

## HEZEKIAH

### 2 Kings 20

As we get into our 60's we receive all kinds of mailings from insurance companies. They know that when we turn 65 we can apply for Medicare and not have to depend on our employee based insurance, but there is a need for supplemental insurance. It is all part of the system that has been set up to enable senior citizens to retire.

But none of that existed 150 years ago. In 1883 German Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck introduced a retirement program, offering a pension to those after turning age 60. It was part of his efforts to stave off the growing movements towards socialism in Germany. Franklin D Roosevelt proposed the Social Security Act of 1935, instructing workers to pay into their own retirement. This was done to convince older people to retire so that there would be more jobs for younger people with the high rates of unemployment during the Great Depression. Since then it has become part of the American dream to retire in comfort. With our advances in medicine and the technology that allows people to get things done without heavy labor, people aren't living to a higher lifespan (people don't make it to 125), but more of them are living way past 65. It is not a time to be taken care of because people are too weak to take care of themselves, but a time to relax and enjoy the world. It is seen as the reward for all the hard work before retirement. Here is an example of how that is expressed:

Beginning at 65, and ending who knows when, is the happiest time of life, the reward for all one has done up to now. It's the time to enjoy friends and family, to travel, to take up fishing or knitting, to be a little wicked. The secret to doing what one has always wanted to do is contained in the words "ending who knows when".

With that can come the attitude that Hezekiah expressed. We think of Hezekiah as the faithful king who trusted in God; who, along with Jerusalem, was rescued from the Assyrians by the angel God sent at night to slay so many Assyrian soldiers. But the story of Hezekiah goes on:

In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover.'" Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying, "Now, O LORD, please remember how I have walked before You in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: "Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD, and I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for My own sake and for

My servant David's sake.” And Isaiah said, “Bring a cake of figs. And let them take and lay it on the boil, that he may recover.”

And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD on the third day?” And Isaiah said, “This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that He has promised: shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or go back ten steps?” And Hezekiah answered, “It is an easy thing for the shadow to lengthen ten steps. Rather let the shadow go back ten steps.” And Isaiah the prophet called to the LORD, and He brought the shadow back ten steps, by which it had gone down on the steps of Ahaz. (2 Kings 20:1-12)

God spared Hezekiah from his illness. He had time to live, free from the threat of Assyria—like a time of retirement. But we see next what happened as a result of that:

At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them. Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say? And from where did they come to you?” And Hezekiah said, “They have come from a far country, from Babylon.” He said, “What have they seen in your house?” And Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.”

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD: <sup>17</sup> Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?”

“Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days.” Perhaps we have heard that expressed this way. “We will let the next worry about that.” Or “Let the young people take care of that.” Or “leave that to the next generation.” Hezekiah made it easy on himself. By showing off the temple treasury, he made the Babylonians friendly with him. They were eager to destroy the Assyrians so that people like Hezekiah’s Judeans could retain their wealth. Then later, when the Assyrians were eliminated, that wealth could be seized by the conquering Babylonian armies. In the short run, in Hezekiah’s lifetime, Jerusalem was spared. But in the long run, it was to be wiped out by Babylon.

As older people, we can complain how the younger people are ruining things—redefining what male and female are, leaving church, replacing hand made with computer made. But do

we realize that our aging population of retirees is putting a great future risk on the next generation? Can we put that off? Can we leave that to the next generations?

Our ideas about retirement cast work as some evil we want to overcome through retirement. But in Genesis 2:15 when God made man it says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” Work is not a curse. The curse is the sin in Genesis 3 which turned work from a blessing from God into something we can see as an evil. It is a good thing to retire from a job because we do not have the wealth to do it anymore or because someone young can do it and serve other sin that way better than we can. It is a good thing to retire to free us to serve in new ways like grand-parenting or volunteer work. But we don’t retire to give ourselves a reward for all the hard work we put in. In fact we should be rethinking our attitudes from “retirement” into “renewing.”

More than any time before, the health and numbers of seniors today give them more chances than ever to make a difference in this world. A perfect example is our ministry to internationals. Many internationals are parents who only have free time during the day when their children are at school. Retired people have the time to meet with them. Older people speak more slowly, which helps them in learning. And so often these internationals come from cultures with great respect for their elders—being a senior citizen gives you instant credibility with them.

For years the Church, like politicians and advertisers, has centered efforts on youth. One popular saying was, “The youth are the church of today, not tomorrow.” That is still true, but projections tell us that the number of retirees will be greater than that of children by 2034. This month a deaconess intern will be installed at the Perry Lutheran Homes. Her work will involve working with seniors at the nursing, but the families of the workers at the homes and seniors who are still at home, but isolated in the community. She is there as an intern, to learn. But her work will help the church at large to better minister to the aged. It is with that thought that our board of directors, acting as representatives of the congregation, donated to support the deaconess internship program at the homes. We hope that she will spend some time here, helping us to better minister to seniors in our community.

And who can often best serve these seniors? Seniors themselves! As we get older, we do not like to do things at night. Working with seniors is work that primarily takes place during the day, when working people are working, but when retirees are free.

But what if my age keeps me from physically doing many of the things that I would like to do to serve God? One thing we all can do is pray. Prayers are not a sideshow. They are at the very heart of ministry to others. Martin Luther once said, “I am so busy now that if I didn’t spend the first three hours in prayer, I would not make it through the day.” We have a prayer

circle to pray not only for the needs of the ill and grieving, but to pray for missionaries and God's work in our own community.

What fuels the right attitude from "retirement" to "renewing" is knowing that God never retires. He never grows tired or just gives up on us. He never says, "Leave it to the next generation." That influences us not just in retirement or as we near it, but when we are preparing for a career at school, starting our career, changing jobs, and raising a family. Our goal is not to get to a stage where we can sit back and say, "Let the young do it." It is about first of all knowing how much God loves us and cares for us and then living our lives in thankfulness to Him by seeing our lives as service to Him by serving others.