DONKEY FOR DINNER - 2 KINGS 6:24-7:20

Surviving Seemingly Impossible Situations #1

About 20 miles south of the home we lived in for 18 years on the east side of the state is a small city called Monroe. We drove through this town every time we traveled south to Florida or east to see Sandy's folks out in New York. As you enter Monroe, you are greeted with a large sign signifying Monroe as the hometown of General George Custer. After seeing that sign a number of times, my curiosity was aroused to do some study refreshing my memory as to the historic details of that tragic slaughter and this battle remains interesting to me even to this day. History books tell us of General Custer leading his 7th cavalry into the ambush by the Little Bighorn River in Montana where 3,000 Sioux and Cheyenne Indians patiently waited just 9 days before our nation celebrated its centennial. The history books also tell us of the complete victory of the Indians, that this was the single greatest defeat of the white soldier by an Indian army in all of American history. What the history books often do not mention is the one who did not die, the one who survived Custer's last stand.

As the relief soldiers arrived too late to help the 7th cavalry, they could only gasp in horror at the carnage on the battlefield. Hundreds of mutilated bodies, debris scattered all over the place, and the deafening silence. But then, one of the bodies moved. Amid all of that death, there was a faint flicker of life. As one of the relief soldiers rushed to assist the survivor, he could not help but notice all of the bullet and arrow wounds. 12 in all. Most in the neck and the body. But amazingly, no vital organ had been hit or critically damaged. Lt. Henry Nowland ordered first aid. First, the bleeding must be stopped. After that was accomplished, the patient must be moved. The 15 mile trip to the steamboat at the mouth of the Little Big Horn River was touch and go. But the patient was still alive boarding the steamboat. Now the trip to Fort Bismarck must be made. The steamboat made the journey breaking a speed record in 51 hours. And every minute, full attention on board was given to this sole army survivor of Custer's last stand. From Fort Bismarck, the patient was transported to Fort Abraham Lincoln, the headquarters of the 7th cavalry, where even better medical attention could be administered. And everywhere the patient went, he was hailed as a hero. The only one to survive the battle.

It took him almost a year to completely recover. Upon his recovery, this military hero lived out the remainder of his life fully supported by a generous military pension. And he was in constant demand. Whenever there was a military ceremony, this survivor would be called upon to be present. And he would inevitably receive the loudest and longest cheers from the crowds. You would think that the funeral of this hero would have really been something when he finally died of natural causes in November of 1891. But the

army decided not to give this celebrity just a funeral. No, they decided to stuff him and mount him and put him on display where he remains to this day at the Museum of Kansas University. Stuff and mount the sole survivor of the battle of Little Big Horn? That's right. For the only member of the U.S. 7th cavalry to survive Custer's last stand was one of the soldier's horses, a light bay steed named Comanche.

Why would such a big deal be made out of a horse who survived a battle? Why would such manpower and time and effort be made to sustain his life? Why would the steam engines be pressed to the point of explosion to get him to medical help in record time? Why would the army give him a pension to live on? Why would he be stuffed and mounted and be put on display in a museum? Is it not because he lived through what was considered to be an impossible situation. So Comanche became a symbol to our nation. If this horse could survive the impossible situation of Custer's last stand, then maybe, just maybe, we can survive the impossible situations that we face in life as well.

I would like to begin a 3 part series this morning on the subject of surviving seemingly impossible situations. And we are going to look at this subject through the eyes of Elisha, the prophet of God, as he faced one of the truly seemingly impossible situations in all of human history. The city of Samaria was surrounded by the Syrian army. Ben Hadad, the king of Aram or Syria, had laid siege to the city of Samaria. A siege occurred when an army surrounding a city cutting off all supplies. Nobody could enter or exit the city so all the people in the city would slowly starve to death as the city ran out of food. Ben Hadad was a very powerful king in these days. The Aramaen Army was the most powerful in all of the Middle East. There was no hope that the comparatively few fighting men in the city of Samaria could break through the vast Syrian army at this time that was surrounding their city. And so successful had the Aramaen Army been at cutting off supplies to Samaria that the citizens were indeed starving from famine. I mean, Comanche himself could not have hoped to survive this impossible situation for he would have already been eaten. The citizens of Samaria had already consumed all of the flocks and herds, they had already finished off the meat of the animals of burden, they were down now to donkey's heads and seed pods. This was the end of the line. And if you have a KJV Bible with you this morning, you already know that the Hebrew word for seed pod can also be translated dove's dung, so there is some confusion among translators as to what they exactly had left to eat. How would you like to come home from work and ask your wife "what's for dinner, honey?" only to have her set a plate before you with some bird droppings on it?

