

**“The Story” / “When Life Falls Apart”**  
**Sermon 3: “Hezekiah: Hard Choices ...”**  
**January 18, 2015**

Don't you love bacon? My mom told me not to eat in front of people if I couldn't share. But she's not here. Last week we said that God is like bacon – real bacon. Don't settle for cheap substitutes, like turkey bacon, because they won't satisfy. We were actually comparing the real “in the beginning God” to all the idols we put in his place. Well my study partner Randy found a couple other reflections on bacon.

- This one says – No hope, no cash, no jobs – we could live with that. No bacon?!
- Here's a flowchart on bacon ...

Enough of that silliness. Because I lost a bet to a very evil man, I had to wear this today (OSU shirt). That's long enough. What this is really good for is a rug to stand on ... especially if your shoes are dirty.

We are working our way through The Story, and we're up to chapter 16. The Story essentially summarizes the storyline of the Bible in 31 chapters. And this is especially helpful this week, because chapter 16 covers a really confusing part of the Bible story. We are in the period of Israel's history after their civil war, when it has divided into two nations: Israel in the north, and Judah in the south. And they live as two separate nations for about 200 years. But there are pieces of this part of the story all over our Old Testament. You see the Old Testament is not in chronological order. And you'll find parts of this chapter of this chapter in 2 Kings, and 2 Chronicles, and the Psalms, and in at least 8 of the books of the prophets. So it's hard to keep this part of the Story straight. So The Story is really useful here in kind of simplifying the picture so you can see how it all holds together.

Now this chapter of the story is not only confusing, it's ugly. Israel and Judah don't really behave themselves as God's people. The two nations have 38 kings over these 200 years. Only 5 get a passing grade from God. 33 of them are really jerks, in God's eyes. In other words, they are way too normal. And over these 200 years God keeps sending these prophets to warn Israel and Judah to “step away from the sin,” to turn back to God. The prophets keep telling God's people, “You are not on God's path! You are not doing it God's way! If you continue down this path, you'll

find only pain at the end of it.” But they didn’t listen, because we’re pretty stubborn.

In fact there’s a summary of what was happening at the end of 2 Chronicles. It says, “The Lord, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent his prophets to warn them...” God warned them over, and over, and over, and over again. Do you know why he was so patient? It says, “For (God) he had compassion on his people and his Temple.” Guys, he loves us! He gives us way more chances than we would give, if we were in his shoes. He keeps speaking hard truth to us, because of his amazing grace. “But” it says, “the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets...” Because we think we are smarter than God. “Until, (it says) the Lord’s anger could no longer be restrained and nothing could be done.” (2 Chronicles 36.15-16) Because there reaches a time – this is kind of scary; there’s reaches a time when further warnings will just not work; there reaches a time when justice has had enough.

Now, we’re going to focus in on one of the good guys this morning. Remember, 38 kings, only 5 of them get passing grades from God, and Hezekiah is one of the good guys. He also inherits a real mess. There are sometimes when our life is a mess because we’ve been stupid. We choose badly, or we sin, and we mess stuff up. But there are sometimes when our life is a mess because people around us have been stupid. If you were here a couple weeks ago, you’ll remember the theme we unpacked was this: puke runs downhill. Kind of gross. Sometimes we are covered with our own puke; sometimes we are covered with someone else’s puke. And Hezekiah was covered with his dad’s. He inherited a real mess from his dad... But it’s still his mess now! You’ve been there; you’ve felt that:

- Your spouse cleans out the bank account on his way out. You didn’t make the mess, but you have to deal with it.
- Or, other people’s kids are cruel to your kids; or they lure your kids into some dark places. You didn’t cause the mess, but you have to deal with it.
- Or, the VP tells you it is your responsibility to notify 70 men and women their jobs have been cut. And, yeah, your job is #70.

You've been there; you've felt that. Well, let me see if I can explain Hezekiah's mess to you without you going to sleep. Here's a little history lesson. I'll try to make it as painless as possible, but knowing some of this will help The Story make more sense.

First let me show you a map. We'll start at the bottom. You'll remember that after their civil war, God's people are now divided into 2 nations: Judah is in the south, and Israel is in the north. They are both ... pretty small. And way up north is an emerging superpower by the name of Assyria. It's about where Iraq is now.

Now the Assyrians were mean; in fact they were ugly mean – Ohio State mean. They would draw pictures of what they did to their prisoners – and we still have some of their pictures. The Assyrians would skin their prisoners alive, and rip out their tongues, and cut off hands and feet and heads and stack them up in these huge piles of body parts. They would take some of their captives and impale them on huge stakes. In fact they would make ISIS look kind of civilized. They were big, they were strong, they were ugly mean. And they were building an empire ... which means that little guys like Judah and Israel were in real trouble.

