

God's Never-Failing Providence.

Text: 2 Kings 7:1-20

Suggested Hymns:

440, 358, 388, 451, 408

- 1) Our Father in heaven knows our needs
- 2) God always finds a way
- 3) Gratitude For His Blessings
Should Move Us To Proclaim His Goodness

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Kings 7:1-20.

¹ Then Elisha said, "Hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord: 'Tomorrow about this time a seah of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria.'" ² So an officer on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God and said, "Look, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, could this thing be?" And he said, "In fact, you shall see it with your eyes, but you shall not eat of it."

³ Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, "Why are we sitting here until we die?" ⁴ "If we say, 'We will enter the city,' the famine is in the city, and we shall die there. And if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore, come, let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they keep us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall only die."

⁵ And they rose at twilight to go to the camp of the Syrians; and when they had come to the outskirts of the Syrian camp, to their surprise no one was there. ⁶ For the LORD had caused the army of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots and the noise of horses -- the noise of a great army; so they said to one another, "Look, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to attack us!" ⁷ Therefore they arose and fled at twilight, and left the camp intact -- their tents, their horses, and their donkeys -- and they fled for their lives.

⁸ And when these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they went into one tent and ate and drank, and carried from it silver and gold and clothing, and went and hid them; then they came back and entered another tent, and carried some from there also, and went and hid it.

⁹ Then they said to one another, “We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king’s household.”

¹⁰ So they went and called to the gatekeepers of the city, and told them, saying, “We went to the Syrian camp, and surprisingly no one was there, not a human sound -- only horses and donkeys tied, and the tents intact.” ¹¹ And the gatekeepers called out, and they told it to the king’s household inside.

¹² So the king arose in the night and said to his servants, “Let me now tell you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we are hungry; therefore they have gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, ‘When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city.’”

¹³ And one of his servants answered and said, “Please, let several men take five of the remaining horses which are left in the city. Look, they may either become like all the multitude of Israel that are left in it; or indeed, I say, they may become like all the multitude of Israel left from those who are consumed; so let us send them and see.”

¹⁴ Therefore they took two chariots with horses; and the king sent them in the direction of the Syrian army, saying, “Go and see.” ¹⁵ And they went after them to the Jordan; and indeed all the road was full of garments and weapons which the Syrians had thrown away in their haste. So the messengers returned and told the king.

¹⁶ Then the people went out and plundered the tents of the Syrians. So a seah of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD.

¹⁷ Now the king had appointed the officer on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate. But the people trampled him in the gate, and he died, just as the man of God had said, who spoke when the king came down to him.

¹⁸ So it happened just as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, “Two seahs of barley for a shekel, and a seah of fine flour for a shekel, shall be sold tomorrow about this time in the gate of Samaria.”

*¹⁹ Then that officer had answered the man of God, and said, "Now look, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?" And he had said, "In fact, you shall see it with your eyes, but you shall not eat of it."
²⁰ And so it happened to him, for the people trampled him in the gate, and he died. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

One of the strangest characteristics of man, also of regenerated man, is his worldliness, that is, his unquenchable hankering after material things and his deplorable disregard of things spiritual.

The Bible tells me that I am by nature a child of wrath, just as others are; false and full of sin; inclined to all that is evil and subject to damnation. As such I can do no good in the sight of God. Even my righteousnesses are before God as filthy rags. Nor can I in any way cleanse myself from the stain and guilt of sin. Neither the labour of my hands, nor gold, nor even the sacrifices of my very life, can remove the curse of even one single sin. Left to myself, I travel the road to hell.

But God loved me and sent His only-begotten Son to be my Redeemer. Jesus, in turn, took upon Himself my sin and by His holy life and innocent death rendered a perfect atonement for my sin. As soon as I repent and believe in Him as my Saviour, God forgives me everything and treats me as though I had never broken even one commandment.

The Bible also tells me that now is the time of grace and the day of salvation. This life is my only chance. There is neither annihilation (i.e. cease to exist), as some believe, nor a second probation (purgatory), as others think, but only eternal punishment for those who die in their unforgiven sins.

Would you not think, then, that all who know these things would give heed? That they would stop, look, listen, and consider the things which belong to their peace? That they would repent of their sins, believe in Jesus Christ, and thus be saved?

Yet what are the facts? The majority of people turn their backs to this glorious message. They have no time. They are much too busy for things so far away. They want food, money, and fun. Others do give heed, and for a season embrace the Christian faith, but it is not long before they grow cold and return to their evil ways.

