

2 Kings Chapter 6

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn together in our Bibles, and we're going to be reading from 2 Kings and chapter 6.

And if you've got one of the Red Church Bibles, then that's page 374. Page 374, if you've got one of the Red Church Bibles, and 2 Kings, chapter 6.

We're going to read two verses from chapter 6, and then we're going to go into chapter 7 to continue the events. So verse 24, 2 Kings, chapter 6, verse 24.

If you've got the Red Church Bible, that's at the very top of the page on the left, under the subtitle, Famine, Famine in Besiege to Mary. So verse 24 and 25, and then we're going to jump over to chapter 7, verse 1.

Verse 24. Some time later, Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, mobilized his entire army and marched up and laid siege to Samaria. There was a great famine in the city.

[1 : 12] 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. Over to chapter 7, verse 1.

Elisha replied, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says. About this time tomorrow, a sayer of the finest flour will sell for a shekel, and two sayers of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.

The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to the man of God, look, even if the Lord should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?

You will see it with your own eyes, answered Elisha, but you will not eat any of it. Now there were four men with leprosy at the entrance of the city gate. They said to each other, why stay here until we die?

If we say we'll go into the city, the famine is there, and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender.

[2 : 18] If they spare us, we live. If they kill us, then we die. At dusk they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans. When they reached the edge of the camp, no one 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. The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp, entered one of the tents and ate and drank.

Then they took silver, gold, and clothes and went off and hid them. They returned and entered another tent and took some things from it and hid them also. Then they said to each other, what we're doing is not right.

This is a day of good news and we're 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.

[3 : 26] So they went and called to the city gatekeepers and told them, we went into the Aramean camp and no one was there, not a sound of anyone, only tethered horses and donkeys and the tents left just as they were.

The gatekeepers shouted the news and it was reported within the palace. The king got up in the night and said to his officers, I will tell you what the Arameans have done to us. They know we're starving, so they've left the camp to hide in the countryside thinking they'll surely come out and then we will take them alive and get into the city.

One of his officers answered, make some men take five of the horses that are left in the city. Their plight will be like that of all the Israelites left here. Yes, they will only be like all these Israelites who are doomed.

So let us send them to find out what happened. So they selected two chariots with their horses and the king sent them after the Aramean army. He commanded the drivers, go and find out what has happened.

They followed them as far as the Jordan River and they found the whole road strewn with the clothing and equipment the Arameans had thrown away in their headlong flight. So the messengers returned and reported to the king.

[4 : 38] Then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a seer of the finest flour sold for a shekel and two seers of barley sold for a shekel, as the Lord had said.

Well, amazing story and we'll be thinking about what its implications are for us in a little while. If you have a Bible to hand, it would be helpful for you if you turn to the 2 Kings chapter 7 particularly.

That's page 374 in your Bible, page 374 if you've got one of the church Bibles. 2 Kings and chapter 7, that passage we read just a few moments ago.

There's some activities, things like sports and other things, which are quite hard to explain to someone or describe to someone who's never ever seen the sport, never seen the activity you're involved in.

Take, for example, just something as everyday as football. Can you narrow it down and explain it in just one sentence? You might go something like this. Two teams of 11 kick a leather ball back and forth until one team gets the ball to pass through a rectangular frame.

[5 : 53] That's a simple explanation, but that doesn't describe football, does it? Because then you have to get on to the important matters of fouls, throw-ins, free kicks, corners, penalties, and the unintelligible offside rule.

And don't even begin to describe and explain rugby or cricket to people who've never seen that. What about evangelism? What is evangelism?

Could you describe it in a few words? We're another week closer to our May mission, nine weeks or so from then.

And it's important for us to understand what it means to keep what we've called the 11th commandment, what's often referred to as the Great Commission, the command of Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 28, 20.

Go and make disciples of all nations. That's what we're thinking about these last few weeks. Last Sunday we thought about, from God's Word, how God uses every believer, all believers, no matter their age, because we looked at this very young girl that the Lord used, no matter their social standing, she was a slave, no matter their gender, their ability, he uses whoever we are, wherever we're from, to reach the lost.

[7 : 15] We even saw that this young girl, and we see that God uses us in the most difficult personal circumstances to be his witnesses.

