

Where Can You Turn When You Receive Bad News?

Isaiah 36, 37

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Where do you turn when you receive bad news? How do you cope with it? Let's watch and hear some answers to this question. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1L7WIA32gwk>

So that gives us some ways people cope with bad news. How many of you could relate to some of those approaches to bad news? A couple of the respondents stated that "bad news is part of life" and they're right. So how do we respond? The video asked the question "how do you cope with bad news?" I'd like to reframe that question to ask this "where do you turn when you receive bad news – the kind where we don't have the resources to fix it. Think of bad news that threatens to overwhelm you.

Our study in Isaiah raises this question. We're jumping ahead to a turning point in the book. Chapters 36-39 contain a narrative interlude to Isaiah's message. We will go through this interlude over the next 2 messages and then see how Isaiah's messages change on the other side. Today, we're going to meet someone who received very bad news. But then we'll see how he responded and how the Lord responded to deal with it. After we walk through this story, I want to give you a Scriptural principle that can help us deal with bad news and then a way to apply it.

Isaiah 36:1-21(ESV)

36 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. ² And the king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem, with a great army. And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field. ³ And there came out to him Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder.

⁴ And the Rabshakeh said to them, "Say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you rest this trust of yours? ⁵ Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? In whom do you now trust, that you have rebelled against me? ⁶ Behold, you are trusting in Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh King of Egypt to all who trust in him. ⁷ But if you say to me, "We trust in the LORD our God," is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, "You shall worship before this altar"? ⁸ Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them. ⁹ How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants, when you trust in Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? ¹⁰ Moreover, is it without the LORD that I have come up against this land to destroy it? The LORD said to me, "Go up against this land and destroy it.'"

¹¹ Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it. Do not speak to us in the language of Judah within the hearing of the people who are on the wall." ¹² But the Rabshakeh said, "Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the men sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and drink their own urine?"

¹³ Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah: “Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! ¹⁴ Thus says the king: ‘Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you. ¹⁵ Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD by saying, “The LORD will surely deliver us. This city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.” ¹⁶ Do not listen to Hezekiah. For thus says the king of Assyria: Make your peace with me and come out to me. Then each one of you will eat of his own vine, and each one of his own fig tree, and each one of you will drink the water of his own cistern, ¹⁷ until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. ¹⁸ Beware lest Hezekiah mislead you by saying, “The LORD will deliver us.” Has any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? ¹⁹ Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? ²⁰ Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?”

²¹ But they were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's command was, “Do not answer him.” ²² Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of the Rabshakeh.

The account begins in the 14th year of King Hezekiah of Judah. Isaiah prophesied during Hezekiah’s reign and likely lived in Jerusalem along with the king. Hezekiah and his kingdom face desperate times. Verse 1 tells us that King Sennacherib of Assyria had come up against the fortified cities of Judah and taken them. The fortified cities were supposed to protect the country in its different regions. So if another kingdom captured your fortified cities, it meant you were losing. The only place remaining is the capital city of Jerusalem – the most fortified of all. So Sennacherib of Assyria sends an official delegation to negotiate Jerusalem’s surrender. But he also sends a great army that surrounds Jerusalem.

Hezekiah faces a serious threat from Assyria (36:1-21). The Rabshakeh from Assyria was a title for a chief official of some sort. He can speak multiple languages, knows the skills of diplomacy and is well acquainted with the situation inside Jerusalem. He stands at the conduit or big pipe from the upper pool that brought water to Jerusalem. It’s the same place Isaiah met Hezekiah’s father, King Ahaz, years before during another Assyrian threat. This pipe and pool sits quite close to the city walls. So Hezekiah sends out his own officials to meet this Assyrian delegation.

But it’s mostly a one way conversation. The Rabshakeh skillfully tears Jerusalem’s reasons for hope. He challenges in verse 4 “On what do you rest this trust of yours.” Six more times he refers to trust in the speech. Verse 5 – Do you think that your mere words and strategy give power for war? The Jews must have thought they had some strategy to win or they would have already have given up. Verse 6 – You’re trusting in Egypt? Well it’s like a broken reed or staff. When you lean on Egypt, it’s so weak it will shatter and pieces will pierce your hand. “Such is Pharaoh, king of Egypt to all who trust in him.” Or verse 7 – “But if you say to me, “We trust in the Lord our God,” is it not he whose high places and altars

Hezekiah removed saying you shall worship at the central altar.” Well the Rabshakeh is a little off there. Hezekiah did remove high places but they weren’t the Lord’s high places. They were local worship centers where people worshipped other gods. But maybe this Assyrian appeals to the common people who maybe liked the convenience of the worship center in the high place near town. So maybe he tries to plant doubt in the people about Hezekiah.

