

## **A GOOD MAN'S PRAYER ANSWERED.**

– ISAIAH 38:1-8. – JULY 9. –

**Golden Text: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." – Psa. 46:1.**

HEZEKIAH, known as the good king amongst King David's successors, took sick. A carbuncle or other malignant ulcer threatened his life, and the prophet Isaiah was sent to him by the Lord with the message, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die." There are some who are inclined to claim that all sickness is of the devil, that no good person could be sick, etc., but we find nothing in the Scriptures to this effect. We do indeed find that all sickness and all death are indirectly the results of Satan's work. It was his deception of our first parents in Eden that brought upon them the death penalty, with its adjuncts of sorrow and pain, all of which is continued in us their children. We are not to forget that some of the Lord's most earnest saints have been sick, and that thus it is written, "He whom thou lovest is sick," and again, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."

Regarding the whole race as under the divine sentence of death, we realize that as a result of our sharing in this penalty some of us are debilitated in one particular and some in another. All are imperfect mentally, morally and physically, but these imperfections take different forms according to different circumstances, heredities, etc. We are, therefore, to consider sickness in general as operating along the lines of cause and effect rather than as direct inflictions either of God or of Satan. It is well, however, to keep in mind the fact that the Jews under their covenant were subjects of special divine protection to the extent that they lived in harmony with the Lord, just as the Spiritual Israelites of this Gospel age are under special divine protection and guidance, only that the promises and blessings to the natural Israelites were of the earthly, temporal kind, while the

blessings and care promised to the Spiritual Israelites are in respect to their spiritual welfare, their heavenly interests, their spiritual health, etc.

### **"SET THINE HOUSE IN ORDER."**

Assuming then that Hezekiah's sickness was neither of divine nor satanic inflictions (as in the case of Job), and assuming that it was the natural effect from some natural cause, we see Hezekiah sick unto death but not without hope of recovery up to the time he received the message from the Lord at the mouth of Isaiah, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die." By this evidently was meant, Make such preparations in respect to the interests of the kingdom, the disposition of your property, arrangements for your funeral and for your successor in the throne as would be proper. We may each stop here to draw a practical lesson in respect to our affairs. We are not kings, as Hezekiah was, but we have, nevertheless, stewardships great or small received **[R3588 : page 202]** from the Lord in respect to which we should be faithful. The message has come to every one of us that we shall die – every member of the body of Christ is consecrated to death – "Be ye faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." "Ye shall all die like men."

Realizing this, it is incumbent upon us as a part of our stewardship to order the affairs of our lives, our homes, our business or whatever we may have as a stewardship in such a manner as will redound to the Lord's praise and for the good of his cause. This is setting the house in order, straightening out all the affairs of life, so that those who take up the lines where we drop them will be able to do so properly, intelligently – so that whatever we have of the Lord's goods may be disposed of as we believe would be his will, so that our stewardship faithfully carried out through life may faithfully end in death. A great many of the Lord's dear people need counsel on this subject. Many die without having set their houses in order, without

having arranged their affairs financially and otherwise as stewards of the Lord's goods.

### **HEZEKIAH'S FEAR OF DEATH.**

Nothing in Hezekiah's conduct indicated that he had any fear that in dying he would pass into an eternity of torment. He had not so learned respecting the divine plan – neither the Law nor the prophets had given such an intimation. But, on the other hand, he did not exultingly cry, "O, now I shall soon be with God and the holy angels and know ten thousand times as much as I now know." He did not rejoice in the thought of death. On the contrary, he was sad and dejected, fearful, and pleaded with the Lord that he might continue to live. In all this he conducted himself in much the same way as other people do whose minds are not warped and twisted and tangled with false theologies – with the thought that if they were dead they would be more alive than they ever were when they were alive, etc.

Hezekiah on his sick bed turned his face to the wall, as though he would seek the more private communion with the Lord, and prayed, "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, that I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart and have done that which is good in thy sight." This is a brief summary or digest of his prayer, which was accompanied with sore weeping. It was not a boastful prayer, for he freely acknowledged his sins (v. 17.) He did claim, however, as all should be able to claim, that he walked before the Lord with a perfect heart, with a perfect will, with thoroughly good intentions; that there was no desire in his heart to go contrary to the divine will. The history of his times bears out all that King Hezekiah claimed for himself respecting his good reign as the Lord's representative in the throne. See 2 Kings 18:3-6; 2 Chron. 29:2; 31:20,21.

