

God's fight against his enemies

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[0:00] Please turn to 1 Kings chapter 20. That's the passage we're going to be looking at together this morning.! It's the story of the king of Israel and the king of Aram. Aram is what we would nowadays call Syria.

A story of an ancient confrontation. And we've prayed that God would speak to us today through this ancient story.

I'm going to begin by asking a question. In this world, particularly the Western civilization, nowadays it says we're tolerant.

We are a world of tolerance. This is what is said. Civilized society is a tolerant society. Does that leave room for the existence of such a thing as enemies?

That's my question. In politics, would we say that we could have political enemies? Interesting thought.

[1:15] Would we say that internationally the use of the word enemy is a helpful and appropriate one? Or is this, if we even begin to think using the idea of enmity, enemy, is this just racism, intolerance, and really we should get rid of the whole idea of enmity?

Do you have enemies? That's the question that Inspector Morse asks when he comes and finds the corpse in Oxford. Do you ever watch Inspector Morse?

We've been to Oxford. We haven't seen a single corpse yet. And we've been really disappointed. And like *Midsummer Murders*, corpses all over the place.

And the question asked was, did your husband have any enemies? Well, do you think of yourself as having enemies?

Does Christianity allow the idea of enemies? We're told to love your enemy, aren't we? Jesus still uses the word enemy.

[2:26] We're told by the Apostle Paul, as far as it lies within you, be at peace with all people, with all men, with all people. So is that the end of it?

So Christians agree with what everybody else seems to be saying. No such thing as enemies. We tolerate. We're friends with everybody. That's what it's all about. Or would you say that it is a deeper truth that our cosmos consists of two opposing sides that can never make peace?

The kingdom of God versus the empire of the adversary, Satan. Well, that's the question.

And that thought is fundamental to our chapter, our text today. So rather than give you lots of context and things, we'll just more or less dive straight in and pick up the pieces afterwards.

So if you want to go to sleep, probably the best thing is to go to sleep in the first part and wake up in about half an hour's time. So let's more or less just do the story. It consists of two threats at the beginning.

[3:41] Ben-Hadad says, we're besieging you. We want this. And then he says, and then we want this. So the first is sort of a bribe. But the second is, we want to loot the whole place.

And then there are two battles. One of them in which there is a defeat of the Syrians, the Arameans, which takes place in the hills.

The second battle takes place on the level. Not this level, do you understand? But on a flat area.

And then there's this peculiar bit, which is actually the most important bit, about the prophet asking somebody to hit him on the head or hit him some way to strike him.

The first chap says, no, I won't. And then the second chap does, and he ends up being wounded.

And right at the end of these, lots of two things happening. We get one confrontation.

And I just got a little bit about the two attacks. Both of them contain a threat. In both of them, the word of the Lord intervenes as a very significant factor. Both of them produce victory.

[4:49] Both of them have an aftermath. One of them, the aftermath includes the Arameans telling us their theological take on why they failed.

And the second aftermath, Ahab shows mercy to Ben Hadad. So that's sort of what's happening in the chapter. So you get the general idea. Those are the things that we read.

That's what we're going to be going through. That's a sort of map of the whole thing. And it does have patterns of two. And two generally means confirmation.

So it's not just random. It's not just any old stuff. It just happened to be what happens next. But he's saying this is, you know, this. Confirm that. This. Confirm that. This. Confirm that.

So let's see what... Let's work our way through then. Now, chapter 20, verse 1. Now, Ben Hadad, king of Aram, mustered his entire army.

[5:47] So there he is. And he gathers his whole army with their horses and chariots and went up and besieged Samaria and attacked it. So did I say it is accompanied by 32 kings?

Lots of interesting numbers in here. I don't know why these particular numbers. But the writer seems to be fond of giving us numbers. So there's 32. Come on. 32 are the kings.

And he besieges Samaria. So there's Samaria. The siege is going on in Syria at the moment, aren't there? You know, this is ancient warfare to surround a city so they can't get any food.

