

# What Does Trust Look Like?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Morning. My name is Martin Ayres. I'm the Senior Pastor at St Silas. If you're here in the building, it's great to see your eyes. If you're watching at home and you're on the live stream, I'm glad you could join us as we look at God's Word and we worship Him together. Now, if you could keep your Bibles open at Isaiah chapter 37, that's what we're looking at together. It's on the sheets if you're here in the service. And if you don't have a Bible at home, you could look online. There's BibleGateway.com. You could take that just to help us as we focus on God's Word to us. But wherever we are, the Lord is here by His Spirit and He helps us to know Him as by His Spirit He speaks to us through His Word about His Son. So let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to His Word.

Heavenly Father, God of mercy, we praise you for your goodness and love. As we hear your voice in the Scriptures, open our ears, we pray. Open our minds, help us not to be distracted, and open our hearts to your comforts and your challenges. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, we're in this Old Testament book, Isaiah, and we're asking the big question, who do you trust? All around us, people choose different things that they're trusting in to get the good life, the life that they want, everything our hearts long for. So it might be money that people trust, or it might be sex. It could be success. Those things look attractive to us, and particularly because we see the people around us living for them. While the Christian faith gets mocked, among our friends, perhaps, among families, in the media, people speak about the Christian faith in a way that leaves us thinking, is God really worth trusting? And yet, all the while, the promises in God's Word are immensely powerful. We've seen this year, haven't we, how afraid we are of death.

We are deeply afraid of death. And yet, when I've led Christian funerals as a minister, you walk in in front of the coffin as it goes into the crematorium or the church, and I read out the words of Jesus declaring them, I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Extraordinary promises when we fear death. And we fear for the future. Perhaps we fear for the future when we look at the church, or we fear for the future when we just look at the world.

[ 2 : 5 1 ] And yet, the assurance of the Bible is that Jesus will come in glory, and Habakkuk 2, the world will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

So I was thinking about that over the summer, when I've had the opportunity to be on the coast, up in the highlands, and on the beach, and looking at the vast ocean, and thinking that the world is going to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. Is that promise good to be trusted? Is it trustworthy? And what does trusting God really look like?

These are the kind of dilemmas that were facing God's people at the time, that Isaiah was a prophet for them. They were living in and around Jerusalem as a group of people called Judah. That was the name of the kingdom, under the king Hezekiah, who was a king chosen by God. It was in David's line.

And like us, they had great promises, but the question was, would they keep trusting God, even in great danger? I've got a map on the screens, hopefully, and at home, which is of the Assyrian empire, which was causing the problem. You can just see on the map there how the Assyrian empire was enormous. They'd conquered nation after nation. They were covering, I guess, modern day Iraq and Turkey.

And they'd already conquered Israel, which is the northern kingdom of God's people in 722 BC. Now we're in about 701 BC, about a generation later. And Judah is that tiny red blob on the map there.

[ 4 : 2 8 ] And you can see how terrifying that must have been, looking at what seemed to be an unstoppable military machine. Sennacherib is the emperor of Assyria. And you can go into the

British Museum in London. I said this last week. You can see the Lachish reliefs that have been excavated. And there are these incredible stone sculptures of the stone pictures of Sennacherib from the time, from his palace, as people from Lachish, which was one of the fortified cities in Judah that was conquered by him, were brought in front of him, taken captive as slaves. He boasts in his annals he took over 200,000 people captive. And many were slaughtered as well. And fortified cities were taken. It's extraordinary, an extraordinary period of human history. And they come to Jerusalem. This really happened. And they want surrender. And they want submission. So they urge the king, Hezekiah, and the people in Judah, stop trusting in your God to rescue you. So that's our first point this morning, the word of a frightening emperor. Just have a look with me again at how intense the threat is that they receive in verse 10. Verse 10. Say to Hezekiah, king of Judah, do not let the God you depend on deceive you, when he says, Jerusalem will not be given into the hands of the king of Assyria. So you see there outright the denial of God's word, don't we?

Why? Well, in effect, he's saying, look around you, Hezekiah. You might enjoy a bit of temple worship on, you know, now and again. You might enjoy the experience of being in a temple and praying and worshipping. But come on, get in the real world here. Look at the army at your door. Verse 11.

Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries, destroying them completely. And will you be delivered? Did the gods of the nations that were destroyed by my predecessors deliver them? The gods of Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Tel Asar?

Where is the king of Hamath, or the king of Arpad? Where are the kings of Ler, Sephavim, Hennah, and Ivar? These are great questions, aren't they? You can see how fragile faith in the living God looks when you've got in front of you a military power that looks that strong. And it's conquered everything in its path before. And when all the religions of all those countries did then no good at all. They were just obliterated. Now for us today, our situation is very different to that, thankfully. But the challenge to keep going, trusting the Lord, is very real. Keeping your faith when it's under fire.

[ 7 : 25 ] Is the Lord really worth trusting? With real faith, stepping out in daring faith, demonstrating by the way we live our lives, the words we use, what we do with our gifts, that we trust in God's promises. And just as the people at that time had an enemy who didn't want them to trust the Lord, that emperor, we have an enemy, a spiritual enemy, the devil, who the New Testament describes as the prince of this world, who hates God. And so he doesn't want you to stay a Christian.

And the spiritual battle takes place whenever we hear the word of God, just as it did for them. Because when we hear the word of God, the question is, how are we going to respond today at that moment?

Will we exercise real faith in God's word? If you're filling in a health questionnaire ever, and it asks you questions, whether it's for insurance or you're going into hospital, if it was to ask you, are you regularly involved in any dangerous activities?

You should say, yes, I go to church. I go to a church where the Bible is read and the Bible is taught. Because it's dangerous. There's a spiritual battle whenever that happens. And I guess like the words of the frightening emperor here for them then, we might be familiar with people urging us to give up on faith. Come on, mate. I know you're a church goer and you hear all that stuff there. But meanwhile, back in the real world, things have moved on a bit from religion. The rest of us are getting on with life without giving any thought to your God. We go to Tesco on a Sunday. We play sport on a Sunday.

And you might have noticed it's working out pretty well, actually. You're missing out. Your faith is just trusting old words in an old book. It's very challenging, isn't it? So what does real faith look like when we're up against it? Well, we've heard the word of a frightening emperor. Secondly, our second point, the word of a faithful king. Hezekiah. He's distressed. He knows it's serious, but he doesn't panic. Have a look with me at verse 14. Verse 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.

[ 10 : 02 ] I don't know what you think about that. I love that. The physicality of the prayer here. I've had some pretty difficult letters. And I've been in churches where there's been strong opposition to the mission Jesus gives us of making disciples. Opposition without, outwith the church, and even opposition within the church. How about bringing a letter like that, or if it's not a letter, writing down the thing we're afraid of, the thing that we're stunned by and troubled by, writing it down and

spreading it out before God and getting on our knees in prayer. The physicality of saying to God, I'm afraid of this. I can't do anything about this, but my eyes are on you.

And then comes a prayer full of truth about God. So have a look at verse 15. And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, Lord Almighty, 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.

Do you see the need for good doctrine here? And sometimes we think, well, why do we need all this doctrine? Doctrine is essential because there's a frightening emperor saying, how will your God save you when no other gods of any other nations have saved them? And the faithful king says, those religions and those gods that you're talking about are irrelevant because the Lord, the God of the Bible, is in a different category. The gods that they worshipped were made of stone, they were made of wood. But the God I'm praying to is the uncreated creator. That's our God.

And Sennacherib looks pretty powerful, doesn't he? He's an emperor with an army. And there's lots of people around the world today who look very powerful. But our God is in heaven on a throne with warrior angels, with cherubim around him. He is the king of kings. He made everything.

So it's helpful, isn't it, to remember, this is why it's so important to praise God when we pray. I don't know whether you were taught like that when I became a Christian. I was taught that when you pray, don't just bring God the things you want or need or think you need or see that you need, but also give him praise, acknowledge who he is. And that's great, but it's good to remember that we don't do that because God needs it, as though God's in need of a pick-me-up from his people.

