

Kings and Prophets 14-03-14a

This is Friday the 14th of March, 2014. We're in our study of Kings and Prophets. Tonight we resume in 2 Kings chapter 5. This is the story of Naaman, the Syrian general, and his leprosy.

We'll pause as we always do at the beginning to give each of us a chance to focus. I used to say clear our minds. I'm not sure you want a completely clear mind.

You do want something going on up there. But it's a chance to recognize that unlike any other subject that you might study, the study of God's Word requires special conditions to work, and that is the active ministry of God's Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is much misunderstood, and this is one of his primary functions, is to help me present and help all of us learn.

Without him, it is just superficial academic knowledge. You might as well be studying Genghis Khan or contemporary Hollywood celebrity culture. It just doesn't have substance or meaning.

It doesn't contribute anything to our spiritual life or our eternal destiny unless God's Holy Spirit is involved. So we are careful to recognize that, acknowledge it, and avail ourselves of this great gift that God has given us. Shall we pray? Father, thank you for granting us this time of fellowship and an opportunity to improve our understanding of your character, your plan and purpose as it has unfolded throughout the days of the Old Testament into the days of the Lord Jesus and the apostolic times all the way down to our present age.

We thank you for this passage, and we ask your blessing on us as we study it together. Our goal with your blessing is to understand it in a way that will make a difference in how we live so that we come closer to the standard that has been set for us and the trail that has been blazed for us by the Lord Jesus himself, living as we do in the flesh, enabled by your Spirit, informed and empowered by your Word. We pray that this passage will contribute materially to our motivation and our understanding and our execution of your plan in the time that remains to us in this life. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen. In the time of Elisha, we have seen the inauguration of his ministry. We've seen the very strong parallels, comparison, contrast with Elijah in dealing with these ladies who have sons that die and are raised, times of famine, the significance most recently in chapter 4 of purifying the pot of stew back in chapter 4 verse 38 and following.

He's in Gilgal and somebody decides they can make a better stew than the man of God can make. And they go out to add some ingredients. And the principle, the idea from that is we want to be careful not to add human inventiveness to the provision of God.

The way that God's plan works is such that we don't have confidence that it's going to turn out okay. We think, you know, this is good but I can make it better. The Bible is good but let me enhance it, let me edit it, let me change it around, let me add some things.

And this is one of the hazards of someone who studies for the purpose of learning and then passing along what one learns to others. Obviously you have historical background, you have cultural context, you have scriptural context, you have language information that helps illuminate a passage. But to go beyond what the passage is intended to convey, to twist it and send it in a different direction, to use it as a proof text for some idea that isn't a part of the plan and purpose of God, this is very easily done.

It's one of the reasons there are so many denominations. Because you've got one Bible and you've got 500 different ways of understanding it. Well, how can that be? If the Bible is right and if faithful people go study it, why isn't there a large general agreement on what it means? Why is there just these divergent... I mean there's people that have church on Saturday, there's people that dress up in robes and wave smoke and have all kinds of rituals.

There's people who think all different permutations and it's all coming from the same Bible. How can that be? Well, here's my short answer. It's kind of like Joshua, you know, choose you this day whom you will serve.

Choose you this day what denomination you want. As for me in my house, we're just going to try to concentrate on Scripture and do our very best prayerfully in humility and with a recognition of how important it is to try to understand what Scripture says. Everybody else is on their own.

They should be doing the same thing. If they're not, it's on them. We can only do what we can do.

I can't explain, I make no attempt to explain why and how so many people can draw so many different conclusions and externally at least it seems like they're sincere people. I don't know. All I know is I can only do my best and you can only do your best before God in prayer and with regular consistent teaching and regular consistent reflection and thought about what is in Scripture, we do our best to understand it and we do our best to live in its light.

That's as much as you can do. What does the Lord require of you, oh man, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God, to walk with God. To walk with Him is to listen to what He says, try to understand what He means and try to live in a way that is pleasing to Him.

So having said that, there is the danger always from our corrupt nature. Sometimes it blindsides even us. The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked and somebody wants to find a little bit of spice, a little bit of wild gourd, chop it up into the stew and first thing you know it poisons, it's like a little leaven can leaven the whole lump.

