

Leper Logic

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: 18 December 2011

Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] Well, let's turn to that chapter again, chapter 7 of 2 Kings and verse 9.

Then the lepers said to one another, We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until morning light, punishment will overtake us.

Now therefore come, let us go and tell the king's household. The most awful thing about this passage that we've just read is that it's true.

If it was a novel, it would probably, at least the first part anyway, be classed as a horror story. And there are horror stories in the Bible.

The problem with the difference between a novel and the true historical fact is that it is historical fact.

[1 : 08] Because when God gets pushed out onto the margins, then there is nothing that we are incapable of doing, including eating our own offspring.

I can't think of many worse things for any human being to do. I can't think of many worse or in terms of it being inhuman.

It goes against every impulse and every instinct within the human mind and within the human heart. And yet, when God gets pushed out of the picture, there is nothing that we are not capable of doing.

That applies to me as well. Every one of us is capable of doing the most grotesque, horrendous thing that we can think of, given the right circumstances.

There but for the grace of God go I. And this story is all about what happens when God is pushed out.

[2 : 24] That's why this chapter is taking place. That's why the enemy of Israel was surrounding Samaria at this moment in time. And they had done for days and days, waiting for the people of Israel to finally give up and surrender to the Syrians.

The king of Syria was a man called Ben-Hadad. And he had been the arch enemy of Israel for years and years. And it appeared that nothing that he saw of the truth of the God of Israel was going to stop him and his animosity and his enmity toward Israel.

And this was only one of several instances in which Ben-Hadad attacks Israel and in which he tries to overcome them. But the problem here was not Ben-Hadad.

The problem was the king of Israel. He's a man called King Jehoram. And you read about him, his name crops up during the life of Elisha.

Now remember that Elisha was the successor of Elijah. There were two great prophets at that time. Elijah, who had a ministry of judgment over Israel.

[3 : 39] But Elisha had a ministry of healing over Israel. God sent Elisha to bring healing back into the land. But that wasn't easy at all.

It wasn't easy for Elisha. And it appeared that there was much reluctance in Israel to come back to the Lord. And much of that reluctance was down to the lack of faith of this man called Jehoram.

He's called Jehoram, who was the king of Israel. And we find him in this chapter. He's in some area. He's amongst the people. And you might think that he's suffering alongside with them.

The problem with Jehoram is that his appearance appears to be, everything appears to be legitimate with Jehoram. And yet there's a problem with him.

There's something not right. And it's only when you get inside the man that you discover where his faults lie. You can always tell a king.

[4 : 45] And you can always tell a Christian. This is the first thing I'm going to say tonight. They can always tell a man of faith or a woman of faith by where he wears his sackcloth.

You can always tell a person of faith by where he wears his sackcloth. I'm not going to go over the story again.

I think I read it slowly enough for us to take in. I hope you were reading it with me. And I hope you're taking in what took place. The famine was so severe in Samaria. And things were in such dire straits that the most unlikely foodstuff was selling for an absolute fortune.

And people were literally starving to death to the point where we read this awful, this grotesque event in which one woman went into a pact with another woman.

And they agreed that if they ate her son, first of all, that they would eat the other son on the next day. And when the king heard this, you remember, he tore his robes.

[5 : 51] Look at verse 30. He tore his robes and he was passing by on the wall. But did you notice the next words? When the people looked, behold, he had sackcloth beneath on his body.

Now that tells me a huge amount about this King Jehoram. It tells me where he really stood before the Lord. All the appearance on the outside is good.

He says all the right things. He appears to be a strong leader of Israel. And there are several times in the Old Testament, in these chapters, in which he appears to speak very plausibly, even about the Lord himself.

He uses the Lord a lot. But yet, you tell what kind of a man he is by where he wears his sackcloth. Remember in the Bible that when a person wore sackcloth, it was a sign of sorrow and repentance and humility before God.

And when you wore sackcloth, you wore it evidently in front of other people so that other people could see. And when a king wore sackcloth, it was to encourage the whole nation to repent and turn to God again.

[7 : 00] But this man only wore sackcloth as undergarments. So that when you looked at him normally, he wore his robe.

In other words, he was a king first and a Christian second. He was a man of power first. And he was a man of God second.

