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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

There are more recorded miracles Elisha's ministry than any other biblical character. Tonight we are going to look at one more miracle his ministry we move on to what happens next in Old Testament history. I am calling this message, "Four Lucky Lepers," although you need to understand that I do not believe in luck. I am saying that tongue-in-cheek. I believe in the providence of God which is so different from luck. I am just calling these lepers kind of lucky. We could really call them, "The Four Blessed Guys" I guess.

2 Kings 7:1-2. "Elisha said, 'Hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says: About this time tomorrow, a seah [about a bushel] of flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs 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!'"

SCENE 1: THE AMAZING ANNOUNCEMENT

Tonight as we talk about this miracle we're going to look at six different scenes. I am calling scene number one, "The Amazing Announcement." You have to understand the background to realize just how amazing this announcement was. At this time there were two kingdoms: The southern kingdom was called Judah and its capital was Jerusalem. The northern kingdom was called Israel and its capital Samaria. All of this is taking place in the northern kingdom around the city of Samaria.

There was a Syrian general named Ben-Hadad who laid siege to the city of Samaria and said, "I'm going to conquer you by surrounding you—nobody goes in and nobody goes out. I am going to starve you to death!" The scarcity of food had reached a critical point.

2 Kings 6:25. "There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey's head sold for 80 shekels [two pounds] of silver, and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for 5 shekels."

Who's got a King James Version? The KJV doesn't say "a cab of seed pods" it says "dove's droppings." I don't know what they were doing with it, but that's what the literal Hebrew says there. Things had gotten so bad there they were selling donkey heads and dove droppings. If you want to know the truth, take the time to read 2 Kings 6. It had gotten so bad that mothers had taken to boiling their children and eating them! Cannibalism. When the king heard about this terrible action, he got so angry he went to Elisha and said, "I'm going to kill you, because this is all your fault and it's God's fault!"

2 Kings 6:31. "He [the king] said, 'May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today!'"

SCENE 2: THE MOTIVATION TO MOVE

With that in mind Elisha makes an amazing prediction. He said, "I know things are tough but tomorrow a whole bushel of flour will sell for a quarter and two bushels of barley will sell for less than that. There is going to be an overabundance of food and everything is going to be okay." When this guard laughed at him, he said, "I have another prediction to make. You are going to see it, but you won't taste it!" I want us to see how his prediction came true, because the second thing I want to talk about is number two the motivation to move. This is where we are introduced to our four lucky lepers.

2 Kings 7:3-4. "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 [the Syrians] and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die'"

So, these four lepers made an amazing choice and I call it, "The Motivation to Move." "Why do we sit here until we die?" Because these men had leprosy of course; they had been excluded from the city. They had to live outside the city gates. They couldn't come inside the city. They were ceremonially unclean. Here's the picture: Famine in the city, the enemy out there in the field which laid siege to the city and they said, "Hey. Things aren't going to get any better. We're going to die. Why are we just sitting here doing nothing until we die? Here are our options: 1) We can go into the city and die of hunger; 2) Sit out here and die of hunger or 3) Surrender to the enemy and maybe they will make us prisoners and then they will feed us. At least we will be living. Living prisoners is better than being a dead free man! So let's get up and go!"

They were at a very important point in their lives! It is a very important point, because at one time or another all of us probably need to come to this same point I call "the point of total desperation." They became so desperate they said, "I'm not going to just sit here and do nothing until I die! I'm going to get up and at least do something!" Did you know that God often meets us at the "point of total desperation?" I have known people who have problems, whether it be alcohol problems, drug problems, addiction problems, marriage problems, and do you know what? They can't make any changes in their life and God can't do anything until they come to the point of total desperation and just say, "If I don't do something, I'm going to die! I have to do something!" Only at the point of total desperation does God meet them. I thank God that these men came to that point and that was the motivation for them to get up and move!

SCENE 3: THE DELIGHTFUL DISCOVERY

Here's Scene number 3: I call it, "The Delightful Discovery," because it is amazing what happened when they headed toward the camp of the Syrians.

2 Kings 7:5-8. "At dusk they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans. 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. The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp and entered one of the tents. They ate and drank, and carried away 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."

Isn't this just amazing? This is why I love this story. It is a rather obscure story. A lot of people don't know it. Here these four lepers think they are heading toward the very best thing that could happen to them. They think they are going to be made prisoners and they walk into this huge camp of Assyrians and suddenly they look around and they don't see a single person! They lift the flap of one tent and look in there and all they see is some food and drink on the table. They look around and there is gold and silver and all of these treasures and things and they don't see a soul. The Bible says what happened—and this is another part of the miracle—sometime just before the lepers got there this mighty Syrian army heard the sound of horses and chariots and they thought the Israelites and the Egyptians and the Hittites were staging an attack. They thought they were outnumbered and they got up and they ran for their lives. They retreated they fled and left their camp intact.

