

## **THINK TWICE BEFORE YOU PRAY**

**38** *In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him and said, This is what Jehovah says, Put your affairs in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover. <sup>2</sup>Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to Jehovah, <sup>3</sup>saying, O Jehovah, I beg you, remember how I have sincerely walked before you and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your sight. And Hezekiah wept bitterly. <sup>4</sup>Then the word of Jehovah came to Isaiah, saying, <sup>5</sup>Go back and tell Hezekiah, This is what Jehovah, the God of your father David, says, I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Listen; I will add fifteen years to your life. <sup>6</sup>Furthermore, I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; I will defend this city. <sup>7</sup>This will be the sign for you from Jehovah, [confirming] that Jehovah will do what he has said. <sup>8</sup>Look! I will cause the shadow cast by the sun to go back the ten steps it has gone down on the stairway of Ahaz. So the sunlight went back the ten steps it had gone down.*

<sup>9</sup>*The song written by Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery. <sup>10</sup>I said, In the prime of my life I shall go to the gates of Sheol; I am deprived of the remainder of my days. <sup>11</sup>I said, I shall not see Jehovah—[indeed,] Jehovah—in the land of the living; I shall no longer look upon man or be with those who dwell in this world. <sup>12</sup>Like a shepherd's tent, my [earthly] dwelling has been pulled down and taken away from me. Like a weaver, I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom. From day until night you are intent on bringing my life to an end. <sup>13</sup>I waited patiently until dawn; [but] like a lion, he breaks all my bones. From day until night you are intent on bringing my life to an end. <sup>14</sup>I cried like a swallow or a crane; I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes looked wistfully to the heights. O Lord, I am oppressed, be my surety. <sup>15</sup>What shall I say? He has told me what he will do, and he himself has done it. I will walk humbly all my years because of the anguish of my soul. <sup>16</sup>By means of such experiences men learn how to live; and my spirit, also, has surely learned the way of life by this. <sup>17</sup>Surely it was for my benefit that I have suffered such anguish. But in love for my soul you have delivered me from the pit of corruption; you have cast all my sins behind your back. <sup>18</sup>Sheol cannot praise you; death cannot sing your praise. Those who go down into the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. <sup>19</sup>The man who is alive—the man who is living—he [is the one who] will praise you, as I do this day. The father shall make your faithfulness known to his children. <sup>20</sup>Jehovah is willing to save me; therefore we will sing my songs accompanied with stringed instruments in the temple of Jehovah all the days of our lives. <sup>21</sup>Now Isaiah had said, Let them prepare a poultice of figs and apply it as a plaster to the boil, and he will recover. <sup>22</sup>Also, Hezekiah had asked, What is the sign that I will go up to the temple of Jehovah?*

**39** *At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of his illness and recovery. <sup>2</sup>Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them the storehouse that contained his treasures—the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine oil, his entire armory and all that was found in his treasuries. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them. <sup>3</sup>Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and asked him, What did those men say [to you], and from where did they come? Hezekiah replied, They came to me from a distant country—[all the way] from Babylon! <sup>4</sup>Then [Isaiah] asked, What*

*did they see in your palace? Hezekiah answered, They saw everything that is in my palace; there is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them.*

*<sup>5</sup>Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, Hear the word of Jehovah of hosts. <sup>6</sup>Listen. The day is coming when everything that is in your palace, and all that your forefathers have stored up until this day, will be carried away to Babylon. Nothing will be left, declares Jehovah. <sup>7</sup>And some of your sons, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away—they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. <sup>8</sup>Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, The word of Jehovah that you have spoken is good; for he thought, [At least] there will be peace and security during my lifetime. (Isa. 38:1-39:8)*

## **Introduction**

A sociologist at the University of Chicago, Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, has done extensive research on the subject of death and dying. In her research, Dr. Kubler-Ross discovered that there are four stages through which many dying patients and their loved ones pass. There is first denial—the person is convinced that the doctor’s diagnosis cannot possibly be correct. The next stage is anger—the person asks, “Why me, O God?” and he may express resentment towards God. The third stage is bargaining—the terminally ill patient may seek to make a deal with God: “If You will heal me, I will do whatever You ask.” The final stage is acceptance—the person comes to terms with his mortality and accepts the fact that he is going to die (*POWER*, 1/10/88, pp.2-ff.)

In the passage of Scripture presently before us we meet a man who could not and would not accept the fact of his impending death. When Isaiah brought the message from God to Hezekiah that his illness was terminal, Hezekiah pleaded with God for a reprieve, for an extension of his life.

Like Hezekiah, there are times when we seek to overrule God’s will in favor of our own will. But, as we shall see, it is wiser to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, rather than imitate Hezekiah. When our Lord faced the death of the cross, His prayer was, *“Father, not my will, but your will be done”* (Matt. 26:39.) May we learn to pray for and accept God’s will, rather than insisting on our own will.