Then in verses 8-9, he invites Hezekiah to make a bet. “I’ll give you 2000 horses if you can find riders for them.” But it seems he already knows the answer. Judah could not come up with 2000 riders. So he concludes “how would you withstand just one unit of this great army?” In verse 10 he claims that the Lord God actually had commissioned the Assyrians to go up against the land of Judah. He’s right in a way. It’s like he knows the prophecies of Isaiah that Assyria would strip the land of Judah bare. But Isaiah never prophesied that they Assyrians would take Jerusalem.

Now while this Assyrian makes these arguments, Hezekiah’s delegation listens. The Assyrian spoke in Hebrew, the local language. So Hezekiah’s delegation asks to change the language of negotiation. Please speak in Aramaic, the common diplomatic language. Why? The people on the wall listening to the discussion below could understand it. You showed courtesy to another country’s diplomat by talking in a semi-private way. Then the king could spin any deal in a positive way to his own people.

But the Assyrian arrogantly refuses. He looks beyond Hezekiah’s delegation and up to the people on the wall. Then, in Hebrew, he starts slamming Hezekiah. Here the key word is “deliver.” He mentions it about 7 times. He argues that Hezekiah deceives the people by promising deliverance. Then he tries to make surrender appealing in verse 16. “If you surrender, you can continue to eat from your own vineyards and drink from your own wells.” No suffering will be necessary. You can keep on living until, verse 17, we deport you to Assyria. It too is a land of many resources and blessings.

Then he makes his biggest blunder. In verses 18-20, he goes after the Lord. He diminishes the Lord to be just like all the other gods that had failed to deliver their peoples from the Assyrians. But he does leave out one significant detail. All these great Assyrian victories in verse 19 happened before Sennacherib came to power. But the point is made. “Jerusalem is weak and surrounded. You will soon suffer a terrible siege. The Lord can’t deliver you. So why don’t you all just surrender?” Hezekiah’s delegation says nothing by order of the king. They return to the palace with their clothes torn as a sign of deep distress and mourning. They report all they’ve heard to Hezekiah.

He responds by praying and asking Isaiah to pray. (37:1-4)

37 As soon as King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD. ²And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz. ³They said to him, “Thus says Hezekiah, ‘This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the point of birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. ⁴It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the LORD your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left.’”

Hezekiah realizes the severity of the threat. So he tears his royal clothes. Then he puts on sackcloth which was clothing of mourning and humility. He goes into temple to pray. But he also sends a delegation to Isaiah who lives somewhere else in the city. He announces the dark day of distress. He portrays the weakness of their faith with that image of near childbirth. Children have come to the point of birth but there is no strength to bring them forth or deliver them. We have some faith but its weak and we don't know if we will be delivered. So he asks Isaiah to pray.

But Isaiah doesn't pray. **Isaiah reassures the king of the Lord's deliverance. (37:5-7)** ⁶Isaiah said to them, “Say to your master, ‘Thus says the LORD: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the young men of the king of Assyria have reviled me. ⁷Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land, and I will make him fall by the sword in his own land.’” So Isaiah announces that the Lord will intervene. He will influence Sennacherib's thinking so that he will return home and die there. We might think that “Oh good. The story is over.” But the threat remains.

Apparently, the Rabshakeh left to go back to report Hezekiah's silent response to the surrender demand. But he discovers Sennacherib has left his headquarters and moved his army to meet another threat. Somehow the Rabshakeh catches up with Sennacherib and reports what has happened. Sennacherib responds by sending Hezekiah a letter.

The Assyrians threaten Hezekiah again by letter (37:8-13). In this letter, Sennacherib attacks the trustworthiness of the Lord. He again claims the Lord will be just like every other god. Well Hezekiah receives this letter and perceives the ongoing threat. Even though some or all of the army has left Jerusalem, Sennacherib promises to come back and finish the job.

Hezekiah takes the letter before the Lord and prays for deliverance (37:14-20). He takes the actual letter and lays it out before the Lord. Then he appeals to the Lord. He acknowledges the Lord's greatness and majesty. He appeals to the Lord to act not primarily to save Hezekiah and the people but to defend his own honor. Sennacherib has mocked the living god. So Hezekiah asks the Lord to save them so that the earth may know that Israel's God is like no other.

Isaiah reassures the king with the Lord's response (37:21-35). Verse 21 – Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah saying, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib, king of Assyria, this is the word that the Lord has spoken." There's three parts to the Lord's response.

First, the Lord engages in smack talk with Assyria's king in verses 21-29. He points Sennacherib's pride and claim that he accomplished all this by himself. But the Lord shows in verses 26-27 that it was really His plan and oversight that made this happen. So in verse 28, the Lord says, "I have you under complete surveillance. I know where you are Sennacherib. And in verse 29, the Lord promises to force Sennacherib to go home humiliated because he dared to rage against the Lord.

Then in verses 30-32, the Lord reassures the people with a sign. Judah will resume regular farming in 3 years. In the first year, they will have to live off of what grows naturally. In the second year they will live off the seeds of that first natural crop. Then in the third year, they will resume farming. That means the Assyrian army and all the troubled it caused will be gone.

