

**INTRODUCTION:**

This morning, as we think about the Salem congregation, I would like for us to take a few minutes to compare and contrast our mission and our experience with the experience and growth of the early church.

- I recently read that the average member of the Lord's church today has heard 4,000 sermons, sung 20,000 songs, participated in 8,000 public prayers...and has converted zero sinners.
- We can look at the beginning of the church in **Acts 2**, though, and we find near the end of that chapter that the church was growing daily.
- The Christians were sharing their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart—*"...and the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."*
- In the following chapters, we read about *"many"* people hearing the message and believing (**Acts 4:4**), we read about *"multitudes"* of men and women being constantly added to their number (**Acts 5:14**), we read about the disciples *"increasing in number"* (**Acts 6:1**), and even toward the end of the book, we still find that *"...the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing"* (**Acts 19:20**).

I think when we consider the growth of the early church, we would have to conclude that the early Christians looked at the life of Christ, they saw that His mission in life was *"to seek and save the lost"* (**Luke 19:10**), and they took on that mission as their own—seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness—putting the Lord's work first in their lives.

- There may be many reasons why the church is no longer growing at the same rate it did 2000 years ago, but this morning I would like for us to keep this concern in the back of our minds as we study a rather unusual situation from the Old Testament book of **2 Kings 6-7**.

The situation we are about to study takes place in a period of Israel's history known as the **"Divided Kingdom."**

- The kingdom was united under Saul, and David, and Solomon, but then the kingdom divided—10 tribes in the North (known as Israel), and the two remaining tribes in the South (known as Judah).
- During this time, both kingdoms were fairly vulnerable and open to various attacks.
- This morning's lesson takes place in the Northern Kingdom, in Samaria, as the city is under siege (being completely surrounded) by the armies of Ben-Hadad, king of Syria.

The leading prophet (or spokesman) of God during this time was a man by the name of Elisha.

- You might remember a scene from the life of Elijah—as Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal, as they tried to call down fire on Mt. Carmel.
- Sometime after that event, Elijah found a new student by the name of Elisha, and Elisha trained to be a prophet.
- When it came time for Elijah to leave this earth, he asked his student, Elisha, if there was anything he wanted.
- Elisha responded by requesting a double portion of Elijah's spirit—a very bold and interesting request.
- In the following chapters, we find that Elisha did, in fact, inherit the spirit and boldness of Elijah.
- There are some very interesting and powerful stories in the opening chapters of **2 Kings**.
- Right away, as Elisha takes over for Elijah, we read about several young men making fun of Elisha for being bald.
- The Bible says that Elisha cursed them, and at that point two female bears came out of the woods and tore up 42 young men of their number.
- The obvious lesson is, never make fun of anyone for being bald!

Beyond that, we also read about the widow's oil being miraculously replenished, we read about her son being raised from the dead, we read about the poisonous soup being neutralized, we read about the healing of Naaman (the captain of a foreign army), we read about an axe head being recovered from the Jordan River, and then we come to the closing verses of **2 KN 6**.

- As we study this morning's lesson, I would like to divide our study into several parts.

I. First of all, we will find that **THE NATION OF ISRAEL APPEARED TO BE IN A COMPLETELY HOPELESS SITUATION.**

Let's look together at **2 Kings 6:24-7:2.**

- 24 *Now it came about after this, that Ben-hadad king of Aram gathered all his army and went up and besieged Samaria.*
- 25 *There was a great famine in Samaria; and behold, they besieged it, until a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and a fourth of a kab of dove's dung for five shekels of silver.*
- 26 *As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall a woman cried out to him, saying, "Help, my lord, O king!"*
- 27 *He said, "If the Lord does not help you, from where shall I help you? From the threshing floor, or from the wine press?"*
- 28 *And the king said to her, "What is the matter with you?" And she answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.'*
- 29 *"So we boiled my son and ate him; and I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him'; but she has hidden her son."*
- 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 on his body.*
- 31 *Then he said, "May God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on him today."*
- 32 *Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. And the king sent a man from his presence; but before the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, "Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent to take away my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and hold the door shut against him. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?"*
- 33 *While he was still talking with them, behold, the messenger came down to him and he said, "Behold, this evil is from the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?"*
- 1 *Then Elisha said, "Listen to the word of the Lord; thus says the Lord, 'Tomorrow about this time a measure of fine flour will be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.' "*
- 2 *The royal officer on whose hand the king was leaning answered the man of God and said, "Behold, if the Lord should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?" Then he said, "Behold, you will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat of it."*

We look back over these verses, and we find that the situation truly was desperate.