Now basically, both Israel and Judah had 3 options. (1) They could trust God to protect them. That's what God wanted them to do; but that's hard sometimes. Or (2) they could fight. They could even kind of form an alliance with all the other little nations around them. Maybe together they could hold off these dastardly Assyrians. Or (3) they could give in, they could surrender. They could pay whatever ransom the Assyrians demanded, they could push the "In the beginning God" over and worship the Assyrian gods. Option 1 is God smart, but really, really scary. Option 2 is neither God smart, nor man smart. Option 3 is flat out God stupid, even though it seems pretty man smart sometimes.

Well Israel, in the north, chose strategy #2. They formed an alliance with all the little nations around them, except Judah, and they went to war with Assyria. And it went very, very badly. They got their tails kicked. Kind of like Oregon at the hands of Ohio State. Sometimes evil wins, in this world. They got skinned, and their tongues ripped out, and their heads cut off. They were just crushed; and the survivors were scattered. From that point

forward the nation of Israel was dead, and the 10 tribes that were, are simply no more.

On the other hand, Judah, in the south, chose strategy #3: surrender, just give in, even to the point where you honor Assyria's gods. That strategy really was man smart, perhaps – they survived. But it was flat out God stupid. And they guy who led Israel during this ugly time was named Ahaz: Hezekiah's dad.

Ahaz just refused to trust God. It was too scary. So instead of trusting God he becomes Assyria's lapdog. We are told in 2 Kings that Ahaz says to the king of Assyria, "I am your servant and your vassal. I the king am now a slave." He became a puppet king. And the Bible tells us that he took the silver and the gold that the people had given to the Temple and shipped it off to Assyria. He gave God's money to a pagan king. And then he had altars built to the Assyrian gods – in God's temple itself! He led the Israelites away from the one true God into idolatry. In fact he took his own son, he placed the body of his own son in a fire and burned his son to death as a sacrifice to the Assyrian gods. That was Hezekiah's dad. And when dad dies, Hezekiah becomes king, and he inherits this puppet kingdom, with its defiled temple and its broken people.

Now, he really is in a bind. I want to show you a map. That's kind of the world of the Old Testament. You can see the Mediterranean Sea there to the left, and Egypt down at the bottom, where the Israelites had been slaves. The darker green up near the top was where Assyria started – kind of where Iraq is today. The lighter green is where they spread. All the way down to the Persian Gulf on the right, all the way down to Egypt on the bottom. And if you can make it out, you can see one little patch of yellow – that's Judah, under Ahaz, and Hezekiah. A puppet kingdom inside the boundaries of this immense empire.

So what Hezekiah does next will blow your mind. What would you do if you were Hezekiah? You are a puppet, you are surrounded by an immensely powerful and a terribly mean overlord. Your country was pushed into paganism – because if you didn't honor their gods, they'd crush you. What would you do if you were Hezekiah? You are 25 years old – just a kid. Your dad is dead, and you have inherited an absolute mess. Well, here's what Hezekiah does. It says, "He did what was

pleasing in the Lord's sight, just as his ancestor David had done." (2 Chronicles 29.2) In other words, he was God smart, and man insane! This is suicide, it seems.

And it is even weirder than it looks. How does a kid whose dad made such poor choices, turn out so strong, so courageous, so godly? I don't know. Maybe his mom was made of better stuff than his dad. Her name was "Abijah." That means, "Yahweh (Yah) – the "in the beginning God" – is my Father (my ab)." Maybe she lived it. Or maybe he had godly grandparents who spoke hard truth into his life. Or, maybe – this is just conjecture – maybe he was influenced by the prophet Isaiah. We know that Isaiah was around the palace a lot. We know that he was trying to turn Israel back to God from before the time Ahaz became king. We know that Hezekiah is going to lean on Isaiah when he becomes king. Maybe Isaiah took Hezekiah under his wing and taught him about what following God means – no matter what the cost.

I don't know. What we do know is the Hezekiah made some incredibly tough choices, some amazingly God honoring choices. He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight, just as his ancestor David had done. He started correcting the mistakes his father had made. He began rooting out the paganism that was pulling his people away from God. He cleaned out the temple, throwing out everything in it that honored any pagan god, and he rededicated the temple to the "in the beginning God." He sent his guys throughout his land to tear down any of the pagan shrines and altars they found. It says, "Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel." That's hard sometimes. It says, "There was never another king like him in the land of Judah, either before or after his time. He remained faithful to the Lord in everything." (2 Kings 18.5-6) ...