Sad to say, we also have a portion of materialism clinging to us. Are not we also much more eager to provide for the needs of the body, even though we do give enough serious thought to the needs of our souls? Why is that? One reason is that by nature, and even after conversion, we lack the proper trust in God. His promises to provide for us do not seem convincing, and we therefore resolve to help ourselves and make adequate provision for our security.

For our encouragement toward greater trust in our gracious heavenly Father let us therefore consider one of the most amazing examples of God's gracious help in time of need. Let us now ponder *God's Never-Failing Providence*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Our Father In Heaven Knows Our Needs

The Prophet Elisha was in dire straits. War had broken out between Syria and Israel, and the city of Samaria was under siege. So grievous did the resulting famine become that *a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and one-fourth of a kab of dove droppings for five shekels of silver.*¹

What can I say? Several women of the city had even begun to practice cannibalism on their own children in order to stave off that torturous death by starvation.

When this matter was brought to the king's attention, he solemnly swore that the Prophet would have to pay for this with his head. For he had previously advised the king to spare a detachment of captured Syrian soldiers, and thus enabled their king to start this disastrous war and siege. So the king sent a deputy to Elisha's house to take him into custody or even to cut him down without the formality of a trial.

But Almighty God had not forgotten His faithful ambassador. He was well aware of the sinister plans of the wicked king. So he informed His faithful Prophet of the evil plan. The deputy arrives. The Prophet sees him at the door.

Turning to the elders who were with him, he cries out, *“Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent someone to take away my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door. Is not the sound of his master’s feet behind him?”*

Then Elisha goes to the door and says in our text, *‘Tomorrow about this time a seah of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria.’*² *So an officer on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God and said, “Look, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, could this thing be?”* And Elisha said, *“In fact, you shall see it with your eyes, but you shall not eat of it.”*

All this was written for our learning, namely, against the time when we too must cope with the many problems of life. It may be the bread-and-butter problem that vexes us and taxes our ingenuity to maintain an adequate supply. Or it may be the problem of health that worries us, when dreary days and sleepless nights are our lot. Misfortune may come our way and lead us into serious difficulties, or even opposition and hatred on the part of the world over against our Christian faith and life.

In short, there may be many days when, like God’s faithful Prophet, we are hemmed in with seemingly no avenue of escape. To make things worse, like Asaph,² we become envious of the apparent good fortune of the wicked. It seems neither fair nor just that God would permit His children to suffer such grievous hardships while the despisers of His grace and goodness are prospering.

Yet it is then, when the need is greatest and the gloom thickest, that we should not only consider the many precious promises of God, but also the glorious examples of His help as they are recorded in the Scriptures, like that in our text.

2. God Always Finds A Way

The scene of our story now shifts to the other side of the city’s wall, to a spot without the gate. There, as the sun is setting and the air is heavy with the pitiful pleas and moans of the starving people within, sit four leprous men, their conversation running something like this: *“What are we waiting for? We have to do something, or we are dead men. We cannot hold out any longer. Yet to break into the city will not help us, for the death of starvation is stalking through its*

streets. Why not go to the camp of the Syrians? To be sure, they might take us for spies and kill us, but that would be no worse than starving to death. On the other hand, they might feel sorry for us and let us live. We have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Shall we go?"

No sooner said than done. Slowly they slink away in the direction of the camp, their minds filled with fear and expectancy. But, behold, when they approach the edge of the camp, everything is quiet, like a cemetery at midnight. Not a sign of life anywhere.

The Lord, the God of Elisha, had done it. He had caused the Syrians to hear strange noises, namely, the clattering of hoofs and the rumbling of chariots. With darkness falling, they could only surmise that the king of Israel had summoned help and was launching a surprise attack. Confused and panic-stricken, they do not even take time to untie their horses and donkeys for a faster flight, but grasp whatever possessions they can lay hands on and dash away as fast as they could go in the general direction of home, many hundreds of miles away.

Soon they discard these things, even their garments, in their mad dash for safety. Thus, by the time the four lepers entered the camp, it resembles an abandoned city. They enter one tent, then another, and another. Finding no sign of life, they eagerly reach into the rich stores of food to satisfy their raging hunger. Then they search the tents for valuables which they store away for safekeeping.

But in the midst of all this plenty their consciences begin to smite them. Their thoughts drift back to the city from which they had come, and in their minds they see those hungry men, women, and children in desperate search for life-sustaining food. It becomes too much for them. They can stand it no longer.

