

# A LEPER'S DISCOVERY

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Sometimes I wonder if the world can get any crazier than it already is. Can the night grow any darker? Can people behave more senselessly, more viciously? Can situations become any worse? Have you ever felt like that? Maybe you've felt like that this week.

## **God Is Bigger**

Don't stop believing! Jesus is bigger than your problem. He's wiser than all the talking heads on TV and all the bloggers on the Internet. What He set out to do, He will accomplish. No mere humans can derail His plan.

God can breakthrough in a moment. When you least expect Him. When you've given up hope. Even when you've cast aside your faith.

Listen! *God isn't dependent on your faith.* He can do what He promised even if you cannot or will not trust Him. He doesn't need your faith.

YOU need your faith! If you want to participate in miracles, you must trust and obey the Miracle Worker. If you wait for the miracle to happen before you're willing to believe, then you'll probably miss it.

Do you want to always be that person who listens to OTHER PEOPLE tell about God's miracles of grace and provision, but never has a testimony of your own? Well, if you want a testimony, you have to pass a test.

Christians don't know everything, and they don't control everything. They're not always on the winning team, but they always come out on top, because their God DOES know everything, and He controls everything with His love and wisdom.

## **Understanding the Times**

It's impossible to understand the times by just listening to the news. All that reporting is "after the fact." By the time it reaches you, it's old news. In order to understand the times in which we live, and the way in which to live them, you need to *listen to the News Maker*, more than the news reporters.

## **Backdrop of Glory**

The Jewish prophet, Isaiah, predicted such times when he wrote:

*“For behold, darkness will cover the earth*

*And deep darkness the peoples;*

*But the Lord will rise upon you*

*And His glory will appear upon you.”*

(Isaiah 60:2)

Upon you! Upon YOU!

When the world seems all but lost in darkness and confusion, God’s idea is to shine His light *through you*. You will become the world’s source of light, and hope, and joy.

The people around you may be moaning in despair, or wailing in unbelief, or griping in bitterness, or yelling in anger, or silent in apathy.

But those who know His voice, those who listen for His whisper, they have a sense of what is coming. Their hope for the breakthrough is tenacious. Their expectation of God is strong. Their faith cannot be quenched. Their joy endures.

## **Samaria Under Siege**

The city of Samaria, capital and worship center of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was under siege by Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram (now modern-day Syria). A great famine arose in the city. The Arameans locked down the city for so long, and food became so expensive and so scarce, that people were eating refuse. To buy the head of an unclean donkey would cost 80 pieces of silver. If a woman couldn’t afford even that, she could purchase two cups of pigeon’s dung for food for 5 pieces of silver. And you thought prices were high here in Marin!

When times get that hard, and food is that scarce, people become desperate, and do crazy things. Two women had struck a bargain to eat the child of one of them on a particularly desperate Monday, and then eat the child of the other on Tuesday. After boiling the first child and eating it, the two mothers began to argue, because the second mother had hidden her child.

## **It’s God’s Fault**

When news of this horrific event reached the king of Israel, he blamed all the tragedies on the local prophet, Elisha, and promised to behead him the same day. For the king had said, *“All of this misery must be God’s fault. Why should I look for His help any longer?”* (2 Kings 6:33)

(It astonishes me how so many broken homes, and unfaithful spouses, and abusive parents, and wayward kids, and lost jobs, and financial setbacks can be the fault of a local pastor and the local church! Especially among people who spend so little time under his ministry.)

Anyway (I digress), the king sent one of his officers to arrest Elisha. But before he arrived, Elisha already knew the score. He knew the play that had been called, and God had prepared him with an incisive word.

*“Listen to this message from the Lord! This is what the Lord says: By this time tomorrow in the markets of Samaria, six quarts of choice flour will cost only one piece of silver, and twelve quarts of barley grain will cost only one piece of silver.”* (2 Kings 7:1)

The king’s officer scoffed, *“That couldn’t happen even if the Lord opened the windows of heaven!”* (2 Kings 7:2)

Elisha was not impressed. He replied to the scoffer, *“You will see it happen with your own eyes, but you won’t be able to eat any of it!”* (2 Kings 7:2)

And that’s exactly what happened! Exactly! In every detail! God did what He said He would do. He fulfilled the words of His prophet.

## **Another Way**

But, how He did it is the stunning part! He didn’t “open the windows of heaven” for this. He had another way, as He often does. A way that no one could foresee. A way that no one would imagine. A way... where there seemed to be no way.