There she was, kidnapped from her home country, a slave in a foreign place. Even there, God worked through her. And wherever you are, and I am, wherever we are in that time in our lives, whether where we are geographically, wherever we are emotionally, or in relationships and so on, wherever we are, God is willing, desirous to work through us for his glory and the salvation of sinners.

And so what I want us to do is this week to look again at some more, what I've called, unsung heroes of the Bible. Unlikely evangelists.

People that you just wouldn't expect God to work through and use, to encourage us, that even through you and me, God can work and save. People whose names we don't even know, but people who with simple obedience, acted in such a way to the rescue, to the salvation of many.

So back to that question at the beginning, what is evangelism? One of the most succinct descriptions comes from that man Martin Luther, the reformer.

[8 : 38] He wrote this, We are all beggars telling other beggars where to find bread. We are all beggars telling other beggars where to find bread.

And the bread that we're telling people where to find is not that bread we talked of with the children, flour and water and all those other things. It is the living bread that comes down from heaven.

For Jesus himself said, and we read a little part of it there from John in chapter 6, I am the living bread that came down from heaven. You see, within the human heart, within the human soul, there is a hunger for the bread of life.

Jesus himself picks up on that earlier in the chapter, where he says, Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. Already they are hungry, and he is the one who satisfies that hunger.

There is a hunger that drives people. Every person has something of a craving that they try to satisfy with whatever they can lay their hands upon.

[9 : 46] That hunger manifests itself in greed, in the hope that the accomplishment and the gaining of wealth will bring contentment. That craving drives some from one relationship or one marriage to another, in the urge to be loved.

That craving, that yearning pushes people to do whatever it takes to get a moment's thrill or a sense of achievement, no matter what the cost to themselves or to those around about them.

Every single person is hungry. And for every single person on the planet, there is only one way to fulfillment. There is only one thing that will satisfy.

There is only one feast which we can come to and eat of, and that is the living bread of Jesus Christ, the very Son of God. Here again in John chapter 6, which is all about Jesus explaining himself.

Very truly I tell you, the one who believes in me has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Speaking to the Jews, your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died.

[11 : 01] But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. It's the simplest thing in the world to eat of that living bread.

But Jesus describes it in this way, the one who believes, as we said to the children early on. It is as we believe in Jesus Christ, as I believe, that is, as I take him to be the source of living bread, of life-giving bread for me.

As I trust him wholly and solely to meet that emptiness within my soul, to make me complete. It's then that I experience the nourishment that I've been craving, longing, seeking after.

But how will the hungry know where to get bread? We are all beggars telling other beggars where they can find bread.

How can people eat of the living bread of the Lord Jesus Christ? How can they be filled with the good things that he gives if they're not shown where to go? If they don't know where to find him?

[12 : 14] Or as the Apostle Paul puts it in Romans chapter 10, how can they believe in the one of whom they've not heard? And so that brings us back to our passage here in 2 Kings and chapter 6 and 7.

Here is a whole city starving to death. The city of Samaria, the capital of Israel. A famine has come because the city is surrounded and besieged.

Verse 25 in verse chapter 6. There was a great famine in the city. This famine had gone on so long that all the natural food, the natural things that people had eaten had gone, and they were forced to spend a small fortune on a donkey's head.

The equivalent today of about 400 pounds. They were forced to spend quite a considerable money for basically a handful of dove poo.

That's if you look at the footnote here. Cab of seed pods. Around about 25 pounds. They were so hungry that they were forced and resorted to the most evil sort of cannibalism.

[13 : 29] I didn't read this bit in the middle because we had very young children present, but it is one of the most awful, terrible, graphic things that took place in the Bible.

It speaks about a woman boiling her own son to eat him in the agreement that the woman who also shared the devouring of her child would give his own child to be eaten the next day.

That's pretty hungry. That's starving. I skipped that again, as I say, because I showed... Do you see what gnawing hunger is like?

Spiritual hunger is just as desperate, isn't it? What lengths do people go to just to have some relief, even just for a day, from the gnawing emptiness and longing for something which makes sense, something which satisfies, something which gives thrill, something which gives life.

It's a desperately awful, terrible, heartbreaking situation that we read about here. But let us not, dear friends, lose sight that this heartbreaking, awful, terrible situation is but a shadow, but a shadow of the reality of the spiritual desperation, heartache, and emptiness of men and women today amongst whom we live.

