

# CHAPTER 38

This chapter proceeds in the history of Hezekiah. Here is,

**I.** His sickness, and the sentence of death he received within himself (v. 1).

**II.** His prayer in his sickness (v. 2, 3).

**III.** The answer of peace which God gave to that prayer, assuring him that he should recover, that he should live fifteen years yet, that Jerusalem should be delivered from the king of Assyria, and that, for a sign to confirm his faith herein, the sun should go back ten degrees (v. 4-8). And this we read and opened before, ~~201~~2 Kings 20:1, etc. But,

**IV.** Here is Hezekiah's thanksgiving for his recovery, which we had not before (v. 9-20). To which are added the means used (v. 21), and the end the good man aimed at in desiring to recover (v. 22). This is a chapter which will entertain the thoughts, direct the devotions, and encourage the faith and hopes of those that are confined by bodily distempers; it visits those that are visited with sickness.

## ~~281~~ ISAIAH 38:1-8

### HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS

We may hence observe, among others, these good lessons:

**1.** That neither men's greatness nor their goodness will exempt them from the arrests of sickness and death. Hezekiah, a mighty potentate on earth and a mighty favourite of Heaven, is struck with a disease, which, without a miracle, will certainly be mortal; and this in the midst of his days, his comforts, and usefulness. *Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.* It should seem, this sickness seized him when he was in the midst of his triumphs over the ruined army of the Assyrians, to teach us always to rejoice with trembling.

**2.** It concerns us to prepare when we see death approaching: "*Set thy house in order,* and thy heart especially; put both thy affections and thy affairs into the best posture thou canst, that, when thy Lord comes, thou

mayest be found of him in peace with God, with thy own conscience, and with all men, and mayest have nothing else to do but to die.” Our being ready for death will make it come never the sooner, but much the easier: and those that are fit to die are most fit to live.

**3.** Is any afflicted with sickness? *Let him pray,* <sup><3163></sup>James 5:13. Prayer is a salve for every sore, personal or public. When Hezekiah was distressed by his enemies he prayed; now that he was sick he prayed. Whither should the child go, when any thing ails him, but to his Father? Afflictions are sent to bring us to our Bibles and to our knees. When Hezekiah was in health he *went up to the house of the Lord* to pray, for that was then the house of prayer. When he was sick in bed *he turned his face towards the wall*, probably towards the temple, which was a type of Christ, to whom we must look by faith in every prayer.

**4.** The testimony of our consciences for us that by the grace of God we have lived a good life, and have walked closely and humbly with God, will be a great support and comfort to us when we come to look death in the face. And though we may not depend upon it as our righteousness, by which to be justified before God, yet we may humbly plead it as an evidence of our interest in the righteousness of the Mediator. Hezekiah does not demand a reward from God for his good services, but modestly begs that God would remember, not how he had reformed the kingdom, taken away the high places, cleansed the temple, and revived neglected ordinances, but, which was *better than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices*, how he had approved himself to God with a single eye and an honest heart, not only in these eminent performances, but in an even regular course of holy living: *I have walked before thee in truth and sincerity, and with a perfect*, that is, an upright, *heart*; for uprightness is our gospel perfection.

**5.** God has a gracious ear open to the prayers of his afflicted people. The same prophet that was sent to Hezekiah with warning to prepare for death is sent to him with a promise that he shall not only recover, but be restored to a confirmed state of health and live fifteen years yet. As Jerusalem was distressed, so Hezekiah was diseased, that God might have the glory of the deliverance of both, and that prayer too might have the honour of being instrumental in the deliverance. When we pray in our sickness, though God send not to us such an answer as he here sent to Hezekiah, yet, if by his Spirit he bids us be of good cheer, assures us that our sins are forgiven

us, that his grace shall be sufficient for us, and that, whether we live or die, we shall be his, we have no reason to say that we pray in vain. God answers us if he *strengthens us with strength in our souls*, though not with bodily strength, <sup><128></sup>Psalm 138:3.

6. A good man cannot take much comfort in his own health and prosperity unless withal he see the welfare and prosperity of the church of God. Therefore God, knowing what lay near Hezekiah's heart, promised him not only that he should live, but that he should *see the good of Jerusalem all the days of his life* (<sup><128></sup>Psalm 128:5), otherwise he cannot live comfortably. Jerusalem, which is now delivered, shall still be defended from the Assyrians, who perhaps threatened to rally again and renew the attack. Thus does God graciously provide to make Hezekiah upon all accounts easy.

7. God is *willing to show to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel*, that they may have an unshaken faith in it, and therewith a strong consolation. God had given Hezekiah repeated assurances of his favour; and yet, as if all were thought too little, that he might expect from him uncommon favours, a sign is given him, an uncommon sign. None that we know of having had an absolute promise of living a certain number of years to come, as Hezekiah had, God thought fit to confirm this unprecedented favour with a miracle. The sign was the going back of the shadow upon the sun-dial. The sun is a faithful measurer of time, and *rejoices as a strong man to run a race*; but he that set that clock a going can set it back when he pleases, and make it to return; for the Father of all lights is the director of them.

## <sup><230></sup>ISAIAH 38:9-22

### HEZEKIAH'S THANKSGIVING

We have here Hezekiah's thanksgiving-song, which he penned, by divine direction, after his recovery. He might have taken some of the psalms of his father David, and made use of them for his purpose; he might have found many very pertinent ones. He appointed *the Levites to praise the Lord with the words of David*, <sup><428></sup>2 Chronicles 29:30. But the occasion here was extraordinary, and, his heart being full of devout affections, he would not confine himself to the compositions he had, though of divine

inspiration, but would offer up his affections in his own words, which is most natural and genuine. He put this thanksgiving in writing, that he might review it himself afterwards, for the reviving of the good impressions made upon him by the providence, and that it might be recommended to others also for their use upon the like occasion. Note, There are writings which it is proper for us to draw up after we have been sick and have recovered. It is good to write a memorial of the affliction, and of the frame of our hearts under it, to keep a record of the thoughts we had of things when we were sick, the affections that were then working in us, to write a memorial of the mercies of a sick bed, and of our release from it, that they may never be forgotten, to write a thanksgiving to God, write a sure covenant with him, and seal it, to give it under our hands that we will never return again to folly. It is an excellent writing which Hezekiah here left, upon his recovery; and yet we find (~~1495~~ 2 Chronicles 32:25) that *he rendered not again according to the benefit done to him*. The impressions, one would think, should never have worn off, and yet, it seems, they did. Thanksgiving is good, but thanksgiving is better. Now in this writing he preserves upon record,

**I.** The deplorable condition he was in when his disease prevailed, and his despair of recovery, v. 10-13.

**1.** He tells us what his thoughts were of himself when he was at the worst; and these he keeps in remembrance,

**(1.)** As blaming himself for his despondency, and that he gave up himself for gone; whereas while there is life there is hope, and room for our prayer and God's mercy. Though it is good to consider sickness as a summons to the grave, so as thereby to be quickened in our preparations for another world, yet we ought not to make the worse of our case, nor to think that every sick man must needs be a dead man presently. He that brings low can raise up. Or,

**(2.)** As reminding himself of the apprehensions he had of death approaching, that he might always know and consider his own frailty and mortality, and that, though he had a reprieve for fifteen years, it was but a reprieve, and the fatal stroke he had now such a dread of would certainly come at last. Or,

**(3.)** As magnifying the power of God in restoring him when his case was desperate, and his goodness in being so much better to him than his own

fears. Thus David sometimes, when he was delivered out of trouble, reflected upon the black and melancholy conclusions he had made upon his own case when he was in trouble, and what he had then *said in his haste*, as <sup><1802></sup>Psalm 31:22; 77:79.

2. Let us see what Hezekiah's thoughts of himself were.

(1.) He reckoned that the number of his months was cut off in the midst. He was now about thirty-nine or forty years of age, and when he had a fair prospect of many years and happy ones, very happy, very many, before him. This distemper that suddenly seized him he concluded would be the *cutting off of his days*, that he should now be *deprived of the residue of his years*, which in a course of nature he might have lived (not which he could command as a debt due to him, but which he had reason to expect, considering the strength of his constitution), and with them he should be deprived not only of the comforts of life, but of all the opportunities he had of serving God and his generation. To the same purport (v. 12), “*My age has departed and gone, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent, out of which I am forcibly dislodged by the pulling of it down in an instant.*” Our present residence is but like that of a shepherd in his tent, a poor, mean, and cold lodging, where we are upon duty, and with a trust committed to our charge, as the shepherd has, of which we must give an account, and which will easily be taken down by the drawing of one pin or two. But observe, It is not the final period of our age, but only the removal of it to another world, where the tents of Kedar that are taken down, coarse, black, and weather-beaten, shall be set up again in the New Jerusalem, *comely as the curtains of Solomon*. He adds another similitude: *I have cut off, like a weaver, my life*. Not that he did by any act of his own cut off the thread of his life; but, being told that he must needs die, he was forced to cut off all his designs and projects, his *purposes were broken off*, even the *thoughts of his heart*, as Job's were, <sup><1871></sup>Job 17:11. Our days are compared to the weaver's shuttle (<sup><1876></sup>Job 7:6), passing and repassing very swiftly, every throw leaving a thread behind it; and, when they are finished, the thread is cut off, and the piece taken out of the loom, and shown to our Master, to be judged of whether it be well woven or no, that we may *receive according to the things done in the body*. But as the weaver, when he has cut off his thread, has done his work, and the toil is over, so a good man, when his life is cut off, his cares and fatigues are cut off with it, and he rests from his labours. “But did I say, *I have cut off my life*? No, my times are not in my own hand; they are in God's hand, and it

is he that *will cut me off from the thrum* (so the margin reads it); he has appointed what shall be the length of the piece, and, when it comes to that length, he will cut it off.”

(2.) He reckoned that he should go to the gates of the grave to the grave, the gates of which are always open; for it is still crying, *Give, give*. The grave is here put not only for the sepulchre of his fathers, in which his body would be deposited with a great deal of pomp and magnificence (for he was buried in the chief of the sepulchres of the kings, and all *Judah did him honour at his death*, <sup><HEB></sup>2 Chronicles 32:33), which yet he himself took no care of, nor gave any order about, when he was sick; but for the state of the dead, that is, the *sheol*, the *hades*, the invisible world, to which he saw his soul going.

(3.) He reckoned that he was deprived of all the opportunities he might have had of worshipping God and doing good in the world (v. 1): “*I said,*”

[1.] “*I shall not see the Lord*, as he manifests himself in his temple, in his oracles and ordinances, *even the Lord here in the land of the living*.” He hopes to see him on the other side death, but he despairs of seeing him any more on this side death, as he had seen him in the sanctuary, <sup><HEB></sup>Psalm 63:2. He shall no more see (that is, serve) the Lord in the land of the living, the land of conflict between his kingdom and the kingdom of Satan, this seat of war. He dwells much upon this: *I shall no more see the Lord, even the Lord*; for a good man wishes not to live for any other end than that he may serve God and have communion with him.

[2.] “*I shall see man no more*.” He shall see his subjects no more, whom he may protect and administer justice to, shall see no more objects of charity, whom he may relieve, shall see his friends no more, who were often sharpened by his countenance, as iron is by iron. Death puts an end to conversation, and removes our acquaintance into darkness, <sup><HEB></sup>Psalm 88:18.

(4.) He reckoned that the agonies of death would be very sharp and severe: “*He will cut me off with pining sickness*, which will waste me, and wear me off, quickly.” The distemper increased so fast, without intermission or remission, either day or night, morning or evening, that he concluded it would soon come to a crisis and make an end of him that God, whose servants all diseases are, would by them, *as a lion, break all his bones*

with grinding pain, v. 13. He thought that next morning was the utmost he could expect to live in such pain and misery; when he had outlived the first day's illness the second day he repeated his fears, and concluded that this must needs be his last night: *from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me*. When we are sick we are very apt to be thus calculating our time, and, after all, we are still at uncertainty. It should be more our care how we shall get safely to another world than how long we are likely to live in this world.

**II.** The complaints he made in this condition (v. 14): “*Like a crane, or swallow, so did I chatter*; I made a noise as those birds do when they are frightened.” See what a change sickness makes in a little time; he that, but the other day, spoke with so much freedom and majesty, nor, through the extremity of pain or deficiency of spirits, *chatters like a crane or a swallow*. Some think he refers to his praying in his affliction; it was so broken and interrupted with groanings which could not be uttered that it was more like the chattering of a crane or a swallow than what it used to be. Such mean thoughts had he of his own prayers, which yet were acceptable to God, and successful. He *mourned like a dove*, sadly, but silently and patiently. He had found God so ready to answer his prayers at other times that he could not but look upwards, in expectation of some relief now, but in vain: *his eyes failed*, and he saw no hopeful symptom, nor felt any abatement of his distemper; and therefore he prays, “*I am oppressed*, quite overpowered and ready to sink; *Lord, undertake for me*; bail me out of the hands of the serjeant that has arrested me; *be surety for thy servant for good*, <sup>HB12</sup>Psalm 119:122. Come between me and the gates of the grave, to which I am ready to be hurried.” When we recover from sickness, the divine pity does, as it were, beg a day for us, and undertakes we shall be forthcoming another time and answer the debt in full. And, when we receive the sentence of death within ourselves, we are undone if the divine grace do not undertake for us to carry us through the valley of the shadow of death, and to preserve us blameless to the heavenly kingdom on the other side of it if Christ do not undertake for us, to bring us off in judgment, and present us to his Father, and to do all that for us which we need, and cannot do for ourselves. *I am oppressed, ease me* (so some read it); for, when we are agitated by a sense of guilt and the fear of wrath, nothing will make us easy but Christ's undertaking for us.

