

(2 Kings) Outcasts and Kings

by David Guzik

David Guzik's sermon explores the themes of faith, doubt, and God's miraculous provision through the story of the siege of Samaria and the lepers' discovery of deliverance.

Duration: 55:49

Scripture: 2 Kings 7:3

Topics: "Faith And Doubt", "Gods Providence"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of the four lepers in the Bible who were facing a severe famine. Despite their desperate situation, they decided to take action and not sit idly until they died. They discovered that the Syrian army had fled, leaving behind their provisions. The lepers shared this news with the gatekeepers, who relayed it to the king. The king, initially skeptical, eventually witnessed the fulfillment of the prophecy made by Elisha, where the entire situation turned around in just 24 hours. The sermon emphasizes the harmful conduct of unbelief and highlights the overarching truth that God can provide in ways we cannot comprehend.

Transcript

All right, tonight we begin in 2 Kings chapter 7, although it's a little unfair to begin right there at verse 1, because 2 Kings chapter 7 actually begins right in the middle of a story of the siege surrounding Samaria. The Syrian army had surrounded the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel, that's the city of Samaria, and they were starving them out, as was the custom in a siege back in those ancient times. And we're told at the end of 2 Kings chapter 6 that the siege became so bad that the Israelites were resorting to cannibalism in a vain attempt to try to keep themselves alive.

It showed just how desperate it was at this time in the city of Samaria, in the northern kingdom of Israel. And so, now at verse 1, Now, of course, you have no idea to know how those prices are, those high prices or those low prices. Well, let me tell you, those prices are a little bit more than usual.

Those are prices that are slightly higher than normal, but for a time of famine, they're absolutely rock-bottom low prices. You know, there was no food available anywhere in the city. They had been pushed to such extremity that they were eating their own children.

And so, for Elisha to make this kind of promise about food to be this plentiful in 24 hours in the city of Samaria was an absolutely astounding promise for him to make. And I want you to notice something. He

didn't say, I think, or it's my opinion, or I'm going to make this prediction.

He said, hear the word of the Lord. I think it's wonderful that the Lord had anything to say to the king of Israel at this point. Because just a few verses before, he was blaming God for the calamity.

He was blaming God and his prophets for all this calamity of the great famine that had come upon the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. And, of course, it wasn't God's problem at all. Yet God brought this merciful reply that in 24 hours there would be incredible food brought back into the city of Samaria.

And I want you to think about this. I mean, you have to say that this would be a remarkable promise to be fulfilled. Because even if the siege were to end immediately, let's say the Syrian army that was surrounding the city of Samaria decided, OK, we give up on the siege.

We're going to go. Well, if they were to leave, where would the food come from? I mean, you could understand things getting better in a week or two, or in a month or two. But in 24 hours, for the entire situation to turn around, how could it be? Matter of fact, it was such an incredible promise that in verse 2, So an officer, on whose hand the king leaned, answered the man of God and said, Look, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, could this thing be? And he said, that is, Elisha said back to him, In fact, you shall see it with your eyes, but you shall not eat of it.

Now, the king's officer doubted the prophecy. His doubt was based on what seemed to be logic. How could this logically come to pass? But I want you to see that actually his doubt was based on several faulty premises.

First of all, he doubted the power of God. Certainly, if God willed it, he certainly could make windows in heaven and drop down food from the sky for the hungry besieged city of Samaria. God could do that, right? I mean, I think of how Israel in the wilderness, he sent manna to them.

Couldn't God send manna to Samaria all over again? I think of how when they were in the wilderness, God sent a huge flock of quail to provide meat for the whole city. Couldn't God steer a big flock of, you know, turkeys or birds or something flying that's good to eat and send them right down? God could do that. If God wanted to, God could certainly open the windows of heaven.

Why was the king's officer doubting this? Secondly, he didn't just doubt the power of God. I would say he also doubted the creativity of God. In the mind of the king's officer, the only way that food could come to the city was from above because the city was surrounded by a hostile besieging army, right? You can't get food through the army on the ground.

Therefore, you have to drop it down from above with a window in heaven. That's the way that the king's officer thought. But you know what? He had no idea that God would bring the provision in a completely unexpected way.

I mean, he had it all planned out. Okay, well, you know, if God wants to open up windows in heaven, fine. But even if God were to do that, could it be enough? How often faith is just like that, or maybe I should say how often unbelief is just like this.

It says God can work in this way, but not in this way. We doubt the creativity of God. God can do it any way He pleases.

If He wants to open a window in heaven, He can. If He doesn't, well, He doesn't have to. So he doubted the power of God.

He doubted the creativity of God. I'll give you a third thing that he doubted. He doubted the messenger of God.

Now, I'll admit, this was a hard promise to believe, right? But who made the promise? This was Elisha. Elisha, who had been proven true time and time before. The king's officer should have said, I know this seems like an unbelievable promise.

It's a real stretch for me to accept it. Nevertheless, I know who is making the promise, and I'm going to trust it because of that. But he didn't.

All in all, I think that officer very well illustrates the conduct of unbelief. Unbelief dares to question the truthfulness of God's promise. God makes a promise, and unbelief says, I don't think so.

