

Between a Rock & A Hard Place

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Preacher: Rev. Jeff Rafferty

[0 : 00] Today we're going to be looking at 2 Kings chapter 18. 2 Kings 18, 17 through 25 is where we'll begin today. And the title of my sermon is Between a Rock and a Hard Place.

I'm thankful for Colton and all he does. I sent him my PowerPoint and said, here it's plain Jane screen. Make this a little more spiffy here.

He sent me a message back and said, did you mean to say Between a Rock and a Hard Place? Oh man, no. No, between a rock and a hard place. And we're going to be looking at 2 Kings 18, 17 through 25.

Back in 2009, I was serving Mountain View Baptist Church in Hickory, North Carolina. And we had a mission team that was getting ready to go on that Saturday to Honduras.

And my wife and my 12-year-old daughter Ashley were set to be on that team. And I got a call the night before about 9 o'clock and said, we need to meet at the church, the team that's going.

[1 : 07] We need to meet. We've got a problem. So we get up there at 10 o'clock. We're supposed to, the team's going to meet at the church at 3 a.m. to leave on this trip.

And we're meeting for an emergency meeting at 10 o'clock that night. They said, Honduras is experiencing a coup. They've already overthrown the president, run him out of the country.

And the people are rioting, burning, looting, doing crazy stuff. Do we still want to go? Well, I was thinking half of our team, which I believe there was 10 or 12 on that team, half of them were teenagers and their parents weren't going except for my daughter.

And I thought no parent in their right mind is going to let their teenage child go to a third world country during a coup without them even being with them. Well, to my surprise, I get up there and they're all like, let's go.

And all the parents are like, let them go. They're like, the safest place to be is in the center of God's will. And I sat there and listened to that for a few minutes. But then I had to speak up and I said, that's not true.

[2 : 16] The safest place is not in the center of God's will. Tell that to Jesus. Tell that to the disciples. Tell that to countless Christians today who are being arrested, thrown in jail, even killed.

The safest place is not always in the center of God's will. The best place to be is in the center of God's will. But it's not always the safest place.

And they said, you're just scared. You don't want your wife and daughter to go. I said, I'm going to let them make that decision. I'm not going to influence it in any way. But here's what I know.

If they choose to go, I'm sending them and letting them go. I'm giving them to God. And I'm praying for God to use them in whatever manner he sees fit to bring glory to his name.

And if something happens to them while they're on that trip, if they were to be injured or killed, then I sent them to serve the Lord.

[3 : 21] And I trusted that God was using that for his will. Well, we prayed together as a team. And then we left and went home.

And Michelle was not certain what she was going to do. And we went home about midnight. And we began to pray. Remember, they've got to be back up at the church at 3 a.m.

And it's midnight. And we go home to pray, asking God what his will is for them to do. This morning, we're going to see that King Hezekiah, king of Judah, found himself in a very difficult position.

You see, he was surrounded. Jerusalem was the southern kingdom. And King Hezekiah ruled Judah. Or Jerusalem at that point was the capital.

And Jerusalem was surrounded by the strongest military force in all of the world. The Assyrians had already come down and conquered the northern kingdom, which is the 10 out of the 12 tribes of Israel.

[4 : 29] They were that mighty and that powerful. So how could Judah, two of the 12 tribes of Israel, how could they stand up to the Assyrian army?

What should Ezekiel do? Would Ezekiel trust in the Lord? Would he put all of his faith in God and trust that God would see him through and protect them?

Or conventional wisdom would have told him, surrender. Surrender to the king of Assyria. They'll be deported, but at least they would live.

And the people of Judah and Benjamin were the two tribes. At least they would live. They would be deported, but they would live. Let's go to the word of God and let's begin seeing this situation in God's word in 2 Kings 18.

And let's see the situation that King Hezekiah is in and find out what he does. Will he trust God or will he seek conventional wisdom?

[5 : 34] Let's read. The king of Assyria sent his supreme commander, his chief officer, and his field commander with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem.

They came up to Jerusalem and stopped at the aqueduct of the upper pool on the road to the washerman's field. They called for the king. And Elakim, son of Hilkiah, the palace administrator, Shebna, the secretary, and Joah, son of Asaph, the recorder, went out to them.

The field commander said to them, Tell Hezekiah, this is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says. On what are you basing this confidence of yours?

