

"sick unto death," and the promise of deliverance in verse 6 implies the same thing. The Assyrian invasion was made in the fourteenth year of his reign, which lasted between fifteen and sixteen years longer. There was, therefore, over and above the natural love of life, a pressing reason why he should desire to be raised up again. It is in time of trouble and danger that a wise and pious ruler is most greatly needed, and Hezekiah no doubt shrank from leaving his kingdom and his people at such a time.

But, it may be said, the prophet had brought him a distant warning from God, that he should "die and not live." Ought he not to have accepted the intimation with submission, resigning himself humbly to the will of Jehovah? The answer is, that the Lord was not displeased. Just as, in late times, the Syro-Phœnician woman persisted in her request, in spite of the apparent rebuke she received from the Lord Jesus, because there was that within which encouraged her to hope; so did King Hezekiah put up without hesitation his earnest prayer for life, because the known promises of God, and the faithfulness of God, were on his side.

And so his prayer prevailed. Before Isaiah had left the precincts of the palace he was sent back with the answer. In the command to Isaiah there is a striking recognition both of Hezekiah's plea and of his circumstances: "Go tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people." No such word of commendation had been given to any king since Jehovah had spoken to David as "my servant" (2 Sam. 7. 6), and had testified to his "integrity of heart, and uprightness," etc. 1 Kings 9. 4. It was a distinct expression of the divine approval of Hezekiah's walk and rule. And it was also an intimation that it was God's good pleasure to restore him, since it was the "captain's" business to defend his people.

We learn, then, from this history,

1. *That life is a valuable thing.* It is God's good gift, and ought to be prized. It is ingratitude to esteem it lightly. It is sin to throw it away carelessly.

2. *That life is a talent to be used.* Hezekiah's was used for the glory of God and the good of his kingdom. Can we obtain a title as honorable as his—"captain of my people?" There is one more honorable: "Servant of all." Mark 10. 44.

3. *And yet this life is not the best thing.* Christians know of a better. To the Christian "it is not death to die," it is to be "with Christ." How thankful we should be that Christ has brought "life and immortality to light through the gospel." 2 Tim. 1. 10.

4. *That a promise pleaded by faith will always be honored.* A young and devoted servant of Christ was told that her earthly days were numbered. At first the tidings fell sadly on her ear; but she called to mind a promise—not the same as Hezekiah's; there is no promise of long life to a Christian—and yet the same, Psa. 91. 16: "With long life [or, rather, length of days] will I satisfy him."

She pleaded that and it was honored. Her heart was made fully satisfied with the length of her earthly days, and she gladly accepted the summons to the more immediate presence of her Saviour.

I have no space to speak of the "sign" of Hezekiah. It will no doubt be fully entered into in other "notes." Meanwhile it matters little how we may explain it, since the Almighty One who gave it is unlimited in his resources, and infinitely wonderful in his working.

But there is a sad and humbling sequel to Hezekiah's story. The man who had been thus wonderfully delivered and highly honored became lifted up, for a time, with pride, and had to be left alone to the power of temptation to try what was in his heart. It is not enough to "do justice and love mercy," but most needful "to walk humbly with God." Micah 6. 8.

Berean Methods.

Hints for the Teachers' Meeting and the Class.

Notice, first, the condition of Hezekiah, sickness, danger, his kingdom in peril, reforms incomplete, etc. . . . 2. The prayer of Hezekiah, its spirit, desire, and traits. . . . 3. The answer of God, immediate, abundant (more given than was asked for). . . . 4. The means of restoration, lump of figs; its importance. . . . 5. The sign, its character, purpose, explanation. Find similar signs given to Moses and Gideon. . . . 6. The visitors, why they came, political bearings of their visit, and the spirit of Hezekiah. . . . 7. The prediction and how it was fulfilled. . . . Illustrations of prayer answered may be called for from the class, both out of Scripture and out of experience. . . . Do not spend much time over the difficulties in this lesson, as to what was Hezekiah's disease, the sun-dial of Ahaz, the shadow going backward. Touch upon them, explain them as far as possible, but do not let them become subjects of profitless debate.

References. FREEMAN, Ver. 11: Sun-dial, 256. Ver. 13: Royal treasures, 337; Precious ointment, 712.

Lesson Word-Pictures.

What a hush there is in the chamber of the sick king! It seems to reach all through the house, softening the voices of the servants and stilling their steps as they glide about. The very wind seems to subdue its noisy rush to a sad moan through the branches of the palms in the court-yard of the palace. But who is that moving across the palace-court and mounting the stairway to the king's chamber? It is the prophet Isaiah, and he bears to the king that solemn "Thus saith the Lord: set thine house in order; for thou shalt die and not live." O sorrowful face now turned to the wall! "Not yet, not yet." Is the thought in the king's heart, and his soul in trouble reaches after God like the roots of the palm-trees in the court after the waters of the fountain bubbling there night and day. Hear the sobbing of the soul turned in anguish to the wall! God heard that cry also. Isaiah, stop! The prophet leaving the king's chamber has not yet reached "the middle court" when he hears God's whisper in his soul calling him back to the bed-side of the king. There, with Hezekiah, he gives the assurance of recovery; on the third day, Hezekiah shall go up unto the house of the Lord. The remedy for the sickness? A lump of figs. And the pledge of recovery? Perhaps the prophet, glancing out of the window, can see "the dial