Unbelief says, I've never seen anything like it before. This is a new thing, and it can't be true. Unbelief says, It's a sudden thing.

It can't happen that quickly. Oh sure, maybe food can come, but not in 24 hours. It's a sudden thing.

It can't happen. Unbelief says, I don't see any way to accomplish this. Unbelief says, There's only one way that God can work this.

Or unbelief says, Even if God does something, it won't be enough. All of that is unbelief speaking. And in response to the officer's declaration of unbelief, what did Elisha say? He said, In fact, you shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it.

Now through Elisha, God pronounced a very harsh judgment upon the king's doubting officer. He was going to see the word fulfilled, but not benefit from its fulfillment. Isn't that the great tragedy of unbelief? You know, God can be doing good things all around you, and you can see it with your eyes, but if your heart is filled with unbelief, you may see it, but not enjoy it.

You can see it, but you won't taste of it. Now, what happens? How's God going to answer this amazing, amazing promise that Elisha made, or actually the Lord made through Elisha? Well, it's a wonderful story here. Look at it, starting at verse 3. Now there were four leperous men at the entrance of the gate, and they said to one another, Why are we sitting here until we die? You have to love that.

Okay, first of all, famine like this, when a city is besieged, there's no food, people are eating each other, it's that bad. That affects everybody. But you have to admit, it affects some people worse than others.

And if it affected anybody badly, it was the lepers. Now do you understand where the lepers would normally get their food? You couldn't work a job, you couldn't farm, you couldn't do anything. Lepers depended on basically the garbage dump for their food.

That was the only place they could get food. And might I say, in a time of famine like that, nobody is throwing anything away that can be eaten. Nothing.

Nothing that can possibly be eaten. And so they say, why are we sitting here until we die? Those men weren't welcome in the city. That's why they were at the gate.

Their leper's condition made them outcasts. It made them untouchables. And I don't want to give away the story, but I'll tell you right now, God's going to work through these four leperous men.

Isn't it wonderful to think how often in the scriptures God works through poor, afflicted, outcast men and women. If you were to take all the stories out of the Bible where God worked with somebody who was sorrowful, or somebody who was afflicted, or somebody who was sick, or somebody who was distressed in some way. You take all of that out of the Bible, and it's a pretty thin book, isn't it? No, God was going to work through these men.

And it came through this question that they asked themselves. Why are we sitting here until we die? Their logic was perfect. Listen, if they stayed at the city gate, not in the city, because they weren't allowed in, but if they stayed right there at the city gate, they would die of the famine.

Now, if food became available in the city, how long do you think it would take until those lepers got any of the scraps? It would take a long time. So they say, we stay here, we're dead. Now, if we go into the army camp of the Syrians, we're probably dead also.

But my chances are better if I surrender to the Syrians. They say, why do we sit here until we die? If we say we will enter the city, the famine is in the city, and we'll die there. And if we sit here, we die also.

Now, therefore, come, let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they keep us alive, we shall live, and if they kill us, we shall only die. And they arose at twilight to go to the camp of the Syrians, and when they had come to the outskirts of the Syrian camp, to their surprise, no one was there.

Now, first of all, again, you just have to love their logic. And I think that this is great logic for any unbeliever. Any unbeliever who's under the conviction of sin, they say, listen, I'm going to hell, what can I do? I'll go to Jesus.

Well, what if He rejects me? Well, what if He does? You're going to hell anyway. You know, why not just come to the Lord and put your trust in Him? Maybe He won't, well, okay, let's say He won't accept you. Well, you're no worse off than you were before, so you may as well go.

You may as well put your trust in Jesus, and you may as well try something. And that's what they did. And it says that they came to the outskirts of the Syrian camp, and to their surprise, no one was there.

Now, this huge army surrounded the city of Samaria for many months, and so it was set up like a city unto itself. It was the home and the supply center for thousands of men. And when the lepers came upon it that morning, they discovered an empty army camp.

It was like a ghost town. It was fully supplied, but empty of men. I think it's interesting what it says there.

It says that they came to the outskirts of the Syrian camp. Now, those words, they came to the outskirts of the Syrian camp, imply that they came not only to the edge of the camp, but that they came to the furthest most part of the Syrian camp. In other words, what they did was they didn't just go to the camp of the Syrians.

They went all the way around the back of the camp, and came from the entrance furthest away from the city of Samaria. They came implying that they were not coming from the city of Samaria. They figured that's our best chance.

And so they said, okay, well, we'll come, and here we are. We're walking from the other direction. And something happened.

What happened? Look at verses 6 and 7. For the Lord had caused the army of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots, and the noise of horses, the noise of a great army, so that they said to one another, look, the king of Israel has hired us against the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians to attack us. Therefore they arose and fled at twilight, and left the camp intact, their tents, their horses, and their donkeys, and they fled for their lives. Can you imagine what it was like to be a Syrian soldier in that camp? All of a sudden you hear, what's that in the distance? And it gets closer, and closer, and louder, and louder, and you hear what sounds like a huge army advancing towards you.

