

II Kings 7 "Sharing the Good News"

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Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Turn with me, if you will, this morning to 2 Kings 7. 2 Kings chapter 7. Kids, do you have a favorite Bible story? One that you always think of? Maybe it's one that's not really one of the famous ones that everybody likes, but it's just one that's always kind of, you've liked it. It's kind of stuck out to you. And this is one of those stories for me.

Ever since I was a kid, I've thought about it, particularly for one verse in the middle of it. It's another great story of God's redemption that we've been talking about this summer, with a very interesting twist in the middle of that redemption story.

Let me tell you a little bit of what's going on here before we read the story together. There's a foreign army, the Arameans, that have laid siege to God's people in the city of Samaria. And there's a famine on top of that in the land. So the siege is quite effective.

They're running out of food and people are starting to get desperate and to do desperate things in the city. The little food that's left, the prices have gone sky high. You can't get your hands on any of it and people are starting to rumble. The prophet Elisha, however, has just said that things are about to change. Something's going to happen. There's going to be food and the price for that food will be affordable. But some don't believe him. And so the story turns to four lepers.

[2 : 0 0] Certainly these lepers would have been among the most desperate people in or technically just outside of Samaria. We'll pick up the reading at verse 3 of 2 Kings 7. This is from the New International Version, which is the way I learned it in childhood. And it does a good job with some of the words in this passage. But this is God's holy word.

Now there were four men with leprosy at the entrance of the city gate. They said to each other, why stay here until we die? If we say we'll go into the city, the famine is there and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live. And if they kill us, then we die. At dusk, they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans. And when they reached the edge of the camp, not a man was there.

For the Lord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army, so that they said to one another, look, the king of Israel has hired the Hittite and Egyptian kings to attack us. So they got up and fled in the dusk and abandoned their tents and their horses and donkeys. They left the camp as it was and ran for their lives. The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp and entered one of the tents. They ate and drank and carried away silver, gold, and clothes and went off and hid them. They returned and entered another tent and took some things from it and hid them also. Then they said to each other, what we're doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us.

Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace. So they went and called out to the city gatekeepers and told them, we went into the Aramean camp and not a man was there, not a sound of anyone, only tethered horses and donkeys and the tents left just as they were. The gatekeeper shouted the news and it was reported within the palace and the king got up in the night and said to his officers, I will tell you what the Arameans have done to us. They know we are starving so they have left the camp to hide in the countryside thinking they will surely come out and then we will take them alive and get into the city. One of his officers answered, well have some men take five of the horses left in the city.

Their plight will be like that of all the Israelites left here. Yes, they will only be like all these Israelites who are doomed. So let us send them to find out what happened. So they selected two chariots with their horses and the king sent them after the Aramean army. He commanded the drivers, go and find out what has happened. And they followed them as far as the Jordan and they found the whole road strewn with the clothing and equipment the Arameans had thrown away in their headlong flight. So the messengers returned and reported to the king. Then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans.

[5 : 09] So a sayah of flour sold for a shekel and two sayahs of barley sold for a shekel as the Lord had said. Let's pray together and we'll talk about this passage.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for your faithful work for your people and the record we have of it so that we can know you more. And now would you give us your heart?

Would you by your spirit work in our hearts that we might see as you do, that we might love as you do, that we might truly be your people as you have called us to be? We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

It may not be as famous as David and Goliath. You probably haven't heard this one before. It's not as memorable perhaps as the Exodus. But this story is yet another great example of God's miraculously sparing His people. Another beautiful picture of God's faithfulness generation after generation to provide and care for His people. The story highlights the desperation and the deliverance, the bad news and the good news of the gospel. Last week we talked about the glory of God in removing our sins and clothing us in His righteousness. This week the image is a little different, but it's our desperate hunger and God's rich provision. We see the desperation perhaps most obviously in the lepers, right? Who decide how's life looking for them? Their best option left is to walk into the camp of an opposing army and surrender and just hope by chance they don't get killed. That's all they got left.

They really thought it was the end, didn't they? But we see it also in one of the officers of the king who laughs at Elisha's prophecy of lower food prices. Just before what we read in verse 2, here's what happens. The captain on whose hand the king leaned said to the man of God, to Elisha, if the Lord Himself should make windows in heaven, could this thing that you just prophesied be?

