

Hear The Word Of The Lord

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Date: 12 May 2019

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[0 : 00] Let us now turn to the passage that we read, second book of Kings on chapter 7. And we may read again at verse 1.

What Delicia said, Here the word of the Lord, Thus says the Lord, Tomorrow about this time, A sea of fine flour Shall be sold for a sheikh, And to see as a barley For a sheikh at the gate of Samaria.

Now just by way of introduction, A little background information, After the death of King Solomon, The kingdom of Israel was divided into two kingdoms.

Ten tribes formed what became known as Israel, And mainly the tribe of Judah, Plus some of Benjamin, Formed what became known as the country of Judah.

In the new Israel, Samaria became the capital city. Christ and Judah, Jerusalem remained the capital.

[1 : 26] The division of the nation arose mainly from a dispute About conditions of service. The opposition was led by a man named Jeroboam.

His claim was that the people of Israel had been treated oppressively by Solomon. Your father made a yoke heavy, Now therefore, and I'm quoting from the first book of Kings, Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father, And his heavy yoke on us, And we will serve you.

Now it's difficult to know with certainty How much truth there was in this claim.

Whether it was a ploy that was used by Jeroboam for political maneuvering, A denigrate Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor to the throne, Asked for time to consider the claim.

He consulted two different sets of advisors. We are told he first consulted with the old men, Who had served with Solomon.

[2 : 47] He asked the obvious question, How do you advise me to answer these people? And their response was, If you will be a servant to these people today, And serve them and speak good words to them, When you answer them, Then they will be your servants forever.

As those who had served under Solomon, They gave wise and valuable advice. They knew that to govern, He needed the consent of the governed.

I suppose that's something that is lost on many In political circles today. They were counseling, Godly humility, servant leadership, And moderation in the exercise of power.

And that was wise advice. However, it was not the advice that Rehoboam wished to hear. And so he decided to ignore this advice.

And we are told he abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him, To counsel with the young men, Who had grown up with him, Unstood before him.

[4 : 12] In other words, He took advice from his own contemporaries. They were probably men in their 30s and 40s. And he says to them, What do you advise that we answer these people?

Now, when he asked the old men, He asked the question, How do you advise me to answer? When he asked the younger men, His own contemporaries, What do you advise that we answer these people?

Who have said to me light in the yoke, That your father put on us. And you get the sense that Rehoboam is more willing to listen To his contemporaries.

There's no indication of prayer, Or of seeking guidance from the truth. And I suppose when we are young, There is always the temptation To assume that the elderly Are totally out of touch And out of debt.

And what do they know anyway? And the young men who had grown up With Rehoboam, They said to him, Thus shall you speak to these people who said to you, Your father made our yoke heavy, But you lighten it for us, Thus shall you say to them, My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs.

[5 : 40] And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, But I will discipline you with scorpions.

And so Rehoboam decided to accept The advice of his contemporaries. The decision he made resulted In the split of the kingdom, And caused problems for centuries.

Rehoboam, the new ruler of New Israel, Stopped trusting God. He introduced a false form of worship.

He introduced idolatry, In flagrant contradiction of the Second Commandment. And so there was a progressive departing From the teaching of the Word of God.

It didn't happen overnight. Often that is the case. But progressively, The ten tribes known now as the New Israel, They progressively walked away From the teaching of the Word of God.

[6 : 58] And so now, in the chapter that we read, And the chapter before the one that we read, We are told of how the Syrian forces Made in Kersans into Israel.

We are told in chapter six of the Siege of Dothan, And how it ended in such humiliation For the forces of Syria.

And then we have the account of this next in Kersan, Where the forces of Syria besieged The capital city of Israel, Samaria.

And this siege led to the dire conditions In the city. The rich who could afford Extortionate crisis were eating poor faith.

And the poor who didn't have the means Were eating each other. They gave in to cannibalism.

[8 : 01] And in addition, an impatient king Wanted the prophet of God dead. I suppose that Elijah was a convenient scapegoat.

So that brings me to our text. That's the backdrop to our text this evening. Three thoughts. First of all, a startling prophecy.

What Elijah says. And then secondly, a surprise in your currents. In other words, we are told how the prophecy came to be fulfilled.

And thirdly, we are given striking proof Of the fulfillment of the prophecy That was made.

So that's the three thoughts that I wish to elaborate on. A startling prophecy. Why do I say that? Well, I've already referred to the prevailing conditions In the city.

