

2 Kings 6

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Date: 02 September 2018

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[0 : 0 0] so as we were reminding folks just a few moments ago we are going to be starting this week the course empowered and the purpose of that is to challenge us and to equip us in the matter of our duty our privilege of sharing the good news concerning Jesus a little bit further down the line in about a month's time at the beginning of October we will be offering a course that's new for us it's not that new but certainly new for us called life explored and that's from the stable of Christianity explored and discipleship explored and the purpose of that course is also to provide an opportunity for folks to consider the big questions of life but not only consider the questions but also consider the answers that are given to those questions in the gospel and particularly in the person of Jesus now in offering that course one of the tasks that we'll have is to invite people to participate and in due course we'll be providing invitation cards that folk can use for that purpose so we hopefully will be trained in the matter of evangelism we'll have the opportunity to invite folks to participate in a course with that purpose also in terms of sharing the gospel and of course evangelism isn't just about events it's not just about inviting people to a service or a course it's much bigger than that but that's part of it and with that in mind I thought we would revisit a chilling story in the old testament that challenges us in the matter of speaking and not being silent now as to what the challenge of speaking and not being silent on that on that matter just before we turn to the story that I want to tell you and the relevance of the passage that we read in James is the way very very clearly and in a very candid and challenging way reminds us that if we do not do the good that we ought to do then we sin and maybe this is one area where that verse applies and we know that we ought to share with others the good news that it is important that it is urgent and yet we find it difficult and we are slow to do so and and that verse and challengely in a challenging way and comes home to us now the the story that I want to tell you is found in second kings and chapter chapter 6 and 7 I'm not going to read the passage because what I want to do is really tell the story and if I were to read the whole passage it's quite a long passage and then kind of tell the story there would be quite a lot of repetition but it might be useful for you to have your bibles open and where the story is recounted because I will as I tell the story and direct your attention to verses from the whole as it were and so you might find it helpful to be able to just refer to the Bible text as I recount in a somewhat summary form the story as it's recorded recorded for us in the chapters that I mentioned now the the story itself is I think you'd have to say a very gory story it's full of gore and glory full of death and drama and there seems to be a bit of a theme in a sense because this morning we were looking at a passage that was in its own way very chilling and and employed very strong language well if anything what we're going to discover this evening is is even more uh chilling

and as what I want to do is tell the story and then use the story as a bit of a parable now it's not a parable it's a historical account of things that really happened but I think we can employ it uh in as a kind of parable to challenge us in in the matter that I've already introduced so let's just listen to what uh the author recounts uh for us in these chapters now the setting of uh this uh story this historical event or events the setting is Samaria Samaria is the the capital of the northern kingdom uh this is uh an account that relates events that took place some 3 000 years ago and in terms of the history of the time less than 100 years after the death of Solomon so you remember the the early history of Israel

Saul as king and then David and then David's son Solomon and then when Solomon dies there was a power struggle and the result of that power struggle was that the kingdom was divided into the northern kingdom with Samaria as its capital the southern kingdom of Judah with Jerusalem as its capital well these events took place in the northern kingdom in Samaria just one or two generations following the death of Solomon the king in the northern kingdom was Jehoram the son of Ahab but

