

An Amazing Deliverance and Unlikely Messengers

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 June 2020

Preacher: Jim Patterson

[0 : 00] Kings chapter 6. This passage takes us to a period of 800 years before Jesus was born, a world very different from our own world today.

It's a time when the kingdom of Israel was at more or less constant war with the land of Syria to the north.

Some time earlier, Elisha, the prophet, had healed Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army of his leprosy.

There had been a short period of peace after that. Then the king of Syria had again started invading northern Israel, and Elisha had kept thwarting his plans by telling the king of Israel where he was coming.

So the king of Israel always managed to avoid him. He grew fed up with this. He wondered who was telling tales on him, who was the spy.

[1 : 10] When he learned it was Elisha, he tried to capture Elisha. But Elisha, of course, knew he was coming. And Elisha captured his whole army and fed them and sent them home in peace.

Again, there was a time of peace. But it didn't last for very long. Soon the wars started again. And we're going to read now of the latest, as it were, from 2 Kings chapter 6, reading from verse 24.

Let's hear God's word together. Now, as the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried out to him, saying, Help my lord, O king.

And he said, If the lord will not help you, how shall I help you? From the threshing floor or from the wine press? And the king asked her, What is your trouble?

He answered, This woman said to me, Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow. So he boiled my son and ate him.

[2 : 49] And on the next day I said to her, Give your son, that we may eat him. But she has hidden her son. When the king heard these words of the woman, he tore his clothes.

Now he was passing by on the wall, and the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth beneath on his body. And he said, May God do to me, and more also, if the head of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, remains on his shoulders today.

Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. Now the king had dispatched a man from his presence, but before the messenger arrived, Elisha said to the elders, Do you see how this murderer has sent to take off my head?

Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door, and hold the door fast against him. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him? And while he was still speaking with them, the messenger came down to him, and said, This trouble is from the Lord.

Why should I wait for the Lord any longer? Amen. May God bless to us that reading from his word. The city of Samaria was besieged by the Syrian army, and things were desperate in the city.

[4 : 17] Famine was severe, and profiteers were functioning in the city. A donkey's head being sold for 80 shekels of silver.

Now, a donkey's head was unclean food, and it just shows how desperate the people were. And 80 shekels of silver were nearly seven years' wages, because a shekel was a month's wages.

So there was profiteering, and desperate people were spending all their money to buy unclean food. And then there was cannibalism.

The tragic story of the two ladies that we read. Two ladies who called out to the king, and they said to him, Help us, my lord the king.

Help me, my lord the king, the first lady said. And she explained her problem. She said, We ate my child. And we had agreed that after we'd eaten mine, the other lady would give us hers, and we would eat hers.

[5 : 31] I kept my part of the bargain, but she hasn't kept hers. She's hidden it. What a terrible story. What a tragic story.

And we see here, divine judgment on the nation. Back in the time of Moses, back in Deuteronomy, God warned the people of Israel that if they disobeyed him and turned away from him, followed idols, he would judge them.

And he said this, Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, the Lord will bring a nation against you from afar.

And they will besiege your towns, and you shall eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters. And here we see that happening.

You see, they were eating their children in their desperation. Let's think about the king. We read he met the two ladies when he was walking the wall, probably keeping an idea on their defenses and looking out at the Syrian army camped around the city.

[6 : 45] Now, the king isn't named in our passage, but he was almost certainly Jehoram, the son of Ahab. King Ahab, his father, was a very, very wicked king.

We're told that he did more to provoke the Lord to anger than all the kings of Israel before him. And Jehoram was not much better than his father.

He had carried out a slight reform when he came to the throne. But it was only a token reform, really. The nation still worship idols.

And his mother, the queen mother, she was still living in the temple, Jezebel. We've all heard, I'm sure, of Jezebel, the evil queen.

She was still there, still encouraging her son along evil ways. That day, on the city wall, faced by the two women with their tragic story, he tore his robe, which was a sign of just despair, almost grieving.

[7 : 59] And underneath, he was wearing sackcloth. Itchy and unpleasant. Worn to help in repentance.

Worn to show humility. Worn to show distress and sin. And to humble oneself before God. You see, it seemed that Jehoram was giving a nod, at the very least, towards God.

Over the years, he had had several encounters with Elisha. He had seen God's power protecting the nation.

And he wore sackcloth, the sackcloth of humility and repentance. And yet, the Lord, who sees our hearts, isn't deceived by outward signs.

And we see by Jehoram's reaction in verse 31 that his heart was not right before God. When he heard the tale of the two women and when he tore his clothes, he decided, I'm going to kill Elisha.