A little bit of nightshade, a little bit of hemlock, a little bit of chlorine bleach, whatever it is you put in that's poisonous can ruin everything and a little bit of error in church, a little bit of error in spiritual understanding in our hearts can cause grievous harm. There is death in the pot at that point. So what we saw last time is, what is the remedy? Well, symbolically when Elisha takes

that flower, which is the seed of the word in symbolic terms, ground fine.

This has been processed. This is what we want to do. The Lord said the sower went forth to sow and he scattered the seed.

Well, that seed is planting seed. It goes into the soil and it produces various results depending on what the soil does. But this is the other end of the process.

Once you have the harvest and you gather the grain, what happens to that grain? To be usable and to be most effective, it needs to be threshed, it needs to be winnowed, and then the good stuff needs to be ground. This is where you get your whole wheat flour. It's ground, ground fine.

This makes all parts of it usable, all parts of it beneficial. And flour, ground grain, is what he throws into the pot. And when error creeps up, as it will, in all of our lives, in all of our hearts, when we go amok, I guess you can't go amok.

You run amok, don't you? You can go astray. You can run amok. I guess we don't walk amok.

We don't crawl amok. We run amok. When we diverge into error, when we depart into misunderstanding, misapplication, what is the cure? What takes the death out of the pot? You've got to go back to the word of God that we know to be true by experience.

Ground grain, flour, is kind of like we understand the word epinosus in Greek. Gnosis is knowledge. Epinosus is experiential.

We know this. We didn't just learn that out of a book or hear it in class or watch it on a film. We have done it.

You can read a book about weaving baskets. I know some people that are doing basket weaving. I no longer talk about somebody getting an idle degree.

You know, they used to say, well, you've got a degree in basket weaving. Listen, if you actually had a degree in basket weaving, you would know some amazingly complex stuff. That is not an easy skill to master.

Now that I know something about it, it's amazing. It's complex. But you could look at it in a book and they'll have a little black and white line drawing.

You know, take read A and stick it behind read B and weave it this way and hold this just so and get this so wet and bend it so far and do this and that. That would be gnosis. That would be knowledge.

That would be the seed. Okay? But if you actually get the supplies and you do it with your own two hands and you discover the little tricks and the little necessities and what happens if you bend it too far, if you get the moisture wrong, if it's too short, it's too long, it's lopsided, it's all

of the little things, that's the seed ground fine. You think about some skill that you have, whatever it may be, some craft, some hobby that you engage in, some thing that you do, it could be carpentry, it could be making stuff.

I made a, I told you, I haven't told this story in a while, but I made a, I found my mom's Betty Crocker book and back when you think you can just do anything, I thought, you know what, this dessert looks good. It's snow pudding. I'm going to make this snow pudding.

So I made it all together and mixed all the ingredients and one of the ingredients was, they said egg whites and I was all occupied with how do you get the yolk out of the egg so that you only have the white. You know, you got to crack them without breaking them and you got to, they make a little thing that you can kind of blp an egg through and it just extracts the yolk. Well, I figured it out.

I got it all done. I was real proud of myself. Did all the finishing touches, brought it out and nobody would eat it because what I didn't know is that you were supposed to beat the egg whites and they were just in their original slimy form and trust me, nobody calls it snow pudding when it's slimy like that.

They call it something else and I had to eat my creation myself. I made a, on that same, I was on a kind of a cooking kick. I also made a, I made a complete lemon meringue pie in a bottle cap.

I just wanted to see how small I could go and it was a nifty little, kind of like for Barbie. You know, here's your, but you find things out by experience. That's the flour ground fine and one of the great messages here when you think about death in the pot and the man of God making that edible again, reversing the poisoning of the nutritious meal is what keeps us from dying from error.

It is experiential knowledge of the word of God. This is why we walk and we learn to walk and we gain momentum as we walk and if we have a error, if something comes up, even somebody else in our periphery, not everybody went out and gathered gourds. One guy got the poison gourds and cut them into the stew and it affected everybody.

They're all gagging and clutching their throats and chests and saying there's death in the pot and so the flower of experiential knowledge of the word of God is added to the pot and people drink more of the stew. They partake more of that same substance and it is no longer deadly. There's no harm.

There's no raw evil in the pot and this is a very practical lesson for us because error is going to happen. People are going to make mistakes that are potentially deadly. This is a parent's greatest fear.

I'm going to mess up my child. I'm going to kink their soul. I'm going to warp their id.