As I have studied this and look at the original scripture, it does not say they heard a sound *like* horses and chariots—it says they heard the sound of horses and chariots. A few weeks ago we looked at one of Elisha's miracles when he and his servant were surrounded by the Syrian army and Elisha said to his servant, "Don't worry. They that be with us are more than they that be with them." The servant said, "What? There are only two of us and there are *thousands* of them!" Then Elisha said, "Lord, open the eyes of my servant." When the servant's spiritual eyes were opened, what did he see? He saw that the mountains were filled with horses and chariots and an angelic army. What I and many other people who have studied this believe this was that same angelic army. God just opened the ears of the Syrian soldiers with and they heard the sound of this angelic army and they turned and ran. Then these four lepers walked into that camp. Do you know what we have said since we were kids? "Finders, keepers, losers, weepers. This is my stuff! I found it." So they sat down and they started doing what any hungry person would do. They started stuffing their faces they started grabbing all this silver and treasure and burying it for themselves. They said, "Man! We have it made! There we were about to die thinking that we were going to die of hunger then thinking we were going to become prisoners. Man have we hit the jackpot!

SCENE 4: THE WONDERFUL WITNESS

That could be the end of the story and that would be a nice story, wouldn't it? But there is more to the story and I call Scene 4, "The Wonderful Witness," because they did something about it.

2 Kings 7:9-11. "Then they said to each other, 'We're 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.' So they went and called out to the city gatekeepers and told them, 'We went into the Aramean camp and not a man 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."

Now the point I want to make here is these four lepers could have said, "Forget Samaria! After all, this is the city that excluded us. This is the city that said we were unclean. This is the city that kicked us out. Let's forget about those people! Let's just let them stay in there and starve. Let them keep eating donkey head soup and killing their own babies. We have it made! Forget about those people!" But that's not what they did. What one of the lepers said is a great lesson for us today. "You know this is good news and we cannot keep silent about it. We must bear witness of the great gift that we have been given!" I hope you have already picked up on this lesson.

The application is this: You and I are like those four lepers. We are all inflicted and infected with an eternally fatal disease. We deserve death but when we by an act of faith say, "Why am I going to sit here until I die?" and we get up and we come to Christ by faith did you know that we receive more blessings than we could ever even imagine. We get forgiveness of our sins, a new home in heaven, a new nature, and a new family. We receive all of these bountiful blessings. It's just like these four lepers stumbling into all of the treasures of this camp. Just as these four men could not remain silent, you and I cannot remain silent when it comes to telling others what we have experienced.

1. Silence is sinful

There are a couple of things I want to say to you about silent Christians or silent Christianity. Number one: Silence would be sinful. Have you ever heard the expression, "Silence is Golden?" Did you know in the Christian life silence is yellow! It's cowardly! Because it would have been sinful for these men to have enjoyed all of that great food and treasure when just down the road there were people dying. The same thing is true today. When you and I do not share the good news of Jesus Christ with a lost and dying world, it constitutes sin. If some scientist discovered the cure for cancer up at MIT or some other school but simply held out for more money, that that would be a crime! It would border on sin, because there are people dying every single day of cancer. If somebody has the cure and doesn't share it, it is criminal—it's sinful. The same is true for those of us who know the cure for sin sickness. Silence is sinful!

2. Good news must be shared

Number two also we need to understand on the positive side that good news must be shared. Because these lepers had their bellies full and because they had all of these possessions they just couldn't keep quiet about it. They had to go tell their family their friends the people in Samaria. "Hey you won't BELIEVE what we have found! There's a whole camp out there full of food, full of treasure and it's yours for the taking! Come and get it!" When you have tasted the bread of life, you'll want to tell everybody you come in contact with, "I know the answer! You just taste the bread of life who is Jesus and it will make all the difference in your life!" So there was a wonderful witness they shared what they knew.

SCENE 5: THE REASONABLE RELUCTANCE

But that's not the end of the story either! I call the next scene, "The Reasonable Reluctance."

Before we read it let me just ask you, what would you think? Here you are in the city, dying of hunger, you know there is a camp of opposing soldiers out there. They have been laying siege to your city for months and suddenly these four lepers come in hollering that the camp is empty and there is plenty of food, plenty of treasure—just come on out and get it! Wouldn't most of us be a little reluctant about that? That's what the king said.

2 Kings 7:12. "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 are starving; so they have left the camp to hide in the countryside, thinking, 'They will surely come out, and then we will take them alive and get into the city.'"

1. "It's too good to be true!"

