

ELISHA

MEN WHO SHARED GOOD NEWS (2 KINGS 7:3–16)

Our previous lesson revolved around the siege of Samaria by the Arameans. As food became scarce, those within the city became desperate. In their frantic efforts to find nourishment, they sinned both against God and against nature.

Among the starving were four lepers. This lesson focuses on those four individuals. I am calling them “Men Who Shared Good News.” As we review their story, we will emphasize the responsibility you and I have to share good news today.

GOOD NEWS THEN (7:3–16)

Good News for Them

“Now there were four leprous men¹ at the entrance of the gate” (v. 3a). In our lessons on Naaman, we discussed the terrible disease of leprosy. In Israel, lepers were not allowed inside towns and cities (see Leviticus 13:46; Numbers 5:2, 3). These four men probably huddled near the gate in hopes that people coming and going would throw them scraps of food. Now, however, there was no food to be shared. Like those within the city, the lepers were dying of starvation.

The four held a consultation: “Why do we sit here until we die?” (2 Kings 7:3b). They needed to do *something*, and it had to be done *soon*. “If we say, ‘We will enter the city,’ then the famine is in

¹One Jewish uninspired tradition says these were Gehazi and his three sons (Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes*, vol. 2, *Joshua—Esther* [New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n.d.], 504; Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, ed. Leslie F. Church [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961], 409).

the city and we will die there” (v. 4a). Even if they managed to get inside the walls, their situation would be no better. However, to stay where they were would mean certain death (v. 4b).

Finally, the lepers decided, “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” (v. 4c). In other words, “The worst they can do is kill us, and we are going to die anyway. Quick death from a sword might be preferable to slow death from starvation. On the other hand, who knows? Maybe they will take us as prisoners and feed us.”

Thus “they arose at twilight to go to the camp of the Arameans” (v. 5a). Writers speculate on why the men went at twilight, but perhaps the explanation is simple: upon reaching a decision, they acted immediately.

The lepers were no doubt nervous as they left the walls of the city. Any moment, they might have expected to hear, “Halt! Who goes there?” They were ready to fling themselves to the earth and beg for mercy.

As they started toward the camp, noise and commotion could be heard from the encampment (see v. 7a); but when they reached the place, they were met by silence (see v. 10). “When they came to the outskirts² of the camp of the Arameans, behold, there was no one there” (v. 5b). Imagine them peering this way and that in the darkness. Perhaps the lepers thought, as the king did later (see v. 12), that it was a trap; but there really was no one there.

²“Outskirts” indicates the edge of the Aramean camp—the edge of the camp nearest the city of Samaria.

The camp was deserted.

“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” (v. 6a). Some commentators have thought it their responsibility to explain *how* the Lord did this. Several have even attempted to “explain away” the incident as a natural phenomenon. For believers, it is sufficient to know that *God* was responsible for the Arameans’ hearing the sound and that the experience was totally convincing. “The Lord had defeated the Moabites by a miracle of sight ([2 Kings] 3:20–23) and now He defeated the [Arameans] by a miracle of sound.”³

When the soldiers heard the noise, they said, “Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians,⁴ to come upon us” (v. 6b). “The Hittites” were inhabitants of city-states in northern Aram that had arisen after the fall of the Hittite empire.⁵ The Arameans jumped to the conclusion that the king of Israel had hired Hittites to attack them from the north while Egyptians struck from the south.

Filled with terror, the soldiers had “fled in the twilight [the same time the lepers had started from the city], and left their tents and their horses and their donkeys, even the camp just as it was, and fled for their life” (v. 7). Since they could have traveled faster on horseback, the fact that they left their horses indicates how traumatized they were.

Cautiously, the lepers entered the camp (v. 8a). They perhaps saw campfires burning and animals tethered (see v. 10), but no people. Sticking their heads into one tent, they found a meal prepared, left uneaten! They “ate and drank” (v. 8b); food had probably never tasted so good! Then, spying “silver and gold and clothes,” they grabbed the treasures and carried them out into the darkness to find a hiding place. They hurried back and rushed from tent

to tent, looting each in turn (v. 8c). No longer beggars, they were now rich!

