

TEXT: 2 Kings 20:1

THEME: PUT YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER

**In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." (2 Kings 20:1)**

Dear Shirley, Nick, and Katie, family and friends of our dear departed brother, Jim:

Just about a year ago, Jim called me and said he needed to talk with me. We set the appointment, he came to my office, and calmly explained that he had been diagnosed with stage four cancer. He knew he was going to die. There was not a hint, not a trace, of self-pity, anger, or bitterness in his voice. He sat there and flashed that big smile that could light up a room and said, "We're going to fight it, but either way, I'm a winner! If I beat it, I can stay here and serve Jesus longer. If I don't beat it, I'll be with Jesus in heaven. No matter what, it is a win-win situation for me." Throughout this last year, through all the treatments and the sickness and the pain, even when he began to resemble me a bit more (baldness), Jim never lost that attitude, that spirit.

That's because Jim's house was in order. With the help of the Holy Spirit, let me explain what that means. Jim came to my office that day right after he had been at the funeral home, making all his final arrangements, and I mean all—even choosing the font for the engraving on his urn. He chose the hymns we are singing today, the Scripture lesson we just heard, as well as the text and theme of this, his funeral sermon. Jim chose all of this to give you comfort and to leave you with a message of encouragement. His encouragement to all of us is: PUT YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER. And Jim wanted to share that encouragement with you today because he loved you.

In a way, it seems as though Jim's whole life gave that encouragement. He had served our country in the Navy and was rightfully proud of that, in his always humble way. He had put his house of national service in order.

Jim worked hard at his job—sometimes too hard, putting in 14-15 hour days, getting home and spending a couple more hours on the computer finishing up the paperwork. His territory was the whole state of Michigan and he was a good salesman, in part because he could service and fix everything he sold. He could do that not only because he was naturally mechanically inclined but because he had worked his way up from the ground-floor in the business. Jim put and kept his work house in order.

Jim loved to eat and he would try anything once. In Shirley, the Lord gave Jim a wonderful wife who is also a fantastic cook. Jim especially loved desserts—desserts of all kinds—and candy, especially jelly beans. One time when that love of sweets began to show a little bit as he actually gained a few pounds, concerned Shirley tried to lighten up dessert a bit by serving Jim angel food cake, but Jim just added a thick layer of butter and called it pound cake. Of course, when Jim decided to take off the extra pounds, he did so with determined resolve and success, just he did when he stopped smoking cold-turkey. Jim put the house of his body in order.

Jim's family, Nick and Katie, were his pride and joy. He loved spending time with them, watching them grow, enjoy success, and mature into the fine young Christian man and woman they are today. His dog, Sadie, was a constant companion and comfort to him this last year. And of course, to every friend he made, he seemed like a brother. Jim had his family house in order.

Jim was faithful at worship, served on various church boards, was a communion assistant, and a willing volunteer for the Living Christmas Card. He was instrumental in getting the evening Good Friday service established so that people who could not get off work at noon could still worship on that holy day. He always expressed his gratitude for that added service. Jim had his church house in order.

But Jim wanted you to know today that none of the order in his life, that none of the things he planned and did so well, that none of what he did would mean a thing or would have any lasting value if it were not for Jesus, his Savior. Jim knew that because he was a sinner, he was going to die, just as all of us sinners are going to die, unless Jesus returns first. Jim did not want to stand in the courtroom of God with a notebook in his hand detailing all his good deeds in an orderly way. Jim knew that such a listing of good deeds would be useless to make up for all his sins—or for even one of his sins. Yet Jim was looking forward to standing in heaven's courtroom because the Judge is his Savior Jesus. The Judge himself lived a perfect life in Jim's place—and in our place. The Judge himself suffered and died the death that Jim deserved—and that we deserved. The Judge himself paid with his own blood the debt of Jim's sin—and the debt of our sin. The Judge himself rose from the dead to assure us that Jim will rise from the dead, not with a body ravaged by cancer, but with a glorified body designed to live for all eternity. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead assures all of us believers in Jesus as our Savior that we too will rise from the dead. Jesus promised Jim and he promises us: "**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die**" (John 11:25-26).

Jim wanted to remind you today that Jesus has put your relationship with God—your house with God—in order. You are right with God only because of Jesus. With this message from God's Word, "**Put your house in order, because you are going to die,**" Jim wanted to encourage each of you to put your house in order with Jesus; that is, to trust in him as your one and only Savior from sin, to remain faithful in your worship of him, to serve him faithfully with your earthly life, not because you have to, but because you want to in love and gratitude for all that Jesus has done for you.

Jim's final message of love to each of us here today is this: Put your spiritual house in order and keep your spiritual house in order by remaining close to Jesus your Savior through the faithful use of his Word and Sacraments. Amen.

—Pastor Richard D. Starr