

INTRODUCTION

Five years ago, everyone was anxiously waiting to see if the Y2K prophets of doom were correct. They predicted that at midnight on December 31, 1999, all the computers would roll over to the year 1900 rather than 2000. This Y2K "bug" was supposed to bring our entire infrastructure crashing down. They predicted that airplanes would fall from the sky, electric power grids would fail, and even the cars with computer chips would refuse to start.

In memory of Y2K, here's a little poem:

'Twas the night before Y2K
And all through the nation
We'd soon see the bug
That caused such a sensation.

The chips were replaced
In computers with care
In hopes that ol' Buggy
Wouldn't stop there.

While some folks could think
They were snug in their beds
Others had visions of dread in their heads.

And Ma with her PC
And I with my Mac
Had just logged on
to the Net and kicked back with a snack.

When over the server,
There arose such a clatter
I called Bill Gates
To see what was the matter.

When what to my wondering eyes should appear
On my screen, Millennium Buggy was here!
The hack of all hackers was looking so smug
I knew in a moment it was the Y2K bug.

His image downloaded in no time at all
And he whistled and shouted
"Let all systems fall."
"Go Intel! Go Gateway! Now HP! Big Blue!
Everything Dell, and Pentium, too.

All systems big and all systems small

Now crash away, crash away, crash, away all!"

Of course, Y2K was a non-event. It is estimated that \$600 billion was spent in preparing for Y2K. Michael Hyatt made a lot of money from his book, *The Millennium Bug: How to Survive the Coming Chaos*. He wrote, "On January 4, 2000 the first business day of the new year begins. Many businesses, utility companies, and government agencies WILL not open—many WILL not be able to open. Many that do open WILL be swamped with customer complaints. Chaos and pandemonium WILL reign." In addition to his books, Michael Hyatt also sold thousands of packets of preserved food Y2Krazies could hoard along with their batteries, generators, and guns. Even though he was wrong, he was laughing all the way to the bank. There is one bright side of the story, however. I read that Michael Hyatt invested most of his money in Enron!

As we approach 2005, we will face something much more certain than Y2K—it's S2W. But you don't have to worry about S2W because it isn't something harmful. Instead, S2W can change your life and lead to your success. It stands for Surrender 2 Win. Everybody wants to be a winner. The Bible teaches that the key to success or victory in the Christian life is through unconditional surrender to God. Over the next few weeks, we're going to be talking about specific areas of your life to surrender to God, but today, I want to introduce the wonderful concept of how surrendering can lead to amazing blessings. This message is entitled, "The Blessing of Surrender." And it comes from an obscure story hidden in the pages of the Old Testament in II Kings 7.

Before we read the scripture, it's important to understand the context of this passage. These events happened almost 3,000 years ago, during a time after King David and King Solomon ruled Israel. The nation divided, and had split into two kingdoms. The southern kingdom, based in Jerusalem was called Judah. The northern kingdom, based in Samaria, was called Israel.

The Northern Kingdom, led by King Jehoram, was at war with the Syrians, called Arameans. The Syrian army placed a blockade around the city to starve the people out, and it was working. Living conditions were so bleak that a donkey's head sold for 2 pounds of silver, and a spoonful of seeds cost two ounces of silver (\$15 at today's silver prices). Hunger was so widespread that the people resorted to cannibalism to try to stay alive.

In the midst of this terrible siege, God's prophet, Elisha predicted that within a single day, God would reverse the conditions and there would be a surplus of food. The king's officer laughed at this prediction. Meanwhile, outside the city, there were four lepers who were between a rock and a hard place. They were suffering from leprosy, and were starving like everyone else. We'll pick up the story in II Kings 7:3:

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. 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, 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.

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."

If you want to learn the wonderful secret of surrender to win, you can learn some important principles in this amazing story.