**III.** The grateful acknowledgment he makes of God's goodness to him in his recovery. He begins this part of the writing as one at a stand how to express himself (v. 15): "*What shall I say? Why should I say so much by way of complaint when this is enough to silence all my complaints* *He has spoken unto me; he has sent his prophet to tell me that I shall recover and live fifteen years yet; and he himself has done it: it is as sure to be done as if it were done already.* What God has spoken he will himself do, for no word of his shall fall to the ground." God having spoken it, he is sure of it (v. 16): "*Thou wilt restore me, and make me to live; not only restore me from this illness, but make me to live through the years assigned me.*" And, having this hope,

**1.** He promises himself always to retain the impressions of his affliction (v. 15): "*I will go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul,* as one in sorrow for my sinful distrusts and murmurings under my affliction, as one in care to make suitable returns for God's favour to me and to make it appear that I have got good by the providences I have been under. *I will go softly,* gravely and considerately, and with thought and deliberation, not as many, who, when they have recovered, live as carelessly and as much at large as ever." Or, "I will go pleasantly" (so some understand it); "when God has delivered me I will walk cheerfully with him in all holy conversation, as having tasted that he is gracious." Or, "I will go softly, even *after the bitterness of my soul*" (so it may be read); "when the trouble is over I will endeavour to retain the impression of it, and to have the same thoughts of things that I had then."

**2.** He will encourage himself and others with the experiences he had had of the goodness of God (v. 16): "*By these things which thou hast done for me they live, the kingdom lives*" (for the life of such a king was the life of the kingdom); "all that hear of it shall live and be comforted; by the same power and goodness that have restored me all men have their souls held in life, and they ought to acknowledge it. *In all these things is the life of my spirit,* my spiritual life, that is supported and maintained by what God has done for the preservation of my natural life." The more we taste of the loving-kindness of God in every providence the more will our hearts be enlarged to love him and live to him, and that will be the life of our spirit. Thus our souls live, and they shall praise him.

**3.** He magnifies the mercy of his recovery, on several accounts.



**(1.)** That he was raised up from great extremity (v. 17): *Behold, for peace I had great bitterness.* When, upon the defeat of Sennacherib, he expected nothing but an uninterrupted peace to himself and his government, he was suddenly seized with sickness, which embittered all his comforts to him, and went to such a height that it seemed to be the bitterness of death itself *bitterness, bitterness*, nothing but gall and wormwood. This was his condition when God sent him seasonable relief.

**(2.)** That it came from the love of God, from love to his soul. Some are spared and reprieved in wrath, that they may be reserved for some greater judgment when they have filled up the measure of their iniquities; but temporal mercies are sweet indeed to us when we can taste the love of God in them. *He delivered me because he delighted in me* (~~Psalm~~ Psalm 18:19); and the word here signifies a very affectionate love: *Thou hast loved my soul from the pit of corruption*; so it runs in the original. God's love is sufficient to bring a soul from the pit of corruption. This is applicable to our redemption by Christ; it was in love to our souls, our poor perishing souls, that he delivered them from the bottomless pit, snatched them as brands out of everlasting burnings. *In his love and in his pity he redeemed us.* And the preservation of our bodies, as well as the provision made for them, is doubly comfortable when it is in love to our souls when God repairs the house because he has a kindness for the inhabitant.

**(3.)** That it was the effect of the pardon of sin: *“For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back, and thereby hast delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, in love to it.”* Note,

**[1.]** When God pardons sin he casts it behind his back, as not designing to look upon it with an eye of justice and jealousy. He remembers it no more, to visit for it. The pardon does not make the sin not to have been, or not to have been sin, but not to be punished as it deserves. When we cast our sins behind our back, and take no care to repent of them, God sets them before his face, and is ready to reckon for them; but when we set them before our face in true repentance, as David did when his sin was ever before him, God casts them behind his back.

**[2.]** When God pardons sins he pardons all, casts them all behind his back, though they have been as scarlet and crimson.

[3.] The pardoning of the sin is the delivering of the soul from the pit of corruption.

[4.] It is pleasant indeed to think of our recoveries from sickness when we see them flowing from the remission of sin; then the cause is removed, and then it is in love to the soul.

