

MeadowBrook Church | May–July 2020

lifeGROUP

Life together for the Kingdom of God

II KINGS

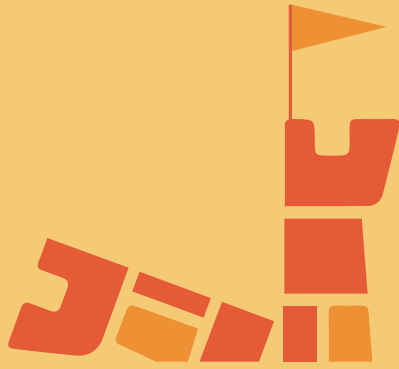
Glimmers of Hope in the Fall of a Nation





MeadowBrook CHURCH

MeadowBrook seeks to CONNECT people to Christ and His church, GROW them as disciples to be disciplers, and equip them to SERVE through missions, ministry, and worship, all to GLORIFY God.



II KINGS

As we pick up in the narrative in the middle of the kings narrative, things look about the same. It's a time of great wickedness and faithlessness in the land of Israel. The prophetic mantle would shift from Elijah to his disciple Elisha, and though he would be faithful, Elisha would see his beloved nation go from bad to worse in the journey to their exile. Was God still working? How do the faithful endure in wicked times? Is the Word of God really true and powerful? Where is our hope in times of trouble? 2 Kings speaks to each of these questions in the tragic narrative of Israel's fall as it foreshadows the advent of the King of kings.



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If you are interested in writing or editing in the future, email hunter@mbchurch.com today.

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Don't Mess with God

1 Kings 22:51–2 Kings 1:18 | May 3rd, 2020

Have you ever been in a situation where you thought you were in control, but turns out, you were not?

Read 1 Kings 22:51 - 2 Kings 1:18

What stands out to you?

What context is important to the meaning of the text?

The LORD is unique and jealous for his glory.

*You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you—for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God--lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.
(Deuteronomy 6:14-15 ESV)*

Sinful dynasties see their kingdoms crumble. After a lengthy and wicked reign, Ahab dies in obscurity on the battlefield. His son, Ahaziah, takes the throne and continues in the wickedness of his father and immediately sees his kingdom crumble. He loses control of the region of Moab and becomes seriously ill after an injury he sustained in his home. In this moment of desperation, Ahaziah recognizes his need for divine aid and sincerely seeks out help. Unfortunately, and to his own destruction, he sends messengers to Baal-zebub, a false god worshipped in Ekron. This false god's name was most likely a slur used by the author, meaning "Lord of the flies."

"What Baal can only do in mythology Yahweh can do in history..."

God alone deserves worship. Not even sincere, committed worship of another god is permitted, for the prophets of Baal and their patron Jezebel were certainly willing to die for their beliefs. Worshiping a non-existent deity benefits no one."

– Paul House

We cannot judge based on sincerity. Sincerity counts for nothing if its directed toward the wrong God. There are many sincere followers of false gods and false teaching who experience measures of change in their life, however, the gospel does not call for measures of change. The gospel calls for sincere repentance and faith in the one true God that results in a new creation brought about by the Spirit.

Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

Apply

Respond

Additional Passages:

Deuteronomy 6:14-15

1 John 5:19-21

Psalms 2

Philippians 2:1-11

The author used this name to replace Baal-zebub, a name meaning "Baal the Exalted." Elijah, the man of God who had given his life to the LORD and his people, stands up against a wicked shepherd of God's people yet again. God will not be mocked in this way. He will not allow his glory to be shared with Baal-zebub. Ahaziah's idolatry will cost him his life, and if we are not careful, idolatry will also cost us our life as well.

Idolatry is simply looking to anything or anyone other than Jesus to provide for us that which God richly provides for us in Christ Jesus.

Idolatry attempts to rob God of what rightfully belongs to him and him alone. False worship mangles the image of God in humanity, aligning the heart behind the father of lies rather than the Word of God. Idolatry, thus, at its root, is a rejection of Jesus Christ—and the Father moves against idolatry with decisive action. The Lord is unique, and he will not share his glory. He will avenge the wickedness of maligning his image in his most prized creation, and he will avenge his Son.

Idolatry is a big deal, and the sinister thing is that our sinful hearts can turn anything into an idol. Ultimately, all sin is some expression of idolatry—some moment of looking to something or someone for meaning, satisfaction, help, or purpose instead of God. In his commentary, Paul House calls on modern-day disciples “to make a fearless inventory of idols in their lives.” We need to have seasons where we evaluate our lives and motives for any idolatrous undercurrents that are directing our steps—then promptly turn from our idols and run to Jesus, experiencing his grace and abundant life!

Idol Inventory

- What drives the pursuits of your life? Is it the kingdom of God and his righteousness?
- Where do you struggle most to exhibit self-control?
- What causes you to get upset, frustrated, or flustered? Are there any common threads?
- Where do you spend your time?
- What do you do with your money?
- Is there anything that regularly keeps you from worshipping God with his church?
- What or who brings you the most satisfaction, joy, peace, and comfort? Is it Jesus?

Pause and Discuss: *Stories like this help us to see the folly and destructive nature of idolatry. Why is it more difficult to see the folly and destruction of our own idolatry? How can we help each other put idols to death in our lives?*

Lead Well

Leadership, whether at work, home, or in the church, has serious ramifications in the lives of others. Ahaziah's poor leadership led to the death and destruction of another 102 men, which affected countless others. The third captain, however, saved the lives of the fifty men under his control because of his positive and humble leadership.

God has specifically called, entrusted, and created men to be leaders in their home, church, and community, and he has given women opportunity to exercise leadership in many God-honoring ways in each of those domains as well.

- *Where has God called you to lead for his glory?*
- *Are you leading in such a way that shows heartfelt concern for those you lead?*
- *Are you leading with humility?*

The LORD is the supreme authority over all earthly authority.

Ahaziah thought he had the authority to wipe out Elijah the pesky Tishbite, but he and 102 others quickly learned who was in control—and it was not them! After the first captain asked Elijah to come down to his death and the second captain demanded that he come down, Elijah revealed that it is the LORD who possesses all authority.

In uncertain times such as these, it is encouraging to those who follow Jesus that all authority has been given to him and he is with us always. We have no need to fear man. The worst man can do is destroy the body, but we fear the one who destroys both body and soul in hell. He will avenge the righteous. He will bring everything to account. We can trust him and confidently walk in obedience—no matter the outcome.

Pause and Discuss: *How can we demonstrate boldness as believers, not fear, in a world full of wicked authorities and ever-changing political and cultural landscapes?*

The LORD responds favorably to those who approach him in humility.

The third captain, recognizing his peril, demonstrates what Tony Merida refers to as a “gospel response.” He knew that fire had consumed the previous two captains, so he approached Elijah—and the God Elijah represented—with great humility. Knowing he was not the one with authority, he prostrated himself before Elijah and pleaded with him for mercy, confessing that the true God of heaven had judged his predecessors. The Lord responded favorably to this captain and spared his life.

Jesus elevated humility in his ministry as well when he said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3-4 ESV) Pride and self-promotion are the ways of the world—and they lead to destruction. Salvation belongs only to those who humble themselves before God—a.k.a. true disciples of Jesus Christ. So, how do you become a true disciple of Jesus Christ and be granted entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven?

- **You must humble yourself, turn from your old ways, and seek mercy from Christ.** There is nothing you can do to save yourself. All are guilty and deserve eternal fiery punishment. Jesus Christ bore our punishment on the cross, was buried, and rose from the grave on the third day offering forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those who would turn from their sins and believe. He is our only hope.
- **You must recognize and submit to his authority over your life.** Just as the third captain realized he was not in control, so the disciple of Christ must surrender his authority. Christ, not you, becomes the Lord of your life. This is important, for if Jesus is not your Lord, he is not your Savior either.

Have you humbled yourself and come to Jesus in surrendered faith? If not, do so today!

Pause and Discuss: *Pride not only keeps people from entering the kingdom of God, but pride also keeps genuine disciples of Jesus Christ from the fullness of kingdom living—for pride at its root is the idolatry of self. How can we learn from this story and use it to help battle pride in our lives?*

Family Application: Sins of the Father

(From Tony Merida’s Commentary on Kings)

“Here we see the sins of the father manifested in the son. Ahaziah had seen the gracious and harsh acts of God toward Ahab, yet he follows in the evil path of his father. When parents detest God or minimize Him, they shouldn’t be surprised when their children do the same. When we passively and implicitly teach our children that God isn’t important will live it out. Parents who inadvertently teach their children that the world revolves around them by regularly skipping corporate worship to play on a travel baseball team [or anything else] shouldn’t be surprised when later in life he doesn’t see connection to the local church as that big of a deal. Children will be influenced by what they have been taught, whether it is explicit or implicit.” –Tony Merida

Pray

Father,

We humbly confess you to be the Lord of lords and the King of kings. Nothing nor anyone compares to the magnificence of your glory and might. We humble ourselves before you. We are unworthy of your grace and mercy. Indeed, we deserved to die, but thanks be to God who saved us from our wretched fate! O, good and gracious Father, help me to live in the power of your Spirit under the authority of your Son and my King.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Vindicated

2 Kings 2:1-23 | May 10th, 2020

Have you ever been in a situation where you needed to persevere?
What helped you continue in that moment?

Read 2 Kings 2:1-23

What stands out to you?

What context is important to the meaning of the text?

The time had come for the mantle to pass from Elijah to Elisha, as the Lord had foretold (1 Kings 19:16). Was Elisha ready? Could he possibly take his mentor's place? Would others respond to him as they did to Elijah? Would he persevere in the prophetic faith or be given to the idols of the people? Before Elijah left, he tests his protégé one last time and leaves the vindication of Elisha to the Lord.

The LORD vindicates those who persevere in faith.

Elijah tests Elisha's faithfulness in order to prepare him one last time before the transition of prophetic leadership moves from him to Elisha. In doing this, Elijah recreates the circumstances that marked the transition from Moses to Joshua in his journey out of Israel and into the wilderness beyond the Jordan. Elisha perseveres in his faithfulness, and the Lord vindicates him by his Spirit in front of the sons of the prophets as the one who possesses both the wisdom and power of God.

Leave a Spiritual Inheritance

Elisha's request for a double portion of the Spirit reflects what the eldest son would have received as an inheritance from his earthly father (Deut. 21:17). After Elijah was taken up into heaven, God granted Elisha's request. The Spirit who was with Elijah was now with Elisha. The principle for parents and disciple-makers is this: pass down something more than an earthly inheritance. Leave a spiritual inheritance. Train your children in the way of Christ, call them to higher commitment, point them to their need for the Holy Spirit, and mobilize them to be kingdom ministers wherever they are—the workforce, the church, the ball fields, or the mission field.

Fathers, make the decision today to leave a spiritual inheritance to your children that will be enjoyed throughout eternity!

Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

Apply Respond

Additional Passages:

Galatians 5:16-6:10

John 15

Revelation 22:1-7

Psalms 1

The same is true for disciples today who endure in the faith—the Lord will vindicate us by his Spirit in the last days when he raises our bodies up to eternal life and brings judgment against the wicked. The hope of the Christian is that Christ will complete the work He began in us when He returns, however we are called to actively persevere in faithfulness as Elisha does in this story. What can we learn from Elisha's model? Here are three ways we persevere in our faith:

1. Choose God over the idols of the people.

Both Bethel and Jericho were centers of worldliness in the land of Israel. Jeroboam set up his golden calf cult in Bethel, and Ahab sinfully rebuilt Jericho – the first enemy conquered and cursed by Joshua in his entrance into the promised land. Both represent a departure from God's purposes and plans for his people. Elijah offers Elisha the opportunity to leave his side and embrace the idolatrous and rebellious way of the surrounding culture. Both times he refuses, and persists in his devotion to the Lord.

Those who are not truly disciples of Jesus Christ eventually capitulate to the idols of the surrounding culture

rather than endure in sound faith to the Lord. The pull of the idols of comfort, control, significance, money, sex, power, self, sports, entertainment, etc. entice the rebellious heart and draw them away from the Lord regardless of their external religious practices. If we are to persevere in the faith, we must be firm in our choice of God over all other idols. He must be our joy. He must be our satisfaction. As long as the Lord lives, which is from everlasting to everlasting, we must not leave his side, for he alone is our God.

2. Recognize your need for the Spirit of God.

As the eldest child was given a double portion of the father's inheritance, Elisha asks for a double portion of the Spirit of God. He knew that the power his mentor displayed was not in his natural abilities, gifts, or talents—Elijah's power was the Spirit of God. Elisha knew if he was going to succeed as a prophet, he did not need better methods, speech, or leadership skills. He needed the Holy Spirit.

