

8. Good news and bad news

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As many of you know I immigrated to the United States from Sweden in May 16th, 1981. When I came here with my wife Karen and a month and a half old daughter Michelle, everything was new to me. Coming from a small country South Korea, everything the Americans have was big to me – big country, big land, big cars, big houses, even a dog house was big, although it was only occupied by one single badly shaking chihuahua.

Even though I've learned English grammar in high school and college, it was not an easy transition from the classroom English to practical and conversational one. It seems that there are more exceptions in American English than the ones that following its rules.

One of the interesting things from American English was someone saying, "I have a good news and bad news." Then people answer, "I want the good news first." From where I grew up, you get the bad news out of the way first and make it up with the good news. But you weird Americans have to be different.

Let's face it, naturally we all like to hear good news over bad news anytime. However, depend on how a person take good news, it can become a blessing or it can become a stumbling block and eventually becomes bad news to that person.

This morning we are going to meet an officer of the Israel king who heard a good news, but he didn't believe what a faithful and merciful God did for them. Eventually it became a really bad news for him.

A. BLAME ON GOD

2 Kings 6:24-33 And it happened after this that Ben-Hadad king of Syria gathered all his army, and went up and besieged Samaria. 25 And there was a great famine in Samaria; and indeed they besieged it until a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and one-fourth of a kab of dove droppings for five shekels of silver. 26 Then, as the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried out to him, saying, "Help, my lord, O king!" 27 And he said, "If the Lord does not help you, where can I find help for you? From the threshing floor or from the winepress?" 28 Then the king said to her, "What is troubling you?" And she answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' 29 So we boiled my son, and ate him. And I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him'; but she has hidden her son." 30 Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he tore his clothes; and as he passed by on the wall, the people looked, and there underneath he had sackcloth on his body. 31 Then he said, "God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on him today." 32 But Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. And the king sent a man ahead of him, but before the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, "Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent someone to take away my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?" 33 And while he was still talking with them, there was the messenger, coming down to him; and then the king said, "Surely this calamity is from the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?"

The Syrians border raids stopped, but Ben Hadad II decided it was time again for war. This time he launched a large, full-scale attack against Samaria, the capital city of Israel. Their way to siege a walled city was cutting off all the supply lines – drinking water, foods and any necessary items for living. It took a lot of time, but it was a very effective way to demoralize any fighting spirit of those who were inside.

God warned that He would punish His people if they failed to live up to the terms of His covenant. Among His punishments were military defeat as it was mentioned in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Had Israel king Joram called his people to repentance and prayer, the situation would have changed.

Imagine how little meat there would be on a donkey's head. How about dove poops for your next meal? Very appetizing for a lunch, huh? You will be surprised what you are willing to eat when you are extremely hungry. I've been in the South Korean army where you get to learn to eat a lot of interesting creepy crawlies or anything moves around. But eating their own children went too far.

Look at the Israel king's reaction for that. Rather than repenting, he put the blame on God for this calamity. Tearing a robe and wearing a sackcloth was a sign of deep sorrow, but what good is it when there is no repentance or humility?

King Joram should have said, "I am the cause of this great tragedy and I repent of my sins! Pray for me!" The Lord always keeps His covenant, whether to bless if His people obey or to discipline if they disobey.

Are you in a similar situation? Everywhere you turn, it seems like you are facing more problems? Would it be because of your sin and you are putting the blame on Him? You need to stop doing that and you take the ownership of the sin and repent, so that God can bless you and restore you.

B. GOOD NEWS TO EVERYONE, BUT BAD NEWS FOR HIM

2 Kings 7:1-2 Then Elisha said, "Hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord: 'Tomorrow about this time a seah of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria.'" 2 So an officer on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God and said, "Look, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, could this thing be?" And he said, "In fact, you shall see it with your eyes, but you shall not eat of it."

Throughout Hebrew history, in times of crisis, the prophets had God's message for God's people, whether they obeyed it or not. God's promise through Elisha was that in 24 hours the economic situation in Samaria would be completely reversed. Instead of scarcity, there would be such abundance that food prices would radically drop in the city.

But the king's officer doubted the prophecy and what God could do for them. Because he didn't know the Lord, he couldn't fathom how He could pull it off. His unbelief came from a seed of doubt.

Doubt is a small ember that sets a wild fire in the forest of unbelief. It always goes after the promises of God, the faithfulness of God and unchanging character of God.

Ephesians 6:16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

This man doubted the power of God. He put the limit on what God could do, because it was beyond his imagination. The world says, "Seeing is believing," but God says, "Believing is seeing."

This man doubted the creativity of God. In his limited mindset, since they were surrounded by the enemy, the only way God could bring the foods they need was from above with limited supplies. Isn't that what we often do as well? We often limit God's way because of our ignorance of Him.

The officer of the Israel king was a natural man. Natural man cannot understand spiritual things, because he cannot discern spiritual things.

1 Corinthians 2:14-15 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

To the humble and godly heart, the Word of God, the Bible increases one's faith. But to the proud and self-centered heart, the Word of God that promises God's faithfulness is meaningless, so they harden their hearts. The same sun that melts the wax will harden the clay.

Please note what Elisha said to this doubting and skeptical man in v2:

"In fact, you shall see it with your eyes, but you shall not eat of it."

It is a really bad news for this dude. Unbelief in God can steal the joy of God's blessings in our lives.

In light of this horrible economy, it is very easy to be terrified by what we hear every night from 6 o'clock news:

- The nation's job loss rate went up again.
- The stock market makes another head long dive as soon as the Secretary of Treasury Tim Geithner opens his mouth.
- The Congress, Senate and the President want to have the universal health care for one third of uninsured people in the nation at the expenses of 1.4 trillion dollars in next 10 years and they have no idea how to foot the bill other than raising taxes from everyone. They don't remember that we already owe 50 cents of every dollar they spent.
- The gasoline prices are going back up again.
- And you are wondering if you are going to have another paycheck to pay bills or not.