The Lord was merciful to Hezekiah, hearing and answering his prayer. Isaiah had not gotten out of the king's house on his homeward way until a message from the Lord came to him directing him to return to Hezekiah's sick chamber to tell him that the Lord had heard his prayer and seen his tears and had added to his life fifteen years, directing him through the prophet to the medicine, the poultice which would bring relief – a poultice of figs. There is a lesson here: not that we should never use remedial agencies in connection with our troubles and ailments, but that we should recognize as behind the remedial agents the will of the Lord. The fig poultice would not have brought relief in this case aside from the divine interposition of divine power, but on the other hand the divine power preferred to operate through the poultice of figs rather than without it. It is not for us to dictate to the Lord how our blessings should come, but to seek to learn from these and other illustrations he has given us what would probably be his will respecting us and our afflictions.

The question arises, Did God change his plan and arrangements because of Hezekiah's prayer, and does he do so whenever a prayer is answered? We reply that in certain matters it evidently is as easy for the Lord to arrange them one way as another without any interference with his general plans. To our understanding the Lord would have allowed Hezekiah to die if he had not prayed. In other words, the Lord merely informed the king of what would have been the natural consequence of his case, and informed him for the very purpose of giving him an opportunity to ask in faith for his recovery. Thus the Lord waited to be gracious to him.

### **ALL CASES NOT ALIKE.**

We are not in this wishing to imply that Hezekiah's conduct and prayers should be a sample and a lesson to all of the Lord's people under similar circumstances, that when ourselves or our dear ones are ill we should make specific request for the prolongation of their lives and recovery from their illness. There is a difference between

our condition and our relationship to the Lord and that of Hezekiah. Although the king was a good man he lived before the Gospel call began. He was, therefore, not one of the spirit-begotten ones, for the holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus had not yet suffered and had not yet been glorified. (John 7:39; 1 Pet. 1:11.) Those who are the Lord's consecrated people now, the "saints," should realize that they have entered into a new special relationship to the Lord, different from that of other men; that the Lord has agreed with them that their surrender of earthly life and all their earthly interests shall bring to them instead special spiritual favors, privileges, safe guardings, etc.

From this standpoint it would be unwise to ask the Lord for earthly privileges and advantages of any kind, since this might work to their disadvantage as New Creatures. Rather they are to remember the words of our Lord, that all mankind are seeking after the earthly things, but that the Father knoweth the things we have need of before we ask him, without our asking him. The preferable attitude of heart for the Lord's consecrated people therefore is – O, Lord, thou knowest far better than I what would be for my highest welfare, my highest spiritual interest. Thou hast promised that all things shall work together for good to me because I am thine, because I have been called according to thy purpose. I entreat of thee give what is best in all of life's affairs and withhold whatever seems unto thee best – "Thy will be done." For the Lord's consecrated people to undertake to move Jehovah's arm in respect to their affairs would seem to be the taking of the rudder out of his hands – would seem to be more or less of self-will, which we have pledged to the Lord shall be dead that his will may be done in us.

The Lord granted Hezekiah a sign that he would recover and that he would live fifteen years. Elsewhere **[R3589 : page 203]** we learn (2 Kings 20:8) that Hezekiah requested the sign. This brings up the general question of the propriety of asking the Lord for signs. We find that the Lord gave Gideon a sign in answer to prayer – a choice

of signs; and similarly in this case the Lord gave Hezekiah a choice of two signs, either that the shadow on the dial should advance ten degrees or that it should recede ten degrees. Hezekiah chose the latter as being the more difficult to be accounted for and therefore the surer test. On the other hand the Lord spoke disrespectfully of the Jews of his day saying, "This faithless generation seeketh after a sign," etc. The thought would seem to be that a sign may be desired for one of two reasons. Disbelief may ask a sign, thoroughly doubting the possibility of one; on the other hand true belief may ask one for confirmation of faith. The latter seems to have been the case with Gideon and also with Hezekiah. We recommend that the Lord's people of the New Creation avoid putting the Lord to tests and signs, for we remember that the Lord has called us to a special high calling, the test for which is faith, and that this is one reason why throughout this Gospel age he gives few if any outward signs, desiring his people to walk by faith and not by sight.

### **THE DIAL OF AHAZ.**

Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, had erected a stone dial, the latest design up to that time for measuring the hours of the day. It was formed of a succession of steps on two sides and a crest in the center, and was so oriented that the rising sun would so strike the top as to cast its shadow on the lowest step on the western side of the dial. As the sun rose higher and higher the shadow crept up and up, step by step, until at noonday there was no shadow, for the sun was directly overhead. In the afternoon, the sun having passed to the westward, the shadows would begin to lengthen out upon the eastward side of the monument or dial, covering gradually one side at a time until the last, each step representing approximately half an hour.

