

## 2 Kings 6:24-7:20 – The Good News of God’s Salvation

### Introduction

It’s been just over two months now since the Afghanistan government collapsed and the Taliban officially took control of the country. This was a moment of total desperation for many Afghani citizens fearful for their lives and longing for rescue.

And the scenes from this moment were *truly* distressing.

The world watched on in horror as video emerged of Afghani citizens literally clinging to the side of a US air craft as it was taking off. When you’re at that level of desperation, you will do almost anything to escape and survive.

Now, while many were rescued via the biggest airlift in US history, the fact is that this rescue mission ended with many others left to fend for themselves. This moment demonstrated the limitations of even the most powerful nation on earth to fully save a desperate people in real danger. Most of us watching on wished more could have been done and more people saved.

In our passage today we see the kind of rescue we long for. God saves an entire desperate populace from the threat from an enemy force. But this passage does more than just give us a good rescue story. The good news of God’s rescue here points us forward to the greater news of His rescue of people today – a rescue from our sin, which comes through Jesus Christ. So, what we’ll do is look at this gripping story in four parts (The desperation, the promise, the good news and the warning) and as we do that, we’ll think about what this means for us in light of Jesus.

### 1. Unthinkable Desperation.

First, let’s think about the unthinkable desperation of this passage.

Two weeks ago we looked at the passage immediately prior to this one. And you might remember that it finished with a scene of eating and drinking in the capital of Israel – Samaria (6:23). It was a moment of peace and joy in which Israel and Aram put aside hostilities and feasted together within the city gates.

Everything has changed by this point in time.

Peace has turned to conflict. Joy to desperation. And the days of feasting are but a dim memory for the desperate Israelites trapped inside their capital city of Samaria. Aram has laid siege and cut off all supplies to these people. You see it there in verse 24-25:

*<sup>24</sup> Some time later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram mobilized his entire army and marched up and laid siege to Samaria. <sup>25</sup> There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey’s head sold for eighty shekels<sup>[a]</sup> of silver, and a quarter of a cab<sup>[a]</sup> of seed pods<sup>[a]</sup> for five shekels.<sup>[a]</sup>*

We took the kids out to get a soft-serve cone from maccas a couple of nights ago – And I was shocked that a cone is going to 70 cents now. For ages it was 30! We like to grumble about the price inflation don’t we? Well spare a thought for the price inflation that was going on in Samaria. The average wage for an Israelite at this time would have been in the area of 1 shekel per month. Which means, a stinking old donkey’s head, was the price of 6 and half years, worth of wages! Imagine that, your house deposit gone on a donkey’s head! And keep in mind that eating a donkey was actually

unlawful for Israelite people. It was not kosher according to Lev 11:3-8. All of which paints a picture of desperation within a famine.

But the desperation doesn't stop there does it? The picture goes from shocking to the downright unimaginable.

As the king of Israel walks along the city walls, a woman sees him and cries out, verse 26:

*"Help me, my lord the king!"*

It's kind of like that scene in Titanic, where a desperate mother begs the captain for help as the ship is sinking. He looks at her, registers her panic and then just walks on... He knows all hope is lost, there's nothing he can do.

The king of Israel is like this captain here. He's lost all hope, he's got nothing to offer. Verse 27:

*"If the LORD does not help you, where can I get help for you? From the threshing floor? From the winepress?"*

But, unlike the captain in the movie Titanic, he is at least willing to ask what the matter is in verse 28. And what comes next is perhaps one of the most bone-chilling replies in the Bible:

*She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give up your son so we may eat him today, and tomorrow we'll eat my son.'"<sup>29</sup> 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."*

It's an unimaginably horrific picture of human desperation isn't it?

So, what should we do with such a confronting picture of human desperation? What would you do if you came across it in your daily bible reading?

When we come to confronting passages like this, it's helpful not simply to react to *what* is said, but to *reflect* on why it is said.

It's a bit like if you were driving along and in the distance you saw this image [of a gory eye] on a billboard. Reaction without reflection will lead you to simply screw up your nose and look away as you drive past. Reaction *with* reflection, will lead to you take a closer look, read the subtext and realise it's a good warning against the dangers of blindness that come with smoking.

If we only react, but don't reflect we may miss a helpful message that God has for us.. And we might also come to incorrect conclusions, which seems to happen with the King of Israel.

He simply reacts with anger at God, believing this to be a cruel act of divine punishment by a God who does not care. That's why his first response is to rush with his officer to Elisha's house so that he can cut God out of his life by cutting off the head of his prophet. That's why he spits out the words of verse 33:

*"This disaster is from the LORD. Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?"*

But God does not simply want us to react to the what, but reflect on the why.

