

Session 4

November 4, 2018

PRAYING FOR OURSELVES

Matthew 6:11b; Isaiah 38:1-6,15-17

“Give us today our daily bread.”

Jesus made it clear that once a proper relationship between holy God and a sinful man is acknowledged, and submission to His will is established, that personal prayer requests are welcome. While God is not a Santa Claus, and our petitions are not a wish list, God does invite us into His presence for both communion and consideration. The writer of Hebrews suggested that we “come boldly to [His] throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Paul echoed the intimate (and often seemingly mundane) nature of making personal prayer requests when he said, “Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6). The story of King Hezekiah, the upright son of wretched King Ahaz, provides a good example of praying for one’s self and seeing God work through personal prayer.

The prayer is offered (vv. 1-3). Hezekiah’s story is found in 2 Kings 16-20, 1 Chronicles 28-32, and Isaiah 36-39. Overall, Hezekiah’s reign was known for reestablishing worship after his father’s reign, for its conflict with warring nations (especially Assyria), and for a willingness to seek God in prayer. God’s approval of Hezekiah is recorded in 2 Kings 18:6-7, stating that the king “held fast to the Lord and did not stop following him; he kept the commands the Lord had given Moses. And the Lord was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook.” The focal passage explains that Hezekiah became terminally ill. While some commentators look for “reasons” that the king was struck, the text makes no mention of such things. Very simply, he developed an infection that apparently became septic (see Is. 38:21). Isaiah the prophet brought Hezekiah the startling news that he would die, preceded by the blunt advice to “put his affairs in order,” and followed by the matter-of-fact observation that “he would not recover.” As was the habit of this king, he turned to the Lord in prayer. While the text may not report all that Hezekiah said in his prayer, the essence is clear: “remember how I have walked before You faithfully and wholeheartedly and have done what pleases You” (v. 3). While there is no evidence that Hezekiah pleaded for his life, his bitter tears indicate his disappointment at his appointed fate.

The prayer is answered (vv. 4-6). Fortunately for Hezekiah, Isaiah’s return visit was much more positive than his first! God *heard* Hezekiah’s prayer, *saw* his tears, and *added* fifteen years to his life. Almost as a bonus, the promise was made to defeat the Assyrians and defend the holy city. While we must be careful not to see God simply “changing His mind” at our behest, the lesson highlights the grace of God in answering a personal prayer request in such a way that blesses God’s child, blesses the nation he represents, and exalts the Lord God. In the words of James, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16 KJV).

The prayer is acknowledged (vv. 15-17). How often do we make a request of God in prayer, receive an answer, then go merrily on our way? The righteous person graciously receives God’s response to his prayer and acknowledges the God who answered it. These verses attest to the gratitude of the king as he returns to God in prayer. The Hebrew construction is complicated, but there is no mistaking the outpouring of affection Hezekiah feels toward God. To walk slowly is

to move humbly, remembering the bitterness of his soul (v. 15). It is by God's grace that he was healed, and by God's grace that his life goes on (v. 16). Further, Hezekiah admits that without going through such misery, he would not have experienced the depths of peace he was now feeling (see Rom. 8:28). Finally, the king saw his deliverance as a precursor to God's ultimate deliverance: salvation from the curse of sin (v. 17).