



**KING'S
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EDINBURGH

A Day of Good News (2 Kings 6:24-7:20)

2 Kings covers one of the bleakest seasons in Israel's history. Having asked for a king to rule them (rejecting God's Kingship over them), they found themselves reaping the consequences of a sequence of ungodly kings who led them away from God and into idolatry. The kingdom divided into a northern and southern kingdom ('Israel' and 'Judah'). The northern Kingdom never had a godly king.

This is where Elisha the prophet lived and ministered. Throughout this book, God continually loves His people, actively sharing His word with them even though they are unfaithful. God is present among them.

A dark situation desperately in need of deliverance

This is a dark story, comparable with human misery we hear about in parts of the world today. There's a siege situation. The economy crashes. Nobody has access to food, causing hyper-inflation so that a donkey's head is trading for 80 months wages and dove dung for 8 months wages! The poor get left behind.

The writer puts a human face on suffering to help us connect. Two mothers are profiled who, in their desperation, have made a deal to eat each other's children. This is unimaginable to us, but we're wise to understand that desperation is often accompanied by bad decision making. At its worst it leads to the devaluation of human life.

The King is an astute politician, but is completely unable to help. This is a humanly unsolvable problem, and he quickly finds someone else to blame: God and his messenger, Elisha! Part of our sinful human condition is to blame God for our mess.

Today, the same often gets directed at his human agent today: the Church.

But the description of the impossibility of this situation is a backdrop to an impossible deliverance to come:

Elisha replied, *"Hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says: About this time tomorrow, a seah of the finest flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria."* (2 Kings 7:1)

The climax of the story occurs just a few verses later: *"... 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."*

God changes this situation completely in 24 hours. What is humanly impossible, God does. And He does it without any help at all from anyone! God's deliverance comes on His terms in His timing and in His way; entirely by him.

God doesn't need our help in dealing with the impossible situations we may find ourselves facing. God is able to bring about deliverance. Even before you discover it, God has been working.

In fact, this is the central story of the Christian faith: a God who brings us victory without our help and without our knowledge. When Jesus was crucified on a roadside outside Jerusalem, no-one thought, "Wow- can you feel the victory?". It seemed very unspectacular. Jesus was deserted, abandoned, alone. What was really going on?

"He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." (Colossians 2: 13-15)

Our sin was being removed, cleansed, forgiven. Every demon in hell was screaming as Christ defeated them.

That victory is our ultimate human victory, so that even death itself can never separate us from a God who loves us (Romans 8).

The news is given to wholly unlikely messengers

"There were four men with leprosy at the entrance of the city gate"(2 Kings 7:3)

These are the people God partners with to break the good news to the city in desperate need! There are better people available: There are kings envoys (7:13), soldiers with horses and armour, and people who have heard the promise of deliverance spoken by Elisha. Yet they're debilitated through unbelief.

So God stirs these four lepers. They were social outcasts; infectious, unclean beggars. They didn't have much going for them. It may surprise you who God uses. God's not anti-clever; He himself is all knowing and all wise. But He is against people who think they know better than him.

"Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." (1 Cor 1: 26-27)

It's often God's way to choose the unqualified, the unproven, the unrecognized.

The story is powerful because the story of the lepers is wrapped up in a much more significant narrative. We must be careful not to see our Christian life as only about our personal salvation.

The story of the four lepers models grace beautifully: Spiritually starving people discover life-giving food. The blessings of grace are a feast: forgiveness, relationship with God, new identity, new clothing of righteousness, new family, a certain and glorious future hope, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The danger is as Christians we think the story ends there. But God's grace goes beyond us and is to be shared with a world in need.

The leper's pang of conscience in 7:9 brings about the salvation of thousands more people.

"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."" (7:9)

God wants us as believers to be both well fed (enjoying the wonder of grace) and also generous in sharing it with the world. Bill Hybels notes that whilst the worldwide church has grown in expressing grace through its care for those in need and in writing great worship songs, he observes that sadly fewer Christians seem to be sharing the good news of their faith in Jesus.

Therefore we need to be diligent to share the good news. How?

1. **Don't worry you don't have all the answers:**Your primary qualification is your own experience. We often don't share Jesus because we feel unqualified. In this story they said what they knew and let their hearers make their own investigation.
2. **Use your own style:** Use the gifts God has given you to share his news. The lepers and gatekeepers shouted (not a very acceptable style in our age!) Most of us don't get to shout. Caring, conversation, friendship, invitation, hospitality, caring for the whole person. What's your style?
3. **Be full of faith:** Be expectant! This story contrasts people who should have faith but don't with people who find it through deep experience of God. Ask God for opportunities and look for them.
4. **Get in a community that will provoke you:**These lepers did that for each other. Small groups are a good place to provoke one another to share good news.

Questions

- **Dark times:** The story tells of a desperate situation leading to bad decision making. What pressures do we come under when we're faced with impossible situations? Do you have an experience of this?
- **Responding in faith:** How would responding to Elisha's word have helped their situation? Why didn't they? Are their similar challenges for us today?
- **Unseen victories:** How does this story, and also the seeming obscurity of Jesus dying on a cross help us to understand God's victories in our life?
- **Wonderful grace:** In what way does grace help us and hinder us sharing good news?
- **A day of good news:** Do you find it easy to share the good news with people? What stops you? How can we help each other?



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