Do you recognize your need for the Holy Spirit in your life, work, and ministry? A good litmus test is your prayer life. Little prayer results from little recognition of need for God. James Merritt says it well when he says, "we often worry about everything, yet pray about nothing." If you are to fulfill God's purpose as a spouse, parent, worker, or disciple, you need the Holy Spirit. More importantly, if you are to persevere in the faith unto eternal life, you need the Holy Spirit. He is the one that keeps us secure—and he will certainly keep those in Christ to very end. But do not be deceived: the self-willed "Christian life" devoid of the Spirit is no "Christian life" at all.

Leave the hamster wheel of self-will and run to the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ through his life, death, and resurrection.

3. Embrace your calling.

It came about in the wilderness that Elijah, the prophet of fire, was taken up in a chariot of fire into eternal glory. Upon seeing his mentor taken up, in a mixture of grief and commitment, Elisha tears his garments and takes up Elijah's cloak, separating himself once again from his past and embracing God's calling on his life (ESV Study Bible).

John 15 tells us that those who abide in Christ bear fruit—the fruit of the Spirit and the fruit of discipleship. Yet in our flesh we are often hesitant to embrace God's calling on our life in the kingdom, in the church, in our homes, and in our workplace. Those not in Christ persist in idly moving through the world, never embracing God's eternal calling on their lives. In contrast, disciples of Christ, though not perfect, move towards God's calling on their lives. His Spirit empowers disciples with the express intention so we might be a blessing to those around us.

Understanding Your Calling

How has God called you? Take a moment to review these Scriptures and record how God has called you in your current stage of life:

In the Kingdom: *Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12*

In the Church: *Romans 12:1-13*

In the home: *Ephesians 5:22-6:4; 1 Corinthians 7:6-16, 32-35*

In the workforce: *Colossians 3:22-24*

Are you embracing your calling? How is the Lord moving you to embrace your calling in each of these areas?

God lifts the curse of sin for those who seek him, but carries out the curse of judgment on those who mock him.

Elisha begins his ministry by blessing the people of Jericho who approach him in faith by lifting the curse that had been placed on the land, bringing restoration to that which was broken. This foreshadows the work Christ would do in his life and ministry. On the cross, he bears the curse of judgment for sin in the place of sinners, so the curse of sin might be lifted from us and blessing be given in its place. This is the good news of the gospel. Christ will restore us by removing the barrenness, and brokenness that cause so much pain and death. He has made us new spiritually, and there will be a day when the curse is also lifted from creation. The old heavens and earth will pass away, and new heavens and a new earth will take its place. The river of life will flow from the throne of God through New Jerusalem with trees on either side that bear fruit each month and its leaves will be for the healing of the nations. In this glorious city, disciples of Jesus Christ will enjoy the presence of God face-to-face, reflecting perfectly his image forever and ever.

However, Elisha also curses a gang of young boys (ranging from 12-30 years of age) who were threatening his life and rejecting God himself. (Go up = get out now; “you bald head” = perhaps a reference to the prophets of God shaving their heads or Elisha just simply being bald [Merida]. Either way it is a mocking and rejection of God’s prophet, which is a mocking and rejection of God himself.) As God foretold in Leviticus 26:21-22, he brings quick judgment to this unruly gang. God will not be mocked. In his patience, he relents for a time. Those who persist in their mocking will reap eternal judgment, not blessing, eternal death, not life.

No one is promised tomorrow.

Leave the foolishness of sin and embrace Jesus as your Lord today.

Victory Over Death

Fire played a major role in Elijah’s ministry. Elijah used fire to reveal the power of God over the false god, Baal, and over the earthly authority of kings. It is only fitting that God would bring Elijah into glory in a chariot of fire, revealing his power even over death. Jesus Christ, the true prophet greater than both Elijah and Elisha, gives his disciples this same victory and power over death. Through his resurrection, Jesus defeated death, and at his glorious return, Jesus will utterly destroy death with the fires of hell.

Death holds no sway in the life of the disciple. When the world is given to despair, fear, and fruitless efforts to stop the inevitable, believers in Jesus Christ are confident that in Christ, they possess eternal life and will never taste the sting of death.

⁵⁴ *When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”* ⁵⁵ *“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”* ⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* ⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:54-57 ESV)*

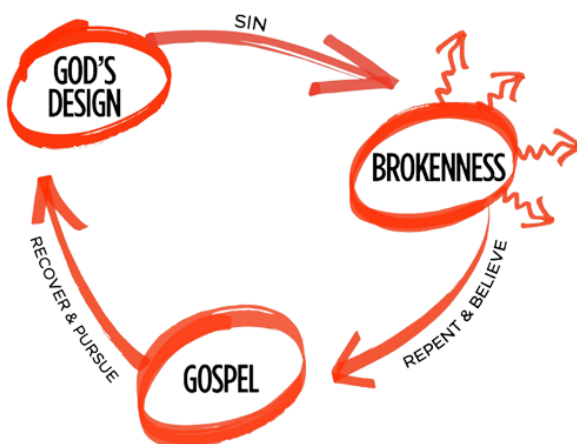
Pray

Father,

Thank you for the eternal salvation you have provided in Jesus Christ. I am confident the work you began in me will be brought to completion at the day of his return. Examine my heart and reveal any idols that have taken root. There is no God but you. Help me to forsake my old foolish ways, live by the Spirit, and embrace the call of Christ in every area of my life.

Lord, I specifically ask for wisdom and strength in the area of _____. Help me as I seek to be faithful in _____

In Jesus’ name, Amen.



Living by the Word

2 Kings 3:1-27 | May 17th, 2020

Have you ever been in a situation where you were lost and going in circles? How did it feel to find your way again?

Read 2 Kings 3:1-27

What stands out to you?

What context is important to the meaning of the text?

Living by your impulses will lead you to dry places that go nowhere. Live by the Word of God!

Upon Ahab's death, Moab rebelled against Israel, refused to provide livestock for the nation, and gained their own sovereignty. Because of Ahaziah's accident and sudden death, Israel did not respond until Ahaziah's son, Jehoram (also called Joram), took the throne. Before Jehoram went to war with Moab, he first conferred with Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah. Though he was largely viewed as a faithful king, Jehoshaphat continued to make alliances with the sinful dynasty of Ahab. These alliances came with a cost each time. Whatever his motivation, Jehoshaphat impulsively decides to link with Jehoram and councils him to attack Moab from the south so they could pick up support from Edom, who was currently under the rule of Judah. With no king seeking to hear the Word of God through the prophet Elisha, the three kings set out on this foolish quest, finding themselves in the midst of a desert, out of water, and marching in circles. Even though Jehoram never sought the Word of the Lord, he still blames God for their predicament. Jehoshaphat comes back to his senses and calls for a prophet so they might hear the Word of God.

"At Least I'm not as bad as..."

Many people prop themselves up because they compare themselves to other "sinners" who are worse than they are. But Jehoram reveals that the "not as bad" mindset does not cut it. He did not go as far into idolatry as Ahab and Jezebel, but he was still rejected by God because he still did not display faith in the one true God. God's standard is not "better than the next guy." It's perfection. It's Jesus. And we all fall short and are in desperate need for his grace.

Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

Apply

Respond

Additional Passages:

Deuteronomy 8:1-10

John 1:1-5

Psalm 119:1-12

Galatians 2:15-21

How often do we do the same thing? How often do we choose to act on impulsive, "gut decisions" rather than live by the wisdom of God revealed in his Word? We do not see the big picture and our hearts are deceptively wicked. Living by our guts, i.e. living by our own wisdom, leads to fruitlessness, futility, and spiritual dryness. If we are to be fruitful and effective to the glory of God in our careers, ministries, and families, we must live by the Word, not our guts. The Bible should inform and guide the way we parent, spend money, live as married couples or as single persons, vote, make business decisions, plan for the future, and prioritize our life. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (Proverbs 4:12, ESV).

Pause and Discuss: Where do we find ourselves making decisions by gut impulses rather than by the Word of God most often? How would it be different if we lived by the Word of God?

Gospel Connection: Salvation comes as a result God's grace alone for those who are with the Davidic King.

After Elisha is summoned, he sarcastically confronts Jehoram and questions why he has not called on his false prophets. After looking around Elisha notices Jehoshaphat is there in company. He testifies that if it were not for Jehoshaphat, a son of David, Jehoram and the king of Edom would certainly be destroyed. But because of God's grace and his regard for the line of David, Elisha prophesies that salvation would come. Life-giving water and victory would be given by the Lord.

Elisha's prophecy foreshadows the salvation that would be offered to all men through the true Son of David, Jesus Christ. We are all born like Jehoram, sinfully rebellious and given to idolatry, but because of God's grace toward us, when we turn from our sin and hide ourselves in Jesus in an act of surrendered faith, God restores our souls with living water and gives us the victory of Christ over our sin, death, and Satan. That which was dry, is now full of water, and that which was hopeless, is now full of hope. The victory is ours! God is for us, so who could be against us?

Have you experienced the restoration and victory of Christ through the grace of the gospel? If not, repent and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins!

The Bible is not an Airbag

"Don't treat God's Word like an airbag in your car—only there in case of an accident. God calls us to lifelong submission to His Word, not to temporary, sporadic moments of interest. We need His Word in the normal days of life, not just when we are dying of thirst in the wilderness. Are you really interested in a path of discipleship or just escape from trouble?" –Tony Merida

with the ESV and translate 2 Kings 3:16 along these lines: "Make this valley [lit. wadi] full of ditches [lit. cisterns]." Whereas the ESV translates it "I will make this dry streambed full of pools." The KJV, CSB, and NASB translate the verb make as an imperative, whereas the ESV focuses on God as the actor. Both are legitimate, but I believe the CSB, KJV, and NASB hit closer to the mark. This means the soldiers were called to take up arms and dig ditches that they were trusting would be cisterns full of water by morning, according to the Word of the Lord.

Thus, ditch digging becomes a good picture of the Christian life. As a parent, we work hard discipling, training, praying with, correcting, and encouraging our kids, trusting the Lord and leaving the results up to him. As managers of resources, we live simply, save wisely, and give generously trusting that God will provide for us and that the richness of our reward is promised in eternity. The Christian life is not a lazy life, but an active life driven by the glory and promises of God so that in all things we expect great things from him, and in return, attempt great things for him.

Pause and Discuss: *In what aspect of your life is God calling you to faithfully dig ditches, digging because you know your restoration will come in eternity?*

Personal Reflection:

God often disciplines with seasons of dryness. If you feel spiritually dry or disconnected from God, could it be that you are living by your own wisdom rather than the Word of God in an area of your life?

Live by faith!

Elisha gives his oracle of restoration and victory, but this does not happen apart from the people. God does the work, but he still uses his people who live and act in faith in the Word of God. This can be seen in three ways:

1. "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." – William Carey

This quote from the Baptist Missionary who many dub the "Father of Modern Missions" captures well the principle seen in Elisha's prophecy about the water. Due to some difficult phrasing in the original Hebrew, the KJV, CSB, and NASB differ

2. Fight the battle God has won for you.

After God supernaturally provides the water, he supernaturally changes its appearance to blood in the eyes of the Moabites. Thinking the three kings have turned on one another, the Moabites attack, but instead of finding victory, the Moabites are routed by Israel because God had given them the victory.

The same applies today in our battle against sin. We do not fight for victory, but from it. God has already defeated sin for us at the cross and will ultimately destroy it in the last days at the return of Christ. We fight our sin in faith in these two assurances, and embrace the nature of Christ given to us by the Holy Spirit within us. There are two dangers: (1) we fight in our own strength, which leads nowhere, and (2) we don't fight at all, or as it is popularly said, we 'let go, and let God,' which also leads nowhere. God works with us, in us, and through us, but he will not work without us.

Pause and Discuss: *How are you battling sin? Have you fallen into one of the two dangers?*

3. Devote to destruction that which should be destroyed.

The story ends unexpectedly with the king of Moab sacrificing his son to the Moabite false god Chemosh. This was a regular part of the Moabite "worship" of Chemosh, and the dearer the sacrifice, the more effectiveness it was thought to have. Then, interestingly the text describes great wrath coming against Israel so that Israel withdrew, giving opportunity for the soundly defeated Moabites to exaggeratedly claim victory (The Moabite Stone artifact). So, what happened? Why did wrath come upon Israel? Whose wrath was it? Here are some things to consider when handling this difficult verse:

First, God does not respond favorably to human sacrifice. Second, Chemosh has no ability to display wrath. He is a false god, incapable of even the smallest of acts. Third, some commentators have suggested it was Israel who became so disgusted and indignant at the site, causing them to withdraw, however, that interpretation does not line up with the context of the narrative nor the historical context of Israel's synchronistic embrace of pagan worship. Fourth, the Hebrew word for wrath is used three times in 1-2 Kings, the other two times are clearly referencing human wrath (Naaman in 2 Kings 5:11; Elisha in 2 Kings 13:19). Thus, it seems best to understand the wrath as being the wrath of the Moabites who, upon the wicked sacrifice, rallied around their king and were able to make a final stand that led to the Israelites withdrawing from the battle. Perhaps the Israelites believed the sacrifice accomplished something and therefore feared Chemosh more than the living God.