I. THE CHOICES OF LIFE

These four lepers were in a tough spot. Not only were they suffering from a terrible skin disease, but they were on the verge of starvation as well. They were diseased, dying, and desperate, and none of their choices appeared to be promising. You may be in the same situation. You may be facing a health crisis and you don't know how you're going to survive. You may be trying to survive a bad marriage, and you seem to be dying emotionally. Your crisis may be a job or financial crisis. Whatever desperate situation you're in, you can learn something from these four lepers.

Your future will be determined by the choices you make. The great lawyer, William Jennings Bryan once said: "Destiny is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of choice." Life is full of choices. The good choices you make will lead to positive consequences. The bad choices you make will always lead to negative consequences. Here are three choices you can make:

(1) You may choose to retreat: Go back and starve!

Verse 4: If we say, 'We'll go into the city'—the famine is there, and we will die.' Their first option was to simply go back to the city. The lepers were suffering from malnutrition—they were starving. There was a famine in their city. In the same way, it's possible for a person to suffer from spiritual malnutrition. The Bible says we should be growing spiritually, to become more and more like Jesus Christ. But instead of moving forward, many people are actually experiencing a spiritual decline. If there was ever a time in your life when you were more committed to serve Christ than you are at this moment, you've gone backwards. Without even being aware of it, you made a choice to retreat spiritually. It might have been when you stopped praying every day, or stopped reading your Bible. Perhaps you've reverted to some old habits and old sins you thought you had stopped. If you have, it's a sure sign you're suffering from spiritual decline. The word we often use for that is "backsliding." It's easy to do. We don't call it "back-climbing" but "backsliding" because it's like sliding down a slippery slope. You don't really have to do anything much except lean in that direction, and, "whoosh," you're gone.

Has your faith, that was once strong and vibrant become cold and dead? I once read about a tribe in the jungle that discovered an ancient sundial. They regarded it as a good luck omen, so to honor it, they built a hut over it protect it. In their desire to honor it, they had rendered the sundial useless. It was simply a fetish, and had no practical value. That's how many people regard Christianity. It is simply a once-a-week habit they have enclosed within stained glass and steeples. If that's what your faith is, you're backsliding—in retreat. That's the first choice—to go back to where you used to be—and it seldom leads to good results.

(2) You may choose to remain: Do nothing and die!

Verse 4: "And if we stay here, we will die." The lepers also faced the possible of simply doing nothing. That's the easiest thing to do—nothing. In the same way, when you face a crisis, and become desperate, it's easy to become complacent and simply say, "What's the use?"

In verse 3, the lepers asked themselves a question, we all need to ask: "Why stay here until we die?" I have a pastor friend who recently walked through his den and noticed his teenage son, who was a star athlete, was watching a cooking show on HGTV. He said, "Son, why are you watching that channel?" His son said, "Dad, that's the only channel I can watch, the remote control is broken." His dad said, "Son, back in the good old days, I'll have you know that I used to have to get up and walk barefoot through shag carpet and change the channel on the television set itself. You can do the same thing!" His son really didn't know or had forgotten he could change the channel on the set, so he was simply sitting there watching what was on, too lazy to move.

There may be some of you who are in the same situation. For a long time, it has been the same channel. Your spiritual life has become a monotony of the same-old, same-old ritual week after week. You need to ask yourself, "Why stay here until I die?" It may be time for you to make some changes, to get up off your spiritual couch, and change the channel. Spiritually speaking, if you're staying the same, you're going backwards. The status quo is nothing to "quo" about.

(3) You may choose to risk: Take a chance and surrender!

Verse 4: "So let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die." I admire these four guys because they had the guts to get up and do something. They decided they were going to surrender to a stronger power, and appeal to this stronger power for help. This choice to risk it all and surrender was the smartest choice they ever made. Perhaps you're at a place right now, where you are desperate, and you don't know what to do. It's a lot easier to retreat or remain where you are than to risk it all, but those who choose to risk it all and surrender to God find it is the smartest decision they have ever made.

