

Whose Word, and Whose Word Alone, Saves Starving Souls?

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Preacher: Philip Copeland

[0:00] We're going to turn now to our Bible readings. We are reading together in the Old Testament in the second book of Kings.

Phil Copeland has been on and off leading us through some of these stories. And we're coming this morning to really a very remarkable and exciting story indeed.

So boys and girls, before you go out to junior church, do listen carefully as we read. And ask your mom and dad later on at lunchtime what they learned this morning. And that will hopefully mean that they will stay awake and listen.

Because they know that you're going to quiz them at lunch. But this is a very exciting story. And we're reading from 2 Kings chapter 6 at verse 24 right through to the end of chapter 7. So it's long. But do concentrate because it's very interesting and very remarkable. Last time Phil was speaking on the previous passage.

[0:59] And we read how at the very end the Syrians did not come again on raids into the land of Israel. But now we're reading of difficult things starting again.

Then afterward, Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, mustered his entire army and went up and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria as they besieged it.

Until a donkey's head was sold for 80 shekels of silver. That's a very great deal of silver. And the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung, tiny little bit of dove's dung, for five shekels of silver.

Now as the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried out to him, saying, Help my lord, O king. And he said, If the lord will not help you, how shall I help you?

From the threshing floor or from the wine press? And the king said to her, What's your trouble? And she answered, This woman said to me, Give your son that we may eat him today, and we'll eat my son tomorrow.

[2:14] So we boiled my son and ate him. And on the next day I said to her, Give your son that we may eat him. But she's hidden her son. And the king heard the words of the woman.

He tore his clothes. Now he was passing by on the wall. And the people looked. And behold, he had sackcloth beneath on his body. And he said, May God do to me, and more also, if the head of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, remains on his shoulders today.

Elisha was sitting in his house. And the elders were sitting with him. And the king had dispatched the man from his presence. But before the messenger arrived, Elisha said to the elders, Do you see how this murderer has sent to take off my head?

Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and hold the door fast against him. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him? And while he was still speaking with them, the messenger came down to him and said, This trouble is from the Lord.

Why should I wait for the Lord any longer? But Elisha said, Hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord.

[3:36] Tomorrow, about this time, a seer of fine flour, that's a huge amount of flour, will be sold for just one shekel.

And two seers of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria. Then the captain, on whose hand the king leaned, said to the man of God, If the Lord himself should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?

But he said, You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it. Now, there were four men who were lepers at the entrance to the gate.

And they said to one another, Why are we sitting here until we die? If we say, Let us enter the city, the famine is in the city, and we shall die there.

And if we sit here, we die also. So now come, let's go over to the camp of the Syrians. If they spare our lives, we shall live. And if they kill us, we shall but die.

[4:39] So they arose at twilight to go to the camp of the Syrians. But when they came to the edge of the camp of the Syrians, behold, there was no one there. For the Lord had made the army of Syrians hear the signs of chariots and horses, the signs of a great army.

So that they said to one another, Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to come against us. So they fled away in the twilight and abandoned their tents, their horses, their donkeys, leaving the camp as it was, and fled for their lives.

And when these lepers came to the edge of the camp, they went into a tent and ate and drank and carried off gold and silver and clothing and went and hid them.

And they came back and entered another tent and carried off things from it and went and hid them. Then they said to one another, We're not doing right.

This day is a day of good news. If we're silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now, therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household.

[5:46] So they came and called to the gatekeepers of the city and told them, We've come to the camp of the Syrians. And behold, there was no one to be seen or heard there. Nothing but the horses tied and the donkeys tied and the tents as they were.

And the gatekeepers called out, and it was told within the king's household. And the king rose in the night and said to his servants, I'll tell you what the Syrians have done. They know that we're hungry. Therefore, they've gone out from the camp to hide themselves in the open country, thinking when they come out of the city, we'll take them alive and get into the city. One of his servants said, Let some men take five of the remaining horses, seeing that those who are left here will fare like the whole multitude of Israel who've already perished.

Let us send and see. So they took two horsemen, and the king sent them after the army of the Syrians, saying, Go and see. So they went after them as far as the Jordan.

And behold, all the way was littered with garments and equipment that the Syrians had thrown away in their haste. And the messengers returned and told the king. Then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Syrians.