So, what do we make of the story? Since God typically prohibits the cutting down of good trees (Deut. 20), it seems that he had determined to deliver the Moabites over to destruction as he did with the Canaanites who originally lived in the promise land. The Israelites in 2 Kings, however, like the Israelites under Joshua, stopped short of God's intention, leading to negative results down the road. The Moabite practice of sacrificing children to Chemosh later become a part of the worship practices of the people of Judah—a practice leading to their exile to Babylon.

How do we apply this to our lives, specifically our battle against sin? It's simple. Devote to destruction the sin in our lives. Too often we stop short of killing the sin in our lives and think that it's ok to embrace a little sin. However, God intends something far more glorious for us. By the Spirit of God, let's determine in our hearts to devote our sin to the destruction it deserves—no matter how much it fights back.

Pray

Father,

Let my first impulse be to run to your Word. Give me a hatred for the sin that still resides in my sinful flesh and strengthen me by your Spirit to put it to death, for I know that I have been crucified with Christ. He lives in me and shares his victory with me each day. It is in his name that I approach your throne, Amen.

SERVE: Proclaim God's Word through Our Worship Ministry

When delivering the Word of God, Elisha chose an interesting method and communicated his message with music (and song?). God has used music from the beginning to help communicate the truths about his majesty (Gen. 1 is biblical poetry that could have easily been sung). MeadowBrook's Worship ministry is committed to worshipping our Lord and Savior in spirit and in truth. We sing songs full of rich theological truths that celebrate the Lord's work on our behalf in the gospel and in his promised return. This has three purposes:

1. To sing praises to our God.
2. To sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ.
3. To proclaim the Gospel of God to those who have yet to believe.

Many have come to surrendered faith in Christ through the proclamative ministry of Worship. So, if you play an instrument or sing, start using your gifts and talents today to further the message of Christ!

Email Kevin@mbchurch.com or Mason@mbchurch.com to get started.

Reversing the Curse

2 Kings 4:1-37 | May 24th, 2020

Have you ever been in a situation where you needed to persevere?
What helped you continue in that moment?

Read 2 Kings 4:1-37

What stands out to you?

What context is important to the meaning of the text?

Widows and couples who could not have children did not occupy high levels of standing in ancient society. Both the widow and the Shunammite woman are nameless, ordinary people. No great feats are recorded here about them or their lives. Their stories hidden from the annals of history, yet they were not hidden from God's compassionate gaze. These two stories teach us much about the nature of God—partially revealed through the work of Elisha, ultimately revealed in Jesus Christ—and the ingredients that make up a life lived by faith.

The LORD is our compassionate redeemer who reverses the curse of sin in our lives.

One of the prophets being trained and led by Elisha had died, leaving behind a wife, two children, and a mountain of debt that threatened the freedom of his two boys. In stark contrast to King Jehoram, the widow seeks out the prophet of God. Instead of angrily dismissing her as he did Jehoram, Elisha compassionately asks how he could help her. God then miraculously provides for her with oil, paying her debts and setting up the widow's family for a stable life. In doing this, Elisha effectively stands in as this widow's kinsman-redeemer. For according to Leviticus 25:35-55, "persons and property ending up in the hands of creditors could often be redeemed, and among the responsibilities of the "kinsman-redeemer" in an extended Israelite family was the maintenance or redemption of the dependents of a kinsman in debt (ESV Study Bible)."

Not Everything Has to be Public

In our day of tweets, stories, and posts, it's hard to think of anything as private anymore. While the Christian life is certainly not meant to be private, it is not meant to be trumpeted in a self-exalted manner as is so often done on social media. This widow was commanded to experience the goodness of God in secret. Jesus commanded us to love God and pray and fast in secret as well, caring not about the recognition of man.

This means that you don't have to post the perfect Insta of your quiet time and coffee. You don't have to post all the pictures from your mission trip. Yes, live publicly for the Lord and testify of his goodness and glory, yet seek to love him in secret as well, putting to death any self-promotion or longing for the glory that comes from man.

Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

Apply

Respond

Additional Passages:

Genesis 3:1-19

Galatians 3:10-14

Philippians 4:6-7

Isaiah 65:17-25

Likewise, our own sin-debt was massive, we had no means to repay what we owed, and the creditor was coming to take away everything. But Jesus, full of compassion, paid our sin debt (past, present, and future) in full as he gave his life on the cross. He bore the wrath of God in our place and rose victoriously from the grave, crediting those who turn and believe in him with his righteousness and eternal life. Where the account once showed the debt of sin, now shows the wealth of righteousness. Christ has redeemed us, and we live in the abundance of his provision.

How does having our debt of past, present, and future sin removed by Christ change the way we live out the Christian life? What is our motivation?

Financial Principles Found in 2 Kings 4:1-7

While the main point of the story about the widow and oil is not about financial management, we can still learn principles from this story to help us manage our resources in a God-honoring way.

First, live simply and avoid debt. When we go into debt, we forfeit freedom. We are less free to give and participate in the joy of kingdom ministry. We are no longer free from anxiety, because debt is a crushing force that robs households of peace. Lastly, we are less free to enjoy the goodness of life within our means because of debt. Therefore, live within your means and avoid freedom-robbing debt.

Second, work hard to pay off debts, trusting God's provision. God may not work miraculously to provide for you as he did the widow, but you can follow her example by taking ownership of your situation, seeking help from God, and working hard to pay off your debt with what the Lord has provided you.

God continues to reveal his kindness in this story to another unnamed woman by reversing the curse of sin in her life. Eden was a place of fertility. Husband and wife were charged to be fruitful and multiply, yet after sin entered in, infertility and difficulty in child-bearing reared its ugly head. The union of marriage, intended for fertility and multiplication, became marked by the curse of sin (sin in general, not necessarily a specific sin committed by a couple). The Shunammite woman and her husband were battling the effects of this particular curse of sin in their lives, as many before and after them have. Nonetheless, they seemed to have come to terms with it and used their home to glorify God by showing hospitality to his prophet, Elisha. In response, Elisha asked if there was anything he could do for her. She humbly declined, but after his servant filled him in on her story, Elisha promised that her infertility would be removed and that she would bear a son—which came to pass about a year later! Unfortunately, when the child was old enough to help his father in the fields, an illness came upon him and he died suddenly in her arms. She was experiencing the ultimate curse of sin—death. In desperate faith, she immediately sought the Lord through his prophet. Elisha responds, and through a series of events revealing even Elisha's limitations—an issue never experienced by Christ—her son was raised from the dead! The curse of death was overcome, if only for a time. God had yet again displayed his power over death.

Of course, it was only a matter of time before the child and the Shunammite woman would die, but this story gives us hope for we know that in Christ, we have overcome the grave and are promised an eternal resurrection. The curse and sting of death has been removed, and unless Christ returns first, we will die but never taste death. Our spirit will immediately be ushered into the presence of Christ where we will await the resurrection of our bodies and the rejoining of our spirit with our glorified self. For in these glorified bodies untouched by sin, we will have the capacity to enjoy the presence of God forever in the New Earth where there will be no more tears of desperation, no more sickness, no more sin, and no more death!

"Elisha gave a sneak preview of the resurrection power of Christ. When Christ was on earth, he was giving us a sneak preview of the ultimate resurrection to come. The Shunammite lady looked to Elisha in desperation, but we look to Jesus who has overcome the grave."

—Tony Merida

Member Spotlight: Heath & Andrea Simmons

As we look back at our journey to becoming a family of six, we can relate to the story of the Shunammite woman from 2 Kings 4. Many years ago, like this woman, we found ourselves in a place that seemed out of step with what was the societal norm – married for long enough that biological children were expected of us, but none had come. We were told that it would be impossible for that to happen, and like the Shunammite, we knew that it would take a miracle – God stepping in to achieve the earthly impossible.

And so He did for both us and her. God's plan for her was a miraculous pregnancy; for us it was four God-ordained adoptions. Her journey to parenthood had some very unexpected circumstances along the way, yet at the most devastating moment in the journey, she tells her husband "It will be well." (2 Kings 4:23) We wish we could say that we had that amount of faith when our journey was rough and uncertain, but there were many times that we said "It cannot be well." instead. As we look back now, and we see our journey in hindsight, it is abundantly clear that not only is it 'well' now, but 'it was well' all along.

The widow and the Shunammite exemplify lives lived by faith.

Trust the Lord with your needs.

The widow had a real need, and instead of the culture around her that looked to idols to meet their needs for provision, she looked to the Lord—and he met her needs! Jesus taught us to trust the Lord with our needs as we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, resting in the provision of our good God who gives good gifts. The question is: Are you presenting your needs to God as this widow did? In his commentary, Tony Merida rightly delineates this practice from the prosperity gospel when he encourages his readers to “present your needs (not your greed) to God. God cares about big stuff and little stuff... Do you believe God cares and can help? If so, follow the nameless widow to the throne of grace.”

Are there any pressing needs, big or small, your Life Group can pray with you about, trusting the sovereign will of our Good Father?

Display biblical hospitality.

The Shunammite woman and her husband are described as wealthy homeowners. Instead of selfishly using the blessings of God for themselves, they joyfully used what God had entrusted to them to serve and welcome Elisha as he furthered the cause of God in the land. This wealthy couple exemplifies biblical and God-honoring hospitality. The Bible both encourages and commands hospitality. In hospitality, we reflect the nature of God as we welcome others, expecting nothing in return. We will even practice hospitality in Heaven!

Consider the following passages:

Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. (Romans 15:7 ESV) [Our hospitality is a reflection of Christ's hospitality.]

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. (Romans 12:13 ESV) [Hospitality requires proactive intentionality.]

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. (1 Peter 4:9 ESV) [Hospitality is not accompanied by grumbling, i.e. “Why do we have all these teenagers at our house again?!”]

And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. (Luke 16:9 ESV) [Hospitality is an earthly ministry that can have an eternal impact.]

Cling to the Lord in your despair.

This life presents us with despairing situations. Loved ones die. Terminal diagnoses are received. Jobs are lost. Spouses are unfaithful. Close friends and family reject Christ. In these moments of hurt and brokenness, we need to follow the example of the Shunammite woman who clung to the prophet of God who represented the Lord on earth. Likewise, we are to cling to Jesus, the Son of God, in the midst of our blinding grief. Now, it is not promised that any affliction will be removed from us in this life, but God promises that he will comfort us in any and all affliction. So, even if our requests go seemingly unanswered, we can remain confident in the Lord and experience his comfort through the worst of trials. *When the trial hits, will you cling to the Lord—even if it does not end in the way you would have chosen?*

Merida's Enemies to Hospitality

1. Ignorance of the biblical teaching,
2. Carelessness
3. Greed
4. Fear

How can you use your home to bless others?

Pause and Discuss: *In what aspect of your life is God calling you to follow one of these two women's example of faith?*

Pray

Father,

Thank you for redeeming my life through your Son, Jesus Christ. Lord, right now I am really feeling the effects of the curse of sin in _____.

Lord, I trust you in your provision. I am asking you that you would _____ but if not, O Wise and Gracious God, I entrust myself to your wiser determinations. Amen.

God, The Provider and Purifier

2 Kings 4:38-5:15 | May 31st, 2020

Name a time where God provided for you. How did God answer your prayer? Was it in the way you thought it would be or wanted?

Read 2 Kings 4:38-5:15

What stands out to you?

What context is important to the meaning of the text?

In the latter part of Chapter 4, we see two instances in which God essentially verifies Elisha as a messenger and a prophet. The stories of Elisha purifying the stew and feeding a hundred people with merely 20 loaves of bread and a sack of grain allow us to draw foreshadowing of the miracles Jesus would perform as he carried out his ministry.

A relationship with God transforms you.

There was a severe famine in the land and Elisha sent one of his servants to collect ingredients so they could make a pot of stew. Unknowingly, the servant mixed in a vine that could have potentially poisoned the pot. Elisha then ordered the other servants to bring some flour that he could mix into the stew in order to neutralize the potentially deadly toxin. Once the flour was added, the men were able to eat the stew without worrying about being poisoned. Was there anything magical about the flour? No. The real point of the flour was to accent a miracle of God.

A small amount of the root, much like the small amount of leaven mentioned in Galatians 5:9, was enough to ruin the entire pot, but no task is too big or too small for God. The poisonous root is much like sin in our lives. Instead of God destroying the whole person, he addresses the root of the sin and works to remove it so the whole body might be made pure again. Elisha purifying the stew can be seen as a direct foreshadowing of Jesus purifying his children.

