Where Do We Go From Here? #1

**Spread It Out**

*The Story of Hezekiah*

Dr. Marty Baker / 2 Kings 18-19 / August 7, 2016

 Have you ever been at a place where you think that you have your life all planned out and then you come to an intersection, a crossroads and you don’t know which way to go? I have been there … many times and what I have discovered is that I can find peace when I take time to pray. I realize that pray can be intimidating. You have heard people talk about their prayer lives and right of the bat, you think, “That’s not my life.”

 Look under your seat, there’s a prayer card. You will see the Lord’s Prayer printed on this card. If you have never prayed, I want you to take your first step by praying this prayer every day for the next 21 Days. I believe that God will speak to you. He may even open some doors for you and yes, he may even close some too. Just carve out time for Him and let’s see what God will do.

 Today we are starting a new series, “Where do we go from here?” This is a vision series … God has a vision for your life. He has a plan and a purpose for your life. You are not here by accident. God has ordered your footsteps and has created this opportunity for you to be a part of what he is doing in your world.

 God, not only has a vision for you, but He also has a vision for our church. God placed us here to be a light in this community. He has placed us to be a positive influence and encourage those around us. You are a leader in your home, in your neighborhood, in your school, in your community and in this church. You are a person of influence.

 Today, I want to talk to you about one of the greatest leaders in the Bible. He was not necessarily the most well-known man in the Bible, but he was an effective leader. His name was Hezekiah. When he was 25 years old, his father, King Ahaz, passed away and he became the King of Judah. He was determined to change the world, so on his first day in office, he called the leaders together and said.

**2 Chronicles 29:5-6**

**5**He said to them, “Listen to me, you Levites! Purify yourselves, and purify the Temple of the Lord, the God of your ancestors. Remove all the defiled things from the sanctuary.

**6**Our ancestors were unfaithful and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God. They abandoned the Lord and his dwelling place; they turned their backs on him.

 These men took his words to heart. They worked for 16 straight days around the clock, cleaning the temple, repairing damage and carrying out all the unclean things that Hezekiah’s father, Ahaz, had brought into the temple.

 In addition to that, they restored all of the scared items that had been removed. They also went out on the hill sides and destroyed all of sites where people had worshipped pagan gods. Hezekiah got rid of everything and anything that was taking their focus and their worship away from God.

 Now, not everyone agreed with the king, or liked what he was doing. But, he did what needed to be done. He was a faithful leader and God gave him a chance to make a difference, a chance to change his world. He did what needed to be done.

 ***Are you willing to do what needs to be done?*** We often fail to open our heart, say what needs to be said, or do what needs to be done because we assume that there will be a tomorrow. Don't miss your moment! Here’s the point:

**You miss out on opportunities when you assume that you have second chances.**

 Many of you will be starting school in the next few days. Don’t squander this opportunity. Make the most of this opportunity that you have been given. God has a plan for your life. You need to make decisions in a way that will honor the Lord and fulfill His purpose for your life. Listen to these words:

**Ephesians 5:15-17**

**15**Be very careful, then, how you live—not as *unwise* but as **wise**,

**16***making the most of every opportunity*, because the days are evil.

**17**Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.

 Hezekiah realized that he had one chance to make his first impression. He knew the principle: The speed of the leader; the speed of the team. So, he went to work. After the 16 days, they cleaned out the temple. They prepared sin and burnt offerings to the Lord and they had a huge worship celebration. It was an incredible day for the nation of Judah. It was a day of victory, renewal and revival. This decision at the beginning of his reign set his kingdom up for success.

 Everything was going well … that is … until the day in the fourteenth year of his administration, when he was 39 years old, King Hezekiah received **a letter** from the king of a neighboring country that said unless you surrender immediately and unconditionally, this King’s army was going to invade Jerusalem and kill every man, woman and child in the city. This was a real threat. Hezekiah knew that the maniac neighboring king had the troop strength to do exactly what he said he would do. We see this in 2 Kings 19.

**2 Kings 19:10-12**

**10**“This message is for King Hezekiah of Judah. Don’t let your God, in whom you trust, deceive you with promises that Jerusalem will not be captured by the king of Assyria.

**11** You know perfectly well what the kings of Assyria have done wherever they have gone. They have completely destroyed everyone who stood in their way! Why should you be any different?

**12** Have the gods of other nations rescued them—… My predecessors destroyed them all!

He said, “Hezekiah, the same thing is going to happen to you. So surrender and we’ll take it easy on you when we take you into captivity.”