perhaps more is known of the prophet who was his contemporary uh the prophet Elisha now Jehoram like many of the kings in the northern kingdom and indeed some in the southern kingdom Jehoram was a was a bad piece of work perhaps not as wicked as his father Ahab but still described in the bible by that that well-worn description as one who did evil in the eyes of the lord and that evil of king Jehoram resulted in judgment and judgment that came in the form of Ben-Hadad the king of Syria laying siege to Samaria now the consequences of this siege of Samaria are are graphically described in the biblical account in second kings chapter 6 and 7 and the account speaks of food shortages you can imagine that a siege would have that as one of its consequences and the food shortages leading to to rocketing prices so maybe if I could just direct you to what is said in second kings chapter 6 and verse 25 on that one consequence of uh the siege and there we read there there was a great famine in the city the siege lasted so long that a donkey's head sold for 80 shekels of silver and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for five shekels now we read that it doesn't mean very much to us because we have no idea what a donkey's head should sell for it's not something we often buy at Tesco so we read that it doesn't really mean much to us but to give you an idea of of the hyperinflation that the city was suffering from in first kings chapter 10 in verse 29 you don't really need to look this up you can trust me on this one in that passage the cost of a horse is put at 80 shekels of silver now here in second kings we're reading that a donkey's head so you can imagine a horse should be worth way more than a donkey said a donkey's head is selling for 150 shekels double the price now that that's sufficient i think to give us an idea of the crisis that uh was enveloping uh samaria as a result of this this siege famine rocketing prices and all the suffering that that would accompany that and we could maybe only imagine that the drama being lived by so many in the city now i say we can only imagine but uh we're not left only to imagine uh one particularly chilling drama among no doubt many personal dramas that there were but one of them is recounted for us uh we're told of of two mothers forging a macabre and stomach churning pact uh in the face of the famine that they're confronting and perhaps to to get a sense of what they what they agreed it's probably best just to read uh the verses in question so it's in chapter 6 2nd kings chapter 6 and verse 26 and listen to what what the account uh describes of what was happening as the king of israel passing was passing by on the wall a woman cried to him help me my lord the king so this is king jehoram one of the inhabitants of the city cries out to him the king replied if the lord does not help you where can i get help for you from the threshing floor from the wine press then he asked her what's the matter and she answered this woman said to me give up your son so that we may eat him today and tomorrow we'll eat my son so we cooked my son and ate him the next day i said to her give up your son so that we may eat him but she had hidden him well it's just it's uh it's really stomach churning really what has been described uh the consequences of this horrendous famine and so this is one drama among no doubt many others that uh aren't recorded uh for us now the the breaking of this pact between these two mothers drives the the cheated mother to to further despair and she she cries out in frustration to the king as we've read and the king is obviously also despairing uh at being you know uh at his help being sought when he really has nothing to do nothing he can do for them and his own despair frustration impotence uh he he lashes out in rage at the prophet elisha and we read there in verse 31 may god deal with me so this is the king speaking may god deal with me be it ever so severely if the head of elisha son of shaphat remains on his shoulders today so again he has violence in mind he his his response to the crisis as well to kill this this this prophet is always prophesying uh doom and gloom certainly from the perspective of uh of the king the king well rather than lashing out at elisha he perhaps would have been better employed looking at his own heart and his own responsibility for what was occurring now elisha no hears of of the king's intentions he's forced to seek refuge and but then there is a twist as the king seems to have second thoughts about his plan to kill elisha and rather than proceed with the execution of elisha he seems to resign himself really to his own fate there in verse 33 of chapter 6 we read while he was still talking to them so that's the king to some of his advisors the messenger came down to him and the king said this disastrous from the lord why should i wait for the lord any longer he comes to the conclusion that there's really nothing to be done now at that moment elisha prophesies a dramatic though undescribed resolution to the crisis that will be evidenced in a plummeting of the prices at the city gate we read there in verse 1 of chapter 7 elisha said hear the word of the lord this is what the lord says about this time tomorrow a sale of flour will sell for a shekel and two sales of barley for a shekel at the gate of samaria and again we don't need to know about prices uh to understand that's what's being described is things getting back to normal uh