[9 : 13] The Lord has sent us trouble. He was thinking, why should I wait for the Lord any longer? And he showed his true colors and he said, we'll take Elisha's head off his shoulders before the day's over.

There was no true confidence in God. Now, there's a warning here for us all. It is possible to comply outwardly with many outward signs of Christian orthodoxy to do the right thing and yet have a heart that is not right before God.

The Lord's judgments and the Lord's chastisements are meant to bring us to repentance and faith and yet the unbelieving heart shakes its fist against God.

Trouble brings the believer closer to God but trouble can make the unbeliever turn further away from God and Jehoram thinks I'm going to kill Elisha.

Of course, Elisha knew what he was thinking. He was sitting in his house with the elders around him and he said the executioner is coming. Shut the door.

[10 : 33] Keep him out. The king is on his way after him. And sure enough, soon the king came down. Now let's think again a little bit about what this story can say to us today.

We've too got a desperate situation, don't we? Coronavirus killing lots of folk, causing economic chaos in our land and we are rightly concerned.

Everyone thinks a lot about it and many have suffered and our hearts go out to them. But as believers, we know God is in control. The virus does not make God wonder what he's going to do. He doesn't have to set up a committee to think of the way out. A road map to leave coronavirus behind? Not at all.

He reigns. He guides the affairs of men and we pray that he will heal our land and that our nation under this chastisement will realize that they need to repent.

[11:40] We need to repent and seek his face. And we say with Job, though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

We know that he works for good for those who love him. He is sovereign and he is working for our good.

People of Jerusalem were in a desperate situation. But now we read an amazing promise. We're going to read chapter 7 verses 1 and 2.

The king has come. He's joined Elisha in his house and Elisha said, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord. Tomorrow about this time a sea of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel and two seas of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.

Then the captain on his hand the king leaned, said to the man of God, if the Lord himself should make windows in heaven, could this thing be? But he said, you shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it.

[12:53] The king has arrived in Elisha's house and Elisha says to him, tomorrow there will be food, reasonably priced food again.

A sea of flour is seven litres of flour for a shekel amongst wages instead of a donkey's head for 80 shekels. Good food, reasonably cheap.

How could it be? How could it be? What an amazing cross. The Syrian army was still out there besieging the city. How could this food, where is it going to come from?

Humanly speaking, it was impossible. It seemed impossible. And the king's, the captain who was with the king, his assistant, he showed his unbelief and mocked Elisha.

He said, can't happen. The Lord should open windows of heaven. Could this thing be? Yet, the impossible is possible with our God.

[14:01] We used to sing that old hymn, got any rivers you think are uncrossable, got any mountains you can't tunnel through. God specializes in things thought impossible.

He will do what none other can do. You see, nothing is impossible with God. The cattle on a thousand hills are his, the wealth in every mine.

Tomorrow is open and clear before him. Nothing is hidden from his sovereign rule. And even when his promises seem impossible, we know that he will keep them.

the king's captain showed his unbelief at this amazing promise of God. Now we're going to read now about how the promise is fulfilled.

Again, 2 Kings chapter 7, we're going to read from 3 to 11. Now, there were four men who were lepers at the entrance to the gate, and they said to one another, why are we sitting here until we die?

[15:12] If we say, let us enter the city, the famine is in the city, and we shall die there. And if we sit here, we die also. So now come, let us go over to the camp of the Syrians.

If they spare our lives, we shall live, and if they kill us, we shall but die. So they arose at twilight to go to the camp of the Syrians.

But when they came to the edge of the camp of the Syrians, behold, there was no one there, for the Lord had made the army of the Syrians hear the sounds of chariots and horses, the sound of a great army.

So they said to one another, behold, the kings of Israel, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to come against us.

So they fled away in the twilight and abandoned their tents, their horses and their donkeys, leaving the camp as it was, and fled for their lives.

[16:19] Four lepers sat at the gate of the city of Samaria. Oh, sorry, I've stopped too soon.

Um, reading on from verse 8 there. And when these lepers came to the edge of the camp, they went into a tent and ate and drank. And they carried off silver and gold and clothing and went and hid them.

Then they came back and entered another tent and carried things from it and went and hid them. Then they said to one another, we are not doing right.

This day is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household.

So they came and called the gatekeepers of the city and told them, we came to the camp of the Syrians and behold, there is no one to be seen or heard there. Nothing but horses tied and the donkeys tied and the tents as they were.

[17 : 28] Then the gatekeepers called out and it was told within the king's household. four lepers sitting at the gate of Samaria.