And the unlikely heroes of this amazing story were four lepers. Leprosy was thought to be a skin disease, but it turns out that it’s really a nerve disease. Fingers and toes are not eaten away from within, but, having lost the sensation of pain, they become bruised and broken and gangrenous and are lost.

As if the medical condition weren’t grievous enough, lepers were cast out by family and members of the community, and treated as shameful, dirty, and accursed. They called themselves, and were shunned by others, as “unclean.” They couldn’t work for a living; they could scarcely beg, since they were forbidden to come near to others of live within the city’s walls.

Now, in the Bible, leprosy is one symbol of sin. Like sin, leprosy separates people from one another. Like sin, leprosy causes shame. Like sin, leprosy weakens and diminishes an individual, yet forces him to try to make it on his own without the support of community. To heal a leper, as Jesus did with His touch, was a phenomenon.

Sin is a predator. A cruel taskmaster. And a destroyer of lives. To be freed from sin is liberation from the agony of death.

So, there sat four lepers, beside the city's gates. They could not go in, for they were unwelcome by their own people. They could not go out, for the Arameans were armed for battle.

## **Nothing To Lose**

As one long, and dreary day lapsed into another even more hopeless, they, too, became desperate. But with nothing to lose, their desperation made them bold.

2 Kings 7:3-8

*"Why should we sit here waiting to die?" they asked each other. <sup>4</sup> "We will starve if we stay here, but with the famine in the city, we will starve if we go back there. So, we might as well go out and surrender to the Aramean army. If they let us live, so much the better. But if they kill us, we would have died anyway."*

*<sup>5</sup> So at twilight they set out for the camp of the Arameans. But when they came to the edge of the camp, no one was there! <sup>6</sup> For the Lord had caused the Aramean army to hear the clatter of speeding chariots and the galloping of horses and the sounds of a great army approaching. (But it wasn't speeding chariots or galloping horses or a great army; it was only four lepers. God doesn't need chariots or horses or armies. He uses ordinary people; even broken, faltering people. No one was there!)*

*"The king of Israel has hired the Hittites and Egyptians to attack us!" they cried to one another. <sup>7</sup> So they panicked and ran into the night, abandoning their tents, horses, donkeys, and everything else, as they fled for their lives.*

*<sup>8</sup> When the men with leprosy arrived at the edge of the camp, they went into one tent after another, eating and drinking wine; and they carried off silver and gold and clothing and hid it.*

There is nothing sweeter than the spoils of battle. Unless it's the spoils of a non-battle!

Through no effort of their own, other than walking out there, these four became better fed and richer than they had ever imagined possible. In a single evening their lives had changed so dramatically that they didn't know what to do except celebrate.

## **I Am No Fool**

I've known Christians like that. In fact, I have been that kind of Christian. So amazed and thrilled and pleased with the changes in my life—the sense of freedom, of joy, of peace, of victory—that I reveled in them. The dark days were forgotten. My loneliness was gone. Each day was a gift. And I spent those days reveling in my good fortune with others of similar grace. Life had become, for awhile, a perpetual celebration!

Yet darkness and famine were just behind me and still all around me. Others, oblivious to the wealth of joy I had found, were still haunted by emptiness and fear. Once, I had longed for their friendship, or at least their acceptance or toleration. Now, I was reluctant to be with them, as they once had been toward me, for fear of sinking back into the mire of their misery.

But the fact is, you can only take in so much light, you can only drink so much joy, and then... you can take no more. When what was empty has been filled, there will be room for no more.

Too much impression, without expression, leads to depression. Or, in the words of Jim Elliot, missionary martyr: "He is no fool who gives away what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose."

If you don't learn to give away what you receive from the Lord, the flow will cease—not because He withholds or is reluctant, but because you can receive no more, until you give some away.

*"God pours His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us." (Romans 5:5)*

And God's love is one of those things that you cannot keep without giving it away. And the more you give away, the more you will have. That's the economy of heaven! Write that down somewhere. Better yet, put that into daily practice.

If you see someone without a smile, give him yours!

Perhaps you can tell, I've had an awakening. I still celebrate the Lord and His goodness every day. But, now, I do it by sharing, not by hoarding.

## **Awakening**

Those four lepers had a similar awakening.

2 Kings 7:9-11

*<sup>9</sup> Finally, they said to each other, "This is not right. This is a day of good news, and we aren't sharing it with anyone! If we wait until morning, some calamity will certainly fall upon us. Come on, let's go back and tell the people at the palace."*

*<sup>10</sup> So they went back to the city and told the gatekeepers what had happened. "We went out to the Aramean camp," they said, "and no one was there! The horses and donkeys were tethered and the tents were all in order, but there wasn't a single person around!" <sup>11</sup> Then the gatekeepers shouted the news to the people in the palace.*

Everybody who heard began to get happy. The city came alive!