We are talking the end of the road here. No hope for the future. A seemingly impossible situation. No means of defense, no food, no hope at all.

How can a person face a seemingly impossible situation successfully? I see 3 responses to this seemingly impossible situation in this passage. The first, we could call the **natural response**- how people

respond naturally to seemingly impossible situations. We want to look at this natural response this morning as we see how 2 women, how an ungodly king and how his chief officer responded to this seemingly impossible situation. Then, next week the Lord willing, we want to move on to see a **supernatural** response to a seemingly impossible situation. For in the midst of all of this panic and hopelessness, there is a prophet of God named Elisha. His situation is just as hopeless as everyone else's, yet he responds in such a different manner. He represents the godly response for us. And then finally, 2 weeks from now we want to look at the response of 4 ambassadors who lived outside the city gate. 4 lepers, 4 rejects from society- their response in this seemingly impossible situation has a message to teach us as well.

But now notice with me this morning the natural responses to this seemingly impossible situation.

1. The first response we see in 2 anonymous women who are introduced to us- and they exemplify the response of **selfishness**. Their response could be summed up in the motto "look out for number 1".

<u>READ 2 KINGS 6:24-29</u>

2KI 6:24 Some time later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram mobilized his entire army and marched up and laid siege
to Samaria. 25 There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey's head sold for
eighty shekels of silver, and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for five shekels.

2KI 6:26 As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him, "Help me, my lord the
king!"
2KI 6:27 The king replied, "If the LORD does not help you, where can I get help for you? From the
threshing floor? From the winepress?" 28 Then he asked her, "What's the matter?"
She answered, "This woman said to me, `Give up your son so we may eat him today, and tomorrow we'll
eat my son.' 29 So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, `Give up your son so we may eat
him,' but she had hidden him."

Now we have a pitiful situation here. 2 mothers are introduced to us. Happily, for their families' sake, their names are not given. But their eyes had become so blinded by the hopelessness of their seemingly impossible situation that they had made an almost unthinkable deal with each other. Driven by their hunger, they had agreed to eat the one mother's child one day and the other mother's child the next day. Only a mother could know how twisted and warped their minds must have become to reach this state. They probably had been overjoyed with the news that they were going to bear a child for such news was considered the ultimate blessing during these days. And then they had born the discomfort of the 9 months of pregnancy because they were looking forward to the joy of holding their child in their arms. And then the time of delivery came. But the pain and agony, as severe as it was, was endured as part of the life-giving process. What could possibly bring these mothers to the place where they would be willing to eat their own

children, their own flesh and blood? After having journeyed to death's door in their delivery of these sons, what could have tempted them to turn on them in such a perverted fashion as this? These mothers had become blinded by the seemingly impossible situation that surrounded them. They had lost all hope. And in their despair, complete and total selfishness had overcome them.

Now I am sure that they rationalized this agreement that they had made with each other. If they would not have thought it to be a reasonable response at the time, the one mother certainly would never have approached the king himself to ask him to intercede on her behalf. I'm sure that they reasoned that they were all going to die soon of starvation anyway, and it would be impossible for the young children to live without the mothers, so it was best for the children to be sacrificed so that the mothers would at least have a better chance. But the fact remains that they were blinded by the circumstances surrounding them that they considered to be insurmountable. They did not see the horror of what they were doing. They did not see the selfishness of their behavior. They did not realize that if they would have just waited one more day, they would be delivered from their seemingly impossible plight.