Say, get out of here! Now, it wasn't just the sound that they heard, but it was also the reaction in their mind, the reaction in their hearts, that they get out of here, we have to leave immediately. Don't take the time to pick up the camp. Don't take the time to break up the kitchen, or pack up the food, or do anything.

Just run! And that's what they did. I wonder how God did this miracle. You know, I think of these lepers shuffling their feet, walking towards the camp.

One commentator I read suggests that God amplified the sound of the little shuffling of the feet that the lepers made, because it was coming from that direction, it was coming from the outside direction, right? And maybe God just amplified the sound until the shuffling little feet of four lepers sounded like it was the roar of a mighty army. But then I think more about it. You know, did God put sound waves into the air that made it sound like the army was coming? Or did he just put the electrical impulses in their brain that made it sound in their heads like an army was coming? I don't know.

But God did it. He made it sound as if there was a great army coming and they said, go now. Now, they left the camp intact.

Everything was left behind, leaving the unlikely lepers as conquerors of the Syrian camp and spoilers of it. As a result, I want you to notice right now, the lepers walk into the camp, all the Syrians are gone. Hey, do you understand something about the siege of the city of Samaria? It's over.

The army measuring, the army guarding the siege walls, they're all gone. The siege for the city of Samaria is over. But not a single person in the city of Samaria knew it.

As far as they were concerned, they were still starving to death. As far as they were concerned, you couldn't go out of the city walls without immediately being killed. Everybody who went to bed that night in the city of Samaria felt that they were still in that horrible place of starving to death with no hope, no possibility, and they didn't know you'd been set free.

You were set free. Isn't that amazing, what God does with the work of Jesus Christ on the gospel. He has set people free from the law of sin and death.

They just don't know it yet. They don't know that if they were to go out and receive it by faith, it could be theirs. But now these four lepers, they're the only ones who know, they're the only ones who can enjoy it.

And so notice what happens here, starting at verse 8, it says, And when these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they went into one tent and ate and drank and carried from it silver and gold and clothing and went and hid them. And they also came back and entered another tent and carried some from there also

and went and hid it. Then they said to one another, we're not doing right.

This is a day of good news. And if we remain silent, if we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household.

You know, I can just picture this in my mind. They rush into a tent. It's full of food on the table.

You know, it was just where the general was there with all this food on the table. And they can't believe it. They look to one another.

They look around. Surely this is a trap. There must be Syrians.

There's nobody there. And then they go and they come upon the food and they grab it and they're just about ready to eat. Oh, what if it's poison? No, I'm going to try it.

And they eat it and it's so good. And they start eating so fast. They start getting stomach aches and then they start feeling guilty about everything.

And they think, no, we can't do this. We can't do this. We are not doing right.

We have to go tell people about this. Now, was it right for the lepers to enjoy the miracle that God had put right in front of them? Absolutely it was right. We would never tell those lepers, now don't you eat a thing until you've told everybody else.

No, no, no. Eat, eat, eat. Stuff yourself, but then go tell.

And that was exactly their attitude here. You see, they understood that for them to remain silent, for them to be silent and to selfishly enjoy their blessings would have been a sin. They had a responsibility to share the good news.

Now listen, boy, isn't this convicting for us? How many Christians? That's their attitude. Oh, I love the feast, Lord. Woo, you've provided.

The siege is broken. I'm free. And here's the feast right in front of me.

Oh, Lord, you've provided. Isn't it great? And they want to eat and eat and eat. But they never sense the Holy Spirit telling them, you can't keep eating this without telling somebody else.

When are you going to set somebody else free? When are you going to turn somebody else onto this banquet? So that's one lesson. Yes, we have a responsibility to tell others also. But nevertheless, I want you to notice something else.

They enjoyed the feast first before they told other people about it. And that's how it should be for us. Many Christians aren't enjoying the feast.

They're there. They're looking at the table. They're watching it.

They're not enjoying it. I don't know why. They're on a hunger strike before the feast that God puts right in front of them.

And then they say, oh, yeah, would you like to enjoy the feast too? Well, are you enjoying it? Oh, no, not me. But maybe you'd like to eat it. Well, no, enjoy it first yourself.

Feed on it. And then tell others about it. So what happened here? Check it out here, starting at verse 10, where we read, So they went and called to the gatekeepers of the city and told them, saying, We went to the Syrian camp and surprisingly no one was there.

Not a human sound. Only horses and donkeys tied and tents intact. Now, if you notice, that was their opening line.

They had to speak to the gatekeepers. By the way, I like that. Who else could they tell? The only people in the whole city they could talk to was the gatekeepers.

I bet the gatekeepers knew these four lepers. Oh, there's the four lepers that we won't allow into the city. Hey, stay away from here.

That's about all the gatekeepers ever said to the lepers. Get away. Oh, finally.

Oh, there's the four lepers. Where have you guys been? I know exactly how I would film this if I was making a movie of this. I would have the four lepers coming up, kind of sheepishly looking at the gatekeepers.

And then they would say, hey, we've got something to tell you. And then they go out and they tell the news to the gatekeepers. And the gatekeepers don't believe them until one of the lepers lets out a big burp.