Now, let me step off to the side for just a moment. What do you do when you realize your life is mess? In fact, maybe you realize there is a boatload of God-dishonoring trash in your life? Are you willing to start fixing what is broken, even if it hurts? Are you willing to remove those things in your life that are dragging you away from God? Some of you may have some DVDs you need to get rid of, or you may need to eliminate some of the pay channels on your TV set. Some of you may need to put a filter on your computer, or sign up for something like XXXchurch.com. They'll help you clean up. Some of you need to get rid of a stash of pills,

or bottles – because they are tugging you away from God. Some of you may need to find an accountability partner. How can we be here begging God’s blessing and while we hold onto our idols?

But rooting out temptation can be really hard! What makes it even tougher for Hezekiah was that he was sticking a needle in Assyria’s eye. Some of those altars he was tearing down were for Assyria’s gods. In fact it says, “He revolted against the king of Assyria and refused to pay him (any more) tribute.” (2 Kings 18.7) Remember that map? That little spot of yellow in that sea of light green. That was Hezekiah, deciding to do things God’s way, no matter what the cost. Because it’s the right thing to do.

Don’t misunderstand the risk. Sometimes when you do the right thing it’s going to hurt. Sometimes doing things God’s way isn’t going to turn out well ... here. Sometimes God smart isn’t man smart, at all. So be it! You see, this isn’t some “Let’s Make a Deal” with God. This isn’t, “God, I’ll scratch your back and you scratch mine.” And it’s certainly not, “God, you do something good for me and then I’ll be good for you.” Hezekiah just trusted his God. He just did the right thing. He did it knowing things would likely get worse before they got better.

You see – we need to understand this, and accept it: Every time we try to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord, someone will get ticked off. Often when we try to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord, somebody or something will come against us. The Bible says that this world is at war with God – so you can expect them to come against God’s people. Jesus said, “If they hated me, they are going to hate you.” So be it. When you start cleaning up the mess... especially a mess from which they profit...you’ll probably get trouble coming your way. And the king of Assyria saw Hezekiah’s actions as a declaration of war!

Now remember Assyria has already crushed Israel. And now they are camped at the border of Judah with an army of more than 185,000 warriors! Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, looks across the border of Judah and says, “Now you’re next!” And he begins to take Judah out one city at a time. It looks bad! Hezekiah gathers the people into Jerusalem, his capital, and here’s what he tells them (this is pretty cool). He says, “Be strong! Take courage! Don’t be intimidated by the king of Assyria and his troops — (because) there are more on our side than on their side. (Say

what?! Hezekiah says,) He only has a bunch of mere men; we have our God to help us and fight for us!" (2 Chronicles 32.7-8)

Now, that's one of the big themes of the Bible: "Our daddy is bigger than your daddy!" There are these two kids at school. One says, "My daddy can whip your daddy." The other kid says, "So ... So can my mom." But you want to know that your dad can take care of you when you're little. And you want to know that your dad cares. Well, we believe God cares, and we believe God can take care of us, if we do the right thing – no matter how hard it gets. Our God is just that big!

- In the book of Job God says, "Do you have an arm like my arm? Can you shout in thunder the way I can?" (Job 40.9)
- Isaiah the prophet says, "God has rolled up his sleeves. All the nations can see his holy, muscled arm." (Isaiah 52.10)
- The Psalm says, "Powerful is your arm! Strong is your hand! Your right hand is lifted high in glorious strength." (Ps 89.10)

Yeah, the Assyrians have 185,000 warriors, which works out to about 370,000 arms. Against God, with one arm tied behind his back. I think I'll go with God ... wouldn't you? Don't you?

Now, Hezekiah's response is kind of like a story that we didn't get to in the last chapter. This prophet named Elisha had ticked off the king of one of Israel's neighbors. So Elisha and his servant are running for their lives. They hide out in this house one night, and the next morning Elisha's servant gets up to let the dog out and he sees that they are surrounded. There is an army surrounding them – horses, chariots. And he goes back into the house and he says to the prophet, "We've got a huge problem. We're surrounded!" Well, Elisha looks up from his caramel frappuccino and he says, "Don't be afraid!" He says, "There are more on our side than on theirs!" (2 Kings 6.16) And then he says to God, "Open his eyes Lord, and let him see." And the Lord opened the young man's eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire." (2 Kings 6.17) They weren't alone. We're never alone. Our daddy is always bigger than their daddy. You see, we focus on the problem; but faith lets us see the one who is way bigger than any of our problems. Faith trusts; faith does the right thing ... knowing that one day, it will be worth it. Maybe not today, but one day it will be worth it.