I'm going to bruise their psyche. I spanked them too hard. I should not have ever spanked them.

I didn't spank them enough. I did something wrong. I was neglectful.

I was overprotective. I was under this and over that. Most people, when they have their first child or two, they're rookies at it and you're going to make all these rookie mistakes.

You think, well, this child is just going to be some kind of a psychopathic mess of neuroses by the time they grow up because I did it all wrong. And you think, I've put death in the pot. It was mostly good, but then I've poisoned their mind some way.

Bad example. Well, listen. Everybody does this.

There is no situation like this but is common to man. It has been going on since Adam and Eve were arguing with each other about how Cain went bad. Well, you didn't hug him enough when he was a child.

He didn't get enough maternal love. Well, you were never around, Adam. You were off over there scratching by the dust of the sweat of your brow and you didn't come in and discipline him.

That's why Cain went bad. This went all the way back to Adam and Eve. Look, it isn't how things go wrong.

God knew things would go wrong. This whole universe is corrupt and fallen. What is the fix? What is the solution? Where is the flour to put in the pot and take the death out of the pot? That's the great message of this chapter is there is ground grain, processed Word of God, put it in the pot, there is no death in the pot.

Well, then we had the feeding of the 100. You can see how much better the Lord Jesus is than the whole law and the prophets because Elisha feeds 100 guys, the Lord Jesus feeds 9,000 guys and their families. That's how much better our age is than the age of Israel.

It's like 900 times better. But we saw the meaning of Baal Shalisha the Lord, the triune Lord, the trifold Lord, Baal Shalisha that brings the bread, 20 loaves of barley bread and there are so many interconnected threads in Scripture. By the way, here's a trivia question for you.

What kind of bread did Jesus multiply for the 5,000? What kind of bread was it? Barley loaves. It specifically says barley loaves. Very same kind of bread that is brought here.

It's the common bread, barley grain, not fine flour. It wasn't show bread made from the finest. This is barley bread.

This is the cheap stuff. This was sort of the ubiquitous wonder bread of the olden days. 20 loaves of barley bread, newly ripened grain.

So we covered that last time as well. He said it before them, they ate and had some left over according to the word of the Lord. Now we come to chapter 5. In chapter 5 it says, Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria.

Let's stop right here. What do we know about Syria and their victories? You go back to the days of Ahab, when Ahab was fighting the Syrians and lost and died. One of the reasons that the Syrians did so well is that God was judging the northern kingdom with the likes of Ahab as king, the whole Omri dynasty.

So it says here that the Lord had given victory to Syria. Why would the Lord give victory to Syria? They're Syrians. They're not Israelites.

Why would the Lord give them victory? Because they were coming against the people of God and God was using Syria as a spanking, as a chastisement, as a judgment to turn the northern kingdom back to the Lord. So God gave them victory. Now, point of application.

You and I, I trust, never want to be in the position where God decides to give the victory to our enemy, because we have gotten that far from what we're supposed to do. But God will do so. People say, I don't understand why my life keeps taking these turns.

I don't understand why I seem to be stymied. I can't make progress. I take one step forward and fall two steps back.

Where is the blessing? Where is the opportunity? Where is the peace and the contentment and all of the things? Now, I'm a believer, for crying out loud. Why am I so frustrated? This is one thing to check. Now, there are many reasons why we might be challenged and might not be granted temporal success.

But one of them to take a close look at, and maybe the first look at, is am I so neglecting my spiritual priorities that God has chosen to give victory to my enemies? God, the Lord, blessed Syria with victory. Every time they came up against Israel, Syria wins, Israel loses. Why? They are far from God.

And God says, remember all those covenant promises where one of you will put to flight a thousand? Do you notice how those promises are no longer being fulfilled? Why would that be? And it's designed to wake them up. It doesn't give God pleasure to see his people defeated and slain on the field of battle. Women made widows.

Children made orphans. The maimed and the enslaved and all of the consequences, the economic hardship that comes from military defeat. That isn't God's plan and purpose for his people.

Why would he give victory to Syria? This is a pretty awful thing to see in Scripture. The Lord gave Syria victory. Well, it's one of the last resort ways that God uses to wake his people up.

So when we find ourselves in extremis, this is one of the things we want to check first and be sure that this is not the reason for our suffering. There are at least seven distinct and separate reasons why believers suffer. And one of them is this.