The Greater Elisha

"As we wait for the day God makes all things new, let us keep our eyes on the One greater than Elisha, Jesus Christ. Soon we will dwell with him forever, where all the redeemed from every tribe and tongue will sing praises to his name. On that day there will be no more lepers. No more Ebola (or Covid-19) sufferers. No more pain. No more tears. All the redeemed, who experienced God's saving grace and who lived on God's supplying grace, will exalt the One who rescued them." —Tony Merida

Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

Apply Respond

Additional Passages:

Exodus 16:1-36

John 6:1-35

Matthew 8:1-4

Psalms 51

God is our all-satisfying provider.

In these verses we are able to see Elisha perform another miracle oddly similar to one that Jesus would later perform. A man came and brought Elisha the first fruits of his harvest. While his heart was in the right place, a sack full of grain and 20 loaves of bread would not even be able to scratch the surface when it came to feeding over 100 people. Elisha, trusting God would provide, commanded the men to begin feeding the people. Despite their questions and their disbelief, the people were fed and there was a surplus of food left over.

Much like Jesus feeding the 5,000 using nothing but a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread, God brought glory to himself by providing. You see, God promises not only to provide, but to provide in a way that we will see an overflowing of his goodness and provision. Elisha trusted in the promises of God, and therefore the people were able to witness another miraculous feat. He satisfies the hungry.

Chapter 5 opens up with the story of Naaman, a highly respected commander in the Aramean army. Known as a mighty man of valor, Naaman oversaw many victories, possibly even several victories against the nation of Israel. Despite being a Gentile, Naaman was known to be a fine soldier, a great leader, a kind master who listened to his servants, and a righteous man who obeyed the prophets of Yahweh. Whether he fully understood it or not, Naaman was very successful as a direct result of God's favor shown to him. Despite all of his military prowess and accomplishments, Naaman suffered from leprosy. At this point in time in history, leprosy carried a great stigma with it. There is a lot we can learn from this often overlooked, yet significant passage of scripture. We see that no matter how successful we might be by the world's standards, much like Naaman suffered from leprosy, we all are in need of cleansing from our own form of imperfection: sin.

Love Your Enemies

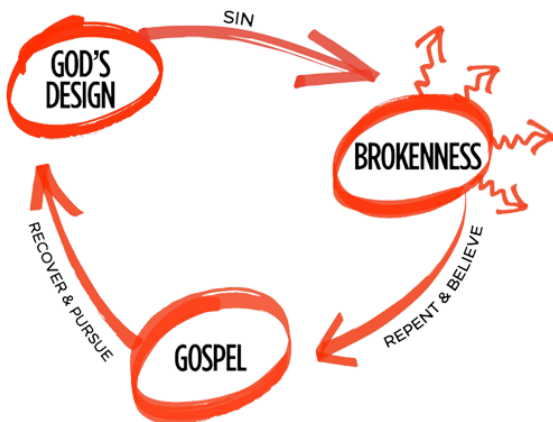
Naaman's wife's servant not only cared for her master, she also had faith that Elisha could bring healing to her master. Seeing that she was being held as a captive servant, the young girl could have very well have chosen to sit back and watch her captor suffer with his disease, but instead she decided to show compassion and allow God to be glorified as he brought healing to Naaman.

One with the mindset of the flesh could easily suggest that she would be justified in withholding the truth of God from Naaman. However, she loved the one who had enslaved her and was instrumental in bringing him to "salvation." The same is true for us today. We are to love our enemies by extending grace and mercy to them, loving them, and pointing them to Christ, the one who can save them from eternal judgment.

God works through others to bring his people to faith.

Like many other great biblical characters (Gideon, David, Jeroboam), Naaman was described as a mighty man of valor. This is especially unique to Naaman in the fact that at this point he was the only Gentile given this distinction. This was a title that was reserved for a very select few at this period of time. Despite all that he had going for him, Naaman had something equally devastating working against him. He suffered from the incurable disease leprosy that not only carried horrible social implications, but also a disease that would eventually lead to his death. None of his military accomplishments could change the fact he was a leper.

Naaman's wife had a servant girl who was brought back as a captive from one of his conquests over Israel. Despite being a servant, it is evident she not only had the ear of her master, but also had his respect. She suggested Naaman seek out the help of Elisha, a prophet from the land of Samaria. In what could either be viewed as an act of desperation or an act of blind obedience, Naaman adheres to the advice of his young servant and seeks out the prophet Elisha.



Pause and Discuss: Think back to your salvation and the events leading up to it. Who were the people who pointed you in the right direction and shared the gospel with you? Take time to thank God for these people, and if possible, reach out to them and thank them for their obedience to God's direction.

Are you being those people to others? Look for an opportunity to not only share this story with others but also to be a part of another person's "Naaman story." **Practice the 3 circles as a Life Group.**

God graciously purifies those who respond to His Word in faith—even if it's not perfect faith.

Upon receiving his king's blessing, Naaman set out for Israel bearing gifts for the king of Israel. To no one's surprise, the king of Israel became irritated upon reading the letter from his rival king. The king knew there was nothing he could do to heal Naaman of his leprosy. He was also frustrated due to the fact that he did not have any kind of real relationship with the prophet Elisha. The king could not help but to feel as if the king of Syria was trying to trick him into some type of confrontation. Upon hearing of the king's distress over the matter, Elisha sent word to the king to send Naaman to him so he may be healed.

Naaman sought out Elisha, and before he could have a face to face encounter, Elisha sent out a messenger with very specific instructions for Naaman to follow. The message was very simple and the instructions uncomplicated. Naaman was to go and wash himself in the Jordan river seven times and his flesh would be restored, making him clean again. Letting his pride get the best of him, Naaman lashed out in anger as he thought that Elisha would rush out to meet him and personally call out to the Lord and plead for healing. After all, Naaman had come all of this way seeking in faith that he would be healed. Didn't Elisha realize who he was dealing with? This was not just your average Joe at his doorstep. This was Naaman, the mighty man of valor. Talk about your humbling moments.

Luckily, Naaman had some pretty wise servants. One spoke out and pointed out that Naaman would have attempted any great feat had it been asked of him, so why not at least give this simple directive a chance. Swallowing his pride, Naaman followed the instructions of Elisha. Naaman went down to the Jordan river, submerged himself into its waters seven times, and upon emerging the final time he saw that his skin had become as fresh as the skin of a newborn child and he had been made clean!

God had done it! He had used a wise servant (Elisha), to send an obedient servant (the messenger), to convince faithful subordinates (Naaman's servants), to bring healing to a very desperate, yet trusting man (Naaman). The simple method of healing, without the prophet Elisha even being present, allowed God to get all of the glory and make a believer out of Naaman.

The story of Naaman is one that should be all too familiar for each of us as followers of Christ. After all, we all once had a sin deficit that only God himself could fix. Through the use of obedient servants, we were allowed to experience God's saving grace through the gospel. We have been saved from the death of sin, made as pure as snow, and are now satisfied by his all-satisfying presence within us. No matter how dirty you think you are, you are not outside the reach of God's purifying ministry. No matter the sin, no matter the failure, no matter the shame, God can cleanse you. Run to him in faith!

On His Terms

Naaman expected God to do something more mystical, more spectacular, more immediate. He had an expectation of not only what God would do, but how God would do it. Naaman thought that he had it all figured out. God would heal him in some miraculous way that would only add to the legend of Naaman. Rather, God chose to humble Naaman and bring him to a point of humility and obedience before bringing healing and restoration.

How often do we desire God to work on our terms? How often do we want him to work in way that increases our acclaim rather than his? This story should humble us in our approach to God, leading us to reject any teaching resembling the prosperity gospel or any pride that swells in our hearts. God is the all-wise one. His ways are better than our ways, his thoughts higher than our thoughts.

At Work Application

Naaman had more authority than any employer in our modern context has, yet he treated those under his authority with grace and understanding. He allowed them to have input and even question his decisions if necessary—and he was the better for it!

How can we learn from his example in our own workplaces? Are you treating others with the same graciousness and respect?

Pray

Father,

Thank you for _____ and the role they had in bringing me to you. You save me from death and satisfy me. Lord, help me to find satisfaction in Christ, the Bread of Life, and forgive me for looking for satisfaction in _____. Lord, use me like you used the servants of Naaman to bring others into your kingdom. Specifically, I am asking that you would use me to bring _____ into your kingdom and that you would give me opportunity to do so in the coming weeks. It is in Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, I pray, Amen.

Generosity, Greed, and Provision

2 Kings 5:15-6:7 | June 7th, 2020

Name a time where God provided for you. How did God answer your prayer? Was it in the way you thought it would be or wanted?

Read 2 Kings 5:15-6:7

What stands out to you?

What context is important to the meaning of the text?

A relationship with God transforms you.

After Naaman's encounter with the true and living God, he is radically transformed. Grateful for the work of God in his life, he seeks to bless Elisha with a generous gift. Elisha, on principle, graciously denies his generous offer. Naaman's gratitude gave way to generosity. Secondly, Naaman radically changed who he worshipped. The false idol, Rimmon, was revealed to be the fraud it always was, and Naaman would have no more of the folly of idolatry. He would worship God alone. He even begged pardon because his work demands had required him to enter the idolatrous house. Truly, Naaman, a Gentile, demonstrates more faith in this passage than the majority of the house of Israel.

Has your relationship with God transformed you? One way to examine your life for evidences of God's work is to examine your generosity. Those who have received freely the grace of God give freely to further the Kingdom of God and goodness to their fellow man. God does not desire begrudging generosity. Transformation of the Spirit produces a transformed heart that gives with joy and gratitude, not reluctance. Money isn't the issue. It's the heart. Do your money habits, whether you have little or plenty, reflect the transformation of the Spirit?

Also, like Naaman, have you made a hard cut with your past idols. Jesus saved us from our sin, not so that we could continue to live in that which we are now ashamed, but that we would be set free from our old, empty ways! Are you entertaining sin and idols in your life? The transforming power of the Spirit will have nothing of syncretism (the worship of both God and the idols of the culture). Let him work powerfully in you, and leave your idols behind.

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Colossians 3:12-14 ESV)

Pause and Discuss: How does the Spirit reveal his transformation in us?

Are you seeing the effects of his work at this moment? If not, why not?

Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

Apply Respond

Additional Passages:

Colossians 3:1-17

Romans 6:1-14

Joshua 7

Psalms 65

Greed is an idolatrous cancer that begets more sin and misrepresents the gospel and nature of God.

While the Gentile is forsaking idols, the Israelite is embracing an idol—the idol of money. Gehazi, who had seen the power of God on display, makes a foolish decision. He chooses temporary wealth over the glory of God. He follows, like Eve and Achan before him, the deadly pathway of sin:

1. He sees Naaman's wealth.
2. He covets it in his heart, after seeing Elisha reject the gift.
3. He takes that which does not belong to him.
4. He hides his sin, and lies to cover it up (more sin).
5. He experiences judgment from God.

Gehazi's greed misrepresented the good news of God to Naaman, and misrepresented the character and nature of both God and Elisha. Think: Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, I will receive none." Then, Gehazi takes it upon himself to tell Naaman that Elisha will receive some. Unknowingly, or more accurately, uncaringly, Gehazi communicates that God does not live, that his word is as shifting as the daily events, and that his free gift of salvation is actually not so free. However, none of those are true representations of God. This is what happens when one walks down the pathway of sin. We misrepresent God's character, God's Word, and God's gospel. Idolatry promises the world, but delivers death.

Greed, the idolatrous affection for money (whether you have a lot or a little), destroyed Gehazi, and it will destroy you.

The Unexpected Attacks of Greed

Excerpt from DesiringGod.org Article, "How to Fight Dragon Sickness," by David Mathis

"By way of definition, then, greed is our inordinate desire, our excessive love, for wealth and possessions, for money and the things money can buy — and even for self-esteem, security, status, and power. Greed's object is money and things, but it is not to be identified with those things. Greed is a misplaced craving in the heart. It is good desire gone wrong. God made us to have and to hold, to desire possessions and things as his creatures in fitting relation to him. The problem of greed is not that we desire things, but that our desires are misdirected and out of proportion.

Greed lurks in our hearts, often unnoticed, as we walk the aisles of a store, or consider cheating on our taxes, or ponder how much to tip the waitress, or how much to give the church, or whether to help a friend in need. We could be browsing Amazon or flipping through a catalog, or evaluating our insurance and retirement, when our sinful and broken hearts swell in their desire for the things of earth in a way that eclipses our valuing the God of heaven."

Pause and Discuss: *How do we overcome a heart of greed? Where are some unlikely places greed manifests itself?*

Greed and COVID-19

Assuming now is a time of trouble (I am writing this in April), we may be tempted to embrace greed but disguise it as preparedness. It was a time of trouble for Gehazi as well. He was in the minority. Famine was in the land, and the prophets were not exactly known for their wealth. Troublesome and uncertain times do not excuse greed. Have you allowed greed to gain a foothold in your heart during the fallout of COVID-19?

