

II Kings 7:3-20: Siege of Samaria 2

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Beloved in the Lord,

When the Son of man comes will He find any faith on the earth? Many are lamenting 哀叹 the shifting sands 流沙 of evangelicalism 福音教派 today as the church rather than confronting 面对 a post modern 后现代 world is becoming rather like it. Many call themselves Christian yet the divorce rate, pre marital 婚前 sex rates are nearly the same as secular society according to Focus on the Family statistics 统计. Church has become a worship event rather a body of Christ known for its faith and way of life. The church has become the great spiritual mall where folk can come and get the fix for what ails 苦恼 them. Service seems all but lost to many in the church. It stems from a lack of faithfulness and a desire to live out of the word. Subsequently many churches are dying. Once grand churches filled with young and old are now empty. Wonderful pipe organs remain silent as congregations merge seeking somehow to survive. Lamps are being blown out and we must take heed 留意. There comes a time when God is finished with His covenant people.

The Ten tribes were a testimony to the failure of Israel's theocracy 神权政治. Planted to be light to the nations they were barely visible there in the dark fog of mixed religion and open paganism. Ahab and his sons seemingly were unable to make the choice for Yahweh. Still God does not let His people go without a fight and without blessing Him. He gives grace but there is always a need for us to understand that grace very easily is used for an opportunity of greed 贪婪. When grace is given the church can flourish 兴旺 in many ways but she must flourish for the Lord and His glory rather her own. Rome has had to learn that and we in the Reformed world must learn that as well. Grace for grace or graced unto greed. Grace unto glory or grace unto self gratification 满足感.

I bring to you the word of the LORD under the theme:

The Lord Redeems His Unworthy People:

1. The Looting 抢劫 Lepers 麻风病人 2. The Plundering 劫掠 People

Looting Lepers In those days of severe famine 4 lepers were living together in their forced exile according to the law of the Lord. Israel was to be a Kingdom of Priests and as such leprosy was a symbol of contamination 传染啊 and disease incurable 不治之症: namely sin and its need for remedy. The lepers were excluded from worship and society, family and friends but together they had formed a bond. Together they contemplated 计划 and became rather pragmatic in their philosophy. They do not strike us having faith do they? No they look at their plight 处境 and figure they have nothing to lose if they surrender to the Syrians. If they stayed near Samaria they would die like all the rest and if the Syrians executed them so be it. Who knows they might luck out and be given life with food and drink.

Off they went then and to their surprise they found the camp deserted 废弃. The writer of Kings lets us know what had happened. See the Lord had told the King and the people that He would send rescue. The chief understood that this would take nothing short of a miracle and it was a miracle that the LORD provided. He sent a mighty sound like armies on the march. The pagan and superstitious Arameans said, "Look, the king of Israel has hired the Hittite and Egyptian kings to attack us!" And off they ran! They ran away from a ghost. They ran away from nothing but a figment 虚构 of their imagination.

We see the feeble 弱点 philosophy of paganism once more. There is and can only be fear. I think if we really analyze Islam today and the siege 围城 they seem to take of the world

today they live in fear of their God. It is that fear that drives them to do the things that they do. It is that fear that causes them in war and skirmish 小冲突 to be fearless.

The Arameans ran for their lives because they had no faith that their gods would save them. Yet these are some of the same gods that Israel worshipped. Strange times!

Back to our lepers! Yes they saw the bonanza in front of them. Amazing grace caused four wretches to pad their coffers 填满金库 and take advantage. All alone in the night they ate and drank and found clothing and made a few trips back to their abode 住处. No worship now is there. No bending the knee to God. No praising God for the relief that he has sent. They are

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e characteristic 特色 of the Israelites of that day. God did what He does to serve them.

S. G. De Graaf asks the question commenting on the text about how the people of God respond to grace. Grace must always drive us to give God the glory. God sends His grace in order that we love, honour and adore Him. But isn't true that in Canada and the western world the grace that God has supplied in abundance for the church in order that these maybe the resurrection community has too often been used to build glorious buildings, to take care of the body rather than be used to take care of the task at hand. Generationally that means that generosity 慷慨 and charity slip away and giving becomes second to getting. The reason for that also might be fear. Fear of poverty, fear of not pleasing the wife or the kids or fear of not keeping up with Joneses 攀比 means that generosity becomes second to getting. Fear causes us to compete for respect in ways of the world. Why is that?

We too often forget the wonder and the riches of salvation. It is too easy to take grace for granted and to cheapen. We forget the miracle of Christ chasing down the enemy and defeated sin, death and hell on the cross. We forget that Jesus died so that we could be the people of God

and the sheep of His pasture. When grace is misunderstood as the context for greed then the generosity of the Gospel is forgotten and we and not God are served.

The looting lepers had a turn of conscience and being the pragmatists 实用主义者 they are understood that if it was found out that they had taken and told nobody they would certainly be in trouble so they headed back to the city to share the good news. The siege was lifted! The troubles were over. It was the nearing the dawn of a new day and a special day for Israel.

