

II Kings 6:24-7:2; Dt. 28:52-57; The Promise of the Impossible I. The Desperate Situation II. The Ruler's Lack of Hope III. The Prophet's Hopeful Promise

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, does the promise of salvation and deliverance seem impossible to you? I mean, streets of gold, trees and rivers that bring life, a new heaven and a new earth. Do these seem like far off fantasy or certain promises of a firm future? Well, the promise of certain blessings in the future are often played off as fairy tails and fantasies by modern man. Not even God could do what is described in the book of Revelation- so modern man scoffs. But for those who embrace these promises by faith- we know that what seems impossible for man is surely possible for our God! Today we return to our series in II Kings and we find the troubling army of Syria once again attacking. The Northern Tribes of Israel are locked in an on again/ off again battle with Syria. Ben Hadad, the king of Syria, has returned to the land of Israel once again. Earlier in ch. 6 we read that Syria's army had been lead into the city of Samaria by Elisha- but they were let go and allowed to return home in 6:23. There was a time of peace to follow- but now an all out war breaks out. So once again, a Syrian army has surrounded a city of Israel. One of the issues in our passage today is this- can man resist the sovereign will and plan of our God? Can humans undo- and man's leaders cancel His purposes. Or to put this another way, when disaster strikes, who do we call upon? For example, after the hurricanes have moved on the fires have been extinguished, the reporters almost always ask- what is the government doing to help? And we often hear those who have lost everything- where is the government? Where is FEMA when I need them? Well today we find that mankind must learn to humble themselves under the almighty hand of God! We consider this theme: Jesus Christ proves the stubborn rebellion of man's heart in their response to God's messenger.

### **I. The Desperate Situation**

In our first point we find the desperate situation that has fallen on Samaria- the capital city of the Northern Tribes. After being surrounded and besieged by the Syrian army, the city is on the brink of

collapse and disaster. Now this is total and absolute warfare. We do not read how long this siege has lasted, but it the land already in the midst of a 7 year famine. So they had little to start with- and now matters are worse so that no food can be brought into the city. Commerce has all but collapsed! We read in v. 25 that people were paying for a donkey's head- just so that they could have something to eat! Even the dung of birds was sold- anything that might have some nutrition! Perhaps you have read of situation where people were eating the bulbs of flowers- or boiling leather in water to try and get some calories during time of famine and war. Now we may have seen a few empty shelves these past few years- but I have never really been on the verge of starvation! Now we may be thinking that inflation is bad- and it is not unheard of to live through times of rationing- but what if there is nothing to ration! It truly was a desperate situation. But it is even worse than that- because of the madness that extreme hunger brings- mothers are eating their own children in v. 28. The people have turned to cannibalism- worse than that- murder and then cannibalism. They are not eating the flesh of dead people- but they are killing the living- their own seed and offspring- in order to get some food! What would move a mother to such a heinous act? Just this past week I saw two stories in the news- there was a mother who was punishing her 6-year-old son- torturing him to the point that he died. And another mother who threw her newborn child in dumpster in New Mexico. So it is possible- even today- for a mother to have no compassion on their own child! But this particular form of suffering in Samaria had been foretold. As we read back in Dt. 28, if the Israelites refuse to listen to God's word- if they refuse to give up their idols and worship the LORD alone- then these curses would befall them! They would endure famine and siege- mothers will have no compassion on their own families- they will eat their own children and the whole city will be overwhelmed by distress. Well, the curse of the LORD has played out- God removed His restrain and blessing and the people plunged into darkness, distress and death! But there is a point to all this- the LORD is teaching His people that sin has consequences! Rebellion against the LORD leads to poverty and want! The LORD has sent this desperate situation upon

them to open their eyes- that following idols leads to bondage! If you want to worship idols I will show you what idols can do- and that is nothing! Or to put it in today's context- if you want to trust in the government, I will show you how inept and bankrupt the government is! Those who trust in man's hand will find that man cannot save- they cannot provide! Those who forsake the LORD will find only famine and want- true poverty! The only hope that we have is to repent- to cry out for mercy and look to His hand for blessings!