And in other words, he wasn't a man of God at all. Even although there are certain aspects of him, he seems sometimes to grasp what God is doing.

He seems sometimes to believe what God is doing. He seems sometimes to recognize the truth of God in Israel. And he seems sometimes to be obedient.

And yet, time and again, you discover with this man that his obedience and his recognition and his understanding is all defective. Because the number one in his life was himself. He was prepared to give God a place in his life.

[8 : 02] But the place that he gave his life was not the central place. He was a king first. And then he was a Christian second. If that's the case, then he wasn't a Christian.

If you tonight, if number one is you, and God takes anything but the central place of obedience, God first and second and third and fourth.

Some people talk about putting God first. And that can be very dangerous. Because if you look at just putting God first, then you say, well, God's got his place in my life.

And now I've got my place. But no, God demands all. A person who has come to faith in Jesus Christ has come to accept him as Lord. The king, the master.

We saw a little bit of that this morning. He is the master, the Lord. Is he your Lord tonight? Do you turn to him for every aspect of your life?

[9 : 04] Have you surrendered every single aspect of your life? And here's a man who recognizes God. He's prepared. If you said to him, do you believe in God? He'd say, of course I believe in God.

But there's a difference between believing in God, even believing in the God of the Bible, even believing that everything in the Bible is true, and actually personally surrendering to God. This man knew the right convenient time to tear his robes.

He should have done that a long, long time ago. He should have been in sackcloth all the time, day in, day out, because it was for that reason that God was chastising his people, because he had been pushed to the margins.

He'd been pushed to the outside. And so that's the king, Jehoram. I could say a whole lot more about Jehoram, because he appears, he crops up in all of these chapters, or in many of these chapters, and in all of them, there appears to be some recognition.

There appears to be even some faith. And he knew who was king. He knew all about God. And yet, he didn't give him the first place, the place of lordship and surrender to him in his life.

[10:19] I want to ask once again, have we surrendered all? Have we surrendered all to the lordship of Jesus Christ? If any man would come after me, says Jesus, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Then I want to look at the prophet himself. You remember, of course, how the king, when he had heard the words of the woman, the awful words of the woman, he had lost the place altogether. And the strange thing is that instead of humbling himself and returning to God and going to the prophet Elisha to prayerfully ask what he should do, he lost his temper.

And he took his anger out on God. And he said, he said, yeah, there it is.

In the very last words of chapter 6, why should I wait for the lord any longer? Why should I wait for the lord any longer? See, that's the problem. When you refuse to give God the central place in your life, when you allocate to him a place on the sidelines, then what's going to happen is this.

[11:36] Something's going to happen that you don't understand and that you don't expect.

Something that you can't cope with. And when God is not the central place, and when he does, when something happens that you can't cope with, what you do is you blame him for it.

You see him as the culprit. God has done this. And then you become bitter. And you take your anger out against God.

And you do that by taking it out on his word. You see, Elisha, once again, remember that Elisha represented the word of God, the message of God to Israel. Or you could call it the church of God. And have you ever wondered why so many people, especially in modern times, are so antagonistic towards the church, why they're so hateful towards Christians.

And that is because they are hateful towards God. I believe tonight that every single person, the Bible tells me that every single person knows within, deep within his heart, that God exists.

[12:47] And the way we've reacted to that, instead of recognizing that and bowing down before him in surrender and in faith and in obedience to him and accepted Jesus as our Lord, we've done the opposite.

We've done exactly what Adam and Eve did in the garden. Instead of listening to God and taking him at his word, we put ourselves first. And if you put yourself first, then God is always a threat to you.

There's always that threat of his punishment and his judgment. And you always know that you're accountable to him. And so, as Jehoram wrestled and struggled with that truth, he became angry. And he sought to take his anger out on God by killing Elisha. The strange thing here is it's really illogical, isn't it?

The logic of the king is complete nonsense, isn't it? The king knows that there is a God and that he depends upon God for everything that he is. And so, he knows that if anyone's going to help him, it has to be the Lord.

[13:49] So, what does he do? He goes after Elisha. And he's going to kill Elisha. Running the risk of the Lord completely withdrawing from them altogether.

You see, that's the kind of logic. That's the kind of empty logic. It's going to get us nowhere when you push God out onto the margins. But when Elisha heard that the executioner was coming to cut off his head, he first of all told his friends to bolt the door.