[ 12 : 46 ] No, we praise God not because he needs it, but because we need it. And when we praise God for who he is and worship him for who he is with our words, it speaks to our hearts about how he really is worth trusting. If the God I'm praying to is the majestic king of kings and lord of lords, what am I afraid of? Why am I so afraid? And then after remembering God's power, Hezekiah remembers that God is personal as well. So he is going to be concerned for his people and for what other people are saying, verse 17, give ear, Lord, and hear. Open your eyes, Lord, and see. Listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God. And then he prays in line with God's priorities for God's name. Verse 20, now, Lord our God, deliver us from his hand so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, Lord, are the only God. It's an extraordinary priority, isn't it, for Hezekiah to have. He's faced with what looks like it could well be a massacre. That's the threat. And yet his priority is to pray in line with evangelism, with God's mission, with God's name. God, act for your glory everywhere, so that all the nations of the world would know that you are God and you keep your promises to your people so they could come to know you and trust you. And that would be for the glory of your name. So friends, this is what real faith looks like. It looks like taking our fears to God in prayerful dependence, instead of walking away from God because something in our life seems so terrifying. We either think God's not powerful enough or not personal enough to be bothered, no, rather we take it to Him in prayer. And maybe for us we could think about the fears we've had this year, and we still have with the pandemic, our fear of death. Or we could think about our fears in terms of the gospel advancing and the world knowing who God is. As we look at our city, Glasgow, when I meet people and I think, I sometimes meet people and think, how is the gospel ever going to connect with you? You seem so far from the gospel. What would it take for you to be willing to hear the news that there is a king? God has made a king of the world, Jesus, and you've mistreated Him.

And that has consequences. He is angry, but He loves you, and He's come and died for you, so that you can know God and have eternal life. People seem so far from the gospel.

I think, personally, with children about the ways that our schools are so closed to the gospel in Glasgow. And I think about how it's only 30 years ago that I was at state school in the UK singing, at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, every tongue confess Him, King of glory now.

And now, you know, our kids sing pop songs that they hope will boost the self-esteem of the children. You know, you're going to hear me roar. And I think, where do we start? Where do we start, God?

Well, we could start with praying, like Hezekiah. Spread it before the Lord in prayer. Apathy for the gospel, people ridiculing the gospel, standing against it. Spread it before the Lord. And praise God that He is powerful. He's the King of kings. And ask Him to hear, because He's personal. And pray for Him to act. Act in our lives today, to keep us Christians. It's a good thing to pray to God, thank you, God, that I'm still a Christian today. God, please keep me a Christian till tomorrow.

[16:54] Help me to get to the new creation. And praying that He would bring everyone around us to know that the God of the Bible is real, and His promises are good, they're true. So that's our second point.

After the word of a frightening emperor, secondly, we have the word of a faithful king. It's a magnificent moment in the Old Testament, Hezekiah's prayer, the word of a faithful king. And what happens next is sensational. Our third point, the word of a rescuing God. So have a look at verse 21. As God says why He's going to act, verse 21, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says, because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib, king of Assyria, this is the word the Lord has spoken against him. Because you have prayed to me. The implication being, if you hadn't prayed to me about this, if you hadn't trusted me to do this, then I wouldn't have acted.

But you prayed. And because you have prayed, this is what I'm going to do. I guess we'll be in different places about this on a spectrum. At one end, some of us might be so full of expectation that God hears and answers prayers, that in pastoral ministry, I come up against people who are destabilized because they were praying for something that they so wanted and felt was the right thing. And it hasn't worked out that way. The answer from God has been different.

And it's destabilized them. And ultimately, that's a case of thinking God's plans, with all His wisdom, that's so much more vast than mine, are different. But He is good. And He's done things differently. But some of us, maybe you're at another end of the spectrum when it comes to prayer, where we get that God has a plan, and we get that God is sovereign, and that He's going to act for His glory, and He's going to take things forward to the new creation, and He's going to build His church.

[19:05] And there's just a danger that our prayers, in that good belief, that actually our prayers become a bit fatalistic. And we end up thinking, and I count myself in this as a danger, that I end up thinking, I need to pray about this issue because it will do me good. But it's not really going to change anything, my prayer. I know I should pray, but prayer doesn't change things, it just changes me.

That's the kind of danger, maybe, that some of us would feel. And here we're reminded that God acts in response to people's prayers. Here, the sovereign God must have moved Hezekiah to pray this prayer in line with his will, so that he would then respond in answer to that prayer. Because you prayed, this is what I'm going to do. And then the Lord speaks His word against the emperor, that no human being can stop. Verse 22, this is the word the Lord has spoken against him. Virgin daughter Zion despises and mocks you. Daughter Jerusalem tosses her head as you flee. See how the tables are turned? The mocker is getting mocked by the people that he come to mock. Why? Verse 24, by your messengers, you have ridiculed the Lord. It's a very serious thing to ridicule God. And we often don't see that here and now. But Sennacherib came to discover that then.

And the emperor's greatest mistake here was pride. So we see that in the structure of these words from Isaiah, from the Lord. If you look down at verses 24 and 25 again, just look at how often he uses the word I here. He's quoting Sennacherib. Sennacherib's attitude here. That Sennacherib, for all his accomplishments, says, with my many chariots, I have ascended, I have cut down, I have reached, I have dug wells, I have dried up all the streams of Egypt. He's boasting.

Just like so many people around us today would think, I've done it, when they accomplish things, not realizing that it's God who gave them everything. And God's response to Sennacherib is exactly what we need to hear if we're feeling like that. Verse 26, God says, no, no, it was me who gave you all that, emperor. Verse 26, have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it. Now I have brought it to pass that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone. And then the humbling word of verse 28 to the emperor. But I know where you are and when you come and go and how you rage against me. Because you rage against me and because your insolence has heard my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth and I will make you return by the way you came. So that in verse 33, he can say to the people, you're safe. Verse 33, therefore this is what the Lord says concerning the king of Assyria. He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it.

[22:40] By the way that he came, he will return. He will not enter this city, declares the Lord. And the reason is exactly why Hezekiah had prayed. Verse 35, I will defend this city and save it for my sake and for the sake of my servant David. The promises that God's made to preserve David's line. So that's the word of God. And then the outcome in verse 36, then the angel of the Lord went out and put to death 185,000 in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning, there were all the dead bodies.

And the emperor, having lost his brutal army, retreats back to Nineveh and he stays at home until verse 38, irony of ironies, he's worshipping his own idol in his temple. Verse 38, one day while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Cheriza killed him with the sword and they escaped to the land of Ararat.

And Esahad and his son succeeded him as king. It's all quite simple in the end. The army was frightening. The mockery was frightening. But God says he won't succeed. And then his army gets struck down in the night. And Sennacherib himself is killed by his own sons. And above all, what this is, is a fantastic deliverance for the people who trusted God. And it's rooted in history for us to take courage from, to be encouraged by. Is God really worth trusting? Well, look back to 700 BC and look at what he did for the people who trusted him then. And as we read it in its place in Bible history, we can also be thinking, as you read it, at last, at last God's people had the kind of king they've always needed. A faithful king who depends on God and trusts God, even when he's under pressure.

And the great news for us is that Hezekiah there is a picture of our king, of his descendant, the Lord Jesus. When he was in the hour of his greatest need in the Garden of Gethsemane, instead of acting to put things differently, he prays in John 17, Father, I want those you've given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. And because the Lord Jesus faithfully prayed when he, the king, was heading for the cross, God raised him to life and he's conquered death and he now reigns at God's right hand and he will return. He's building his church now, he's protecting his people, he's interceding for us and he'll return to put things right so that the world really will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

So friends, when we feel discouraged, when we feel demoralized, when we feel afraid, disheartened, let's take on board this model of what real faith looks like, spreading our fears before the Lord, praising him for who he is, asking him to act for his namesake, that the whole world would know him.

[ 26 : 10 ] And let's remember the outcome of that kind of faith, this incredible, miraculous rescue, and the deliverance that it ultimately points forward to, that Jesus conquered the grave, the storm was rolled away and death itself was smashed to bits by God in response to the prayers of his faithful King Jesus, so that we can trust that he rose and he rules and he will return.

Amen. We're going to respond together to God's word now. We'll just have a moment of quiet, just a chance for each of us to do business with God, to think about the ways that these events and Isaiah 37, God's speaking to us. And after a minute of quiet to reflect, we're going to say together, Psalm 46.

Psalm 46.