This is what they were doing in those days. They besieged Samaria. Samaria is the capital of the northern kingdom. And just in case you don't know the story of this, when God had his headquarters on earth, he had a kingdom of a national geopolitical kingdom.

And at the center of it was Jerusalem. And everything was great. But then there was a fragmentation and it divided north and south. And this is the north half of the kingdom that God was interested in in those days.

[7:03] So it's besieged. And there's loads of people camping around it. And it's the headquarters of King Ahab, who is the king of the northern kingdom of God's particular kingdom that God is interested in.

And I shouldn't forget to insert into this the supplies of alcohol, which seem to play quite an important part in the story.

So there we are. We've set it all up. And it says that Ben-Hadad, who is the king of Aram, sent messengers into the city to Ahab, king of Israel, saying, this is the word of Ben-Hadad, Your silver and gold are mine, and the best of your wives and children are mine.

Your silver and gold are mine, and the best of your wives and sons are mine. I just think that sets up an interesting, rather comical dilemma for Ahab.

Of all my wives, which is the best one. Of all my children, which are the best, because they're the ones he's going to take. Seems a rather bizarre thing to say.

[8:17] But anyway, that's what he says. Ahab seemed to know what was meant. And he says, verse 4, The king of Israel says, Just as you say, my lord the king, I and all I have are yours. So he says, there's a siege.

Sieges are awful things. I've lost this one. And if what you're saying is I've got to pay, you know, a percentage, then so be it. You might say that that was a wise move, given how awful sieges are. But he says, yes, I'll accept this. He a little bit rashly says, I and all I have are yours. But I think what he's saying is, If you want me to pay a bribe, If you want me to pay a percentage for you to go away, You know, okay, I've lost this one.

Okay, I'll do that. Now, Ben-Hadad receives the message. And he says, verse 5, The messages came again. So this is the word of Ben-Hadad.

I sent to demand your silver and gold, your wives and your children. But actually, this time tomorrow, I am going to send my officials to search your palace and the houses of your officials. They will seize everything you value and carry it away.

[9:29] So I've changed my mind. It's not a percentage. I'm just going to take the whole lot. Everything you value. I'm going to clear your place out. I like sending the bailiffs in.

Just take everything. And King Ahab says, That was not what I was up for. That's different. This is total humiliation.

And he wisely, I think, shares this with the city leaders. The king of Israel summoned all the elders of the land and said to them, See how this man is looking for trouble.

I want to stop on the word trouble because it's actually a strong word. It's evil. Look at this evil that this man is pursuing. It's not just a bargain. I was up for that.

This is evil. This is terrible. When he was sent for my wives and my children, my silver and my gold, I did not refuse him. And the elders and all the people answered, Don't listen to him or agree to his demands.

[10:29] This is not what we thought. No, we're not up for this. So he replies to Ben-Hadad, Tell my lord the king, Your servant will do all your demand the first time, but this demand I cannot meet.

A bribe, yes, but total destruction, no. And then Ben-Hadad sends another messenger to Ahab, May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely.

This is a formula for a formal oath. It would be like a curse. You know, if you'll excuse the English language, he'd say, I'll be damned if I don't make you into dust by tomorrow.

That's what he's saying. May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely. If enough dust remains in Samaria to give each of my men a handful, I'm going to crush you into such dust.

You will be triviality. I mean, there won't be enough dust left over for all my people to have a handful. That's how much I'm going to crush you into nothing.

[11:48] Nothing. Not a nice man, is he? Do you agree? Not a nice man. And the king of Israel, the best he can answer is, tell him, one who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off.

And I wonder if he put a... You know on Facebook you have those little smiley faces and things? I wonder what sort of face he would have put. Is it a smiley face? That was a joke. Or is it...

I don't know. Do you have a sort of... Don't... You know, it's all right for you saying this when you haven't put your armor on yet. You say that when you're taking your armor off at the end of the day. Well, how on earth did he expect to make good on that? I don't know. But that's what he said.