[7:02] So a seer of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two seers of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord.

Now the king had appointed the captain on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate. And the people trampled him in the gate so that he died, as the man of God had said when the king came down to him.

For when the man of God had said to the king, Two seers of barley shall be sold for a shekel, and a seer of fine flour for a shekel, about this time tomorrow in the gate of Samaria, the captain had answered the man of God, If the Lord himself should make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?

And he had said, You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it. And so it happened to him. For the people trampled him in the gate, and he died.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word, and teach us all that he has for us to learn today.

[8:19] Well, good morning. And please have your Bibles open to 2 Kings, chapter 6 and 7. That will be most helpful. Thank you. 2 Kings 6 and 7 has the answer.

We'll look at that in a moment, but let me just quickly remind you, and maybe for you, if you've been here for the first time, let me just tell you where we are in the Bible, where we are in the book of Kings. We're in a section that I've titled, Dismal Kings in a Divided Kingdom.

God's people are currently split in two. In the south, we have two tribes make up the nation of Judah. And in the north, we have ten tribes under the title Israel, with the capital city of Samaria.

And remember that ever since the northern kingdom has been established, it has been a torrid tale where the majority of the people have persistently rejected the Lord their God.

To instead worship dead false gods, idols of the nations. And the kings of Israel, who are supposed to lead the people, have led them in this idolatry.

[9:48] They are exceptional at idolatry. But friends, you know, despite all this, because the Lord is so patient and merciful, He has not withdrawn His all-powerful Word from the northern kingdom.

In fact, in the immediate context of our passage this morning, the Word of the Lord has been working powerfully and publicly through the prophet Elisha. For example, at the start of chapter 6, the Word of the Lord enabled Elisha to thwart the plans of the hostile king of Syria. And as the end of verse 23 says, Because of the Lord's work through His Word, all of the constant raiding parties that brought great harm in Israel by Syrian soldiers was put to a stop.

And Israel got some relief. And why has the Lord been carrying out such powerful works publicly? Well, because again, He is so merciful and patient.

He does these things so that unbelieving Israel might see reality. And might turn away from where they're going into ruin. Might shun their idols.

[11:03] And instead worship and love the Lord God alone as the living God. And in our passage this morning, we've yet another, another instance where the Lord displays the power of His Word.

And we're going to look at this passage in four scenes this morning. Four scenes. And hopefully, as Willie said, you will not fall asleep. All right? If anyone falls asleep, give them a loving, sanctified elbow. Or if you don't know them, don't do that.

But there we go. Scene number one, from verse 24 to 31 of chapter 6. We see starving people in need of deliverance.

Starving people in need of deliverance. So a new crisis has risen for Israel. As I said, Elisha's actions, verse 21 to 23 of the chapter, brought an end to Syrian raiding parties.

But it didn't bring about lasting peace with Israel. And so in verse 24, Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, comes with his entire army and lays siege around Samaria.

[12:07] And we know from later on in the chapter that they were not camped right outside the city walls. Their base was a little bit further out from Samaria. But it was highly effective nonetheless.

And the siege obviously goes on for a long time. Because eventually, all the food in the city of Samaria is used up.

And a devastating famine sets in. I'll never forget when I was at school reading about something. I wonder if you know this, if you know your history. The hunger winter.

Do you know about the hunger winter? 1944 to 45, food supplies were cut off to German-occupied Western Netherlands. And people had to resort to eating grass or sugar beets, which are disgusting, woody vegetables.

They ate dogs, cats. And in the end, they had to boil tulip bulbs to stay alive and eat them. Most people lived on about 400 calories a day.

[13:07] Thousands died of starvation. That is what's going on in Samaria in verse 25. Conditions were so bad that we're told that the cost of a donkey's head, which is hardly your sirloin steak, a donkey's head was 80 shekels of silver.

To put that in perspective, you got one shekel for a month's wage. This donkey's head cost 80 shekels. 80 months' wages.

That was roughly one kilogram of silver was being spent on a disgusting bit of an animal that was, according to Leviticus 11, unclean.

But of course, that all went out the window because things were so desperate. And people were paying through the nose for this horrible, meatless thing. Also, a bag of Doug's dung was going for about five shekels, which was roughly 55 grams of silver.

