

## FOUR LIBERATING LEPERS - 2 KINGS 6:24 - 7:20

### Surviving Seemingly Impossible Situations #3

There was great anticipation that night in 1874 when the Hungarian Prince Paul went out into his horse stables. Prince Paul raised racing horses. He prided himself in the purity of his breeds. One of his mares was about to give birth to a new foal. It didn't matter how many colts Prince Paul had witnessed coming into this world, he always got excited. For with each one, he wondered, *maybe this will be the great champion that I have so desired.* The prince already had a name picked out for this colt- Kincsem meaning my fortune. But seldom was the Prince as disappointed as he was that night. For that knobby-kneed, spindly legged, short-necked mare that was born certainly couldn't be a champion. So disappointed was Prince Paul that he immediately determined that this colt must be removed from his stalls- she would be a poor influence on the other horses. So the Prince worked up a deal, selling several horses, and he threw in Kincsem to get her off his estate.

The new owner never paid much attention to Kincsem. He worked with his other race horses, but Kincsem just grew up on her own. And as she grew, the Prince's original suspicions seemed to be verified. Kincsem's proportions were just not right for a race horse. Especially her hindquarters appeared to be much too weak. But nobody was able to look into the heart of this growing mare.

In June of 1876, Kincsem finally got her chance. The other horse that the new owner had entered into a race had come down sick, and Kincsem was the only other 2 year old that he had available. It was almost like Kincsem reflected her owner's inferiority complex about her, for in these days there was no starting gate for the horses, the horses just all lined up on the starting line, and Kincsem wouldn't go up to stand with the other horses. It was as if she didn't feel that she was worthy. But when the starting gun fired and the other horses took off, Kincsem suddenly came to life. Quickly she caught the other horses, then she glided effortlessly right past them winning the race easily.

Race after race, the pattern was the same. No matter how hard her jockey tried, he could never overcome Kincsem's instinctive sense of inferiority, lingering back behind the other horses. But when the race started, every time Kincsem would catch and then pass the other racing stallions. The condition of the track didn't matter. Fast or muddy, Kincsem would always win. 54 major races. Never was Kincsem beaten. No other race horse in history has ever equaled that record. Kincsem is remembered today as the greatest racing horse that ever lived. And she never started one race without spotting the other horses several lengths. I wonder what Prince Paul of Hungary thought as he saw that horse that he didn't want, that ugly foal that he quickly discarded as a rejection, win race after race and become the greatest champion ever?

Sometimes in life, that which is discarded as worthless eventually becomes that which is most valuable. So it is in the text from the Scriptures that we would like to focus our attention on this morning. In the first millennium B.C., there was no more hopeless or helpless condition than that of leprosy. A leper had a terminal illness that was totally incurable. A leper was a hopeless person who was just waiting to die. Society had rejected the leper for its own protection. Lepers could not live with the general population because of the fear that they would contaminate the healthy. So lepers had to live in their own little communities, isolated from the mainstream, totally unable to communicate or contribute to the welfare of society. If a healthy person began to wander towards a leper colony by mistake, the leper was required by law to cry out "unclean, unclean" and to cover his face so that he would not infect the unsuspecting person with germs. Just think of how inferior lepers must have felt. With the depression of an incurable illness, with the obvious rejection of having been isolated from the mainstream of society, with the impossibility of ever contributing positively to the community where they once lived, with the continuous reminder of their nauseating condition being required by law to cry out "unclean" every time a normal person came near them, lepers must have felt like they were the lowest of the low in human society. And, frankly, most considered them to be just that. The attitude of most people was "why don't these lepers just die and get it over with. Then we won't have to see them around here anymore."

But ironically, it was 4 lepers who became the liberators for the capital city of Israel. These lepers saved a whole city of people from certain death.

During the past 3 Sunday mornings, we have been looking at responses to a seemingly impossible situation. We feel that a situation has become impossible in life when we see no apparent way of escape and when all of our resources are gone. And that is exactly what had happened to the citizens of Samaria in 2 Kings 6-7. Benhadad the king of Aram had brought his armies surrounding Israel's capital city cutting off any escape routes and all supplies coming to the city. After months of siege, the food supplies in Samaria had dwindled to the point where donkey's heads and pea pods and even bird droppings were selling for exorbitant prices, and people had even stooped to the place where they were cannibalizing their own children. Certainly, the situation had become hopeless. Death appeared imminent for everyone.

But it was in this seemingly impossible situation that 4 lepers became heroes. Notice with me the steps that they took which allowed them to be liberators to the entire community.

1. First, these lepers recognized the utter hopelessness of their situation, and they admitted it.

#### READ 2 KINGS 7:3-4

2KI 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?"<sup>4</sup> 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."

The logic of these lepers is beautiful in its simplicity, isn't it? We are starving to death here outside of this city wall in our little community with no food. Soon, we will die. We then have only 2 alternatives to staying here and dying. If we try to force our way back into the city where we would be more safe from the Aramaen army, the Jewish citizens might kill us because we are lepers. But even if they let us live, we will soon die of starvation there as well because they have no more food than we have. Or, we can go out to the camp of the Aramaen soldiers and face them, begging them for food. They probably will kill us, but what do we have to lose? We are going to die anyway. And maybe, just maybe, they will give us some food.