- The capital city of Samaria had been surrounded so long that the people of the city were completely out of food.
- In the USA, in 2009, it is truly difficult for us to even imagine what a severe famine would be like.
- We live in the land of fast food.
- Our idea of a famine is traveling on a holiday and finding that McDonald's is not open!
- We have such an overabundance of food that huge amounts of food are wasted every day.
- I have found that it is really easy to go to an all-you-can-eat restaurant and to pick out more food than is possible to consume.
- Next time you go to Ryan's or Old Country Buffet, just look around at the piles of wasted food on the trays that people leave behind when their mealtime is over.
- We live in a nation where the leading causes of death are now actually caused by too much food—a phenomenon that has never happened before in the history of the world!

But try to just imagine for a moment what would happen if our food supply were to be cut off, and try to imagine what would happen if everyone in our entire nation were in the same situation.

- The Bible says (in **6:25**) that the head of a donkey was selling for eighty shekels of silver.
- This is especially significant, because the donkey was an unclean animal.
- In other words, it was against their religion to eat a donkey. Beyond that, it was the head!
- I cannot imagine eating the head of a donkey!

- I have not personally been to Chinatown in Chicago recently, however I have heard that there are some shops where it is still possible to buy sheep's heads.
- You could walk down the sidewalk, look in a window, and there is a skinned sheep's head for sale!
- But these people in Samaria were so hungry that they were willing to pay 80 shekels of silver for the head of a donkey.

The same verse also tells us that they were buying about *“a fourth of a kab of dove's dung”* for 5 shekels of silver.

- As I understand it, a fourth of a kab is about a pint—about the size of a *Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream*.
- I don't know if they were eating this or what they were doing with it, but it was basically a hopeless and desperate situation.

We go on, and we see the king walking around the city as a woman called out for help.

- From our reading, we can see what her problem was—she had been tricked into eating her own son and was arguing with another woman about eating her son!
- If the king had read his Bible, he would have known that this exact situation was predicted by Moses in **Deuteronomy 28:52-57**.
- Moses warned what would happen if the nation of Israel refused to serve the Lord—and it was a solemn promise.
- Speaking of a foreign nation that would swoop in like an eagle, the Lord said,

*52 “It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land, and it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout your land which the Lord your God has given you.*

*53 “Then you shall eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of your sons and of your daughters whom the Lord your God has given you, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you.*

*54 “The man who is refined and very delicate among you shall be hostile toward his brother and toward the wife he cherishes and toward the rest of his children who remain,*

*55 so that he will not give even one of them any of the flesh of his children which he will eat, since he has nothing else left, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you in all your towns.*

*56 “The refined and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground for delicateness and refinement, shall be hostile toward the husband she cherishes and toward her son and daughter,*

*57 and toward her afterbirth which issues from between her legs and toward her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of anything else, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you in your towns.*

If the king had known the Scriptures, he would have turned the nation around and begged for God's forgiveness.

- However, the king did not respect God, and the king's response in **verse 31** was to threaten the life of God's prophet.
- In **verse 33**, the messenger went even further and blamed the Lord.
- In response to that accusation, starting in **chapter 7**, Elisha made a prediction that by this time the next day that flour and barley would be selling for bargain prices.
- The messenger made fun of Elisha (which, remember, you don't want to do), and Elisha made another prediction—the messenger would see this happen, but would not benefit from it.
- It was a desperate situation, but the king refused to listen to God's messenger.

As we think about our own situation, I would suggest that the world around us is also in a desperate situation.

- We read in **Romans 3:23** that *“...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*
- And certainly we would agree that without the Lord, the world is lost.
- I'd like for us to keep this in mind as the lesson progresses.

## **II. There is a second lesson in this event, and it comes from the fact that **THE LORD PROVIDED DELIVERANCE IN A VERY POWERFUL AND UNEXPECTED WAY.****

Let's look together at what happens next—in **2 Kings 7:3-8**.