### **I. As You Pray, Will You Accept God’s Will, or Plead for an Exemption?**

When King Hezekiah becomes gravely ill, the LORD sends Isaiah to bring him the message, *“Put your affairs in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.”* The LORD informs Hezekiah that his illness is terminal; it is God’s will that Hezekiah’s earthly life be terminated at this time. But Hezekiah refuses to accept the fate God has clearly revealed to him. Rather than resign himself to the will of God, Hezekiah pleads that God’s will be “overruled” and that his own will be done instead (vs. 2-3.)

Hezekiah offered up his prayer with bitter tears (vs. 3b)—like a little child begging his father to allow him to have his own way. Compare Hezekiah’s prayer

with the Lord Jesus and His prayer life as described in Hebrews 5:7, "*During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard [or, he gained a hearing] because of his reverent submission.*" In His true humanity, the Lord Jesus drew back from the awful fate of the cross; and as the beloved and righteous Son of God, He gained a hearing with His Father. Now contrast Hezekiah's prayer with that of our Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 26:39, "*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.*" The Lord Jesus surrendered Himself to His Father's will, accepting His Father's will and relinquishing His own will.

In his psalm, written at the time of his recovery, Hezekiah reveals the thoughts of his heart. He first bemoans the fact that he is 'too young to die' (vs. 10.) He sees himself as being at the zenith of his life and he feels that he is being deprived of the remainder of his years—note that he speaks about "*my days.*" Contrast this with the Psalmist's testimony, "*But I trusted in you, O Jehovah. I said, You are my God. <sup>15</sup>My times are in your hand*" (Psl. 31:14-15a.) Note, too, James 4:13-15,

*Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." <sup>14</sup>Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup>Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."* (Jas. 4:13-15)

Hezekiah bewails the fact that the LORD has cut off his life. He describes his life as a shepherd's tent that is taken down and carried away (vs. 12a.) As a weaver rolls up his cloth on a roll, preparing it to be cut off from the loom, so has Hezekiah's life been "wrapped up" as the LORD prepares to cut it off (vs. 12b.) Just as the LORD swiftly and surely brings a day to a close, so has He brought Hezekiah's life to an end (vs. 12c.) Do we ever argue that God's will is unfair? Do we ever feel that by accepting God's will we are being unjustly deprived of our due?

Hezekiah's hopes for recovery were dashed by the message from the LORD that his illness was terminal (vs. 13.) He describes himself as patiently waiting for the dawn (i.e.; the hope of recovery), but like a lion, the LORD has broken all his bones. That is to say, the LORD's message delivered by the prophet Isaiah has shattered all Hezekiah's hopes for recovery. When we discover that God's will for our life involves hardship and is contrary to what we would envision, do we find ourselves to be crushed unto despair like Hezekiah?

Next we find Hezekiah protesting that he cannot handle God's will for his life, so he pleads for an extension of his earthly life (vs. 14.) With the realization of his approaching death, Hezekiah is completely weighed down with a sense of his frailty and helplessness—his wailings resemble those of the swallow or the mourning dove. In his extremity, he cries out to the LORD, reporting his condition ("*O Lord, I am oppressed*"—I cannot bear Your will), and praying that the LORD

would be his surety—i.e.; that the LORD would stand in his place and spare him from this ordeal. Instead of praying, “Heavenly Father, give me the grace to accept Your will, carry me through this trial;” Hezekiah is praying, “Father, I can’t handle this ordeal, don’t make me go through it, take my place and spare me from it.”

Hezekiah testifies that this close encounter with death has had a profound impact upon his life, he will never be the same (vs. 16.) *"By means of such experiences men learn how to live"*—i.e.; a close encounter with death has a profound and lasting affect upon a man’s life, it is something he lives with, it is not something he easily forgets—it is something that teaches him about the meaning of life and the way life is meant to be lived. He goes on to assert, *"my spirit, also, has surely learned the way of life by this."* Hezekiah is testifying that this experience has had a tremendous impact upon him, he profoundly benefited from it. He assures the LORD that he has certainly learned from this close encounter with death; and now, having given the LORD this assurance, Hezekiah hopes that he will be delivered from this ordeal.

Hezekiah now recognizes and confesses the spiritual benefit derived from this horrible experience (vs. 17.) *"Surely it was for my benefit that I have suffered such anguish"*—Hezekiah acknowledges that this ordeal was intended for his benefit, that is to say, for his spiritual well being. His testimony is similar to that of the Psalmist: *"Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I observe your word"* (Psl. 119:67.) Then he goes on to declare, *"But in love for my soul you have delivered me from the pit of corruption"*—Hezekiah now acknowledges that it was the LORD’s love for him that has caused the LORD to spare his life—*"you have cast all my sins behind your back."*

Because the LORD has answered his prayer, Hezekiah promises to always sing God’s praises (vs. 18-20.) He rightly recognizes the true purpose of his redemption: *"Sheol cannot praise you; death cannot sing your praise ... <sup>19</sup>The man who is alive ... he is the one who will praise you, as I do this day"*—he recognizes the fact that he has been redeemed in order to praise God in life and in song. Hezekiah promises to fulfill that high calling of praising God for all the remainder of his life: *"therefore we will sing my songs accompanied with stringed instruments in the temple of Jehovah all the days of our lives"* (vs. 20.) Do we ever tell God that if He will allow us to have our way we will always be grateful to Him? Do we promise to repay God with lifelong gratitude and service if He will grant that our will be done instead of His will?