They were unclean because of their disease. They couldn't go into the city. They were outcasts from normal society and they sit there waiting for death, either through starvation or when the Syrian army finally completes its attack on the swords of the Syrians.

So they say to each other, why are we sitting here waiting to die? We can't go into the city, there's nothing to eat there, even if they let us go in. Let's go out to the camp of the Syrians. they might give us something to eat and if they kill us, we shall but die. And so they go and walk out towards the camp of the Syrians.

You can imagine their trepidation, their nervousness as they approach it. What will they do to us? And then probably they thought, well, why are there no guards? Where's the guards?

[18 : 45] Why aren't they here? And they come into the camp and there's no one there. It's empty. They go into the first tent and there's food. And they eat.

And they eat. And they notice all this loot, all this silver and gold and clothing. So they take some of it and they go out with it and they hide it somewhere for themselves for afterwards.

And they come back and they go into the second tent and they do the same thing. And then they think, well, what we're doing, is it right? we do not well.

This is a day of good tidings and we hold our peace. Or as another translation says it, this isn't right. We have stumbled upon a good thing and we've kept it for ourselves.

So they go back to the city and they shout up to the watchmen on the walls. The camp is empty. The Syrians have gone. Well, they're the king didn't really believe him.

[19 : 52] And he sent out a checking party, a scouting party to see what had happened. And he found out it was really true.

The Syrians had gone. Think about these four lepers. They weren't the best educated in the city. They weren't the most influential or the most successful. Far from it. Far from it. They were outcasts. The ones people avoided if they could.

Yet they were the ones that God chose to bring the good news to a starving city. God had worked the impossible. At twilight, four half-dead lepers walked towards the Syrian camp.

But also at twilight, God had made the Syrians hear the noise of a great army approaching, chariots and horsemen and troops. And they thought, the great army is coming.

[21 : 01] The king of Israel has got allies. And they had fled, fled from this great army, four half-dead lepers. God's timing, you see, was perfect.

It always is. And God shows his sovereignty and his choice of messengers. It shows that what happens is the doing of God.

It's not the doing of the messengers. It doesn't depend on great learning or great wealth or great prestige. These men, we don't even know their names.

and yet God used them. Isn't it wonderful that God often uses those of us who feel insignificant and unknown.

He did it here with these four men. He did it when he healed Naaman. Who was it told Naaman about the prophet in Israel who could heal him?

[22 : 05] It was a non-known Jewish slave girl. We don't know her name. She witnessed and Naaman was healed.

I wonder do you feel you don't have many gifts but God can't use you? You're too insignificant. The God who can use lepers and a slave girl can use you.

It's not great gifts that count. It's great likeness to Jesus. It's great closeness to Jesus at France.

These men were at the bottom of the social ladder but they realized they had good news to tell and so they told it.

They went back and told it. This is a day of good news and we are keeping silent. Again, what about us?

We have a bigger problem even than a siege on a city. but we also have amazingly good news. The problem I'm thinking of isn't coronavirus.

[23 : 15] Coronavirus can kill our bodies but the problem is sin because sin will lead to God's judgment and eventually unless we are born again by the Lord Jesus and the Spirit of God, it will lead to hell.

Sin is a much greater problem. than coronavirus. By nature, we are slaves of the devil, strangers to the grace of God, without hope, without God in the world, held captive by him, just as the Israelites were in Samaria by the army of Syria.

And as slaves of the devil, we're dying of spiritual hunger. our situation is desperate. But as Christians, we have good news to tell to us spiritually dead people.

We know that the rescue has already taken place. God sent Jesus to die for us, to rescue us, to defeat the devil, to pay the price of sin, and to bring us back to God.

And that's the good news. He has already come. By his death, he has done everything necessary to free us from those chains and to bring us into his family and to feed us on the bread of heaven.

[24 : 48] We have good news to tell. But I wonder how often can it be said of us, yes, we have good news to tell, but we keep silent.

We try and be invisible Christians. Why? Are we ashamed of Jesus? Afraid of being laughed at? Afraid of the mockery of our workmates or our friends?

The hymn writer wrote, ashamed of Jesus, sooner far let evening blush to own a star. Or have we lost confidence in the gospel?

We aren't thrilled with our message. Our hearts aren't bubbling over with joy at our standing in Christ Jesus. We're not bursting to tell it.

These men were. when they realized what they were doing, they were bursting to tell them. Are we? Are you? Now, I know in our society it isn't easy.

[25 : 57] People don't want to talk about Christ. They don't want you to make them think about their sin or death or their need of a saviour. They're happy in their unbelief, but their situation is desperate because they are on their way to judgment and hell.

