

Unexpected Ways

FOCUS THOUGHT

God works in unexpected ways to bring His purpose to pass.

▶▶ FOCUS VERSE

II Kings 7:9

Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household.

▶▶ LESSON TEXT

II Kings 7:3-9

3 And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?

4 If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.

5 And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there.

6 For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.

7 Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life.

8 And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it.

9 Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household.



THE PARIS AUTO PART MIRACLE

While Lugo and Valeria were stationed in Germany, they were introduced to the gospel and found a Pentecostal church. Although new Christians, the Lord directed them to go to Spain and minister to three specific people. They packed their belongings and decided to stop in Paris along the way. About two blocks from the Eiffel tower, the clutch cable on their Fiat broke and fell into the road.

Picking up the pieces off the street, they prayed for help and provision. After asking for directions and struggling with the language difference, Lugo thought he understood there was an auto parts store about six blocks away. He left Valeria and their daughter with the car and asked them to pray he could find a part.

Lugo walked a few blocks and saw a man pacing in a circle on the sidewalk in front of him. This seemed strange, but he still needed more directions. When he questioned the man, he responded in perfect English that the auto parts store was about two blocks away. The man then asked what happened, and Lugo told him about the broken clutch cable. “The same thing happened to me!” the man exclaimed. “When I went to the auto parts store, they gave me the wrong part, and I have it in my car.” The man reached into his car and pulled out the exact clutch cable Lugo needed. Lugo paid the man 50 francs (about \$10 U.S. at the time), and the man then offered to help install the cable.



OUTLINE

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- C. God Drove the Syrians Away
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- C. We Must Tell Others of the Good News We Have Heard and Believed

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CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Growing up in the Midwestern United States, I can remember the weather being crazy. The running joke was the speed with which the weather would change. In a word, it was unpredictable. Typically this is not a word we use to describe God. However, there is much of God that remains a mystery to us. In the words of the apostle Paul, “We know in part” (I Corinthians 13:9). This missing knowledge of God can cause us to question our faith at times.

In our journey to understand who God is and grasp His nature, we can become overwhelmed by the fact He is far beyond us. To this end, His actions are not only divinely dynamic but truly unpredictable. In our lesson text we see that God is not subject to demonstrate His power in a way we think is best. He is sovereign. Therefore, He works in the way He wants, regardless of our opinions, and in some cases, regardless of our desires.

I. SYRIA SURROUNDED SAMARIA

Sin and rebellion had once again led the people of God into a place of total loss. Surrounded, and in the midst of famine, King Jehoram (son of Ahab) was desperate. The power of God is most effective when people get desperate enough to lay down their pride and submit to His plan. It is always amazing how often people will allow pride to stop the move of God in their lives. Pride will bring division into any relationship. The first few years of marriage will teach this principle well. All newlyweds will encounter a time in their marriage when they will need to humble themselves to reduce any conflict. Most fighting in any relationship is a result of either party not being willing to let go of pride and bring the discussion to a peaceful resolution. Pride has destroyed many relationships. Any relationship that allows pride to go unchecked will end in failure. If you find yourself in a dispute or argument, make sure to check your spirit and make sure your pride is not the reason for the ongoing conflict.

» *How has pride affected relationships in your life, including your relationship with God?*

A. Severe Famine

The Scripture speaks of the economic conditions in Samaria reaching rock-bottom. The people had turned to cannibalism to satisfy their hunger. Although King Jehoram was angry with the prophet, this situation had been brought about by the king's own leadership and rebellion against the Word of God. What is beautiful to consider is the tremendous miracle God performed in the great depression of Samaria. This story should remind its readers that God's omnipotence is not limited to spiritual troubles but includes economic and financial matters as well.

B. Elisha Prophesied

In this setting, the king of Israel turned to the prophet Elisha for direction. Some believed the word of the Lord that came from the prophet; others did not. It is a picture of the gospel message that was to come. Those who believe the gospel will be partakers, but those who refuse to believe may see but not be able to partake. Here we also have the same imagery as Moses and his final days. Because of Moses' unbelief, he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. (See Numbers 20:12.) A mistrust in God will always cause a person to miss out on the glorious things He has planned.