People probably used that for cooking fuel. Or it might well have been that people were so desperate that they were taking it as their morning granola. Now, it could also be that Doug's dung back then was a derogatory nickname for a bag of seeds, in the same way that a plate of salad in my house is often referred to as a plate of rabbit food.

[14:27] Whatever is meant by Doug's dung, though, it is clear that things were desperately hopeless in the capital city. And it only gets worse as we read on.

In verse 26, the king of Israel was out for a walk on the wall, perhaps doing some personal reconnaissance. He's not mentioned by name, and that's probably because he's not worth noticing. Because he is a pathetic, lousy king. And in context, he seems to be the same Israelite king mentioned in the previous chapters called Jehoram, the son of the extremely wicked Ahab and Jezebel.

So anyway, he's out walking on the city wall when one day a woman cries out to him, Help my lord, oh king! And in verse 27, he shouts back with something that on the surface maybe looks pious, but

is actually really cynical and bitter.

Verse 27, he says, If the Lord will not help you, how can I help you? From the threshing floor to the winepress. So don't be fooled if you think this is pious-sounding talk here.

[15 : 36] This is actually true to form with Jehoram. He always responds to a crisis with pious talk about the Lord and the fact that only the Lord can help us. But really, friends, he's not interested in seeking the Lord's help at all, as we shall see.

And in verse 28, the king asks the woman, Look, what's your trouble? And the woman tells him of this horrific incident that she's involved in.

She says, This other woman said to me, Come, let's cook your son and eat him. And then tomorrow we will cook my son and eat him.

So that is what we did. I cooked my son and we ate him. But the next day, the other woman hid her son and refused to serve him up.

Now, friends, if you were sat there when this was being read out and you felt slightly sick to your stomach, that is absolutely right. That's how you should feel.

[16 : 41] It is absolutely disturbing. Now, we don't know if the sons were both dead already. Although that, to me, is what it reads as.

Perhaps they were cooking and eating the remains of their dead children. But however way you look at it, it is horrific. It's horrific. And as you read this in light of all that's gone before in Kings, you're supposed to think, Look at how low God's people have sunk.

Look at how far they've slipped down. See, back in 1 Kings 3, Do you remember? In the glory days of Israel under Solomon's reign, King Solomon in all his wisdom was approached by two desperate women.

And they both cried out for justice in an incident involving their sons. And through his God-given wisdom, Solomon sorted it out like that, beautifully. And justice was done.

But now in 2 Kings 6, Look how shockingly different things are. Look at the sickening decline. Not only Israel's king, He's now deeply unwise and incapable of delivering his people and this woman in any way.

[17 : 56] But just look at what they're resorting to in order to live. Cannibalism. And these people are supposed to be a light to the nations of God's beauty. But friends, let's just be clear about this, please.

This is all self-inflicted. Yes? The siege. The famine. The desperate measures taken to stay alive. It all comes down to the fact that these people have chosen to reject the Lord their God.

They have spurned His love. They've spurned His grace, His covenant, to instead worship things that are less than God. Years before this, actually, in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the Lord had lovingly warned His chosen people.

And He pleaded with these people. He said, Do not choose this. Do not choose this. Do not reject me and my life-giving ways. Do not walk by unbelief. Rather, choose life.

Choose me. I love you. I've chosen you. So choose me. Walk by the obedience of faith before me and be blessed. But if you walk by unbelief, you will be choosing the way of covenant curse, the way of despair, the way of death.

[19 : 07] In fact, in both Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, the Lord warned Israel about this precise scenario that comes up in 2 Kings 6.

Listen to Deuteronomy 28. The Lord God said to His people, They, your enemies, shall besiege you in all your towns, throughout all your land, which the Lord your God has given you by grace.

And you shall eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you.

And my friends, even today, it is utterly disastrous when the Lord's people, those who profess to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, also spurn and reject His grace and mercy and reject His life-giving ways.

I'm not talking about little slip-ups or stumbling like we all do. I'm talking about going for it against the Lord and His revealed will. When the church of Jesus Christ refuses to walk by the obedience of faith, friends, it will not go well for us either.