Well, almost everybody. There are always some who have difficulty believing good news. Weighed down by fear and negativity, they hear it without really hearing it. They become the naysayers, pouring cold water on the faith of others. Some feel it is their duty to quench any flickering flame of hope, in the name of realism.

Jesus demonstrated a different way. He was described by Matthew with this quote from Isaiah's writings:

<sup>18</sup> *"Look at my Servant, whom I have chosen.*

*He is my Beloved, who pleases me.*

*I will put my Spirit upon him,*

*and he will proclaim justice to the nations.*

<sup>19</sup> *He will not fight or shout*

*or raise his voice in public.*

<sup>20</sup> *He will not crush the weakest reed*

*or put out a flickering candle.*

*Finally, he will cause justice to be victorious.*

<sup>21</sup> *And his name will be the hope*

*of all the world."*

(Matthew 12:18-21)

He will not crush the weakest reed or extinguish a flickering candle. Have you known people like that—so weak that they cannot stand up straight, always just flickering instead of burning brightly? It's easy to lose patience, to give up trying to encourage, to conclude that they only flicker at all because of you, so they might as well be extinguished. It seems to be their only serious intent: to fail.

2 Kings 7:12

<sup>12</sup> *The king got out of bed in the middle of the night and told his officers, "I know what has happened. The Arameans know we are starving, so they have left their camp and have hidden in the fields. They are expecting us to leave the city, and then they will take us alive and capture the city."*

**"Danger, Will Robinson!"**

Or, as the writer of the Proverbs expressed it, *"There's a lion on the road! Yes, I'm sure there's a lion out there! If I go outside, I might be killed!"* (Proverbs 26:13 and 22:13)

You'd better be careful! I know others who have recklessly believed and suffered for it. I've heard of people who thought they heard from God, but it didn't turn out as they expected. You'd better be careful!

Then there's the voice of reason. Couched in logic and caution, what seems wise may actually be hollow thinking. But God can deal with that...

Send the deacons to check it out. Go ahead, check it out. You'll find it is just as God said it would be. His words are true.

2 Kings 7:13-15

*<sup>13</sup> One of his officers replied, "We had better send out scouts to check into this. Let them take five of the remaining horses. If something happens to them, it will be no worse than if they stay here and die with the rest of us."*

*<sup>14</sup> So two chariots with horses were prepared, and the king sent scouts to see what had happened to the Aramean army. <sup>15</sup> They went all the way to the Jordan River, following a trail of clothing and equipment that the Arameans had thrown away in their mad rush to escape. The scouts returned and told the king about it.*

When the "reasonable" scouts began to proclaim the good news, too, the people were overcome with faith, and all heaven broke loose!

2 Kings 7:16-17

*<sup>16</sup> Then the people of Samaria rushed out and plundered the Aramean camp. So it was true that six quarts of choice flour were sold that day for one piece of silver, and twelve quarts of barley grain were sold for one piece of silver, just as the Lord had promised. <sup>17</sup> The king appointed (the same scoffing) officer to control the traffic at the gate, but he was knocked down and trampled to death as the people rushed out.*

*So everything happened exactly as the man of God had predicted when the king came to his house.*

## **Are You a Morning Person?**

Awakening comes to people at different speeds. It's not about who gets there first. It's about who brings others with them.

Don't just sit by the gates of the church, neither going backward nor forward. Get up and take new ground. Climb out of the boat and test the waters where Jesus is.

Don't seek to be a traffic controller at the gate. Traffic controllers are not happy people. They hate confusion and they hate messes, and are always trying to clean other people up for the Lord's sake.

You don't want just to hear about the abundant life; you want to live it. Seek to flow in the current of the Holy Spirit. Go where He leads you, pouring out the love and peace and joy that He's given you. Receive His bounty, only to turn around and give it away again.

Your breakthrough will surely come. God will revive His church again. The water of the Spirit will overflow the dam like Lake Oroville. But it won't destroy; it will make alive everyone who receives it.

Once you have tasted the love of God that is in Jesus Christ, you can be more than you think you are. You can do more than you think you can. You can go farther than you've ever been before.

*"If you are willing and obedient, you will eat from the best that the land has to offer." (Isaiah 1:19)*

In the name of Jesus Christ, take it from this former leper.