 Now, imagine for a moment that you’re Hezekiah. There has been no battle yet. Back in those days, there was no way to get the word out—no e-mail or telegrams or so. One day, messengers come to you. Here’s a letter, here’s a message from the king of Assyria. This is life or death.
 Hezekiah sits down to read the letter. This is the worst news possible. **Sennacherib** is saying, "I will completely destroy you and your puny little nation just like I have destroyed every other nation of your size."

 *Now imagine how Hezekiah must have felt when he received this message*… It was a handwritten message… A letter from that king… I'm sure he probably read through it quickly the first time as he was trying to get the gist of it. Then, he slows down and realizes the full weight of it.

 At this point he probably broke out in a sweat. He felt a little nausea coming on, and then he reads that part about every man, woman and child who was going to killed.

 Hezekiah probably thinks about his own wife and kids. He thinks about his extended family and friends. He gets lightheaded and just before he passes out with anxiety about this whole thing, he realizes that his only hope is God. He says, “God is my only hope.” It is God or a massacre. It is God or total destruction and extinction. There is no human plan B, plan C or plan D that will work. Either God steps in or it is lights out for everyone that I know and love.

 ***Have you ever received news like that?*** It was such terrible news that you can remember exactly where you were when you received it. I remember when President Reagan was shot. When I heard the news, I was in Walker Hall at Lee University. Do you remember where you were when the Twin Towers fell? I was sitting in a doctor’s office waiting room.

 Have you ever had your life rocked by a medical report or by a lawsuit or by a foreclosure notice? … And you say oh, I will never forget that morning… Or that evening… or that knock at the door.

 Some of you remember being served divorce papers and you remember saying, “Are you kidding me? Really? I thought that we were still talking.

You opened up the envelope and there's these papers and you go really, 27 years and this.” You remember where you were when you received it.

 Some of you remember where you were when you heard that your business partner took off with the money or that your wife took off with the boss.

Some of you have had news hit you like a sledgehammer; so much so that in that one split second that you came to total clarity that… **Your only hope is God**. There is no human plan B, plan C or D that is going to get you out of this mess. Either God is going to step in or it is lights out for you.

 Again, if you have ever had these things happened, you remember where you were, who you were with, and the time of day.… Sometimes even what you were wearing.

 **Do you remember what King Hezekiah did after he received this threatening letter?**

**2 King 19:14**

**14**Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord.

 I love this imagery where he takes the letter itself, a handwritten letter from the king and he runs to the temple and he spreads it out before God. He says, God this problem is too big for me to handle. God I need you to see this whole letter, I need you to read every sentence and every word because I cannot handle this alone. He begins to pray.

**2 King 19:15**

**15**And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: “Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

 That is just the preamble to his prayer. Hezekiah is just warming up. He is filling his faith-tank. He focusing his prayer. Hezekiah is reminding himself that God is sovereign, majestic and powerful.

 That's why he says, *“Oh Lord, and enthroned on high, creator of the universe. You are the one who controls everything, every king and every kingdom. You're the one with unlimited power.”*

 He does this because he knows that there is a huge difference between *wishing some God would do something* and *believing that God has the sovereign power to do anything.*

 Hezekiah is reminding himself. He is filling his faith tank. He is reminding himself that his God spoke the world into being and placed the stars in the sky and if He has the power to do that, then surely he can handle this sword-wrenching king.

**Prayer is bringing your wishes and worries to God; faith is leaving them there.**

 Hezekiah understands something that we all need to understand.… That faith is really critical to affective prayer. He takes the responsibility to fill his faith tank.

 When I am desperate to see God do something in my life, I **think about** all of the works that he has already done. I **think about** the times that he has opened a door or closed a door. I **think about** the times that he has protected me. I **think about** the times when he has met a need in unexplainable ways. As **I think about** these times, my faith increases. Faith grows when we hear God’s word and we put our trust in Him.

 You have to learn to trust in the Lord.

**Proverbs 3:5-6**

**5**Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
**6**in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

 The path before you may seem like a dead end. Don’t look only at the circumstances. Don’t lean on your own understanding. God is working in your life**. If you are praying, God is working**. He does not make mistakes. You may be facing a dead end right now—financial, emotional, relational—but God can see a path that you don't know about. If you will trust God and keep on moving in faith, even when you don't see a way, He will make a way.

It will become more understandable as you head down the path he sets before you, but understanding is not a requirement for you to start down the path. Faith is. You have to step out in faith. You have to learn to trust in the Lord even though you don’t understand.

**Faith is trusting God even when you don’t understand His plan.**

Now, back to Hezekiah's prayer.

