

# The Inside Story

by Fred Tomlinson

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*This sermon delves into the story of Elisha purifying the waters of Jericho, highlighting the hidden issues and secrets people carry within, drawing parallels to individuals like Naaman, the rich young ruler, Judas, and Ananias and Sapphira who struggled with internal conflicts. It emphasizes the power of God's Word to bring transformation and deliverance, pointing to the gospel of Jesus Christ as the ultimate solution to the deep-seated issues of the human heart. The sermon concludes with an invitation to embrace God's Word and experience the miraculous exchange of a transformed life.*

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 2:19, Romans 7:24, Ezekiel 36:26, John 10:10, Romans 1:16, Joshua 6:26, Psalm 51:10, John 14:6, 2 Corinthians 5:17

**Topics:** "Transformation", "Inner Conflicts"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the story of Elisha purifying the waters of Jericho, highlighting the hidden issues and secrets people carry within, drawing parallels to individuals like Naaman, the rich young ruler, Judas, and Ananias and Sapphira who struggled with internal conflicts. It emphasizes the power of God's Word to bring transformation and deliverance, pointing to the gospel of Jesus Christ as the ultimate solution to the deep-seated issues of the human heart. The sermon concludes with an invitation to embrace God's Word and experience the miraculous exchange of a transformed life.

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## Transcript

So, if you're following me with your Bible, then maybe you turn with me to the second book of Kings in the Old Testament, and I'm going to read four verses here from the second chapter. So it's 2 Kings, chapter 2, and verse 19. When we find Elisha's name in this passage, I'm sure that most of you will know that Elisha was one of the great prophets of God that the Bible speaks about at some length, but we're just breaking into a moment in his life experience.

These were in verse 19. Then the men of the city said to Elisha, Behold now, the situation of this city is pleasant as my Lord sees, but the water is bad and the land is unfruitful. He said, Bring me a new jar and put salt in it.

So they brought it to him. He went out to the spring of the water and threw salt in it and said, Thus says the Lord, I have purified these waters. There shall not be from there death or unfruitfulness any longer.

So the waters have been purified to this day according to the word which Elisha had spoken. Amen. You know, many years ago I was motorcycling in Scotland and there's a particular scene that's very vivid in my memory.

It was well into the evening and it was dusk and riding down a road, which once again I can see even as I'm talking to you in my memory, and we were approaching a little town. And entering into the town, there was a large car park on the right hand side and lo and behold there was a mobile fish and chip van there and it was open. So before very long I was standing in a queue, as you would say in England, or a line as we would say here, with several other people waiting to be served fish and chips.

As I was standing there I got into conversation with a person next to me and I remember commenting on the fact that as we'd come into the town I noticed that most of the houses were painted in particularly bright colours. And I was just commenting on that to this person and they said, well of course you know why we would do that here, don't you? And I didn't of course. And this person said to me, well you see, with just where this town is situated next to these mountains, we get very little sunshine here and so this is our way of just brightening the town up.

In other words there was something going on there in that town that a casual visitor would have no idea about. And that really is what this passage of scripture is about that I've read to you. The town in question is the city of Jericho as a matter of fact and as Elisha has come there into this community, men of the city have let him in on a secret.

In other words there was something that wasn't immediately obvious to the visitor as in the case for me going into that town those years ago. The city of Jericho is known as the City of Palms. It was a green oasis in a virtual desert setting.

It was profuse and luscious. But there was a huge problem that was not immediately obvious to the people passing through the town. Beneath the surface there was something going on.

In fact the people in that community were living with a crippling secret. The Bible in other passages reminds us in a number of different stories of other situations, other people who were living with personal secrets. I'm thinking of a man called Naaman.

We could read about him not far from where I've just read to you already. But Naaman was the captain of the Syrian army. He was a great man we're told.

The verse of scripture speaking of him says that he was highly respected and also he was a valiant warrior. And then comes that three letter word, the conjunction but, B-U-T. He was a great man.

He was highly respected. He was a valiant warrior, but he was a leper. There was something else going on in his life.

But I'm thinking in the New Testament of the man we know as the rich young ruler. To all intents and purposes as he approached Jesus on this occasion, he was pursuing eternal life. That was his concern evidently as he approached Jesus and asked a question.

