**“But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you.” - Psalm 39:7**

**Part I – Looking Ahead**

Today we are talking about “Looking Ahead.” And I am curious, when you hear the phrase “looking ahead” is there a picture that comes to mind? Is there something specific that you are looking towards? Maybe it is a particular event that you have scheduled or something you just expect to happen in the future. It could be something that you anticipate with joy and excitement or maybe you are dreading it. It may be something in this life or even at the end of this life.

 I want us to use a particular Bible story to examine some different aspects of what it means to be looking ahead to the future. And of course, each time we study the Bible, it is not just to get the facts of what has happened. But as I mentioned last week, we do not just read the Bible, but hopefully we “read and apply” what the Bible says to our own lives. God gave us his Word as a guide so that we might know how to live our lives more abundantly and experience all the blessings that God has in store for us.

 So, I encourage you that as you listen to this sermon today that you might also be listening to the Lord’s whispers of guidance that he is specifically giving to you and where you are at this point in your life. May each of us hear the Lord’s loving directions for our own circumstances and situations.

**Part II – King Hezekiah**

 The individual we are looking at today is Hezekiah. He was the 13th king of Judah. According to Biblical history, after the time of King David and King Solomon, there were a total of 39 kings who are mentioned that ruled in either Israel or Judah. Of those 39 kings, the Bible says that only 8 of them were good kings, all of the others were evil and led the people away from God. But Hezekiah was one of the best kings and so there is a lot written in the Bible about the reforms he put in place and how he tried to be faithful to God. 2 Kings 18:5-6 says *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.*

Because Hezekiah was faithful to God then good things were happening to Judah and God protected the nation of Judah from Assyria. Hezekiah also had a strong prayer life and he would cry out to the Lord for guidance and for help.

 The part of Hezekiah’s story that I want us to look at today is about his illness. It is actually told in three different books of the Old Testament: it is in 2 Kings 20, 2 Chronicles 32, and Isaiah 38. Just for ease of following, I am going to be looking at the version that is in 2 Kings 20, so if you would like to turn to that in your Bible or the pew Bible you are welcome to do so.

**Part III – Going to Die**

The 20th chapter of 2 Kings begins by saying that Hezekiah is ill and at the point of death (vs 1). In fact, the Lord has told the prophet Isaiah to go tell Hezekiah to put his house in order because you are going to die.

 These days sometimes doctors will attempt to make an estimation of how long someone who is very ill might survive. They are basing it on their experience and their medical knowledge, but they don’t really know…only God knows the number of our days. But in Hezekiah’s case, since Isaiah is bringing a message from the Lord then Hezekiah can be pretty sure of this prophecy.

 The next verse (2) says that *Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord.* Now remember, Hezekiah had a powerful prayer life. He had tried to depend on God to lead the country and had gone to the Lord in other critical situations and has seen God do miraculous things. So, he is praying and trusting in who God is, and hoping that his past relationship with the Lord might influence the result.

 This is Hezekiah’s prayer (3), *“Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.”* And it also says that *Hezekiah wept bitterly.* So, he is pouring out this request to the Lord.

 Let’s stop right here and examine for Hezekiah what it looks like for him to “Look Ahead.” You know, as soon as the prophet Isaiah states the Lord’s words that he is going to die, then he has *nothing* to look ahead to except for death. If God said it, then that’s it.

 And yet, Hezekiah does not just roll over and die, but based on how God has answered his prayers in the past and his history with the Lord in trying to be faithful, he is hoping that God might show mercy.

**Part IV - Hope**

 Now let me remind you that this is a story in the Old Testament, this is before God sent his Son Jesus Christ to save the world. This is before Jesus was willing to sacrifice himself upon the cross so that you and I might be saved and have eternal life. Hezekiah lives 700 years before Jesus so there is no way that he can know the hope and the blessed assurance that you and I have because of Jesus’ resurrection.

 In red-letter words in John 14 – Jesus is trying to explain to his disciples (and to us) that there is life beyond this life. Jesus tells them (2) “*In my Father’s house are many rooms, …I am going there to prepare a place for you.”* He is promising us that we can be with him in eternity. And a little later he says (19B), *“Because I live, you also will live.”*

 The New Testament is full of Jesus’ promise that if we believe in Jesus and confess him as our Lord and Savior, we will be saved and have eternal life. So, for you and I, if we know Jesus as our Lord, then if we should ever find ourselves in a situation like Hezekiah, there is no need to weep bitterly. If God heals us – great, and if not, we get to experience glorious heaven and a new birth into eternal life. As 1 Peter 1:3 says *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* So, for us as we Look Ahead, the view is pretty amazing.