C. God's Word Will Come to Pass

"God can't" are not words we like to use. Nonetheless, there are some things God cannot do. The Scripture tells us God cannot lie. He is bound to His Word. The story of the lepers illustrates once again that the word of the Lord will always come to pass. The prophet wrote, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper

in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). We can rest assured that God’s word will always come to pass.

» *How should we respond when God has not answered a specific prayer?*

II. FOUR LEPERS AT THE GATE OF THE CITY

Banished to the outskirts of the city, the four lepers are the ones God chose to bring salvation to the Samaritans. These unlikely and unqualified outsiders changed the course of a nation and gave another chance to a king to get it right. It seems as if it is often the people no one would expect whom God chooses to use in His plan. From Abraham to Jacob, from Gideon to David, God has consistently empowered those who did not match the standard of what some would call great. This is even seen in the twelve men Jesus chose to be in His inner circle. Jesus called the disciples to have significant insight and receive unrestricted access to His ministry, yet the religious leaders were astounded. “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). It was not merely the disciples’ education level the leaders were referring to, but rather the fact these were common people—fishermen and tax collectors—and yet they were well-versed in the Hebrew text and the plan of the Messiah.

A. Why Stay Here Until We Die?

The driving force of these lepers was summed up in the question they considered: “Why stay here until we die?” In other words, how can this get any worse? Their situation had gotten to the point where they no longer feared the consequence of death. The fear of death would no longer hold them back. Often people allow fear to hold them hostage. Whether it is something simple like a job or career move, fear tends to keep people in the state they are in rather than trying to reach for something greater.

Fear is something all humans share. In many ways, fear is a major factor in every life-choice a person makes. Fear can be a good thing. A healthy fear will let us know when something is wrong. It will ensure that our children and loved ones are cared for and safe. However, fear can also become unhealthy and irrational. The spirit of fear can gain strength when unchecked in our lives. (See II Timothy 1:7.) As believers, we must make up our minds that fear will not hinder the progress of the gospel, nor will it keep us from everything God has in store for our lives.

» *Have you ever had a deep, unsettling fear that seemed to paralyze you? Explain.*

B. Decided to Walk to the Syrians

Each day we will make hundreds, if not thousands, of decisions. The recipe for success is making good decisions. One study showed that the cascade of choices a person evaluates each day actually leads to what psychologists refer to as “decision

fatigue.” One thing rings true and is important to understand: not all decisions are created equal. For instance, choosing your spouse and choosing your toothpaste are obviously not equivalent propositions. The four lepers were faced with a decision that would determine the fate of their lives and the destiny of a nation. Understanding the gravity of our decisions is paramount in our walk with God. There may be some choices we will make today that will set us on a path of growth or lead us down a path of destruction.

C. God Drove the Syrians Away

God will always fight for His people. This story shows that God is more than just “in our corner.” In fact, there are moments in life when we are too weak, too overwhelmed, and exceedingly overmatched. But it is in those situations when God steps in and fights the battle for us. Over and over stories in Scripture describe the way God defends His people.

Standing on the edge of the land promised to their fathers, the children of Israel saw an enemy of great power occupying their destiny. In the midst of their fear, two people reported the victory was within reach. The word of the Lord came to the people affirming the faith of Joshua and Caleb. This word was a consistent message to the people of Israel. The Lord said, “The LORD your God he shall fight for you” (Deuteronomy 3:22). This message of assurance was repeated multiple times throughout the journey of Israel to the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 1:30; 2:24–25, 31, 33, 36; 3:2–3; 20:4). We should never forget the battle always belongs to God.

D. God Responds to Hunger

The hungry always seem to get God’s attention. Jesus, standing in the midst of more than five thousand people, said, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). Both spiritually and physically, it would seem God cannot resist those who hunger and thirst. This fact is deeply rooted in His character. We see His compassion for humanity scattered throughout the Bible. God Himself told Moses that His compassion is given by Himself alone. God said, “I will . . . be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy” (Exodus 33:19). This grace and compassion have been realized by the redemptive work of Calvary. The whole Bible, it would seem, is the story of how God has demonstrated His love and compassion for humanity. The redemption of humanity is the strongest evidence we have that God has shown mercy, grace, and compassion to all people.