[20 : 23] Well, what was the only hope for the starving souls in Samaria? Well, the answer is, turn to the Lord who's been so patient with you in genuine repentance and faith.

And that's why when you read verse 30, for a split second, there's a flash of hope. Verse 30, When the king heard the words of the woman, he tore his clothes.

Now he was passing by on the wall and the people looked and behold, he had sackcloth beneath his, on his body. So the king's initial distress, his response, and tearing his clothes, that was totally appropriate for this horrible account of the woman.

And you wonder if this horror has finally got through to him. Maybe he's going to return to the Lord. Another hopeful sign is his undergarments, which is exposed when he tears his jacket open.

He's wearing sackcloth against his skin, which back then was what you did to express sorrow or mourning if you'd carried out evil or being part of evil.

[21:30] And so, we'll read that in verse 30. In verse 31, what you're ready to hear is this. The king gathered all the city together to lament together before the Lord their God.

He called Elisha to come and intercede for the people. And they all confessed that they were all guilty of idolatry and in need of the Lord's cleansing, forgiveness, and renewal.

What does the king do in verse 31? Does he do that? No chance. Tragically, he blames the word of the Lord. He blames the Lord and threatens to kill the man who carries the word of the Lord.

Please look at verse 31. The king says, May God do so to me and more so if the head of Elisha, the son of Shaphat, remains on his shoulders today.

The king of Israel is done pretending he is repenting. His sackcloth is a sham and his words here show that to be true.

[22:35] He is angry with God for all of this and he takes no responsibility at all. My friends, so often, do you not encounter this in the world?

I've encountered this in the world. People just like this king. Some difficulty sweeps over their lives and you're heartbroken for them. And often, it's because of the decisions that they've made themselves in life that's led them to this difficult place.

And in their initial response, maybe they show a little bit of interest in the Lord Jesus. Maybe they know you're a Christian. They come to you and they say, would you pray for me? Only for things to then get worse.

And then that's when what really is inside the heart comes firing out of them. And they show that they're never really interested in God at all. They're just bitterly angry with him and his people for what they're going through.

And yet, friends, they are raging and rumbling against the only one who can help us in the face of death and despair. And that brings us to scene two. Scene two.

[23:43] In verses 31 of chapter 6 to 7, verse 2, we see a stunning promise of deliverance. A stunning promise promise of deliverance.

So in verse 32, the king gets the ball rolling with his plan to execute Elisha. And he sends a messenger down to the prophet. And meanwhile, Elisha is sitting in his house.

Notice, he's not alone. He's surrounded by the elders of Samaria. What a statement that was. The elders seem to know exactly where the source of hope is to be found.

It is not around the king. It is around the Lord's prophet and the Lord's word. So there they are, sitting in Elisha's house. And just like many times before, Elisha has been given advanced notice from the Lord of the plot against his life.

And that is why he turns to the elders before the king's messenger arrives. And he says, Do you see how this murderer, the king, is sent to take my head off?

[24:49] And then he commands the front door be barricaded shut. That's not because Elisha's full of fear, for he knows the armies of the Lord are with him that we read about earlier in chapter 6.

I take it he shuts the door, and it's not obvious from our English translations, but in the Hebrew text it seems that the messenger of the king was actually a forerunner for the king himself.

The king himself was about to turn up, along with this captain and his soldiers. And so Elisha is really holding off things so he can speak God's word directly to the king.

And eventually everyone arrives. The messenger passes on the king's message. And again, it's marked by real anger and bitterness at God. In verse 33, the king says, This trouble is all the Lord's fault.

Why should I wait for the Lord any longer? That is, I'm fed up with all this humbling yourself rubbish and waiting on the Lord. It's just rubbish. And in 7 verse 1, Elisha finally speaks out to the king.

[25 : 57] And the Lord gives the king a stunning promise. Please look at 7 verse 1. Hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord, Tomorrow at this time, a seer of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel and two seers of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.

In other words, the Lord is saying, I promise that over the next 24 hours I will deliver you from the siege and this famine will be over. Food will be available. Prices will be so much better in Samaria. I will bring relief. Food will be swapping hands again at the gate of Samaria, which of course was the marketplace. at that time. Glorious.