## **II. The Ruler's Lack of Hope**

As we continue, we next look at the rulers of Israel- specifically we start with the king and his complete lack of hope. Jehoram the king is walking by the walls in v. 26 and he hears this distressing tale of a woman who ate her child. He is overcome by grief and rage, and sets out to kill Elisha! Now why would he go after Elisha? Well, remember back in 6:20 it was at the word of Elisha that this army was spared. Jehoram wanted to kill these soldiers as they were surrounded in Samaria- handed to Israel on a silver platter- but Elisha forbids and instructed Jehoram to let them go. Now they are back- and this time it is the Syrian army that is surrounding the city! The tables have turned! But more generally, the king blames Elisha and his God for this whole mess. As Jehoram says in v. 33- this evil is from the LORD- so why should I wait for the LORD any longer? It is the LORD'S fault- He has brought this army here. Now is this true- it was the LORD who brought this army here. But what the king neglects to confess is this- it was the sin and rebellion of the Israelites that moved the LORD to send this Syrian army to punish and chastise them for their sin! We find a similar situation with Jeremiah and King Zedekiah in Jer. 19- where Jeremiah is blamed even though it is the LORD'S work performed in response to Judah's sin! And since Elisha speaks for and represents the LORD- the anger of Jehoram is directed against this prophet. It is classic case of shooting the messenger because you don't like the message! So Jehoram sends his commander- the captain of his army- to go and kill Elisha in v. 32. But before we look at the words of this captain, we have to consider if this angry response is justified. Is it proper for men to blame God

when hardships come? To be angry with God when famine or pestilence arrive? It is true that this calamity was from the LORD'S hand- it had happened according to God's word. But the proper response should be patience- to submit- to humble yourself under the LORD'S almighty hand. But instead of submitting, the king tries to cancel the LORD'S decree by killing the LORD'S prophet! The fact is- both the King and his captain have lost hope. So the captain says in v. 2- what you are saying is impossible! Even after Elisha promises an end to the siege, the captain says- could this really happen? Even if the LORD would open the windows of heaven, could this thing be? Both the King and the Captain doubt the power of God. God can bring an army here- but there is no way that this famine will be over so fast- even if the siege would be lifted! But the captain will learn- nothing is impossible for God! There is always a danger of growing cynical when you see the brokenness of our world. For example, do you truly believe that God could end this pandemic in one day? More than that- we are tempted to doubt His promises! Is Jesus really going to come back and make all things new? Will God really resurrect the dead? Has He truly forgiven my sins? All these promises are sure and certain- finding their yes and Amen in Jesus Christ! So we should not doubt their fulfillment! But these rulers of Israel had lost hope- they could not believe the good news- they had no lasting comfort! But for those who do believe- when hard and difficult times- we repent and wait upon the LORD for His goodness! Knowing that ultimately, our cup of blessings will overflow! We can wait upon the LORD- trusting that one day soon He will renew our strength like that of the eagles!

### **III. The Prophet's Hopeful Promise**

But back to our passage- we find that promise of hope that is revealed to Israel. Although the King and his Captain cannot believe it- we do have these elders who are sitting by Elisha in v. 32. To these a message of hope and deliverance are given. Tomorrow- at this time- there will be relief as found in v. 1. There will be plenty, there will be normalcy! Trade and commerce will continue- there will be food to be purchased! This enemy that you so greatly fear will be removed- they will melt away. Although

completely undeserved, God will once again spare His people from being completely consumed! The message of salvation by grace alone is clear- only God could do what is necessary! Only God can provide- only God can rescue from a foe like this! Next week we will look at the fulfillment of this word, but suffice it to say that God keeps His promises of protection and provision! But what are we to make of this rebellion in our passage? Well, the Israelites have quite a history of rejecting their prophets. As was mentioned with Jeremiah- and here with Elisha- her kings and rulers did not humble themselves in the presence of the LORD! They did not take to heart the warning in His word! Even as the parable in Mt. 23 makes clear, the land owner sends messengers again and again. Those wicked tenants mistreat and abuse the messenger. Finally the land owner will send His Son! How will Israel respond when the Son arrives? Will they listen to Him? Will they submit and obey- repenting of their sins and producing the fruit of righteousness and obedience? Or will they seize and kill the Son? As you know, when the perfect prophet comes, He will be rejected by His own and killed by lawless men. Although the door was bared in our passage so that Elisha was not killed- when Jesus comes the door will not be bared! Men will do to Him as they please- because they hate His message as their deeds are evil! But praise God, that the death of the perfect prophet was also according to the promises of God- according to His will and Word! So that by the death of Jesus, we mind have the windows of heaven open to us and His riches fall down upon us!

To conclude, the rebellion of Israel and the rejection of Elisha is just one more example of man's sin- but in sending a message of hope and deliverance we find another example of God's grace! Jesus Christ proves the stubborn rebellion of man's heart in their response to God's messenger. Praise God that man's sin cannot thwart His purposes! In fact, He has ordained to us the greatest act of evil to bring about the greatest blessing to us! To use the crucifixion of Jesus to open to us a fountain of blessing and life through His blood! Praise God for His sovereign purpose and plan!