You say you have the counsel and the might for war, but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending that you rebel against me?

Look, I know you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff which pierces the hand of anyone who leans on it, such as Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to all who depend on him.

[6 : 43] But if you say to me, we are depending on the Lord our God, isn't he the one whose high places and altars Hezekiah removed, saying to Judah and Jerusalem, You must worship before this altar in Jerusalem.

Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria. I will give you 2,000 horses if you can put riders on them.

How can you repulse one officer of the least of my master's officials, even though you are depending on Egypt for chariots and horsemen?

Furthermore, have I come to attack and destroy this place without word from the Lord? The Lord Himself told me to march against this country and destroy it.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we come to you today and we thank you for your word. Lord, we know that your word is sharper than any double-edged sword and pierces the depths of our being, pierces the depths of our soul.

[7 : 48] And I pray, Lord, today that you would speak to us through your word. Wherever we are, whatever circumstances we find ourselves up against, whatever challenges stand before us, I pray that you speak to us, Lord, and help us to realize that we are to keep our eyes on you and trust in you and believe in you.

When the world may say not to trust you, I pray that we will. And it's in your holy name we pray.

Amen. As you can see, Hezekiah really found himself between a rock and a hard place.

He had the largest military force in all of the world that had surrounded Jerusalem and was demanding that he surrender.

If he surrendered to the Assyrians, at least they would live. And the practice in that day and time is a conquering army would take the people, they would usually take the most educated, the most skilled, noble families, the best of the best, and they would take them and deport them and settle them somewhere else.

One thing it did is it helped from rebellions rising up against them at a later time and they wouldn't have to keep, like the Assyrians wouldn't have to keep as large a force there to constantly squash down rebellions against them.

[9 : 11] But it also took those skills, that knowledge, that training, and it resettled them somewhere else where they could use that to rebuild other places. Now this is exactly what's happened to the northern kingdom.

The northern kingdom had gotten so far away from God that they were worshiping fake gods, false gods, idols, gods of the nations around them.

They had gotten so far away from God that God raised up the Assyrians. God did that. He raised up the Assyrians to come in and conquer them and they led them out of the area and resettled them. You know, the ten northern tribes of Israel are no more. We have no idea where they are. We have no idea what became of them because what happened is when you resettle them in other places, they began to intermarry and mix and mingle with the other people groups and they completely lost their identity.

And so when we think of Israel today and we think of the Jews, it's the two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin, that make up God's people today because the ten northern tribes vanished off the scene of history.

[10:29] And in chapter 17, verses 7 and 8, it tells us because they sinned against God, because they forgot the covenant that they had made with God when they entered into the promised land.

They forgot and they began worshiping other gods, doing other things. They had gone so far that they even sacrificed children to false gods.

They were throwing their babies in fire as acts of worship of these false gods. And so God raised up the Assyrians, conquered them, and led them out.

You know, Hezekiah, again, is between a rock and a hard place. Oftentimes the struggles that we face in life are bigger than we can imagine.

Some of the struggles that we face are challenges or obstacles that we face in life. They're bigger than us, aren't they? They're bigger than our ability to overcome and deal with.

[11:31] However, what we're going to see this morning is that if we will learn to keep our eyes on God, no matter what struggle, no matter what challenge, no matter what obstacle you face today, if we learn to keep our eyes on God rather than the situation and circumstances, we keep our eyes on God and we continue to live in obedience to Him, we will learn that God will be with us in the midst of those struggles, in the midst of the pain, in the midst of the sorrows, and He will use those situations and circumstances to mold and shape us and help us to be the people that He wants us to be.

He will see us through and He will bring us through. I know everyone in here can probably look back on your life and you can see challenges that you've faced in life and they were hard, difficult circumstances.

Probably many tears were shed. But as you look back, you can see the hand of God in the midst of those struggles and circumstances being with you.

Sometimes God uses those challenges that we face in life to develop character within us.

Sometimes God uses those circumstances to remove sin out of our lives.

Maybe we have sin. Maybe we have rebellion and stubbornness in our heart. Maybe unforgiveness of someone in our life. And God uses situations and circumstances in our lives to remove that out of us.

[13:15] Sometimes He's preparing us for future work that He has for us. We think about Joseph of the Old Testament. He went through a great deal, but God was using that to prepare him for what He had in store for him.