And Ben-Hadad heard this message. And there he is in his... While he and the kings were drinking in their tents.

[12:51] So there's Ben-Hadad drinking. And he orders his men, okay, prepare to attack. So they prepared to attack the city.

So what was going to happen now? Well, we get one of those interventions that is very unusual. And it's...

The verse 13 says, meanwhile. But the commentators I read say that's not a good translation. It's more like saying, and then suddenly, this is what happened.

And the word of the Lord comes in. And it happens... So here's another number which doesn't get translated. One prophet. So interestingly, we've got 32 kings.

We've got thousands and thousands of soldiers all deployed in various places. But one prophet. And one prophet is enough to change the whole situation.

[13:54] One prophet. And he comes and he says, Thus says the Lord. This is what the Lord says. Do you see this vast army?

Look at this vast army. There's so many of them. Do you see this vast army?

I will give it into your hand today. Your hand is singular. Your hand, personally, Ahab, Then you will know that I am the Lord.

The you is plural. That you lot will all know that I am the Lord. So God is going to show something about what sort of person he is.

When I do this, you will see what sort of God I am. The sort of God who can face an army with one prophet and beat them.

[14:51] The sort of God who can take one army and have a few people and still beat that big army. That's the sort of God I am. The God who works miracles.

The God who steps in on behalf of his people. I will do this and you will know that I am the Lord. And Ahab says, Who's going to do this? Verse 14.

The prophet replied, This is what the Lord says. The young officers of the provincial commanders will do it. Perhaps a little bit of a grand translation. Sorry.

Who will do it? I'm getting this. No, I've got this the wrong way around. Who will start it? The young country leaders are the people who will start this.

Because it wasn't a big, sophisticated, advanced civilization. They'd probably get farmers and people like that involved.

[15:48] You know, the leader of the farmers union of Lewis.

Or the head of the fire brigade, the part time fire brigade in Rottingdean. Or something like that. Those guys will start it off.

Sorry, I've got that the wrong way around on the screen. So Ahab summoned the young officers of the provincial commanders, 232 men.

Then he assembled the rest of the Israelites, 7,000 in all. And they set out at noon. They set out at noon. While Ben-Hadad and the 32 kings allied with him were in their tents getting drunk.

I mean, there are amusing sides to this. They don't expect anybody to start a war until at least afternoon time. Of course, one hasn't had a glass of sherry so far.

[16:55] Or a little whiskey to get one going in the morning. But anyway, they start off the battle early.

Ben-Hadad had dispatched scouts who reported, men are advancing from Samaria. I'm not sure whether this is an entirely clear thought that he expresses.

If they've come out for peace, take them alive. Fair enough. If they've come out for war, take them alive. Well, don't you want us to fight them? I suppose, yeah. Fight them. But that's what he says.

Take them alive. Okay. The young armies of the provincial commanders marched out of the city with the army behind them. And each one struck down his opponent.

At that, the Arameans fled with the Israelites in pursuit. But Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, escaped on horseback with some of his horsemen. The king of Israel advanced and overpowered, struck down the horses and chariots and inflicted heavy losses and struck them down with a great slaughter.

[18:03] Struck down the Arameans with a great slaughter. So the Arameans go off, off they go, and they get struck down with a great slaughter. So striking down is a word that's repeated, actually.

So, oh, that's good. Quite a surprising outcome. But praise God for it. It came by the word of the Lord. The Lord is in this.

We should know that he is the Lord. Great. So let's look at the aftermath. Verse 22. Afterwards, the prophet came to the king of Israel and said, Strengthen your position.

See what must be done. Because next spring, when the year turns, the king of Aram will attack you again. So the prophet comes to the king and he says, Prepare for the turn of the year.

And it's interesting that in God's provision, he doesn't say, well, just pray about it. Because God works supernaturally. There's this sort of working together.

