

A Different Perspective
Having Faith That Moves Mountains (2)
09-23-2
A Hopeless King

Have you ever been in one of those places of real desperation? You know, nothing's going right. You're wondering what if anything God is thinking – Has He taken a holiday? Has He taken leave of His senses? How can a faithful God allow **this** to happen to **ME?** I mean ME of all people?

Today on the program, we're going to start a close look at such a time in the history of Israel. It was absolute desperation time. In fact things were so bad, people were so hungry, that mothers were cannibalising their children.

The king – well, the king – he'd lost the plot. They guy who should have been holding it all together, the guy who was God's anointed leader – this king was running around in ever decreasing circles of desperation.

And there's a reason we're looking at this story today. Because last week, this week and in fact over the next couple of weeks, we're talking about faith. I've called this series of programs – Having Faith that Moves Mountains.

And you know something, by and large, we don't have to rely too much on faith when it's all going swimmingly well. We need faith when there are mountains that need moving. We need faith when we have something impossible to deal with.

And those are precisely the times that we find ourselves at our weakest and most vulnerable. Those are precisely the times, when the last thing we feel like we have, is some mighty faith.

So this story – this story takes place at a time in Israel's history that can best be described as – well, as Rock Bottom.

So let's have a look. And a warning. You might be thinking "Why is this joker reading **the Bible on this program?** If you're anything like me, you'll be tempted to skip over the Biblical text and move on to the next thing. Flick the dial to another station. Maybe make a cup of tea or coffee while I'm reading this story. Please don't. God's Word has the power to change our hearts. There's something special that happens when we read it and take it in. This is one of those stories that will stick with you all the days of your life.

2 Kings 6:24 – 7:2

Some time later King Ben-hadad of Aram mustered his entire army; he marched against Samaria and laid siege to it. As the siege continued, famine in Samaria became so great that a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and one-fourth of a kab of dove's dung for five shekels of silver.

Now as the king of Israel was walking on the city wall, a woman cried out to him, "Help, my lord king!"

He said, "No! Let the LORD help you. How can I help you? From the threshing floor or from the wine press?"

But then the king asked her, "What is your complaint?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give up your son; we will eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, 'Give up your son and we will eat him.' But she has hidden her son."

When the king heard the words of the woman he tore his clothes—now since he was walking on the city wall, the people could see that he had sackcloth on his body underneath –and he said, "So may God do to me, and more, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat stays on his shoulders today." So he dispatched a man from his presence.

Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. Before the messenger arrived, Elisha said to the elders, "Are you aware that this murderer has sent someone to take off my head? When the messenger comes, see that you shut the door and hold it closed against him. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?"

While he was still speaking with them, the king came down to him and said, "This trouble is from the LORD! Why should I hope in the LORD any longer?"

But Elisha said, "Hear the word of the LORD: thus says the LORD, Tomorrow about this time a measure of choice meal shall be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria."

Then the captain on whose hand the king leaned said to the man of God, "Even if the LORD were to make windows in the sky, could such a thing happen?" But he said, "You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat from it." (2 Kings 6:24-7:2)

What a sad, sad state of affairs. Can you imagine a hunger and a hopelessness so deep that mothers are cannibalising their children. I can't conceive of a situation more desperate, more repugnant, more sad, than this. But here it is. That's what happened. Rock bottom. In fact so rock bottom that you and I would struggle to point to an event more rock bottom situation in our own lives.

Israel was under siege from the Aramean army. The whole point of a siege is to starve the opposition out of their impenetrable citadel. And quite clearly food had run out. I don't know the last time that you went down to the butcher's shop and bought a donkey's head, but my hunch is that there's not a lot of meat on a donkey's head. And this was selling for an outrageous amount of money. A clear case of supply and demand.

So here's God's anointed king (in fact the Hebrew word for God's anointed is 'messiah' – and it is often a word used of the kings of Israel) – he's walking on the ramparts of the city, and tearing at his clothes. He's wearing sackcloth, which means that he's in mourning. And up there on the city wall all the people can see him. What they need is leadership and inspiration from God's man and what they get is a king who's hopeless in every sense of the word.

A woman comes to him from sheer desperation. This King has lost the plot. These mothers have been killing and eating their children. She comes to him and lays her case before Him. What does God's anointed king do, God's anointed leader? He says "What do you expect me to do? I mean, look at the mess we're in! Do you expect me to get food from the press and wine, what do you want me to do?" Great leadership. And that's the obvious thing to do of course when you're God's anointed king and you believe in God and lose hope. You blame God of course. Clearly this mess was His fault. He is God isn't He? Which is exactly what the king did.

He went for Elisha. He was going to take the prophet's head off. He blamed Elisha and said "This mess is from God". He wanted to go kick the dog, didn't he. He wanted go and shoot the messenger as it were. I make light of it, but Elisha, was in danger of losing his head. So the King goes to see the Prophet. Remember the Prophet in Israelite society is the man who speaks for God. The Prophet's role, here in Israel, is to speak God's Word into the life of Israel.

And so the king demanded to know of the Prophet – *This trouble is from the Lord! Why should I hope in the Lord any longer?*

That as it turns out is a very good question. It's a question that a few of us have probably asked once or twice at some rock bottom point along our own journeys. And the Prophet speaks the Word of God. It's a Word of outrageous hope and promise. It's a faithful Word from a faithful God.

"Hear the word of the LORD: thus says the LORD, Tomorrow about this time a measure of choice meal shall be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria."

Now that was completely and utterly outrageous. It was impossible ... unless you believed in God. And remember what the King's soldier said: *"Even if the LORD were to make windows in the sky, could such a thing happen?"*

But God did more than that. And within 24 hours the words of the Prophet – the very Word of God – came to pass. Why? Because however difficult it is to believe, however impossible the situation and big the mountain and distant our God seems – He is mighty to save. He is faithful. He is awesome. Just is!