In this story, we see a small example of what happens when people are in need. God responds to the hungry. Of course, hunger is not the only requirement to get a response from God. God is faithful to His people. David said, “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psalms 37:25). God’s people can trust Him to care for physical needs and to know that He responds to our faith for greater needs as well.

III. LEPERS FOUND THE SYRIAN CAMP EMPTY

A. Fed Themselves

When traveling in an airplane, the flight attendant will announce, “In the case of an emergency, be sure to secure your oxygen mask before assisting other passengers.” Basically they are saying to help yourself first because you are no good to anyone if you are not taking care of yourself. Often those who neglect their own well-being and health (both spiritually and physically) will end up losing out on the things they have worked so hard to accomplish.

This principle is evident in the greatest commandment we find in Scripture. Jesus was asked what He considered to be the greatest commandment in the Law. His response is recorded in all three of the synoptic gospels of the New Testament. He said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” Then He gave the second greatest commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” It is imperative to note that we must be focused on our own salvation before focusing on the salvation of the world. These four lepers fed themselves first before turning to share their blessings with friends and family in Samaria.

B. Did Not Keep the Good News to Themselves

Think about how many problems would go away in our lives if people would just consider others more. The lepers in our story experienced the benefit of not hoarding the blessings and good news. They elected to share the news with the rest of the army. The very essence of the gospel is tied to considering others. When we consider others, we not only obey the gospel but grow even more in the image of God.

C. We Must Tell Others of the Good News We Have Heard and Believed

If the lepers had kept silent, the people would have stayed in their misery. The Samaritans were starving and the lepers had the solution. This lesson is twofold. First, the people of God have what the world needs. Hungry people are roaming the earth looking for anything to satisfy their appetite and quench their thirst. They have tried everything the world has to offer and are still empty. Like the prodigal son, they keep waking up in the pig pen wondering what went wrong. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the meat that will satisfy their hunger. The second lesson is the blessing the believer receives from sharing the good news. The lives of the people were saved, and the lepers were able to share in the victory and provision of God alongside the rest of the nation. It would seem the lepers' lives were also changed during this miracle. Without a doubt, the blessings of God will always be on those who take the Great Commission seriously.

» *Have you ever been blessed by sharing the gospel with someone? Explain.*

IV. SAMARIA PLUNDERED THE SYRIAN CAMP

Only a few changed the lives of many. The Samaritan army was able to benefit from the bravery and decision of just a few lepers. It is amazing the influence a few can have on the masses. With God, these numbers and influence is even greater. Deuteronomy 32:30 says, “How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?” With God, nothing is impossible. When God is fighting for us, one person can defeat an army.

A. The Word of the Lord Came True

Words have power. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof” (Proverbs 18:21). We get this human attribute from our heavenly Father. The words God speaks are the most powerful force on earth. Everything He says is true, and any predictions He makes are going to be fulfilled. Our faith is in the fact God does not make mistakes, and our trust is in the fact God is not like flawed humans. When God says something will happen, it will happen.

B. God Works in Unexpected Ways to Bring His Purpose to Pass

The prophet Isaiah wrote, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9). It should be no surprise that God works in unexpected ways. God knows everything. We must trust that He also knows what is best for us. Often we think we know how God should act or respond. Trusting God is the ultimate test of our faith. Trust is the feet to our faith. We can say we have faith, but it is tested when we are forced to trust in God’s plan.

» *Has God ever surprised you? In what ways did God work in an unexpected way in your life?*

▶▶ INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

In December each year we gather together to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. This one event has captured the attention of every believer, and it still stands as a sign to those who have yet to believe. It is often curious to consider the thoughts of those who were there to witness the birth of Christ. What did they think? Did they have a clue about what it meant to be the Messiah? Even with a little knowledge it seems clear that no one can know for sure what plans God has for His people. The apostle Paul said, “Now we see through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12), meaning there are many things about which we simply do not have a clear picture. The imagery here is looking at a foggy window and trying to determine what is being reflected. In our lives, we must find the room to trust God with every decision. Like the lepers, we cannot know for certain where or when God will choose to bless, deliver, heal, or save. Our job is not to figure out the method but rather trust that God knows and will be faithful.