He just said, "Bah! That's just too simple! I just cannot believe that. It just doesn't make sense. It doesn't add up. It's not reasonable so I'm not going to believe the good news!" When you and I who have tasted the bread of life, you and I who have been cleansed from our eternal sickness, sometimes when we do share the good news with other people, they say the same thing. "Nah! I just can't believe that. It's not reasonable to think that the blood of a man who died two thousand years ago can cleanse me of my sins. It doesn't make sense. It doesn't compute or to think that you can just pray a sinner's prayer and invite Jesus to come into your heart and then you are going to live in heaven forever. It doesn't make sense. It is not reasonable!" It's amazing today that sometimes when we share the good news, folks don't respond. They don't respond for the same reason the king didn't. Let me give you a couple of reasons. Today some say, "It's just too good to be true!" Have you ever heard the phrase, "If something's too good to be true, it's probably not?" It just sounds like it's too good an offer to be true! We have all developed a sense of skepticism. I think one of the reasons that you and I are so skeptical about things is that we have grown up watching television commercials all of our lives that say, "This laundry detergent will get your clothes whiter than this laundry detergent will." "This food is better for you than this food." So, when somebody comes along giving us the truth of the gospel sometimes people out there in a skeptical society say, "No that's just too good to be true!"

2. "It's too simple to be real!"

The second thing people say is, "It's too simple to be real!" For me to believe that all I have to do is walk out of this city, walk down the road, walk into the camp, sit down and eat the food of my enemies? That's just too simple. I have to fight for it. I have to work for it. I have to try hard to earn it! "No it's there. It's a gift. God has provided it. All you have to do is receive it!" "But that's just too simple!" We need to remember that Jesus said, "For you to become a Christian, you must become as a little child. Unless you become as a little child, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven!" I thank God for every child who gives their heart and life to Jesus Christ, because children are able to express such childlike faith! I know there are some who are too young and they don't understand. Sure they love Jesus, but they are not ready to be saved. It is a beautiful thing to me when an eight, nine or ten year old child says, "Yes, I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sins and yes, I received him into my heart and yes, I believe I'm going to go to heaven when I die because I'm trusting Jesus!" There's something refreshing about that. Sometimes we try to make children answer adult questions to be saved. If I understand what

Jesus said, we need to take *adults* and ask them childlike questions for them to be saved. Do you know why some men and some women with college degrees don't accept Jesus Christ? It's too easy! It's too simple. There is a reluctance to receive the message based on reason and rational thinking.

We won't read all the rest of the verses in that section, but I thank God that not everybody was reluctant. A lot of the people when they heard the news said, "Praise God! This is great! I'm heading out to the camp. I'm going to receive this great gift that God has provided."

2 Kings 7:16. "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."

The amazing thing to me is when we share the gospel message out there with the world, there are some who say, "I'm not real sure about that. I don't think I'm going to accept it." But I thank God there are many who say, "Man, I'm ready! I'm just going to run out and I'm going to accept by faith this free gift!"

SCENE 6: THE FATAL FULFILLMENT

That leads us to our final scene I call, "The Fatal Fulfillment." Do you remember what Elisha said to the king's servant when the king's servant said, "Oh that can't happen! There's no way what you predicted can happen, Elisha!" Elisha said, "You're going to see it, but you are not going to eat it!"

2 Kings 7:17. "Now the king had put the officer on whose arm he leaned in charge of the gate, and the people trampled him in the gateway, and he died, just as the man of God had foretold when the king came down to his house."

He didn't starve. God didn't have to strike him down. The people were so excited to go out and receive the plunder of this camp and he was refusing to go. I don't know if he was standing there saying, "Don't go!" or if he was just standing in the way, but when the crowd came, they trampled him and he died!

CONCLUSION

Arthur Pink, a great Puritan writer in the twentieth century, says this man represents for all eternity every person who refuses to accept God's free gift of eternal life, who stands in rigid unbelief at God's free offer of grace, because one day these people will experience eternal death! Well that's the story of the four lepers. What's the lesson that you learned from that tonight? Maybe there are some of you who are still like those four lepers you are spiritually unclean. You are infected with that spiritual sin sickness and what you need tonight is to receive God's free gift of cleansing. Maybe you are here tonight and you are one of those who have already received God's gift of eternal life, but you are like some who never tell. You refuse to go and share the good news. Maybe you know someone who needs to be told about the bread of life. Maybe you know someone who needs to be told about the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Remember good news has to be shared and silence is sinful!

OUTLINE

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SCENE 5: THE REASONABLE RELUCTANCE

1. "It's too good to be true!"
2. "It's too simple to be real!"

SCENE 6: THE FATAL FULFILLMENT