Good News for Others

Somewhat belatedly, they had an attack of conscience. They held another conference. “We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent” (v. 9a). There they were, with all the food they could eat and more, but inside the city people were still starving.

A practical note was introduced into the discussion: “If we wait until morning light, punishment will overtake us” (v. 9b). This was a reasonable conclusion. When morning came, the sentries would see that the enemy was gone, and eventually people would learn that the lepers had kept this news to themselves. Punishment was inevitable—from the people, from the king, and even from God.

Long ago, I read about an ancient teaching that went something like this: If a man knows of something good that will benefit his neighbor and keeps it from him, that man is guilty of stealing. For example, let us imagine that a man was aware that a neighbor needed food for his family. Imagine, too, that the man knew where his neighbor could get a free sack of flour, but failed to tell him about it. In that case, the man would be considered guilty of stealing the sack of flour from his neighbor as surely as if he had entered his home and taken it. If the lepers did not tell the people in Samaria about the available food, they could be considered thieves.

They decided, “Now therefore come, let us go and tell the king’s household” (v. 9c). They went to the gate and shouted up to the gatekeepers what they had found in the Aramean camp (v. 10). The gatekeepers passed on the message to the palace (v. 11).

Attendants awakened the king (see v. 12a) and gave him the report. It would have been commendable if he had responded, “So *this* is how Elisha’s prediction [7:1] will come true.” Instead, he thought the news “too good to be true.” He told 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’”

³Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Distinct* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Victor, 2002), 55.

⁴Scholars speculate that this should be Mutari or Muzur or some other location. Every translation I checked has “Egyptians.”

⁵J. Robert Vannoy, notes on 2 Kings, *The NIV Study Bible*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 535.

(2 Kings 7:12b). Joshua had used a similar strategy to defeat the city of Ai (Joshua 8).

One of the king's servants suggested that the ruler should at least check whether or not the story was true. The servant said, "Please, let some men take five of the horses which remain, which are left in the city" (2 Kings 7:13a). Presumably, most of the horses in the city had died (and had probably been eaten). The servant continued, "Behold, they [the men sent out] 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" (v. 13b). Basically, he was saying, "The worst that could happen to those sent is that they will be killed. If they stay in the city, they will die anyway, so why not send them? What is there to lose?"

It was finally decided to send "two chariots with horses" (v. 14). The chariot drivers found the camp empty, just as the lepers had said. They followed the trail of the fleeing Arameans, a trail that led to the Jordan River.⁶ "And behold, all the way was full of clothes and equipment which the Arameans had thrown away in their haste" (v. 15a).

The messengers returned and told the king (v. 15b). Word quickly passed through the city, and soon the gates were opened. "So the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans" (v. 16a). They ate and were satisfied; they had been delivered! The Lord was responsible for their deliverance, but He had used four unlikely candidates to accomplish His purposes: four lepers willing to share good news with others!

GOOD NEWS NOW

A number of applications might be drawn from this story, but I want to focus our thoughts on the lepers' words in verse 9: "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. . . ." Parallels can be drawn between the lepers' situation and ours.

⁶The army had two available routes back to Aram: They could go north and then east, or they could go east across the Jordan and then north (see the map on page 8 of the article "Elisha: The Man Who Blessed a Life"). They had chosen the second route.

Good News for Us

The first thing that strikes us in the lepers' statement is the phrase "good news." We are reminded that the word "gospel" literally means "good news." The heart of that gospel is the story of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). We can still say, "This day is a day of a good news": We were lost, but Jesus took our sins upon Himself and died on our behalf (1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:6)! The lepers had good news to share about physical benefits; we have good news to share about spiritual blessings!

Many parallels can be drawn. We might think of the world as "besieged" by sin (see Ephesians 6:12). Those without Christ are "starving" spiritually, without hope (see Ephesians 2:12). However, God, through His mercy, has provided the means for rescuing mankind (see Titus 3:4, 5a; Acts 2:38). Through Jesus, every person can be victorious over sin (1 Corinthians 15:56, 57). A "feast" of spiritual blessings is available for all who are willing to partake (see Matthew 22:9).