[19:07] He says, get your preparations done. And God will bless you in that. It's interesting that God likes to use us. He's made us to be his family, if you like.

And he likes to involve us in the things that he does. He just does. Prayer is part of that. But action is part of it too. So the prophet says, get yourselves ready.

It was one of the, was it Oliver Cromwell who said, Trust in God and keep your powder dry.

Something like that. It was English Civil War.

Let's not give you the details of all that. So here's the aftermath as it relates to the king of Israel.

The prophet comes and advises him and gives him some theology, which says, prepare.

Get yourself ready. Be wise in this. God will be with you in the future. But you must prepare. And meanwhile, there's some more theological education going on with the king of Aram.

[20:14] Verse 23. Meanwhile, the advisors of the king of Aram advised him. There he is. Oh, he's still drinking. And they advised him. Now they've got some theology as well.

They say, when we lost that battle, here's the truth of it. They had a God who was with them.

But he is a limited God. This is our theory. This is what we've thought about. I'm pretty sure this is right. He is a God of hills. So that was our mistake, you see.

He's strong in the hills. So next time we have this battle, we'll attack them in the plain, in the low country. Because their God, he won't manage it on the plain.

He's a God of the hills and not a God of the valleys. He's a very limited God. So I put Elohim. Sorry, that's Hebrew. It can be singular or plural. So their gods are gods of the hills.

[21:13] So we'll attack them on the plain. Let me just read it. Their gods are gods of the hills. That is why they were too strong for us. But if we fight them on the plain, surely we will be stronger than they.

And do this. Remove all the kings from their commands. Replace them with other officers. You must raise an army like the one you lost. Horse for horse. Chariot for chariot. So we can fight Israel on the plains.

Then we will, surely we will be stronger than they. And he agreed with them and acted accordingly. So replace the entire army. Because this is the theology.

God can deal with XYZ, where XYZ is hills. But he cannot deal with PQR, which is the plains. It's interesting.

That's Aramean theology. And I suspect that we are sometimes guilty of Aramean theology too.

[22:11] And we say, here's a particular problem. I've got a problem with whatever it is. God can deal with the sort of problem I had last year.

Because he did. That was different, you see. Maybe last year I had a problem with the mortgage. The Lord saved me and blessed me in that. But this year I've got a problem with my health. I can't see that God can do anything about that.

He's a God of XYZ, but not PQR. It's Aramean theology. Have you ever noticed yourself doing that? So God, you know, trust God for that bit. Trust God for that distant bit.

But the problem that I'm in at the moment, I really can't see how God can be any use at all in that. Well, if we're thinking that, we're being as bad theologians as the Arameans.

Because God is the God who can deal with everything. It isn't just specialised in this and is a bit useless at that. Even the hairs on our head are numbered.

[23:10] God deals with everything from top to bottom. Minutest detail. Wisest overview. Worth thinking about that, isn't it? Let's not make the same mistake that they made.

So let's go on. So what happens at the turn of the year? So at the turn of the year, Ben Hadad mustered, it's a technical word to gathering an army, he mustered the Arameans and went up to Apek to fight against Israel.

So there's Apek. Looks quite a bit like Samaria, but it's a different colour. That's Apek that I've drawn up there. And the Israelites were also mustered and given food and they marched out to meet them.

And the Israelites camped opposite them like two little flocks of goats compared with the Arameans who cover the countryside. So loads of them.

A little bit just reminds me of the orcs in Lord of the Rings. Loads of them. The CGI budget went through the roof doing all those orcs.

[24:17] But you get the point that Israel is just this tiny little vulnerable two flocks of goats and you've got this great horde of Arameans' enemy facing them.

So what's going to happen? Well, again, like the first time, the word of the Lord comes into this situation.

It really is a feature that God's word, spoken by his prophet, changes everything. We perhaps aren't as aware as we should be of the power of the word of God.

The dynamics of how that works these days, I would say, is a bit different. But the word of God is the same and it's still powerful.