**2 Kings 19:16-19**

**16**Give ear, Lord, and hear; open your eyes, Lord, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.

**17**“It is true, Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands.

**18**They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands.

**19**Now, Lord our God, **deliver us from his hand**, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, Lord, are God.”

 Hezekiah’s prayer is simple …. God, listen to me. Open your eyes and see what’s happening here. Deliver me.

Hezekiah is in the temple and he has this letter spread out… This letter says that the King is going to attack and kill his people and he simple says, God will you deliver us from this King.

 Hezekiah does something in the 6th century BC that the apostle Paul in the 1st century A.D. encourages all of us to do:

**Philippians 4:6**

**6**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

 Talk to the Lord about it. Let your request be made known to God. You don’t need impressive words…just tell him what is on your heart.
 So put yourself in Hezekiah’s place: **What do you do with a letter like that?** What do you do when you get the worst news you’ve ever gotten in your life?

**2 Chronicles 32:20**

**20**King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz **cried out in prayer** to heaven about this.

 Hezekiah called his friend, the prophet Isaiah, to come.

He knew that he needed someone to join him in prayer. **There is power in agreeing together in prayer.**

 **21 Days of Prayer begins today. Who do you need to pray for during this time?** I want you to write down the names of people that you want God to bless during this 21 Day period. Ask God to pour out his favor. Let’s join together and ask God to save and deliver people who have lost their way.

In addition to this, we have dedicated these glass windows in this auditorium as prayer walls. If you have a spiritual concern for someone, come forward pray for them and write their name on the glass. We believe that the future belongs to people who pray.

**We want Stevens Creek Church to be known in this community not only for the music that we sing and the messages that we share, but for the prayers that we pray.**

 Beginning tomorrow … the church will be open for individual and private prayer at 6:00 AM and we will join together for a service at 7:00AM. On Saturday, we will have a service at 9:00AM. Carve out time to connect with the Lord during this season.

**Matthew 18:19-20**

Jesus said, “If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.  For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them”.

 Hezekiah knew the power of agreement. Here’s what they did. He took the letter and went to the temple and spread it out before God and prayed.

**2 Kings 19:14**

**14**After Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it, he went up to the LORD’S Temple and spread it out before the Lord.

 Hezekiah takes his greatest burden, his greatest worry, his greatest fear, and he’s very open about it, and he expresses with his body the anguish that is in his heart. And he does exactly the right thing. He spreads it out before God and he prays. He prays one of the great prayers of Scripture.

He prays this prayer and God sends an answer through Isaiah. God says,

**2 Kings 19:20**

**20**Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent this message to Hezekiah: “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: **I have heard your prayer**…”

 Hezekiah prayed and God answered. God said, "Because you took this piece of paper and spread it out before me. Because you trusted me, I will answer your prayer.”

 That very night, the angel of the LORD put to death 185,000 Assyrian soldiers as they were camped out near the city so that when the Assyrians woke up the next morning, they saw the dead bodies, broke camp, and made a beeline back to Nineveh, which was their capital. God delivered Hezekiah and the nation of Judah from their enemies. He will do the same for you.

 Now, here’s my question. **What do you need to spread out before the Lord today?** You know, we get letters from Assyria all the time. People in our world, people in this room, live under so much pressure.
 Any time you get a piece of news or even a thought that could pressure you into anxious concern or tempt you to live in anxious fear--even for a little while--or disturb your sense of living in God’s love and care, that’s your letter from Assyria, that’s your letter from Sennacherib.

 So what’s your letter from Assyria? **What’s the little piece of paper you need to spread out before the Lord?**

 Maybe it’s a piece of paper from work. Maybe it’s an assignment that seems too hard, or a performance review that has you worried, or an expectation you’re not sure you can fulfill.
 Maybe it’s a little pink slip. Maybe your piece of paper is from a bank. Maybe it’s a bill you don’t think you can pay. Maybe you have huge financial worries.

 For some of you, it’s a word from a doctor. Maybe it’s cancer. Maybe it’s a letter from a teacher about one of your children, and you’re so worried. Maybe it’s a word of rejection from somebody important to you, maybe your spouse. Maybe it’s an e-mail that cut you. Maybe it’s a painful letter from a lawyer’s office.
 Maybe it’s just deep-rooted anxiety inside you, and you don’t even know, completely, why it’s there. And you’d make it go away if you could, but you can’t. You can’t. Hezekiah spreads what he’s most concerned about before the Lord. And God hears and God answers. And the angel of God comes and completely routes the Assyrian army. And they go home, and Assyria goes into a decline it will never come out of.
 Here’s what we learn from this story. The single most important activity that moves us in the right direction is prayer.