prices for foodstuffs first of all them being available uh but at a price that people can afford to pay now elisha doesn't say how this is going to happen he simply prophesies the outcome of some intervention that will result in this uh outcome and at this point in the story four unexpected characters are introduced and they're four lepers now these lepers were outside the city gates now we know the reasons for that because of the nature of their illness they couldn't be with the folks within the city so they they were outside the city gates and they get to thinking about their plight and they realize these four lepers that they've they've got three options one option is to remain where they are and die you can imagine in the circumstances there was no prospect of any charity from within the city gates uh for them so they're going to die so that's one option just do nothing stay where they are and die the other option would be well to try and get into the city and see what could happen there but of course within the city they're also just going to die because there's no more food in the city than there is outside of the city so that's their second option now their third option is to go to the camp of the samadians the army that is laying the city under siege and they can go there now there's food there but israelite lepers don't really have much chance of survival if they go to the samadian camp but when you think of their odds the first two are definite death and third one is probable death almost definite death well of the three that was uh marginally uh the better one so that's what they decide to do and i wonder how these lepers would have approached the camp as they uh hope against hope that something good will come of it but what they discover as they approach the the the camp of the the the uh soldiers the syrian soldiers is that they find that the camp is abandoned there's nobody there and why could this be well we're told uh we're told that god had intervened so there in chapter 7 and verses 6 and 7 we we discover what had happened probably we need to read from verse 5 to get the sense at dusk they got up and went to the camp of the arameans so these are the lepers when they reached the edge of the camp not a man was there for the lord had caused the arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army so that they said to one another look the king of israel has hired the hittite and egyptian kings to attack us so they got up and fled in the dusk and abandoned their tents and their horses and donkeys they left the camp as it was and ran for their lives well you can imagine the the the lepers walking into that camp and seeing no syrian soldiers nobody to stop them and looting all that there was before them and of course that is exactly what they do they can't believe their luck they're like children in a sweetie shop and they grab all that they can what they can't eat they hide with a view to maybe selling perhaps at a subsequent date you know we read there in verse 8 they ate and drank and carried away silver gold and clothes and and went off and hid them and they went from tent to tent on this this uh you know this journey of uh of of consumption uh through the the syrian camp after however long they spent doing that these four lepers pause maybe to to recover a strength but they also begin to reflect on their behavior and these four men are convicted of their selfishness and they express themselves in very memorable terms maybe the most memorable words in this account even if we're not perhaps familiar with the story uh or that familiar with the story these words maybe are ones that we will be more familiar with because they pause and reflect and this is the conclusion they come to in verse 9 of chapter 7 it says then they said to each other we are not doing right this is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves if we wait until daylight punishment will overtake us let's go at once and report this to the royal palace and in these words we see the manner in which these men are convicted and there's a few elements to this conviction first of all they they recognize that they are blessed in this turn of events and this is a day of good news you know we have we we are benefiting from this remarkable turn of events so they themselves are richly blessed they're conscious of that but they're also conscious and this is where the conviction comes in they're conscious that this is really good news they should be telling others it's not right that they should keep this news [17:14] to themselves they're conscious that it's wrong to do so it's wrong for them to keep silence they're also conscious and perhaps somewhat fearful that they will be punished for their silence we're not told who they imagine will will execute that punishment but there's also that sense that their wrongdoing is punishable and worthy of a punishment and they are conscious that in the light of all that that they must act they must do something they must act urgently so what do they do well they do what obviously they had to do they they returned to the city the city that imagines itself under siege but actually is no longer under siege they return to the city with the good news but they face a problem when they come and they share this good news the problem is that people don't believe them well certainly the king doesn't believe them the king smells a rat he imagines that a trap has been sent and he opts to do nothing in response he he believes that the camp is seemingly