It's sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces and analyzes us at a deep level. And the word of God is like a hammer that breaks rock in pieces and is like a fire.

[25:29] And it still is that. The man of God came up and told the king of Israel, this is what the Lord says. So this is what the Lord says. You heard the word of Ben-Hadad.

This is the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says. Because the Arameans think that the Lord is a God of the hills and not a God of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands.

Singular. Your hand. Singular. That you may know, you plural, will know that I am the Lord. Because they think I am only a God of the hills and not a God of the level places. I will give this vast army into your singular hand that you plural may know that I am the Lord. And it's interesting to see God's motivation, isn't it? Because he wants to assert his glory. To say, you people have too small an idea of who I am and I'm not having that. I want people to know that I am a great God, not a limited God.

[26:36] A great and glorious God. So we pray that, don't we? Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. May people see how glorious you are.

And I was at one point the moderator, I sort of caretaker pastor for a little church in Port Slade. And next door to that little church, they were building a Hindu temple.

And you can see the signposts if you go out to Port Slade, they're a little at a Hindu temple. And at that time, the survival of the little church seemed at risk. And it seemed to me, and the prayer I prayed, and I think other people prayed the same thing, Lord, don't let the people of Port Slade think that you are such a God that your church is nothing and disappears and fails while the Hindu gods have got their great temple and that they're the better gods.

Don't let that be thought. Do you see what I mean? And God doesn't always do so, but it is a strong thing to pray about. Lord, you've given us to understand.

You don't want people to have small views of who you are. Therefore, act. So that gets us to verse 28. So for seven days, they camped opposite each other, and on the seventh day, battle was joined.

[28:08] So those of you who know your Bible, what other battle involved seven days? The battle of Jericho. Yeah. The Israelites struck down, it's that struck down again, they struck down Aram a hundred thousand in one day.

The rest of them, oh, there's a striking down, the rest of them, oh, what happened? The rest of them fled to Apek. So off they go. And the wall collapsed on them.

That's the, oh dear, I've given it away. Where else did the wall collapse? Don't imagine you never saw that. Where else did the wall collapse? Jericho. So it's a Jericho-like event.

The wall fell down like Jericho. And Ben-Hadad flees to the city and hides in an inner room. So it's a little bit like going into the bunker. You know, there's probably an emergency bunker in there and he hides away, puts the bolts over and concrete and everything, just waits for them to all go away.

And he's got his, his officials with him. You know, Lieutenant General this and Commander that and Colonel so and so. And they're having their final conference.

[29:35] You know, what should we do? Should we take cyanide or what should we do? And his officials say to him, we have heard. There it is. So we've got victory for the Israelites really.

This is just the aftermath now. And the officials say to him, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful.

Now, I want to stop on that word merciful because that's not, you might get the wrong idea of that word. It is a word that those of you who've been along a few times will know that I make a point of. It's the word hesed. Hebrew word which means promised love. So it's the love when you're bonded to somebody and you don't let them down.

So a friend might show you hesed. And your husband or wife might show you hesed. They would stick with you through thick and thin because there's a promise between you.

[30:39] And God is a God of hesed. His steadfast love that's sometimes translated to God excels in hesed. And they've picked up on this and they say, we hear that the kings of the house of Israel are kings of hesed.

steadfast love. So let's go out to them. Oh, now what's happening here? They didn't realize it would be as slow as that.

So those are the advisors. And they say, let's go out to the king of Israel with sackcloth round our waists and ropes round our heads or perhaps ropes round our necks.

perhaps he will spare our life. So they open a few negotiations on this. You know, perhaps white hanky, hello.

Your servant Bedhadad says, please let me live. Please spare my life. And the king of Israel says, is he still alive? Does he still live?

[31:43] He is my brother. Ah, brother. You see, negotiations are taking place. You know, we know what they say about negotiations. Frank negotiations were held.

