

In Whom Do You Trust? - Isaiah 36-37

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*(Leaders, please use these questions **as a guide for discussion**. Please don't feel like you have to go through every one!)*

Warm-Up

1. Can you think of a time when you faced a situation that felt impossible? Who or what did you turn to first for help?

Read Isaiah 36:1–37:13

2. Isaiah 36:1 tells us the Assyrians have captured the fortified cities of Judah and Jerusalem is about to fall. What question does this put in front of King Hezekiah and the people?
3. What questions does the Rabshakeh ask? What is he trying to make Hezekiah and the people doubt?
4. In verses 13–20, what does he promise, and why would it have been tempting to listen to him? What does verse 20 reveal about how he sees the LORD?
5. What are some of the voices in our world today that make promises or taunt us into trusting something other than God?
6. Hezekiah could have negotiated, gone to Egypt or joined Assyria. What does he do instead, and what does this show us about who he trusts?
7. Read 37:5–7. What does the LORD say through Isaiah, and what does he promise? How do his words compare with the words of the king of Assyria?
8. Read John 1:14 and Hebrews 1:2. How has God's word come to us in an even greater way, and why does that make Jesus worth trusting?
9. Why does it matter so much whose words we listen to and obey? What are some practical ways we can keep listening to God's word instead of the world or our own thoughts?
10. Read verses 8–13. Sennacherib sends one last taunt, claiming the LORD is no different from the gods of the other nations. What does he get wrong about who the LORD is?

Read Isaiah 37:14-38

11. Hezekiah prays in 37:14–20. What does he say about who God is in verses 15–16? Why is it helpful to begin prayer by remembering who God is?
12. What does Hezekiah ask God to do in verse 20, and why? How is this different from the way we often pray when we are under pressure?
13. Ray Ortland writes that when all we want is the glory of God on display through our lives, "God fills you with overcoming courage." Why do you think a God-centred prayer leads to bold and courageous faith?
14. See 37:21–38. How does God answer Hezekiah's prayer? What reasons does God give for saving Jerusalem (v. 35), and what happens to Sennacherib?
15. When you are under the pump, what do your prayers usually sound like? What would it look like to ask God to use your situation, and your words and actions, to show off his grace and goodness?
16. Read Matthew 6:33. Where are you most tempted to trust or live for something other than the LORD? What is one step you could take this week to seek God's kingdom first?

PRAY: *Heavenly Father, thank you that you alone are God, the creator of heaven and earth. Thank you for sending Jesus, your Word made flesh, who delivered us from sin and death. Help us to trust your word, to pray with God-centred hearts and to live for your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

TITLE: Isaiah - In Whom do you Trust?
PASSAGE: Isaiah 36-37
LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM
BI: Salvation and deliverance belongs only in the LORD
STRUCTURE:

- 36 - Scene 1 - Who do you trust? Who can deliver you?
- 37:1-7; Scene 2 - Thus says the Lord…don't be afraid
- 37:8-13; Scene 3 - Who is the Lord?
- 37:14-38; Scene 4 - The Lord alone is God

- The year is around 701BC and we are in the land of Judah in Jerusalem.
- The glory days of King David were 300 years ago - but since then things have never been the same.
- The great nation of Israel had split into two after the reign of King Solomon - the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah
- The Kingdom of Israel had bad king after bad king after bad king, and the northern kingdom had walked further and further away from the proper worship of the Lord
- So much so that around 720BC - God sent the Assyrians to take the land, raise it to the ground and take the people with them.
- The Assyrians were the major player on the world stage. They took city after city, land after land, they were like a freight train!
- And then they started entering into the land of Judah! In the land they took the strong cities, the garrison cities!
- And now they come up against Jerusalem.
- It seems that the capital city, the place where the temple is, the place where the throne of the king is, was going to be the next to fall in the line of dominos.
- It seems like all hope is lost, it seems like there's no escape, and King Hezekiah, the king of Judah, is faced with the question of - who do you trust?
- In the face of great turmoil, great uncertainty, great anxiety, heightened pressure - who do you trust?
- Welcome to the world of Isaiah.

