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Sermon Notes

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On Whom Are You Depending?

Isaiah 36:1-22

The Ultimate Bully:

As we come to Isaiah 36, we come to one of the lowest moments in the history of the Jews...

But it's also the darkest night before a most glorious dawn... one of the greatest displays of the power of God in the history of mankind.

In this chapter, we will study the bluster and intimidation of the Rab-Shakeh, the “field commander” of the Assyrian army... the man Sennacherib, King of Assyria—the so-called “Great King” sent to talk Hezekiah and the Jews from the fortress of Zion, the city of Jerusalem

Through it, we will analyze the intimidation of Satan, the great talker, the Liar who is the Father of Lies... they way he seeks to talk us out of the fortress of our safety as well

Finally, more than anything, we will pick up on a phrase the Field Commander uses... “In whom do you now trust?” to probe the innerworkings of your own heart

Amazingly, God uses the Field Commander to ask us that critical question... ultimately, there is only one possible right answer: We ARE TRUSTING IN JESUS CHRIST, the Lamb that was slain for us

I. The Dire Situation: Assyria Invades Judah!

A. The Setting: 701 B.C.

1. In 722 B.C., Assyria had invaded the northern kingdom of Israel
2. 705 B.C.: Sargon II, the King of the Assyrians, died; his son, Sennacherib, took his place
3. Hezekiah seems to have led a group of vassal (subject) kings to rebel against Assyria... evidence of Hezekiah's FAITH

2 Kings 18:5-7 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. ⁶ He

held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. ⁷ And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.

4. There were several other kings who also rebelled at that time, including Merodach-Baladan, king of the Babylonians
5. 703 B.C: Sennacherib took his powerful army down to Babylon and defeated Merodach-Baladan in battle and subdued the Babylonians
6. When that we done, he turned his attention to the small kings who had rebelled against him, including Hezekiah

B. Hezekiah's Religious Reforms... removal of the High Places

1. Hezekiah's piety on clear display, especially in removing the high places for worship
2. Frequently the High Places were used for worshipping false gods

1 Kings 14:23 They also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree.

BUT just as frequently, the High Places were used for worshipping the true God, Yahweh, as well

3. Thus, they became a blind spot even for godly kings like Asa and Jehoshaphat

Asa: 1 Kings 15:14 Although he did not remove the high places, Asa's heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life.

Jehoshaphat: 1 Kings 22:43 In everything [Jehoshaphat] walked in the ways of his father Asa and did not stray from them; he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD. The high places, however, were not removed, and the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.

4. One of the steady drones of 1 & 2 Kings was

2 Kings 12:2-3 Joash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD... The high places, however, were not removed

2 Kings 14:3-4 [Amaziah] did what was right in the eyes of the LORD...The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.

2 Kings 15:3-4 [Uzziah] did what was right in the eyes of the LORD... The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.

2 Kings 15:34-35 [Jotham] did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, ... The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.

5. Finally, along comes the godly king Hezekiah

2 Kings 18:3-6 [Hezekiah] did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done. ⁴ 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 Nehushtan.) ⁵ 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. ⁶ He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses.

6. Hezekiah's faith also led him to break the faithless alliance his father, Ahaz, had made with Assyria

C. The Invasion

1. After dealing with Babylon, Sennacherib turned his attention to the small kingdoms of Palestine
2. He swept down the western coast of the Mediterranean Sea and crushed the King of Tyre and Sidon, leaving a small force to besiege the fortress of Tyre
3. Fear and panic was spreading through all the other unconquered nations that were next on Sennacherib's list
 - a. Ashdod, Ammon, Moab, and Edom all sent emissaries to Sennacherib with gifts, swearing allegiance to him
 - b. Sennacherib then invaded the land of the Philistines, and subjugated Ashkalon
 - c. Then he turned his attention to Ekron, where its pro-Assyrian king had been captured by his subjects and turned over to Hezekiah as a prisoner; south of Ekron, Sennacherib was confronted by a small allied army of Philistines, Egyptians, and Ethiopians... at Eltekah, about 20 miles west of Jerusalem, Sennacherib defeated the Egyptian army, proving true Isaiah's prophecies that Egypt would be no help at all

- d. So, then, after all these victories, all this carnage, there is only ONE REBEL LEADER who still defies the mighty Assyrian Emperor... and that is Hezekiah of Judah
- e. Sennacherib now directs all his might and vicious vengeance on him... and that's where our story begins

Isaiah 36:1 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them.

- 4. Sennacherib swept into Judah at last and began conquering its fortified cities, one after the other... in all, he destroyed 46 of Judah's towns or cities
- 5. He came into Judah just as Isaiah had prophesied he would

Isaiah 8:7-8 therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty floodwaters of the River--the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks ⁸ and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck.