[7 : 44] And Elisha said, you shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it. Now Elisha's prophecy comes true as we've seen. Not just the food prices dropping, but this official is killed in the stampede towards the Aramean camp. But he feels here that things are so bleak. He's so desperate that even heaven, if the windows of heaven opened and poured out, they couldn't help us. Even heaven doesn't have enough to rescue us. That's a good physical picture in that desperation of our spiritual desperation. Sometimes we don't feel it because we aren't physically hungry, perhaps, but we are spiritually hopeless on our own. It's the end of the road for us. We're desperate to be rescued and can't do it ourselves. Of course, God's deliverance is even more overwhelming than our desperation. In the clearest way possible in this passage, the lives of the lepers are spared and the starvation of God's people is stopped without their lifting a finger, right? Verse 6, the Lord had caused the Aramean army to run off. Were they scared of Israel and the army coming out against them? No. The Lord had made them run off and leave their camp as it was. God does indeed seemingly open the windows of heaven and dump upon his people more grace than they could even imagine.

They can't even believe God's kindness, can they? The king hears this story and he says, it's a trick. It's too good to be true. It couldn't possibly be happening. Has God done that for you?

That's when you know the gospel is starting to sink in in your heart and life. When you look at what God has done for you and say, oh my goodness, it's too good to believe. There's no way that he could possibly meet the needs of a desperate, undeserving failure like me. Maybe what it really is is that I'm just given a second chance to live my life right and I better not mess it up this time. Maybe that's the message of the Bible. No. It's even better than that. It says, as good as you've heard, the good news of the gospel is that God gives life to otherwise dead people. That God sends his son to live a perfect life, to die a horrible death in the place of those who deserve to die and rise from the dead. And so as a result of what Jesus does, all our sins, even the worst ones, are paid for by his death. His perfect obedience is credited to our accounts as righteousness. We stand in right relationship with God and his eternal life is shared with those of us who trust him so that as surely as Jesus himself lives, we live forever in the glory of relationship with God that he created us for. And we never lifted a finger. We can't take credit for any of it. That's the good news of the gospel. Not that you've got a second chance to do it right this time, but that God has indeed done everything that was needed to rescue you and me. Full purpose to fill the aching longing inside of us.

Eternal life instead of certain death. Divine deliverance for desperate people. That's the good news that God's people tasted in this passage and that you can experience today because of Jesus.

We could keep talking about that good news all morning, but there's a particular aspect of it I want to zero in for a few minutes together. And that is that such good news must be shared. The grace we experience must be expressed. There's no outline in your bulletin this morning because it's really that simple. It's not complicated. It's not complicated and I'm trying hard to avoid something that I tend to do quite often, which is make something simple seem very complex. And many of you have suffered under that gift that I have. But verse 9 is the verse that always sticks out to me since I was a kid.

[12 : 44] In this beautiful picture of God's redemption. The lepers get there and they're in the tent. The second tent actually. And they said to each other, what we're doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. Could that verse be appropriately applied to our lives many days?

What we're doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. Things are great, but something's not right. I mean, think about those lepers for just a second. Just a couple hours ago, they were famished to the point of death.

Hungrier than you have ever felt in your life. And now they're sitting in a buffet restaurant with tent after tent of options. Life is good. This is great. What a gift. Could anything be better than this?

Things are great. Things are great. But something's not right. The food is so far beyond filling.

The gift is so magnanimous. The grace is so extravagant that it is simply not right to keep it there. The news is too good. It can't be contained to four lepers. It must be shared with all the others, right?

[14 : 36] I'm in a generation where it seems that most things haven't really happened until you've shared them.

Until they've become Facebook official, right? I mean, if you've seen a beautiful sunset or taken a wonderful vacation or seen your child achieve some great victory, it's almost as if the thing hasn't really taken place until you've got a picture and can tell others about it and share with the world, right?

But I think there's something about the way we were wired a long time before Facebook that resonates with this idea of good news being meant to be shared. Maybe you've experienced that deep joy of sharing a momentous event with a spouse or a family member or a close friend, and it just becomes that much richer when you share it. I grew up loving Christmas morning, one of my favorite moments of the year. But since I was just about five years old, it wasn't fully Christmas until Bill and I talked. Bill was a childhood best friend, and we have talked now 30 or so Christmases in a row. We just got into the habit of calling each other every Christmas morning. It used to be that we had to share with each other the excitement of the new sports equipment that we had just received and talk about what we were going to do with it together and how we were going to play. And I remember getting a basketball goal, and that was exciting. But until I had shared with Bill that I had a basketball goal and we had played with it together, it wasn't as exciting as it could have been, right? And then when I heard about what he got and how we were going to get to share it together, it was like having Christmas all over again with his stuff. Nowadays, we mostly share the joy of our kids and what they've received, but it's a Christmas tradition. Good news that's too big for us, we have to share. It's like a summer thunderstorm in Huntsville. The windows of heaven just start spilling grace, like a drenching downpour that's coming. You've been in those before. And it's coming so hard that it's way more than one person to soak it all in. Imagine thinking, yeah, I'm just going to go around and I'm going to be the only one that touches all the rain all through town. No, it is dumping everywhere for everyone.

