

Bible Reading Schedule The Golden Thread

June 5 – 2 Kings 6: 8 – 17

In today's reading we see a contrast between the way we usually see our world, and the way we should see our world. You can imagine the shock and horror of Elisha's servant as he goes outside to stretch and take in the morning air, and sees the Aramean army encamped all around their home. You can understand why he would be so panicked. After all, his master, through God's directing, has been acting as a spy telling the King of Israel everywhere the King of Aram was planning on attacking him. Spies are executed, and since he was Elisha's servant he probably would be executed as well. As the servant looks out on his world all he can see is trouble in the form of the Aramean army. But Elisha sees the world very differently. Look at verse 16. Elisha knows that they are not alone; he knows that the army of the Lord is encamped around them, and protecting them. In verse 17 Elisha prays and asks God to open the eyes of his servant, so the servant can see the world the same way Elisha does. As the servant's eyes are opened, he sees the hills filled with the horses and chariots of the army of the Lord ready to sweep in and protect Elisha.

We live in the same world as Elisha and his servant, and often times we see the world the same way Elisha's servant saw it, rather than the way Elisha saw it. We too shrink back in fear at the thought of what the world might do to us, but the call of Christ is for us to stand firm in our faith.

Hebrews 10:38-39 *But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.*

Elisha was very aware of the spiritual reality in which he lived. Elisha understood that the real war was a spiritual war, and Elisha knew that there was no doubt who would win that war. The Book of Revelation contains an amazing account of this spiritual warfare.

Revelation 12:7-12 *And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸ But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was hurled down-- that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. ¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the*

accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. ¹¹ They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. ¹² Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them!

The spiritual reality we live in is this: The power of Christ has defeated Satan. If we are trusting in Christ, we no longer have to fear Satan and his forces of evil, because the one who is in us is greater than he who is in the world.

1 John 4:4 *You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*

At times when it seems like the forces of evil are ready to sweep over us, we must ask God to help us to open our eyes, so that we can see the truth of the power of Christ in and over our lives.

Ephesians 1:18-23 *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

June 6 – 2 Kings 6: 18 – 23

Today's reading is a continuation of the story of Elisha and the Army of the Arameans. As we saw yesterday, even though the Aramean Army seems to have Elisha surrounded, the spiritual reality is that it was the Aramean Army that was surrounded by the Armies of Heaven. Elisha could have just sat back and done nothing and waited for the Arameans to advance against him. If he had done that the Armies of Heaven would have destroyed them in order to protect Elisha, but rather than doing that Elisha steps in to show them mercy and thereby spares their lives. Elisha prays that God would strike them all with blindness. Now at first glance it doesn't seem like an act of mercy to pray for someone to be blinded, but think of it this way. If Elisha hadn't prayed for that to happen, all of those soldiers would have lost their lives at the hands of the Army of the Lord. Would you rather be temporarily blinded or dead?

As God answers Elisha's prayer and blinds the Arameans, Elisha is able to single-handedly capture the entire army and lead them to the King of Israel; where once again, he shows them mercy. The King of Israel

wants to kill them on the spot, but Elisha steps in, and in another act of mercy, spares their lives again. From a human perspective Elisha would have had every right to take the lives of those who had sought to take his life, but instead Elisha gives us a picture of God and His mercy to us.

Think how we have rebelled against God. First, we rebelled against God's authority in the Garden of Eden, and then, when God (Jesus) came and dwelt among us, we murdered him. Now you might be tempted to think that you didn't do either one of those things, but the truth is each of us are part of the rebellion. Each of us is a sinner justly deserving God's wrath.

Ephesians 2:3-5 *All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.*

So often we seek to get even with those who have wronged us, rather than showing them mercy. Even if we don't try to get even with those who have wronged us, how often do we fail to truly forgive them and let go of the wrong that they have done to us? We are called by Christ to be a people of mercy and forgiveness, no matter how much or how many times we have been hurt or wronged by someone.

Matthew 18:21-35 *Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. ²³ "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. ²⁶ "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. ²⁸ "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. ²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' ³⁰ "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. ³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' ³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the*

jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

June 7 – 2 Kings 6: 24 – 7: 20

As you read today's reading, pay close attention to the reversal that is taking place. The kings' right hand man, whom you would think would be the first to get any blessing that would come to Israel, hears Elisha's prophecy that the siege will end, but he refuses to believe, and because he refuses to believe the word of the Lord, he is cut off and misses out on the blessing. On the other hand, the lepers, who were society's outcasts, and the last ones you would think would receive a blessing, are the ones who benefit first as the siege is lifted. Stop and think about that. The kings' right hand man is trampled underfoot, and the lepers who are society's downtrodden are lifted up. It's an amazing reversal, but that is how God works.

James 4:6 *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

Jesus told a parable in Matthew 22 that is very similar to the historical account we just read in 2 Kings 6. It is a parable about the Kingdom of Heaven and who will be the ones to actually receive its blessings.