And then he had a messenger. He had a message for the king as he arrived at the door. But I'm not entirely sure of the process and the particular turn of events.

But Elisha said, Hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord, Tomorrow, about this time, a seah of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.

Now, it appears that when the king heard that there was good news from God, that the king granted Elisha a stay of execution.

[14:57] Okay, he said, This time tomorrow, I'll give you 24 hours. Off he went. You see, this is the whole point. This is what I meant earlier on when I said, You always see in Jehoram there's something within him that recognizes the Lord, but he's not giving himself completely to him.

He's always holding part of himself back from the Lord. But the servant of the Lord was completely, the servant rather, of the king was completely dismissive.

The captain on whose hand the king leaned said, If the Lord himself should make windows in heaven, could this thing be? In other words, this was him sneering at Elisha's message.

The captain, I'm quite sure, was all ready to cut Elisha's head off and he was quite probably disappointed when the king gave him a stay of execution and he snorted at the prophecy that Elisha

made and he said, If the Lord himself should make windows in heaven, could this thing be? But what Elisha said to him at that point was, You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it. Meanwhile, at that very moment, at that very moment of desperation amongst the Israelites, when they were literally starving to death and doing the most inhuman and inhumane things in their desperation and at the same time refusing if only they had just turned to the Lord a week before or a month before or two months before.

[16:36] You see, what's conspicuous about this chapter is what they don't do. Why is it that only Elisha and his few friends hold up in his wee house in some area?

Why is it that only they are the ones who are faithful to God and everyone else is suffering because they have turned their backs on him? Meanwhile, you would expect, wouldn't you, you would expect that if God is chastising his people like that, if he is allowing them to suffer like that, you would expect that at this point in time he would destroy them and instead he's doing the opposite because God is a God of grace, a God who in wrath, the Bible tells us, in wrath he remembers mercy and that's exactly what is happening.

The people are suffering the consequence of God's wrath towards them and yet at the same time the mercy of God is just about to become evident.

In fact, even as they are speaking, God is working in the background to turn things around to resolve the problem so that within a few hours everything is going to be put right and the people are going to have as much food as they want to the point where all the prices are back to what they normally are and they're going to have enough and to spare and it seemed to be so unbelievable to this captain that he said, no, I don't believe it.

see, the test about whether you're prepared to take God at his word is when you're in the minority.

[18:19] That's when the test is on. When you're in the majority, imagine everyone in Scotland tonight was a Christian. Everyone poured into churches or churches, it would be a great thought, wouldn't it?

But it would be easy to go to church. It would be easy to listen to the gospel. It would be easy to go along with the crowd, wouldn't it? But the testing time comes when we're in the minority like Elisha with his few wee friends, his small group of friends in their little house.

They were the only ones that were sitting there faithfully waiting on God, praying to him, asking him to have mercy upon them. They were in the minority. Everyone else was suffering. But that's the time when their faith was tested.

You see, the captain just went along with everyone else. It's easy to shrug your shoulders and say, no way. It's impossible. I don't believe a word of it. Because according to what looked like from the outside, he was right.

Every appearance was of desperation. There wasn't a scrap of food to be seen. So where is Elisha going to get all this food from? What he wasn't prepared to believe and accept was that with God, all things are possible.

[19:31] Do you believe that tonight? That with God all things are possible and nothing is impossible with God. God stretches and tests our faith sometimes so that we accept that fact without seeing it.

Faith is taking God at his word without seeing it. And here, all these men, the king, everyone around Elisha, when Elisha said, here's the word of God, here's what God has to say to you.

You're not going to see it for 24 hours. The test is, are you going to believe it or are you not? In 24 hours from now, everything will be right.

God's going to give you as much food as you can eat, as much drink as you can drink. You can have anything you want 24 hours from now. That was the goodness of God. And this man refused to believe it.

Went along with the majority. He just looked around him and just accepted. He just believed what the outside appearances were. And that's unbelief.

[20:35] And that's why by the end of this chapter, while everyone else was enjoying the promise of God, this man died as a result of his unbelief.

In fact, this is the way this chapter ends. This man died. You would think that the king with all his faults and his failures and his sins, that he'd be the one to be put to death, wouldn't you?