Grace abounded that day. God had brought salvation to a city and its king who had little faith, if any faith. The Word came to Samaria. The Good News that God saves sinners came to the ten tribes of Israel. Elisha had brought the prophecy and the LORD brought the fulfillment. Then enemy was God. There was nothing to fear. The grace of the Lord abounded. It does this morning for us. God saves sinners through His Son. The Word has come to us today and we are called to repent and believe to live by faith and not by sight and live in grace abounding! And God used these four lepers to bring the good news.

Maybe they were a motley 丛杂 crew in terms of the social mores of Israel and the priestly laws. But it pleased God to use the simple and the foolish things of this world to bring the wisdom of God to bear. Even so the LORD is doing so with us His people here and all over the world. If the lepers brought good news how much better is the good news we have to bring! We have heard the joyful sound! Jesus Saves! Jesus saves!

The Plundering People They heard the joyful sound there in Samaria that special night. You can imagine the buzz. On a personal note one wonders what the woman who had eaten one's son was thinking. But alas 呜呼! it was deliverance day! It did not take much time for the Word to reach the palace. When the Word comes, will there be faith in Israel?

It was met with speculation 推测 and cynicism 玩世不恭. How could the king be sure that this was really happening? It was a ruse 骗术 he thought. It was a conspiracy 阴谋. No matter that Elisha had told him a miracle was happening. No, this was not to be trusted. So once more the faithless become pragmatic 务实 driven not by grace but by fear.

The king likely did not have too many soldiers or horses and chariots to send out, but as the King's commander so compassionately points out that the soldiers are either going to die like the rest under siege or under attack so what does it matter to send them out? Sounds a whole like the lepers doesn't it? Of course it one thing to decide that for one's self and quite another to decide that for someone else. No trusting in the Lord, fear and bewilderment. The King gave the orders.

The good news was confirmed. As far the river Jordan the evidence was that of an army that turned tail and ran leaving everything behind. Blessed are those who have not seen but believe! Faith formed by the evidence allowed the King to command his chief aid to direct events from city gates. It was time to let the people out. You can imagine the freedom of running out from behind those walls. Outside was the water, food and the booty 战利品 and the people ran out and like the lepers revelled 狂欢 in the grace of God by looking out for number one. The people began the plundering. It is sad really. There was no thinking about the truly weak and dying. There was only each man for himself. Man verses man, man's inhumanity 不人道 to man is what life is like outside of Christ and it was evident there as well.

Others came back with food; it was of course not to be shared by to be bought. Not generosity but greed! "Then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a seah of flour sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley sold for a shekel, as the Lord had said."

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(II Kings 7:16) This was not cheap, but it was strikingly better than the exorbitant 昂贵的 prices the people paying to eat the forbidden and to pay for the necessary food.

It was just as the LORD had said! What a day for rejoicing and what a day for worship! What a day of sadness. See the Word was openly rejected. The King's chief aid had ridiculed 讥笑 Elisha! But now the words of Deuteronomy 18 come to bear

21 You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?"

22 If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously 自以为是的. Do not be afraid of him.

Elisha is the prophet of God. God had performed a great miracle. But grace was met with worship. Grace was not met with graciousness. There was no difference between the looting lepers and the plundering people. Grace was given and they took and in time as Israel's theocracy failed precisely because of this rejection of grace God would remove the lamp stand. He sends them into exile. The house of Ahab was not long for this world any more. The sound of Jehu's thundering horses will be heard. The Word of the Lord would come true. The Word comes with grace and judgment.

The King's aid was directing affairs there by the wall. He must have stood there amazed. Do you think he remembered the Word of the LORD as the he felt the feet of the people of God crush the life out of him? What hope is there then? It is as the writer to the Hebrews wrote, "A terrible thing to fall into the hands of an angry God.

What shall we say then beloved? Is God moving the lamp stand from the churches of the West and here in Canada? Sure there are faithful just as there those men in Samaria gathered at the feet of Elisha and so we still we meet with at the feet of Jesus. But we feel that things are changing. We feel the pressure more that to take a stand now will demand more resolve, more courage and more faith. We get the sense that the freedom is not there the way it used to be. Governments coddle 娇养 the religions of the Middle East and have rejected, for the most part Christianity. That is a curse of God upon Canada.

But we must also see the need now to be loving and obedient and generous with the grace we have been given by God in Christ. Not now just the wonder of salvation, of grace alone and faith alone, but what we have been given in this country. If the people of God use this time of grace to become rich for wealth's sake then we have missed an important opportunity to help others not only here in the city and province but around the world. We have truly been given much and as Jesus said; to whom much is given much is expected. Are we investing the talents, including our money into the Kingdom? Yes that means Christian education and missions, church buildings, but to what end? If needs be will we sacrifice the way so many of the older generation did that the schools might be built, teachers taken care, ministers taken care of and missionaries sent around the world?

There it is before us again. Whom will you serve? It is also before us we cannot serve God and mammon 物质财富. It was a great day of redemption that was soured by the death of the cynic 愤世嫉俗的人 and the lack of worship by a king who, like his father before him, was silent before the grace of God. We have started the right way this week again. We have gathered for worship that ought to translate itself into work and living as worship of the great and gracious

God. God is still keeping His Word to Abraham and He is saving people from all over the world.

So grace for His glory or grace unto greed? May our God be praised! Amen