It means one of them said to the other, you stupid sons, oh, I cannot bet. So that's frank negotiation. This, here's my brother. I think, oh, right, right, right. You know, warm negotiations are being held. Friendly negotiations are being held. So Ahab says, he's my brother. Ben Hadad is my brother. And they take this as a good sign, verse 33.

They pick this up as a good sign. They pick up on his word. They go, ah, my lord, my lord, he called you brother. That's brilliant. Do you get that, brother? So, come on out.

So out they come. And, yes, your brother Hadad. Go and get him, the king says. And Hadad comes out. And Ahab says, I'm in a chariot, by the way, come up into my chariot.

[32:45] come and sit with me in this royal place, in this royal chariot. We're chums. And, while they're there, they say, Ben Hadad says, you know those cities that my father took from you?

Tell you what, you have those cities back. Yeah? And, as a bonus, I'll give you trading rights. So you can come and trade in Damascus.

So you could have your little Ahab, Ahab, Ahab software incorporated. They've got an office there. And Ahab banking, they've got an office there.

Ahab stock exchange. You know, this is going to be great. We get along together brilliantly. So it's a deal. And I think the deal is really involving money. And, even more theologically significant, Ahab says, we will make a covenant.

So the word treaty, covenant, same thing. It actually says, we will cut a covenant. Very powerful, serious covenant making. We'll, we'll be like that.

[34:04] Cutting a covenant, covenant. They call it that because what they used to do was take an animal, cut it in half, a big animal or a small animal, cut it in half, walk between the pieces, and they're each saying, if this covenant goes wrong, let me be like, like that animal.

No, really, it's like signing in blood. We'll cut a covenant together. On the basis of a covenant, he let him go. He said, all done.

You're free. Off you go. It's one of the things that Jesus says to Christians. He says, paid for your sins, given you my spirit, adopted you in my family.

Stop writhing around on the floor. Off you go. You're free. You're free. You're free. So he made a covenant with him.

He cut a covenant and sent him away. Go away free. Okay? So if you were asleep, now's the bit to wake up for.

[35:18] So is this the end of the story? And in fact, it is just the beginning of the story because now we find the meaning of it. So now, verse 35.

By the word of the Lord, one of the sons of the prophets said to his companion, strike me. Is that word to strike? Strike me? I don't know where the weapon came from because I looked in my interlinear Bible and I couldn't see weapon.

Has everybody got weapon in their translation? Yeah, I don't know why it says that. Perhaps I'm missing something. I thought it just said strike me and it says it twice because the man refused to strike him.

That bit is definitely there. So I think there's two prophets and it's by the word of the Lord. He says, strike me and he refuses to strike him.

And then the prophet says, okay, if that's what you, if that's your reaction, when you leave me a lion will kill you. There's the lion and it's going to kill you because you have not obeyed the Lord.

[36:31] So he will end up being killed by a lion. You're thinking, we'll come back to that. There was another prophet that was killed by a lion, wasn't there?

Do you remember this? Back several chapters, the time when the prophet was sent to denounce the king and he was told to be back home by tea time.

But he lingered and he got killed by a lion. So it seems to be a standard punishment for prophets who don't do what they're talking about. So let's move.

So that was number one. Prophet stuff number two. The prophet found another man and said, strike me please. So the man struck him and wounded him. He did strike him down and he wounded or bruised him.

So the striking does take place. And the prophet went and stood by the road waiting for the king. He disguised himself with his headband down over his eyes.

[37:37] So I'm not quite clear whether this is that he's wounded so this is sort of a bandage or whether it's simply a disguise. I didn't quite understand that bit. But anyway, he's waiting for the king. There he is sort of disguised or bandaged or whatever.

And as the king passed by, verse 39, as the king passed by, the prophet called out to him. Okay, this is the prophet's story. He says, your servant went into the thick of the battle.

Somebody came to me with a captive and said, guard this man. If he is missing, it will be your life for his life or you must pay with the talent of silver which is a huge amount of money.