The turning back of the shadow ten degrees or ten steps on the dial would be a very noticeable matter, not only to the king, who looked for it, but to his entire household and to the people of Israel in general, who would be informed of the event, the king's business

being very generally public property in such matters. It was a miracle probably very similar to that wrought in Joshua's day, when the sunlight was made to linger in the valley of Ajalon. We have no thought that God either stopped the earth on its axis or that he moved the sun backward in its course. In either of these cases the miracles as we may call them could be much easier performed, and we think that undoubtedly the Lord would take the easier way in any such matter. Prof. Garbett declares that he had a practical illustration of this miracle, and describes the modus operandi to the astronomer Richard A. Proctor, as follows: –

### **THE MIRACLE'S POSSIBLE PROCESS.**

"The shiftings of the shadows on the dial that Isaiah predicted to sick Hezekiah are liable to occur at any time when these two circumstances concur: (1) that the upper atmosphere is in that condition which causes two bright parhelia or mock suns to appear on opposite sides of the sun; and (2) that the air contains drifting clouds, massive enough to hide often two of the three. When the real sun and the eastern mock sun are hidden, there is only the western to cast shadows, which then coincides with that the sun will cast an hour and a half later; but if the clouds shift so as to hide the west parhelion, and disclose the eastern, the shadows instantly become such as the sun casts an hour and a half earlier. The parhelia being always caused by rays refracted through two faces of equilateral triangular prisms or fibers of ice, their angular distance from the sun is always the minimum deviation that such a prism of ice produces on the brightest or yellow rays, which is very nearly a fourth of a right angle; so that if Hezekiah's dialers divided the quadrant into forty, than which no number is more likely, considering how constantly it recurs in the Hebrew laws and history (oftener, indeed, than any number above ten), the advance or recession of the shadow would have to be ten of these parts. On March 28, 1848, these effects occurred, had any one been looking, on every dial in the Isle of Portsea, and very probably

of much of Hampshire besides. The parhelia were present and bright enough at about 11 a.m. and still better at 1 p.m."

The fact that the method of God's operations might be learned by us would not disprove them. For instance, some day we shall know just what process turned the water into wine at Cana of Galilee, but our knowledge of the process thus used by our Lord will not in any measure detract from the miracle which was certainly beyond human power – just as in the miracle now under consideration, all the laws of nature are subject to the God of all creation, and this is sufficient for the eye and ear and heart of faith.

### **HEZEKIAH'S PRAISE FOR DELIVERANCE.**

On his recovery from his illness Hezekiah wrote a poem of thanksgiving, praising the Lord for his deliverance from the jaw of death – from the grave. In it he describes his feelings as he thought of death and his rejoicing at his recovery. He said, "In the cutting off of my days I shall go into the gates of the grave [sheol, hades, the tomb]. I am deprived of the residue of my years....Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove: my eyes fail with looking upward: O, Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me. What shall I say? He hath spoken unto me and himself hath done it." [I freely acknowledge that it was not the lump of figs, but the Lord who had produced the recovery.] Then, speaking of the effect this should have upon him for the remaining years, he added, "I shall go softly all my years because of the bitterness of my soul.... Behold it was for my peace that I had great bitterness, but thou hast in love for my soul delivered it from the body of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. For the grave [sheol, hades] cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee, they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day." – Verses 9-19.



Hezekiah's proper desires were to live and serve and praise the Lord. He well knew that these things would be impossible in death, that the only hope in death is in the resurrection. The case of the Lord's people even during this Gospel age, even since redeemed with the precious blood, has been very similar. They have properly no desire to be unclothed but rather to be clothed upon with the heavenly conditions. But now in the close of the age matters are different from what they ever were before. Living as we are in the presence of the Son of man, we realize that although all must die, [R3589 : page 204] yet the overcomers will not sleep, but will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye – in the moment of dying – changed to the glorious spirit condition which the Lord has promised to them that love him. From our standpoint, then, not only has death lost its terrors, because Christ has redeemed us from the power of the tomb and will by and by bring forth all from it that are in it, that they may have an opportunity for coming into harmony with him and attainment to eternal life, but to us death has lost its dread in another sense, namely, that we shall not need to sleep – ours is the blessed time of the change. Let us wait for our change and seek by the Lord's grace to be so prepared for it in heart and character development that we shall welcome it with joy.

"Unanswered yet! – the prayers your lips have pleaded  
In agony of heart these many years; –  
Does faith begin to fail? Is hope departing?  
And think you all in vain those falling tears?  
Say not the Father hath not heard your prayer:  
He'll answer yet your right desire – sometime, somewhere."

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