- If you've been reading along in the Isaiah reading plan - well done! It's been a journey so far.
- Throughout Isaiah, we've seen oracles of judgement. Judgement against the nations, judgement against the rebellious people of Israel and Judah, judgement against those who turn to worship other gods.
- But in the midst of all this judgement - there is immense hope for those who return to God
- But as we soak in these chapters and let these words wash over us a bit as we rapidly read through them - we are left with one overwhelming thought - only YHW, the Lord, is God. There is no other. And he sees all things and knows all things, and will fix all things.
- But these poetic oracles get interrupted in Chapters 36-39.
- We can see in the text of our bibles - the lines look different! We aren't reading poetry - we are reading a historical narrative.
- And this section in Isaiah is almost a hinge in the book.
    - In chapters 1-35 we get warnings, we get judgement, we get a picture of the davidic King who is to come on the day of the Lord.
    - In chapters 40-66 we get messages of hope and restoration and we'll get a picture of the restoration through the suffering servant who is to come.
- But smack bang in the middle is this historical narrative. It's almost like Isaiah has crafted this to show us what happens when we do trust in the Lord. We've seen the poetry, we've got the message that YHW is the Lord - but what does that look like in earthly terms?
- Well, let's look at these chapters today.

- We're going to look at this narrative in 4 different scenes
    - 36 - Scene 1 - Who do you trust? Who can deliver you?
    - 37:1-7; Scene 2 - Thus says the Lord…don't be afraid
    - 37:8-13; Scene 3 - Who is the Lord?
    - 37:14-38; Scene 4 - The Lord alone is God

- **Isaiah 36 - Scene 1 - Who do you trust? Who can deliver you?**
- So as a reminder, we're in Jerusalem, Hezekiah is the king of Judah - and in 2 Kings, he gets a glowing report.
- He had genuine faith in the Lord, he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and there was no other king like him! He made great reforms in the nation - he took down all the pagan alters and poles, and he had military victories.
- But now he faces a great test. The threat of the assyrians.
- The mighty empire had invaded Judah and taken the garrison cities -
    - They had forced Hezekiah to pay him silver and gold to hold him off as we see in 2 Kings 18
- The assyrian king's name is Sinnacherib and he sends out a high ranking military officer called a Rabshakeh to the walls of Jerusalem and some of Hezekiah's men meet him there:
- Is 36:4 "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**"
- The Rabshakeh's words, which are really the words of the king of Assyria - are dripping with pride. They are totally arrogant.
- You can imagine him sneering as he spits them out!
    - "Who are you trusting in?..Will "mere words" really defeat the mighty army of Assyria?...You're a joke Hezekiah!"
- Sennacherib sees the nation of Israel and her God as a spider that he'll just squash with his big pair of boots.
    - *Recently in the Calder household with all the rain and heat coming in, we've also had a heap of flies in the house.*
    - *And we've got the fly swats on top of the fridge ready to go..*
    - *But let me tell you, as gross as it is, it is very very satisfying going on a rampage, squashing flies up against the door, or in mid-air - picking them up in tissues, and dumping them in the bin.*
- That's how Sennacherib sees Israel and the Lord. A fly.
- That's how he views the word of the Lord - totally worthless.
- And in V6-10, the taunts continue, with a mixture of lies and half-truths and half promises.
- Hezekiah may have wanted to go to other big superpower, Egypt, for help - Sennacherib calls them a broken reed, useless.
- Then he offers Hezekiah to join his alliance, come and put riders on his horses!
    - "Mate, come join me! Don't go to Egypt, don't try to defy me by trusting in your own God, join me and we can be great together!"
- And then in V11 - Hezekiah's men plead with the King's representatives to stop speaking in the language that the people at the wall could understand [Hebrew] - but speak in Aramaic so that the common people won't know how bad the situation actually is!
- But the Assyrian knows exactly what he is doing. He lays out what can happen in a full-on siege V12 - the people will be doomed to eat their own dung and drink their own urine if Hezekiah doesn't submit to Sennacherib.

