. He doesn't even try to hide the coming deportation, just puts a little positive spin on it, like any good salesman.
 - i. Like when friends rented an apartment right by the railroad tracks and when they asked the landlord about it during the showing the landlord put a positive spin on it, "you know, it becomes comforting after a while. It just kind of lets you know the world is still going."
 - ii. This offer must have sounded like relief and release from the danger and the horror of a siege. Can you imagine how tempting it would have been to the people on the wall? Just give in and you'll have financial security.
2. The people didn't answer.

2. Judah was **rescued** by God. (Isaiah 37)

- a. Hezekiah **humbled** himself by actions and words. (37:1-5)
 - i. Ortlund – one of the turning points in the history of God's people. They are at their end, surrounded by an overwhelmingly superior force. The enemy is gloating over royal Jerusalem, saying 'checkmate!' what move will Judah make next? All they have left is God.
 - ii. He tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth
 1. We are embodied people. Appropriate to show rejoicing, lament, contrition in physical fashion
 2. Biblical sign of mourning but also of repentance and humiliation.
 3. The repentance seen here is not concerned with human opinion but with divine opinion as he went into the temple, the house of the Lord.
- iii. His message to Isaiah the prophet was one of total and known helplessness

1. This is a day of distress, rebuke, and rejection – they know God is disciplining them.
 2. Using the analogy of birth. Death in childbirth was very common in those days when there were complications like a breech birth, which caused the mother to labor in exhaustion until her strength gave out. You couldn't stop the delivery, labor was inevitable, but there was no strength or ability to carry it to completion.
 3. Jerusalem must be delivered, but neither he nor his government nor his people has the strength to do it.
 4. Ortlund - So long as we believe that we only need some assistance, we are still treating ourselves as lords of the situation, and that latent pride cuts us off from all that God would give us. Only when we have admitted our complete bankruptcy are we able to receive what he has for us. This is what Hezekiah did.
- b. God ***promised*** to rescue Judah. (37:6-7)
- i. "Thus says the Lord" – same language used by Rabshakeh representing the King of Assyria is now used by Isaiah representing the true Lord.
 1. Two kings, two decrees, both offering deliverance.
 - a. A counterfeit deliverance is being dangled in front of the people by an earthly substitute – peace! Security!
 - ii. The offense was against God – they have blasphemed ME.
 - iii. He will conquer Sennacherib with a rumor and an assassination.
 1. Spirit here is probably used in the sense of attitude, disposition, or feeling. God is going to predispose Sennacherib to leave.
 2. **Proverbs 21:1** The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.
- c. More ***pressure*** arrived from the king of Assyria. (37:8-13)
- i. The language and challenge are very similar to chapter 36 so we won't go through in detail. Sennacherib is keeping the pressure on, this time in a letter.
 - ii. If Hezekiah felt a sense of relief from the words of Isaiah, this may be testing that resolve.
 - iii. One writer compared it to tool of manipulation of prisoners. The interrogators may relax the stress followed by an immediate restoration of that stress, given some freedoms and then having those freedoms taken away, tends to break the former resolve. Hezekiah may feel that hear. Brief reprieve but then the pressure reinstated.
- d. Hezekiah ***prayed***. (37:14-20)
- i. He physically laid the letter out before God.
 - ii. His prayer is a marvelous example for us. Listen for the request and listen to everything else around the request.
 1. He starts with worship
 2. He asks God to listen. God has promised to do so, especially in the temple.

- a. **2 Chronicles 7:13-15** "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, ¹⁴ and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. ¹⁵ "Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayer *offered* in this place.

3. He makes a simple request – deliver us from his hand.

4. He bases his request on God's glory – that all the kingdoms on earth may know that You alone, LORD, are God.

e. God **answered**. (37:21-35)

- i. Because you have prayed . . . don't minimize the value and necessity of prayer.

1. This is the way God has chosen to work. Our prayers matter.

- ii. Though Sennacherib claimed to be mighty (vv. 24-25), it was God who long ago planned the acts of Sennacherib before he ever committed them (vv. 26-28).

- iii. Sennacherib's pride is dealt with in catastrophic fashion (vv. 29)

- iv. Within two years the people would be flourishing again in the land – it takes time for crops to be reestablished. (vv. 30-31)

- v. God will defend the city for His own sake – God's glory and the people's good are accomplished simultaneously. (v. 35)

f. God **rescued**. (37:36-38)

- i. Almost anticlimactic – only 3 simple verses to describe this defeat.

1. Like going to an action movie that spends 2 ½ hours building up to the final battle only to have it be over in one punch that takes 10 seconds.

2. I think the brevity and simplicity is intentional. They can't fight back against God.

- ii. 185,000 soldiers struck down overnight.

1. Large army but not out of proportion for ancient armies. No need to see it as an exaggeration. Doesn't mean the whole army was camped outside Jerusalem. They may have been spread throughout the region.

- iii. Sennacherib returned home where he was eventually assassinated by his own sons 20 years later.

3. In whom will **YOU** now trust?

- a. Do you fear that rapidly changing cultural values in America will crush churches and Christian colleges and non-profits by taking away our tax-exempt status and increasing pressure until we accept their culturally defined values on marriage?

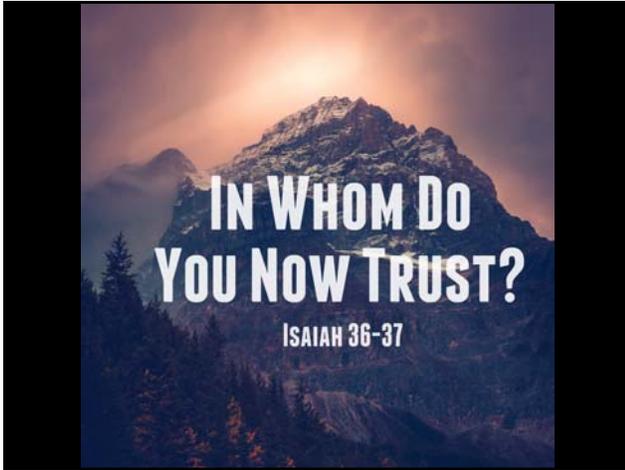
- i. Life may get harder but God's work will continue.

- b. Will you trust your own intelligence or personal drive to build "the good life," knowing that one doctor's visit could collapse everything you've built?

- c. Will you trust your own goodness to make yourself acceptable to God?

- i. George Whitefield said that's like climbing to the moon on a rope made of sand.

- d. God is faithful, God is able, God is good.
- e. Big idea: Trust in God when you feel completely ***helpless***, broken, and defeated.



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Isaiah 7:3 Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field,

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- b. Assyria issued a blasphemous and bullying challenge:

i. Neither **Egypt** nor your **God** will save you. (36:4-10)

ii. Your people should be **afraid**. (36:11-13)

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