A big belch. And just, oh, that satisfied burp of having eaten so much. And the gatekeepers look and, hey, those guys have just eaten something.

There must be food out there some way. So anyway, the gatekeepers had to relay the message. Look at it.

They're starting at verse 11. And the gatekeepers called out and they told it to the king's household inside. So the king arose in the night and said to his servants, let me now tell you what the Syrians have done to us.

They know that we're hungry, therefore they've gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying when they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive and get into the city. And one of his servants answered and said, please, let several men take five of the remaining horses which are left in the city. Look, they may become either like the multitude of Israel that are left in it, or indeed, I say, they may become like all the multitude of Israel left from those who are consumed.

So let us send them and see. Therefore, they took the two chariots with the horses and the king sent them in the direction of the Syrian army, saying, go and see. And they went out after them to the Jordan.

And indeed, all the road was full of the garments and weapons which the Syrians had thrown away in their haste. So the messengers returned and told the king. Oh, I like this.

You know, the lepers couldn't speak to the king, right? Never in a million years. So who could they speak to? The gatekeepers. You know, God doesn't expect you to witness to the people that you can't witness to.

Speak to the people that you can. There's somebody you can speak to. And so he spoke to who they could.

But that's how it is with good news. The gatekeepers told it to somebody else and they told it to somebody else. And eventually it got all the way to the king.

And the king said, well, we better find out and see. So they went out and they sent this expedition to see if it was true. And it was true.

So now, verse 16, then the people went out and plundered the tents of the Syrians. So a saya, a fine flower, was sold for a shekel and two sayas of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord. Well, isn't that just how the Lord works? Just exactly as Elisha the prophet had predicted.

But who could have ever thought that it would be fulfilled in this way? You see, when the good news that started with the report of the lepers was found to be true, there was no stopping the people. Could you imagine the king to say, all right, everybody, we've just discovered there's a massive amount of food just outside the city, but let's go there in a very orderly fashion. Nobody run it.

You couldn't stop them, right? They're beating down the walls. They're opening the gates. They're running out to satisfy their need because they knew how needy they were.

They were happy to receive God's provision to meet the need. And so they say, well, let's go out and get it met. And they run out.

And it all happened according to the word of the Lord. Now, I wonder what the king's official thought at all of this. You know, he thought that I couldn't see how this could have happened.

How could this be true? I don't believe it. But you know, you can't argue with somebody like those lepers who is actually known and handled and tasted the food. It's like that great testimony from the Gospel of John, right? The man who was born blind and then he had the testimony when Jesus healed him.

Once I was blind, but now I see. Once I was hungry, but now I'm filled. You can't argue against that.

Well, you see the argument that the Lord made against the city official. Verse 17. Now the king had appointed the officer on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate.

But the people trampled him in the gate and he died just as the man of God had said who spoke when the king came down to him. So what happened just as the man of God had spoken to the king saying to say as a barley for a shackle and a sale of fine flower for a shackle shall be sold tomorrow about this time in the gate of Samaria. Then that officer who had answered the man of God and said, Now look if the Lord would make windows in heaven, could such a thing be? And he had said, In fact, you shall see it with your eyes, but you shall not eat of it.

And so it happened to him for the people trampled him in the gate and he died. I wonder if the king did not give this officer this responsibility as a rebuke. You know, you doubted the prophet.

So now you have to supervise the people as they run out to get this. But I don't know if the king did it as a rebuke or just as a matter of course. But no matter why the king did it, the man went out there to supervise the people running out to the Syrian camp that was now empty.

And now the people trampled him and he never saw the provision that he doubted would come because of his unbelief. He saw other people enjoying God's blessings while he did not. And I think that has to be one of the huge, huge lessons from this chapter, right? I mean, this is a really beautiful chapter with many, many practical devotional type applications to our life.

We can think of the lepers and we can think, you know what? The boldness of faith. Just going out there and saying, hey, look, if I stay here, I'm going to die. If I do something, why not go for it? Why not try something bold for the Lord? Why not try something and see what God will do with it? And that was their attitude.

We can take a lesson from the king's officer and see the harmful, harmful conduct of the unbelief. We can see how it's possible that other people can be enjoying things right in front of us, but we don't enjoy it because of our own unbelief. And we can see in the overarching way, the way that God cares for his people and can provide even when there seems to be no other way for him to provide.

This is a glorious truth from the scriptures repeated many, many times that God has ways to provide that we know nothing about. Isn't it human nature that when we have a need, we immediately start thinking how God can meet the need for us. And then we start, you know, sort of putting God in a certain box, in a certain direction.

Lord, you have to meet this need for me. And I'm not just talking about material needs or financial needs. You may say, well, I have a need, you know, for this emotional thing.

Lord, I need a special friend and I know how that friend should be. And you start thinking all about in your mind how this must be, how God has to do it. And you know what? You better be totally open to the fact that God may do it in a completely unexpected way.