Discipline. Wake up call. The Lord had given victory to Syria and Naaman, being a faithful, good soldier, a good strategist, he is a very high-ranking officer.

He's well-known to the king. He may be the commander-in-chief at this point of the whole Syrian army. Mighty man of valor, a leper.

A leper. Somewhere in his travels, he picked up this disease. And the Syrians had gone out on raids and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel.

Notice, they have been raiding Israel and succeeding. Great victories. The king says, boy, Naaman, every time you raid Israel, you come back gangbusters.

You're bringing all kinds of booty and spoil and slaves. Now, they took a lot more than this one girl. It sounds like they made many, many raids and the end result was this one girl.

She's one of probably hundreds of people enslaved because of the breach of covenant of God's people. But this girl is special. And we're going to see that unfold.

On one of the raids, they had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She was before Naaman's wife, is what it says in Hebrew. Waited on.

The word isn't really waited on. It just says she was before her. It's kind of like pouring water on Elijah's hands.

This means she was her lady's maid. Remember now, Naaman is massively successful, so he's massively wealthy. And if you watch these English mansion series and you've got ladies that help other ladies with every little thing, brush their hair, press their clothes, clean off the mud from their shoes and just do all these little things, that's this girl's job.

Now, think about this. It's one thing to be taken captive and to be enslaved. But as a slave, where do you end up? This maid, this young lady, ends up as the lady's maid to one of the most prominent women after the queen herself in Syria.

She's not in a humble home. She's not in an average home. She's not in an affluent home.

She's not in a moderately rich home. She is in one of the highest spots an enslaved maid can be. Now, why? Aside from the fact that God is superintending, she is good at what she does.

She's not bitter. She's not self-absorbed. She's not sitting in a corner sobbing all the time.

She's been torn away from her family and everything she knows in the land of Israel, taken to a foreign land and enslaved. But like Joseph before her, like Daniel before her, actually Daniel's

going to be after her, now that I think about it. It's before in the sense of books that we've studied.

But like Daniel and like Joseph, she concentrates on being as faithful and as good at what she is asked to do as she can possibly be. And she is remarkable. It would take a remarkable slave to be assigned this function.

Why not a professional slave in Syria? Why not somebody that has been doing it a long time and knows all the ins and outs? This girl is really extraordinary to be assigned this job. This isn't just a little hovel somewhere. This is a palatial mansion.

Naaman is incredibly successful, incredibly rich, can have any slave in the land. And this girl is desirable and is doing a great job as his wife's maid. When the chips are down, that's not the time to fall apart.

It's not the time to fold up and sink into a pit and a pool of self-pity. If you're a slave, be the best one you can be. If you're in humble circumstances, do the very best you can.

Do it as though you're doing it for the Lord Himself. That's what this girl has done. She is exceptional for her faith.

She's exceptional in a lot of ways. But don't glide over this lightly. This gal as a captive slave ending up in this household serving this lady is extraordinary.

And she has to have been an extraordinary girl to be there. So she's waiting on Naaman's wife. And she said to her mistress, If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria, for he would heal him of his leprosy.

This is an incredibly bold statement. Incredibly bold. Because Elisha has never healed a leper.

He's done a lot of things that are not recorded in Scripture. But one thing I know with an absolute certitude is that Elisha had never healed a leper. And so she says, If only the master would go see Elisha, was with Elisha, Elisha would heal him of his leprosy.

She's never seen this. She's never heard of it. How can she make this statement? How does she know Elisha can do leprosy healing? You know how I know that Elisha has never done it before? Keep your finger here and turn over to Luke chapter 4. Luke chapter 4. This tells us two things.

First of all, we have it on the highest authority, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In verse 27 of Luke chapter 4, Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian. So, guess how many previous lepers Elisha has cured? Zero.

If the Lord says it, I believe it. That settles it. But it raises the question, Why did this girl think Elisha could do it when he's never done it? The second thing you find out from this passage in Luke is how intimately familiar the Lord Jesus was with the Scripture we are studying here in

recent weeks in the book of Kings, the Hebrew book of Kings.

Notice the previous verse there in chapter 4. Previous few verses. He's making the point in verse 24, A prophet is not accepted in his own country. This must be an important point because it is in all four Gospels.