[14 : 49] To be without Christ is to be in a far worse condition than the woman who eats her own child. Because the repercussions are not simply that they will physically die.

As we thought right at the very beginning, two weeks ago, there is an eternal, everlasting judgment and hell to be faced. Dear friends, if we have not begun to grasp just what an awful world in which we live, spiritually, and we see all the ripples and the repercussions, we see it in the actions of ISIS, and we see it in Boko Haram, and we see it in the things that are going on in North Korea, we see it in so many places, we see it even in the evils of our own hearts, and the way we speak to one another and react to one another, dear friends, if we haven't grasped just what a desperate situation our world is in, not from nuclear warfare, not from terrorism, not even from the awful things of famine that are going on in North Africa at this time, but because we are enemies of God, and we are in opposition to a holy, mighty, judging and just God, then we won't really be aware of the great need of the people that we walk amongst and live amongst.

So here's this terrible famine, this terrible situation where people are eating their own children, where people are absolutely desperate, where they are utterly on the point of starvation and death, and into this most unlikely of situations, four evangelists arrive.

Four very unlikely evangelists, chapter 3 in verse 4, now there were four men with leprosy at the entrance to the city gate. What on earth can they do? They are outcasts from their own society, they have to live at the city gate because they're not allowed in the town, they're lepers, therefore they're contagious, they're despised, they're rejected, they're on the outskirts of society.

What on earth can they do? Well they are the very ones that God chooses to be the messengers of saving life to the city of Samaria. They are the very ones that God sets apart and uses to bring rescue, life, salvation and living food to thousands of people.

[17:10] Not Elisha. Elisha's in the city. Remember Elisha, he's one of the big stars of the Old Testament. He's a prophet of God, he's a miracle worker, he's the one who's able to take a great pot of poisoned food and to make it edible and take out the pot.

He's able to do incredible things with God's power. But it's not Elisha that God uses. It's not Elisha that he prophesies and says that God is going to do something and God is going to provide the food but it's not him who does it, it's these four diseased and despised men who you'd count as worthless in any other situation.

And what do these four men do? Well they've had enough of being hungry as well. They've had enough of the griping pains and they've decided upon a very risky strategy.

They've decided to have a plan. Here's what they say, verse 3, why stay here until we die? If we say we'll go into the city, that's Samaria, where the people, there's a fire in there, we're going to die.

If we stay here at the gate, we're going to die. Let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. Perhaps they might spare us and we live but if they kill us, well we're going to die.

[18:28] So here's their plan. It's got a 33% chance of going right and a 66% chance of death. Okay? But it's the only thing that they can think to do.

And so they set off at dusk in the evening to the camp going to surrender themselves hoping that they'll be accepted, even given food because they surrender and are not fighting against them.

But when they get there, they met with this incredible thing. Verse 5, when they reach the edge of the camp, there's no one there. The camp's empty. The camp's empty but it's full of food.

It's not just that the Arameans have just left, they've packed up their camps and their food and they've just decided, well we're bored with this, let's go somewhere else. No, they've fled. God has done something incredible that nobody knew about.

Nobody knew that God had put the wind up as it were and they'd run for their lives afraid that they were going to be killed. And so the camp was there, tables laid, horses tethered, you know, the bath water still lukewarm.

[19:38] It's all there. And so what do they do? Well of course, verse 8, the men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp entered the tents and ate and drank.

Wow, what a day for them. Can you imagine it? They go into these tents and there's the food. They haven't eaten properly for months. They're starving, hungry and there's all this food.

It must have been like a foretaste of heaven for them. What a banquet. They ate and ate. Surely they ate until, oh, they were going, oh, I can't eat another thing. Can't eat another thing.

Then they get some food and then they get some silver and gold and hide it away. But then they're struck with a thought and surely it's a God-given thought.

A thought where they're convicted, if I can put it that way. Convicted about what they haven't done. Verse 9, they said to each other, what we're doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we're keeping it to ourselves.

[20 : 38] We've got to go and tell the starving thousands in the city that there's food here for them just a matter of a few hundred yards away.

We've got to go and tell them this good news that it's here for them as well. We've got to share it. And so the good news is delivered to the city. Verse 10, they went and called to the city gatekeepers and told them.

