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A Desperate Deliverance II Kings 6:24-7:20

Intro: We're about to launch into a study of a lengthy narrative, the back drop being a Syrian invasion of Israel that results in a devastating siege of it's capitol city, Samaria. This incursion by the Syrians may seem a little odd considering we concluded last weeks study with 6:23 that states that Syrian raiders no longer molested the Israelite countryside. There is no contradiction here because this attack by Ben-Hadad involved mustering his entire army and is not the work of a measly band of raiders. We're not told if the king of Syria employed scorched earth tactics against all of the surrounding towns and villages or just blitzed straight to Samaria to take out her king in hopes of bringing the rest of the country under his control. But, Syrian strategy is of little concern to the inhabitants of Samaria who are just struggling to stay alive. The central theme of this story is that Yahweh shows grace to His desperate people by granting them deliverance. As we will see, this deliverance will have parallels that hit close to home.

6:24-33 – The bleak picture we see in Samaria here is that of human desperation. The outrageous cost of food is part of that desperation. Today we complain about the rising cost of visiting the grocery store but we haven't seen inflation on the scale of what a siege would bring. Who knows how many calories a donkey's head contains but if you factor in that 5 shekels was more than a month's wages for a common laborer, you can see that only the wealthiest people in Samaria were enjoying donkey head soup. Of course, donkey meat wasn't kosher but these Samaritans had been doing quite a bit of things that weren't exactly kosher and they'd been doing it for a long time so this dietary restriction wasn't a concern for them.

You might wonder what nutritional value was to be found in a kab of dove's dung. Well, scholars seem to take this term as a popular euphemism for carob pods. Much like college students will call their cafeteria the Poison Palace or we would call the food truck that visited the Saia dock in Dallas the Roach Coach; neither of those terms were meant to be taken literally it, it's just what they are called. But, regardless if it was carob pods or actual dove's dung, if you didn't have over a month's salary on hand to buy it – “No soup for you!”

But, as desperate as the expense for food was in Samaria, the human expense was even worse. A local constituent brings her sad case to the king as he was on his own personal reconnaissance mission atop the wall. Her story is not just shocking to us – it shocks the king as well! He's so put off by the horror that has been brought before him that he doesn't even render a judgment – he just gives way to anguish over what this siege was doing to his city.

Now, Yahweh had said there might be days like this. He told Israel as much in [Lev 26:27-29](#) and [Deut 28:52-53](#). This is one of the covenant curses. In it, God graphically threatens Israel with this exact disaster if she stubbornly refuses to repent of her pagan infidelity. So, we're not just looking at human desperation but at divine judgment as well. What we are witnessing in the text is not Syrian atrocities but divine punishment falling upon Israel for rejecting God and abandoning the covenant He had made with them that they all swore to keep.

Also note the exhausted patience in the king's reaction. Seems he had had just about enough of this siege and this woman's story drives him over the edge. When the king tore his clothes, everyone could see that he was wearing sackcloth underneath, which is normally a sign of repentance. But the king is not just deeply grieved, he's also angry. Of course, he has a right to be angry but he's not angry with himself, with Israel or with her sin. No, he's angry with the prophet of God. He more in the mood for murder than repentance; he thinks it time for Elisha to lose his head.

Now, here's the thing, if Elisha knows the military plans of the king of Syria, he's got to have the inside scoop on the murderous plans of the king of Israel, so it's no surprise to us that he knows what's about to go down. It may very well be that Elisha had counseled the king to repent (thus the sackcloth). Judging by his exasperation in [v33](#), it appears that the king is rejecting Elisha's counsel. Elisha had probably directed the king to wait in faith for God's deliverance and help but the morbid revelation of maternal cannibalism has soured him of this opinion. His retort in [v33](#) shows that his "faith" and "repentance" was just a tool to get Yahweh to do his bidding. When it proved ineffective, it was quickly cast aside. "I tried Christianity and it didn't work." The problem is revealed in the declaration. There's often a fine line between sackcloth and cynicism.

Another reality the text impresses upon us is that of political helplessness. What is clearly on display in this scene is the ineffectiveness of royal power in a situation that only God can deal with. The government is bankrupt of both help and solutions (27). This truth is painfully obvious to us in our text but I wonder how many Western Christians still hold that the government is somehow a big chunk of their hope? How many still entertain the secular mindset that constantly asks, “What is the government doing to help?” There is no solid hope in politics. The implication from the text is that governments don’t cope very well with things that really matter. As believers, we would be better off dropping our anchors on passages like Ps 146:3-6 and Ps 124:8.