And sometimes God is just simply testing our faith. Testing to see if we will stand firm and stand strong and believe in Him and obey Him and the things that He's called us to do.

What struggle are you facing today? What challenges are you up against? You know, they say that we're all faced, we're either going into a problem or a struggle or a storm.

We're in a storm or we're coming out of a storm. That's pretty much everybody's life, right? We only spend a short period of time on the mountaintop before we go back into something.

So what are you facing today? What are you getting ready to go into? What are you coming out of? And let me ask you this. What struggle have you faced or you might be getting ready to face that God cannot handle?

[14:24] What struggle or challenge or obstacle can God not handle? Luke 1.37 says, For nothing is impossible with God.

Also Romans 8.28 says, And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him. So whatever hardship, difficulty, struggle, pain that you might be facing, if we keep our eyes on the Lord and we stay focused on Him and we continue to walk in obedience to Him, then we have to realize that God is working in the midst of all of that and He will be with us in the storm.

He may not stop the storm immediately. He may not remove the pain immediately. He may leave us there for a time. But He's working to accomplish His purpose and His will.

I think of the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul had a very painful thorn in his flesh. And he prayed three times for God to remove that thorn.

What was God's answer? Yeah, but He just said, No. My grace is sufficient.

[15 : 51] He said, No. He didn't remove the thorn. Why? Because God was using that thorn for a purpose in Paul's life.

Now we don't know what the thorn was, but we do know Paul had begun to get prideful, puffed up, because God had been using him to do some mighty things.

And God was using that thorn to kind of humble him a little bit and bring him back down. You know, God will work the same way in our lives. It may not be a thorn like Paul faced.

It may not be pride and humility that you need. But God will be working in the circumstances and situations in our lives to mold and shape and develop us into the people that he needs us and wants us to be.

Israel had been led into the promised land by Joshua. And God had clearly told Israel through Moses, before Moses died, and now through Joshua, he clearly told them, If you will go into the promised land and you will honor me, obey me, stay faithful to me, then I will bless you.

[17 : 03] But if you do not, you know, if you go back and look at that scripture, you'll notice that God had about 15 verses where he says, I will bless you.

But do you realize there's about 50 verses where he warns them and says, But if you do not, I will curse you.

I will fight against you. He wanted them to clearly know and clearly understand that if they forgot the covenant that he had with them, if they disobeyed him, if they walked in sinfulness or worshiped other gods, then the one true God would fight against them and curse them.

Unfortunately, the northern kingdom they forgot. Another generation arose and they completely forgot the covenant they had with God and they had become disobedient.

They began to worship other gods. They abandoned their faith. And as I said a minute ago, they had sunk so low that they even sacrificed their children in the fire in worship to these other gods.

[18 : 17] Well, God is a patient God, slow to anger. And so he sent the prophets. He sent prophets to warn them and tell them, you know, to remind them of the covenant they had and that they needed to come back to the Lord.

But the Jews were very stubborn, hard-headed people and they didn't listen, did they? Many times they killed the prophets or they abused the prophets or they just didn't listen to them at all.

And so God raised up, God had to raise up the Assyrians to come in and to conquer the northern kingdom. Today, I look at the United States of America and I think about a nation that was founded and built upon faith in Jesus Christ, a land that religious freedom, but when it was founded, that meant religious freedom to worship Jesus Christ.

And yet I look at a nation that a new generation is arising that has forgotten much of that. And it's now become socially unacceptable to go back and teach that we were founded upon faith in Jesus Christ.

You want to know why the United States of America is one of the greatest nations in the world? It's because we were built upon faith in Jesus Christ.

[19 : 46] And yet now we see a nation that is drifting further and further and further away from God. If you go out west, do you know what the percentage of evangelical Christians live in Washington State?

I can go to Africa and find nations that are more Christian than Washington State or Oregon.

These 3%, 3% are evangelical Christians in places like Seattle and Oregon and out west and then up north it's not a whole lot better.

But you know what really worries me? What really worries me today is not the condition of the lost people in our country.

What concerns me is the church. What really worries me are those who are children of God that are allowing the things of the world to be adopted into their lives and living by the world's standards and yet claiming to be Christians.

[20 : 58] That's what concerns me more. People often talk about is God going to destroy the United States? Well, I'm more concerned about us giving an account to God as His children and

people of God and how we live.