But in the course of the interaction between him and the Lord Jesus, it became very obvious that inwardly he worshipped another god. And then I'm thinking of Judas. Outwardly and to all intents and purposes, he was a faithful disciple of the Lord Jesus.

But he was a thief. Or what about Ananias and Sapphira, who we read about in the earliest days of the Christian church. Outwardly and to all intents and purposes, they were committed members of that new wonderful movement that was the work of God at that time.

But inwardly, they were hypocrites. Over the decades of my life, I've had many people who have confided in me of ways in which they are secretly chained inwardly. Chained to dark issues.

Issues that they were completely unable to resolve. Issues like fear. Fears that crippled them.

Or guilt. Guilt that stalked them relentlessly. Or addictions and immoral behaviors that they were not able to get free from.

In mentioning these particular items, I'm not for a minute underestimating that opportunist the devil and his legions are only too ready to take advantage of men and women and their situations for their own evil purposes. And yet as I speak to you today, I want to emphasize the fact that there is yet an even more sinister and powerful power that in a sense is and would have been directly related to the persons that I was thinking of when I listed out those fears and guilt and addictions and so on. The fact of the matter is there is, in a very real sense, that demonic influence and interference with men and women which insofar as men and women respond to the temptations and the influences, they create a doorway into their lives to become influenced and sometimes controlled by those dark powers.

And we don't want to in any way underestimate and trivialize what I'm about to say just because we're familiar with one or two of the words that I'm going to mention in a moment. Because what we're looking at today is a power that is incredibly influential and controlling in our lives. I'm thinking of a core factor that is in every man and every woman.

The Apostle Paul would refer to this frequently in his writings as the flesh. Often we speak of that which Paul is referring to as self, that self feature of our being, our identity, who we really are. I'm thinking how the scripture again in referring to the flesh and to our self lives will find that another word comes on the scene and to all intents and purposes I think we can group them all together and that is the word heart.

The word heart is used in several ways in the scriptures and I'm not trying to analyze that today but I'm thinking of this central core being that we are inwardly and the Bible says a lot in a variety of passages in the Bible about the human heart and its condition. It is in fact and could be seen, perhaps I should put it this way, as the very control center of our lives. It's the nerve center of who we are.

It's in another sense, it's the throne room within. Truth of the matter is that in that fall that is described in the early passages of the book of Genesis, that aspect of man's make up was defiled completely and became the very seat of sin in the human life. This is that self-worshipping me that we're talking about that demands gratification, that demands attention, that demands recognition.

This is that driving force within of human experience that in many ways is like a chameleon. It's able to adapt its color to its particular surroundings. On the one hand this self, this corrupted self can display itself as being devout and pious and on the other hand a moment later it can be involved in that which is utterly corrupt and evil and vile.

In this capacity of fallenness the human heart is completely and utterly incapable of truly knowing God and truly experiencing fellowship with God even though we may learn words about him and attempt to make responses to him but in our state of fallenness we are dead to God. This is how the Bible speaks of man's

condition. Inwardly in this fallen state man is as polluted as the water was in Jericho and this is man's real inward story.

But Jericho and in Jericho the issue was not merely that the water was tainted or unpleasant to the taste but it was also evidently the cause of crushing disappointment to the people. Another translation takes one of the phrases and the phrase I'm thinking of in particular is in verse 19 which says the water is bad and the land is unfruitful. Another translation which attempts to interpret this particular word, unfruitful, words it like this, the water is bad and causes miscarriages.

In other words the idea being put forward is as the result of the condition of the water women were miscarrying and the crops were miscarrying also. There was unfruitfulness as the product of this polluted water. That very idea being introduced at this stage in this little story suggests to us that the people who lived there in that city at that time were living with just a longing, an inward longing that this terrible cycle that they were exposed to would be broken in some particular way and this nightmare which it must have been for so many of them whether they were thinking if we're right to believe that it was causing physical miscarriages, the nightmare that that would bring into the lives of men and women or those, the business people, the people growing the food that would see it developing up to a point and then it just falls and miscarries and hope always that this time it's going to be different perhaps, this time perhaps it will work but it never is or it never was.