7:1-2 – Despite his murderous intentions, Elisha has good news for the king. In just 24 hours, there would be plenty of food to go around. The news was too good to be true and the king’s assistant employed his gift of sarcasm to point it out. Elisha follows the promise with a threat (2b). Now, Elisha wasn’t promising cheap food; just relief from the terrible siege. He’s merely saying that things will begin to get back to normal. The fine flour and barley will still be pricey but at least they would have flour and barley available. Expense barley is a vast improvement over dove’s dung at any cost. Elisha’s not predicting discount groceries but relative relief.

Even with this explanation, it was still too much for the royal aide to believe. Thus, he was given a word of judgment. But notice the severity of his judgment – it excluded him from enjoying the promise! What’s possible for God can’t be measured in terms of what’s conceivable to man. God’s not limited to operating within the sphere of my limited imagination (or lack of). Notice how the OT expects and demands faith just like the NT. But it’s crucial to understand what kind of faith is demanded. It requires that we believe what God has promised. In this case, the king’s aide will see the miracle happen but he himself will not eat of it. Salvation for the people will involve judgment for this one man for to mock the word of the prophet is to mock the Lord who has given that word.

We are not called to have some generalized faith that God will do unheard of, bizarre or unlikely things. Some people believe that if they squeeze their eyes shut enough and clasp their hands tight enough and if they pump up enough faith to believe, then God will do whatever they ask. They believe

this ridiculous concept because that is what is taught in many pulpits around the country and around the world. But, their ultimate disappointment in this kind of faulty faith will stem from the simple fact that God is only obligated to do what He has previously promised to do. So, if God has promised deliverance, we are required to believe it, no matter how crazy it may seem. We must believe what God has said no matter how unlikely it sounds.

We have many unlikely statements from Jesus in the NT. In [John 14:19b](#) He says, "Because I live, you will also live." The increasing amount of funeral services we attend as life goes on might cause us to doubt this statement, or it might just cause us to cling even tighter to it in faith. [Phil 2:10-11](#) says every knee shall bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord... In a world saturated with secular humanism and pagan morality that truth seems rather distant but it is no less true. What about [Rom 6:14](#)? Do you really believe this? There are some Christians who almost deny it! They seem to believe that their past, whether it's their sin or that of others against them has so crippled them and predetermined their actions that they can hardly imagine living a life free from the grip of sin. But God has promised it so we must accept it as truth. We cannot use victimization to deny sanctification. There are so many promises given to us that we're not only required to believe but to claim and walk in the power of them.

3 – And now, for something completely different... What do 4 lepers have to do with anything we've read so far? Well nothing...and everything. The author is not just averting our attention from the human desperation burning inside Samaria, he is about to reveal Yahweh amazing deliverance and He will bring it through the most unlikely of means. In fact, the story of these 4 lepers has been carefully crafted to emphasize Yahweh's miraculous handiwork.

4-11 – At the center of this section from [v3-11](#) is found the "explanation" which reveals the primary theology of the entire story. Why did this massive Syrian army evacuate Israelite territory as fast as their little Syrian feet could carry them? It was because of divine intervention ([6](#)). This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes ([Ps 118:23](#)). The praise is His alone and the writer highlights it by placing Yahweh's role at the heart of the story. But deliverance needs evangelists to proclaim it. That's where these lepers come in.

Notice that their role began with a simple exercise of logic: “Our situation is serious. What are our options? If we enter the city: famine and death; if we stay here – same. If we defect to the Syrians, they might kill us or there’s a 1 in a million chance that they may feed us.” So you’re saying we have a chance? It was a no-brainer. Let’s go see what Syrian food tastes like...or Damascus steel; either way, it will be over quick. Off they go to find the Syrians.

When they arrive, the place is deserted. It’s not all dusty and broken down like a ghost town, just recently vacated. Notice that the precision of timing is dramatic. **V5** says the lepers rose at twilight to go to the Syrians. At that exact moment, at twilight (**7**) the Syrians rose to flee. They were convinced by Yahweh that it was time to get the heck out of Dodge. As the lepers were plodding off to the Syrian camp, the Syrians were flying out of their camp in a panic! Was this coincidental? Not at all! How many times have we “waited” on God to move in our situation only to discover that He was waiting on us to step out in faith so that He could move on our behalf? We can’t even say these lepers were walking by faith. They’re just employing logic. God has given us intellect and sense. He certainly doesn’t want us to rely on our own intellect or sense but He does expect us to use these God-given gifts from time to time.