- 6. Sennacherib, King of Assyria was in the process of besieging Lachish, one of the mightiest cities in Judah when Hezekiah sent him emissaries with all the gold and silver he could find in the kingdom, supposedly what the King of Assyria had demanded from him

2 Kings 18:14-16 Hezekiah king of Judah sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish: "I have done wrong. Withdraw from me, and I will pay whatever you demand of me." The king of Assyria exacted from Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. ¹⁵ So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace. ¹⁶ At this time Hezekiah king of Judah stripped off the gold with which he had covered the doors and doorposts of the temple of the LORD, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

- 7. At this point, the treachery of the Assyrian king became obvious... he accepted the gold and silver, but also sent his field commander with a large army to intimidate Hezekiah and his people with him in Jerusalem to surrender to him

Isaiah 36:2-3 Then the king of Assyria sent his field commander with a large army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. When the commander stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field, ³ Eliakim son of Hilkiyah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went out to him.

II. Psychological Warfare: The Field Commander's Intimidating Speech (vs. 4-17)

PROPAGANDA... The Goal: To Talk Hezekiah and Judah Out of Jerusalem

1. Siege warfare is extremely costly and time consuming
2. Even if you have an overwhelming advantage, it's still difficult to get an enemy from behind prepared fortress walls
3. You have to be patient, or be willing to lose a lot of men
4. Either way, it's always very expensive... and it would be better by far if this field commander could intimidate Hezekiah and the Jews into surrendering without a fight

B. The Central Question: On What Are You Basing this Confidence of Yours? (vs. 4) On Whom are you Relying?? (vs. 5)

Isaiah 36:4 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?"

1. The field commander acts incredulous!!!
2. Don't you know who we are? We're the undefeated and undefeatable Assyrian army! Where in the world did you get this confidence to rebel against my master??
3. Note the disrespect: the Field Commander calls him "Hezekiah", not "King Hezekiah"
4. Note the arrogance: "This is what the GREAT KING, the King of Assyria says"...
5. Almost like he's God or something... "Thus says the Lord"
6. The central question of this chapter:

Vs. 4 On what are you basing this confidence of yours?

7. The Field Commander spends the rest of his speech trying to figure out what Hezekiah and the Jews were trusting in, so he can knock their confidence out from under them
 - a. Perhaps some secret strategy or military strength (vs. 5)
 - b. Perhaps your alliance with Egypt (vs. 6)
 - c. Perhaps the Lord (vs. 7)
 - d. Whatever it is, the Field Commander wants them to grow weak and discouraged

C. Secret Military Strength or Strategy Cannot Save You!! (vs. 5)

Isaiah 36:5 You say you have strategy and military strength-- but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me?

1. Perhaps some secret military strength or some hidden strategy
2. BUT those are mere words... and MERE WORDS cannot withstand our military might!!

^{ESV} Isaiah 36:5 Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? In whom do you now trust, that you have rebelled against me?

3. Hezekiah may be a bold leader, very persuasive... but words can't stop the Assyrian army
4. Amazing how the Field Commander is seeking to use MERE WORDS to talk Judah into surrendering!!

D. Alliance with Egypt Cannot Save You!! (vs. 6)

Isaiah 36:6 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.

1. Amazingly, the Field Commander AGREES with what Isaiah has been saying about Egypt...

Isaiah 30:5 everyone will be put to shame because of a people useless to them, who bring neither help nor advantage, but only shame and disgrace.

Isaiah 30:7 Egypt, whose help is utterly useless. Therefore I call her Rahab the Do-Nothing.

2. Amazing image of a false faith... a SPLINTERED REED OF A STAFF WHICH PIERCES A MAN'S HAND IF HE LEANS ON IT
3. God says about Egypt:

Ezekiel 29:6-7 Then all who live in Egypt will know that I am the LORD. "You have been a staff of reed for the house of Israel. ⁷ When they grasped you with their hands, you splintered and you tore open their shoulders; when they leaned on you, you broke and their backs were wrenched.

4. In any case, the Field Commander is striking at whatever he can find to demoralize the people of Judah

E. The Lord Will Not Save You!! (vs. 7)

Isaiah 36:7 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"?

1. The Field Commander goes for the jugular... the ultimate hope was that the Lord would save them...this is PRECISELY what Hezekiah was banking on!
2. Twisting the truth!!! Perhaps stirring up division between Hezekiah & the people

F. The REAL ISSUE: You Are Pathetically Weak Compared to Us (vs. 8-9)

Isaiah 36:8-9 "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! ⁹ How then can you repulse one officer of the least of my master's officials, even though you are depending on Egypt for chariots and horsemen?