And after some very careful investigation by the king who's very suspicious, the whole population rushes out to share in the life-supplying bounty that the four men had first discovered.

There in verse 16, then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. Well, what a rush it was. In fact, we didn't get a chance to read all that. Such a rush that the man who's guarding the gate is trampled to death.

Rushing, running, hobbling, walking, wheeling out, whatever they can do. And eating of that good food so that indeed, we're told, by the end of the day, a seer of the finest flour sold for a shackle and two seers of barley for a shackle.

[21 : 46] In other words, they're back to the everyday prices that they were. Whereby before, it was 400 pounds for a moldy old donkey head and 25 quid for a bit of dung. Now, the flour and the food is in abundance and you can buy it and eat to your heart's content.

That life-supplying bounty that those four men had first discovered now becomes a life-giving bounty to a whole city.

So why did God use these lepers? Why did God use these lepers as his evangelists? What does it have to say to us?

How does it reflect upon our experience today? Well, think of this. First of all, these four men were men who had all experienced hunger for themselves.

They had been part of the city of Samaria. They knew the hunger. They knew the desperation of what it was to be without food. They knew the pain of longing to have their hunger satisfied but not being able to find anything to eat.

[22 : 53] So they knew what these people were going through. They knew what their hunger was like. They knew they could empathize with the people of Samaria. They knew just how awful it must be to continue day after day to be hungry.

And their hearts in one sense go out to those who hunger as they have once hungered. Why do you think that God has not given the responsibility of evangelism to angels instead of us?

Think about it. Wouldn't angels be so much better evangelists? So much better missionary, so much better to tell the gospel. Imagine an angel stands before somebody and says repent and trust in Jesus and he's, you know, what the Bible tells us is huge glowing.

Wow, people would be, they'd listen, wouldn't they? They'd pay attention and of course angels haven't got all the problems we've got. They haven't got the problems of being afraid. They're the ones who stand in the presence of God day and night.

surely it would be better if God had sent angels to give the message instead of you and me. So why hasn't God done that? Maybe many reasons that you can think of.

[24 : 05] This is the only one I can think of at the moment. Because angels have never been hungry. Angels have never felt the need for forgiveness. Angels have never been desperately searching in their lives for that which satisfies.

Angels have never known what it was to be cut off from God and not to enjoy the love of God and the peace of God. They've never felt any of those things. But you have, dear Christian, and I have.

Every one of us has experienced that soul hunger that sin produces in the human heart. Every one of us has felt the weight of that guilt upon us which rakes and crushes. Every one of us have felt and known the sorrow and the grief of living in a life which has no peace and no hope and no God.

We lived just as other people live now craving contentment, searching for something to fill the void that our sin has created in us.

Therefore, dear friends, we are the ones who are rightly fit to speak to our neighbours and our friends because we know what they're going through. We can empathise with them in a way that no one else can.

[25 : 21] We know the pain. We know the sorrow. We know the grief. And if you've been a Christian for a little while or a long while, dear friends, you know what it is to have tasted of the bitter herbs, as it were, of this world.

And therefore, you have experience with which you can speak to people from. That's why you are where you are. Dear Christian, you are the one that God has chosen.

But notice as well that God chose them to be his messengers because they ate and were filled. Verse 8 tells us that they ran into the camp and ate and drank.

They didn't return to tell the good news until they'd experienced an eating of the food themselves. Now, in one sense, that's a naturally selfish thing to do.

There's the food. I've got to eat it. I'm not going to go and tell anybody. My hunger is satisfied. They'd experienced the joy of having their hunger met. And only when they'd tasted of the good things for themselves did they go and tell the others.

[26 : 32] Well, dear Christian, you have tasted of the Lord that he is good. You have received the love of God poured out into your soul, into your heart, by his Holy Spirit.

You've experienced the relief of those gripes that pull upon your heart of guilt and shame. You yourself have known the emptiness taken away.

You're the perfect choice to go and tell them because you can tell them I know that this message is real. I know that this bread of life Jesus Christ satisfies. I know that there is a way to have peace with God.

I know that there is a way for hunger to be removed. I know that there is a way to have peace with God. I know that there is a way to have peace with God. men said to each other what we're doing is not right.