Matthew 22:2-14 *"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. ⁴ "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' ⁵ "But they paid no attention and went off-- one to his field, another to his business. ⁶ The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. ¹³ "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ "For many are invited, but few are chosen."*

Just as in today's reading from 2 Kings, Jesus makes a point of telling us that those whom the world would expect to be the ones who are

invited to be part of the Kingdom of Heaven are usually too proud to accept the invitation. It is the humble who are willing to come when invited. But let me make one last point from Jesus' parable. Notice how the parable ends with one guest being thrown out of the party, because they are not properly attired. In Jesus' day the host of the party would have provided the clothes for the party. This man's failure to dress properly was because he refused to wear what the host provided. The same is true for us. We can't wear whatever we want to Jesus' party. We can't come dressed in our righteousness. We can only come dressed in the righteousness that he provides to us by way of the cross.

June 8 – 2 Kings 4: 8 - 37, 8: 1 – 6

In 2 Kings 4, there is an account of Elisha and a woman whom the writer of 2 Kings refers to as a Shunamite. That designation meant that she was not an Israelite, but was from an area in Canaan just outside of Israel's territory. 2 Kings 4 tells us that this woman cared for Elisha whenever he came to the territory she lived in, and Elisha had intervened with the Lord on her behalf, so that late in life she was able to give birth to a son. Later Elisha would intervene once again as the Shunamite woman's son became ill and died. 2 Kings 4 tells us that through the power of the Lord, Elisha raised the young boy back to life again. Now, in 2 Kings 8, a famine comes to the land and Elisha tells the woman to take her son and go and live elsewhere until the famine passes. The woman and her family were gone for seven years, and when they return to Israel, the woman went to the king and begged for her family's land to be returned to her. Through God's providence, at the very moment this woman came to beg for her land to be given back to her, Gehazi, Elisha's servant, was there talking to the king, and answering the king's questions about his master Elisha. In fact, Gehazi has just told the king about the miracle of Elisha raising a young boy from death to life as this woman comes to see the king. The woman is able to tell the king all that Elisha had done for her, and in response the king sees to it that all of her land and even her lost income are restored to her and her family.

Once again, we have a story that is full of amazing reversals! Going back to 2 Kings 4 where the story starts we find the first reversal, a woman who hasn't been able to have a child gives birth to a child late in life. Then we have a second reversal, as this son dies and is raised back to life again, and finally, in 2 Kings 8, we have the third reversal as the land that was lost is restored to her and her family. What a great

picture these reversals give us of Jesus and his work on our behalf. When we were unable to save ourselves Jesus came and gave us life.

John 10:10 *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

When we were dead in our trespasses and sin, Jesus came and raised us back to life again.

Ephesians 2:1-5 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.*

When we had lost everything because of our sin, Jesus came and restored everything.

1 Peter 1:3-5 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*

June 9 – 2 Kings 17: 7 – 23

In 722 BC, God finally has had enough of Israel (the 10 northern tribes), and God allows the Assyrians to come and conquer the Israelites and take them into exile. These 10 northern tribes are never heard from again. For all intents and purposes, they vanish from the face of the earth. We see the reasons why in this passage. The Israelites had turned away from God and worshipped idols. These 10 northern tribes had everything going for them. They were heirs to the promises that God had made to Abraham—part of the covenant family, but they turned away from God, and refused to live by faith. Because they were Abraham's seed, they thought they had it made. They thought they were in, but the message here is clear isn't it? Just because they were Israelites didn't mean they were automatically part of the promises. Paul writing about his people, Israel, said this:

Romans 9:2-8 *I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. ⁵ Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. ⁶ It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be*

reckoned." ⁸ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

The Israelites had it all, they were born into the right family, the promises of the covenant were theirs for the claiming, the promised messiah (Jesus) would come from their family, but unlike their father Abraham, they refused to live by faith.

Romans 4:13-16 *It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. ¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring-- not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.*

We can't be saved because we are part of a certain family, or because we have gone to church our whole life. We are saved the same way Abraham was, by faith in Christ alone. Our faith is proven by our actions. We live what we believe. It is clear that Israel walked away from faith in the true God and gave their faith to idols. We may not think so, but it is easy for us to do the same thing. If we believe that Jesus is Lord, then by faith we must live that way and obediently follow him wherever he leads.

