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I had much for which to give thanks in my day, just as you do today, and your biblical record seems to appreciate my leadership as the thirteenth king of Judah. I was a well-loved king—maybe you’ve even heard of me: King Hezekiah. I became king at the age of 25 and ruled for 29 years. My reign occurred about 700 years before the birth of the one you call Jesus.

During my first month as the new king, I purified the temple and had it repaired, for it had gotten into quite a disarray.<sup>1</sup> The doors had been closed for a long period of time, and I reopened the doors and had them repaired. Inside I found quite a mess, for things had accumulated that didn’t really belong in the temple. We spent a few weeks cleaning out all the junk.

The practice of lighting the sacred flame and incense had even been discontinued. Can you imagine that?! Just imagine how you would feel if the doors to this beautiful sanctuary had been closed for a long period of time and no one came to light your sacred candles. I give thanks that I could

restore our place of worship and our holy traditions. Once the repairs were completed, we had a wonderful rededication with lots of music and celebration. I wish you could have experienced that day, for it was quite something.

In addition to restoring the temple, I destroy many of the high places people had been using for idol worship. In doing so, I emphasized the importance of worshiping at the temple, one common place for all our people. I even reinstated the practice of celebrating the Passover pilgrimage, and I invited all the scattered tribes of Israel to worship together at the temple during the Passover. I wanted to unify God’s people, and the temple seemed like the perfect place for us to gather and give thanks.

I give thanks to God for the many wonderful years that God guided me, and your pastor invited me here this morning to speak with you as you prepare for your annual day of Thanksgiving. I can see why he gives thanks for all of you and for this place, for you have a beautiful sanctuary in which to

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worship. And from what I've heard, everyone is welcome here, even those who have different backgrounds and different ways of viewing God. Your pastor said that he gives thanks that even though you don't all agree on every issue, you can worship here together as one family of God.

You have something for which you can give thanks, a common place where all may gather, which is what I was striving to emphasize in my day as well.

But as you heard in the reading from the prophet Isaiah who wrote about my reign, not all was easy during my time. There were even times I wondered if I could give thanks to God. As I watched King Sennacherib from Assyria attack and destroy our neighbors to the north, I began to worry that his invading armies would soon arrive in Jerusalem. I began planning for such an event by having our walls fortified, but even if we could avoid having a breach in the walls, we would die without our daily trips to get water from the wells around the city. I initiated the creation of a secret tunnel

through the city walls to one of the wells, so that water could flow into the city even during a blockade by the Assyrian armies. In addition, we plugged up many of the other wells so that invading armies could not find a source of water for themselves.

We were prepared, and then it happened. The King of Assyria sent a great army outside the walls of our city, and an emissary shouted to all my people:

Don't let the king lead to you to believe that he will be able to save you. Don't follow your king in trusting in the God of Israel. Forget about all those beautiful, but empty, promises that God will save you. Your God, as also the other gods of your neighboring cities, are useless. Rather, pledge allegiance to the king of Assyria. He promises you a life of peace and prosperity. Who would not want to eat from your own vine and fig tree and drink water from your own cistern? You could do so unhindered under our rule, until the day that we move you to another

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country, which is precisely like your own, where there also will be grain and wine, bread and vineyards.<sup>2</sup>

As the emissary ranted his lies, he ended by saying, “Don’t let Hezekiah mislead you by saying, *The Lord will save us*, for look at all the other nations we’ve conquered. Did their gods do any good?”

When I heard these words, I tore my clothing in sorrow and put on sackcloth as a sign of my sadness and distress. At this point I found it difficult to give thanks for all the preparations we had made. I prayed to God, “Thanks? After all the work we’ve done, we have to endure the insults of this wicked tongue? Thanks?”

Have you ever had a hard time giving thanks? As I’ve read about all the violence in your nation and around the world, I imagine it’s hard to always give thanks. I’ve seen in your news about raging wildfires and other natural disasters, and it’s hard to give thanks when such destruction occurs.

Maybe you’ve had a hard time giving thanks when faced with financial struggles or health problems or the loss of a job. Ever experienced a broken relationship? In those times it’s hard to give thanks.

Although many of you will gather with family this week and give thanks as you eat lots of food according to your Thanksgiving traditions, what about those who are alone? Those who are sad rather than joyful? Those who can’t afford a great feast? I imagine some may have a hard time giving thanks.

When the reality of our lives doesn’t match the plans we’ve made, it’s hard to give thanks. When all my plans could not prevent the mocking we heard from the Assyrians, and when we saw the army gathering around our city walls, giving thanks was the last thing on my mind.

I consulted the prophet Isaiah about what to do, for he often spoke words of wisdom from God, but all he could say to me was “Thus says the Lord, Do not be afraid because of the words you have heard

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[from the Assyrians].” I struggled to not be afraid, but Isaiah envisioned a time when all people would stream to God’s house for worship, when we would beat our swords into blades for plows and would turn our spears into tools to prune and trim the trees. Isaiah could see beyond our particular conflict to a time when nations would no longer lift up swords, when they would no longer plan for war.

I gave thanks for Isaiah’s hope and vision, and luckily the Assyrian army was not able to breach our walls. Something amazing happened, for one morning I looked out over the wall and all the Assyrian soldiers were dead or had left. I attributed this event to the angel of God, though some have suggested that a disease spread by field-mice affected the soldiers and many died.<sup>3</sup> Either way, I know God was involved, and for this, I gave thanks.

It’s hard to give thanks in difficult times, but even in the struggles you will encounter, God has not left you. It took me a long time to learn that God doesn’t send chaos into our lives, though some people in my day believed that God punished us for our sins. We began to realize that explanation is too simplistic of an answer, for bad things happen to everyone—even good people. I learned to trust the words of Isaiah—be not afraid. I’ve learned that God is always striving to bring the best in our lives, and for that I give thanks.

As you gather around your tables this week, whether in celebration or in struggles, be not afraid, for God is with all of you too, and for that, let’s all give thanks.

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<sup>1</sup> See 2 Chronicles 29

<sup>2</sup> Based upon Isaiah 36:14-20 from [www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3835](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3835)

<sup>3</sup> <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/cambridge/isaiah/37.htm>