[9 : 07] The wonderfully vivid narrative in chapter six Tells a pitiful story of women boiling their children.

Of unclean food worth more than its weight in silver. A city faced with the choice of slow and painful death By starvation already practicing cannibalism.

Such was the low moral and spiritual standard That prevailed. Government were shorn of answers To deal with the desperate and rapidly worsening conditions.

The king was worked up to a pitch of frenzy And he had murderous designs. He renounced his allegiance to God.

Oh yes, you can read that he wore the garments of contrition. Garments of sackcloth. But it is evident that his That his contrition was superficial.

[10 : 23] It was just outward. Why do I say that? Because true repentance means waiting on the Lord. Listen to what the psalmist writes in one of the great Penitential Psalms. I wait, he says, for the Lord My soul waits, and in his word I hope.

My soul waits for the Lord. More than watchmen for the morning. More than watchmen for the morning. There is no evidence of such a penitential spirit In the life of this King Jehor. He is bent on murder.

This is his response to God's judgment. Upon them as a nation, his response is one of outright defiance.

And his, his promise is, or his pledge, is to be head The prophet Elisha. And that shows that it was anything But truly contrite in heart. May God do so to me and more Also, if the head of Elisha, the son of Shafat, remain on his Shoulders today. So the response I would suggest of Jehor and the King is still alive in the world today.

It's the response of many who essentially Hate God and take their hatred out in exercising It upon the people of God.

[12 : 09] We were told in the introduction by Donald this evening Of Open Doors, of how Christians are the most Persecuted group in the world today. Now we may not be aware of it In our communities here, because we are largely protected But there is still, you scratch the surface and you will find and discover That there is a level of hostility just bubbling Beneath the surface. You will find it expressed perhaps In different ways. An outright opposition To the teaching of the word of God. You will find it expressed in other ways By mocking those who profess to follow the Lord By seeking to undermine the confidence of those who come to attend church services And so on. So in a way to put them off and to discourage them

Well, here it is demonstrated in the desire of Jehoram To be head Elisha and to get rid of him.

See when people are challenged by the truth. When the truth challenges Our values, our views and especially our views of self.

Because we have very pronounced views of ourselves. When the truth destroys the reputation that we think we have Just like this king. Often the reaction is one of anger.

Where there is no repentance. In other words, I'm not going to listen to that. His messenger was sent to tell the prophet That the king would not wait for the Lord any longer.

[14 : 17] You find that in chapter 6 and verse 33. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer? And it is into this seething, turbulent, hate-filled cauldron That God chose to make this startling, prophetic statement Through his servant Elisha. Note how the prophet emphasizes The source and authority of the message in delivering it.

Hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord. Hear the word of the Lord. In other words, listen to the word of the Lord.

In the sense of paying careful attention to what God is saying. For your well-being hangs on your response to the word of God.

And that is true in every generation. How we deal with the word of God. How we respond to the word of God. Our eternity hangs on how we respond to the word of God. Our eternal destination is in a measure decided by how we respond to the word of God.

Whether we receive it or whether we reject it. And you know the inclination is always to reject it, isn't it?

[15 : 59] Where as we are urged by the teaching of the word of God to receive it and to receive it in faith. Thus says the Lord. Not just listen but thus says us the classic prophetic formula that is used in the Bible to indicate God addressing the people. And the prophet was not just a fourth teller but a foreteller. The prophets predicted events that would happen. In this particular situation to most and especially the unbelieving heart what the prophet was predicting appeared to be pure fiction. Pie in the sky. That food would be sold again at reasonable prices in comparison to the extortionate prices that were being demanded. Why did it appear to be pure fiction?

Well the the the answer is simple. The stranglehold placed on some area by the superior Syrian forces. They were surrounding the city. They were blockading the city.

No supply lines could get through. So there didn't appear to be any hope of alleviation of any kind. Every avenue, every road was blockaded.

So would the Syrian army, would they sanction a convoy of supplies to get through? And the answer is always sound in no. They were bent on capture in the city.

They weren't going to let any supply lines get through. They weren't interested in some kind of aid coming through. You know sometimes through the pressure of political pressure exercised by governments. You'll hear sometimes of an aid convoy getting through to places where there is real hardship.