Four Ways to Pray for a Generous Heart

Excerpt from Tim Challies Article “The Character of the Christian: Generous”

“God loves a cheerful giver because He Himself is a cheerful giver. So, I encourage you to pray in these ways:

1. I pray that you, Father, would make Christ more precious to me than all else—including money.
2. I pray that you would give me a generous heart that is quick to identify and meet the needs of others. Help me to gladly lay up treasures in heaven with greater enthusiasm than I lay up treasures here on earth (Matthew 6:19–24)
3. I pray that you would help me trust in you at all times—even and especially when finances are tight. Help me to believe that if you care for the birds of the air and if you so clothe the grass of the field, then of course you will provide for me as well (Matthew 6:25–34).
4. I pray that I would worship you as I give to your work this Sunday.”

God provides for us in the day-to-day.

After seeing examples of both generosity and greed, the narrative moves to a brief story highlighting the faithful provision of the Lord. The unnamed son of the prophet—a disciple of Elisha—wanted to add on to their dwelling place. This prophet was not wealthy. He does not own his own house, and the one he is staying in is too small. More than that, he does not even own his own ax, and despairs when it is lost. Working through a miracle performed by Elisha, God provides for this prophet and restores to him the lost ax.

This story may seem odd or insignificant, but it was not insignificant to this individual, nor to God who by his Spirit inspired it to be written in his Holy Word. This story, brief as it is, teaches us a lot about God’s character:

1. **He cares about the little things of our lives.** There was a famine in the land, yet our God, in his compassion, steps in to meet this simple need in the life of this prophet. He cares about you as well. He cares about the daily things that weigh on you. Like this prophet, go to the Lord with your needs.
2. **He is our provider.** You may be in a tough time right now—this prophet certainly was—but the Lord is our provider. He is trustworthy and kind. There is no need to despair. In all situations, we remain confident, empowered to endure all circumstances through Christ who strengthens us.

Pause and Discuss: *How does this brief story comfort you?*

Are you trusting in the Lord’s provision?

Pray

Father,

I long to see your Spirit work in my life in this way: _____.
Strengthen me and encourage me with the gospel of your Son as I pursue righteousness. Forgive me for any greed that has been revealed in my life. You are my provider and your provision is sufficient. Lord, during this time I need your provision in _____.
_____ I trust your will to be done.

In the name of Jesus, I pray,

Amen.

Humble Pie

2 Kings 6:8-23 | June 14th, 2020

Recount a funny time when you had to eat some “humble pie.” What was the situation and what happened?

Read 2 Kings 6:8-23

What stands out to you?

What context is important to the meaning of the text?

In his arrogance, the king of Syria (Aram) did not recognize it was “the Lord who had given victory to Syria” (2 Ki. 5:1) and ignored the grace that was shown to his top military commander Naaman. Thus, he began carrying out raids into Israel, going as far as Dothan, a mere 10 miles from the capital city of Samaria. His pride prevented him from seeing the truth. Ben-hadad, in his own blindness, seeks to put an end to Elisha—a direct affront to the God who in his sovereign and gracious rule over all peoples had generously provided all of their successes. The Lord reveals his omniscience and omnipotence to both Ben-hadad and an unnamed servant of Elisha, bringing low the haughty and protecting the faithful. Elisha also exemplifies a life lived by faith in the midst of one’s enemies, showing us how to love our enemy well.

The Lord humbles the proud.

Everyone struggles with pride. We all have put ourselves before God and his will, and we continue to fight against that tendency. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that God humbles each of us as well. He does not humble us out of some vindictive arrogance, however. Our God is good and kind. As Tony Merida puts it, “God humbles us that He might save us and use us for his glory.” Of course, not everyone responds in faith. Some persist in their pride. Ben-hadad does and joins the list of many others such as Esau, Pharaoh, and Judas who in their pride rejected God. How will you respond to the humbling work of God in your life? Will you respond in faith or rebellion? How can we tell when God is humbling us? In this story, we see God humbles Ben-hadad in three ways: he frustrates his plans, he reveals his weakness before the Almighty God, and he extends mercy (Merida). Let’s examine each of those.

During Ben-hadad’s raids, God kept revealing his ambush sites to Elisha, who would then inform the king, saving the lives of countless Israelites. It happened so frequently and consistently that Ben-hadad was certain he had a traitor in his midst. But there was no traitor. God in his omniscience was humbling Ben-hadad by frustrating his plans.

The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. (Psalm 33:10 ESV)

Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

Apply

Respond

Additional Passages:

James 4:1-17

Matthew 5:38-48

Job 40 (Really 38-42)

Psalm 33



Source: ESV Study Bible: <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-study-bible/map-12-01/>

How often do things not go according to plan in your life? It may not be openly opposed to the will of God as Ben-hadad's plans were. It could simply be that your plan for a restful Saturday of doing what you want to do is frustrated by the needs of the home and other family members, or your plans for blocked off time at work are frustrated by interruptions from the new employee or a client that requires more attention than most, or even your plans to lead your teenagers to engage in family time are frustrated by their lack of catching on to your vision. How do you respond when things don't go according to your plan? Is it anger and frustration, perhaps even at God? Have you considered that God might be using this "interruption" to humble you and help you grow in your love for others or in your dependency upon him?

Pause and Discuss: *How can we respond in faith when things don't go according to plan?*

Ben-hadad did not respond in faith, because he thought his might and his armies could overcome the God who knew the very words he spoke in his bedroom. This led to an embarrassing encounter where his entire army was blinded and led by the hand to the capital of the country he was trying to invade.

⁷ *Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.* ⁸ *They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.* (Psalm 20:7-8 ESV)

God will often humble us by pointing out our weaknesses. It has become popular in Christian circles to say, "God will not give us more than we can handle." However, that is a misquote and misapplication of 1 Corinthians 10:13. God most certainly gives us more than we can handle. The bible says in John 15:5 that apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. So, everything good in this life, every trial, every temptation, every mundane event that happens in a given day is more than we can handle on our own. We need God. God will use circumstances to show us our weaknesses so we might understand our deep need for him and confidently rely on him, not our own strength.

Pause and Discuss: *Where are we tempted to rely on our own strength?*

How do we overcome the prideful tendencies seen in Ben-hadad, and embrace the faithful dependence exemplified in Elisha?

Lastly, we see God humble Ben-hadad by showing mercy to his army. This reveals the abundant goodness of God. He highlights the foolishness and weakness of Ben-hadad to not destroy him (at this time) but to extend mercy, further humbling the proud king. The God who was a shelter to Elisha would have been a shelter to Ben-hadad—if only he would have turned from his sin and found refuge in the Lord (Merida).

The mercy of the Lord should humble us. When God had every right to strike us down, he struck down his Son that we might be lifted up with Jesus. How humbling is that? We truly are so undeserving of the goodness revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Have you sought refuge in Christ? Are you arrogantly persisting in your ways rather than the Way, your strength rather than in the strength of the Almighty, the perils of your sins rather than the refuge of the righteousness of Christ? Have you humbled yourself before Jesus in surrendered faith?

The Value of Community

When Elisha's servant saw the armies of Syria surrounding him, he was terrified. Elisha, however, helped him see the truth and encouraged him in the midst of his fear. When facing terrifying and troubling situations, we likewise need the community of God's people to encourage us and help us see the truth. Life Groups are an amazing opportunity for this to occur. When trials rise up—and they most certainly will—these are times to rally around each other, pointing them to the eternal truth of God's Word and the hope of Heaven.

What situations in your life are causing fear and worry? Share them with your group and receive encouragement from them.

***Many long for this type of community, yet do not have it. How can you be intentional to seek out those needing community? It may be that you help launch a new Life Group to multiply the ministry of your group that you love and cherish to others who desperately need it.*

The Lord is the protector of his people.

God reveals himself as the protector of his people to the servant of Elisha. God opens his eyes to see the chariots of fire that are surrounding and protecting him. This story echoes the truths sung in Psalm 91, which declare that “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.” (Psalm 91:1 ESV). We can have confidence in the protection of the God who commands the hosts of heaven! He is for us, so who can stand against us? What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Absolutely nothing. No matter what horrible things happen in this life, we know the Lord protects us. He preserves our life, and we will not know the bitterness of death but will dwell eternally with God in glorified bodies.

Less than that, we also know God protects us according to his will in day-to-day living. We can trust him, confident of our eternal hope, entrusting ourselves to the one who cares for us in the turmoil of life. So, when the world panics, we remain confident for we know “those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

Live by Faith: Love your enemies.

Elisha exemplifies what it looks like for one to love his enemies. He warns the king of Israel of peril, though Jehoram clearly is opposed to the things of God and has a disdain for Elisha. He trusts God in the midst of the conflict, resting in the justice and will of God. Lastly, Elisha extends mercy to the wicked army of Syria. So, how can we love our enemies as well as Elisha?

- 1. Warn them of their eternal danger in love.** This requires us showing a deep and genuine concern for another individual who might embrace a worldview, political opinion, or religion vastly different than ours. They might even respond with hostility, but instead of hating our “enemies” by remaining silent, knowing the peril that lies before them, we graciously warn them and point them to the grace of Christ.
- 2. Trust in God’s will and justice.** God is sovereign over all things. So, if we suffer for righteousness’ sake, it is because God allowed it to happen—for our good. Leave your vengeance to the Lord. He will avenge your pain in the cross or in his judgment.
- 3. Show mercy, not hate to those you consider your enemies.** Comment wars, biting sarcasm, grudges, and physical altercations are not the way of Christ. Forgiveness, mercy, and grace should mark the life of a believer. So, when cursed, bless, when asked unfairly to go one mile, go two, and when given the opportunity to strike someone down, build them up in the grace of Christ.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰ To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:14-21 ESV)

Pray

Father,

You are the Almighty. I am the powerless one. You are all-knowing. Apart from your Word, I know nothing. You uphold the universe constantly with ease, yet I need sleep each night. Lord, I humble myself before you. Strengthen me with your strength and teach me with your Wisdom Mine is insufficient. I need you. In the name of the True Vine who gives me strength, Amen.

Love Your Family

Sometimes, in addition to failing to love our enemies, we fail to show the same mercy of Elisha to those we love most—our families. How often do we choose to strike down in arguments rather than build up? How often do we hold grudges and bring up past sins and mistakes? How often do we fail to warn those closest to us of the peril that awaits them? Let’s be intentional to love our families with the love of Christ.

How can you apply the love and mercy of Elisha to your family? List the ways.

The Discipline of the LORD

2 Kings 6:24-7:20 | June 21st, 2020

Remember when you were disciplined properly as a child. Do you see the purpose now? How so?

Read 2 Kings 6:24-7:20

What stands out to you?

What context is important to the meaning of the text?

⁴⁵ "All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you. ⁴⁶ They shall be a sign and a wonder against you and your offspring forever. ⁴⁷ Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, ⁴⁸ therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. ⁴⁹ The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, ⁵⁰ a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young. ⁵¹ It shall eat the offspring of your cattle and the fruit of your ground, until you are destroyed; it also shall not leave you grain, wine, or oil, the increase of your herds or the young of your flock, until they have caused you to perish. ⁵² "They shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land. And they shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land, which the LORD your God has given you. ⁵³ 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. (Deuteronomy 28:45-53 ESV)

The Lord judges idolatry and disciplines his people.

Israel had long rejected their God. The house of Omri had led the people astray into all sorts of idolatry and the Lord was bringing about his judgment. This siege served as a warning to a people living in sin of something coming that would be worse—exile. Unfortunately, the warning went unheeded.

The account of the two women reveals the horrifying consequences of idolatry. The economic stability of Ahab's reign had all but vanished in just over a decade, and people's hearts were so hardened that dishonoring an agreement to eat one another's children was seen as more heinous than the very practice of eating one's offspring. Those who worshipped the gods of wealth and security were seeing those very things taken away before their eyes. Their idols proved to be useless. Ironically, the king completely missed the point. Instead of genuinely repenting of his idolatry, Jehoram went through the motions of repenting and grew bitter and angry at his only hope of deliverance.

How can we learn from this story? First, we learn that idolatry is a big deal that leads to horrifying places. Even the exile is just a foreshadowing of a much worse judgment to come in hell. Idolatry leads people there, and cannot be tolerated in the lives of the faithful.

Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

Apply

Respond

Additional Passages:

Hebrews 12:3-17

Revelation 1:4-8

2 Corinthians 4:1-7

Psalms 13

Second, we can learn from Joram's mistakes and respond better to the discipline of the Lord. Joram feigned repentance, grew bitter towards God, and refused to wait upon the Lord. Whereas when we experience the discipline of God in our life—whenever God uses life's circumstances, good or ill, to reveal and confront sin in our lives—we respond by:

1. Genuinely repenting of sin.
2. Trusting God's good purposes.
3. Confidently waiting on our blessed hope of the return of Jesus Christ and his restoration.

Pause and Discuss: *In the events of the past 6 months, how has God revealed sin in your life?*

How was your response?

In the power of the Spirit, how can you respond better than Joram did?

Share the good news!