Stunning. But look at verse 2. The king's captain, his right-hand man, hears this word of promise and he scoffs.

He scoffs at what the Lord says. He says, If the Lord himself should make windows in heaven, could this thing be? The Lord making windows in heaven is a metaphor used elsewhere in the Bible to speak about the Lord miraculously tearing open the heavenly realms to pour out either blessing or judgment on the earth.

[27 : 18] And the captain is really saying here, Come off it, Elisha. Come on. Look around you. Do you expect us to believe that the Lord is going to do that? Really? Get a grip of reality.

There's no way that the Lord will do that and I doubt that the Lord can even do that. Open up the heavens and pour out blessing upon us. Look around. Friends, this is the voice of what the Bible calls a scoffer.

This is a scoffer. Here is a man who flat out refuses to stand on every promise of the Lord. He is, in other words, a clear example of what it is to walk by willful unbelief.

And because of his scoffing at the stunning promise of the Lord, Elisha announces consequences. Look at the end of verse 2. And friends, this should actually alarm us, I argue, even more than the story of the woman eating her son.

This should alarm us. Elisha says to the captain, you will see the Lord's deliverance, but you will never eat of it. And we will see what happens to him later on.

[28 : 29] But friends, as we look at this scene, we should note the fact that both the Old Testament expects and demands faith from us just like the New Testament. Surprise, surprise, this is all one gospel.

But it's also crucial to note what sort of faith the Bible demands from us. It requires that we take the Lord at his word and believe what the Lord has promised.

As one commentator says, we are not called to have some general faith that God will do unheard of, bizarre, or unlikely things. As though if we squeeze our eyes shut, clasp our hands tight enough, and pump enough faith to believe, then God will do whatever we want.

No. But if God promises deliverance, however wild it may seem, we are required to believe it. In fact, we must always believe what the Lord says, no matter how unlikely.

And when you come to think about it, friends, we have many unlikely words of our Lord, don't we? Think about John 14, verse 19, where he says, because I live, that is, because I have been raised from the dead, you also will live.

[29 : 45] Do you believe that? As you go throughout your life, and you are invited to more and more funeral and graveside services? Or Philippians 2, verse 10 and 11, which says, one day, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, doesn't that seem, friends, like a wild pipe dream when history seems to consist so much of terror and oppression, especially against Christ's church?

Well, friends, real faith means doing the opposite of this captain here. Real faith means taking the Lord at His word and building your life upon it.

Even if it seems so unlikely to come to pass, many of us will remember our dear sister in Christ, Jo Skelton Smith. Many of us, I can see many faces just smiling at the mention of her name.

She was a member at the Tron for many years. She was a force to be reckoned with, I tell you, but she was lovely as well. But every time I went to visit Jo, my eyes were always drawn to just above her mantelpiece, above her fireplace, and there was a plaque always on display that said these words, if God said it, I believe it.

That's what it said. It didn't have a punch. That was just me getting into it. And that's how Jo lived our life, wasn't it, if you knew her? Because that's what real faith does.

[31 : 14] That's what real faith is. And that's what the Bible caused all of us to do so too. Stand on every promise of His word. Take it seriously. No matter how unlikely they may seem to be in our

eyes.

Scene 3, from verses 3 to 15, we see surprising proclaimers of deliverance. Surprising proclaimers of deliverance.

So verse 3, the action suddenly moves off of Elisha, off of the king and the captain, and we're now randomly outside the gate of Samaria where we meet four lepers, four nobodies, four outsiders.

Why on earth are we told about them? Well, we shall see that these four unlikely men are going to be used by the Lord to play a key role in the Lord's deliverance of Samaria.

So in verse 3, these lepers say to each other, why are we just lying here? We're waiting around to die. Let's get up, move. But where should we go? Verse 4, they say, well, there's no point going into this city because it's just rife with famine.

[32 : 30] We'll starve and die there like everybody else. Look, why don't we go to the Syrian army camp? Perhaps they will show us mercy and give us food.

And if they don't, what's the worst that could happen? They'll kill us and give us quick deaths. Either way, it'll be much better than just sitting around here. So off they go.

Verse 5, to the Syrian camp. And when they get there, it's deserted. It's empty. Not a soul in sight.