While your servant was busy here and there, or was very busy or doing stuff or doing this there or doing this there, oh, he's disappeared. Who would have thought it? When I was busy, he disappeared.

And King Ahab says, well you see, it started off with just being a conversation and now it goes into sort of denunciation mode. So the king says, you've, that's your sentence, that's your mishpat, that's your verdict, that's your law.

[38:56] You pronounced it yourself. And the word, there's another word for sort of stirred it up. You stirred this up yourself. And then the prophet, so it's a little bit like Nathan with David, isn't it?

He gets him involved with the story and then he turns the tables on him. He says, well actually, ta-da, take off my headband, look who I am.

I'm one of the, the prophet, I recognize you, says the king of Israel. There he is. And I'm now pointing the finger at you, says the prophet. Forfeit. This is what the Lord says.

You have set free a man I determined should die. And just as in my story it was life for life, so it will be with you.

Life for life. You didn't do what you were supposed to do, therefore your life is forfeit. And in fact, it's not just life for life, it's people for people.

[40:02] Ahab went home.

And he went home, do you see it? Sullen and angry. Bottom lip, like that. Sullen and angry. Sullen and angry.

Had a good day, dear? Sullen and angry. The king went to his palace, raging.

Anything that matter? So, we ask ourselves, why is he so angry? Why is he so angry?

He's been told off by God for doing something wrong. But don't you think he would be wise to heed the rebuke? I think it would be wise to say, instead of going, I don't like being told off, I don't like being told what to do by God, to say, I got it wrong.

[41:24] And do you not think that he should have picked up on the bit that the prophet said, I was told to hang on to that prisoner, otherwise I will have to pay with a talent of silver.

He never picks up on that bit at all, does he? Because I think, no, I'll start that sentence again.

Because God speaks in warning like this to encourage people to come back to him in repentance.

That's why he does it. You got that wrong. I did, didn't I? I did get that wrong. What can we do?

Is there any way that can be made up for? Is there any redemption? redemption. God is a God of redemption. God says to people who have got it completely wrong, don't go away sullen and angry. Come, let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Don't go away sullen and angry. Let's talk about this. Could there be a ransom for such a deep mistake?

[42:45] Is there, you know, I don't have, I don't think I have a talent of silver. It's a huge amount. But is there any ransom anywhere to be found? Peter says of Christians, you've been ransomed with a huge, huge amount of, not even silver and gold.

That would be too little. But with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without spot or blemish. So if you were thinking, I'm just going to go away from church this morning sullen and angry because it just told me off.

I said, hold on. God's saying, well, there's big things at stake, but there's a big redemption in Christ. Big things can be put right, you know.

Now then, you were thinking, this is a very strange story. And all sorts of questions arose. Let me try and guess some of them. Number one, you might not have thought this, but it is a good question.

Why does God even bother taking all this trouble with Ahab? We're told later, he's a really wicked man. Why does God bother giving him all these chances? He's so evil.

[43:54] Why does God say to him, I'll give this vast army into your hand that you may know that I am the Lord. And I'll give this vast army into your hand that you may know that I am the Lord. Why does God even bother doing that?

And I think the answer is because God is just so unbelievably patient and persistent. So you and I, if we'd been in charge of this, this chapter wouldn't have been here because we would have said, Ahab, don't tell me about Ahab.

He's finished. Let's get on to the next chapter. But God says, no, I'm going to give actually three chapters to Ahab. He is remarkably wicked. He is totally perverse.

But I still want to talk to him. I think that's amazing, don't you? It is what the Bible calls grace. Undeserved favor.

Sheer grace. And aren't we glad of it? I think we should be glad of it. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but that everyone would come to repentance. Remarkable, isn't it?

[44:53] God deals with everyone in that patient way, wanting them to come to repentance. And wasn't it odd of the prophet to ask to be struck?