It is extremely easy and tempting to fall into self-pity party because we can barely make ends meet with each paycheck. I am with you on that. It is easy to complain about what we don't have rather than thankful for what we have at this moment. It is easy to worry for unknown future rather than trusting all knowing God. But our God is faithful and He has a perfect track record.

Philippians 4:19 "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

If the truth be known, we want what we want, not necessarily what God says we need. He will not provide our greeds, but He will provide all our needs. Depend on it, God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply.

If the Lord cannot meet your needs even though He created the entire universe out of nothing, He is not God. He SHALL MEET YOUR NEEDS.

C. GOOD NEWS FROM THE ENEMY CAMP

2 Kings 7:3-16 Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, "Why are we sitting here until we die? 4 If we say, 'We will enter the city,' the famine is in the city, and we shall die there. And if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore, come, let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they keep us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall only die." 5 And they rose at twilight to go to the camp of the Syrians; and when they had come to the outskirts of the Syrian camp, to their surprise no one was there. 6 For the Lord had caused the army of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots and the noise of horses--the noise of a great army; so they said to one another, "Look, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to attack us!" 7 Therefore they arose and fled at twilight, and left the camp intact--their tents, their horses, and their donkeys--and they fled for their lives. 8 And when these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they went into one tent and ate and drank, and carried from it silver and gold and clothing, and went and hid them; then they came back and entered another tent, and carried some from there also, and went and hid it. 9 Then they said to one another, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household." 10 So they went and called to the gatekeepers of the city, and told them, saying, "We went to the Syrian camp, and surprisingly no one was there, not a human sound--only horses and donkeys tied, and the tents intact." 11 And the gatekeepers called out, and they told it to the king's household inside. 12 So the king arose in the night and said to his servants, "Let me now tell you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we are hungry; therefore they have gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, 'When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city.'" 13 And one of his servants answered and said, "Please, let several men take five of the remaining horses which are left in the city. Look, they may either become like all the multitude of Israel that are left in it; or indeed, I say, they may become like all the multitude of Israel left from those who are consumed; so let us send them and see." 14 Therefore they took two chariots with horses; and the king sent them in the direction of the Syrian army, saying, "Go and see." 15 And they went after them to the Jordan; and indeed all the road was full of garments and weapons which the Syrians had thrown away in their haste. So the messengers returned and told the king. 16 Then the people went out and plundered the tents of the Syrians. So a seah of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord.

These lepers' logic was perfect. They could wait for some scraps to eat from the people inside of the wall of Samaria. At this point, that was not going to happen. That means it would be a slow hungry death for them. Or they could beg for foods at the Syrian camp and might get a quick death. At least they could try for the Syrian's mercy because they had nothing to lose.

I've read some commentators who tried to explain how God performed miracles to make the Syrian army to run away for their lives. Remember what I said before, when the Bible is silent, be silent. In Greek, it is "Shut up."

The Lord defeated the Moabites by a miracle of bloody sight in chapter 3 and now He defeated the Syrians by a miracle of sound.

Everything the Syrian army brought to this battle was left behind. The siege for Samaria was over even though the people who were inside of the wall of Samaria did not know what the Lord did for them.

I am so glad that these four lepers chose to share the good news with the people of Samaria so that they also could enjoy the blessings of the Lord.

Some of you are more than willing to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with anyone comes across in your life. God bless you and may your tribe be multiplied.

At the same time, some of you would do absolutely nothing when it comes to talking about Jesus and sharing your testimonies – what the Lord has done in your life. Whether your reason is ‘being scared’ or ‘don’t want to be rejected’ or simply ‘don’t care’, you need to share what you know about Jesus with the unbelieving world. It is your privilege and duty. You need to start to think about other people’s eternal souls more than your temporary emotional status.

How many are unbelievers out in the world who are dying spiritually without the Bread of Life and the Living Water even though He is just within their reach? If you have visited our church web site home page, you know that it says: “We are keenly aware that it is not us making the difference in their lives, but only Jesus our Lord and Savior. It is nothing more than one beggar telling another beggar where to find the Bread of Life that makes us never to hunger again and the Living Water that makes us never thirst again.”

Some day when you get to heaven, the Lord will ask you, “What did you do with all those opportunities you could share your testimony about my Son Jesus?” Please tell others what Jesus had done for you. However, you have been committing sin continuously and willingly, please do not share your testimonies with them. It will give them more excuses not to come to Christ. Repent and be forgiven by the Lord first, then you share the Good News of Jesus with them.

D. THE BAD NEWS CAME TRUE

2 Kings 7:17-20 Now the king had appointed the officer on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate. But the people trampled him in the gate, and he died, just as the man of God had said, who spoke when the king came down to him. 18 So it happened just as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, “Two seahs of barley for a shekel, and a seah of fine flour for a shekel, shall be sold tomorrow about this time in the gate of Samaria.” 19 Then that officer had answered the man of God, and said, “Now look, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?” And he had said, “In fact, you shall see it with your eyes, but you shall not eat of it.” 20 And so it happened to him, for the people trampled him in the gate, and he died.

God means what He says, what He says He means it. The Word of the Lord lived on but the man who denied the Word was killed.

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

E. APPLICATIONS

- 1) We often limit God's way because of our ignorance of Him.
- 2) Unbelief in God can steal the joy of God's blessings in our lives.
- 3) Believing that everything in God will come to reality is true faith in him.
- 4) The unbelieving mind would not be convinced by any proof, but the worshiping heart needs none.