For verse 6, look at verse 6, the Lord had made the army of the Syrians hear the sound of chariots and of horses, the sound of a great army.

So that they said to one another, behold, the kings of Israel have hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to come against us. And so they fled away. Verse 6 is emphatic.

It's right in the center of this chapter to make the point that this is the Lord alone who has worked powerfully to deliver his starving people just as he said he would.

[33 : 40] All those tents the Syrians left behind contained a lot of riches, a lot of weaponry, a lot of food, and a lot of drink. And there was also plenty of livestock there for the taking too.

And notice how the Lord scared the Syrians. He caused the noise of chariots and horses and of a great army to ring in their ears. That's why they bolted. Now that could have been just a noise that the Lord created in their ears, but it actually could have been the noise of the armies of heaven.

The Lord's angelic hosts, his soldiers, believers in the unseen realm that we got a glimpse of back in chapter 6 verse 17. However it happened, what's clear is once again the Lord has shown his word to be all powerful, unstoppable, and totally trustworthy and dependable.

the Lord's promises are as solid as an eternal rock. What a contrast to the woeful and powerless words of the King of Israel. What a contrast to the woeful and powerless words of all those in authority in our land today as well.

The Lord's words are trustworthy and mighty to save. But there's still a problem. All the people are still shut up where?

[35 : 04] In Samaria, all the people are still starving in the city with no knowledge of the Lord's saving work. How will they come to know and receive the gifts of God's grace if they have not heard?

And how will they hear if no one tells them? Deliverance, friends, needs evangelists to proclaim it. And that is where these unclean and unnamed lepers come in.

Here are the Lord's surprising proclaimers of deliverance. So verse eight, the four of them having found the camp deserted immediately bound into the first tent and they start to stuff their faces.

It's a really great scene if you picture it in your mind. And they also understandably help themselves to some treasure and squirrel it away in a nearby location. And then they move on to tent number two and repeat the process.

But then verse nine, it's conscience time. And they stop what they're doing and they say to each other, look, this isn't right. Why? Because this is a day of gospel.

[36 : 12] This is a day of good news. It's not right for us to keep the news of the riches of God's gracious deliverance to ourselves. If we keep silent about this, then there will surely be a price to pay.

So come on, let's go and tell the good news to the king and the city. And that's exactly what these unclean lepers do. They are used by the Lord to be his evangelists.

They go forth and tell in verse 10. And notice they're not alone in this task. In verse 11, these unnamed lepers tell unnamed gatekeepers, who then go and tell the news to the king's unnamed servants, who then tell the king in verse 12.

And in verse 12, the king jumps out of bed, because having heard this news, he immediately remembered the word of the Lord that Elisha spoke to him in verse 1. And he throws himself down upon his knees, and he worships and praises and thanks the Lord so graciously for what he's done. Wrong. No, that's not what it says in verse 12. No, not a chance. King Jehoram seems to have completely forgotten every single word of promise, the Lord had spoken to him.

[37 : 30] He is just like his scoffing captain, willfully blind to the word of the Lord. How does he respond in verse 12? He says, well, I know what this is.

It's Syrian trickery. They want to draw us out of the city so that they can attack us and finish us off once and for all. And in verse 13, the Lord uses another unnamed servant to give the king bold and wise counsel.

It's a wonderful thing to know that the Lord's people are around, voices of authority. Look at verse 13. One of his servants said, let some men take five of the remaining horses and see that those who are left here, and seeing that those who are left here will fare like the whole multitude of Israel who have already perished.

Let us send and see. Come on, let's go and have a look. Let's examine this. And so in verse 14, the king listens and he sends out two horsemen to investigate.

And they go, verse 15, all the way to the river Jordan, and they find that the Syrian army has really fled away back to their homeland. For they are nowhere to be seen and the ground is littered, covered in their abandoned weaponry.

[38 : 53] And these two scouts return to the king, they confirm the good news that the lepers have shared. And as a result in verse 16, the people of Samaria stampede their way out of the city and they plunder the Syrian camp and they enjoy all the riches of the Lord's gracious deliverance.

We'll think more about verse 16 in a moment. But before then, friends, I think the way that the Lord works here, I think if we're Christians here today, it should really thrill our hearts as the Lord's people.