No, I mean, just try it, you know. At prayer time, go up to somebody, you know, and say, I'd like to share something with you. Oh yeah, what would you like to share? Whack me around the face, would you?

And wasn't it tough on the peace-loving prophet who said, I could possibly whack you around the face. And he said, well, in that case, you'll be killed by a lion. It seems disproportionate, doesn't it? But, it was the word of the Lord. Now, I think we have to say that there are some things in the Bible which are not there for us to imitate, but they're there to make a point.

And the point is that if the word of God is going to be spoken, it ought to be obeyed by those who speak it. So, this is one of the prophet's companions. He says, this is the word of the Lord.

[45:59] I want you to do it. The prophet has to do it. Even if it seems strange, even if it seems uncongenial. And there's a very fundamental thing there for everybody who would say the word of God that we who say the word of God must be obeying it.

Jesus said, why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do the things that I say? Very, a serious point. And then you were thinking, why, what was the matter with Ahab being merciful? That's what you were thinking that weren't you?

You were thinking it's very strange. Because he was just being merciful. There'd been a battle and he was letting somebody off. It's always nice to do things like that. Love your enemies. Yeah. But I want to point out to you a word that I didn't, that only comes right at the very end where it says, you set free a man, this is verse 42, I had determined should die.

And if you might have a little note in your margin which says, the Hebrew term refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the Lord often by totally destroying them.

[47:18] It's a very important word. It's herem. It's a word that was used at the battle of Jericho. This city is herem. It is totally belonging to the Lord.

It's the Lord's. You do, you take it for him, you give it to him and you don't lay a finger on it. Do you see what I mean? You don't, it's not yours. You don't take any of it. It's herem.

It belongs to the Lord. And outside the context of warfare it means belonging exclusively to the Lord. So, I think the priests are probably herem.

They belong to the Lord. In the context of warfare it means something belonging exclusively to the Lord for his holy judgment. Like Jericho.

Remember the treasure that Achan took? Do you remember this story that there was Jericho and it was herem and Achan was one of the people and he said oh there's a really really nice vintage Babylonian fantastic what that would be on flog it you know goodness knows.

[48:29] What's what's the problem? I'll just take that. And it caused untold disaster because it was herem it belonged to the Lord. the Lord's property not ours and Ben Hadad was that.

He was herem. He was part of this ultimate battle between God and Satan and that's the side that Ben Hadad was on and you don't make brotherhood with Satan you don't make a treaty you're in a holy war and you stay on your side and you don't make peace with the other side which side would we say we were on in this holy war?

Are you conscious of being in a holy war? The New Testament on a number of occasions uses the metaphor of warfare and says we must fight and not give in fight the good fight of faith it's not fighting people but it is fighting against Satan which enemy can we never make peace with?

Which side can we never agree with? See there is such a thing isn't there? There will be enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of Satan and you say well come on you're making it far too dramatic because really the whole world is about oneness and peace and just togetherness and I say if that's what the world is really like why did Jesus die on the cross then?

Well what's the point of that if it's all oneness and togetherness why did he sort of engage with the enemy why was there such evil poured onto him why did he have to suffer so terribly if it's all just oneness he was determined to die he was here devoted to the Lord the evil enemy was devoted to holy destruction and it all went wrong because Ahab wasn't up for that if there's money in it we make friends and because he did not because Ben Hadad was not subject to holy destruction life for life people for people this will affect your people if he had been killed your people would be safe but you didn't kill him and your people are now at risk there was another man who was devoted to holy destruction and he was not spared nobody said oh that's no no just make just we'll just negotiate our way out of this he was not spared it's

[51:31] Jesus who did die in this battle if you like and his people were spared because he died his people did go free and one day the whole cosmos will rejoice that the lamb triumphed in the holy war for his people by dying as if he were the greatest worst most abominable sinner there ever was that's how he died and that's how he set us free the lamb of god the lion of the tribe of judah has triumphed let's sing together hundred and nine hundred and sixty seven you