The Enemy at the Gates

You know, it’s so wonderful when we ask for testimonies and people stand up and declare the wonderful things that the Lord has done for them. It gives us an opportunity to share with each other the victories that the Lord has brought about in our lives. But there’s another kind of testimony we need today. See, because sometimes…I don’t need to hear about what you did when the doctor gave you a “clean bill of health”…I need to hear a testimony about what to do when the doctor’s report isn’t good. I don’t need to hear about your wonderful wedding day…I need to hear about what to do when my wife files for divorce. I don’t need a testimony about your son graduating from school…I need a testimony about the phone call at 2 AM telling me my son’s been arrested. See, I know what to do when life is filled with “milk and honey”…what I need to know…is what to do…when the enemy is at the gates.

Well, I know someone who has the answer, someone who literally had the enemy at the gates. His name was King Hezekiah (Hizkiyahu) and he was the king of Judah from about 715 to 687 B.C. (about 29 years). The part of his reign that I want to focus on is found in 2nd Kings, chapters 18 and 19. Now, before we get to his story, let’s set the stage by seeing what kind of king he was. Here’s his background check as told in 2nd Kings 18:3-7…

“He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done. He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called N’chushtan / Nehushtan. Snake in Hebrew is nachash.) Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook…”

So, the first thing that I want you to take note of…is that the enemy isn’t just after the bad guys and sinners…oh, no…Hezekiah’s righteousness didn’t take him off the hit list. Because if we peek over the wall of the city, you’ll see he’s got enemies at the gate.

(2nd Kings 18:17-18) “The king of Assyria sent his supreme commander, his chief officer and his field commander with a large army, from Lakkish (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 Elyakim (Eliakim) son of Hilkiyahu (Hilkiah) the palace administrator, Shevnah
(Shebna) the secretary, and Yo'ach (Joah) son of Asaf (Asaph) the recorder went out to them."

Okay, now, let’s see what the enemy wants:

(2nd Kings 18:19-25) “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 strategy and military strength—but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me? Look now, you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces a man's hand and wounds him if he leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him. And 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 two thousand 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.' "

Whoo…let’s pause here for a minute and examine the words of the enemy. Because these are the same things he says to us.

The first thing the enemy does is tell you that you’re weak. Even before the battle begins, he tries to destroy your confidence and convince you that you’re on your own. His first verbal assault is 3-fold…let’s take a quick look:

1. “You say you have strategy and military strength—but you speak only empty words.” This is the first seed of discouragement that is sown against you. You have no strength. You won’t win this one because you are weak.
2. “On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me?” These words of doubt are focused on any outside help you think will come to your aid. He said, don’t be thinking that Egypt is going to help you…Egypt is in worse shape than you are. Our enemy does exactly the same thing. Your family, your friends, your so-called brothers and sisters in the Lord…they got their own problems. They don’t have the time or energy to help you out…so don’t depend on them.
3. Finally, and this is probably the worst. “And 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?" Oh…this is amazing…the enemy says you can’t depend on God because He’s your enemy too. You haven’t been obeying Him so He certainly
isn’t going to come to your rescue. And how ironic that the enemy used the good things that Hezekiah did…removing the pagan high places and alters…and he twists it around and says that the good he did was in fact…against God.

So, now that the enemy has set you up by planting the seeds of doubt in your mind…you have no strength…no one will help you…then he delivers the “knock-out” punch...“The LORD himself told me to march against this country and destroy it.” The Commander was saying that not only was the Lord not going to help you…the Lord is actually against you and has sent me to destroy you.

So, there’s step one on the enemy’s agenda. THE SITUATION IS HOPELESS! Why? Well, you have no strength, no one else is going help you, and God won’t help you. As a matter of fact…this problem is directly from God…He’s punishing you for something you did. Well, now that you’re troubled and disheartened…the enemy presents a solution in…2nd Kings 18:31-36...

"Do not listen to Hezekiah. This is what the king of Assyria says: Make peace with me and come out to me. Then every one of you will eat from his own vine and fig tree and drink water from his own cistern, until I come and take you to a land like your own, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey. Choose life and not death! "Do not listen to Hezekiah, for he is misleading you when he says, ‘The LORD will deliver us.’ Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamat (Hamath) and Arpad (Arpad)? Where are the gods of S’farvayim (Sepharvaim), Hena (Hena) and Ivah (Ivvah)? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand?" But the people remained silent and said nothing in reply, because the king had commanded, "Do not answer him."

Well, this 2nd verbal attack is also 3-fold and equally as devastating.

1. “Make peace with me and come out to me.” Your only hope is peace with the enemy. Isn’t that an oxymoron?...You know...two words that shouldn’t go together because they contradict each other...like “original copy” or “steel wool”. If he’s your enemy, how can there be peace?