If we reflect, we'll start to consider the fact that the narrator of this passage could have actually chosen all sorts of atrocities to speak about, that I'm sure were happening within the city walls of Samaria at this point.. But he decides to focus his attention squarely on this one? Why?

Well, he does this to let us know that what is happening is not random, nor the result of a vindictive and uncaring God as the king thought. He speaks of this scene with the mothers to let us know that this an act of just judgment for their sin. A judgment that God had lovingly warned would come to them should they reject Him, worship idols and commit all kinds of evil and oppression. This particular image of siege, famine and cannibalism was laid out in Deut 28:

*<sup>53</sup> Because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the LORD your God has given you.*

The extended words of Deuteronomy 28 mirror almost exactly the graphic situation we are presented with in 2 kings 6. We've seen over the course of 1 and 2 kings how Israel under the leadership of her kings had repeatedly rebelled against God and now they were feeling the consequences, which they had been warned about but had ignored.

Like the eyeball on the billboard these confronting verses give us an uncomfortable message *we* need to hear. They tell us that we can't reject God and think everything will be okay. They tell us that *sin* leaves people impoverished, desperate, and helpless!

But the real impoverishment of sin is not actually material but spiritual! Israel was spiritually desperate long before they were materially desperate in this famine. They had cut themselves off from the God who gives life and eternal hope.

And that spiritual desperation (which lies at the heart of this awful scene) is as true for us as it was for Israel.

Because, like Israel, we've all got hearts that are prone to rejecting God, mistreating others and living life according to our own moral code that so often is weighted towards ourselves. This is why God speaks of humanity as being "dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph 2) A people who stand condemned and deserve God's wrath... You can't get a more desperate description than being dead!

You don't have to be eating a donkey's head to be desperate in God's eyes... Sin makes you desperate. This is why Jesus refers to us as the sick who need a doctor – that is, people who need him to heal us, by removing our sin, as a surgeon removes a cancerous tumour.

I say in our CE course, before you can fully appreciate and understand the good news of God's salvation, you *have* to first understand the bad news of human sin. The more you get how spiritually desperate you are, the more you will get how much you need Jesus.

## **2. The huge promise.**

Thankfully, God does not leave desperate people without hope. He comes to them with a huge promise of salvation. Which is our second point.

Remember, these people are in total desperation – surrounded by an enemy force they were literally starving to death. People were spending their life savings on a donkey's head and resorting to unthinkable means of survival.

But then comes the word of the Lord (7:1) and everything changes! This passage suddenly moves from desperation to hope. Look at verse 1:

*7 Elisha replied, "Hear the word of the LORD. This is what the LORD says: About this time tomorrow, a seah<sup>a</sup> of the finest flour will sell for a shekel<sup>b</sup> and two seahs<sup>c</sup> of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria."*

"You may have nothing now, but you will have all you need by tomorrow".

This promise huge and unthinkably good... But what is the first response we see? Unbelief. The king of Israel's officer who is at the door of Elisha's house refuses to believe and let's everyone know it.

*<sup>2</sup> 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?"*

In this guys mind, there are some things that even God Himself can't pull off:

*"You will see it with your own eyes," answered Elisha, "but you will not eat any of it!"*

Now, we'll come to this guy's unbelief soon, but right now I just want us to pause and reflect a little on what this huge promise says about our God.

This promise to the desperate people of Israel says that God is incredibly gracious and compassionate.

Remember, the people God promises to save here are the same people who have repeatedly sinned against Him. What they deserve is God's justice for their sin, but what God promises them is mercy.

It's a bit like this. Imagine your real estate agent had to come over to a routine inspection and what she finds is an absolute bomb site... The yard's a mess, but the inside the house is worse. The kitchen is filthy. The floor boards are scratched. The furniture the landlord generously left for you is now broken, scratched, and stained. And so, as the agent leaves she lets you know (in no uncertain terms) that you've completely broken the less agreement, that the owner will be outraged and that you should expect to receive an eviction notice by the next day.

The next morning you wake up feeling ashamed and desperate. And then the phone rings. It's the landlord. You panic and brace yourself for string of threats and swear words.. But instead, he speaks with a calm and kind voice to you.

He says: "I've heard about what you've done to my property. I'm ringing to tell you, that you don't have to worry, you are welcome to stay where you are. I'm going to send some guys around to help you clean up the property and I'll cover the cost of some new furniture to replace what has been wrecked. I've told the agent all about this, it's going to be okay.