That God may meet that need that you have and want to meet it. But the problem is, is your way of planning things out for God has essentially made your heart unbelieving towards any other way that God might meet your need. You've said this, well Lord, if you want to open a window in heaven and do it that way, that's fine.

But that's the only way you can meet my need. Well, did you see that in this case with the Syrian camp? God didn't have to open a window in heaven. He did it in a completely unexpected way.

I think we all benefit tremendously when we just say to the Lord, okay, you're God. I'm not your God. And just let him handle it from there.

Alright, well now on to 2nd Kings chapter 8 verse 1. We sort of come to another instance, another miraculous occasion in the life of Elisha. Verse 1. Then Elisha spoke to the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying arise and go, you and your household, and stay wherever you can. For the Lord has called for a famine, and furthermore it will come upon the land for seven years.

Now, you remember this situation where Elisha had brought this widow's son or this woman's son back to life and she was beautifully restored or excuse me, she was restored of having her son come back to her, that the son was restored to life. And out of kindness to them, when Elisha knew that a famine was coming upon the land, he warned them. He said, go ahead, go a different way, find some other place to live, because it's going to come upon the land for seven years.

And so it tells us, so the woman arose and did according to the saying of the man of God, and she went with her household and dwelt in the land of the Philistines seven years. It came to pass at the end of the seven years that the woman returned from the land of the Philistines and she went to make an appeal to the king for her house and for her land. Now again, this woman's story was previously reported to us in 2 Kings chapter 4, where Elisha's previous dealings with this woman included restoring her son to life.

And so her and her husband were godly, generous people who had helped the prophet, but through Elisha's prayer, they were blessed with a son who was also brought back miraculously to life. And she went with her household at the warning, at the prompting of Elisha, and lived in the land of the Philistines seven years on the advice of the prophet, and therefore they were spared the worst of the famine. But upon leaving Israel and going back to the land of the Philistines, the woman forfeited her right to her ancestral lands.

And so she makes the appeal to the king coming back. And I like the woman's logic. I don't think that I should suffer for obeying the prophet of God.

And so I'm going to make an appeal to the king. If he doesn't answer, he doesn't answer, but at least I will make an appeal to the king to have these lands restored. And let me ask you, was this a king of Judah or a king of Israel? It was a king of Israel.

In fact, it was Joram, the son of Ahab. Now the son of Ahab, would you expect him to be a godly man, a sympathetic man, not one bit? We don't expect this man to answer favorably. Remember how Ahab liked to grab land from people, how he wanted to get the land of Nabal, and how he was willing to murder him for it, and all the rest of it? So you remember that whole occasion there? It doesn't look very optimistic for this woman to say, oh please, can I have my land, my house back? But look at what the Lord does.

Verse four. Then the king talked with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God. Stop right here.

Remember Gehazi? Where was the last place we saw Gehazi? Getting struck with leprosy because he went after Naaman, the Syrian, and asked for material things, and God had said, you know, no, to Elisha, and to Elisha's servants as well, no, don't take anything from Naaman the Syrian. And so God gave him some of the wealth of Naaman, but he also gave him Naaman's leprosy. Now we read this and we say, oh my gosh, is the king of Israel having a conference with Mr. Leper here, Gehazi? And there's two responses to that.

Number one, this may be out of chronological order. This may have happened before Gehazi was smitten with leprosy. Or there's another possibility.

It may be that Gehazi was leprous. And yet the king was so interested in what was going on with the prophet Elisha that he even had a leprous man come and tell him. Because it says here in verse four, then the king talked with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, tell me please all the great things Elisha has done.

He really wanted to know. Now, while the king is having this conversation with Gehazi, what happens? Now it happened as he was telling the king about how he had restored the dead to life that there was the woman whose son he had restored to life, appealing to the king for her house and for her land. What a coincidence, right? At the very time Gehazi is telling about this stupendous miracle about raising this woman's life, her son to life, excuse me, the doorbell rings, so to speak, and it's, oh, wouldn't you know, it's

the woman.

And she has a request to make to the king. And Gehazi said, my lord, oh king, this is the woman and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life. And when the king asked the woman, she told him.

So the king appointed a certain officer for her saying, restore all that was her and all the proceeds of the field from that day that she left from the land until now. Do you see this? Not only did she get her house back, not only did she get her fields back, but any income that those fields had made since the time she was back, it was restored to her. You have to say, in the one sense, is this a great miracle? Well, I don't think you compare this miracle to bringing her son back from the dead.

You can't compare the greatness of it. But nevertheless, isn't this a glorious miracle of God's timing? That's all what it was. It was just timing.

And you know, aren't those some of the most wonderful miracles that God does in our lives? Miracles of timing. It's not that the events in themselves are so remarkable or so amazing, but how God times them, how God arranges them, makes us just stand back in wonder and say, Lord, you have done a great miracle here. You did it at the exact time necessary, just as it was with this woman and her need.

Well, verse 7 brings us on to another subject where there's a new king who's going to reign in Syria, and it happens in a very interesting way here. Look here, verse 7. Then Elisha went to Damascus, and Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, was sick. And it was told him, saying, The man of God has come here.