In verses 33-35, the Lord addresses the current situation in Jerusalem. He promises that Sennacherib will not take the city. He won't even get one arrow shot into the city. For the Lord will defend the city and save it for his own sake and his servant David.

The Lord delivers Hezekiah and Jerusalem from the Assyrian threat. (37:36-38) ³⁶ And the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. ³⁷ Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home and lived at Nineveh. ³⁸ And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword. And after they escaped into the land of Ararat, Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

So the siege and threat end because of this intervention by the Lord. Sennacherib retreats home to Ninevah. There his sons assassinate him with the sword. This fulfills the prophecy made by Isaiah back in Isaiah 37:7 where the Lord says "I will make him fall by the sword in his own land."

So Hezekiah faced incredibly difficult news. He turned to the Lord in prayer and asks for deliverance. The Lord responded to Hezekiah's prayer by providing deliverance. So I am going to gather up a Biblical principle from this and then we'll talk about it. **The Lord will deliver us from threatening forces by responding to our prayers.** Friends, if you have received bad news recently or have been living with it for awhile, have you prayed? Have you turned to the Lord with your need? We talked last week about how we sometimes turn to the Lord only as a last resort. But we need to grow so that prayer is our first response.

But wait! I prayed and was not delivered. Why? The Hezekiah story works out. But many times, we have heard bad news, prayed for deliverance and it didn't happen. My loved one died when I prayed for healing. My spouse didn't change and the marriage fell apart. No one spoke up for me at work so I ended up losing my job. My relative with severe mental illness just continues to get worse. Those situations are very tough and I don't understand your circumstances or burdens.

So how might we answer this charge? **Answer 1 - There are different types of deliverance. Immediate Deliverance** - Sometimes the Lord will bring some immediate relief and deliverance. It may be in that instant or that day or within the week. But it comes and makes a difference in life today. When that happens, we must rejoice in and praise the Lord. In this account – the Lord struck down 185000 of the Assyrian army quite soon after Hezekiah's prayer. That's pretty immediate deliverance.

But there is also **Eventual Deliverance**. In our account, it looks Sennacherib's army is wiped. So he goes home and the next day gets killed by his sons. But this text doesn't tell us that he was killed 20 years after he retreated from Jerusalem. So in a sense the threat remained. But he was now powerless without his army. God's prophecy was fulfilled 20 years later.

Sometimes deliverance comes months or years after we started praying. One example might be parenting. When you're a parent of young children, you might sometimes pray for deliverance from the never-ending demands they make. They depend on you for almost everything. You might wonder, will I ever get to do a different place. I remember that feeling when it was rare to find a moment to ourselves when the children were young.

Yet if God were to deliver us from that and fast forward our lives so the kids suddenly became young adults, what might we miss? When you come through that state of parenting, you realize God can help us handle more than we would ever choose ourselves. So in a sense there is an eventual deliverance to another stage. Some wise person said to me

when our kids were young “The days are long – but the years are short.” Before you know it your kids will be in their teens, 20’s and then hopefully moving out if they’re able.

Or maybe we have a tough situation at work. We pray for deliverance but it doesn’t get much better. Yet by the Lord’s strength we persevere day by day. Before we know it we have come through 5 years with that situation. Then another position finally opens up. It pays a little less. We would never have considered it when we first prayed. But we go into it with a much greater appreciation for the healthy working environment compared to the one we came from. The Lord delivered us eventually and developed our character and perspective.

Sometimes, God immediately delivers. Sometimes God eventually delivers. But God will certainly provide **Ultimate Deliverance**. By ultimate, I mean deliverance from death, sin, the devil, injustice and hell. Our prayer for our loved one’s healing does not get answered yes. But our loved one dies and goes to heaven. So they are ultimately delivered from the disease and from the limitations of their earthly body. Or we pray for justice to be brought against someone who has wronged us. They die before justice happens. But Judgement Day will come and that offender must face God. And we are delivered from any lingering sense of injustice. So if we prayed for deliverance and we didn’t get it immediately, we need to adopt a longer view of deliverance.

Answer 2 - The Father did not deliver the Son from going to the cross because of a greater purpose. He did not deliver Jesus so that we could receive deliverance. God has not exempted Himself from the painful experience of going through hard times. When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane before His arrest. Jesus prayed, “Father, if it is possible, take this cup from me.” You could rephrase that prayer to say “If it is possible, deliver me from the cross.” But Jesus also prayed “Yet not my will but yours be done.”

Jesus was not delivered so that we could receive ultimate deliverance, eventual deliverance and sometimes immediate deliverance. The Father did ultimately deliver Jesus on the third day after the cross.

So when we receive bad news, **We must pray “Take this cup from me but if not give me strength to drink this cup.”** In very tough times, we need to pray for that strength every day. So when we receive bad news we need to go and pray first. Acknowledge the hardship; the loss; the discouragement. But then bring it to the Lord. Let’s do that now as we go to the Lord’s Table.