Some people are so afraid of failure they never risk anything in their lives. Have you ever driven behind someone who had their foot on the brake pedal the whole time they were driving? In the same way, there are many people who are so cautious and fearful they go through life never risking anything. Their lives end up being like a boring inning of baseball—no hits, no runs, no errors—nothing.

The truth is if you *risk* doing something, you may fail. But it is much better to attempt something great for God and fail at it than to never attempt anything.

One of my favorite Christian groups is Superchick. The lyrics of their songs are so positive that they are reaching a teenage audience outside the church. One of their songs is about how it’s important to get up and try again even if you’ve failed. The lyrics are: I’m not afraid to fall; It means I climbed up high. To fall is not to fail; You fail when you don’t try...Not afraid to fall; I might just learn to fly; So, I will spread these wings of mine...I’m not afraid to fall; I’ve fallen many times. They laughed when I fell down; But I have dared to climb. Not afraid to fall; I know I’ll fall again; But I can win this in the end.

If I get up I might fall back down again; So let’s get up c’mon. If I get up I might fall back down again; But we get up anyway. But we’ll jump up and see, even if it’s the 20th time, We’ll just jump and see if we can fly. Our four friends were risking death by entering the camp of the enemy to surrender, but they ended up enjoying the spoils of the battle without even having to fight. True faith always involves a risk. Faith is coming to the very edge of all you can see and touch, and then taking one more step. It is believing that God will be there to give you another solid place to step...or He’ll teach you how to fly.

II. THE LESSONS OF UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

Our four friends serve as a perfect example of S2W—Surrender 2 Win. When they were willing to risk it all and surrender to the Arameans, their lives were changed forever. As we think about surrendering to God, there are three important lessons we can learn from this great story.

(1) God requires only one thing from you—your ALL

God doesn’t just want your soul, or your emotions. He wants all of you. The Bible says in Romans 12:1, “Here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.” (Romans 12:1 *The Message*)

When it comes to our commitment, God really wants all or nothing. The all-or-nothing principle can be illustrated with the muscles in your body. There are some muscles that can contract partially. For instance, I can contract my biceps slightly, moderately, or totally. Your heart is a muscle, but unlike other muscles, it contracts involuntarily. And every time it contracts it contracts totally: It is an all or nothing muscle. And when it is giving all, you live. When it contracts not at all, you die. The Bible says we are to seek God with our whole heart; that means we surrender totally to Him and give Him our all. We contract all of our emotional, mental, and spiritual muscles in seeking and serving Him. Either Jesus is Lord of all in your life, or He is not really Lord at all in your life.

(2) When you surrender to God, He will take care of you

The best decision these lepers ever made was to give up and surrender. It says in verse 8: “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. They enjoyed the spoils of the battle without even having to fight. Can you imagine their joy upon seeing all the food, drinks, silver, gold, and clothes? They could have been singing that old song, "We're in the money. We're in the money. We've got a lot of what it takes to get along!" They went from growling stomachs and empty hands to full stomachs and more booty than they could carry away.

There's a great lesson there for us. I believe when you totally surrender to God, He will make sure all your needs are met—and give you a little extra. II Corinthians 8:9 says, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich." Yes, God wants you to be rich, but that doesn't mean you'll have a million dollars. The Bible's definition of rich is: "Having all your needs met, and having the capacity to enjoy life." There are a lot of people who have tons of money, but they are miserable. If you are having your needs met and you are content in Christ, you are a rich man.

One of my favorite promises is found in Ephesians 3:20, "Now unto Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." The God who taught us to go the second mile is also the God who goes beyond what we could ever expect or anticipate.

(3) When you experience God's love, you cannot be silent

These lepers weren't content just to enjoy the food and bounty themselves. We read in verse 9: "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."

They had good news to share, and so do we! The lepers ran back to Samaria to share their good news, and the people came into the camp and enjoyed the food and spoils of war, too. I can't read that without thinking that because we have experienced the riches of God's grace, we cannot keep it to ourselves. We want to share it with others. Sharing your faith should be so natural that it is like one hungry man telling another hungry man where to find bread. We aren't selling a product; we're sharing the answer to life's problems.