As you pray, will you accept God’s will, or, like Hezekiah, will you plead for an exemption? When God’s will for your life involves hardship, trial or disappointment, will you pray like Hezekiah, “Father, I can’t handle this, don’t make me go through it, spare me from it”? Or will you pray like our Lord Jesus Christ, “Father, your will be done. Give me the grace to accept your will, please uphold me and bring me through the trial you have set before me?”

## II. As You Pray, Will You Accept God's Will, or Risk the Consequences of Having Your Own Way?

The LORD allows Himself to be moved by the pleading and child-like begging of Hezekiah, and promises to give him fifteen more years of life (vs. 4-5.) In gratitude for answered prayer, Hezekiah promises to make known God's truth to his children and to ever sing praises to the LORD in His temple (vs. 19-20.)

Isaiah 39 now goes on to record the visit of Babylonian ambassadors to the royal court of Judah. They came to pay their respects, because they heard of Hezekiah's illness and recovery (vs. 1.) Also, they came because they were aware of the miraculous sign granted by God, note 2 Chronicles 32:31, *"envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land."*

The LORD granted Hezekiah his request. The LORD allowed His own divine will to be "overruled" in favor of Hezekiah's will—but what were the consequences?

Hezekiah was granted a fifteen-year extension to his life. But could he truly enjoy that period of time, knowing the precise date it would be terminated? By way of example: If you wake up fifteen minutes before the alarm clock is set to ring in the morning, are you able to enjoy those fifteen minutes in relaxed sleep, or is there the constant anticipation that the alarm is about to ring? God's way, however hard, is far more satisfying than our own way, however appealing.

Hezekiah may have made known God's truth to the son born to him during this fifteen-year extension, but that son did not follow God's truth until he had first brought untold ruin and misery to his nation and to himself. 2 Chronicles 33:1 indicates that Manasseh was born in the third year of Hezekiah's fifteen-year extension: *"Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years."* 2 Chronicles 33:2 goes on to state concerning Manasseh, *"He did evil in the eyes of Jehovah, following the detestable practices of the nations Jehovah had driven out before the Israelites."* It was only after he was taken captive by the Assyrians that he came to repentance:

*... Jehovah brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. <sup>12</sup>In his distress he sought the favor of Jehovah his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. <sup>13</sup>And when he prayed to him, Jehovah was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that Jehovah is God. (2 Chron. 33:11-13)*

Hezekiah may have promised to live in grateful devotion to the LORD, but the visit by the Babylonian ambassadors demonstrated his well-intentioned promise to be unreliable: *"Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them the*

*storehouse that contained his treasures—the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine oil, his entire armory and all that was found in his treasuries. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.”* (Isa. 39:2.)

*“Hezekiah received the envoys gladly;”* (literally, *“he was glad because of them.”*) In other words, it made Hezekiah feel good and important to entertain these foreign dignitaries. In his pride, Hezekiah showed them all that he had, all the treasures and wealth of the nation of Judah. As a consequence of that pride, the LORD declared that He would cause the Babylonians to take away all that they had been shown of the wealth of Judah (vs. 5-7.)

As you pray, will you accept God’s will, or will you risk the consequences of demanding your own way? The famous British preacher, Charles Spurgeon, relates the account of a woman who refused to accept the LORD’s will for her son. The boy lay gravely ill. She solicited Spurgeon’s prayers. Spurgeon suggested that they surrender the boy into the hands of the LORD and ask that His will be done. The woman refused, insisting that the preacher pray for the child’s recovery. The boy did recover—only to grow up to become a notorious criminal.

## **Conclusion**

Like Hezekiah, there are times when we seek to overrule God’s will in favor of our own will. But as we have come to see, it is wiser to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ in prayer (*“Father, not as I will, but your will be done”*), than to imitate Hezekiah. This is the lesson to be learned: It is far better to surrender ourselves to God’s clearly revealed will and rely upon His sustaining grace, than to pray for a departure from that divine will with much pleading and many tears. May the words of the hymn writer, Anna L. Waring, be our prayer,

Father, I know that all my life is portioned out for me;  
The changes that are sure to come, I do not fear to see:  
I ask Thee for a present mind, intent on pleasing Thee.