And I'm wondering as I'm saying these things whether there's something in this particular unfolding story that sounds ominously familiar to you. I'm wondering if maybe in your life, in your experience, there's a longing within, a longing to know inward purity, a longing to know inward peace, a longing for personal freedom, a longing to be truly Christian, a longing to really know God, a longing to be holy. This puts us in mind I think of the graphic words of the Apostle Paul when he wrote in the seventh chapter of Romans and he said this, he said, I delight in the law of God in my inner being, but I see in my members another law, waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

He goes on to say, O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death? You know, thinking back to the city of Jericho, there's an important and fascinating fact that we find in another section of scripture, as a matter of fact in Joshua chapter 26. I'm just going to read it to you from the English Standard Version. It goes like this, Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, Cursed before the Lord is the man who raises up and rebuilds this city Jericho.

At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up the gates of the city. In other words, there was a divinely imposed curse on Jerusalem. There's a whole story that surrounds that event and why that became the case that we won't consider this morning, but the fact is that this city that we're reading about here in 2 Kings is a city with the curse of God upon it, and the polluted water is not just a fact that it was a polluted stream or source or something or other, but in actual fact it was a product of the very act of God, the curse of God was upon it, and so on.

Elisha came on the scene. He was an agent, if you will, for the living God. And he came into the town, and as we saw from the reading, he was able to bring deliverance into that situation whereby that curse was broken.

The fact is, the curse was not broken because of Elisha. It was broken not because of his skill or his learned words. And although the bowl and the salt likely have their own particular significance which could

be explored in another setting, but the fact is that that which took place for that river and for that water was not the product of man's skill.

It wasn't even the product of these items, the bowl and the salt, which once again may have their own significance that's of great interest to us, but the fact is the miracle that took place was the direct product of the word of God. That's how it took place, and why it took place. We read here in the passage, this is what the Lord says.

I make this water pure, and it will not cause any more deaths or miscarriages. And that water has been pure ever since, just as Elisha said it would be. Did you see that? I make this water pure.

Elisha was the agent bringing the message and speaking the words that could be heard by those around him, but he was bringing the word of God into this situation. And it reminds me of other passages, but certainly not the least, what I read in Ezekiel chapter 36 when I hear the prophet speaking then and bringing the word of God, and it was this, I will give you a new heart. This is God speaking.

I will take away the old heart of stone. I will give you a heart of flesh. Do you see, when we're speaking of the word of God, we're thinking of what God is saying, God's word that is immutable and all powerful.

And this is the message that we find as we read on into the New Testament. When I hear Paul saying, as I've just quoted to you from Romans chapter 7, Who will deliver me from the body of this death? He continues with these words, I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. We're introduced now to another element as we move into the New Testament.

He will continue and go on to say, For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. We're reading about the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We're thinking about the work and power of God.

The gospel is the how of this miracle. Jesus Christ, in becoming incarnate, coming from heaven to live in this world as a man, He was 100% God. He remained 100% God.

And He became at the same time 100% man. And on the cross upon which He died and shed His blood, He cancelled my sin debt before God. He sealed my pardon.

He absorbed for me and on my behalf the very wrath of Almighty God. He died my death in order that I may live His life. This is the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

I'm applying it to myself and claiming it to be my experience. This is what God is able and wanting to do for you, my friend. Jesus brought sinful men and holy God together.

Jesus had said already, John 10 and verse 10, He said, I am come that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly. In the Christian gospel, God breaks the power of cancelled sin. He sets the prisoner free.

We're talking about this incredibly powerful inward tyrant called self which is polluted as the result of the fall, which is in need of help that only God can provide. And God has provided that help in the person of His Son. And through the Christian gospel, it is broadcast and made available to men and women such as you on this occasion.

In Jericho, it would appear to me that since the water was so stale, these people very likely never really knew what the taste was of fresh, clean water. But they longed for it, scarcely knowing what it was. Perhaps today you claim that you are a Christian.