- 3 *Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, "Why do we sit here until we die?"*
- 4 *"If we say, 'We will enter the city,' then the famine is in the city and we will die there; and if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us go over to the camp of the Arameans. If they spare us, we will live; and if they kill us, we will but die."*
- 5 *They arose at twilight to go to the camp of the Arameans; when they came to the outskirts of the camp of the Arameans, behold, there was no one there.*
- 6 *For the Lord had caused the army of the Arameans to hear a sound of chariots and a sound of horses, even the sound 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 the Egyptians, to come upon us."*
- 7 *Therefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents and their horses and their donkeys, even the camp just as it was, and fled for their life.*
- 8 *When these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they entered one tent and ate and drank, and carried from there silver and gold and clothes, and went and hid them; and they returned and entered another tent and carried from there also, and went and hid them.*

Up in **verse 3**, we are introduced to four men who suffered from the disease of leprosy.

- Today it is known as Hansen's Disease. It begins with little specks on the eyelids and on the palms of the hands, and it eventually spreads all over the body—bleaching the hair white, causing the skin to crust over with shining scales, causing swelling and sores.
- Beyond the skin, it goes deeper—eating away at the flesh, and joints, and bones—eventually causing parts of the body to rot and fall off.
- It attacks the lungs, the organs of speech and hearing, the eyes, and eventually results in a slow and agonizing death.

The disease is contagious and is primarily spread by tiny droplets that are released through speaking and sneezing.

- For that reason, under the Law of Moses, those with leprosy were quarantined outside the camps and the cities.
- They were required to announce their condition—calling out a warning while covering their mouth so as to avoid spreading the droplets.
- The law on leprosy is outlined in **Leviticus 13-14**.

Nevertheless, these four men, in their desperation, make a difficult decision.

- They could stay outside the gate of a besieged city and starve, or they could risk surrendering to the Assyrians.
- They decide to risk surrendering to the enemy.
- It took a little while to get to the enemy camp, and as they arrive we can certainly imagine how scared they must have been—expecting any minute to be killed by scouts or guards.
- But as they get closer and closer, they suddenly find themselves in the enemy camp, but no one is there!
- God had caused the Assyrians to hear a loud noise of attacking chariots, the Assyrians assumed the Israelites had hired the Egyptians and the Hittites, so all of them fled in the darkness—leaving behind, literally, enough food to feed an army!

The Bible says that after weeks of starving, these four men literally stuffed themselves.

- Beyond that, they carried away silver and gold and clothing, and went and hid these things in the wilderness.
- I find it interesting that those who were completely desperate discovered the good news first.
- Of all the people in Samaria, God allowed these four men to find the food first!
- What an amazing statement about the love of God!
- These four men are basically looking for someone to surrender to, but they find a campload of food instead!
- These lepers, who had been begging for a living, were the first to find tents full of gold and silver and clothing!
- They had been given an indescribable gift.

We can think about our situation today—we, also, have been blessed in unimaginable ways through our Christian faith.

- In **Romans 6:23**, the Bible says, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
- Not only have we been blessed with eternal life, but in **Ephesians 1:3**, the Apostle Paul says that the Lord has blessed us *“...with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”*
- The invitation for us is the same that is found in **Revelation 22:17**, *“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.”*
- All of us as Christians could echo Paul’s words in **2 Corinthians 9:15**, when he said, *“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”*
- However, we all know that this story is not over.

**III. Let’s go on and notice a third lesson from this passage, and that is, THE LEPERS SUDDENLY REALIZE THAT THEY HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS.**

Let’s look together at **2 Kings 7:9-20**—and we pick up as the lepers are hiding their loot in the wilderness.