And the king said to Hazael, Take a present in your hand, and go and meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover from this disease? So Hazael went to meet him and took a present with him of every good thing from Damascus. Forty camel loaves. That's a big present.

And he came and stood before him and said, Your son, Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, has sent me to you saying, Shall I recover from this disease? Well, apparently, at this time, I don't know if you could say there's warm relations between Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel, but at least there's some kind of relations between the king of Syria, Ben-Hadad, and the prophet of God, Elisha. He had such a respect for the prophet of God that he wanted to know if he would recover from this disease. And so he sends this servant of his, Hazael, down to present the gift and to make the question.

And they take the present in their hand, hoping for a favorable outcome. And there he comes and makes the request. And what do you think Elisha is going to say to this servant? We'll check it out here.

Verse 10. And Elisha said to him, Go, say to him, You shall certainly recover. However, the Lord has shown me that he will really die.

Then he set his countenance in a stare until he was ashamed. And the man of God wept. See what's happening there? First, Elisha tells him, Okay, Hazael, you go tell your king that he's going to recover.

However, Hazael, just between you and me, the Lord has shown me that he will really die. God gave Elisha insight into more than the health of the king of Syria. He also saw the inevitable and ultimately the God-ordained political of things that would happen after the death of the king.

You see, Elisha rightly said that the king would recover from his illness. And by the way, he did. However, he also saw that the same servant that he spoke with at the moment would engineer an assassination and

take the throne.

Now, the king certainly did recover from his illness, but he really did die soon and from the illness. And then I love what it says there in verse 11, where it says, Then he set his countenance in a stare until he was ashamed and the man of God wept. This was a dramatic personal confrontation between the prophet and this high official in the Syrian government.

Elisha stared at him so much because he had a prophetic knowledge of the future events and how this man would trouble Israel in the future. Look at what it says there in verse 12 and had to else said, Why is it that my Lord is weeping? And he answered, Because I know the evil that you will do to the Children of Israel. There's strongholds.

You will set on fire and their young men. You will kill with the sword and you will dash their Children and rip open their women with a child with child. So has a cell.

But what is your servant a dog that he should do this gross thing? And Elisha answered. The Lord has shown me that you will become king over Syria. What a dramatic confrontation.

There's Elijah staring at Hazael. His eyes fixed upon him and it seems that he was able to see into his soul in maybe a way that had the L himself couldn't even see. And then he began to wait.

He wept because God told Elisha more about the coming situation than Elisha wanted to know. He showed the prophet that this messenger of the king standing before him after he would take the throne from the present king of Syria that he would do evil to the Children of Israel. Isn't it interesting to think that at times Elisha's prophetic calling and gift was more of a burden than a blessing? He could certainly see what would happen to Israel through Hazael, but he was powerless to prevent it.

He couldn't say, and thus the Lord will curse you right now when you shall die. It wasn't anything like that. No, it was I know this is going to happen.

You see, his tears were in themselves signs of his understanding that a severe judgment would come upon Israel and they deserved it and that it should happen and that it would come through Syria itself. Now, what was the reaction of Hazael to hearing this? He said, well, but what is your servant, a dog that he should do this gross thing? I wonder what was going on in Hazael's heart. You know, I can just see him.

I know what it would be like if I'm picturing it in my mind here. When he's told that the king will die, the smallest of smiles breaks out on Hazael's face. Oh, that's my opportunity.

You see, perhaps Hazael had planned this assassination and simply acted ignorant at Elisha's announcement. Perhaps he had not yet planned it, and he didn't know the evil capabilities in his own heart. But God knew, and now the prophet knew.

Either way, his offense at this was inappropriate. He should not have taken offense at what Elisha said. He should not have doubted how much evil he was capable of in his own heart.

Instead, he should have taken this warning from the prophet as a warning to confront himself and to do right instead of turning an accusation back upon Elisha. He should have said, well, how could you ever say such a thing about me? He should have said, my goodness, is it possible that I am really that corrupt

in my own heart? You know, how we respond to rebuke, how we respond to correction, tells an enormous amount about us in our Christian life. I was talking about this with a pastor friend of mine that I was visiting not too long ago, and we talked about this phenomenon that often happens to people who are in ministry, that at some point, usually early in their ministry, they're confronted by somebody, and you know what? Maybe the confrontation is good, maybe it's bad.

Maybe it's something worthy, maybe it's something unworthy, but they're confronted by somebody about something that they should do and how they handle that confrontation will determine what happens in the rest of their ministry. If they'll receive it and they'll say, you know what? I think you're right, or maybe you're right, or I'll take it seriously. Maybe God has something to say to me from this.

You know, if they'll take it in the right way, then their ministry will go on and something will be blessed. But so often, and I shouldn't say so often, if it happens once or twice, it's often enough. But often enough, in the lives of these men or women who have this confrontation ministry, they hear the confrontation and they say, no, that can't be me, no, who are you to say such a thing? And they do nothing but take offense and feel rebuke and feel awful and turn it back upon the person who brought the confrontation.