Like the four lepers, those of us who are members of the Lord's church are enjoying God's provision. We have gone from "starving" to being "satisfied" (see Matthew 5:6). We have gone from being spiritual "beggars" to being "rich" (see 2 Corinthians 6:10; Matthew 5:3). What wondrous promises and blessings are ours! (See Ephesians 3:20; Philippians 4:19; Hebrews 7:25.) We can say with Paul, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15)—the gift of His Son!

Good News for Others?

The question for us is this: Do we understand the world's urgent need for what we have? If we fail to share the good news with those lost in sin, like the lepers, we must say, "We are not doing right."

Regrettably, we have not always told others the good news about Jesus. I am not sure why this is the case. It is possible that some have not truly "tasted the kindness of the Lord" (1 Peter 2:3); in other words, they themselves have not yet been saved. As soon as Andrew found the Lord, he ran to tell another (John 1:40–42); that is the natural response. If one feels no compulsion to share the good news, he should examine his

own relationship with the Lord.

Another possibility is that some of us do not fully appreciate what the Lord has done for us (see 2 Peter 1:9b). If we are truly appreciative, we will want to share the news (see Luke 8:39)!

Sometimes a failure to tell the good news indicates a lack of concern for others. If we knew our neighbors were starving physically, probably none of us would be so heartless as to refuse them food. Those around us might not be starving physically, but they are “starving” spiritually. If we fail to take them the “milk” and “meat” of the Word (1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:12; KJV), what does that say about us? Truly, “we are not doing right.”

Our problem may be that, somehow, we have missed the spirit of Christianity. Early Christians were eager to share the good news with all they met (see Acts 5:42; 8:1, 4). In so doing, they were fulfilling the Lord’s commission (Matthew 28:18–20; see 10:27).

We have many reasons to tell others about Jesus, including our love for the lost and our desire to obey the Lord. We could also add a factor that concerned the lepers: “If we wait . . . , punishment will overtake us.” In Ezekiel 3:18 we find this sobering statement from the Lord: “When I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.”

Indeed, this is “a day of good news”! Regarding the past, we may have to admit that we have not done right because we kept silent; but, regarding the future, let us echo the words of the lepers: “Now therefore come, let us go and tell”!

CONCLUSION

This lesson has been directed to Christians, to encourage each of us to share the good news, the gospel. However, as we close, I want to make application to any who have not yet taken advantage of the Lord’s provision. As the lepers sat starving outside the city, they asked, “Why do

we sit here until we die?” (2 Kings 7:3). I would ask a question similar to theirs: “Why do you sit there, unmoving and unmoved, drawing nearer and nearer to death with each breath you take?” I pray with all my heart that you will not sit there until you die! If you believe in Jesus (John 3:16) and have repented of your sins (Luke 13:3), I urge you, as Ananias urged Saul, “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16)!

NOTES FOR TEACHERS & PREACHERS

The latter part of this lesson is based on an outline prepared long ago from undocumented sources. My apologies for not giving credit where I should. An alternate title for this lesson is “We Are Not Doing Right” (“We Do Not Well” if using the KJV). For maximum effectiveness, make application in this lesson to a specific opportunity for evangelism, such as inviting people to a special gospel service. As you invite people in your audience to obey the gospel, you may also want to encourage response by Christians who have failed to share the good news with others.

—David Roper

VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE USED IN THIS STUDY

AB — Amplified Bible
Berkeley Version in Modern English
CEV — Contemporary English Version
CJB — Complete Jewish Bible
JB — Jerusalem Bible
KJV — King James Version
LB — Living Bible
NASB — New American Standard Bible
NCV — New Century Version
NEB — New English Bible
NIV — New International Version
NLT — New Living Translation
REB — Revised English Bible
RSV — Revised Standard Version
TEV — Today’s English Version