empty but if you read the account you'll discover that he's thinking no this is a trap the syrians are hiding uh they're wanting to lure us out and then they're gonna ambush us and destroy us and so he he doesn't believe that uh this is good news at all but rather a trap to be avoided and so uh he chooses to do nothing in the light of the good news that the lepers uh bring but there's one of the king's servants uh who chooses to employ very similar logic to that which had to be employed by the lepers and his logic is simply well there's no harm in having a look the king you may be right it may be a trap but at the end of the day we're all dying here so we might as well sell and send somebody to see if this maybe is true and so that's what they do they send a couple of chariots uh some soldiers are selected and they're told go and see uh what the story is and if they die well they die they were going to die anyway uh but at least we'll discover what's what's going on and so the chariots are sent this this uh delegation of soldiers go and of course the account of the lepers is confirmed and so they return and as they return um the people who now hear another account verifying what the leopards had said and believe and they head out to plunder the camp we read in verse 18 of chapter 7 it happened uh as the man of god had said um about this time tomorrow a sale of flour will sell for a shekel and two sales of barley for a shekel at the gate of samaria and so this this prophecy of the situation being resolved is indeed uh confirmed when uh elisha had originally made that prophecy that the following day this would be what would go on at the gates of the city one of the servants of the king had refused to believe elisha he said he couldn't believe that that could possibly be true and at that point elisha had said to that man well you will see that it is true but you will not eat of the food that is uh available and provided and that is in fact what what then occurred there in verse 19 we read the officer had said to the man of god look even if the lord should open the floodgates of the heavens could this happen the man of god had replied you will not see it with your own eyes but you will not eat any of it and that is exactly what happened to him for the people trampled him in the gateway and he died so this is this story that as i said at the beginning is full of gore and glory of drama and death and it's a memorable story it's a true story chilling but true now the question is having told the story uh what is there in this

account for us bear with me i suppose is one way of putting it as i i use this story as a kind of parable now i said at the beginning it's not a parable it is a historical account of what happened some three thousand years ago it's not a parable but we can employ it as a kind of parable or use it as a parable and we can do so in the following way and it's maybe obvious to you the way in which we could employ this as a parable and one thing we can draw from it if we look at it in this way that we are like the lepers before being rescued by god we were lost and without hope burdened by sin and guilt and facing certain death no prospect of being saved we thought that there was no answer to our need when in fact ample provision had been made by god for us but we simply didn't realize that that was so what we needed to do was simply take hold of the provision that god had made to take hold of christ and of all his riches now the day came when we were enabled to trust in jesus to have our sins forgiven to be welcomed into the family of god to enjoy the the many and manifold blessings that god so generously provides for his own to use the the language of of the account uh so many tents to explore of all that is ours in christ all the treasures that are provided for us so so we are like those lepers we had no hope without hope without god in this world doomed to to death and destruction but god provides in this remarkable way all that we need but also like the lepers it is often the case that we enjoy the blessings that god is providing but we say nothing or say very little we fail to share this generous provision with others the lepers had way more than they could possibly have consumed there was no way they could have possibly even if they had tried and kept everything to themselves so generous was the provision that really needed to be shared indeed in the sharing of it they would not be left uh without sufficient and there was so much to share and similarly with us god's blessings are blessings available to all and yet we often fail to share that provision with others while others starve we are richly fed the situation in the city uh was a desperate one uh the the men and women of samaria were dropping like flies and it's not so different for us in our context uh in terms of the spiritual health and condition of those who we live with and work with and alongside us when we think of our our city we're we're surrounded by many whose lives are empty and hopeless without hope and without god many who are hungry for love and meaning and purpose and yet who can see no hope and who can find no answers and with the lepers in the story we need to pause and reflect we need to come to the conclusion that they came to we are not doing right our silence is not only uh lamentable uh it is a guilty silence and let me just quote to you words of the baptist uh preacher from the 19th century charles spurgeon who

comments in his own very vivid style on this passage and i'm simply going to read some of what he has to say about it he says as follows had those lepers held their tongues they would actually have been doing evil suppose they had kept their secret for 20 and four hours or four and twenty hours many hundreds might have died of starvation