Just a couple more pieces of Hezekiah's story. Hezekiah's rebellion ticks Assyria off. And when they get mad, they get mean. Sennacherib, their king, starts knocking off Judah's cities. Because, sometimes it is painful to do the right thing, to do it God's way. But Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, where Hezekiah was, was a fortress. It was built on top of a mountain; it had these huge thick walls. It would require a lot of dead soldiers, or a prolonged siege to starve it out. So Sennacherib decides to attack Jerusalem with propaganda.

He sends some drones over the city walls to drop some leaflets. Not really; just wanted to see if you were still listening. Actually he sends some guys who spoke Hebrew to try to convince the people there was no hope, that they might as well give up. They shout at the city, "Listen to what the great king of Assyria says! Don't be fooled by (your king) Hezekiah. He can't save you. Don't trust him when he tells you that the Lord will protect you ... Were any other gods able to defend their land against us? ... Were the gods of (Israel) Samaria able to protect their land against us? None of their gods kept their people safe. Do you think the Lord your God can do any better?" (2 Kings 18.28-35) ... Have you ever heard nonsense like that before?

- "You don't really think God can get you out of this mess, do you?"
- "Not even God can save your marriage this time."
- "Why are you trusting the words of a quaint old book?"
- "Why are you listening to the words of some misguided, broken old preacher?"

And way too often, we believe the lie. Because sometimes it really is hard to trust a God we can't see, isn't it?

Well, here's what Hezekiah did. If you read chapter 16 in *The Story* last week you read this little summary. It's in italics, which means this part is not word for word from the Bible, it's a summary of what happened. It says, "Clearly outnumbered and facing brutal defeat, Hezekiah appealed to the prophet Isaiah. 'Please pray for God's help,' the king entreated, tearing his cloths and wearing sackcloth, in utter desperation...Hezekiah's humble prayer brought dramatic results." No kidding! He's tried doing the right thing, no matter what the cost. And it cost him a lot. So when it seemed like all was lost, he prays; to the one who can always, always, always – be trusted.

And here's what God does... Actually I need to show you a little video clip first. You old guys know who Chuck Norris is. For you young guys, let me tell you a little about Chuck Norris.

- Chuck Norris has a grizzly bear carpet in his bedroom. The bear wasn't dead; it was just afraid to move.
- Chuck Norris and Superman once fought each other on a bet. The loser had to start wearing his underwear on the outside of his pants.
- Chuck Norris once kicked a horse in the chin. Its descendants are now called giraffes.
- Chuck Norris once threw a grenade; it killed 50 people; then it blew up.

Well, here's the clip, from Expendables 2. You'll figure out which one is Chuck Norris...

Well, Hezekiah prays and God sends an angel – just one angel. (2 Kings 19.35-36) And this one angel – remember, real angels don't look like chubby little babies or Victoria Secret models. Real angels are formidable, and they are irresistibly powerful – compared to us. Well God sends one Chuck Norris angel, and that angel killed 185,000 Assyrian warriors, in one night. Remember how God had sent an angel to kill all the firstborn of Egypt, in one night. Revelation speaks of a time when 4 angels will take out a 1/3 of mankind – billions. And it says that after this, king Sennacherib went back to Assyria, with his tail between his legs. No kidding! ...

Guys, life gets messy. Sometimes it's messy because we get stupid. Sometimes it's messy because someone else is stupid, and we inherit the mess. Doesn't much matter why it's messy; for us the fix is the same. We do the right thing, we do what is right in the eyes of the Lord. We do whatever we can to eliminate the things in our life that are pulling us away from God. We choose God's path – no matter how impractical it seems. Sometimes when we choose to do things God's way, people will come against us. So be it. In the end – maybe not here, in this world – but in the end, it will be worth it.

In a minute we are going to share the Lord's Supper together.

- When you partake: declaration of trust.

Before that, sing this song: from the heart...

Our Father everlasting / The all creating One / God Almighty

Through Your Holy Spirit / Conceiving Christ the Son / Jesus our Saviour

I believe in God our Father (that means "I trust him")

I believe in Christ the Son (that means "I trust him")

I believe in the Holy Spirit / Our God is three in One (I trust him)

I believe in the resurrection / That we will rise again / For I believe in the  
Name of Jesus