Are we being faithful? Are we being obedient to the things He's called us to do in His Word? Or are we allowing trends, you know, things that go on in the world to be adopted into our lives and our patterns?

Are we doing the things God has called us to do? That's what we need to be concerned about and focused on today is the church.

And are we being the church? Are we going out into the world and proclaiming the gospel and reaching lost people with a message of forgiveness?

Not of hatred and anger and judgmental, but forgiveness and love. Which, by the way, I forgot this in the announcement time. Then I aimed to do it again when I got up here and I forgot again.

[22 : 13] But we had a great week this week with Vacation Bible School. We had a great week and I wanted to say thank you to everyone who participated in that. If you were here serving in any capacity, if you helped decorate in advance, if you put a yard sign out in your yard, I want to say thank you because that is one of the tools that we can use to reach, you know, a lost world.

We had a lot of children who came here. I helped teach the Bible story and I was blown away at some of the knowledge that a lot of these children did have. But we also had children here that probably don't ever go to church anywhere except for Vacation Bible School.

So I do want to say thank you to everybody that helped be a part of that in any way. Now during the time that the northern kingdom was being conquered and destroyed by the Assyrians, King Hezekiah ruled the southern kingdom or Judah.

Now Hezekiah's father was Ahaz and he was a very evil king and he did many things wrong in the eyes of the Lord. However, Hezekiah, he didn't follow the example of his father.

He was one of the greatest kings next to David that ever ruled over Israel. He honored God and he actually went through and tore down all the Asher poles and the places of worship.

[23 : 34] He did everything in his power to lead Judah back to being faithful to the Lord. And as a result, God was with him and he was successful in everything that he did.

It was his faith in the Lord that caused him to rebel against Assyria to begin with and not pay the tribute that he was supposed to pay.

So what that did is the Assyrians got angry and they invaded Judah. And this reminds us that sometimes our faith cost us something.

To have faith in the Lord and be obedient and faithful is not about an easy walk in the park and everything's going to be roses every day. Sometimes we have to take a stand for the Lord and honor Him and it will come at a cost.

It will come as an expense. But faith in the Lord is not always about God just making everything smooth sailing in our lives.

[24 : 38] Sometimes if you look in the New Testament especially there's a cost to pay. When Michelle and Ashley were thinking about going to Honduras we prayed and we began praying and God just gave them an overwhelming sense of peace to go.

Go to Honduras. Do not let fear keep you from going. And so we quickly went to bed they got about an hour of sleep got back up got ready to go to Honduras and they got on that plane and flew to Miami.

When they got to Miami there were people flying from Honduras other mission teams coming back into the country and they were saying you can't go. Do not go. It's too dangerous.

There's looting there's burning there's destruction people are being killed do not go. Well our team was faced with a challenge once again and they got together the adults and they discussed it and they prayed.

Well that time my daughter Ashley don't tell us she's not here today so don't tell her I said this.

Again she was only 12 but she was scared and she started crying and didn't want to get on.

[25 : 48] Michelle just grabbed her arm got on that plane and they went. And you know what? God protected them. God kept them safe and he sent them to the mountains where people had been praying for years for God to send somebody to them.

And they were able to also meet a little girl that we had been sponsoring in an orphanage there. They were able to spend time with her and meet her for the very first time. It was a great experience.

But it could have cost them. It could have turned out very differently. They went knowing that they gave their lives to the Lord and asked God to use their life in a way that would bring honor to him. Hezekiah sent a message to the king of Assyria stating that he had sinned against him. He was sorry that he had rebelled against him and that he would collect the money the gold and the silver that the king of Assyria was demanding if he would just withdraw.

And he was demanding 11 tons of silver and 1 ton of gold. And so Hezekiah this is the one blemish on King Hezekiah's account is that he went through the land and he took the silver and gold as much as he could find.

[27 : 03] He even went into the temple and he took the silver and the gold out of the temple that was decorating and designing the temple and he gave it to the king of Assyria.

But what happened much like sometimes when we play with fire you're going to get burned. You know what? The king of Assyria did. He took the gold and silver and he did not withdraw. He besieged Jerusalem and he came against them to conquer them and defeat them. And Hezekiah found himself in a time of crisis with a fundamental question that is just as fundamental for us today.

What do you believe about God? What do you truly believe about God? Is God worthy to be trusted?