The deliverance Elisha promised the foolish captain came about, further proving the Word of God. In God's sovereign goodness, he arranged for four lepers outside the city to be the first beneficiaries of God's salvation. These four lepers, having reached a point of desperation, moved towards the Syrian camp knowing they were either going to be executed or made into slaves who would at least be able to eat and live. When they arrived, God had miraculously driven out the Syrian army, and these four lepers began to enjoy the fruit of God's deliverance. However, conviction shortly settled in, and they felt the need to proclaim the good news of God's salvation to the people of Israel, still starving within the city walls.

We too have received good news of salvation that is received outside the camp. Jesus was taken outside the camp of Jerusalem and crucified at Golgotha, his body becoming the bread of life broken by the wrath of God in the place of sinners. He died on that cross shedding his blood for the forgiveness of sins, and he rose from the grave unto eternal life in victory. Now, all who look to Christ for salvation, all who through faith die to themselves and are born again by the Holy Spirit to eternal life, experience the full satisfaction of Christ—his life, his righteousness, his fulfillment, now theirs by God's grace. Those who were once starving, now full. Experiencing the salvation of God comes with the obligation to live out the commission of God. Like the lepers, we do not want to be the ones who experience God's salvation and remain silent while countless others starve in the city. **We must proclaim the good news!**

Is it ok to be Angry at God?

Excerpt from Denny Burk

"[The Psalms of Lament] teach us to cry out to God with brutal honesty when life hurts us. They make sense of a world in which we suffer real evils and have real tears streaming down our faces. They deal with death, depression, and all the other evils that make us feel undone in this life.

These Psalms teach us how to hope in God in the midst of suffering. They reflect the reality of the human condition in a fallen world where oppression, violence, and death hound the people of God. They reflect the same world that you and I live in where children get cancer, fathers desert their families, and strong men rule and oppress as dictators. They portray the world as it is, not as it should be. They reflect the whole range of human experience and do so with unflinching honesty and hope...

There is not a single psalm that teaches us that it is right to be angry with God. You can look high and low in the Psalms, and you will find no such expression. It's just not there. What is there is desperation, grief, anxiety, frustration, and lament. But in none of it is there justified anger against God. There is a world of difference between "How long, oh Lord" and "How DARE you, oh Lord?" These Psalms have a great deal of the former and none of the latter.

This discussion is not an academic speculation about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. We all have skin in the game, and we are all going to suffer. Some people reading this are suffering right now. Some may be feeling that they are hanging on by a very thin thread. The last thing that these sufferers need to hear is that it is right for them to be angry with God. What that tells them is that it is okay to disapprove of God's character and His ways.

But that is precisely the opposite of what the sufferer needs. And it is the opposite of what the Psalms are leading the sufferer to do. The Psalms are doing their level best to show us that no matter how low we feel, no matter how low we go, God is good and holy and trustworthy in all that He is and in all that He does. The faithful response to affliction is to believe in God's goodness and faithfulness no matter how bad things get. This is the fight for faith that all of us have to wage when the chips are down."

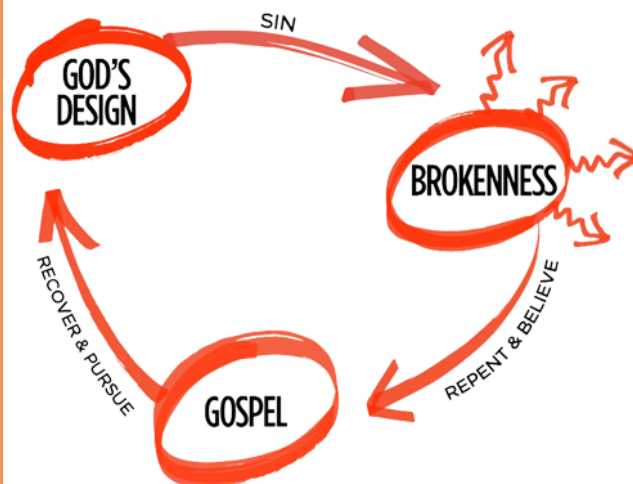
<https://www.dennyburk.com/it-is-never-right-to-be-angry-at-god-ever/>

Who is God pressing upon your heart to share the good news of salvation?

1. Write their name down _____.
2. Pray for them.
3. Pray for opportunity to tell them about Jesus.
4. Share the good news with them in joyful anticipation.

The lepers were not bothered by the fact that the Israelites thought it was too good to be true. Their job was to proclaim the good news. God took over the rest.

Practice sharing the gospel as a class.



Those who reject the good news will see the salvation of the Lord, yet will not experience it.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this story is what happens to the captain. The events of his downfall are predicted once and recounted twice. So the repetition of the biblical author catches our attention. The captain heard the good news of salvation from the prophet of the Lord and rejected it. The word of the prophet should have been just as sure in his mind as the leper's experience, if not more so. However, this captain had no faith. As a result, he saw the salvation of God, but instead of experiencing that salvation, he experienced judgment.

Revelation 1 paints a similar picture. Now is the time when the good news of Christ is going forth. People are either responding to it in faith like the servants pressing the king to heed to the leper's message or they are rejecting the message of salvation like the foolish captain. There will come a day when there is no more time for response. The salvation of God will be revealed. Christ will return in glory, riding on the clouds, and every eye will see the salvation of God. Those who rejected God's gracious word will wail on account of it and experience eternal judgment. Which are you? Have you rejected the word of Christ or have you grieved your sin, turned from it and towards Christ in surrendered faith? Now is the time for faith. Respond today!

Pray

Father,

I feel your discipline in my life. I know it is for my good, but it is hard. I trust you in the midst of this situation. Strengthen me that I might not grow angry or embittered. You do all things for my ultimate and eternal good. Lord, I repent of my:

Let your Spirit use this season to mold me more into the image of Christ. He is my rock and my shield. Lord, I also pray for _____. Please, use me to proclaim the good news of salvation to them and give them ears to hear your message. In Jesus I pray, Amen.

The God who Saves Lepers

Lepers were outcasts in ancient times, unable to experience the community of God's people. They were often poor and downtrodden, having to call out "unclean" when they walked, rarely experiencing the affection of human touch. Yet in this story the lepers receive God's salvation first. Already, we've seen God purify Naaman the leper in his grace, and we know that when Jesus came on the scene, some of his most compassionate miracles included him reaching out, touching lepers, and making them pure. No one is outside of God's reach.

If you feel alone, like an outcast, or the downtrodden, know that God loves you. He cares for you. You are not outside his sight. He can and will use you in mighty ways. Our God is the God who saves and uses lepers. He certainly can save and use you!

Justice and Faithfulness

2 Kings 8:1-24 | June 28th, 2020

Have you ever been on the receiving end of injustice? How did you feel in that moment? What should have happened?

Read 2 Kings 8:1-24

What stands out to you?

What context is important to the meaning of the text?

God cares for the destitute.

Throughout the Scriptures God reveals his heart for the lowly and challenges his people to love in the same manner. James reminds us in his epistle that “Religion (lit. devotion to God) that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” (James 1:27 ESV). 2 Kings 8 reveals this same heart of compassion our God possesses.

After being warned by Elisha of the upcoming famine, the Shunammite woman whose son was raised by God fled for refuge in Philistia. Commentator Paul House describes the context of her situation well when he says, “This time away spares her the pain of famine, but it leaves her with no claim to her land and perhaps without her husband, who was mentioned in 2 Kgs 4:8-37 but not here. G.H. Jones explains that ‘property left temporarily was taken over by the crown and was held in trust until reclaimed by the legal owner...’ [If her husband had died], she has fled a famine, lost her main male supporter, and seems to be at the mercy of the political system.”

Justice at Work

King Joram of Israel has a bright moment in his interaction with the Shunammite woman. Given the choice between injustice and justice, he chooses justice.

Disciples of Jesus Christ who have been transformed by the gospel should advocate for justice when possible in their efforts to love our neighbor as ourselves. We speak up for the oppressed, the destitute, and the maligned. We vote in ways to promote justice and use our careers to further God’s justice as defined by his Word, not the culture. This supplements our Christian witness—testimony of the good news of Jesus Christ—with the Christian ethic—the transformative work of the Spirit that foreshadows the kingdom of God.

Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

Apply Respond

Additional Passages:

James 1:26-27

Acts 12:20-24

Genesis 50:15-21

Psalms 89

Providentially (i.e. God’s sovereignty over the details of life, what many mistakenly attribute to coincidence or luck), Gehazi is in the king’s court when she arrives. He vouches for her, so the king justly restores the woman’s land back to her. God yet again made provision for the destitute. [Gehazi was in either his pre-leprosy days and the author was following the common practice of not telling stories in the strict chronology we are accustomed to today or his leprosy was of the sort that did not warrant his removal from society like Naaman (House)]

This truth should comfort and challenge us. First, it should comfort us in that no matter how society views us or how weak we might be, God provides and cares for us. Secondly, it should challenge us to pursue justice for the lowly. God’s wrath is stored up for those who oppress others. The gospel moves us to demonstrate love, compassion, and uprightness to all people—particularly those who cannot pay us back.

Pause and Discuss: *How have you seen God's providence in your life?*

How does this story comfort you? How does it challenge you?

How can God use you or your career to further his justice in this world?

God is sovereign over wicked rulers and righteous in his judgment.

In the next section, God fulfills the word he spoke to Elijah in the wilderness through Elisha. Elisha anoints Hazael to be king over Syria. Ben-hadad becomes sick and sent his servant, Hazael, to inquire of Elisha who was in Damascus regarding his illness. Elisha delivers one command, yet three prophecies. The first prophesy is that the illness is one from which the king would recover. This is what he instructs Hazael to tell the king. Elisha, however, has been given insight to what will transpire. The king, who would recover if things took

their natural course, will be murdered by the man standing in front of him. This same murderer would become king over Syria, according to the will of God, and carry out great terrors on the Israelites as a part of God's judgment. Elisha weeps over the people of Israel, yet faithfully carries out the will of God. God is sovereign over wicked rulers and righteous in his judgment.

Do you weep over the lost?

From Tony Merida

"God must judge sinners, but He is slow to anger and full of mercy...Elisha knew judgment was necessary, but it was sad. He was a brokenhearted prophet.

If people are going to refuse to believe and head off into destruction, then let them do so by walking through a puddle of our prayerful tears. Are you broken for those who do not know the King? Let us learn from Elisha to weep over the unrepentant and to remember, 'God seldom blesses a tearless ministry.'"

How comforting is it to know that God is sovereign in the worst of times? We may be tempted to only see how the enemy is at work—and certainly the enemy is at work. However, he can only work in specific parameters determined by God. This is seen in the life of Joseph, Job, Paul, and Christ himself. In each situation, the enemy is clearly at work in his wickedness, yet God is working in ways unknown to the enemy for the good of his people, the destruction of the wicked, and the revealing of his glory.

To paraphrase John Piper, "the sovereignty of God that could stop the hardship, but does not, is the same sovereignty that sustains you in the midst of it." When the hardships come and the enemy clearly is at work, ask yourself: What is God doing that I do not see yet? What sin do I need to repent of? How can this trial be used to strengthen my faith?

God keeps covenant.

The narrative shifts from Israel to Judah, who is following a similar downgrade into foolish idolatry. The summary of Joram of Judah's reign is bleak. Beginning in the life of Elijah and continuing into the ministry of Elisa, Joram leads the people into idolatry, loses control of Edom, and even has a territory of his own people revolt against his rule. The Chronicler later would say that no one regretted his passing. Jehosphat's son, walking down the path his father lamentably set him on, was an utter failure as king. However, God was not willing to destroy Judah. Why not? For the sake of the promise he made David.

Ministry through Others

In 1 Kings 19, God told Elijah he would do three things: enlist Elijah, anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, and anoint Jehu to be king in the place of the house of Ahab. Elijah only did one of those things himself, but his ministry lived on through his disciple Elisha. This is the glory of disciple-making.

It is in one sense ministry to someone. We are giving time, energy, and prayer in order to strengthen and invest God's Word into an individual or small group of individuals. But in another, much broader sense, we are ministering through our disciples to others in such a way that could have never been possible in our own ability. Disciple-making is the glorious ministry of equipping others to do the work of ministry that the Kingdom might go forth in multiplied ways.

In 2 Sam 7, God promised David that from his posterity would be a king whose kingdom would never end. This Davidic King, however, did not come in Solomon. Indeed, he would not appear for nearly another thousand years—and even then, it was only a partial fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. Christ established his kingdom, but the fullness is still to come. In its original context of the exile of Judah, this would have been very encouraging words to the faithful remnant in Jeremiah’s audience. God is faithful to his promises. Circumstances and failures do not move the immovable God. He is faithful. He keeps his promise.

