

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dearly Beloved,

Last week when meditating on the theme of "Perseverance", it would have been helpful, I think, to also have covered the two kinds of situations that tempt many away from their Savior.

And we find them both in the context of our story.

The first situation is one of great ease... prosperity... even luxury.

Perseverance during this time is crucial because we tend to become lax, less disciplined, and easily forget the Lord and all He has done and is doing for us.

The second situation is one of great difficulty... tribulation... distress... misery.

Perseverance during this time is crucial because we easily lose faith and blame God and try to rely on our own resources and counsel.

And when the distressing time comes after the prosperous time, that often has a very sad outcome for those who have become lax in their faith and then have it severely tested.

So that we may be warned and comforted, let us meditate on this text....

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

After these things and these acts of faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah... And [Hezekiah] ... **spoke encouragingly to them, saying, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles." And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.**

After this, Sennacherib king of Assyria, who was besieging Lachish with all his forces, sent his servants to Jerusalem to Hezekiah king of Judah and to all the people of Judah who were in Jerusalem, saying, "Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, 'On what are you trusting, that you endure the siege in Jerusalem? Is not Hezekiah misleading you, that he may give you over to die by famine and by thirst, when he tells you, "The Lord our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria"? ...

Then Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed because of this and cried to heaven. And the Lord sent an angel, who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land.... (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Our text starts out: "**After these things and these acts of faithfulness.**"

This begs the question, "What **things**, what **acts of faithfulness**?"

When Hezekiah first became king, he started out (like after the first month) by cleansing the temple because of the uncleanness caused by the faithlessness of his father, the priests, and the people.

A short list continues: He organized the priests/Levites again to serve in the temple, and restored the true worship of the Lord, including the grandest celebration of the Passover in Israel's history.

These spiritual reforms were some of the first things that Hezekiah (a lad of 25) did when crowned.

He wasted no time in preparing the people for whatever might occur.

I want you to note what I just said. These spiritual reforms were his first preparations for whatever might occur, including the all-but-inevitable confrontation with Assyria.

Did you notice what preparations he made just before Assyria came to take Jerusalem?

**He... built up all the wall that was broken down and raised towers upon it,
and outside it he built another wall, and he strengthened the Millo in the city of David.**

Doesn't that seem backwards? To first repair the Temple and then to repair the city defenses?

Obviously, Assyria was a threat. It was the world power in the region at the time and was expanding. And Assyria's campaign against Judah wasn't a surprise because Hezekiah had decided to rebel against Assyria by not paying their annual tribute.

(This, by the way, was also an act of faithfulness as the Lord had redeemed them and made them free. They were not to submit to any foreign powers, or fear them.)

So how was it that Hezekiah thought that their first preparations needed to be re: their spiritual state even before their military state?

The chronicler puts that answer to the forefront as he reports the incident.

When Sennacherib's men came with a message, it wasn't one of how piddly their defenses were.

It was one of defiance toward Israel's God.

"On what are you trusting...," he said, "Is not Hezekiah misleading you..."

Has not this same Hezekiah taken away His high places and His altars and commanded...,

'Before one altar you shall worship, and on it you shall burn your sacrifices'?

Who among all the gods of those nations that my fathers devoted to destruction was able to deliver his people from my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you from my hand?"

Now, to be fair to Sennacherib, recent experience seemed to be on his side.

But when had his fathers ever encountered a nation that was worshipping the one true God?

...

This section of Scripture always gets me.

As I read it, envisioning myself standing on the walls of Jerusalem, I get a little nervous.

Assyria's general was not talking in hypotheticals.

Assyria had laid siege to many cities, numerous of them for lengths of 3 years, like Samaria.

What do you think was happening behind those sieged walls?

People so hungry, so thirsty, so ill, so desperate that they would eat dung and their own children.

And yet, the people on the wall did not respond to the general because Hezekiah told them not to.

They trusted, not only their king, but as a people, they trusted in God.

And judging from recent military might, it would seem that Assyria's gods were stronger.

Yet, the Lord had blessed Hezekiah's spiritual reforms

and the people **took confidence from the words of Hezekiah.**

**"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria
and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him.**

With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles."

This is a timely message for us today.

We may not have the Assyrian army surrounding our walled city, but make no mistake, we, as 21st century Americans, are in a very similar situation to Hezekiah's Judah.

The Lord has blessed us with great prosperity and the danger to our faith is evident

as more and more churches are closing,
as the older generations die and younger ones walk away,
as more people of all ages slip out the back door, or leave because they will not repent.
This trend is no less true in our synod and congregation as it is in other denominations.

We are under attack. We are under siege. But the difficult thing is that we can't always see it.
It is more dangerous than an invisible virus, more dangerous than any economic disturbance,
more dangerous than riots, political upheaval, social unrest, personal distress.
We don't always recognize the seriousness of our constant spiritual situation.
But St. Paul reminds us, **For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood...
but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.**^{Ephesians6:12}

But notice how ill prepared we are, how lax we have become, when viruses, economic disturbances,
riots, political upheavals, social unrest, and personal distresses rock us spiritually,
and make us wonder if God is watching out for us, or that God loves us, or that even God exists.
To be sure, our flesh and blood is no help in this.
It is under the same corruption of sin and so wars against our spiritual preparedness.
It wars against any dependence upon the Lord.

But how are we to fight against these enemies? How are we to be prepared for such onslaughts?
Or for such long drawn-out sieges?
Well, it isn't building up mound works around your house, or fortifying your nest egg, or voting,
or vaccinations, or long and cutting Facebook screes.

It is starting where Hezekiah started.

First, it is to hear the Word of the Lord and to confess our laxity in spiritual discipline,
your failure or apathy to fight against temptation, your distrust or mistrust of God's goodness.
Second, it is to hear the Word of the Lord and to take comfort and confidence in His forgiveness,
in His love and mercy for you who are but flesh and blood partook **of the same things:**
He Himself took on flesh and blood, He became man, so that on the one holy altar of the cross
at Jerusalem, He might shed his blood to cleanse the temple of your body
and remove the your apathy, fatigue, fear, and guilt and
that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.

Third, it is to repeat those first 2 steps each and every day, and during temptations and any situations
that you recognize a danger to your faith.

This is nothing less than living in/cherishing your Baptism as one who has been redeemed & freed,
from the tyranny of any **spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.**

As you continue in this constant daily battle, you will get fatigued. Count on it.

You will find a hunger and thirst for something that you do not naturally have inside of you,
a hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God.

And though the enemies siege would keep it from you,
you yet have access to this righteousness each and every week in the Divine Service
or privately at the hands of your called ministers in the Lord's Supper.

These are the preparations for all your battles, be they spiritual, physical, emotional, social, or any other. Coincidentally, they are also the way that you actually wage war against the devil and your own flesh.

And... lo and behold, you find that you are not actually the one doing the fighting, for the **Lord our God is with you to help you and to fight your battles.**

And the Devil has already been sent away **shame faced**, just as Sennacherib was.

Then you have comfort and joy no matter the earthly outcome, whether you live or die.

Whether you suffer or prosper. Whether in sickness or in health.

Nothing shall move you, and even more, nothing shall REMOVE you from your Savior.

Therefore, **"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before ... all the horde... for there are more with us than with him.**

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria