

The Story of Four Lepers

2 Kings 7:3-11 And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die here. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die. And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life. And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it. Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household. So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they

told him, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were. And he called the porters; and they told it to the king's house within.

[2 Kings 7:3-11] This is the central part of a story that comprises the message this morning.

When I pick up the Bible and I turn to the Book of the Kings and I read about four lepers? ***[2 Kings 7:3]***.

I thought when I picked up the Bible and looked at the title of these volumes, that when it spoke of kings, that I would read of the great and the mighty, the magnificent and the illustrious.

Therefore, when I turn the page of the book and find that so much of it is given to the poor and the distressed and the despairing, I am amazed at the choice of God when He writes down, what He inspires the prophet and the apostle to speak of in the Book.

Did you know if you were to take out of this Bible all of the stories of the poverty-stricken and the brokenhearted, you'd have hardly anything left?

The Psalms speak of the poor,
the promises to the despairing and the grief stricken,
and the stories of God's humble and poor in the earth,
they comprise the whole Bible;

the story of Joseph, as he is sold into slavery [**Genesis 37:26-31**];

the story of the little baby Moses, exposed on the river of the Nile to die [**Exodus 2:1-4**];

the story of Job, sitting in ashes, crying in agony for the afflictions God hath sent upon him [**Job 2:8, 3:1-26**];

the story of the two widows who came back homeless and helpless, gathering sheaves, handfuls left for the poor in the fields of Boaz [**Ruth 2:1-17**];

the story of the widow, whose son was sold for the debts of her deceased husband [**2 Kings 4:2**].

I haven't time even to begin to mention how much of the Bible tells the story of the poor and the distressed, those who despair before God.

Now this story is one of them; the Book of the Kings.

And there were four lepers [**2 Kings 7:3**].

Now it came about like this.

The king of Israel is Jehoram.

He's the brother of Azariah, who died childless, and both of them, the sons of Ahab and Jezebel.

In the twenty-fourth verse of **chapter 6** of **2 Kings**, we are introduced, again, to Ben-Hadad II, the king of Syria.

And he has brought a host of his army [**2 Kings 6:24**].

And they have shut up Samaria in an iron band.

And the famine is so indescribably terrible in Samaria that—in the twenty-fifth and following verses, these things are told—so tragic is the starvation of the people, as they are shut up by the great army of Ben-Hadad, that an donkey’s head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver **[2 Kings 6:25]**.

Ordinarily, you wouldn’t eat the flesh of a donkey to begin with.

And the head of an animal is the last part to be desired.

But the head of a burro was selling for fifty dollars which was an astronomical sum of money to those poor people.

And the fourth part of a cab of dove’s dung was sold for five pieces of silver, for three dollars **[2 Kings 6:25]**.

Sometimes a commentator will say that dove’s dung refers to pulse because of the brownish color of it.

But you will find other commentators who say as repulsive as the thought may be, let it stay like it reads.

The offal of a dove was sold, a pint for three dollars, so tragic the famine in the city.

Then, you have the story of the woman who cries unto the king as he passes by on the wall, looking out over the vast host of Syria.

And the woman says, “O lord, my king, help.”

And the king replies, “If God does not help you, how could I?”

How could I?" **[2 Kings 6:26-27].**

And she says, "This woman by my side has a little son, and I have a little son.

And in our distress, we agreed that one day we would boil my son and eat him, and then the next day, we would boil her son and eat him.

And we boiled my son and ate him.

And the next day, when we were to boil her son, she hath hid her son" **[2 Kings 6:28-29].**

And when the king heard of the cannibalism of his people, eating their own flesh and blood, he rent his clothes.

And he said, "God do so, and more also to me, if the head of Elisha stands on him this day" [2 Kings 6:30-31].

Evidently, what Elisha had done was to tell that unbelieving king, the son of a murderer, that if you will trust God, God will give you an abundance.

If you will just trust Him, God will deliver you [Psalms 37:40].

So he says, "God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day" [2 Kings 6:31].

So he sends to Elisha. And Elisha says to his counselors around him, "You keep the door closed.

Do not let his messenger come in because this son of a murderer is behind him, fast on his heels” **[2 Kings 6:32]**.

So the King Jehoram, himself, comes and stands before Elisha, and Elisha says, “By this time tomorrow, there shall be a measure of fine flour, three gallons sold for a few cents.

And there shall be two measures of barley, six gallons of barley sold for the same amount, a few cents” **[2 Kings 7:1]**.

Why, it was the most unbelievable promise, it was the most astounding message that a mind could imagine!