Can we really trust God? Can He really fulfill His promises to us today? If Hezekiah trusted God and he stood up to Assyria and God was not able to do what He said He would do then the people of Judah would have been killed and destroyed.

[28 : 25] They would have been wiped out as bad as we see on the news in Gaza. They would have been mutilated by the Assyrians if God was not able to do what He said.

And so Hezekiah being the man of God that he was, he consulted the prophet Isaiah to know what he should do which is really good advice, really good example here of what King Hezekiah did.

He went to a prophet, he asked for a prophet and then in a minute we'll see that even after getting the word from the prophet he went back to God in prayer seeking God.

But look at 2 Kings 19 verses 5 and 7. Should be on the... There we go.

When King Hezekiah's officials came to Isaiah, Isaiah said to them, Tell your master this is what the Lord says. Do not be afraid of what you have heard, those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me.

[29 : 35] Listen, when he hears a certain report I will make him want to return to his own country and there I will have him cut down with the sword.

God is saying through Isaiah the prophet, don't worry about the Assyrians. I can handle them. I can deal with them. They're not going to conquer this city.

And so Hezekiah, still a bit concerned and worried, he goes to the temple and he begins to pray, wanting to know for sure, is that the message God was giving?

And so once again, God gives a message to Isaiah, to give to King Hezekiah. And it's in verses 32-36 of 2 Kings 19.

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 was shield or build a siege ramp against it.

[30 : 37] By the way he came, he will return. He will not enter this city, declares the Lord. I will defend this city and save it for my sake and for the sake of David my servant.

That night 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.

So Sennacherib, king of Assyria, broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and he stayed there. God was showing that he can handle just about anything.

He can handle anything. You've got the largest military in all the world at that time surrounding you and he sent an angel, one angel, that went through the camp and he destroyed or killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers.

And so the king of Assyria withdrew and he went back to Nineveh. God showed king Hezekiah that his faith in him was real.

[31 : 50] That he it was worthy to put his faith in God. That he put his faith and trust that God would defend them and God did just that.

No one has ever lived without having problems or crisis to arise in our life. We see throughout the scriptures faithful servants such as Hezekiah facing great challenges.

You know it can be hard to understand sometimes why God allows us to go through difficulties and hardships and we pray and we ask for God to solve the problems, to deal with situations and circumstances and he doesn't always do it when we want.

And it's hard for us to understand and sometimes we get angry at God or we get mad at God and we wonder where are you God? Why are you not solving this problem for me?

But if we'll learn a lesson here today that God is more than able and he works in situations, he works in circumstances of our lives, maybe not the way we want him to, maybe not as quickly as we want him to, but he works in his timetable and in a manner that he brings about his purpose and his will in our lives.

[33 : 15] Everyone faces problems at some time or another, but how each person responds to those problems or those challenges is what makes the difference.

Do we respond in faith or do we respond in fear and doubt? King Hezekiah faced what the world described as a hopeless situation.

He was surrounded by a superior army, one that had already destroyed many lands and ten of the twelve tribes of Israel, but Hezekiah trusted in the Lord and the Lord delivered him in a manner that only God could do.

It's my hope and my prayer today that we will take a lesson from King Hezekiah and we will realize that whatever challenge you're up against today, whatever obstacles stand in your way, whatever struggles you're enduring, don't focus on them.

Focus on the Lord. Stay focused on Him and He will more than be willing to handle those situations and circumstances and resolve them in a manner that empowers us, builds us strength, gives us character and helps us to maybe serve Him in a greater capacity in the future.

[34 : 44] And most of us can look back and we can see where God has worked in times past. Let those experiences encourage us today to stay faithful and obedient and trust in the Lord.

Today I don't know what challenges you're up against. I don't know what circumstances that you're fighting. I don't know what painful things are going on in your life. But I hope that you will hold tightly to God to work in your life, build your faith, build your strength and know that God is able.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father we thank you for this word today. We thank you for your word. And I pray Lord that you speak to each of our hearts.

We're all facing different things. We're all facing different circumstances. We all have different painful experiences in our lives that we've gone through. But I pray Lord that we keep our eyes on you.

and we trust in you Lord. And that we will know that you are working to help us to get through those situations and circumstances and be stronger to have greater faith and to be a people that you will use to bring glory and honor to your name.

[36 : 09] And it's in Jesus name that we pray. Amen. We're going to stand and have a time of invitation. If there's anything that you want to do,