



REVIVAL II

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

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Lection - 2 Kings 7:1-20 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 1) 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.” (v. 2) 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."

(v. 3) Now there were four leprous men outside the city gate, who said to one another, "Why should we sit here until we die? (v. 4) If we say, 'Let us enter the city,' the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; but if we sit here, we shall also die. Therefore, let us desert to the Aramean camp; if they spare our lives, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die." (v. 5) So they arose at twilight to go to the Aramean camp; but when they came to the edge of the Aramean camp, there was no one there at all. (v. 6) For the Lord had caused the Aramean army to hear the sound of chariots, and of horses, the sound of a great army, so that they said to one another, "The king of Israel has hired the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to fight against us." (v. 7) So they fled away in the twilight and abandoned their tents, their horses, and their donkeys leaving the camp just as it was, and fled for their lives. (v. 8) When these leprous men had come to the edge of the camp, they went into a tent, ate and drank, carried off silver, gold, and clothing, and went and hid them. Then they came back, entered another tent, carried off things from it, and went and hid them. (v. 9) Then they said to one another, "What we are doing is wrong. This is a day of good news; if we are silent and wait until the morning light, we will be found guilty; therefore let us go and tell the king's household." (v. 10) So they came and called to the gatekeepers of the city and told them, "We went to the Aramean camp, but there was no one to be seen or heard there, nothing but the horses tied, the donkeys tied, and the tents as they were."

(v. 11) Then the gatekeepers called out and proclaimed it to the king's household. (v. 12) The king got up in the night, and said to his servants, "I will tell you what the Arameans have prepared against us. They know that we are starving; so they have left the camp to hide themselves in the open country, thinking, 'When they come out of the city, we shall take them alive and get into the city.'" (v. 13) One of his servants said, "Let some men take five of the remaining horses, since those left here will suffer the fate of the whole multitude of Israel that have perished already; let us send and find out." (v. 14) So they took two mounted men, and the king sent them after the Aramean army, saying, "Go and find out." (v. 15) So they went after them as far as the Jordan; the whole way was littered with garments and equipment that the Arameans had thrown away in their haste. So the messengers returned, and told the king. (v. 16) Then the people went out, and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a measure of choice meal was sold for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord. (v. 17) Now the king had appointed the captain on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate; the people trampled him to death in the gate, just as the man of God had said when the king came down to him. (v. 18) For when the man of God had said to the king, "two measures of barley shall be sold for a shekel, and a measure of choice meal for a shekel, about this time tomorrow in the gate of Samara," (v. 19) the captain had answered the man of God, "Even if the Lord were to make windows in the sky, could such a thing happen?" And he answered, "You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat from it." (v. 20) It did indeed happen to him; the people trampled him to death in the gate.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

As noted in Revival One, the word “revival” stems from the Latin word *revivere* which means “to live again.” This definition implies that something has died. The historical significance of revival meetings for African Americans and the basic focus of such contemporary services in black churches have already been noted in Revival One. But one must keep in mind that this liturgical moment suggests that God wants us fully alive in the Christian journey, that God does not want us dead in spiritual graves. To even have a Revival Two, as this moment is named, implies that revival is not a one-time event or moment, but an ongoing process of renewal, of God making all things new, the way God wants them to be in the Church and world. Having a Revival Two reveals how actual revival services may spontaneously overflow into additional worship services as God moves a particular people, because God is in charge of revival. This moment, Revival Two, gives us another opportunity to allow God to resurrect the dead places in our lives and communities.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: 2 Kings 7:1-20

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

In this moment of U.S. history, there is uncertainty—uncertainty about the economy as houses are foreclosed, gas prices rise, and food costs follow the same incline. A country that is considered to be the wealthiest in the world is experiencing strain, and those who live in it are feeling the inevitable effects. “I have to pay how much for gas? Milk is how high? You’re gonna lay me off?!” Businesses are even getting more cut-throat in the face of necessary cutbacks. During this uncertain season, and all financially uncertain seasons, people must reconsider how they handle their money and evaluate their priorities—“Do I really need another pair of shoes?” Is there really nothing that can be done about CEOs making 300 times more than the people who help them earn their exorbitant salaries? People that have felt low are now feeling lower, many have hit rock bottom economically, creating a larger chasm between the rich and poor. For some, it is a “famine” of sorts, and an economic revival is needed.

At the same time, there is an unprecedented historic moment in which an African American could possibly be the next President of the United States. Some may view Barack Obama as the great Black hope, audacious enough to fix our famished economy. Some see hope in him as they hear of hope from him. Some would rather trust Barack Obama than the God of our mamas and papas. Who will we turn to when life is hell? Others remain hopeless. They do not believe in anything or anyone, not even God. Many are asking, “Why should I hope in the Lord any longer?” This passage directs us to the One who can turn our hell into hope, which is true revival. Not recognizing this point may bring more pain, but believing this is true will lead us to sing “I’m gonna trust in the Lord ‘til I die.”

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

The king of Israel had no trouble trusting the Lord when all was well with him and his people and their stomachs. He could prepare a “great feast” in Samaria (2 Kings 6:23) and not worry about their next meal. However, this eating, drinking, and being merry

takes a turn for the worse as the Aramean army lays siege to Samaria while they experience a great “famine” (6:25). All feasting has ceased and food is scarce. Because of this, food prices skyrocket such that a “donkey’s head was sold for eighty shekels of silver.” According to Lev. 11:2-7 and Deut. 14:4-8, a donkey was an unclean animal and was not ever to be eaten, but the famine was so bad that they not only ignored the laws of uncleanness, but the least edible part of a donkey became very costly, and “one-fourth of a kab of dove’s dung sold for five shekels of silver” (6:25). Whether dove’s dung here refers to the excrement of a bird or the bulb of a plant as some scholars have argued, the bottom line was that people were getting ripped off, paying more for food than what it was worth. Sound familiar? This biblical economic depression leads some folk to desperate actions, for survival in desperate times calls for desperate measures. There is a woman who “cooks” her own son for her next meal (6:28-29). Famine had stolen the humaneness out of humanity. People would kill to have a meal. Their souls were parched, and the king could not help but tear his clothes and wear sackcloth to mourn their predicament. “Nobody knows the troubles I see.”

The king who once said, “Let the Lord help you,” (6:27) now wants to behead Elisha, God’s representative, and blames God for their famine. The king says, “This trouble is from the Lord! Why should I hope in the Lord any longer?” (6:33) When all hell breaks loose, the king loses hope and turns to violence. In his hell, he tells Elisha and God, “This is nothing but death in the flesh.” One can’t blame him for asking, “Why should I hope in the Lord any longer?” This is the question of the hour, not just for him, but for so many people. “Why should I hope in the Lord when I have to raise my son without a father?” “Why should I hope in the Lord when I work a full-time job but still have to be on welfare?” “Why should I hope in the Lord when the police keep stopping me just because of the color of my skin?” “Why should I hope in the Lord when blackness is still demonized in society?” Even elders of the faith, matriarchs and patriarchs of the Church, have doubts and questions too sometimes, because hellish living can be very hot. “Why should I hope in the Lord any longer?”

This is the question Elisha answers like any good preacher-prophet would, by beginning with, “Hear the word of the Lord” (7:1). It is this word that shows that God will turn their hell into hope, by turning things around for the people. Then Elisha declares the Lord’s word: “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.” Basically, their economic fortunes will be reversed. There will be food again in the right amounts and for the right price. God will bring an economic revival. God will bring a true economic stimulus package. Despite this word of assurance, not everyone is ready to shout; some doubt. The captain, the chief adviser for the king, says, “Even if the Lord were to make windows in the sky, could such a thing happen?” (7:2). He does not trust God to revive their economy and, because of this, Elisha tells the captain “You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat from it” (7:2).

But four men with leprosy see the revival and taste it. The divine promise to turn the famine into food becomes clear to the lepers. These outsiders, outside of society and living “outside the city gate” (7:3), go into the Aramean camp, get food, drink, money, and clothes, and realize that, “This is a day of good news” (7:9). These common folk are

the ones who understand the good news about God's economic reversal and revival. They who had nothing now have something, because of God. All of this action takes place at the gate of Samaria, which is the city's main market area. God was the source of revival even in the marketplace in the inner city. These men taste and see that the Lord is good.

Unfortunately, not all see and taste this economic revival. The Arameans run away scared (7:5, 7) and the captain is trampled to death (vv. 17, 20). As it was predicted, he would see the revival with his eyes, but never taste it (v. 19). Thus, one must be cautious in thinking that all were happy because revival came to this city. At times, good news for some is bad news for others. Revival for some is not necessarily revival for all. Not all will experience the freshness of revival. Some will see God's economic revival happening, but never taste its effects. Not all will rejoice in God, but will instead ask, "Why should I hope in the Lord any longer?" and, when told God will turn things around, they will ask "Could such a thing happen?" While the fires of revival burn, some may disappear (as did the Arameans) and others die (as did the captain). But if we turn our eyes to the revival hill, we will know where our help comes from and preach with faith and, like Elisha, "hear the word of the Lord." And when that word goes forth to answer the question, "Why should I hope in the Lord any longer?" the reply will be because God will turn your hell into hope!

Celebration

There might be a famine in the land, but God will eventually provide everything we need. God will revive our economy, proving why we should still hope in God. God is our help in the time of trouble. Our fore parents gave us a good road map for what to do in harsh times when we need revival, economic or otherwise. As they watched, fought, and prayed, they held onto their faith in the One who is able to do more than we can dream or imagine, even bringing hope out of hell.

Descriptive Details

The descriptive details in this passage include:

Sounds: Elisha's words/the Lord's words (v. 1); the captain's response (v. 2) and then Elisha's response to him (v. 3); the four leprous men talk to one another (vv. 3-5, 9-10); the Arameans' fearful voices (v. 6); the sound of the chariots, horses, and the great army which the Lord caused the Aramean army to hear (v. 6); the mumbling of the gatekeepers (v. 11); the king speaks with his servants (vv. 12-13); the plundering of the Aramean camp (v. 16); the captain being trampled to death (v. 17);

Sights: The four leprous men outside the city gate (v. 3); these men get up and go to the Aramean camp (v. 5); the Aramean camp empty of people (v. 5); the Arameans running away at twilight (v. 7); the abandoned tents, horses, donkeys, food, drink, silver, gold, and clothing of the Arameans (vv. 7-8); the lepers going into the Arameans' tents and eating and drinking, carrying away the money and clothing, and hiding all of this (v. 8); the king's servants go out to see if the Aramean army is still around (vv. 14-15); the

plundering of the Aramean camp (v. 16); the people run and trample the captain to death (v. 17); what the captain sees as he is being trampled (vv. 2, 19);

Smells: The abandoned tents, donkeys, and horses of the Aramean army (v. 7);

Textures: The lumpy and puss-filled skin of the lepers; the weighty silver and gold (v. 8); and

Tastes: The food and drink of the Aramean army (v. 8); the choice meal and barley that is being sold (vv. 1, 16).