The Aramaen army represented the biggest fear to these 4 lepers. That enemy was the cause of all of their problems. It was because of the Aramaens that they were hungry, for the siege had brought on the famine. But these 4 lepers had come to the place where they recognized their helpless state to the point where they were finally willing to face their fears- walk right into that enemy camp.

It is a most difficult step to be willing to face the ultimate fears that we have in life. Many people never do come to this place. The fear of total isolation, the fear of complete failure, the fear of physical death, these are fears that few people are ever willing to face squarely. And there is the greatest fear that comparatively few are willing to come face to face with- and that is the fear of eternal death. What is going to happen to us after we die? Where are we going to spend our eternity? Most people spend their entire lives running from that fear. Most people just try to convince themselves that they are not that bad, that if there is a heaven and a hell, they are probably in the top 50th percentile and they will hopefully make it to heaven. Most people try to convince themselves that if they just do enough good deeds in life, they will have a chance. But the nagging fear still lingers in the back of their minds.

It is only as we come to end of ourselves spiritually, recognizing that there is nothing that we can do in our own strength to earn or merit eternal life that we are then in a position to gain it. For the Bible tells us that it is not by works of righteousness that we have done that we gain an eternal home in heaven (Titus 3:5). The Bible reminds us that it is by grace alone that we are saved, not of works that we do (Eph. 2:8,9). If we are going to have confidence concerning our eternal home, we must first of all come to the place where we are willing to admit our spiritual helplessness, our inability to save ourselves. We must face this fear that we would otherwise naturally run from.

2. But let's now move to the second step that the lepers took. They eagerly accepted the life-giving provision that they found when they reached the camp. [READ 2 KINGS 7:8](#)

2KI 7:8 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.

What unspeakable joy this must have been for these lepers. We can only imagine the conversation they had on their way to the camp, for realistically speaking, they seemed to be walking into a certain death trap. Why would Aramaen soldiers take pity on 4 hungry lepers and give them any food? They wouldn't have wanted any personal contact with these men out of fear of contaminating themselves. The natural course of events would have been for the soldiers to kill these lepers, put them out of their misery without feeling any guilt whatsoever. After all, the lepers were the ones who had broken the law in approaching a normal population sight- they deserved to die. And so we can only imagine the conversation of these lepers as they approached what they must have considered to be certain death.

But then the most amazing thing happened. As they got near to the Aramaen camp, they would have undoubtedly noticed that there were no guards, no sentries posted on the camp outskirts. That was strange. And then as they walked into the camp, they would have been awestruck at the deafening silence. No soldiers around at all. And the disheveled condition of the camp would have struck them as well. Usually, a military camp was run with order. But this one was different. Clothing, weapons, other materials strewn all over the place. What a mess. How strange.

But then these lepers would have seen their first food. And I'm sure that when they did, all other questions vanished temporarily from their minds. I'm sure that they would have attacked that food and devoured it in huge bites. And then more food, and more food. I'm sure that they would have eaten until they couldn't hold anymore. What a glorious prospect. In their wildest dreams they could never have imagined a scene such as this. As much food as they wanted, and more.

I'm sure that when their appetites were sated, they then began to look at all of the other food that was around them. And then they would have seen the gold and silver and clothing and other valuable articles. And then the carting began. Taking the food, and the clothing, and the gold and the silver, and hiding it. In a frenzy, for they could not be sure how much time they had. This was just too good to be true.

It is not even worth serious consideration thinking that the lepers could have come to the camp, seen all of the life-giving provisions there for the taking, and then turned away from them. But it is amazing that this happens all the time today in the spiritual realm. Every day, people who are helplessly bound for an eternity apart from God are presented with the life-saving claims of Jesus Christ. They are told of God's decision to give his one and only son to redeem the human race from sin. They are made aware of Christ's unique birth and sinless life. And then they hear of the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary for the

sins of mankind, and of God's gracious invitation that anyone who will admit their sinful condition and receive Jesus Christ into their lives will be given an unconditional pardon from their sins. They can become a member of God's own family. They can be a recipient of the very presence of God himself in their lives as the Holy Spirit will then accept the invitation to make his dwelling with them. They can be assured of heaven as their eternal home. Every day, people are presented with this good news or gospel that does sound too good to be true. It is not unlike that which the lepers experienced as they walked into this deserted enemy camp. But amazingly, every day the majority of people who hear the good news of eternal life through Jesus Christ reject it, and refuse to accept it into their lives.

We would stand speechless if this story in the Bible ended with the lepers walking away from these life-saving provisions without partaking of them, yet that same scenario continues every day in our world in the spiritual realm. And the consequences are far more serious, for not just physical death but eternal life or death hangs in the balance.

Truly, this story would be one of the most encouraging stories in the Bible if it ended right here. 4 lepers recognizing their hopeless condition, being willing to face their fears and finding their courage rewarded with bountiful food and clothing and gold and silver. 4 lepers who had no hope in the world who were delivered from a seemingly impossible situation in their lives.