- 9 *Then they said to one another, “We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent; if we wait until morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let us go and tell the king’s household.”*
- 10 *So they came and called to the gatekeepers of the city, and they told them, saying, “We came to the camp of the Arameans, and behold, there was no one there, nor the voice of man, only the horses tied and the donkeys tied, and the tents just as they were.”*
- 11 *The gatekeepers called and told it within the king’s household.*
- 12 *Then the king arose in the night and said to his servants, “I will now tell you what the Arameans have done to us. They know that we are hungry; therefore they have gone from the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, ‘When they come out of the city, we will capture them alive and get into the city.’ ”*
- 13 *One of his servants said, “Please, let some men take five of the horses which remain, which are left in the city. Behold, they will be in any case like all the multitude of Israel who are left in it; behold, they will be in any case like all the multitude of Israel who have already perished, so let us send and see.”*
- 14 *They took therefore two chariots with horses, and the king sent after the army of the Arameans, saying, “Go and see.*
- 15 *They went after them to the Jordan, and behold, all the way was full of clothes and equipment which the Arameans had thrown away in their haste. Then the messengers returned and told the king.*
- 16 *So the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. Then a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord.*
- 17 *Now the king appointed the royal officer on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate; but the people trampled on him at the gate, and he died just as the man of God had said, who spoke when the king came down to him.*
- 18 *It happened just as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, “Two measures of barley for a shekel and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, will be sold tomorrow about this time at the gate of Samaria.”*
- 19 *Then the royal officer answered the man of God and said, “Now behold, if the Lord should make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?” And he said, “Behold, you will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat of it.”*
- 20 *And so it happened to him, for the people trampled on him at the gate and he died.*

Back up in **verse 9**, the lepers suddenly realized, *“We are not doing right. This is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent!”*

- These four lepers, losers in the eyes of the world, were the vital missing link between life and death for the entire city.

Maybe you can remember a number of years ago when the UPS drivers went on strike.

- At first it was not a problem, but as time went on, it very quickly turned into a crisis.
- Businesses were swamped in orders that needed to be shipped.
- Packages were piling up, customers needed their products, but the drivers were not working.

- In a slightly similar way, God had blessed the nation of Israel with food, the people needed food, but these four lepers were holding up the process by refusing to deliver the message.
- What would have happened if the lepers had not gone back to the city?
- They had been kicked out of the city—they could have easily rationalized not going back.
- It is entirely possible that people would have kept on dying—not knowing about the food just over the horizon.
- And yet the lepers did not keep silent.

The king is suspicious, so he sends out some scouts, and the scouts determined that the lepers were right.

- Elisha's promise was fulfilled in such a powerful way that the king's messenger who did not believe was literally crushed to death by the mass of people going out to get the free food.
- Just as Elisha had said, the messenger saw the blessing but did not benefit from it.

The obvious lesson for us is that there are people at our jobs, and schools, and in our homes and communities who desperately need the gospel, but the delivery drivers have gone on strike!

- There is no one delivering the message!
- In hundreds if not thousands of cases, we are the missing link between God and the world.

The Salem area can be compared to the nation of Israel—starving to death while surrounded by piles of food.

- Evangelism has been defined as **“one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread.”**
- And that is a very accurate definition. All of us here this morning are the lepers.
- If God can turn a leper into a hero that can save a city, then God can use all of us here this morning to teach the gospel to a friend.

This morning, we have enjoyed singing praises to God.

- We have spent time talking with one another as Christians who share the blessings of being in the Lord.
- Every week, as we sing, and pray, and take the Lord's Supper, we must also realize what the lepers realized—it is wrong not to share this with others the good news.
- Next Sunday evening, we have a SNAC night.
- I hope you will invite someone to come and hear the good news and join us for food and fellowship.
- The lepers were blessed with food and gold, but we have been blessed with so much more!

As Christians, our sins have been washed away.

- Some of you may have been saved from alcoholism, and drug abuse, and serious financial trouble.
- Others here this morning are in marriages and families that only God has held together.
- We look back, and we know that only God is responsible for our blessings.
- As we close our lesson, I would like for us to remember the lepers' statement in **verse 9**—They said, **“We are not doing right.”** It is not right to keep silent.
- Like the lepers, we must also realize that we have a responsibility to share the good news.

In closing, I am reminded of Jesus' words in **Luke 12:48**, **“From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”**

### CONCLUSION & INVITATION:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, we are obviously faced with a challenge.

- We can keep on going the way we are going...or we can tell ourselves, **“We are not doing right. This is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent.”**
- We can make the decision to overcome our fear—going back into the city (like the lepers)—saving the lives of our neighbors and friends.
- If we make it OUR mission to seek and save the lost, it is certainly possible that the people here in the Salem area will be added to the Lord just as happened nearly 2000 years ago when the church began.
- If you are not a Christian, we want you to know that the Bible tells all people to believe in God, and then to trust God to forgive your sins as you are immersed in water in obedience to the Lord.
- If you are ready to make this decision, you can talk to me right now as we sing the next song. Let's stand...