**Part V – A Miracle & A Sign**

Hezekiah’s hope was that God would hear his prayer. And I think it is a great reminder in the power of prayer. We don’t know why God answers some of our prayer requests, but not all of them. Yet we trust that God is a good God who loves us dearly and always knows in the long run what is best. So, we pray, and we trust that God has it all under control.

 It says in verse 4 that before Isaiah even got out of the palace that the Lord was speaking to him again and sending him back to Hezekiah to say (5), *I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you.* And God told him (6) *I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria.*

 So not only would Hezekiah get the miracle of healing, but his country would be at peace. And also, the Lord would give him a sign so that he would know that what the Lord had promised would come true. In verse 9, Isaiah asks him which sign he would prefer, “*This is the Lord’s sign to you that the Lord will do what he has promised: Shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or shall it go back ten steps?”*

Hezekiah realized that (10) *it is a simple matter for the shadow to go forward ten steps,* so he requested that it go back ten steps. Which means that just as the sun in its normal motion makes the shadow lengthen, that for this one-time God made the shadow move in the opposite direction just so Hezekiah would know that it was God doing all of this.

 That day Hezekiah received both a miracle healing and a miraculous sign. I would say that for Hezekiah at that moment as he looked ahead that things were looking good.

**Part VI – For Those to Follow**

 But I wonder, when we look ahead, are we only concerned about what is ahead for us as individuals, or should we also be looking ahead for our family and our community and those generations to follow.

 Because there is a little more to Hezekiah’s story. You see, (12) the son of the king of Babylon had heard about Hezekiah’s illness and so he sent letters and a gift. So, Hezekiah welcomed his messengers (13) and showed them all of his storehouses – his silver, gold, spices, and fine oil, his armory and all of his treasurers. Scripture says *There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.*

Afterwards, Isaiah comes to Hezekiah and asks about where those men were from and what Hezekiah had shown them. Hezekiah said that they were from Babylon and that he had showed them everything. What an incredibly foolish thing for Hezekiah to have done! What a shame that he did not take that opportunity to pray to God about what should be done. But I guess he prayed to God about the big things in life and forgot to talk to God about the smaller decision and things that he was doing. And apparently, he thought he was wise in showing every treasure and all that Judah had.

 Isaiah answered him (16) one more time with the word of the Lord and a prophecy of what to look forward to in the future. *“Hear the word of the Lord:* (17) *The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord.* (18) *And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood, that will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”*

 You would think that Hezekiah when he heard this disturbing prophecy of what would happen to his country and his family in the future would be remorse that he was so foolish to show all of the treasures. And in the past, when there was a crisis situation for the nation or for his health, then he poured out his prayers to the Lord to help. And yet, this time, there seems to be no regret or tears and prayers for mercy, instead hear these words that Hezekiah spoke when he heard about what would happen to his nation and family in the future, Hezekiah replied (19), *“The word of the Lord you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?”* Apparently, as he Looked Ahead, the only thing that mattered was about himself.

**Part VII – Learning from Hezekiah**

So, end of the story! Well, at least it was the end of the story for Hezekiah, but hopefully we did not just listen to the story – hopefully we learned from the story some things that we can apply to our lives.

 As you Look Ahead to your life, are there things that you possibly learned from Hezekiah’s life? Things like: the importance of being faithful to God and how a powerful prayer life can make a difference. Or remembering who God is and that he is more than able to do miracles and show us miraculous signs of his powers.

 Hopefully we all know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and if so then that is when we can Look Ahead to not only life in this world knowing that the Lord is always with us, but also because of Jesus’ resurrection we Look Ahead with blessed assurance to being with Jesus in heaven.

 And finally, recognizing that none of our lives are lived in a vacuum. We have an opportunity to touch other lives and share the blessings of knowing the Lord so that they too can have something glorious to Look Ahead to for their future. And hopefully we leave this world in a better condition so that those behind us, the generations that follow are touched by our witness and our actions so that they too can Look Ahead.

 We Look Ahead with hope! In fact, our Memory Verse this week is Psalm 39:7 and it asks the question, *“But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you.”* As long as we look to the Lord, then we have hope. Because remember the Lord has declared (Jeremiah 29:11), *“I have plans for you, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans for hope and a future.”* That certainly sounds like it is worth Looking Ahead. Amen.