within the walls of samaria had they so perished would not the lepers have been guilty of their blood and then he challenges his readers and he challenges us do you not agree with that may not neglect be as truly murder as a stab or a shot if in your street a man shall perish through not knowing the savior and you never made an effort to instruct him how will you be guiltless at the last great day if there be any within your reach who sink down to perdition for want of the knowledge of christ and you could have given them that knowledge will you be free from blood in the day when the great inquest shall be held and god shall make inquisition for the blood of men well this is the question that spurgeon poses in the light of this event drawing on it in a similar way to what we are trying to do so we are like the lepers we enjoy the the blessings but so often are slow to share with others we need to pause and reflect and having done so we need to tell the story the little that you know you are to go and tell the lepers knew very little of the the circumstances of the provision they had no idea how this had come about they knew that there was food for all but they had no idea how that was so they had no explanation for the empty camp but they knew that there was provision in abundance there was enough for everybody and what they knew they told and that proved sufficient certainly for many and kind of reminds me of the the the story in the new testament of the blind man who was healed by jesus and the religious leaders are challenging him and they say don't you know that this this man is a sinner and the blind man responds along these lines well if he's a sinner or not i don't know but one thing i know is that i was blind and now i see i know that i don't know who he is i can't give you theological explanations but i do know this i was blind and now i see him the lepers are a little bit like that we don't know how this happened but we were hungry and now we're full and they said what they knew that's all they knew but it was enough for others to then explore and maybe discover more of the the whys and the wherefores so we need to tell the story and perhaps the final thing we can do this evening as we kind of um somewhat uh abuse of this passage in using it as a parable even though it's not a parable we can maybe note that the response that there was to the good news and see how even in the response to the lepers we can see some kind of parallels with the response to the good news that we have to share there was of course in the account king jehodam who doesn't believe the lepers there must be a catch that's his angle on this there must there must be a catch you know sometimes people respond to the gospel in that way no there must be a catch there must be something there must be some small print you're not telling me about well certainly that was the view of king jehoram there was the unbelief of the captain the one who who elijah or elisha had said that there would be food to spare the following day and he he didn't believe elisha's prophecy the the prophetic promise was deemed too good to be true and that can also be the response of some to those who at least listen to what we have to say some respond in that way or can respond in that way it seems almost too good to be true all my sins forgiven to be part of the family of god it can't that can't be right and so this man the captain he ends up seeing but not eating but then of course there are many more certainly in the story of the lepers who do believe and they go and they eat and they're satisfied and they're they they survive they're able to cheat as it were imminent death as they eat of all that there is in the camp and as they benefit from the plummeting prices as the siege is lifted and as we share the gospel no

doubt there will also be many responses there will be those who who aren't interested who are skeptical who who who there will be those who who perhaps respond negatively for any number of reasons and but we believe that as we go out and trust trusting in god to to open the way to touch hearts that there will be many who hear who respond who go who eat and who are satisfied and may that be so and so let's just perhaps guard in our minds or keep at the forefront of our minds as we embark into this week the the words of the lepers and make them our own we are not doing right this is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves well let's pray heavenly father we do thank you for your word we thank you for this account that in itself can be in in parts of it uh very unpleasant uh very difficult to even digest uh the the horror uh that samaria was enduring and uh what it led people to do that it seems almost uh unimaginable uh that the plight that they were uh suffering the fate that was uh imminent for for multitudes and yet we we thank you for the way in which you intervened in favor of of a rebellious people and provided so uh abundantly uh for them we thank you that that is uh so true of us we are undeserving sinners uh and yet you have

provided abundantly for us you've provided most wonderfully for us in the person of your son our savior who came into the world who who died in our place who bore the punishment that we deserve and who having uh fulfilled the mission that he was commended uh opens the the the doors of heaven and a blessing of forgiveness of new life and to all who would but trust in him and so we pray that as we have enjoyed and continue to enjoy these many blessings we would be also uh those who who recognize and acknowledge the the privilege but also the duty that is placed upon us to share this good news uh with others conscious that uh some will show little interest and some will be apathetic some will be hostile and some will uh be polite but uh not beyond that but also confident and trusting that you will be the one who will place in our paths those who will listen and who will explore and respond and discover that the account that we share with them is indeed true and come to know and trust in Jesus and we pray these things in his name amen