Very few things in the career of the Lord Jesus are in all four Gospels, but this saying in one form or another is in all of them. A prophet is not without honor except in his own country. You can kind of understand this, especially if the families of pastors know this, the families of evangelists and people that are missionaries and things like that, because you think, Well, you're up there teaching the Word of God and you look at your feet of clay and all of your mistakes and failures and shortcomings and people who know you have an easy avenue to discredit you because we're all infinitely discreditable or disreputable.

And there's nobody that knows that better than your own household. And so it is a thing that the Lord Jesus points out and it is emphasized in Scripture as something for us all to remember because it pertains really more than just the prophet. Anyone, especially someone who is striving to please God, is going to have failures and their family and their immediate community is going to know about those failures.

And to fail to honor what God is doing because of the person's shortcomings is dangerous ground. The Lord Jesus said it is a truism, it is a common thing that a prophet will not be honored by those that are closest to him. And in any area, you may be overcoming some deficit spiritually.

This isn't just like a pastor passage alone, although it certainly pertains. But anything, you've got a history. You remember that guy with the tattoos on his arms and he holds them out, that's so you know I had a past in that spoof video.

Everybody's got a past. Everybody has things in their history they're not proud of. Well, who knows those things? Your family, your household, those that are closest to you.

And it is a temptation to dismiss what God has done based on what people have not done, where people have failed. And to say, well, you're not all that because I know this about you. Jesus said it is a common human failure to hold your intimate knowledge of them as a weapon to drub them with.

And it's something we want to watch out for whether we're on the receiving end or on the distributing end of that syndrome. All four Gospels, it's no light thing. Back to Kings, just as we go to our break.

The girl says, if only my master Naaman were with the prophet who is in Samaria, Elisha, he would heal him of his leprosy. This tells you something else about this girl. She is a thinker and she, even as a girl, has great faith.

What has she figured out? How does she know Elisha can cure leprosy? Because she knows the story of the Shunammite's son. If you can raise the dead, you can cure the living death. It's an a fortiori argument.

If Elisha can raise a boy from the dead, then Elisha, because leprosy was viewed then and now as a living death. You're alive, but your flesh dies on you. That's why the miracle, when the Lord Jesus cleanses the lepers, is so pertinent.

We saw that in great detail. It's a walking death. It's a living death.

It's permanent uncleanness. It permanently separates from God. It is a picture of what it is to be alienated from the life of God, without hope, without God in the world, as Paul puts it.

She has figured out the correspondence. There's actual death. Well, living death is less than that.

If you can do the greater, you can do the less. This is what we are supposed to do, to abstract from things we know, things that aren't specifically written down. Did anybody specifically say Elisha can, with God's power, cure leprosy? No.

She deduced that. She observed, interpreted, and applied to her current situation and her current circumstances from something that is nowhere written down and has no precedent. That is faith.

That is spiritual vitality. And this girl probably thought it was bad enough living in northern Israel. Then she got captured in a raid and carried off to Syria, and it's even worse.

But she doesn't lose her faith. She doesn't lose her ability to look at her circumstances, think about the truth of God pertaining to the man of God, and make an application. She has already concluded this in her heart before she ever mentions it to her mistress, because she's thinking.

She's thinking about her circumstances. This is a great girl. And it's really extraordinary that in this seeming... By the way, you know how this story turns out.

Can you imagine when Naaman returned home that he and his wife wouldn't adopt this girl like a daughter, and she would be lifted to the heights of not just creature comforts and wealth and so on, but to have in common faith in the God of Israel with Naaman, and I'm sure with Naaman's wife, and to have a little family of believers in this exile. If she had family back in Israel, do you not think Naaman would have made sure that she got back home? I mean, her faith in this darkest hour is going to be the means of her deliverance. Do you seriously think she's going to be out there grinding with the cured Naaman back in Syria? She doesn't see it yet, but after a period of time, God is going to bless her in extraordinary ways for her faith.

So the story, before it ever gets into the story, is this incredible Israelite girl from the wrong side of the border. Wouldn't it be better if she was from Judea? But she's from Samaria. She's

from the north, and she's already been living in a bad culture and a bad time spiritually in the nation, and then even worse, she's taken captive.

But look at what faith in God, trust in God, confidence in God, and in the power of God will do. And not only will Naaman be delivered, but she is going to be delivered in an extraordinary and remarkable way. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll see the rest of this story unfold.