But we have good news to tell. And we should be looking, praying for opportunities and ways to share. May God help us to realize that in our silence, if we are silent, like the lepers, we are not doing well.

how easy it is to keep silent. As a young engineer in an office, I was in that office for about six months and I changed jobs at the end of that time and I was leaving the company.

And for a time during my spell there, I worked with a senior engineer. As I was just about to leave, my colleague my senior engineer and I, we discovered that we were both Christians.

Almost on the last day, we had worked together for weeks and neither of us had said anything. We had noticed something, but we hadn't said anything.

[27 : 31] It was only on the last day that we realized that we were both Christians. We do not well. this day is a day of good tidings and we hold our peace.

I read the story of another man who was leaving his company and on the last day, his colleagues had a going away a goodbye ceremony for him as it were when they thanked him and said goodbye.

time. And they said, you have been such a nice guy, so easy to work with over the years, so pleasant, and we've been wondering what makes you the way you are.

We thought about it and we've decided you must be a Buddhist. Now, he was a Christian, man, but they didn't know.

They saw the difference in his life, but they didn't know what made the difference. Brothers and sisters, may God forgive us our guilty silence, and may we in his power have courage to speak for him.

[28 : 45] the amazing promise, tomorrow you'll have cheap food, was fulfilled. But finally, in this story, there was judgment on unbelief.

Let's read again from chapter 7, 16 to 20. Then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Syrians, so a seer of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two seers of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord.

Now the king had appointed the captain, on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate, and the people trampled him in the gate, so that he died, as the man of God had said when the king came down to him.

But when the man of God had said to the king, two seers of barley will be sold for a shekel, and the sea of fine flour for a shekel, about this time tomorrow in the gate of Samaria, the captain had answered the man of God, if the Lord himself should make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?

And he had said, you will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat of it. And so it happened to him, where the people trampled him in the gate, and he died. Amen.

[30 : 00] the next day, when everyone heard the Syrian camp was empty, and there was food there, and they were starving, they were dying of hunger, there was a stampede to get out.

And the officer who had mocked Elisha, the king had put him in charge of the gate to keep control of things. But the starving people weren't going to be held back that day. Those behind pushed forward and those at the front were pushed on, and the captain was trampled to death.

The promised blessing had come, relief from their enemies, food, the end of the famine, it had all come according to the word of the Lord, but this man was trampled to death in the very day of rescue.

Hebrews 12, 25, warns us, see that you do not refuse him who is speaking. What a terrible thing you see it is, the promises of God who cannot lie.

I wonder, is there anyone listening to me today and you are doubting the promises of God, those amazing promises that he has given us, promises of forgiveness of sin if we will come to Jesus, promises of adoption into his family, promises of his care and protection over us?

[31 : 33] Is there anyone, anyone out there and that's you? My friends, come, come for the feast is spread. There is food for your hunger and water for your thirst.

There is forgiveness for your sins and new life for everyone who will come to Jesus. God grant that none of us will be like this unbelieving officer in Samaria at that time.

Come, come to Jesus. And may God grant to, God help each of us who know Jesus to be witnesses to that good news that we have.

not to be sound, but to witness to the good news that we have in the gospel.

So we have seen in this story a desperate situation, an amazing promise, unlikely messengers, and finally judgment on unbelief.

[32 : 40] May God bless his word to all our hearts this morning. Let's bow again in prayer. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word.

Thank you, Lord, for the way that you saved and rescued your people at that time, through unlikely messengers, and through an amazing miracle.

Father, we thank you. And we thank you that you can do the same today. We pray that you will. We pray that we, Lord, might go from our service this morning to be faithful witnesses to you.

And Lord, indeed, if anyone listening still has not received Jesus as Savior, may today be the day that they come to you. Lord, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're going to close now in singing our final psalm, psalm 96, sing verses 1 to 5. Oh, sing a new song to the Lord, sing all the earth to God.

[33 : 52] Oh, to God sing, bless his name sure still, his saving health abroad. And in verse 3 there, among the heathen nations, his glory do declare, and unto all the people show, his works that wondrous are.

Let's praise God together. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. And unto all All the people showing His words that wondrous sob, for praise the Lord and brave He is to be magnified.

Amen. Amen. Yea, worthy to be To be fair is He above all gods beside.

For all the gods are idols, now which my ten nations fear.

But our God is the Lord by whom God has created.

[35 : 43] Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word. Write it on all our hearts this morning, we pray.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and evermore. Amen.