2. The second element here is to get you to think that “surrender” is the right choice. There’ll be eating, drinking and partying...surrender is the right thing to do...surrender is “life.”

3. And for number 3...again we have the knock-out punch..."Oh by the way, no one has ever won before. The enemy declares himself the “undefeated heavy-weight champion."
So let’s review for a minute before we launch our counter-attack. One day you wake up...just an ordinary day...you’re not expecting anything different. Maybe you’re getting ready for work or maybe you’re planning on doing some things around the house...maybe you got some shopping to do. When all of a sudden you hear something. Sounds like thunder but the skies look clear. No, that’s not the sound of thunder...that’s the sound of an army. You run to the wall and you discover that the enemy is at the gates. The enemy may be the loss of something...a loved one, a job, or some possession. It may be an illness or a relationship under siege. But whatever it is...the attack usually follows the pattern that we outlined...2 coordinated battles with 3 attacks each...for a total of 6 assaults:

1. You have no strength
2. No one will help you.
3. God is against you.
4. Let’s make a deal...a deal with the enemy brings peace.
5. Giving up is actually a good thing.
6. You can’t win.

So there you have it...who feels like fighting? Hezekiah did! Now let’s see what he did. Because his plan is absolutely brilliant! About a month ago, at one of our services, I was talking about choices. We always have a choice don’t we? Well, actually we have a choice in how we act or respond to something...but we don’t always have a choice in what happens to us. No one chooses to lose a loved one...no one chooses to be sick...no one chooses to lose their job...no one chooses to have an enemy at their gate. But we can always choose our response. Praise over panic...faith over fear...and hope over tears. See the real question is, “What do you choose when you have no choice?”

Well, class is in session...so let’s see what the king chooses to do. 2nd Kings, chapter 19 begins with these words (verse 1)..."When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the LORD.” I love this...first thing he does...he runs to the Lord. Is that always our first response? Probably not! We usually grab a sword...open the gates...and start swinging. Never a good idea. Hezekiah’s first response was head for the Temple...not for the gates. Now let’s listen in on Hezekiah’s prayer...you’ll find it in 2nd Kings 19:14-19...

“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. And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD : "O LORD, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib
(Sancheriv) has sent to insult the living God. "It is true, O LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands. Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God."

I want to take a few minutes now and break this prayer down so we can study each part. It’s a 6-fold counter-attack that Hezekiah used and it was military genius.

1. **Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it.**
   This doesn't really seem like a step does it? But this step is first for a very important reason. When the enemy is at the gates we need to assess the situation. This is where we so often run into trouble because we don’t have all the facts. See, Hezekiah had sent messengers to the Assyrian commander and now he was hearing back from the Assyrian messengers. You need to have all the information before you react. If you allow panic to short circuit this first step, you might as well go open the gates and put the coffee on. This is where you need to look at the situation and make some evaluations. I’m simply saying…gather the facts and do an honest assessment before you fire a shot. Remember when I mentioned that 2 AM phone call that your son was arrested? Before you go nuts, what do you want to know? You want to know what he’s been arrested for. Did he run a red light or murder someone? Makes a difference doesn’t it? The enemy is a master at getting you worked up over almost nothing. This step calls for a cool head. Remember the TV show, Dragnet? It was an old police show…and when interviewing witnesses, Sargent Joe Friday would always say, "Just the facts, ma'am…just the facts."

2. **Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD.**
   Okay, now you know the situation…so where do you go? Hezekiah went up to the Temple to talk to the Lord. Isn’t it interesting…or actually, isn’t it sad…that the last place we go for help is to the Lord. How many times have you heard someone say, “Well, I've done everything I can do…it’s up to the Lord now.” Shut up…put your hand over your mouth…it’s always been up to the Lord. And since everything in this universe is “up to Him” wouldn’t He be a good place to go first? Hezekiah knew exactly what he was doing…and I absolutely love the second part of that verse..."and spread it out before the LORD."

   He said, “Lord…look…here’s what I know…this is the situation…but…but…maybe I might be missing something. I’m laying it out before you…what do you think?” We almost never do that. Our way is more like, “Here’s my plan Lord…for you to carry out.”
We’re not shy about telling God what He should do and how He needs to handle the enemies in our lives…and at our gates. But no plans on Hezekiah’s part…no tactics…no campaign slogans. Just a simple…“Lord they’re at the gates and it looks like they mean business.”