And because they can't handle it correctly, there seems to be in some way a side tracking in their ministry. Even though this was very terrible for Hazael to hear, he shouldn't have turned it back upon Elijah. Instead, he should have said, is it possible that I am capable of such a thing in my own heart? Maybe the prophet's wrong, but I need to take a look.

I need to regard it seriously. And then he said, the Lord has shown me that you will become king over Syria. I think there's a fair question for us to ask here.

Should Elijah have told Hazael this? I mean, after all, perhaps by telling him this, he set in motion a self-fulfilling prophecy and actually inspired the assassination of the king of Syria. You know, maybe he should have not said this. Maybe I see it, but I can't say it.

But I think that there's many reasons for thinking that Elijah did exactly the right thing when he said this to Hazael. First of all, I want you to notice Elijah did not tell Hazael how the king would die. He did not reveal to him that it would be through assassination.

Secondly, Elijah did not tell Hazael how he would become the next king of Syria. He did not tell Hazael to assassinate the king. Third, Elijah went against his own compassionate and patriotic interest in telling Hazael this.

It's all the more likely that he did it from God's prompting because honestly, he did not want this man to be the next king over Syria. If anything, Elijah perhaps hoped that this amazing prophecy would touch Hazael's heart and turn him away from the evil that he might later commit against Israel. You see, as it turned out, as all these events unfolded, God knew the actions of Hazael, but he did not make Hazael do this.

He knew what would happen, but God did not make Hazael. He did not predestine Hazael to do this evil, even though he knew that he would. Well, look at how it turns out here in verses 14 and 15.

Then he departed from Elisha and came to his master who said to him, What did Elisha say to you? But he answered, He told me that you would surely recover. Now, was that true? Yes. Have you ever heard the saying, A half-truth is a whole lie.

Surely it was never more appropriate than here. Because it says here, verse 15, But it happened on the next day that he took a thick cloth and dipped it in water and spread it over his face that he died. And Hazael reigned in his place.

He told me that you certainly would recover. And he certainly did recover or would have recovered if not Hazael would have wickedly committed this murder. And so he died.

Hazael took an evil inference from Elisha's prophecy and he seized the throne. He should have taken the prophet's announcement as a warning to check his own heart. Instead, he acted on that evil and he was fully responsible for his own actions.

You know, let me sort of make a little parable or a little illustration of this. What if there's some young man in ministry and he's young and he's married and he's having a fine ministry and he's doing all of this and some other person comes up to him maybe a weird guy, let's make it a weird guy to make it all the better. Some weird man comes up to that young man in ministry and he says, I think that you're going to commit immorality and you need to be on guard against that.

I'm warning you right now. Now, what should that young man do? Should the young man immediately take offense? How could you ever say such a thing? Well, I'm walking in purity. And let's say that he is walking in purity.

He says, well, oh, I can't believe it. And instantly he writes off this weird man and he condemns him and rebukes him and can't wait to tell everybody else about what a wicked man this weird guy is and on and on and on. Don't you see that that's the wrong response altogether to make? Matter of fact, I wouldn't be surprised that if that young man were to react in some way, in such a way, that he might not find himself in immorality before too long.

Instead, what would be the proper response to such a word? The proper response would be, you know what, that seems really weird to me but maybe God is speaking something to me even through this weird man. And so I better take it to heart. Thank you, weird man, for your word.

I will take it to heart. Listen, you wish, I wish, that God would only bring us easy, light, wonderful words through wonderful people who have wonderful motives. But I have to say that sometimes God has spoken to me through weird people, through wicked people, through people who spoke against me for wicked, evil motives, and yet it was still the Lord speaking through them.

And so you can't write it off too quickly, folks. You really can't. This will be a measuring mark in our life, particularly, might I say, in our ministry.

How will we respond to a word of correction? And even if the person is wrong, you are still bound to respond to the word of correction rightly. Even if it's not true, you still need to pause, consider, not kill the messenger for the sake of the message, and say, Lord, do you have something to say to me through this? Well, when we come to verse 16 of 2 Kings chapter 8, we come into a whole new section here because actually what we're talking about now is we're talking about now going back to the kings of Judah. I want to remind you that we haven't dealt with the kings of Judah since 1 Kings chapter 22.

It's been that long since we've dealt with any of the kings of Judah. All the way since 1 Kings chapter 22, we've been talking about the northern kingdom of Israel and those kings and their dealings and the prophets that dealt with them, but now finally at 2 Kings chapter 8 verse 16, we're back talking about one

of the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah, and this man's name is Jehoram, and I'm sort of depressed that we have to talk about him because he was not one of the good kings of Judah. Look at it here, verse 16.

Now in the fifth year of Joram, the king's son of Ahab, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat, having been king of Judah, Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, began to reign as king of Judah. He was 32 years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem, and he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done. For the daughter of Ahab was his wife, and he did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Did you catch that? Who was this man's wife? The daughter of Ahab. How would you like to have Jezebel for your mother-in-law? Ahab for your father-in-law? This was a wicked family, and we have to say that even though Jehoshaphat was in large measure a good king, this was a bad thing that he did. He made a wicked alliance.