Believers can have this same assurance in the midst of their failures and trials of life. The work he began in us, he will bring to completion. If we have been made alive spiritually, we will be made alive physically in glorified bodies at the resurrection. If Christ established his Kingdom spiritually, we can be confident in its future, physical fulfillment. Each of these truths encourages disciples to greater levels of righteousness, hope, and ministry as they await their fulfillment in the return of Christ.

Pause and Discuss: *How does God’s faithfulness encourage us to greater confidence and kingdom ministry today?*

Parenting

Jehosaphat, by in large was a great king of Judah. He led the people to worship God and demonstrated success as a king in other matters. However, he had a glaring fault. For some reason, he had a soft spot for the house of Ahab. This led to spiritual and physical destruction for his family. Unfortunately, although Jehosaphat succeeded as king, he failed in his household—and his family paid the price.

Parenting is a big job and not for the faint of heart—but in the Spirit of Christ we can shepherd our families in a way that brings glory to God and sets our children on the path of wisdom. In Randy’s sermon, Biblical Homelife, he reminds parents that this kind of parenting requires intentionality. He challenges parents and grandparents to “Be purposeful to instruct your family with words and by example.” He highlights three ways to pursue this goal:

1. Planned times of instruction (family devotions)
2. Unplanned occasions for instructions (life moments)
3. Reflective and instructive conversations (developed moments)

You can listen to his whole sermon on how to foster biblical homes here at:

<https://www.mbchurch.com/sermon/proverbs-on-biblical-homelife/>

For more resources on family discipleship, visit [mbchurch.com/familyworship/](https://www.mbchurch.com/familyworship/)

Pray

Father,

You are the God of perfect justice and faithfulness. Thank you. Give me wisdom as I seek to reflect your image in my home and in my career. Lord, I ask that you give me a heart that weeps for the lost as Elisha and Christ did. Let compassion reign in my heart.

In the name of Christ, my righteous and holy King, I pray, Amen.

Jehu's Reckoning

2 Kings 8:25-10:36 | July 5th, 2020

No one escapes judgment. The wickedness of the house of Ahab had run its course, and at its end, God brought a reckoning. The political and religious landscape of Israel would be reshaped in a fury of rebellion, deceit, and massacre. God was avenging the blood of his prophets.

Read 2 Kings 9:1-13, 10:28-31, & the Retold Narrative

After the death of Jehoram, Ahaziah ascends to the throne—if only for a year. He was young, foolish, and full of the wickedness of his lineage. He forms an alliance with Joram against Hazael. In the battle, Joram is wounded and returns to Jezreel to heal, followed by Ahaziah.

Meanwhile, Elisha sends one of the other prophets to Ramoth-gilead to anoint Jehu as king over Israel. God would use this imperfect vessel to execute his perfect justice on the house of Ahab. Jehu would completely destroy the house of Ahab, Jezebel, and the worshippers of Baal according to the word of the Lord. After his secret anointing, Jehu returns to his curious soldiers. Battle-tested and known for his fury in the battlefield, Jehu had the respect of the soldiers he commanded. Immediately upon hearing the message of the prophet, the soldiers blow their trumpets and make him king on the spot. The rebellion had begun.

Jehu musters his troops and drives furiously to Jezreel in order to assassinate Joram and Ahaziah. When Joram meets Jehu, the mutiny becomes clear. Jehu quickly kills Joram in a similar way his father was killed. He threw his body in the field belonging to the family of Naboth as an act of justice to avenge the death of Naboth and his sons. Ahaziah is chased down and executed as well. Jehu's reckoning had begun.

Upon hearing of the rebellion, Jezebel paints her eyes and adorns her head to meet her enemy with pride. This arrogant act potentially laid her claim to be the personified wife of the Baal (ESV Study Bible). After mocking Jehu, she is murdered by the eunuchs in her service and then eaten by dogs as the Lord had foretold. Jezebel would not be honored with a burial. Her grave would not become further opportunity for idolatrous worship in Israel. She, who had killed hundreds of God's prophets and even had prompted Elijah's flight into the wilderness, had met her end. Not even Jezebel could escape the judgment of God.

Additional Passages:

Revelation 19

Matthew 23

2 Peter 3

Jehu continues in his onslaught on the house of Ahab. Enlisting the elders, the rulers of the city, and the palace guards of the house of Ahab, Jehu puts to death the seventy sons of Ahab, piling their heads at the city gate. If the people were questioning the authority of Jehu, they weren't anymore. Jehu was in charge. After slaying the sons of Ahab, Jehu turned to the mighty men, close friends, and priests of the house of Ahab—even relatives of Ahaziah who journeyed north. Jehu struck them down, and continued to do so "till he had wiped them out, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke to Elijah.

Lastly, Jehu turns his attention to the Baal worshippers. He invites Jehonadab, who would establish a remnant of people faithful to the Lord (Jer. 35), to come observe his zeal for the Lord. So Jehu deceives the false worshippers, gathers them all into the house of Baal, and orders his guards to slaughter them all or forfeit their own life. He demolished the house of Baal and its pillar, burned the remains, and turned it into a latrine. "Baal worship in Israel was officially at an end. It has neither royal patronage nor royal tolerance."

Though he eradicated one form of idolatry—a particularly heinous one that resulted in the death of many—Jehu embraced another. The golden calf cult was the syncretism between the God of Moses and the false gods of the land. It too was an abomination, and like all idolatry, it led Jehu astray. However, since Jehu was obedient in carrying out God's judgment, God promised him a four-generation dynasty. Jehu, however, would lose much land to Syrian rule and never be able to overcome Hazael in battle.

Flawed as he was, Jehu carried out God's vengeance and justice on the house of Ahab. No amount of earthly power was enough to protect from the judgment of God. The unnamed prophets and Naboth, unjustly killed by Jezebel and the house of Ahab, were vindicated. Thankfully for them, God, not Jezebel, had the last word.

Jehu's judgment, while gruesome, foreshadows a judgment to come which is more violent, more widespread, and eternal.

Jehu, like Hazael, was an instrument of God's judgment, and this was not pretty. People differ on how to evaluate Jehu. Did he go over the top? What actions of his are to be commended in chapters 9-10? While the answers to these questions vary, what is unmistakable is that God was fulfilling his word of judgment—albeit through an imperfect king whose reforms at times resemble atrocities (House). The New Testament offers us a different type of king, one that is perfect, and one that will also bring justice upon a sinful world. Jesus came not only to save the people from political and spiritual oppression, He came to save them from the oppression of sin and death. A perfect king delivers a permanent solution—a solution that began on the cross and will be fulfilled in the future.

Jehu's judgment, as gruesome as it was, is a shadow of a judgment that is to come. God is a God of grace and mercy, but he is holy and righteous and will judge the wicked. Jesus will return, and he will judge all who have not turned to him in faith. Unlike Jehu, Jesus will not sin. He will act in perfect justice and righteousness. He will not deceive, but he will appear in the sky and judge the world, the false prophet, the beast, and Satan himself. Jehu only dealt with a subsection of a population in a small country on the Mediterranean. Jesus will judge every person who rejected his gracious offer of salvation, either explicitly or implicitly. It will not be a pretty picture, and no one can escape it. Everyone's sins will be judged.

The good news is that Jesus, the Son of God, took on flesh and fulfilled God's holy standard, bearing God's judgment in our place. On the third day, God raised Jesus to eternal life, victorious and vindicated. God died, that we might live with him. Now the choice is ours. Will we die with Christ on the cross, denying ourselves, following after him in faith, and trusting that he bore the judgment of God in our place? Or, will we bear the judgment ourselves? Our sin will be judged. Either Christ has paid the price, or we will. The salvation of God is offered to you today. Turn from your sins and embrace Jesus as Lord!



Jehu Executes Judgment (841 B.C.)

During a battle with Syria at Ramoth-gilead, King Joram (also called Jehoram) of Israel was wounded and went to Jezreel to recover. While he was there, Jehu, one of Joram's commanders, came from Ramoth-gilead to carry out the Lord's judgment on Joram's family. When Joram and King Ahaziah of Judah went out in their chariots to meet Jehu, Jehu mortally wounded Joram with an arrow and chased Ahaziah to Beth-haggan, where he wounded him as well. It appears that Ahaziah then fled to Megiddo, where he died (2 Kings 9:27).

Source: ESV Study Bible, Crossway

Pause and Discuss: *How does God's future judgment impact the way we live today those of us who have been saved from his judgment?*

God is patient in judgment.

God foretold of his judgment on the house of Ahab in 1 Kings 19. A lot of time has passed since then. Why did God delay? Why did he not strike the house of Ahab immediately? His mercy.

Today, a judgment much worse is coming, but God is patient in bringing it about. The church stands today as a mouthpiece of His grace, representing the one who could exact true vengeance. The church warns of judgment, yet invites the world to experience the salvation of God. We do not purge the land of false worshippers; we love them and invite them to repent and find rest in the one true God. We were all false worshippers at one time who have been saved by God's grace, so now we testify of the free gift of salvation offered to all who would believe in the gospel of Christ.

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! (2 Peter 3:8-12 ESV)

Who are you inviting to experience the salvation you know and enjoy?

Learn from Jehu's Failures: Zeal for one's self-interest can easily be mistaken as zeal for the Lord.

"Jehu's acceptance of the Jeroboam's cult seems to make him one more killer whose zeal for God extends only as far as his personal interests allow."—House.

Elijah killed prophets of Baal in his zeal for the Lord, but unlike Jehu, he persisted in faithfulness. Jehu allows the golden calf cult to continue. He drives out one form of idolatry—which was necessary for his ascent to the throne—but leaves "the long-standing Israelite state religion begun by Jeroboam" (House). At the end of the day, he was revealed to be one more zealous for himself than for the Lord.

What about you? Does your zeal for the Lord dry up when it no longer aligns with your self-interests?

Twisted Zeal (Merida)

You might be zealous for religion, but you have never experienced regeneration. You may have zeal to attend worship gatherings but be addicted to pornography. You might think you are zealous for ministry but really have zeal to be known and admired by others... You might be busy with churchy things but have no devotion to Christ, doing everything in the energy of the flesh. You might be into social causes but have no desire for Jesus... Jehu says, 'Come see my zeal.' Jesus says, "Let me examine your heart. That is what matters. Jehu purged Israel, but he still needed purging on the inside." – Tony Merida

Pray

Father,

Examine my heart for impure motives. May external and inward zeal for you be aligned. Thank you for your patience in judgment. I tremble when I consider the terror of your wrath. Thank you for saving me through Jesus. Lord, use me to be a vessel of salvation for _____. Open their eyes to the truth that they might be saved from themselves and the wrath they deserve. In Jesus, the Ark of Salvation and Righteous Judge, I pray, Amen.

The Rightful King

2 Kings 11-12 | July 12th, 2020

What has been the most extensive restoration project you have ever done? Were you pleased with how it turned out?

Read 2 Kings 11-12

What stands out to you?

What context is important to the meaning of the text?

The rightful King will take his throne.

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth... Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! (Revelation 5:9-10,12)

Just as Joash, the rightful king of Judah, took his place on the throne after the wicked ruler was put to death, so Jesus – Creation’s rightful King – will destroy the prince of the power of the air in the lake of fire and rule over all of heaven and earth as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:11-21). The reality of Christ’s return is sure. It cannot be thwarted. The certainty of his return produces great hope and joy amidst all the trials of life. We read this same reaction from the crowd gathered to inaugurate their new and rightful king in chapter 11, verse 12. There was high energy, clapping, and shouts of joy and praise; however, this joy and excitement over the prospects of a young and new king is only a shadow compared to what Christ’s people will experience at his return.

Covenanting People

“In 2 Kings 11:17 we see a picture of a people unified and committed. “Together they’re committing to be a people of God’s own possession, dedicated to living for His glory. Is this not a great reminder to us about the importance of biblical community? Christianity isn’t a lone-ranger religion. It involves covenant relationships. Many today want benefits of a local church (use of facilities, occasionally receiving some teaching, etc.) without committing to a covenant people. It’s like dating versus marriage. Following Christ involves belonging to a people, covenanted together [being committed to one another, willing to sacrifice for them], who care for one another and live on mission together.”

– Tony Merida

Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

Apply Respond

Additional Passages:

Revelation 19:11-21

Matthew 22:37-38

2 Chronicles 24:17-22

Habakkuk 2:14

Just think about it, death will experience death and it will be no more. Evil and sin will have no place in the new heaven and new earth. Disease, fractured relationships, fear, unknown future problems, nor anything broken or tainted in any way will have no place in the presence of our King. And this is not even the best and most exciting part! When Christ returns and establishes his kingdom, we will forever live with and enjoy the presence of our good God, Savior, and Friend. Our perfect, just and loving King will rule with all authority in heaven and earth with no evil opposing him. There will be no effect of sin present in his creation! What a glorious existence for those who are in Christ Jesus!