[18 : 20] There was none of that here. They were surrounded by the iron grip of the Syrian army. So no goods could get through. And yet note the precision and the confidence expressed in this prophecy. The time when the promise will be fulfilled tomorrow about this time says the prophet. And then we are told of the very price of which the grain will be sold, the flour and the barley.

We're even told of the spot where it will be sold. Tomorrow about this time a measure of fine flour will be sold for a shackle, two measures of barley, for a shackle in the gate of Samaria. Men's promises. Men's promises are mostly big but God's promises are specific. And note to something else. There is a silence as to how this prophecy is to be effected. We're not told of how this will come about. I'm not even sure if Elisha knew how this was going to be accomplished. So you have a combination of precision and imprecision and that's kind of remarkable.

Perhaps a hint of how it would take place might have made belief in the fact so much easier.

But it wasn't given. This promise was left to stand in starkly against the the gloom that prevailed in the city. And I suppose that you could say that is frequently the case that often there is a silence in the Bible as to how God's promises are to be fulfilled.

Just for example you know how Paul writes to the Romans that all things will work together for good to those that love the Lord.

[20 : 52] Even to the cold according to his purpose. But the Bible doesn't tell us how these things are to work together for good.

That combination of all things you know the difficult things, the trials, the painful things that are in our lives. And the Bible says all of these come under the umbrella of the little word all.

They are all working together for good but we don't know how. And here we there is the same principle applied.

They are not told how it's going to take place. What they are asked to do is to believe and it shall take place even as it was told. In other words they are to take God at his word.

That's what you and I are asked to do too. We're asked to take God at his word. You know sometimes people say I'll give you my word.

[22 : 02] Sometimes that word is broken because you don't have the means of fulfilling what you have promised. But when God makes a promise the Bible tells us that faithful is the one who has promised.

He never breaks a promise. He always fulfills his promise and he does it in a way that frequently exceeds our greatest expectations. So they weren't told. Now there's one other factor with regard to this this startling prophecy. We are shown the cynicism of an unbelieving heart. Where do we see that? Well we see it in the reaction of the king's chief of staff. The captain on whose hand the king leaned.

That's how he's described in the passage we read. That's what the Bible calls. He is so sneeringly dismissive of the words of the prophet and of the god of the prophet. Impossible says this man for deliverance to be effected. Where would the food come from to drive crisis down? And it's as if he's implying not even manna from heaven could save the city now.

In other words he refused to believe what he himself could not understand. He refused to believe it.

And if he couldn't understand it then God couldn't do it. And it's not not often how you and I react to. Because we don't understand it then God can't do it. Or never. Never underestimate what God can do.

[24 : 09] Irrespective of whether we understand what he does or not. Never underestimate what he can do. He can change lives around just like that.

He changed your life tonight if you are in Christ. He did it by the power of his grace. You may have thought it was an impossibility.

You may have thought that your life would never be turned around. You may have thought that you would never be sitting in a church building on a Sunday evening listening to the message of the gospel.

Impossible. And yet God did it by the power of the truth. Applied by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. So that your heart was captivated by the message.

And you came to trust in the God of truth. And in the Christ of God. Well this man he couldn't understand it. And so he said he dismissed it as an impossibility.

[25 : 15] But he was going to be taught as we all require to be taught. That we cannot exhaust the possibilities that belong to omnipotence.

And that something much more simple than Windows in Heaven can do what is required to alleviate the situation in some area.

Unbelief which rejects God's, God's, God's plain promise. Because it does not see how they can be fulfilled. It's still present until the present hour.

And it's as irrational as it is disrespectful to God. Elisabeth may not have known how it was going to happen. But he trusted in the God who is faithful and who had given his word.

While this chief of staff who perhaps looked upon himself as being much above Elisabeth in his self-conceived and worldliness.

[26 : 30] And as one writer puts it rather graphically, Amor pretending to have eagle's eye declared it to be an impossibility.

He could not see how it would be brought about. And in doing so he exposed his own blind arrogance of the power of God.

And if you have this additional word of prophecy and a warning to this man, you shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it. Now not even this solemn word of warning could shake this man out of his unbelieving cynicism.

So let every one of us ask ourselves tonight, how do we view God's word? Do we accept it? Do we take God at his word?

Do we believe it? Or do we treat it with disdain? A staggering or a startling prophecy. Secondly a surprising occurrence.

[27 : 40] Note how God fulfills this promise. Nothing so dramatic as windows being opened in heaven. We are told the Lord made the army of the Syrians hear the sound of chariots and of horses.