- He taunts the people - he is saying here - who is going to deliver you or rescue you from this fate? Don't listen to Hezekiah and the Lord, but listen to the words of the great king - the king of Assyria
    - 36:15 **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."
- He offers them an ultimatum - come out to him
- And then in V18-20 - he goes through nation by nation, land by land, god by god that he has already defeated - so then Israel -you're next.
- 36:20 "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?'"

- Essentially, the big question from this chapter is *who do you trust?*
- Whose words do you listen to and obey? The word of the Lord? Or someone else's word?
- Is God actually trustworthy?

- When hope seems lost, when we are at our end, when the future seems impossible, when the odds are stacked against us - is God actually trustworthy?
- Well, let's continue on:

- **37:1-7; Scene 2 - Thus says the Lord: Don't be Afraid**
- Hezekiah does have options here. He can try and negotiate with the Assyrians…he could try and go to Egypt…but no, he gets real with God…
- 37:1 "As soon as King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD."
- Tearing the clothes and putting on a hessian bag - is a symbol of remorse and repentance. It's a symbol of lament.
- And so instead of letting his ego get in his way, Hezekiah humbles himself before God.
- He sends people to go get Isaiah the prophet to pray as well.
- And Isaiah responds:
- V6 "Isaiah 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. 7 Behold, 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.'"
- God's going to save Jerusalem. Thus says the Lord - don't be afraid.
- And God whispers words in the King's ear - and the king will be killed by his own sword.

- I don't know if you've noticed in our fly-over or highlights package, the repetition of the theme of the word?
- Hezekiah's actions and decisions really came down to either believing in the word of the Lord or believing the word and torments of the king of Assyria.
- God spoke through the prophets to the kings of Israel and to the people of Israel
    - He spoke the words of the Torah, the law - that the kings were supposed to write down themselves and study…
    - He spoke the words of Isaiah 31 that foretold of the defeat of the Assyrian army, and the Egyptians;
- And what do we read in John 1:14? "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."
- And in Hebrews 1:2? "but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."
- God's word came to us in Jesus Christ - Hezekiah's great great grandson! Who came on earth 700 years later and perfectly obeyed the Father's word.
- And in his work on the cross - he delivered us from sin and death, he rescued us from the ultimate enemy of Satan.
- And not only that, but in his death and resurrection, he was completely vindicated and crowned as the true one and only living God!
- He is the mighty King - not the king of Assyria

- And now today, we too have a choice. Do we listen to the word of God and trust and obey? Or do we listen to the words and torments and ultimatums and offers of this world?
- We live in such a noise-filled world. A word-filled world. With so many empty promises and stories.
    - Eat this type of supplement daily and you'll be happy and healthy well into your 90's;
    - Get this financial package and you'll be set for retirement;
    - Find your perfect husband or wife and only then will you be fully satisfied
    - Put yourself first, your comfort first,
    - "You don't need that God fella - he's just a big, restrictive, spoil-sport"
- Who do we listen to? The world? Our internal monologue? Or Jesus?
- And then - who do we obey? The world? Our internal monologue? Or Jesus?
- But who is Jesus to tell us what to do? Why is God so deserving of this type of audacious trust and obedience?
- That's the question of this next section:

- **[SLIDE 8: Scene 3 heading, Isaiah 37:8-13] 37:8-13; Scene 3 - Who is the Lord?**
- Just as prophesied, Sennacherib backs away - but not without one last taunt, and a warning for Hezekiah

- He sends messengers again to Hezekiah - he urges him against trusting in the words of God because he's going to come back and smash Jerusalem
- And the basis of his argument is that no other gods of the other nations have managed to stop the kings of Assyria, so why would YHW be any different?
- Who is God to stop the mighty nation of Assyria?
- This is the king of assyria putting himself up against YHW - so who wins?