1. Simple mathematics... Assyria was stronger... Jesus acknowledged the appropriateness usually of this kind of calculation:

Luke 14:31-32 suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

G. God Told Us to Come... and He is Fighting for Us (vs. 10)

Isaiah 36:10 Furthermore, have I come to attack and destroy this land without the LORD? The LORD himself told me to march against this country and destroy it.

1. In one sense, this was absolutely true!! God was using Assyria to chasten His people

Isaiah 7:20 In that day the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the River--the king of Assyria-- to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to take off your beards also.

Isaiah 10:5-6 "Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! ⁶ I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets.

2. But as usual, when it came to the Lord, the Field Commander didn't really understand the truth of the situation

3. God had said quite plainly what would happen after the Assyrian reached “up to the neck”... in other words, when God was done using Assyria to chasten His people, He would punish Assyria

Isaiah 10:12 When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say, "I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes.

H. The Humble Request from the Envoys

Isaiah 36:11 Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah said to the field commander, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, since we understand it. Don't speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people on the wall."

I. The Field Commander's Coarse Reply

Isaiah 36:12 But the commander replied, "Was it only to your master and you that my master sent me to say these things, and not to the men sitting on the wall-- who, like you, will have to eat their own filth and drink their own urine?"

1. Dire, worse-case scenario... starvation leading to degradation!!
2. Consider what your life is going to be like during the siege

J. Cold Intimidation

Isaiah 36:13 Then the commander stood and called out in Hebrew, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria!"

K. Divide and Conquer

Isaiah 36:14-15 This is what the king says: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you! ¹⁵ Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the LORD when he says, 'The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'

1. DECEIVE!!! “Don’t trust Hezekiah!!!”
2. Seeking to divide them from faith in Hezekiah, and, even more importantly, faith in the Lord
3. This is a devastating attack, since Isaiah had already told Ahaz years ago, faith in the Lord is EVERYTHING

Isaiah 7:2 the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.

Isaiah 7:9 If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all

L. The Sweetener... a Wicked Lie!!!

Isaiah 36:16-17 "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, ¹⁷ 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.

1. The Field Commander is very diabolical here...
2. We will TREAT YOU VERY WELL!!!
3. Amazing!! The Assyrians were notorious for their viciousness

Nahum 3:1-3 Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims! ² The crack of whips, the clatter of wheels, galloping horses and jolting chariots! ³ Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears! Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses

III. Blasphemy: The Field Commander's Fatal Error (vs. 18-20)

Isaiah 36:18-20 "Do not let Hezekiah mislead 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? ¹⁹ Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? ²⁰ 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?"

A. The Field Commander Overreaches Himself

1. Evil always overreaches... goes farther than it should have
2. Here the Field Commander, filled with arrogance and nationalistic pride blasphemes the living God!
3. The Lord IS NOT ABLE TO SAVE YOU!!!
4. This is the fatal error that will be the key to the demise of the Assyrian Empire
5. The central error: thinking that the God of the Jews was like the god of any other nation
 - a. The gods of Hamath and Arpad could not deliver their land
 - b. Neither could the gods of Samaria
 - c. NO GOD HAS EVER DONE IT BEFORE...

d. So how can you possibly think that Yahweh will be able to defeat the Great King of Assyria

B. The Field Commander Looks at the Track Record... and Misinterprets the Data

1. General approach in a polytheistic world: national gods protecting their nations
2. Regional gods had specific abilities; battles won proved that this god was stronger than that god
3. If your "god" is so powerful, how come your nation is so small??

C. The Greatest Force in the Universe: God's Zeal for His Own Glory

UNLEASHED!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

D. The True Reason that Assyria Had So Much Success

Isaiah 37:26 "Have you not heard? Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone.

E. The Final Act

Isaiah 36:21-22 But the people remained silent and said nothing in reply, because the king had commanded, "Do not answer him." ²² Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went to Hezekiah, with their clothes torn, and told him what the field commander had said.

IV. Central Question in Life: On Whom Are You Depending?

A. The Greatest Bullies in History: Sin and Death

Romans 5:14 death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command

Romans 5:21 sin reigned in death

Sin is a vicious tyrant that has dominated us every step of the way in our lives. Death is the final outcome of sin. Throughout human history, death has stood over our prostrate bodies with its bloody hobnailed boot on our helpless necks, and we were powerless to resist. Death stood over us to mock everything we tried to accomplish... death mocked every human relationship, every expression of love, every human achievement

Death was the foe no one could vanquish... doctors could do as much research as they wanted, they could eradicate forever one scourge—perhaps smallpox or yellow fever or bubonic plague—but another assassin would track us down relentlessly and in the end,

would stand over our lifeless bodies and laugh hideously. And there was not a single thing we could do about it.