The sound of a great army. That's all it took. Imagined sound and they fled.

Now it doesn't take great imagination to imagine how a panic would spread quickly in an undisciplined army.

And history supplies examples of that taking place. And so we have a picture here of an army in disarray, heading for the Jordan.

The road littered with an abandoned baggage. All of this brought about, yes, by divine intervention.

[28 : 53] Working on the fears of men who thought that they heard the sound of an army coming out against them.

But you see, the writer of this book is in no doubt that it was produced by the power of God.

If you track the river of life to its source and you come to God, that's where it begins. It begins with God.

The book of Proverbs tells us the wicked flee when no one pursues. And here the power of imaginary terrors, creating such blind panic in the lives of these soldiers that they felt compelled to flee.

What had seemed impossible happened overnight. Because you see, God's ways are higher than our ways. Much higher.

[30 : 23] And so we are introduced, almost as on our side, the writer tells us of four outcasts, four lepers.

Now leprosy meant that people were excluded from fraternizing with the rest of the population. They had heard nothing of the promise, of the prophecy that was made by Elisha.

But they're very despair. And their precarious existence made them daring and take risks.

And you know how they dwell on the one depressing word, die. Why are we sitting here until we die?

If we sailor has entered the city, the famine in the city, and we shall die there. If we sit here, we die also. So now come let us go over to the camp of the Syrians, if they spare our lives we shall live, if they kill us we shall but die.

[31 : 42] They were living, are living death, I suppose you could say. So death was a topic that was familiar to them.

And yet although they were lepers condemned to a living death, what was true? Life was sweet.

And you know it's worth taking note of that. And the opportunity of prolonging life, even a slug, they considered it was worth a try.

And they seemed to be more aware of their hunger than their leprosy. And they chose twilight to make their incursion into the Syrian camp.

They were men who lived in a twilight world. And you can almost see them in your mind's eye creeping cautiously, perhaps their hearts beating as they made their way towards the camp, expecting at any moment to be challenged, and possibly even to be killed.

[33 : 01] And as they progressively made their way into the Syrian camp, their caution diminishes, their wonder grows, and they go from side to side of the camp, and they found no one.

The horses, the asses left behind, in case that the nines they made would betray their flight, every tent empty, and full of goods.

And for them to quote a phrase Christmas had come early. They just couldn't believe what had taken place.

They are absolutely gobsmacked by the fact that there is no one there, and there is this super abundance of food and of goods, and they begin to plunder, and they eat and drink, as you would expect people who were absolutely starving to do.

And twilight had deepened into darkness before they satiated their hunger and their greed. And it's only then that they began to think of the citizens who had excluded them from the city.

[34 : 30] And the reason that they thought of them first was their fear of punishment. It wasn't that they were caring for a city full of hungry people, but they were afraid.

And the second thing that motivated them was that they had a message of good news. They said to one another, we are not doing right.

This day is a day of good news. And that is worth holding on to, because that is an essence, a message that every person who has been brought to faith and Christ has to share, a message of good news, that Jesus Christ came into the world to seek and to save sinners like you and me.

That's the good news. That's why he's come. If we are in possession of the good news, then our possession of the good news obliges us to share it.

If we have tested that the Lord is gracious, that he is merciful, then we are duty bound to share that message with our fellow man.

[36 : 00] You might have thought that lepers were strange messengers of good news. But you see, if I can put it another way, the message graces the bringer of good news.

God has his own ways of choosing the heralds of good news. And the particular qualification of sharing good news is personal experience of the gracious dealing of a merciful God.

These four men could only say, we have seen and we have tasted. And it is there for others to share it.

And as one writer puts it all, this is vintage Yahweh, using lepers, nameless servants, to propagate the message of good news.

That's what God does. He uses often, nameless people, perhaps, personal testimony from one person to another, as the Gospel is gossiped by one person to another, making a mark on the life of another person, perhaps in your neighborhood, perhaps in your family, one person telling another, and the sheer exuberance of the message that has been given to them is communicated to the next person, and so it goes on.

[37 : 57] Remember how Paul puts it, right into the Corinthians, considering you're calling brothers, not many, few were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, He chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, and God made wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

Therefore, as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. Sometimes the source of good news can come from the most unexpected source.

Perhaps some of you will remember the late Professor George Collins, and he used to tell a story of an elder who was responsible for taking services in a vacant congregation.