Can you imagine a landlord who would be so gracious, and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love? That's a landlord worth knowing right? That's kind of grace that characterizes the God of this passage – the God of us!

The people of Israel had trashed the covenant relationship they were in with God. God had every right to simply wipe them out once and for all by this Aramean army which surrounded them. But instead, he looks upon their desperation with grace and compassion and promises them rescue. They can keep living there and he'll give them what they need.

God does not treat you like any ordinary landlord, who would cast you aside the minute you tick Him off. He's exceptional. He exceedingly gracious towards sinners, towards you.

God's shows you this in Jesus, God's son, who He willingly sends to us to die in our place. Jesus covers the cost of our debt of sin, by taking the punishment we deserve on himself at the cross. Paul speaks about God's crazy huge love to us in Romans 5:6-8:

*<sup>6</sup> You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless [desperate in our sin], Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

The huge promise we see in this passage, does not just speak about the hope of salvation, it speaks about the God of salvation – who you can have a relationship with through faith in Jesus.

### **3. The Good News**

But we move in this story from the huge promise to the good news of its fulfilment.

God acts in power to save His desperate people.

Did you notice that initially the people of Samaria aren't even aware that they *have* been saved! It's only when four guys with leprosy make the decision to take their chances with the enemy that the good news is first realised. Look at verses 3-4:

*<sup>3</sup> Now there were four men with leprosy<sup>u</sup> 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."*

These guys had been forced to stay outside of the city gates due to their contagious condition. But now was the time to reevaluate their position. And the logic is simple: Stay where we are = dead. Go inside the city = dead. Surrender to the enemy = likely dead – but maybe live? And so, they go with the best of three bad options. Verse 5:

*<sup>5</sup> At dusk they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans. When they reached the edge of the camp, no one was there, <sup>6</sup> 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!” <sup>7</sup> 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.*

God had caused the Arameans to flee, leaving *everything* behind. We’re talking tents, food and drink, live-stock, silver, gold, all sorts of goodies...

Now, can you imagine, the experience of these four guys as they head into the enemy camp? They think they are walking into a world of terror. But what they find is a world of treasure.

What would you do in their position? I think, if we’re honest, we’d probably do something similar to these guys. Verse 8 tells us that they rush into the first empty tent they see and start raiding the fridge, eating and drinking all the can! Can you imagine how good that would have been after weeks of living on next to nothing? Then they turn their attention to all the treasure in the camp. And it becomes like Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory – they don’t know which treat to grab next!! Verse 8:

*Then they took 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.*

From tent to tent they go, grabbing the goodies and hiding them away for themselves.

But then comes conscience time.

As they look at themselves, rushing about with arms full of treasure, they realize something is off about it all. Is it really right to be feasting and hoarding everything for ourselves when thousands of people behind those walls are literally eating each other to survive? Verse 9:

*<sup>9</sup> Then they said to each other, “What we’re doing is not 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.”*

“How can we keep this good news to ourselves while our brothers and sisters are perishing?” They rightly sense that a failure to pass on this news would be lovelessness and make them morally guilt-ridden.

And so they go and they tell. They tell the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper shouts it out to the city (Verse 10) and then finally even Israel’s king hears the news. And although he believes the whole thing is an ambush in the making, his scouts soon confirmed the truth of news (vv.13-15). And what happens next? Verse 16 tells us.

*<sup>16</sup> Then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a seah of the finest flour sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley sold for a shekel, as the LORD had said.*

This was a day of good news. God's promise to bring about a remarkable salvation had become a reality.

It's a glorious scene isn't it. But the truth is that we are living in an even greater day of good news. Our good news says that through that through Jesus's death and resurrection, God has caused our greatest enemy of sin and death to flee. We are now forgiven and accepted by God and will not face His judgment in Hell. Our good news says that sinners can now enjoy every spiritual blessing (Eph 1). God gives us His Spirit and will raise us up to everlasting life with Him.

But this passage challenges us. Are we keeping that good news for ourselves, when there is a world out there perishing? There are 62,000 people in Bundoora alone – all of them unthinkably desperate in God's eyes. I wonder how many of them have even heard of the good news we treasure so much.

I don't know about you, but this scene makes me ask the question: "am I as cut to the heart as the four lepers were on this question? We are living in a fractured society, in which our passions are raging about so many different things. And I understand that.. I feel it too... But do we get passionate about our fellow citizens desperate in their sin? Or is it getting sidelined in the moment?"