Selfishness- this is a natural response in a seemingly impossible situation.

2. But notice a second natural response with me. This is looking for someone to **blame**. Here is a seemingly impossible situation. Someone must be to blame for this. The king of Israel illustrates this response.

<u>READ 2 KINGS 6:30,31</u>

2KI 6:30 When the king heard the woman's words, he tore his robes. As he went along the wall, the people looked, and there, underneath, he had sackcloth on his body. 31 He said, "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today!"

It is a natural response to blame someone or something for situations that are beyond our control. It doesn't matter that the casting of blame accomplishes nothing- it doesn't help the situation at all. In fact, if anything, this drive to blame someone or something makes the situation worse. But in the stress of facing the seemingly impossible situation, the temptation to blame is too great. Someone or something must be blamed for this situation.

Now I want you to notice 2 points about the king's blaming here. First, note with me that he didn't blame himself. Now this is important to note. For even though the king is not named in this passage, we know from the surrounding context that the king of Israel was Joram at this time (2 Kings 3:1). Joram was the son of Ahab and Jezebel. Of Joram, it is recorded "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Kings 3:2). Now it is true that Joram wasn't as bad as his parents. But he was still a very wicked king. Yet it never

dawned on him that Benhadad's sieging of his city could be a result of his own sinfulness or his own lack of leadership as king. After all, kings in these days were responsible to defend their subjects. This was the number 1 duty on their job description. They were to make sure they had a strong army to defend their subjects. Obviously, Joram had not done a good job maintaining a strong army as king. But he didn't blame himself for the predicament of his city, did he?

No, Joram blamed Elisha. Now Elisha is a prophet of God. Elisha is just sitting in his own home, minding his own business. But Elisha is to blame for this seemingly impossible situation. And to further demonstrate the irrationality of Joram's accusations, we need only look at the context of this passage, especially the middle part of chapter 6 to see that Elisha represented the only possible hope that Joram had. 2 Kings 6:8-23 tells yet another remarkable story. Benhadad, king of Aram, was being thwarted in his military plans. It was as if there was a leak, a snitch, a spy among his close advisors. For whenever Benhadad planned a move against Israel, the armies of Israel were always ready for it. Finally, Benhadad called his advisors together and accused them of leaking information. No, they pleaded. It is the prophet Elisha. He receives word of your plans directly from God and tells Joram, the king of Israel, warning him. Well, Benhadad devised a plan to take care of Elisha. He would bring his great army against this single prophet of God. It was somewhat of an overkill, to be sure. But Benhadad marched his army down and surrounded Elisha's house. Elisha's servant was petrified. "Oh, my Lord, what shall we do?" he exclaimed to Elisha (2 Kings 6:15). But Elisha was not bothered, for his faith in God remained strong. And Elisha at that time simply prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of his servant. As Elisha's servant's spiritual eyes were opened, he saw the angelic army that was all around them protecting them from evil (6:17). It was then that God did a remarkable thing. As Benhadad lead his troops down to harm Elisha, God struck the entire army of the Aramaens with blindness so that they could not navigate, they could not see where they were or where they were going. And then, another amazing thing happened. "Elisha told them, This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for. And he led them to Samaria. After they entered the city, Elisha said, Lord, open the eyes of these men so they can see. Then the Lord opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria." (2 Kings 6:19,20)

Now this is the story that immediately precedes our text for this morning. And while it is true that Elisha told Joram to let the Syrian army go back home when the king of Israel asked him what they should do, so Joram's anger with Elisha here in the midst of this siege that followed some time later could have been triggered by the thought "if Elisha would have let me kill Benhadad, we wouldn't be in this mess now", it is even more true that Joram should have realized that Elisha represented the only hope that he or his people had at this time. After all, Elisha had lead an entire Syrian army into his hands after they had been stricken

with blindness. You would think that Joram would be at Elisha's door pleading with him to strike them blind again so that the city of Samaria could be saved. But no, Joram is blaming Elisha, the only one who really could help him. And we all realize that God ultimately was the source of Joram's blame, for Elisha was merely a prophet representing God.

