

“This Is a Day of Good News”

2 Kings 6:24-7:20

A Terrible Siege

War between Israel and Syria had broken out once again. Ben-Hadad had besieged Samaria, the capital of Israel. A time of great drought had diminished the harvest for a couple of years. The inhabitants of Samaria had not been able to stockpile food for a siege. Soon the people were reduced to starvation. Prices for the most disgusting fare had skyrocketed. A donkey's head cost about one kilogram of silver, and half a liter of seed pods (used for the cooking-fire), was half a kilogram of silver. It is even more surprising when you recall that a donkey's head was unclean and could not be eaten in Israel. A half pint of dove dung was selling for five pieces of silver. The dove dung could have been purchased for several reasons. It could have been used for fuel, fertilizing of crops or consumption, since there have been times in history when people collected dung to eat during famine. Some even resorted to cannibalism (2 Kings 6:24-29). Two mothers decided to eat their own sons. Their plan was to eat one son the first day and on the second day the other son. However, the second mother reneged on the deal. The other woman was terribly agitated and sought help from the king. But when the king heard about this atrocity, he tore his robes in total despair.

A Prophecy of Hope (7:1,2)

Jehoram, who was king of Israel, blamed Elisha for the horrible conditions that existed. A royal edict went out to have Elisha executed. The king himself came to Elisha's home (6:30-33). Elisha had told the king not to surrender to the Syrians. He promised that by tomorrow at that very time there would be plenty to eat in Samaria (7:1). This seemed impossible even if the siege were to be lifted before tomorrow. He prophesied that flour and barley would be sold for low prices in the city gates the very next day. It would be like promising gas prices would be back to \$1.19 in a single day.

The Prophecy Rejected (7:2a)

The officer sent by the king to execute Elisha rejected the very idea that his prophecy could come true (7:2a). He believed that Israel's God was too weak for such a great miracle. For this, Elisha predicted the officer's death (7:17-20). Later, the king appointed the officer to be in charge of the gate. At the news that there was food outside the walls of the city, the hungry people inside the city panicked and stampeded through the gate, trampling the officer to death.

The Four Lepers (7:3-9)

In Biblical times, the disease of leprosy was regarded as an awful punishment from the Lord. It's very name means "smiting." Those who were afflicted with the disease were considered to be unclean. A leper was required to go bareheaded and to conceal his beard with his cloak as if mourning at his own implicit death. He was bound further to alert passers-by to stay away from him, by calling out "Unclean! Unclean!" A leper was not allowed to speak to anyone, or receive or return

any greeting since this involved an embrace. He was cutoff from the Temple, and barred from priesthood. The law prohibited them living inside a city (Lev. 13:45,46; Num. 5:1-4). During a siege, they were probably the last ones to receive any handouts. The lepers understood their plight.

These four unfortunate men had a decision to make. They could remain where they were and die from starvation or leave the gate and surrender to the Syrian army. With nothing to lose, they decided to surrender.

To avoid being shot by archers, on the wall, the lepers probably left at dusk. When they arrived at the Syrians' camp, they made a welcomed discovery. The camp was empty (7:5). God had caused the Syrians to hear sounds that seemed to be the approaching of horses and chariots. Thinking that they were being attacked by allies of the Israelites, they fled. The lepers found that they had left everything in their camp. So, they started eating the army's rations like mad (7:8). Not only did they discover food but riches and raiment. Remember, these men were the poorest of the poor.

At first they were selfish. They were looking out only for number one. They were slack and silent about the good news (7:9). For some inside the city on the verge of starvation, the delay of even a few hours might have brought death. Others may have been driven to violence by their hunger and may have robbed or even killed to get food.

Suppose the lepers had worn some of the expensive garments they had taken from one the Syrian's tents. Someone might ask questions. So, they returned and called out to the gatekeepers and told them what they had found in the enemy camp.

Who would still dare to say that the Bible is a boring book? This is an amazing story! But what lessons could we learn this? How might this strange series of events help me live the Christian life today?

- The World Is Starving

Remember, how bad the siege was? Mothers were cooking and eating their sons, and the people were eating the most revolting garbage which was worth his weight in silver. For the four lepers to have remained silent would have been inhuman.

Today, we have the "Bread of Life." We have the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Now, there are 1 billion people overweight compared to 600 million people who are hungry in the world today. Yet, there are many more who suffer from spiritual starvation. How can Christians withhold the Gospel?

- The World Is Besieged

Look at the murders, abortion, rape, robbery, homosexuality, alcoholism, sexual immorality, and let's not forget drugs, and now terrorism and just look at what we call entertainment. The Devil has laid siege to people's lives. He has surrounded us by powers of darkness. Satan has laid siege to the soul's of men and the families of our nation.

- The World Is Consuming Itself

Just as they had resorted to cannibalism, people are biting and devouring one another. We feed our selfish desires by abusing other people. We cheat, we lie, participate in corruption, egoism.

- The World Is Impoverished

Mankind has become so busy stockpiling wealth for ourselves that we forget others who need

what we are hiding away. The last thing we need to be hiding is the Gospel. We need to let the light of life shine forth in this dark world. Those who are spiritually impoverished need the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8).

- The World Is Dead

Leprosy is viewed in Scripture as a symbol of sin. Lepers were alive but viewed as dead. In Europe during the Middle Ages, people with leprosy were declared dead. They then witnessed their own funeral and symbolic burial before they were banished. The person without Christ is alive physically but dead spiritually. Paul refers to the lost as being "dead in trespasses, and sin."

- Our Great Discovery

Like the friends of Jesus who first discovered the empty tomb, let us "go and tell" that He is risen. We have the best news of all that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day. Christians have come upon a monumental prize -the fantastic tidings is that Christ saves sinful men. We have a moral indebtedness to share it with others. Evangelism has been defined as "one beggar telling another where he found bread." So, let's do as the lepers did. Shout to the starving, impoverished world that this is a day of good news.

- Our Decision to Share

The silence of the Christian does him harm instead of good. The world needs rescuing. They need relief. We must not remain silent. As John Donne once observed, "no man is an island...every man is part of the main." Paul reminded the Thessalonians that "the Lord's message rang out from you"(1 Th. 1:8).

- The World's Response

At first, the king of Israel was dubious of the good news. He dreaded the possibility that the Syrians were staging a surprise for him. So, the king dispatched men to reconnoiter the area. They picked up the trail. "They found the whole road strewn with the clothing and equipment the Arameans had thrown away in the headlong flight" all the way to the Jordan River.

The world responds to the good news at least four different ways just as they did in Elisha's day:

- 1) Courteously - as did the gatekeepers who were willing to pass on the message to the king's household (7:11).
- 2) Coldly - as the king said to his servants that night that it was a trap (7:12).
- 3) Cautiously - as the king sent out scouts to check the story out (7:13).
- 4) Contemptuously - as the officer had rejected Elisha's prophecy of plenty of cheap food for all within twenty-four hours: "Now look, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?" (7:19).

When it comes to the spiritual side of life, it is feast of famine. All about us, people are starving spiritually. Jesus Christ, who is the bread of life, alone can satisfy the souls' hunger. He has prepared a feast; we need to share it with others.

– Daniel R. Vess, The Forum, December 9, 2007