I'm part of a WhatsApp chat with other ministers, and for the past number of months, it's been filled with passionate talk of all things covid and restrictions. Then a couple of days ago one of the minister posted on the chat asking for prayer for a local woman in his town who had asked to learn more about God's existence and faith in Jesus. To which another minister wrote: "Nice reminder about what we're here for! Praying." It was a good reminder to all of us. Let's not let the good news of Jesus to be drowned out by the bad news of Covid.

Let's not let that happen to us. The way God's salvation comes to people today is by hearing about Jesus through *our* words.. Paul writes in Romans 10:

*"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*<sup>14</sup>

*<sup>14</sup> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom **they have not heard**? And how can they hear **without someone preaching to them**? <sup>15</sup> And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

The four guys in our passage may have had leprosy but to God they had beautiful feet.

What might it look like for you, this week, to be someone who has beautiful feet as you share the good news of Jesus? Maybe it will happen as you speak about your weekend with work colleagues, and instead of quickly passing over livestream church – you pause to give a highlight of one thing about Jesus you took away from the bible talk.

Maybe it will happen as you speak about your confidence in Jesus with a neighbour worried about the spread of Covid.

We aren't required to be bible scholars when it comes to sharing Jesus, we are just called to pass on the good news we have come to know for ourselves – that forgiveness and life come through Jesus.

Or to quote D.T Niles: “Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.” It was like that for the lepers, it’s like that for us.

#### 4. The note of warning

Finally, this passage leaves us on a note of warning.

You might have noticed, but this day of salvation is actually not good news for everyone in this picture. For the officer who had *refused* to believe in God’s power to save, this was a day of reckoning. You see it there in verse 17-20:

*<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> It happened as the man of God had said to the king: “About this time tomorrow, a seah of the finest flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.”*

*<sup>19</sup> The officer had said to the man of God, “Look, even if the LORD should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?” The man of God had replied, “You will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat any of it!” <sup>20</sup> And that is exactly what happened to him, for the people trampled him in the gateway, and he died.*

Did you notice the repetition there? The narrator makes it crystal clear that this officer’s trampling wasn’t random but a divine act of judgment:

- V.17 “he died, just as the man of God had foretold...”
- V.18 “it happened as the man of God has said...”
- V.20: “And that is exactly what happened to him...”

Do you hear the final note of warning in this passage? Just as God’s word of salvation will not fail, so His word of judgment against those who ignore him and refuse to believe in Him will not fail.

The way this passage ends for the people of Samaria and for the officer are world’s apart. They get treasure. He gets trampled. This is a loving warning not to be on the wrong side, of God’s faithful word.

The way you respond to the gracious promise of God’s salvation in Jesus will mean the difference between getting the eternal treasure of God’s Kingdom or eternal trampling of God’s judgment.

Don’t be like this officer, who heard about God’s promise to save, and simply rejected it. Believe God when He tells you that you are a desperate sinner, but can be saved through faith in Jesus. Now you may still have questions about all this. That’s okay. If your happy to, I’d love to talk more about the good news of Christianity with you. Just shoot us a message through our website.

But if you’re already a Christian, then I think this final note still acts as a loving warning to you - to *keep on* trusting in God’s promise to save you through Jesus and not to doubt that. The author of Hebrews tells us 3:12-14:

*<sup>12</sup> See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, **unbelieving** heart that turns away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. <sup>14</sup> We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.*

What is God’s provision against sin’s deceitfulness? It’s your brothers and sisters. It’s the encouragement to keep trusting in Jesus that comes from one another (v.13).

And this is good to remember as we think ahead to next week and the reopening of our building.



Online church has been a good provision in these times, but gathering physically provides such a richer opportunity to encourage each other.

So, if you can, make the effort to come and encourage one another as of next week – for most of you that will look like the returning to our regular 5pm service. For some of you that will mean attending the 3pm service for a time.

It's been a long time since we've been able to encourage one another in person, and some of you, I know have been left feeling pretty emotionally and spiritually depleted because of that. We need each other right now. We need to be encouraged to keep holding fast to the One who will save us completely from this world of sin, suffering and death.

### **Conclusion**

Last week we saw much of Melbourne celebrate Freedom-day – the day in which lockdown ended. Desperately lonely people able to see loved ones. Shaggy haired men, able to get a hair cut. And as of Friday, shop doors flung open once again.

Now, in many ways, all these things are good, and worth celebrating, but we have been shown here in this passage – that we have a greater reason to celebrate (whether in lockdown or not). We have the greater freedom. Freedom from sin and death. The freedom to enjoy God and live with Him forever. As we emerge out of lockdown, let's not get distracted by a lesser idea of freedom. Let's celebrate, the good news that God has saved us, who are desperate sinners, through Jesus Christ.