- **37:14-38; Scene 4 - The Lord alone is God**
- And in response to this letter, Hezekiah gets even more real with God.
- 37:15 "And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: **16** "O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth."
- YHW alone is God. He alone is the creator of the universe - YHW is the king over all creation both heaven and earth, of angelic hosts and of earthly creatures! He is the living God!
- Which means all the other gods aren't gods at all

- After entreating YHW to listen to the taunts of the Assyrians, Hezekiah continues to pray:
- 37:20 **20** So now, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD."
- Hezekiah asks God to save the nation but not out of self-preservation, not out of comfort - but so that the world may know that YHW alone is God.
- God's name had been dragged through the mud - all the other nations and their god's had been smashed to pieces and now Hezekiah asks for God to save them, so that the whole world will know just how great he is.
- This is a really different way of praying isn't it?
- This is the prayer of a God-centred man! His personal agenda isn't a concern for him anymore, his personal comfort isn't a concern for him anymore - but his concern is the glory and vindication of God's name!
- This is the prayer of a man who knows who God is and then knows who he is in relation to God!
- Hezekiah knows that God is the creator; Hezekiah knows that he is put on this earth to display God's image as his created image-bearer - and so his prayer isn't "Lord save me" but "Lord, use this moment to glorify yourself!" "use my life and my situation as a platform to show off just how great you are!"
- Wow.

- When was the last time you prayed like this?
- I know that my prayers can be so self-centred. When under the pump, my prayers usually sound like "God please get me out of this situation…God please make my life better…God please do this for me"
- But prayers like this make it all about me! They are Michael centred and it's like I'm giving my wish list over to God and say - here God - do this!!
- But a prayer that recognises that the Lord is God alone…prayers that recognise that we are put on this earth to show off the goodness and greatness of God sound like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane through tears of anguish - "not my will but Your will be done"
- …for us we could add "Lord, I don't know what you're doing, but use this situation and me - my actions and words - to show off your grace and goodness"
- That's what God-centred prayer sounds like!
- That's what bold and courageous faith sounds like!
- In his commentary, Ray Ortland puts it brilliantly: "When your personal fate is no longer what you're living for, when your own ideal life scenario of perfect health and a perfect marriage and perfect children and a perfect job and a perfect church and perfect control—when that's no longer what you're clinging to and demanding of life, when all you want is the glory of God to be put on display through your existence, that's when God fills you with overcoming courage."

- And so in VV21-35, God answers Hezekiah's God-centred prayer. He declares that Assyria isn't going to enter into Jerusalem or touch it. But he'll save it V35 "For my own sake and for the sake of my servant David" - for the sake of his own name and the promises that he declared long ago to David, that his throne will live forever.
- And just as almost an aside VV36-38 describe the defeat of the Assyrians…and then just as Hezekiah went into the house of YHW to seek help and got it - Sennacherib the king of Assyria went into the temple of his god - and was struck down with the sword by his own sons.

- Oh how the mighty have fallen…

- So then who do you trust in today? Whose words are you listening to today? Whose glory are you living for today?
- We have a choice - we can live for ourselves. We can live in the lie that we don't need God. We can try and bend God's will to our own. We can build our own reputation…live in our own lounge chair of comfort…but that's going to leave us very frustrated.
    - *I've seen it happen! I know of someone who asked for healing constantly but could never pray that God's will be done even if it meant not receiving healing. And so he grew more bitter…more frustrated…and ended up walking away sad…*
- But there is another way…
- Listening to the words of the word-made-flesh, Jesus Christ.
- Jesus says in Matthew 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."
- Seek first the glory of God - the God who is trustworthy, the God who has delivered us from the kingdoms of sin and death, the God who alone is the creator and one and only God - and he will give you his everlasting deep joy and peace.