This is a day of good news and we're keeping it to ourselves. We've had it. We've tasted. We've enjoyed. How can we keep it to ourselves? How can we just as it were like they do bury it away for ourselves and enjoy it on a Sunday to ourselves and enjoy it in the secrecy of our own home to ourselves and enjoy communion with God within our hearts to ourselves?

[27 : 44] How can we when we know that there is a starving desperate dying world? Don't you dear friend feel the constraining love of Christ within your heart to tell the good news?

Don't you feel the drawing within your own heart to tell someone who is hungry and desperate there's a way to be satisfied? that's the Holy Spirit within us and though fear may be strong within us and though our own selfishness may be strong within us we know that it's there and we know that Paul that says to us it's just not right it's just not right that I don't speak of Christ and thirdly and lastly the reason God chose them was not only because they'd experienced hunger and they'd experienced hunger satiated they'd experienced to be filled but they knew where the bread was they knew where the food was the location of enough food to satisfy the whole city was known only to those four men nobody else knew about it they were just a few hundred yards away from it but they hadn't an inkling that relief from the famine was just to be had a few steps away they did and although their message is received with doubt and a certain amount of questioning yet at last their message is believed and people hundreds if not thousands are saved and brought to life and of course we're afraid aren't we we're afraid that if we take the message to people that just a few just a little close by

God is nearby you can trust him and be saved we're afraid that they will doubt us we're afraid they'll think it's a trick we're afraid that they'll pour scorn upon us but dear friends not all of them will and it may be that you are the first to tell and maybe somebody else will have to tell and another have to tell or maybe you're the fifth who has to tell until eventually by the spirit of God their eyes are open their hunger becomes unquenchable and they seek after Christ but listen to me you Christian are the only person who knows where to find the bread your neighbours don't know where it is the people you work with don't know where it is the politicians of our age the great movers and shakers of our age they don't know where it is but you do to you's been given the secret of eternal life to you's been given the treasure map where to find the riches that hungry people are longing for the best that the world can offer the best that the people around about us the best that science can offer the best that education can offer the best that money can offer is dove poo only you have riches and banquet and a feast you know dear friends and I know how the multitudes of people in Whitby are starving you alone know where they can find life you alone know where they can get fullness you know where they can eat of the bread of life that's why you are where you are that's why you live in the house you live in that's why you work in the shop you work in that's why you go to the school you go to that's why you fill up your car at the petrol station and shop where you do at Sainsbury's or wherever it may be you may feel at times like these men we're lepers and we're outcasts we're odds because we're Christians and often when we speak we're rejected and ignored by those who are hungry people whose hunger is driving them crazy to do things that are beyond really sensible unreasonable people to do but you've tasted that the Lord is good you've eaten of the finest things you've got the good news you just can't keep it to yourself prophet Isaiah wrote these words chapter 52 and verse 7 how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news who proclaim peace who bring good tidings who proclaim salvation you and I are to be beautiful feet let's pray together thank you father that you did not leave us in our hunger and emptiness thank you heavenly father that you did not abandon us to the madness which takes hold of the mind and heart of those who long cry out for something to satisfy but look in all the wrong places we thank you that you sent your son the Lord Jesus not only to point us to and to reveal to us that living bread but we thank you that he came to be and is the bread of life that all who eat of him all who believe on him are relieved satisfied filled with good things oh Lord we ask that you

would help us you've given this wonderful bread to us you've given it to us that we might tell other beggars about it and that they might come and eat too oh Lord we ask that you would again grant us your Holy Spirit's help that we may not only enjoy the good things but share the good things of Christ we ask oh Lord that we may eat to our fill more and more of your goodness because the more we taste of your goodness the more we want to share that goodness so we pray that again you give us more of a hunger for you we pray too that you'd give us that constraining love yes even that obedience that says it's just not right that they go hungry and I go full help us oh Lord to overcome those fears you've put us where you want us to be you've made us the people you want us to be so that we might be your messengers your evangelists exactly where we are and you've given us a simple message there's life to be had at a look of Jesus there's salvation there's peace to be had with the living God help us give us opportunities

Lord even in this week to speak to one or two or many of you even just a simple word even just a question just a word in season we pray oh Lord that again you would take and use us for your glory for we ask it in Jesus name Amen and the old the great Jehovah will bring to this foreign land I am weak but thou art Oh Oh

[36 : 26] Oh Oh