But it's not because God's going to give him a little bit longer in this world. But this man here has refused to believe God and God brings him to the end of his days in unbelief.

That's a fearful prospect, isn't it? To come to the end of your days in unbelief, refusing to believe what God has done for you and the goodness and the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. It's the worst thing you can do tonight. You probably don't believe me. The worst thing you can do is to refuse to believe what God has done for you in Jesus Christ.

[21 : 44] God Meanwhile, God was operating in a way that the people couldn't even imagine.

And the way in which the Samaritans, rather the people of Israel in Samaria, the way in which it's really rather fascinating, isn't it?

And this is the way it's told to us. It's told to us by way of lepers. Four lepers who had to live outside the city wall anyway because they couldn't come into contact with the people inside the city.

That's what happened if you had leprosy. And leprosy didn't just apply to what we know as leprosy. It could be a whole variety of skin diseases. And because many of these skin diseases were infectious, then according to God's law, these men had to stay outside the city.

It was an awful way of life to be a leper. And they're living at the entrance to the gate and they're starving as much as anybody else. So they start talking amongst one another.

[22 : 52] They start using their logic and they say this. If we go back in the city, there's no food there, we're going to die. If we stay here, we don't have any food, so we're going to die.

If we go, however, to the enemy, if we go into the enemy camp, they may kill us, in which case we're going to die anyway.

But there is a chance, just a small one, just a tiny one, that they might have mercy on us and give us some food. Maybe send us back. Maybe throw some food to us.

Who knows? You never know. So they took their chances. And off they went into the camp of the Syrians. They went, I don't know how many, I don't know how many meters or whatever.

When they got there, they couldn't believe what they saw. The whole camp was deserted. The explanation is given to us here in this chapter.

[24 : 01] We don't know how they found that out, but the Lord had done something and he had pulled the Syrians' confidence away from them. He had made them hear things that frightened the life out of them so that they fled in terror and in panic.

And the camp, the horses, the fires were lit, the food was being cooked on the fires, the clothes were there, the chariots, I guess.

Everything was there. The only thing that wasn't there was the people. And the lepers, I guess, they couldn't believe their eyes. This was ten times better than they ever, ever expected.

They couldn't believe what was happening. So, of course, as you would expect, they dived in. They started eating and drinking. And then they saw gold and silver and fancy clothes.

I don't know what they planned to do with it. You couldn't do much with gold and silver or fancy clothes. If you were a leper, you couldn't go many places. But, of course, they just acted on impulse and they grabbed as much as they could possibly and went and hid it somewhere.

[25 : 10] Then they came back. They went into another tent. They did the same thing. That's what we read about. They grabbed some more gold and silver. They went. And after a while, they stopped.

Isn't that amazing? They stopped. And they said, we are not doing right. How did they know?

What made them stop what they were doing? Up until now, I guess we're all saying to ourselves, well, that's what I would do. But something registered in their heart.

Something said to them, you are sinning. You're not doing right. Do you know what that was? It was the voice of conscience which God has placed in every single one of us.

Whether you're a believer or a non-believer, whether you're an atheist, whether you're a Hindu or a Muslim, or whether you're a Sikh, it doesn't matter. God has placed the voice of conscience within each one of us.

[26 : 17] The question tonight is whether you listen to that voice or not. I've been doing a little bit of private study on the whole place of the conscience in the Bible.

And what I've, I haven't really done a whole lot, don't have that much time, but there's not a lot being written on this, not a lot being studied about. And it amazes me, it amazes me because it's got such a place, a central place in the pages of the Bible, particularly in the New Testament.

30 times in the New Testament, there's a reference to the conscience. That's how important it is and that's the function. It's a unique human function.

You've heard me speaking about it before. And it tells us when we're doing something wrong. It's not an audible voice. It's a register, something that just does something to us when we're doing something wrong.

And we know the difference. I'm not saying it's perfect. I'm not saying we can always rely on it in every, but it's there. And God means us to listen to what we're telling ourselves from the inside.

[27 : 33] The problem is that when that conscience begins to rise within us and it begins to speak to us, more often than that, we say, oh, be quiet. I'm not listening to you because very often the voice of conscience has to struggle with the voice of what we want to do and the voice of what we want to do wins against the conscience when there's this wrestling match going on.