3. But the story does not end here. These lepers realized something that was very important. They realized that their good fortune gave to them a responsibility. Notice their conversation with me.

READ 2 KINGS 7:9-11.

2KI 7:9 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."

2KI 7:10 So they went and called out to the city gatekeepers and told them, "We went into the Aramaen 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."<sup>11</sup> The gatekeepers shouted the news, and it was reported within the palace.

Many in the world would say that these lepers were fools. Here they had this bonanza all to themselves. Why share it with anyone else? Many would think this way because that is the way many in the world around us live.

But these lepers recognized a moral obligation that they had. They had received this bountiful blessing from God. They had not been deserving of it. There was nothing that they had done to merit it. God had just given it to them. Now they recognized the fact that they had been placed in a position where they could be the liberators of an entire city, and they had a moral obligation to share their good news with the others in Samaria who were starving. The citizens might believe them or might not. It is interesting

that the king almost lost his city through his own skepticism. *It's a trap*, he thought. *The Aramaen army is in ambush waiting for us to leave the fortified walls of the city.* It was only as his advisors convinced him that they had absolutely nothing to lose in researching this newfound prospect. But isn't it interesting that he had his scouts follow the Aramaen army all the way to the Jordan River in order to be sure that they actually had left, before he allowed the provisions to be brought to the city. It is true that many will be skeptical, many will not believe the good news. But that was not the leper's responsibility. We don't find them trying to convince the king of the free provisions in this passage. No, their obligation was simply to tell their good fortune to those who were so desperately in need. And they did. They went to the city walls and told the sentries who were on duty.

These lepers could have surely rationalized hording all of these provisions for themselves. After all they had found these provisions for themselves. And they were the rejects from society. What had the citizens of Samaria done for them? They had rejected them and isolated them and made them to live all alone by themselves. This would be a wonderful way to get back at the citizens. What an irony- that those who rejected the lepers would die before those who had the leprosy.

But the lepers never thought along these lines. They were so overwhelmed with the good fortune that had befallen them, that they recognized the moral obligation that they had to share their bounty.

Now the application here is so clear that I needn't belabor it. God has commanded his children to share the good news of the gospel with others who are not as yet a part of his family. Some of the last words of Jesus Christ addressed this responsibility. *Go ye into all the world and make disciples of every person.* We need to realize that this great commission that God has given to us is not an option for us who are believers. We have been commanded by Christ to share the good news. And we have a moral obligation to share the good news of the gospel with others. If we neglect this moral obligation, we do it to our own detriment.

There are 2 major bodies of water that form the eastern border of the nation of Israel joined by the Jordan River. The body in the northern part of Israel is called the Sea of Galilee. It is one of the most beautiful, vibrant lakes that I have ever seen in my life. The Sea of Galilee is the major source of fresh water for the entire nation of Israel. It is surrounded by verdant farmland. There are thriving cities on its border. Fishing boats continue today to be found all around it with fishermen continuing to make their living from Galilee's abundance just as they have for thousands of years. This lake has been a source of life to millions upon millions of people down through the millennia.

The Dead Sea in the southern part of Israel is completely different. The terrain around it is dry and parched. There is no life. There are no cities on its border. There are no fishing boats to be found

anywhere because there is nothing living in this body of water – that’s why it is called the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is 9 times saltier than the ocean water of the Mediterranean Sea. Its mineral content is so concentrated that you literally can’t sink in it. The Dead Sea is fun to float around in because of the novelty of it, but it is practically good for nothing in sustaining life. And you’d better not shave the day you swim in it or your skin will burn like an iron.

What’s the difference between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea just 60 or so miles to its south? It’s not the water because the very same water that is in the Dead Sea came from the Sea of Galilee. The Dead Sea receives almost no rain. Basically all the water that is in the Dead Sea comes from the Sea of Galilee via the Jordan River. So why is the Sea of Galilee so vibrant and full of life and the Dead Sea so barren?

The major difference between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea is found in the fact that the Sea of Galilee not only receives the fresh waters from the snow melting on Mount Herman and the springs of Hula and Caesarea Philippi, but the Sea of Galilee also allows those fresh waters to flow through to the Jordan River and on down to the south. The land bordering the Dead Sea is the lowest dry land on the face of the earth – 1,378 feet below sea level. Because water flows downstream, when the water reaches the Dead Sea there is no place else for it to go. So the water evaporates leaving behind salt and minerals in such concentration that nothing can live there. The Dead Sea takes and takes and takes, but it never gives out a thing.

The quickest way for a person to become a stagnant, self-centered, bitter, unhappy individual is for that person to receive and receive blessings but never to pass those blessings on to anyone else. God never designed for us to be the final repository of all of his blessings. Rather God designed for us to be channels of his blessings to others. As we become a conduit of God’s blessings to others, not only are they blessed by our generosity, but we also are filled with life, joy and fulfillment.

The lepers understood this principle. Yes, they might have been the lowest of the low on society’s depth chart, but they knew the joy and fulfillment of saving an entire city because they understood the principle that God gives us blessings so that we might have the privilege of passing them on to others.

Do you understand that principle in your life? If you do you know the joy and fulfillment of being a channel of God’s blessing.