And yes, it may very well be that you have never really fully and properly tasted that clear water of life that God has made available through the death of His Son and through the giving of the Holy Spirit that you might have this. You know, a hymn writer put it this way, All my life long I had panted for a draft of some cool stream that I hoped would quench the burning of the thirst I felt within. Can I ask you, does that sound familiar to you? The Apostle Paul, in speaking about the Christian gospel, he said in Romans chapter 1 verse 16, he said, It is, that is the gospel, it is the power of God providing deliverance to everyone who will believe.

The question is, will you believe? Will you believe that message today? Remember, once again, the promise in that Word of Elisha, I make this water pure. It will not cause any more deaths or miscarriages. We're focusing our attention here upon the living God who loves you, who knows the pain, who knows the longings and desires of your own heart, the desires to be free, the desires to be clean inwardly and to really know the richness of the indwelling life of God.

You know, the issue of breaking that cycle is beyond every one of us. There are no exceptions. This cycle, this tyrant power within is so strong we have no ability in and of ourselves to change ourselves at that level and make ourselves acceptable to God.

You know, just this past week, Sheila, my wife and I were driving, we've been visiting our daughter and her family who live in the Okanagan, as it's called here, live about, I don't know, 250 miles away from where we are. The journey is across the mountains to get there. But I remember a particular town, Kamloops is its name for anyone who knows it, but seeing this huge railway yard there, I don't know what its proper title would be, but it works, I think, but there to see just hundreds of freight cars lined up, standing, waiting, no doubt that they are there because they are en route to cross the Rocky Mountains and go to wherever in the eastern parts of the country, but they're standing there dormant and for them it is impossible, it is impossible for them to move from that location and climb over the high mountain passes and make their way on their journey in and of themselves.

It's impossible. The railway track is there. Some men actually gave their lives for the construction of those railway tracks.

They're all in place, they're there, and here are these freight cars, stationary. They're stationary and completely and utterly dependent on those huge locomotives to come and couple up to those cars. And then with that mighty power of those huge engines, it would be taken on that impossible journey.

You know, do you sense that God is speaking to you this morning? That which we're talking about and attempting to focus our attention on today is something that is so real to all of us, something that we've discovered from our own experience to be so impossible to change. And yet on the other hand, with the Scriptures open and the Spirit of God speaking to us, it is revealed to us that God is in a position now because of the redemptive work of Calvary and because of the giving of the Holy Spirit to men and women it is possible if we will allow our lives to be coupled together with Him that He can break the power of cancelled sin in our lives and completely and utterly transform us. We need to take hold on the Word of God when He speaks.

If we sense that God is speaking, even there, don't let's take it for granted. We're talking about God actually succeeding in prompting something deep within our hearts and giving light and quickening faith within our hearts that maybe this is the answer and indeed it is if we will respond to God and get hold of His Word and with a willingness to launch our lives upon a journey of complete and utter obedience to Him God will perform the miracle. I quoted a hymn just a moment ago let me give you another it's the chorus really of that song it goes like this, Hallelujah I have found Him whom my soul so long has craved Jesus satisfies my longings through His life I now am saved If you will take that step and embrace His Word this is not God dangling some proverbial apple or something in front of us tempting us to something that is impossible this is the Word of God my friend this is God speaking by His Spirit through His Word and speaking to you today He's touching on an area that you know about that's very real in your life where you know that you're not free in the way that you long to be free in the way that God intends you to be free speaking to you, it's His Word and I'm encouraging you to make that kind of response today by making that response God will change your inward story completely He will transform your story with an exchanged heart with the richness of His life and presence within you you know if you've taken that step or if you're willing to take that step right now, God will perform that miracle for you let me encourage you to do that I'm just going to pray and when I pray, I'm going to close but I encourage you insofar as you're responding to God in these moments tell somebody afterwards speak it out to seal that in your heart if you've got no one else to tell, contact me you'll find me at our fellowship website [mckenziefellowship.com](http://mckenziefellowship.com) speak it out, confess your faith and trust in God to do the impossible for you.

Father we look to you faithful God we cherish your Word we thank you Lord that you perform the things you promise and insofar as your Holy Spirit is touching hearts in these moments I pray Lord that they will get hold of that Word of God and build their lives upon it completely Lord and that they will know and enjoy and witness this miracle of the exchanged life we ask in Jesus name Amen

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