Pause and Discuss: *What specifically about Christ’s return gives you hope during your current season of life?*

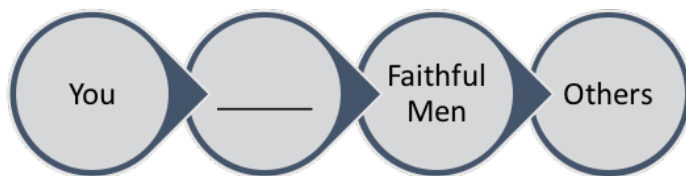
Discipleship matters.

Joash's father was a wicked man who was far from God. His grandmother, Athaliah, was just as bad, if not worse. The kingdom of Judah had been worshipping other gods and neglecting the One True God. So, the fact that 2 Kings 12:2 says And Jehoash (another name for Joash) did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all his days, truly is an incredible statement. The author gives the reason why Joash 1) knew the ways of the Lord and 2) chose to live in an honoring and pleasing way in God's sight – because Jehoiada the priest instructed him.

Jehoiada took time to instruct the new king in the ways of the Lord and Joash had a receptive heart and mind to listen and follow. One of the ways we see how God was moving in Joash's life was through his desire to repair God's temple. If it weren't for an older man of God stepping in to teach and instruct the young king in the ways of the Lord, the likelihood of Joash following in his father and grandmother's footsteps is quite significant.

Fathers and mothers have a unique and certain responsibility to disciple their children in the ways of the Lord, and what a wonderful gift it is. We get front row seats to watching our children's understanding and love for the Lord grow into a faith that is deep, rich and mobilizing. For this very reason MeadowBrook has been creating Family Worship guides to help aid you in your efforts to honor the Lord in the way you parent your children. For those that do not have children of their own, this charge to disciple the younger generation still wholeheartedly applies. Jehoiada was not Joash's father, yet he became an influential voice that radically changed the trajectory of Joash's life. When children and young adults have multiple people from inside and outside of the family teaching and instructing them in the ways of God, truth is reaffirmed in their hearts and minds, and they become better equipped to handle the trials of this life as well as being better able to disciple others

How are you discipling younger generations? What steps will you take this week to speak truth into them and disciple them in the ways of the Lord?



Removing idols is necessary for a flourishing faith.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. (Matthew 22:37-38 ESV)

¹ You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, ² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:1-2

The goal is not simply to finish our race well, it is to make every effort to not only finish well, but also to see fourth-generational disciple-making relationships form.

Immediately after Joash is praised in 2 Kings 12:2, he says Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away; the people continued to sacrifice and make offerings to the high places. In his 40 years of reigning as the king of Judah, Joash never destroyed the temples of false gods and idol worship. This led to Joash ultimately turning away from God's ways for a time after Jehoiada dies (2 Chr.24:17-22). Because he allowed idol worship to linger in his kingdom, it became a disease that harshly affected his leadership, decisions, and ultimately took his life.

Since idolatry has been one of the chief sins the author of Kings was trying to highlight, idolatry has come up often.

- Has the Lord revealed any idols in your heart?
- If so, what was that like?
- Have you repented of the idols, or are some high places remaining?
- Are you resting in the forgiveness and work of Christ or living in shame and self-willed effort?

Ask the Spirit to help you put to death the idols in your life that are inhibiting kingdom flourishing. He is faithful. He will surely help you.

What is an Idol? (John Piper)

“What is an idol? Well it is the thing. It is the thing loved or the person loved more than God, wanted more than God, desired more than God, treasured more than God, enjoyed more than God. It could be a girlfriend. It could be grades. It could be the approval of other people. It could be success in business. It could be sexual stimulation. It could be a hobby or a musical group that you are following or a sport or your immaculate yard... It could be anything.”

Redemptive Work

Joash recognized that a temple's upkeep displayed the importance and reverence a nation had for the god they served in that temple. “The temple of the Lord had suffered neglect during the years in which the worship of Baal was encouraged, and to neglect a temple in the ancient world was to neglect its deity and to risk his or her disapproval and the possible undermining of a king's legitimate authority to rule” (ESV Study Bible). In a sense, Joash was redirecting attention and worship rightfully back to the God of Israel by the restoration of the Lord's temple. This is what love for the Lord does – we join in on his redeeming creation from its broken state into one of glory. Unlike Joash's mediocre attempt to restore that which had broken, Christ's redemptive work is complete, perfect and lasting.

- Take time this week to discuss with your family or friends how God restores us from the brokenness of sin to a glorious son or daughter through faith in Christ.
- How are you joining Christ in the restoration of God's creation?
- What are some potential barriers that may keep you from seeking the restoration of creation (both nature and people's souls)?

Pray

Lord,

You are the rightful King of this world. We know and rejoice in the truth that your glory will fill the earth as you had planned from the very beginning. Thank you for the glory that you share with us through Christ Jesus. We recognize that it is only by your grace that we are able to know you, love you and be filled with your glory. Father, forgive us when we fail to display your glory to the world because of the idols that are in our life. Help us and empower us to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and to follow you. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

Half-Hearted

2 Kings 13:1-25 | July 19th, 2020

Has there been a time recently when you or someone around you did something half-heartedly? What was your response?

Read 2 Kings 13:1-25

What stands out to you?

What context is important to the meaning of the text?

God delivers from temporary peril for the purpose of eternal worship and inward transformation. Jehoahaz missed it. Learn from his mistake.

Jehoahaz succeeded his father—in both the throne and his idolatry. Thus, the Lord used Hazael as an instrument of judgment against Israel as Elisha foretold. Then something interesting happens: Jehoahaz prayed to the Lord for help. Where Ahaziah sought aid from Baal 13 chapters prior, Jehoahaz sought the Lord—and the Lord heard his prayer! God responded and raised up a savior for Israel to defeat the Syrians. Some speculate the savior was Elisha himself, others the Assyrians. The vessel through whom God worked is not the focal point of the story. The Lord is. He compassionately saved a rebellious people led by an unworthy king who was unable to save his people with the pitiful army he had left. The grace of God was on display, but the people of God missed the point. They persisted in their idolatry. Israel received external salvation, but missed out on the inner transformation.

The text says the Israelites reestablished the Asherah Jehu had likely destroyed in his reforms. The ESV Study Bible helps us understand what an Asherah was and its connection to idolatry:

“The goddess Asherah is... the wife of the chief god El and the mother of the gods. In syncretistic Israelite circles, she inevitably appears as the wife of the Lord. The Asherim were cult symbols connected with the worship of this goddess, probably wooden artifacts representing a tree.”

The irony of Asherah worship is that the Israelites were worshipping the false god they saw to be the wife of the Lord, when in fact God himself described his people as his bride. They exchanged the glorious for the shameful, defiling themselves. They were content with temporary relief and unwilling to commit themselves wholeheartedly to their bridegroom—the LORD.

³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:3-5 ESV)

How often are we the same way? When the trial strikes, we seek the Lord for aid. Then when our prayers are miraculously answered, we slip back into our old patterns. Things go “back to normal,” and we forget the Lord. Anytime the trial strikes, it is meant to draw us unto the Lord—either for the first time or for a deeper and holier relationship with him. Yet so often, we are content with the temporary relief and never lay hold of the superior blessing of inward transformation available.

Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

Apply

Respond

Additional Passages:

James 1:1-18

2 Corinthians 1

Romans 6

Psalms 32

Pause and Discuss: Why are we drawn to be content with temporary relief?

How can we rise above the temporary and lay hold of the eternal in the midst of the trial?

When God gives victory, embrace it wholeheartedly.

Nothing makes me cringe more than watching videos of races where a runner has the victory secure, but because he let up in the final stretch, he loses the race. His half-hearted race led to a total defeat. Joash (Jehoash) of Israel (not to be confused with Joash of Judah) is the half-hearted runner who was given the gold, but gets the silver. At the end of Elisha's life, Joash surprisingly approaches the dying prophet, lamenting the poor state of his military and seeking favor from the Lord. Elisha has a tremendous message to share. They shoot an arrow out the window together and Elisha declares that the Lord would give Joash total victory over Syria! He declares his arrows the arrow of victory over Syria, and then tells him to shoot the ground with those arrows. Joash shoots three, and then the text says he stops. He did not run out. He stopped. He let up. Elisha grows furious and condemns his folly, declaring that he missed out on the total victory of the Lord and would only get three. The gold was in sight, but Joash settled for silver.

Cashing Half a Blank Check

"Jehoash was content with only three victories... God gave him a blank check, but he only cashed half of it. The King missed his golden opportunity. Surely we wouldn't be tempted to conduct such halfhearted religion, would we? Managing sin instead of putting it to death? Having a halfhearted prayer life? Giving sporadically, if at all, to the mission? Witnessing inconsistently? Not taking our studies seriously? Are you a three strikes Christian? Let me encourage you: Fire every arrow you have! May God forgive us for halfheartedness and give us a fresh passion today to trust his Word and act on it." –Tony Merida

Through Christ, God gives us total victory over sin, but are we like Joash and embrace the victory half-heartedly? When we are given total victory over sin, are we content with continuing in some sin? When the Bible says we are empowered by Christ to make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:11-14), do we let up and make a little provision for the flesh? The good news of the gospel promises victory to those embattled against sin. Why would we who have been saved from that which now brings us shame continue in practices from which we have already been saved?

In Christ...

You have been delivered from unrighteous anger.

You have been delivered from pornography.

You have been delivered from envy.

You have been delivered from greed.

You have been delivered from _____.

You have been delivered from yourself.

Are you embracing the victory wholeheartedly?

Have you emptied the quiver or are you holding back arrows?

Embrace the victory of Christ freely given to you today!

In our darkest days, God is faithful to his covenant, and he is our only hope in life and death.

After Elisha dies, the author reveals an interesting story regarding his bones restoring a man to life, God's faithfulness in the midst of the oppression of Hazael, and the fulfilment of Elisha's victorious prophecy. To understand the significance of this section one needs to recall the audience of the Book of Kings. The author is traditionally thought to be Jeremiah writing to Judah in the midst of the Babylonian exile, and through their context, the Israelites in the Assyrian exile. Throughout the book, he relies heavily on Deuteronomy to build a theological case against the people of God, justifying God's actions and urging the people to repent. On the other hand, Jeremiah is also writing to the faithful remnant offering glimmers of hope and encouragement in the stories. This last section offers hope to those in the darkest days of their nation.

First, the story about Elisha's bones would have given hope to the "dead" nation. Read the ESV Study Bible's insight: "It is probably important to know at this point that Elisha's powers to resurrect live on (cf. 2 Kings 4:8–37), because as this man was thrown (Hb. shalak) into the grave of Elisha, so God will soon "throw" (or "cast") Israel into exile in Assyria (17:20, same verb, shalak). The Israelites need to maintain contact with the great prophets of the past through obedience to their teachings if this "death" in exile is also to be followed by an unexpected resurrection (cf. Ezek. 37:1–14)."

Secondly, God reveals his faithfulness to the Northern Kingdom on the basis of the covenant he made with Abraham in the same way he did with the Southern Kingdom with David. Even at the point of writing, when Israel and Judah were in exile, God had not totally abandoned his people. Lastly, the Word of God proved true, giving the people confidence in the word of the prophets who testified of a regathering of God's people brought about by the Messiah.

The Legacy of Elish

We now have come to the end of Elisha's story recorded in Scripture. He played a crucial role in a dark time in his beloved nation, largely rejected by his people. Through his faithfulness and ministry, he foreshadowed the Great Prophet, Jesus Christ. He revealed the power of God, championed the Word of God, and stood down the wicked authorities of the day, revealing God to be superior than the strongest of this world. He lived in wicked times. He rose above the times.

Today, we are living in wicked times. Wickedness has crept into every aspect of our society and government—every branch and in both parties. Will we be faithful? Will we reveal the power of God in our life and testimony? Will we champion the Word of God as the world champions godless ideologies and philosophies? Will we stand firm in the will of God in the face of opposition, even if it comes from the governing authorities? Will we be faithful?

In the trial, our hope is the same in Christ. First, death does not stop the power of God. Where Elisha gives a shadow of God's power over death, Christ gives us the full picture. Second, God was faithful to the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenant, he will be faithful to the new Covenant. In our worst days, he is faithful. The work he began in Christ he will bring to completion. Lastly, the Word of God is the source of our confidence in the trial. Over and over again it has proven true. There is a resurrection coming. There will be a restoration of all things. We can hope and live firmly set on the Word of God.

Pause and Discuss: *As we finish another session in the book of Kings, what has God taught you over the past twelve weeks?*

How are you wanting your life to look different moving forward? Write three ways specifically.

Pray

Father,

Thank you for the victory given to me in Jesus Christ. Help me by your Holy Spirit to walk in his victory whole-heartedly. Give me the wisdom and faith to grow in Christlikeness in the midst of the trial. Fix my eyes on the hope you have revealed in your perfect and true Scriptures. May I live a life of devoted faithfulness during this wicked time. I cannot do that alone. I need your Word. I need your Spirit. I need Jesus. In his name I pray, Amen.



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