I think one of the reasons we feel the need to share in great events and good news is that's the way God's designed us in relationship with Him, with the good news of His deliverance. From the time I was a child, I felt the truth of the leper's words. What we're doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. That's why I've always loved that description of Christianity from Martin Luther and others, beggars telling other beggars where to find bread.

That fits with this passage, doesn't it? I thought of it in terms of Cinderella. We talked last week about the ragged maid being given a beautiful dress fit for the ball, invited up to the head table with the prince and by the end of the story, the big event is not the ball but her wedding.

[18 : 28] She's not only at the head table but she gets to set the guest list. So, can you imagine with me for just a minute? Because it's a fairy tale so you can imagine. Who's on Cinderella's guest list?

It's every maiden in the land, right? Do you have any doubt about that? That's the only way she knew she could come to the ball was that the invitation went out very clearly to every eligible maiden in the land. And if Cinderella made sure anyone knew she was included, if someone was to get a personal visit from the Duke on top of the mass invite, it would have been every scullery made in the kingdom, right? Because she knew her desperate need and what it was like to be there, she would not have left out a single other. Come to the party! There's good news for us, for you too.

Is that how you feel about the people in your life each day, each week? Do you see their desperate need before God the way you see your own? Do you have what I'll call a heavenly burden for them?

A holy discontent with the good news being kept to yourself that's just not right? I mean, be honest, you'd never fail to share a diet that works with someone else trying to lose weight.

You'd never fail to share a parenting tip with another parent struggling with their children. You'd never fail to share a new exercise regimen with someone trying to get in shape. Of course we would.

[20 : 17] Why would we not share the overflowing joy of a Savior with those who so desperately need one like me? If we're not sharing it, is it really good news to us?

Are we really beggars ourselves desperate for bread? New Testament is clear that this is the calling we have as those who trust Jesus to share the good news with others.

Just a couple passages to remind us of that. 1 Peter 2, You're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession. Why?

That you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Romans chapter 10, Paul writes, How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.

[21 : 27] And that doesn't mean just standing up in a Sunday worship service and preaching. And it doesn't mean you have to go around the world to do it. Sharing the good news. 2 Corinthians chapter 5, All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

That is in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself. Not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore we are what?

Ambassadors for Christ. God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ. Be reconciled to God. This good news for our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin.

So that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. I have said before that if this sharing the good news is not what we are about in Huntsville and beyond, then we should shut the doors.

That is why God put us here. If the gospel really is the good news we say it is, how could we not share it? Penn Jillette is a famous entertainer and an outspoken atheist.

[22 : 49] One night after a show an audience member hung around to compliment him on the show and have a conversation with him. And I want you to listen to just a couple minutes of what Penn said about their interaction.

Then we'll talk again. Oh, hang on one second. Sorry. We'll start it over again with the audio this time.

Pete, do you know how to turn the audio over there? Okay, I'll show it to you again in a second. We'll work on that. Here's what Penn says.

Yeah, we'll forget the video. I'll just tell you what he says. It's just so much better coming from him. And he says this guy came up after the show. And he was very kind to me and complimentary of the show.

And he gave me this little Bible. It was a Gideon pocket New Testament Psalms and Proverbs. And he said to me, I want to tell you how much I liked your show.

[23 : 49] And I want to give you this. I'm proselytizing. And he said, I'm a businessman. I'm not crazy. But I really, really wanted you to have this.

And Penn says, maybe not what you would expect an atheist to say in that moment. He said, I've never understood before why you wouldn't proselytize if you believed what you really did.

If you believed that there was heaven and there was hell and whether or not you got eternal life depended on knowing Jesus, how would you not tell someone?

Then he says, and these are his words, how much do you have to hate someone to believe that and not tell them? And he says, let me picture it for you this way.