[39 : 16] The elder didn't compose any sermons, he didn't feel he could do it, but he would read sermons from the writings of Thomas Boston, or McChain, or Spurgeon, people like that.

And the care of the congregation often weighed him down, and he felt discouraged. One Sunday he was walking to church, and he was overtaken by a man in the community who had learning difficulties.

In many ways, he was like a child. He wasn't able to dress very well, wasn't able to assimilate very much, but he went regularly to the church services.

This man, he was named Duncan McCree, the elder he was feeling so downcast that morning as he walked. When he was overtaken by this person with learning difficulties and for the sake of conversation, the elder said to him, I wish, he said, you had a good word for a poor man.

He didn't really expect an answer. But to a surprise, back came the reply, I have, I have a good word for a poor man.

[40 : 40] What does that say to the elder? God regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise that prayer.

And the elder received much encouragement from this message. Here was a man with learning difficulties, without formal education, incapable of doing very much.

But God used him to bring encouragement. And here in this chapter we are told of these men, despised people, rejects in society lepers.

And God uses them to bring good news. Sometimes God's ways are deeply mysterious. And when they brought the good news, you would have expected that it will be received with rapturous attention.

But the king suspected a trap. And so he sent out a party to make sure that this wasn't some kind of trap, to get the people to come out of the city and then to be overpowered by the Syrian army.

[41 : 58] No, I suppose, that would have been a prudent course of action had he not heard the prophecy of the man of God.

And that tells you how the king disregarded the prophecy of the man of God. He was using worldly wisdom rather than looking to the provision of God.

And that is often what we are inclined to do, rather than accept the word of God, which is always fulfilled.

They appear too good to be true. But let us trust in the God of power and the God who fulfills his promises rather than going on worldly wisdom, which often lets us doubt.

So you have a surprise in your currents, a startling or a staggering prophecy, and then you have striking proof that the time has gone. So a sea of fine flour was sold for a shekel, two seas of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord.

[43 : 15] In other words, everything that the prophet had spoken about came true. The good news and the bad. Because we are told the people went out plunder the camp of the Syrians, and the writer repeats it again.

Just in case we didn't get it the first time or the second time, he repeats it a third time. So sea of fine flour was sold for a shekel, two seas of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord.

Note the emphasis on the fulfillment of the word of the Lord. Whose word? God's inerrant truth. There is constant repetition and emphasis by the writer on the word of the Lord.

All done to emphasize that God's word is God's word. And the word of God is the oxygen for the fire of revival.

So God brings it about. The chief of staff. He lived to see the prophecy of which he had been so contemptuous and so dismissive.

[44 : 26] But he never tasted half the fruit. The people trampled him in the gate so that he died as the man of God had said. And so it happened to him for the people trampled him in the gate and he died.

The good news that meant life for some also meant death for others. The good news with the message of the Gospel, it gives life to some and it deals death to others.

Receiving the Gospel brings joy and life to reject it is a deadly mistake. Remember how in the New Testament Jesus compares himself to a great stone, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, speaking of himself.

It is a strong foundation for anyone who builds on him. And then he went on toward, everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces and when it falls on anyone it will crush him.

So to summarize, you cannot but wonder if the chief of staff recognized that the prediction, the prophecy made by Elisha was absolutely spot on before he was trampled in the stumped for food.

[45 : 50] We have all heard the good news in Jesus Christ. But the question for every one of us this evening is how have we responded to the message of good news?

Have we responded by trusting in the Christ of the Gospel or by dismissing it? It cynically has not been relevant and appropriate to your life.

Will you, my friend, be trampled in the end? See that you do not refuse the one who speaks.

For the writer to the Hebrews reminds us, if they did not escape when they refused him, who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

A staggering or a startling prophecy, tomorrow about this time, a sea of flower will be sold for a shepherd, a surprising occurrence. The Lord had made the army of Syrians hear the sound of chariots and horses, the sound of a great army so they fled for their lives.

[47 : 01] Striking proof, the sale of grain on flowers in the gate of Samaria, at the very moment predicted by the Prophet on the very day predicted by the Prophet in accord with the revelation of God and the death of the cynical chief of staff.

Take God at His word and you'll never be disappointed. Let us pray. O eternal God, help us to accept your truth, to take your word, to live your word, so that your word becomes foundational in our lives and in our relationship to thyself, from the glory shall be thine. In Jesus name we ask it. Amen.