Have you experienced that? I believe that every single person in here has experienced that wrestling. when you know that something is wrong and yet you want to do it.

And what you want to do always wins, doesn't it? Because of our own sinfulness. And I'm going to ask you tonight, perhaps I've never said this before, I don't know, maybe you've never heard this before, to listen to the voice within.

And the voice within, as far as these lepers were concerned, they said, you are doing wrong. Not because you're taking from the Syrians. The Syrians had left. It was finders keepers from there on. But they were wrong in that they were only enjoying the promise of God for themselves and not sharing it with the rest of God's people.

[29 : 07] This was good news. God had done this. But it wasn't just for them. It was for everyone so that everyone could take part and so that no one else could die of starvation.

And they discovered that not only what they were doing was wrong, but that they were accountable for what they are doing. We will be punished, they said. The voice of conscience not only tells us when something is wrong, but it tells us that we are accountable to God for the way in which we live our lives and for what we do.

Next time you wrestle with your conscience, please listen to it. And the conscience also tells us it directs us to the gospel. It tells us that what we read in the Bible is the truth.

It tells us that Jesus is the Savior and He's the only way for our salvation and for our forgiveness. So listen to that voice of conscience, the voice within that God has placed in our hearts.

So that when these men, and I won't go through the rest of the story because the time has gone, when these men eventually went back to the gate, the word came to the king, the king was first suspicious.

[30 : 20] He sent out a tester to see if this was a plot organized by the Syrians. They discovered it wasn't. There was a massive gold rush. The city gates opened.

Everyone rushed out to make use and to take part in the promise of God because that's what it was.

God had delivered His people overnight and at that moment in time His gift was absolutely free. They could take as much as they wanted. This was the goodness and the mercy and the grace of God. And yet it was shown first of all to the unclean.

I find that fascinating. I cannot read this chapter without wondering why it was the lepers that God used to discover His marvelous salvation.

[31 : 38] You would expect, wouldn't you, that the news would come to the king first of all. Perhaps even through Elisha. Elisha would go to the king and he would say, now you're free to go out the gate and you're free to take your place and to take as much as you want.

But that's not the way it happened. The way it happened was that God in His providence, He led these poor, unclean, rejected men who were really on the outside.

They were outsiders. Nobody would talk to them. Nobody would go near them. and they were the ones that discovered the Lord before anyone else.

Can't help thinking of the connection between the lepers discovering the salvation of God and the shepherds discovering the salvation of God.

The shepherds were unclean as well. Luke chapter 2. Can't help thinking the link between God announcing the birth of His Son to those who were on the outside, the very last people you would ever expect the Lord to come to and to tell of His salvation.

[32 : 59] And when they listened, when they went, when they visited, the place where Jesus was, they went away rejoicing and praising God.

God does not follow our conventions. He very often does exactly the opposite of what we expect. As far as the Lord is concerned, whether you're a king or whether you're a leper, we're all the same. And He does that very often to prove that He's the one who's in control. There are not many mighty who enter the kingdom of God. The ordinary people like yourself.

The question is tonight, are we part of that promise? The promise that God fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ when He came into Bethlehem and when He lived amongst us for 33 years when He gave His life on the cross?

That was His promise of forgiveness, washing, cleansing, newness of life, eternal life, and it's offered just like the Syrian camp offered for all of God's people, all those who live by faith and who come to Jesus Christ by faith.

[34 : 21] And there was one man, and the very fulfillment of the promise of God was the means of His downfall because He refused to believe the voice of the Lord.

There's great news here, isn't there? Great news. There was great news for Israel, for Samaria, for all those who lived in Samaria, but for one man, he missed out.

don't miss out because your salvation is free. Come, take hold of Jesus, come to Him by faith, and ask Him to forgive you and to change your life and to show you the riches of His kingdom.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we pray that You will bless Your word to us again this evening. We thank You for it and we ask Lord that it may remain with us and may have a profound effect in the way in which we respond in faith.

We pray, Lord, that even tonight with this obscure passage, a passage that is not easy to understand and is horrendous in so many respects, and yet a passage in which there is a mine of gold, the riches of the kingdom of God, the promise of God revealed to Your people.

[35 : 50] And Lord, we can come and find an even greater treasure tonight in Jesus Christ. In His name we ask. Amen.