Imagine there's a truck coming to you and I really believe there's a truck barreling down on you at some point before the truck hits you. If I can't talk you into getting out of the way, I tackle you.

[24 : 49] I don't understand Christians or atheists, he says, who wouldn't proselytize. So I really respect that man who came to me. He's wrong. I don't agree with him, but he did what I expect everyone ought to do.

It's kind of convicting to listen to an atheist, which you didn't get the privilege of doing this morning. And you hear him understand the priority of sharing the good news better than most Christians.

We have experience and express grace on the books, don't we? But do we really live that way? Do we really believe if it's not expressed, if it's not shared, then it's not God's grace?

I've been wrestling with my own heart this week and asking myself some questions. In case you've never been a preacher, it's kind of easy to feel like you share it every week, and so you let yourself off the hook in a lot of other relationships and situations.

I've asked myself, does the thought of one person dying apart from Christ grieve me deeply? Is that my heart?

[26 : 12] Does the thought of one person sharing the joy of Christ eternally excite me? Do I really have that heavenly burden for those I walk by, eat with, swim beside, study with, to know the good news of Jesus?

And do I regularly pursue relationships in a way that indicates I have that burden, where I get to know people enough to have a heart that longs for them to know my Savior?

Sometimes I think we adults overcomplicate this. My kids meet friends at school who don't know Jesus, and they care about them enough that they come home and say, hey, I want to pray for my friend and her family.

I know that the how-to of sharing the good news can be hard sometimes to figure out, but don't we sometimes hide behind that and not even pray?

Step one, we know that part. Is my heart overflowing with the urge to share, to figure out some way anyway to show the love of Christ to another?

[27 : 26] See, that's really the issue, isn't it? Love. Penn asks that question, how much do you have to hate somebody not to share the good news with them?

It's a fair question, but how about how much do you have to love them? I think the answer to that is just a little more than you love yourself.

Right? It's like the lepers. How much do they have to love everybody else? Well, they're saying it's not right for us to keep this all to ourselves. The question is, is it all going to be for them, or are they going to go invite somebody else into it?

I'm called to love my neighbor as myself. Just a bit more than my comfort, my control, my bank account, my image or reputation.

And oftentimes I don't. I'm unwilling to sacrifice my time, my schedule, my comfortable, controlled world.

[28 : 32] I'm looking out for, number one, prioritizing those things that I love over the people God has called me to love. And maybe that doesn't sound too awful to you at first.

But stop and think for a minute of the self-serving idolatry in that. A day of good news and I'm keeping it to myself.

I suspect we all have places in our hearts where we need to repent. Where our zeal for the good news of Jesus to be shared doesn't match our zeal for our own comforts.

And that repentance is a good place for us to start dealing with our hearts. At the same time, that's not a guilt-driven repentance.

This passage and this sermon is not about guilt-driven evangelism and railing at you for not doing enough. Why don't you share more? The motivation for the lepers to share the good news is not anybody yelling at them about it.

[29 : 42] It's the overwhelmingly gracious provision they've received. How could they not share it with so many others back in town about to die without it?

What should cause us to love our neighbors? What should motivate us to look out these windows to the Huntsville community and feel a heavenly burden for everyone around us to know the love of Jesus?

Well, the love of Jesus should. The love of Jesus, Paul says, is what compels us to the ministry of reconciliation.

Jesus has loved us, his enemies, by the way, way more than himself. The things I struggle to let go of, the comforts and riches of his life, Jesus let go of in order to come for me because he loved me.

And so I don't have to look out for number one because he is looking out for me. That's the good news, right? My father loves me and provides riches unending, eternal riches so I don't have to fend for myself.

[31 : 03] I can love you. I can share the riches of his grace with you because they will never, ever run out.

the lepers saw house after house of starving neighbors and tent after tent of food they would never even get to eating.

God's grace is even greater than that. It frees me, even compels me to quit worrying about whether I'll have enough and share with you.

Friends, fellow beggars who know desperation, because of Jesus today is a day of good news.

May we never keep it to ourselves but share the good news with everyone. Let's pray. Amen. Jesus, for the good news of your love for us that we could never deserve, we give you thanks.

[32 : 19] I pray this morning that it would feel to us as though the windows of heaven are opening and pouring grace upon grace over us beyond what we could take in and way beyond what we would ever want to keep for ourselves.

Give us your eyes, give us your heart, may we tell of your love over and over until everyone knows the love of our Savior.

Do that work by your Spirit, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.