Now there may have been all sorts of good political or economic or social reasons for doing this, but spiritually, it was an absolute disaster for Jehoshaphat to marry his son Joram to the daughter of Ahab. But it continues on here in verse 19. Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah for the sake of his servant David, as he promised to give him a lamp to him and his sons forever.

In his days, Edom revolted against Judah's authority and made a king over themselves. So Joram went to Zareh and all his chariots with him. Then he rose by night and attacked the Edomites who had surrounded him, and the captains of the chariots and the troops fled to their tents.

Thus Edom has been in revolt against Judah's authority to this day, and Libna revolted at the same time. Now the wrecks of the acts of Joram and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Judah? So Joram rested with his father and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. Then Ahaziah, his son, reigned in his place.

Now he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, it says. That's a very bad thing to say about a king of Judah, isn't it? Look at it there at the beginning of verse 18. If you were going to say something insulting about the kings of Judah, you would say, you know what, you're just like the kings of Israel.

That was a very bad thing to say. But there was no wonder why he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He was married into the family of the kings of Israel.

His own wife was a princess from the kingdom of Israel. And so the daughter of Ahab was his wife. He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.

This was one of the bad kings over the southern kingdom of Judah. And again, perhaps some people thought that the marriage between these two royal families would do something good for the kingdom of Israel. Isn't that how people often think? We'll take someone of a better spiritual condition and we'll join them with someone of a lower spiritual condition and they'll bring the lower one up.

Now ask yourself, does it usually happen that way? No. How does it usually happen? The lower one brings the higher one down to their level. And that's exactly how it worked in this instance.

Now, it's true that God did not destroy Judah for the sake of his servant David. But at the same time, there was a loss of authority. Edom revolted against them.

Libna revolted against them. And so Jehoram rested with his fathers. By the way, did you notice something else here? It said that he only reigned for eight years.

Verse 17, that's not a very long reign. We do not see the blessing of God upon the reign of Joram. Now, verse 25, we're going to take a look at the successor of Joram, the reign of Ahaziah.

Verse 25, in the twelfth year of Joram, the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Ahaziah, the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, began to reign. Ahaziah was 22 years old when he became king and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri, king of Israel.

And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab and did evil in the sight of the Lord like the house of Ahab, for he was the son-in-law of the house of Ahab. Isn't that horrible? Well, how would you like to have for your grandparents Ahab and Jezebel, your mother, a princess in that royal house of the northern kingdom of Israel? And so he began to reign, but you can see again, his reign was not blessed because he was not a godly man. And if his father only reigned eight years, he only reigned one year.

Look at it now, verse 28. Now he went with Joram, the son of Ahab, to war against Hazael, king of Syria, at Ramoth-Gilead, and the Syrians wounded Joram. Then King Joram went back to Jezreel to recover from the wounds which the Syrians had inflicted on him at Ramah when he fought against Hazael, king of Syria, and Ahaziah, the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, went down to see Joram, the son of Ahab, in Jezreel because he was sick.

Well, that's where we have to leave it off for tonight. And next time we're together, we're going to pick it up at chapter 9, verse 1, continuing on with the story of these two different kings, with the king Ahaziah over Judah and Joram, the son of Ahab, over Israel. But I want you to notice something.

We close with two sort of depressing kings of Judah. Two kings of Judah who were not bad. And we remind ourselves that this was the story of the kings of Judah.

Some of them were good, and some of them were bad. When it came to the northern king of Israel, they were all bad. Nevertheless, we see here that the shining lights in this chapter are not the kings, not the king of Israel, not the two kings of Judah that we saw.

Who are the shining lights in this chapter? Well, first of all, it's a prophet who is fairly despised, number one. Number two, it's a widow that sees God's work happen in their life miraculously. And number three, might we say, these four lepers, who simply believed that God might do something.

Who knows? Maybe God will do something. And they stepped out in boldness because of that. I think if God would have us imitate anybody in these chapters, it's not to fashion ourselves after the kings of this world.

The kings in these two chapters come off pretty bad. I can't give you much of anything good to say about these kings. But I can tell you that you can emulate the prophet in his bold stand for truth.

You can emulate the widow for her boldness in asking the king for something. And more than anything, you can emulate those lepers for simply wanting to see what God would do. I pray that God would give us more of that kind of holy boldness to say, you know what? Maybe God can do something great.

I'll step out and see what he does. That's what we need to go forward in our Christian life. So let's pray and thank the Lord for these great examples and take warning from the bad examples here.

Let's pray together. Father, we do thank you for this. We do thank you that even, Lord, in a sense, when we see that the kings of this world let us down, Lord, we see these three kings that we've noticed tonight, each one of them lacking, each one of them failing in their own relationship with you, Lord.

Well, even so, you'll give us an example through four lepers, Lord. And we would actually much rather be like these four lepers than we would like to be like these three kings. Lord, it's better to be a leper and to be a person of faith and evangelizing and with an open heart towards others like these lepers were than it is, Lord, to be these closed, unbelieving, selfish, ungodly kings.

Lord, put our hearts and minds in the right perspective. Set us alongside these people as we should be, more like the lepers in these two chapters than the kings. We pray it, Lord, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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