So what happens? It’s party time! These 4 lepers began eating and drinking and building a diversified retirement portfolio of precious metals and fashion materials. I don’t know where these lepers expected to wear their new glad rags – nobody is impressed with fashion in a leper colony. But, it was there for the taking so... After the party died down it was conscience time. They started to get uneasy about all their good fortune and rightfully so (**9**). Note what the answer to their uneasiness was: they needed to tell the king about this amazing good news. Off they go to tell the gatekeeper who, in turn, tells someone in the king’s household. The point being that the instruments of Yahweh’s deliverance are these unclean lepers. However, they’re not alone for a nameless servant also plays a crucial role.

12-15 – the scene takes place in the royal bedchamber. You imagine the king is rubbing sleep from his eyes while attempting to put both feet in the same pant leg. All the while he has a deep scowl on his face; he’s not so naïve to believe this is nothing more than a Syrian trick. He’s studied military tactics; he knows what up (**12**). He’s got it all figured out. Of course the

camp is empty - the Syrians are hiding, setting up for a major ambush. It's called strategy! Only a fool would fall for this. It's the oldest trick in the book. The king doesn't even stop to consider the possibility of an alternate scenario, despite Elisha's previous promise. So, you can have God's miraculous deliverance and the report of this good news by some hapless lepers but if no one ventures out of the human desperation of Samaria to go risk a look, it will all be of no use.

So, 3 cheers for the nameless servant who has the audacity to talk some sense into the king. The text is a bit rough but the gist of his statement is this: "We're basically just walking skeletons so what are we really risking here?" What possible danger can there be? Since Israel is nearly finished off, there isn't that much to risk. So off they go to see for themselves and lo and behold, the Syrians really are gone. Now it's their turn to go tell the king. All this is vintage Yahweh – using unclean lepers and nameless servants. God is free to choose the means of deliverance and the messengers of that deliverance. He graciously associates these messengers with Himself in accomplishing His work.

But, who does He choose? Not the most qualified, most informed or the most worthy. He chose lepers to carry the news of this miracle just as He chose women to carry the news of the empty tomb on that first Resurrection morning.

The discovery and declaration of God's work is placed in the hands of the unclean and the unnamed. Here Yahweh uses neither the healthy nor the prominent. What are the ramifications of this truth? My obscure status doesn't prevent me from serving this delightful and praiseworthy God. My mundane circumstances are no hindrance to being used by Him. My daily calling is not useless and neither is yours. This truth should grab us by the collar and pull us down to kneel and to praise! Doesn't God deserve high praise for the lowly servants He chooses to use? Besides, we have news to share of a greater deliverance than that of Samaria!

16-20 – So the people poured out of the city to plunder the Syrian camp and there was plenty of fine flour and barley to be had. That was the good news the Elisha had declared back in v1. But there was also a word of judgment that was more than just a little mysterious. How was it that this officer of the king would be able to see this amazing deliverance but not partake of it? Location, location, location! He might as well have been gatekeeper at a

Who concert. The bodies of those Samaritans were emaciated but you get enough of them trampling on your head and its lights out! In fact, the author feels the need to mention this twice.

This passage hammers home the truthfulness of Yahweh's word. We're told 3 times that all this happened according to the word of the Lord (16b) or as the man of God had spoken (17b, 18a). Granted, that word from the Lord had contradicted all appearances and circumstances and it stood opposed to the most likely human projections but it would prove to be true because Yahweh had spoken it. But, do you see the real tragedy here? In the midst of this miraculous deliverance, this man is destroyed. This is a tragedy brought on by this officer's own disbelief. [Heb 12:25](#)

It's important to take note that this man's unbelief did not falsify God's word in the least; it merely forfeited his own benefit from that word. His unbelief didn't change anything that God had promised; it only changed his own destiny.

Today, as Christians, we have greater good news to share that just relief from a siege. We have the good news of freedom from the bondage of sin, relief from the guilt of sin. We have the message of deliverance from an eternity of punishment in hell made possible by the death of God's Son on the cross. It's by the shed blood of Jesus Christ that our sins are forgiven. It's by His sacrifice we are rescued from the horror of human desperation; delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of His love ([Col 1:13](#)).

There will be plenty who will try to rationalize that truth and plenty more who will reject it but that doesn't disqualify the message; it only calls their destiny into question. The message is true and God has called us to not only receive that message but to faithfully carry it to those who need to hear it. Yes, there is a time for us to enjoy the glorious benefits of our deliverance but we must also allow our conscience to kick in and compel us to share the good news.

You might say, I'm not qualified; I'm a nobody or I'm damaged goods. That may all be true but if you are a Christian, God has called you to be an ambassador for Jesus Christ to the world. It is the glory of God to use the unclean and the unnamed to carry the message of His miraculous

deliverance. We see that truth played out in our text and we should see it played out in our own lives. The need is desperate, the message is true and the stakes are eternal. This is a day of good news! 😊