Not just because of the Lord's glorious deliverance that He provides for Samaria over their enemy, but also from the fact that the Lord uses such surprising people to proclaim the news about what He had done.

One writer says this, using unclean lepers and nameless servants, this is vintage Yahweh, the Lord. The Lord associates men secondarily with himself in the doing of his work.

What a privilege! But what men? Not the most qualified, not the most informed, not the most worthy, not the most alert.

[40 : 07] We see God choose lepers to discover the miracle just as it is women who've got no status in the first century coming to the empty tomb with their material concerns who discover the even greater miracle of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

Our Lord loves to use surprising proclaimers. What a great word of encouragement for us today in the church because this scene teaches me that my obscure status does not prevent me from serving this delightful God.

Isn't that marvelous? my mundane circumstances are no hindrance to be used by him. My daily calling, then, is not useless, even if I feel it is sometimes.

And in any case, we can pass on news of a greater deliverance of riches of God's grace far greater than were to be found in the tents of the Syrians.

If you're at church this morning feeling that the Lord could never use you to advance the gospel of his son, then my friend, be encouraged for you and I are precisely the type of people the Lord uses for such a glorious task.

[41 : 28] Well, finally, our final scene this morning, very briefly, in verse 16 to 20, we see a scoffer punished in the midst of deliverance.

A scoffer punished in the midst of deliverance. So in verse 16, the people of Samaria stampede out of the city and they go and plunder the Syrian camp and they enjoy the riches of God's gracious deliverance.

And who is the Israelite soldier whom the king has stationed at the gate just before the hordes and hordes of people come pouring out of the city? The answer is the captain of verse 2, the man who scoffed at the word and refused to stand on the promise of the Lord.

And in this scene with this captain at the gate, everything happens according to the word Elisha spoke. And the author is absolutely super emphatic about this.

He twice repeats all that Elisha said in verse 1 and verse 3 verbatim in these final verses. So the barley and the flour are sold at exactly the price that Elisha said they would be sold at.

[42:46] And they are sold in the exact location where Elisha said they would be sold to. And friends, the scoffing captain gets to see all of this with his eyes.

He looks upon the Lord's deliverance, but he does not get to taste a single lick of it. Because he is crushed to death by the stampeding crowds.

They run over him and he is dead. And friends, this is a sobering warning to all of us, to all of us. But it's especially a warning to those who would scoff today at the word of the Lord.

This is where scoffing leads, friends. 2 Kings 7 pleads with us not to go this way with our lives. And you know, maybe you're here this morning and you've been dragged along to church.

Maybe you're a visiting student, your mom and dad are here with you and they've dragged you along to church. And maybe you would honestly say that you have been one who has scoffed at the Bible, scoffed at God's promises, which are sealed in the precious blood of his son.

[43:59] Maybe you've scoffed at the thought of Jesus returning in glory to bring full and final deliverance for his people. Well, my friend, if that is you, the Bible says, please stop.

Turn to the Lord. Take his words seriously. For in the end, at Christ's return, if you carry on in your scoffing, you will certainly see the Lord's salvation, but you will never taste it.

You will see all the Lord's people sharing in his glory, enjoying all the riches of his salvation that he's won for us, but you will never taste it.

But friend, the good news is God is so patient and merciful. It needn't be that way. The Bible tells us that that is why the Lord has delayed the final day of judgment, so that we all might humble ourselves, and we all must.

And we all must flee from the wrath to come by seeking refuge in the coming judge. Flee to him as Savior now before you face him as your final judge.

[45:12] And if you flee to him, if you trust in his promises, if you seek shelter in him, you will taste and you will see that he is good.

Amen. Let's pray. Amen. Our gracious Father, we praise you for the greater deliverance that you have won for us in and through your precious Son, who came into this world in the power of the Spirit to wage war on our enemies and secure victory glory and glorious riches for all your people to enjoy forever.

Father, help us to walk therefore humbly before you, persevering in faith and repentance. And help us as a church to keep on sharing this good news.

Help us to encourage each other, just like the lepers. Help us to say to each other, God, it is not right for us to keep such good treasure to ourselves. Give us hearts that want to share the message of your gospel with the starving souls of our city.

And we pray this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Amen.