3. And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: "O LORD, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

Now this is an interesting step…doesn’t it sound like Hezekiah is trying to “butter-up” God? It sure sounds like he’s trying to praise and flatter the Lord so that God will help him. Well, that’s not it at all. Hezekiah is beginning his prayer exactly the way we should…with praise. David said in Psalm 100:4, “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.” Why? Is God some kind of egotist that loves to here Himself praised? Of course not! God knows He God…He doesn’t need us to remind Him. We praise Him to remind ourselves. He’s not the one who forgets who He is…we are! Praise gives us a sense of comfort and reassurance by reminding us of who it is that we are going to for help. If you come to me with car problems, I have to remind you that I’m not a mechanic. If you come to me with legal issues, I have to remind you that I’m not a lawyer. See, there’s a lot of things that I can’t help you with. But when you bring your problems to the One who is over all the kingdoms of the earth and as a matter of fact…created the heavens and the earth…well…that’s a different story…isn’t it? Is there anything He can’t do? Genesis 18:14 asks a very important rhetorical question…”Is anything too hard for the LORD?” Let me know if you can come up with something.

4. Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God.

We’re half way through our counter-attack and now it’s time to turn the tables. Here is where we cast our worries, concerns, fears, and anxieties on the Lord. 1st Peter 5:7 instructs us to, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” Hezekiah calls out to God and says, ‘Lord look and see…listen and hear what this pagan king is doing. He’s attacking you Lord.’

Now, why do you suppose Hezekiah said that the Assyrian King was insulting God? Two reasons…the first is found in Zechariah 2:8, “…for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye.” Actually, in Hebrew the phrase is “B’va-vat Ei-no”…and it means "Little Man of the Eye" because “Bavu’a” means image or reflection which refers to the tiny reflection of yourself that you can see in the pupil of another person’s eye. So it really means the “pupil of your eye.” I don’t know why it’s translated as “apple” because apple in Hebrew is “ta-pooh-ach”…some people say that it’s because an apple is round
like your pupils. Anyway...do you remember when David asked the Lord in Psalm 17:8, “Keep me as the apple of your eye;…” In other words, ‘protect me and guard me like you would the center of your eye…the pupil, where I can see my reflection in your eyes...protect me like you would protect your eyesight. So here’s the bottom line. If someone comes against me...God says it’s like they were poking their finger in His eye. See, I’m going to take advantage of that. When you harm me...you poke God in the eye...Oh yeah, that’s really smart!

And the second reason that Hezekiah places the insults on God’s shoulders is that when the king of Assyria came against Hezekiah, he said that the LORD God wouldn’t be able to help him. Let me remind you what the Assyrian king said (2nd Kings 18:35), “Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand?” So Hezekiah simple points out...that it would be true...if the Assyrian king said that Hezekiah was weak and pathetic...but saying that the Lord was frail and feeble...well...that was a slap in the face. So Hezekiah doesn’t rant and rave...he doesn’t throw a temper tantrum...he doesn’t curse, swear or carry on...he simply points to the enemy at the gates and says, 'Lord, they just poked You in the eye and slapped your Face.

5. "It is true, O LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands.

This is all about keeping the right perspective. We’re almost finished with our counter-attack but the enemy isn’t giving up that easy. This is where those doubts begin to come back into your mind. Have you ever won a spiritual battle only to find that you’re right back fighting it again? You declared your faith...claimed the victory...but then you pause for a moment and the enemy says..."Yeah, but what if...?" You have a bill to pay and you know that God will supply all your needs...and you’re claiming Phillippians 4:19 all over the place. “But what if?” Or you have a health issue and you know...in Exodus 15:26, that God says, “…I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.” “But what if?” So what do you do when the enemy bangs at the gates and shouts..."But what if?” Well...you agree with him. Sounds crazy? Sure it is, but war is crazy. You agree at first, just like Hezekiah did...here’s what he said, “It is true, O LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them,...” Oh yes, bills come to the door and health fails...a lot of things happen...sure they do...Oh, but wait a minute...Hezekiah said, “for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands.” This is where you need to stand firm and simply
say, “That was then and this is now.” Others have fallen, but that doesn’t mean I will. I’ve had heartaches before but that doesn’t mean that this will be one of them. See the enemy wants to bring past disappoints to your mind. Maybe it’s someone else’s experience or maybe it’s your own. History can be a hard taskmaster. Looking back at the way it’s been or the way it went…can keep us from going forward. Hezekiah said, ‘Hey those gods didn’t count because they weren’t really gods.’ And we need to say that the past doesn’t count…this is a new day…no “ifs, ands or buts.” The enemy brings up the “old”…well…I bring up the “new”…This is different and I’m standing with both feet on Revelation 21:5…”Behold, I make all things new.”

6. Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God.