There they were,

starving to death,

eating doves’ offal,

boiling one another’s children,

entering into cannibalism,

so terrible and stark the famine that when Elisha said such a thing as that,

it was greeted with open ridicule **[2 Kings 7:2]**.

And the lord on whose hand the king leaned answered and said, “Why, if God were to open the windows of heaven, and if God were to start manufacturing barley and wheat up there, and if God were to pour out upon us His manufactured product, what shall that thing be?”

And they openly ridiculed the delivered message of God's prophet, Elisha [2 Kings 7:2].

Now that is the introduction to the story.

Now we turn to the four lepers.

There they are outside the gate [2 Kings 7:3].

And they are dying,

not only of the rotting of the corruption of their flesh,

but they are dying of the lack of the garbage,

that day-by-day was let down to them over the wall;

those miserable wretches,

that leprous congregation of four wretched men.

Now remember this:

When God says something,

God does something.

When God makes a promise,

God immediately begins to work to bring it to pass.

In some cases, It might not be in our lifetime.

It might not be in our generation, but when God says a thing, God faithfully does it.

And when the Lord said by His prophet Elisha, ***“This time tomorrow there shall be six gallons of fine flour sold for just a few cents,”*** when God said that, immediately, God began to bring it to pass [2 Kings 7:1].

And the Lord made that host out there in the twilight, the Lord made that sieging army of Syria out there in the twilight, the Lord made those men out there in the twilight, to hear a noise of on-rushing horses.

And they said to one another, “That king of Israel, Jehoram in there, has hired the kings of the Hittites and the Egyptians to come against us.

And let us flee for our lives!”

And they fled [2 Kings 7:6-7].

God never needed the Hittites to help Him.

He never does.

He never needed the Egyptians to help Him.

He never does.

He scattered the folds of [Syria] like a man would scatter dust, like chaff which is driven before the wind.

There is not an enemy left in the whole land of [Israel].

They have run to the Jordan, leaving everything they have behind, and they’re all on the other side, fleeing for their lives, frightened like sheep! [2 Kings 7:6-7].

Now you look at the people left behind and what unbelief will do.

And they sit there, in the twilight, shut up like men are shut up in an iron cage!

And they go to bed that night for fear and for stark terror. There is not an enemy soldier anywhere around them.

And they're starving to death! **[2 Kings 6:24-25].**

And there is the abundance for an army of one hundred thousand men, right outside the gate **[2 Kings 7:8-10].**

Isn't that the most startling picture you could ever think of in your life?

What amazing things unbelief will do!

So, the people that God is setting free sit silently on her hill **[2 Kings 7:12].**

And she's frightened, and she's scared, and the people go to bed that night thinking that any hour they may fall into death by the edge of the sword.

And they hope to sleep, that they may forget the agony of their gnawing hunger pangs.

And yet, they are free as birds.

There never was a deer that ran through the wilderness that was more unencumbered than the people were that very night.

There they are afraid, and there was nobody to make them afraid **[2 Kings 7:7]**.

And there they are starving to death—and an abundance all around them to eat **[2 Kings 7:8-10]**— because they had a famine of the faith in their hearts that matched the famine of the hunger gnawing pangs in their stomachs.

What an astonishing thing what unbelief will do!

So the people there are scared to death.

You would have thought that at least the king would have sent out an emissary, to see if this thing that Elisha had said had come to pass **[2 Kings 7:1]**.

What an amazing thing!

Nobody sees.

Nobody tries.

Nobody goes.

They sit in their terror and in their fear and in their starvation, when God has liberated them and provided provisions like He had never done before in the history of the world.

Now, the four lepers; these wretches, outside the gate, say to one another, **“Why sit we here until we die?” [2 Kings 7:3]**.

The garbage that had been handed over the wall, by which they had eaten in days passed, had ceased altogether.

And there they were emaciated, not only in the corruption of their flesh but in the agony of their starvation.

And, ***In their desperation, they said to one another, “Why sit we here until we die? [2 Kings 7:3].***

If we go into the city, the famine is there and the gate is shut: and if we sit here, we starve in agony.

Let us go to the Syrians.

And if they slay us, it will be better to die with one death stroke than it will be to sit here in this long and lingering wretchedness” [2 Kings 7:4].

So they raise the question and they answer it, “Let us arise and go” [2 Kings 7:5].

You know, that would be a revival sermon, wouldn't it?

“Why sit we here until we die?” [2 Kings 7:3].

I remember a song, “When the crimson cross is so nearby, why will ye die?”

When there is mercy and plenty,
when there is God's love and to spare,
and we perish in the grave,
and in the night,
and in death,

and in judgment,

why, why, until we die?

You know, that's a pretty good question.