In seemingly impossible situations, it is natural to look for someone or something to blame. Blaming seldom does any good, but that doesn't matter. Someone or something must be to blame. And interestingly, the blame usually does not end up on the responsible source. Usually some innocent source or even God himself ends up getting the blame. The situation is hopeless, it is impossible- God must be to blame for it.

3. But there is 3rd response that we must look at, and we see this response in the life Joram's chief officer. This is the response of **unbelief**. A failure to trust in God and believe that He is able to bring deliverance to us.

<u>READ 2 KINGS 7:1,2</u>

2KI 7:1 Elisha said, "Hear the word of the LORD. This is what the LORD says: About this time tomorrow, a seah of flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria."

2KI 7:2 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?"

Isn't this amazing? Here the only man in the city who had any kind of a track record of having the ability to help in a seemingly impossible situation offers his help, and the King's chief officer refuses the help even though he has no place else to turn. He refuses to believe. I mean, what does he have to lose? Why not at least wait another day and see if Elisha's word would come true before passing judgment? But no, the natural response was a negative one. It will never work. You are telling a lie. Your word cannot come true. And as we will see in more detail next week, this officer faced the judgment of his unbelief. He saw Elisha's words come to pass but he never partook of the blessing. He saw the grain outside the city walls, but he was trampled in the crowds rushing through the gates.

Now in conclusion, I would like to draw some applications from this passage to our lives today. We are going to do much more of this next week as we look at the godly response of Elisha to this seemingly impossible situation, but we must not wait until next week to see some of the applications of these truths. And let me apply some of these truths by looking with you at 2 seemingly impossible situations.

a. the first is the spiritual state that we are born in as we come into this world. The Bible says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23). We are sinners because we are born

with a sinful nature; and we are sinners because we have all willfully sinned against God. And this places us in a seemingly impossible situation. We all have incurred a debt that we cannot possibly pay. We have sinned against a holy and righteous God. How could he ever let sinners into his heaven to live with him for all eternity?

The natural response to this seemingly impossible situation is to live selfishly. To look out for number 1. To eat, drink and be merry. To live with gusto for we only go around once in life. To think of ourselves rather than thinking of God.

The natural response to this seemingly impossible situation is to cast blame for our sins. Not on ourselves, of course, even though we are the ones who have sinned but on everyone and everything else that we can think of. Our society corrupts us, our peer group tempts us, the Devil made me do it and ultimately God gets the blame, because it is His perfect standard that causes us to fall short.

The natural response to this seemingly impossible situation is to doubt the provision that God has made for our sin in unbelief. The only one who could possible remedy the impossible situation that we are in when we are born into sin has provided a way of escape. God became a man. Jesus Christ, the son of God, came into this world to pay the penalty for our sins upon the cross of Calvary. Yet, amazingly, even though the only one who could possibly provide a way of escape from our impossible situation has done so, many today won't believe it. And like this officer, they will suffer the consequences of their unbelief. They see the blessing of God, but they will not partake of it. There is a better way. Trust in God. Accept Jesus Christ into your life. Become a member of God's own family today.

b. But even for Christians, even for those who are already a member of God's family, the temptation still remains to face seemingly impossible situations in the flesh. When we are totally surrounded by the circumstances of life with no plan B or C left, and when all of our resources are gone, we seem to have no strength left, how do we respond? Do we decide to live selfishly, looking out for only our own interests, forgetting that God has a purpose in this situation that he wants to fulfill for His glory? Do we spend our time finding something or someone to blame? Casting blame seldom does any constructive good. Or do we doubt God's promises and His word to us? God has promised that he will never allow us to be put in a corner where there is no way of escape. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." That is God's promise to you found in 1 Corinthians 10:13. Do you believe it? Trust in God and allow him to provide a miraculous escape for you.