B. Sin and Death Besiege Your Soul and Threaten You With Eternal Loss

C. “In What Are You Now Trusting”?

1. You are faced with your own sinfulness and the death that comes from it
2. There is no escaping this foe...
3. Vs. 5 The key question: “In what are you now trusting...?”

D. False Faiths: “Splintered Reeds That Pierce”

Isaiah 36:6 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.

1. The central “splintered reed”: self-righteousness based on works
2. The “splintered reed” of cults and non-Christian religions
 - a. Muslims trusting in their good works... the “Five Pillars of Islam”
 - b. Hindus trusting in their good works to escape karma
 - c. Mormons trusting in their good works to become gods themselves
3. The “splintered reed” of atheism, scientific materialism... relying in the scientific fact that death ends all conscious existence

Atheist Keith Cornish: The simple fact is that all life-forms end in death and the elements of which they are composed return to the air and the earth to be taken up and recycled in some new organism. This natural process is universal and is beyond dispute

4. The “splintered reed” of nominal Christianity

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

E. Mocking the Defeated Foe by the Blood and Resurrection of Jesus

1. The true confidence is faith in the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus

2. He alone has conquered sin and death
3. By His victory, we are able to taunt death

1 Corinthians 15:54-57 then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

V. How Satan Attacks Our Minds

A. The Field Commander is a Type of Satan; Jerusalem is a Type of Our Souls

1. Methods: The intimidation, arrogance, mingling of truth with falsehood, crudity, threats, false promises
2. Goal: to get us to surrender to him, forgetting the power of God

B. John Bunyan: Mansoul

1. John Bunyan was a 17th century blue collar worker (tinker) who God called into the ministry
2. Astonishing gift of words, power of illustration; incredible preacher
3. Most famous work: allegory of the Christian life called *Pilgrim's Progress*
4. Another allegory, not so famous: *The Holy War: The Battle for Mansoul*

"Mansoul" is the town name, representing the human soul ... a walled fortress city of five gates: the Ear-gate, Eye-Gate, Mouth-Gate, Nose-Gate and Feel-Gate. The first and most strategic gate is the first gate breached: the Ear-Gate.

*Eargate: This was the gate of audience, and through this gate the words of the tempter must penetrate, if the temptation is to be successful. **Into the ears of our first mother did the wily serpent whisper the glozing words of his seductive wiles and through the Ear-gate, he assailed her heart and won it.** To give audience to the tempter is the next step to yielding up obedience to his will.*

C. The Devastating Power of Satan's Words

1. Satan is constantly whispering words in our minds, assaulting our souls
2. His words sound so true... they sometimes drip with honey, like the words of a Temptress; they are sometimes bitter with poison, like a poisonous dart in blow gun

3. Satan's words are alluring, like the Siren's Song alluring the seafarers toward the perilous rocks by which the ships are lost; in Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus wanted to hear the voices of the Sirens and had his fellow sailors block their ears with beeswax and had himself lashed to the mast so he could not sail closer; a vivid picture of the alluring power of words, especially sung
4. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*: the defeated wizard Saruman, locked up in his high tower by Treebeard and the raging Ents that have destroyed his kingdom, is now approached by Gandalf and the Fellowship of the Ring...
DANGER IS HIS WORDS

D. How Satan's Words Attack Our Resolve

1. Genesis 3's Taxonomy
 - a. Questioning God's word: "Did God really say?"
 - b. Outright Lies: "You will not surely die!"
 - c. Truth in Service to Error: "For God knows that when you eat it..."
2. Temptations to Sin: Promising Us the Delights of Sin Like the Field Commander

Isaiah 36:16-17 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, ¹⁷ 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.

"Sin will bring you comforts and pleasures, rich delights and enticements" Like the adulteress of Proverbs 7:

Proverbs 7:16-18 I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. ¹⁷ I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. ¹⁸ Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love!

3. Assaults on Holy Resolutions: Saying that His Power to Tempt is Greater Than Our Power to Resist
 - a. You can't resist
 - b. Sooner or later you will give in
 - c. Resistance is futile
4. Accusations of Sin: Causing Us to Focus More on Our Sins than on God's Provision in Christ

5. Assaults on Hope... Questioning the Promises, Love, or Power of God
6. Assaults on our Unity: Seeking to Sever Us from Confidence in Our Leaders or in Each Other
7. Assaults on our Doctrine: Teaching Blasphemous Lies About God's Limitations Based on Adverse Circumstances

E. Resist Him by the Word!!! In Every Case, These Lies Can Be Refuted!!

1 Peter 5:8-9 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith

Matthew 4:10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written..."