June 10 – 1 Chronicles 21: 1 – 22: 1

1 and 2 Chronicles are a retelling, from a different perspective, of the stories of the Kings of Israel, specifically the southern kingdom of Judah. So, as we read these passages we will revisit some of the same people that we have already read about in 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings, but we will be looking at different accounts from their lives to get a more complete picture of what God was doing preparing the way for Jesus to come. In today's reading we go back and look again at the life of David. In 2 Samuel, we saw David bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, and we saw David's desire to build a temple for the Lord, though as you may recall, God told David that David was not the man who would build the temple—that job would be the job of David's son, Solomon. But as we will see today and tomorrow, that did not stop David from doing all that he could to set the wheels in motion for the temple to be built by Solomon. In today's reading, David finds the exact spot for the temple to be built on. The interesting thing is that the spot where the temple would be built was not determined by a study to see

where the best place might be, in a sense, it wasn't even determined by inquiring of God, at least not in a normal way. The site of the future temple of the Lord was determined through David's sin. Yes, that's right, God even uses our sin and rebellion to accomplish His purposes. We can't be sure exactly what David's sin was, but it was something to do with taking a census of the fighting men of Israel. It may have been the fact that the census that David took showed that he was relying on his military strength rather than on God, or it may have been that David had Joab count the Levites (the priests) among the fighting men, or it may have been some other reason. But whatever it was that was in David's heart, it clearly offended God, and God moved quickly to destroy David and Israel on account of David's sin. 70,000 men fell as a result of God's punishment for David's sin, and the slaughter only stopped as David pleaded with God to withdraw his hand.

As David pleads for God's mercy, God directs Gad, a prophet, to go to David and tell David to build an altar at the threshing floor of Araunah. Araunah offers David the threshing floor for free, but David refuses because he knows that for something to be a sacrifice it has to cost the giver something. David pays the full price for the threshing floor and there he offers a sacrifice that turns away the wrath of God.

Now let's stop and consider a few things. First, let's consider the costliness of what David did. The Bible tells us that he paid Araunah 600 shekels of gold for the site—that's about 15 pounds of gold (or \$300,000 in today's money). It cost David a lot to have a place to make a sacrifice to turn away the wrath of God.

But that doesn't even begin to compare to the costliness of the sacrifice that was made for our sins. I am sure David had lots more money he could have paid if he needed to in order to get the threshing floor, in other words, even though the sacrifice was costly, it didn't cost David everything. But when Jesus came to earth and died for our sins it literally cost him everything. His sacrifice for us is a sacrifice of infinite cost and infinite worth.

Second, stop and think how fitting it is that the place where God's wrath was turned away and the plague was stopped would become the place where the Temple of the Lord would be built. Once the temple was built, it was the place where offerings and sacrifice were to be made. In fact, it was the only place where the sacrifice of atonement, that turned away the wrath of God by taking away the sins of the people, could be made. David's sacrifice was the first of many sacrifices that would be offered on that site, until the day when Jesus would come and offer

himself as a sacrifice once and for all for our sins. Until Jesus came the threshing floor of Araunah was the only place to atone for sin and find true forgiveness. But because of Jesus and the costliness of his sacrifice, the cross has become the place where sin is atoned for and forgiveness is found.

1 John 4:10 *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

June 11 – 1 Chronicles 22: 2 – 19

As I mentioned yesterday, even though David was not allowed to build the temple, he still did everything in his power to make it possible for Solomon, his son, to be able to build it. In fact, as the writer of Chronicles writes about David, his whole focus is on David doing whatever he can to make the temple a reality. In chapter 11, the writer points out that David conquered Jerusalem, the city in which the temple would be located. In chapters 13 – 15 the writer tells of David bringing the Ark of the Covenant, which is the centerpiece of temple worship, into Jerusalem. In chapter 18, the writer of Chronicles highlights David's military victories, but even as he does this he points out the plunder David captured all went into storage to be used in building the temple. And then as we saw yesterday, the writer of Chronicles even points out how David's sin, in conducting the census, provided the site where the temple would be built. From the standpoint of the writer of Chronicles, everything that David did throughout his life was in preparation for the building of the temple. This couldn't be any clearer than in today's reading. Here we see the writer of Chronicles point out all the material David acquired for the building of the temple, and then the writer points out how David charged both the people and Solomon to be faithful to carry out the work God had prepared for them to do. As we look at this we can see how one generation is to prepare the way for the next. Each generation must be faithful to not just carry out the work God has for it to do; each generation must also prepare the next generation for the work it is to carry out.

Psalms 145:3-7 *Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. ⁴ One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. ⁵ They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. ⁶ They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. ⁷ They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.*

When Jesus came he did the work God had ordained for him to do. He gathered and trained his disciples, and then he went to the cross and

died for their sins. But then Jesus ascended into heaven and left them to carry on the work through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8-11 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* ⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

The disciples did the work Jesus left them to do. They carried the Gospel to every nation and prepared a new generation of leaders to continue the work.

Romans 15:18-24 *I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done--* ¹⁹ *by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.* ²⁰ *It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.* ²¹ *Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."* ²² *This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.* ²³ *But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you,* ²⁴ *I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.*

So here we are today. Are we faithfully fulfilling the Great Commission? Are we faithfully training up the next generation of leaders for the church?