 In closing, we are going to do what Hezekiah did. I want to ask you if you would right now take out a pen or a pencil and a piece of paper. I want to ask you to write down the word or phrase that most represents what you’re concerned about. What’s your letter from Assyria? What do you need to spread before God? Maybe it has to do with your work or relationship, family, finances, guilt, sin. This is just between you and God. And put that piece of paper in your hands or put it on your knees and do what Hezekiah did.
 Give it to God. Now, if you want to do this with another person--pray together--feel free to do that. You know, Isaiah was so helpful to Hezekiah.

 You can do that if you want to. But whether on your own or with somebody else right now, we’re going to do what Hezekiah did. So whatever your greatest concern is right now, start talking to God about it.

 Just spread it before the Lord right now.

**Closing Thoughts and Prayer**

**Praying Specific Prayers**

**1. Pray for our nation, state, county and city.**

 Cry out to God. Ask God to establish righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit in our country. We bind the spirit of the anti-Christ, the spirit that incites murder, hatred, racism, abuse, lust and so forth. In its place, we ask that God would establish righteousness, justice, kindness, love, peace, kindness and joy.

 We pray for America. We ask God to turn the hearts of the wayward towards Him. We ask God bring revival to our land. We pray for our President, our Congress and our Supreme Court…that they would be saved and filled with the Holy Spirit.

 We pray: “Let your kingdom come and your will be done in the state of Georgia and South Carolina.” We then pray for our governmental officials in Richmond, Columbia, Aiken Counties. If you live in Burke, Edgefield, McCormick or McDuffie counties, pray for your leaders.

**2. Pray for our church.**

Pray that God’s favor would be upon us as we reach out this fall. Pray that the favor of God would be on:

A. Our pastors

B. Our small group leaders

C. All the believers in our Augusta Campus and our Grovetown campus. Pray that God would raise up people who will serve.

**Matthew 9:37-38**

**37** Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

**38** Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

 Pray that God will send folks to serve in our children’s ministries, our youth ministries, our inner city work, our prayer ministries, our hospitality team, our greeter and usher team and so forth. We need some of you to answer the call. Honestly, we need you to make a commitment. We need you to attend Church 101 and join the church. There’s a class tonight at 6 PM in the conference center. If you are in our Grovetown campus and you have not joined, talk to Pastor Steve right after this service.

**Matthew 9:38**

**38** Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

**3. Pray for the lost people who come through our doors.**

 We want the God’s kingdom, his favor to come upon them. Pray that God’s house will be filled. I look at the names on these walls and I know that they represent real people with real issues. They need the presence of the Lord in their lives.

**4. Pray for your family.**

Here’s how I pray. I start with my wife and ask for the Kingdom of God to come upon her. I pray, “Don’t let anybody but Jesus run her life.”

 Then, I go down the list. I pray for my oldest son, then my daughter and then my youngest. Over and over, I pray, “Don’t let anybody but Jesus run their lives.”

**5. Pray for yourself.**

 Let the Kingdom of God be established in me. Don’t let anybody but Jesus run my life. God, give me an ourpouring of your favor.

 Here is where you align yourself with the Lord. This is the moment in your prayer time that you get your priorities in order. Cry out, “God, let your will be done in my life.”

 Jesus taught his disciples:

**Matthew 6:33**

**33** But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Here’s what I know. You are as close to God as you want to be. There are times when it seems that our lives get out-of-focus. We need to be re-calibrated. We need to put God first.

 Have you done that? Have you put God first in your life? I pray for you. If you have never made Jesus the leader and the Lord of your life, today is your day.

 You have been stuck in this pit for way too long. God wants to set you free. He wants to give you a new start. Will you let Him? He is knocking on your heart’s door right now. Will you open the door? Will you invite Jesus to be the leader and the Lord of your life? Let’s pray.

**Prayer of Confession.**

If you just prayed that prayer, I want to help you take your next step. You need to be baptized. Go by the Next Step Center and sign up for the next baptism class.

**Set-up Prayer for Prodigals**

 As we enter this 21 Days of Prayer, make it a point to pray for family members who are away from God. Pray for wayward children, the prodigals. You love these kids and they love you, but they are far from God.

 You love your husband; your love your wife, but they are far from God.

 I know that you pray for them, but today your church family wants to join with you in those prayers. Now, if your family member is with you, don’t come forward. Pray in your seat and thank the Lord that they are with you.

 But, if you have a son or daughter OR a wayward spouse, we want to join with you and pray over you and your family.

 After the prayer, if their names are not on those glass walls, take time to write their first name on the wall so that we can continue to pray for them.

***Prayer for Prodigals***