(4.) That it was the lengthening out of his opportunity to glorify God in this world, which he made the business, and pleasure, and end of life.

[1.] If this sickness had been his death, it would have put a period to that course of service for the glory of God and the good of the church which he was now pursuing, v. 18. Heaven indeed praises God, and the souls of the faithful, when at death they remove thither, do that work of heaven as the angels, and with the angels, there; but what is this world the better for that? What does that contribute to the support and advancement of God's kingdom among men in this state of struggle? *The grave cannot praise God*, nor the dead bodies that lie there. *Death cannot celebrate him*, cannot proclaim his perfections and favours, to invite others into his service. *Those who go down to the pit*, being no longer in a state of probation, nor living by faith in his promises, cannot give him honour by hoping for his truth. Those that lie rotting in the grave, as they are not capable of receiving any further mercy from God, so neither are they capable of offering any more praises to him, till they shall be raised at the last day, and then they shall both receive and give glory.

[2.] Having recovered from it, he resolves not only to proceed, but to abound, in praising and serving God (v. 19): *The living, the living, he shall praise thee*. They may do it; they have an opportunity of praising God, and that is the main thing that makes life valuable and desirable to a good man. Hezekiah was *therefore* glad to live, not that he might continue to enjoy his royal dignity and the honour and pleasure of his late successes, but that he might continue to praise God. The living must praise God; they live in vain if they do not. Those that have been dying and yet are living, whose life is from the dead, are in a special manner obliged to praise God, as being most sensibly affected with his goodness. Hezekiah, for his part, having recovered from this sickness, will make it his business to praise God: *"I do it this day; let others do it in like manner."* Those that give good exhortations should set good examples, and do themselves what they expect from others. *"For my part,"* says Hezekiah, *"the Lord was ready to save me; he not only did save me, but he was ready to do it just then when*

I was in the greatest extremity; his help came in seasonably; he showed himself willing and forward to save me. *The Lord was to save me*, was at hand to do it, saved me at the first word; and therefore,” *First*, “I will publish and proclaim his praises. I and my family, I and my friends, I and my people, will have a concert of praise to his glory: *We will sing my songs to the stringed instruments*, that others may attend to them, and be affected with them, when they are in the most devout and serious frame in the house of the Lord.” It is for the honour of God, and the edification of his church, that special mercies should be acknowledged in public praises, especially mercies to public persons, <sup>1338</sup>Psalm 116:18, 19. *Secondly*, “I will proceed and persevere in his praises.” We should do so all the days of our life, because every day of our life is itself a fresh mercy and brings many fresh mercies along with it; and, as renewed mercies call for renewed praises, so former eminent mercies call for repeated praises. It is by the mercy of God that we live, and therefore, as long as we live, we must continue to praise him, while we have breath, nay, while we have being. *Thirdly*, “I will propagate and perpetuate his praises.” We should not only praise him all the days of our life, but *the father to the children should make known his truth*, that the ages to come may give God the glory of his truth by trusting to it. It is the duty of parents to possess their children with a confidence in the truth of God, which will go far towards keeping them close to the ways of God. Hezekiah, doubtless, did this himself, and yet Manasseh his son walked not in his steps. Parents may give their children many good things, good instructions, good examples, good books, but they cannot give them grace.

**IV.** In the last two verses of this chapter we have two passages relating to this story which were omitted in the narrative of it here, but which we had 2 Kings 20, and therefore shall here only observe two lessons from them:

**1.** That God's promises are intended not to supersede, but to quicken and encourage, the use of means. Hezekiah is sure to recover, and yet he must *take a lump of figs and lay it on the boil*, v. 21. We do not trust God, but tempt him, if, when we pray to him for help, we do not second our prayers with our endeavours. We must not put physicians, or physic, in the place of God, but make use of them in subordination to God and to his providence; help thyself and God will help thee.

**2.** That the chief end we should aim at, in desiring life and health, is that we may glorify God, and do good, and improve ourselves in knowledge,

and grace, and meetness for heaven. Hezekiah, when he meant, *What is the sign that I shall recover?* asked, *What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord,* there to honour God, to keep up acquaintance and communion with him, and to encourage others to serve him? v. 22. It is taken for granted that if God would restore him to health he would immediately go up to the temple with his thank-offerings. There Christ found the impotent man whom he had healed, ~~John~~ John 5:14. The exercises of religion are so much the business and delight of a good man that to be restrained from them is the greatest grievance of his afflictions, and to be restored to them is the greatest comfort of his deliverances. *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee.*