Why sit we here until we die?

To be done with doing nothing, oh!

There may be fifty ways to be lost; there's one way to be saved [John 14:6]—move toward God.

Move. Move. Move. Move!

“Why sit we here until we die?” [2 Kings 7:3].

Move, move. move, move, move!

Seek, seek. Ask! Come! “Why sit we here until we die?”

And they move.

They move ***[2 Kings 7:5].***

And I can see them, as those four miserable wretches, in their despair, driven to the camp of what they think is a merciless and a cruel enemy, I can see them come.

And one of them says to the other, “Be of good courage, the next step, the next step may be our last.

The next step, the sentry will challenge us.

And the sword will pierce us to the heart!

The next step will mean death, but be of good courage.

Let's go. Let's go. Let's go!"

And there is no sentry that challenges them **[2 Kings 7:5]**.

And there is no death stroke that falls.

And they come into the first part of the camp and the second part, and there is abundance, and abundance, and abundance **[2 Kings 7:8]**, and nobody to say, "No"; exactly as it is with the Lord God and nobody to say, "No."

"He that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out" [John 6:37].

No fear of death.

No fear of the darkness of the grave!

And in coming, there the abundance, the overflowing of the mercies of God [Psalms 103:8].

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies" [Psalm 23:4 5]

One hundred thousand men have fled.

And God's wretches, God's miserable wretches, sit down to the banquet God has prepared for them **[2 Kings 7:8]**.

What an amazing thing!

What an amazing thing!

And as they look on the gold, on the silver, on the raiment, on the food, on the vast wealth of all that had pertained to that vast army, all of it theirs! **[2 Kings 7:8].**

They said one to another, "This is not well. This is not well. Come. This is the day of good tidings; let us tell the king [2 Kings 7:9].

No longer starving, no longer shut up; why, God has opened the windows of heaven **[2 Kings 7:2].**

Look! Look! Come!" And they go to the gate. And they call the porter [2 Kings 7:10], "Porter, porter, porter, gatekeeper, gatekeeper," and he comes to the gate and peers down. And he sees those four miserable wretches. And they say, "Open the gates. And tell the king's household and all of starving Samaria, tell them to come out. God has provided a banquet like we've never seen before, and gold and silver and all things rich!

Come!" And the porter looks down and says, "Are you those same four wretches? Are you those same four lepers? Why, I thought you would have been dead days ago. I haven't passed any garbage to you in over a week. Are you the same?" "We're the same, we're the same. Come. Come. Come" **[2 Kings 7:11].**

I don't know of a finer illustration of what it is to be a preacher, and what it is to be a witness, and what it is to be a Christian than just that thing.

We are not men who are theorizing, and we are not philosophizing.

We are saying to sinners, “There is a way that a man can be saved!”

And we are saying to those who are dying, “There is a way for those who can live!”

And we are saying to those who face, eternity, **“Come, there is a great triumphant hallelujah God hath set before those who will trust in Him!” [John 3:16, 11:25-26]**

That’s what it is.

We are witnesses.

We are proclaimers.

We are announcing the great good news of the love and mercy and forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus. **“Come. Come. Come” [John 7:37; Revelation 22:17].**

“Oh!” said these lepers, “Come. Come. Come! There is bread enough and to spare.” God hath opened the windows of heaven **[2 Kings 7:2, 10].**

And when the king and his people arose and came to the camp, behold, it was even as those lepers had said [2 Kings 7:14-15].

God had opened the windows of heaven.

There was bread for the soul.

There was life for death.

There was freedom for captivity.

There was the blessing and the fullness of God [2 Kings 7:15-16].

Come. Come.

Why starve when God has spread the banquet of heaven before us?

Why be lost in perdition and damnation when God hath opened the windows and the doors and the palaces of glory to us?

Why live cooped up in a little segment of this mortal life when God hath given us the freedom and the liberty of the forever life that is yet to come? [John 10:27-30].

Why live small and beggarly and wretched in this world when God hath given us songs for our souls and praises for our lips and every day's happiness for our pilgrimage in the way?

Why would a man choose to die when the crimson cross is so nearby?

Why doesn't a man come, come to Jesus?

Come. Come.

That's His message to our souls today.

That's His glorious announcement to our people today.

We're not speculating.

We're not philosophizing.

We are announcers and proclaimers that the riches of glory in Christ Jesus are yours for the having, for the taking, for the asking [Ephesians 3:14-19; Philippians 4:19]

Come. Come. Come and see for yourself.

If nothing else, let the judgment and the grief and the death that we inevitably face, let them drive us to Jesus.

Come. Come.

With God, there is enough and to spare for us all.