Now, we’re ready to present our case. And there are two very important parts to remember. There’s a “what” and a “why.” First…the “what”…What do I need? Hezekiah said, “Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand,” There’s a sense of urgency here…”now”…I need help now Lord. But there’s also a submission to God’s sovereign will and plan. Hezekiah simply says, “Deliver us.” He doesn’t give God the game plan…he doesn’t tell God how to do it. It’s a simple direct request…I need deliverance and I’m sure You know the best way to do it. We know from Romans 8:28 that, “…all things work together for good to them that love God,…” so okay Lord, work it out to my good. He left the door wide open for God to act on his behalf in the best possible way…and he continues with this thought in the “why” part of this petition…why deliver him?…”so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God.” ‘Deliver me so that everyone will see and know that you are God. Everyone knows that I can’t beat him…so when they’re defeated…all will know that I didn’t do it. It had to have been You. Rescue me, Lord and receive all the glory.’ In Isaiah 42:8 the Lord makes it pretty clear that…”I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” The Lord is happy to share His Kingdom…but His Glory?…No, that’s His and His alone. So Hezekiah’s simple petition is, ‘Lord deliver me and show the world Your power and glory.’

So let’s see…the enemy is at the gates and I’m powerless…perfect…the enemy has played right into my hands because 2nd Corinthians 12:9-10 says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”
Hezekiah asks for deliverance for his good and God’s glory. Pretty sweet deal. Now before we look at some “take-home” lessons let’s see how this whole situation turned out (2nd Kings 19:35-37)…

“That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men 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 stayed there. One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisrokh (Nisroch), his sons Adramelekh (Adrammelech) and Shar’etzer (Sharezer) cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat (Ararat). And Esar-Hadon (Esarhaddon) his son succeeded him as king.”

Do you remember when Yeshua was arrested in the garden and the disciples were going to fight for Him? He told them to put their swords away because He said, “…do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? (Matthew 26:53). The number of men in a legion could vary, but about 6,000 men is a good estimate…so 12 legions would be 72,000 angels. With a snap of His fingers…a wink of His eye…a nod of His head…Yeshua could have had 72,000 angels at his disposal. And do you think heaven would be depleted? Not hardly…72,000 angels wouldn’t even be missed. Now, how many angels did it take to kill 185,000 well-trained, battle-hardened, cut-throat Assyrian soldiers in full battle array? One…it took one…God sent one. And you know what…that angel wasn’t out of breath…he wasn’t tired…he didn’t even work up a sweat. If I call out to Yeshua, He can snap His fingers and I’m surrounded by 72,000 angels. See the question isn’t…”Got enemies?”…The question is “Got God?”

Okay…Here’s the game plan…the counter-attack when the enemy is at the gates.

1. **Assess the situation**
   Many of our battles can often be stopped right here. It’s very important that we accurately understand the circumstances we’re in. Our enemy wins far too many fights by simply suggesting that there might be a battle…and often times we fight against foes that aren’t even present. Gather all the information **first** before you draw your sword. A lump in your breast isn’t the same as a lump in your oatmeal. Find out what kind of lump you have before you sound the battle charge.

2. **Head straight to the Lord**
   God isn’t plan B…God is plan A. Take the situation directly to Him…this problem may have caught you by surprise…but believe me…no one has ever jumped out from behind the couch and shouted “surprise” to God.

3. **Praise**
   Remind yourself of who you’re dealing with. No, not the enemy…God. Praise Him…let your words of lifting Him up…lift you up. Recount past successes, relive times of
victory. Recount the long history of conquests you have under your belt. Praise Him and remember that all the Power of the Universe rests in the hands of your Father.

4. **Place the problem before the Lord**
Turn the tables. Take the problem off your plate and put it on the Lord’s. There is nothing more frightening that a Father’s anger on behalf of His child, whom someone has hurt. How’s this sound…”Dad they hurt me…they hurt me bad…and they said you can’t do a thing about it.” If I was the enemy I’d be afraid…yeah, very afraid.

5. **Keep the right attitude and perspective**
Watch out because here’s where the enemy will try to plant some seeds of doubt. But this is where you draw the line in the sand and say…”No, not this time.” Don’t tell me how others have fallen, let me tell you about how God will deliver me. Psalm 34:7 says, “The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.” And speaking of angels…here’s number 6…

6. **Ask for what you want and why**
Lord, deliver me for my good and your glory. ‘**Cause all I need** is a wink from my Father and one angel with an attitude.

So there you have it. A six step plan to counter-attack the enemy when you feel surrounded. Six things to do when you feel trapped. See you need to remind yourself that the enemy may be at the gates…but the God of the Universe is within these walls.

Baruch HaShem!!!