Once you know the wonder of God's love, you can't stay quiet. Even if people don't like your message; you'll still want to share it. The prophet Jeremiah had the job of sharing God's message with his people—and they didn't like it. He was persecuted and rejected for it. So he tried to be quiet, but he couldn't. He said, "If I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more I his name,' this word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot." (Jeremiah 20:9) We should be so excited about sharing the good news of God's love that it is like a fire in our bones we cannot contain.

Have you surrendered to Jesus? If you have, then you will find you cannot keep silent about Him. Although Fanny Crosby was blind, she could see Jesus in a way few of us can. She wrote these powerful words: I think of my blessed Redeemer; I think of Him all the day long; I sing,

for I cannot be silent; His love is the theme of my song! Redeemed, Redeemed, Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb; Redeemed, Redeemed, His child, and forever I am.

CONCLUSION

With the release of the movie "Aviator," there's an increased interest in the life of Howard Hughes. He dated actresses, piloted test aircraft, and owned a chain of hotels, and casinos around the world. He accumulated more than \$2 billion, but in the end, he died one of the most miserable men in history. A man's true character is revealed by how he finishes the race of life.

Howard Hughes' last years were spent in isolation, hidden on the top floor of the Xanadu Hotel in the Bahamas. One biographer wrote about his appearance before he died:

"He was emaciated, practically skeletal, with only 120 pounds stretched over his six-foot, four-inch frame. He was not dead, but it seemed his body was already in decay. Only the long grey hair that trailed halfway down his back, the thin straggly beard that reached midway onto his sunken chest, and his hideously long nails that extended several inches in grotesque yellow corkscrews from his fingers and toes seemed to still be growing, still showing signs of life. A tumor was emerging from the side of his head, a reddened lump protruding from his sparse strands of grey hair. His bed sores festered all the way down his back, some so severe that eventually one shoulder bone poked through his parchment-like skin. Then there were the needle marks. The telltale tracks ran the full length of both his thin arms, scarred his thighs, and clustered horribly around his groin.

He lay naked in bed, deathly afraid of germs. He spent his days watching movies. He watched his favorite movie, 'Ice Station Zebra', at least 150 times. Finally emaciated and hooked on drugs he died at age 67." (Bill Hybels, *Character: Reclaiming Six Endangered Qualities*, p. 47- 48)

When he died in 1976, there was no one to claim his body. Finally a distant cousin was given custody of his body and he said, "Is this Mr. Hughes?" *Time Magazine* reported: "Howard Hughes' death was commemorated in Las Vegas by a minute of silence. Casinos fell silent. Housewives stood uncomfortably clutching their paper cups full of coins at the slot machines, the blackjack games paused, and at the crap tables the stickmen cradled the dice in the crook of their wooden wands. Then a pit boss looked at his watch, leaned forward and said, 'O.K., roll the dice. He's had his minute.'"

It reminds me of what Jesus meant when He said, "What shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?" (Matthew 16:26) You probably won't die with an estate worth more than \$2 billion like Howard Hughes, but can have something much more valuable than anything he had. When you unconditionally surrender your life to God you can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Have you given Him your all? He gave it all for you. Jesus paid it ALL. All to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, but He washed me white as snow! (Words by Elvina M. Hall) That's the blessing of surrender!

OUTLINE

I. THE CHOICES OF LIFE

- (1) Retreat: Go back and starve!
- (2) Remain: Do nothing and die!
- (3) Risk: Take a chance and surrender!

II. THE LESSONS OF UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

- (1) God requires only one thing from you—your ALL

"Here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around-life—and place it before God as an offering." *Romans 12:1 The Message*

- (2) When you surrender to God, He will take care of you

"Now unto Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." *Ephesians 3:20*

- (3) When you experience God's love, you cannot be silent

"If I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more I his name,' this word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot." *Jeremiah 20:9*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes