

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DAY MAKES

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Second Kings 6 and 7 records the miraculous deliverance of the northern kingdom of Israel from a devastating siege instigated by the king of Aram, Ben-Hadad, against Israel's capital city of Samaria. As a result of the siege there was widespread famine in the city. In fact, the situation in Samaria had become so desperate that the people in the city had begun to cannibalize their own children (6:28, 29), indicating the deplorable spiritual condition into which the people had fallen. Samaria's doom seemed inevitably sealed; so much so that Israel's King Jehoram had completely given up any hope of deliverance, even from God. As he told the prophet Elisha, *"Behold, this evil is from the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?"* (2 Kg 6:33).

While Jehoram could never be accused of being a faithful follower of God, sadly his attitude is all too typical of many professing Christians today. We start out convinced that God has called us to a specific task or a specific ministry, and that call has been affirmed by other godly people and God's own providential interventions. God gave you the desire, He provided your giftedness which others have affirmed, and He has met all your needs in the past. But then trials come; perhaps sustained trials which lay siege to your life. You tough it out for a while, but then *"a while"* gets longer and longer. Our resources are being depleted and there is still no end in sight. Then, when circumstances appear to be hopeless, when all our efforts seem to lead nowhere, when door after door is closed, when the self-denial seems to be in vain, you give up on God and you abandon the call He placed on your life. Perhaps the cultural pressure to provide a certain standard of living for your family becomes too great or perhaps you tell yourself you must have been mistaken, God didn't really call me, thereby effectively denying all of God's providential working in your life up to this point, or perhaps friends have begun to question your judgment. Whatever the reason, we in essence say *"why should I wait for the Lord any longer?"*

The prophet Elisha had a message for Jehoram. *"Tomorrow about this time a measure of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria"* (2 Kg 7:1). In just one day the siege would be lifted and the city would have food in abundance. What in one day seemed like a totally hopeless situation, by the next day had been turned into a miraculous deliverance and unimaginable blessing.

One of Jehoram's officers found Elisha's prophecy more than a little hard to swallow and scoffed at the very idea, *"Behold, if the Lord should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?"* (7:2)? Not even God was capable of ending the famine caused by the siege, or so he thought. Things are just too bad, too far gone and hopeless. It is time to give up on God, be practical, and face reality. As a result of his unbelief the officer missed experiencing God's blessing which only a day earlier seemed inconceivable (7:19, 20).

So many Christians give up on God. In our culture that has come to demand and expect instant results and immediate gratification, people can't bear the siege. Most can't even bear the thought of a siege. Unbelief creeps in and gets the better of them, and as a result they miss seeing and experiencing God's ultimate blessing for their life. Just think of the spiritual blessings God's people have forfeited because they gave up on God. Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years because they gave up on God. Because people give up on God they never walk with Jesus through the valley of the shadow of death and been comforted by His rod and staff, but instead continue to wander in a spiritual wilderness. Think of the blessings you have missed because you gave up on God. If God preserved and delivered His rebellious and unbelieving people, how much more will He bless those who continue to trust in His loving faithfulness to complete what He has begun? In one day Joseph went from being a prisoner in Egypt to a prince in Egypt. True, in one day he also went from being his father's favorite son to being a victim of his brother's jealousy and sold into slavery. And in one day he went from being in charge of everything in Potiphar's house to being a prisoner in Pharaoh's dungeon. But even all of this was in God's perfect plan and purpose. Joseph never gave up on God, and years later he could look back and tell his frightened and apprehensive brothers that what they had intended for harm, God intended for the blessing of many people. We do not know what blessings the next day may hold, and even if they don't come tomorrow, we have His promise that He will never leave us or forsake us, and we have the assurance that God is for us, even in the midst of our siege. We have Jesus' promise that if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, then all these other things will be added unto us.

Trials are called such because they try our faith to determine how much it is worth, how much dross is mixed with the gold, how much unbelief is mixed with our trust, and how far we are willing to walk with Christ before we give up. Everyone, even unbelievers, experience trials that are the result of living in a sin cursed world. There is nothing inherently Christian about suffering illness, unemployment, financial loss, or the death of a loved one courageously. The afflictions that try the faith of a Christian are not like those which the world experiences, but those that are particularly connected with being a follower of Christ (1 Thessalonians 3:1-4). These trials require endurance, trust, and patient waiting (Psalm 62; James 1:2-4; Hebrews 10:32-36; 1 Peter 2:18-25; 2 Timothy 3:10-12). Since we live in a fallen world we share in the same afflictions as unbelievers, but very few have their trust tested by trials that are a result of following Jesus' call on their life, and that are a result of forsaking all to follow Him. Trust is measured by degrees. The apostle Peter is a New Testament example of this.

Peter's trust failed twice, and both times it was because he took his eyes off of Christ, succumbed to his fears, and gave up on Jesus. The first time was on the Sea of Galilee when he took his eyes off of Jesus and focused on the wind and the waves. The second time was in the court of the high priest at Jesus' first Jewish trial before Annas (Jn 18:12-27) when Peter was ashamed and afraid to be identified with Jesus. Both failures came about because Peter thought he possessed more trust than he actually did. Spiritual pride led to Peter's lack of trust. Confidence in his own abilities and spiritual strength led to his spiritual failure.

We can accomplish what God has called us to do only if we acknowledge our complete dependence on Him and His power and abandon all self-confidence in our own natural abilities. Unbelief is an absence of trust in God. Spiritual pride is a result of trust in our own abilities instead of God, which is really self-worship and self-idolatry. Both lead to spiritual failure and giving up on God. Ben-Hadad's officer suffered physical death as a result of his unbelief. Peter on the other hand, several years after his denial of Jesus, wrote his first epistle to the churches of Asia which at the time were facing intense Roman persecution. In 1 Peter 4:16 he wrote, "but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name glorify God." If anyone knew what it was to be ashamed of Jesus it was Peter. It was the lessons he learned from his spiritual failures that allowed him to write three verses later, "Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right" (4:19). Peter had learned what it meant to entrust his soul to a faithful Creator. He learned what it meant to *really* trust God, and to not give up on God, no matter how hopeless the circumstances or how counter intuitive continuing to trust seemed. But first Peter needed to be stripped of his spiritual pride.

Are you tempted to give up on God? Such temptation comes from two sources; unbelief or spiritual pride, or a combination of both. When God calls us to a specific task or ministry he also calls us to trust in Him unconditionally to provide all we need to accomplish that ministry. Anything less will lead to spiritual failure, giving up on God, and we might miss God's intended blessing by just one day.