"We are not doing right," they say to one another, *"This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household."* Not a moment is wasted. Off they hurry with new strength filling their starved bodies.

Arriving at the city gate, they tell the gatekeeper, and he, in turn, relays the message to the king. The latter, however, is wary. To him the situation looks

like a clever ambush laid by the enemy to lure his people into the open country, where they could be cut down and the city taken.

Yet he finally agrees to send out a reconnaissance patrol. Hurriedly these prepare two chariot horses and race through the countryside in this direction and the other, but everywhere they find the same evidence: The enemy had fled. Garments and vessels are strewn along the way as far as the river Jordan.

So they hasten back to tell of the glad tidings. At once the gates are opened, the hungry citizens rush out to feast upon the spoils and to save their lives from destruction.

And the commodity prices? Donkey's heads and doves' droppings are no longer in demand. The price of flour drops. In less than twenty-four hours after the lepers' happy discovery one measure of fine flour, or two measures of barley, is sold for a shekel, exactly as the man of God had predicted the day before. God had vindicated the faith of His messenger and answered his prayers with unexpected help.

Friends, it frequently requires a strong faith on the part of God's children that our heavenly Father can and will help in time of need. But as we let our eyes pass over the sacred pages of God's Book, we find that times without number God has come to the help of His loved ones at a time and in a manner that none of them ever dared to dream.

Elijah flees before the evil plans of wicked Ahab and Jezebel, yet God provides for him by ravens at the brook and by the widow woman at Zarephath.

Daniel sees the mouth of the lions' den open to receive him, yet God's angel holds the furious beasts at bay, so they cannot harm him. His three friends defy mighty Nebuchadnezzar's blasphemous demand and threat, and, behold! the crackling flames of his roaring furnace do not even sear or singe them.

Four thousand eager listeners follow Jesus into the wilderness, (as we heard in the Gospel before), but the compassionate Saviour does not neglect them. There were no markets at hand to purchase food, the Almighty God blessed their meagre supply and makes it enough for everybody and to excess.

Peter finds himself imprisoned for the Gospel's sake, yet the angel of the Lord finds Him and escorts him to safety.

Thus it has always been. The hymnist writes:³

*“God never will forsake in need
The soul that trusts in Him indeed.”*

God says in Deuteronomy 31:8, ⁸ ***“And the LORD, He is the one who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.”*** And in Hebrews 13:6, ***The LORD is my helper; I will not fear.***

And if it is not a miraculous way, God will send an ambassador in His stead, a Christian brother or sister, to lend help to His needy ones. That is the pattern which He normally follows. That is why He has instructed His children never to become weary in well-doing. Means will never fail Him, He always finds a way.

It is as St. Paul once wrote to the Philippians, ***“My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”***⁴ And that carries with it a solemn obligation, namely, to go and tell, so that others, too, may experience His goodness.

3. Gratitude For God’s Blessings Should Move Us To Proclaim His Goodness

“We are not doing right,” the lepers said to each other, ***“This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. ... Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king’s household.”*** This confession and admonition on their part was wholly unsolicited and voluntary. There was no one to admonish them, none to shame them for their selfishness, none to send them on their way to the doomed city with the glad tidings of help. Their own consciences condemned them and left them no peace.

The person who enjoys undeserved blessings will of himself feel the responsibility to share his good fortune with others. And the happy lepers obeyed that impulse and hastened to the aid of their starving brethren, so that they, too, might profit from their bounty.

Thus, dear friends, it also behoves us to make known abroad the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. We are to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving and to that end also direct others to the knowledge of the Giver of all good gifts, so that they might know to whom to turn in time of need.

In particular should this be done with respect to spiritual gifts, the Bread and Water of Life from heaven. Most assuredly *we are not doing right* if we whose souls are refreshed by these precious gifts of God, the glorious Gospel truths of Christ and His redemption, fail or refuse to set them before the spiritually starving.

We are not doing right if we neglect to make the Bible an open book to the spiritually ignorant. *We are not doing right* if we reap the blessings of Christian churches and schools and do not make them available to others. *We are not doing right* to satisfy our hunger with the blessed Sacrament of Christ's body and blood and then withhold this priceless blessing from other sin-laden souls of the same faith.

In short, *we are not doing right* if we are content to be spiritually filled and then indifferently or wilfully consign others to spiritual starvation.

Therefore come, let us go and tell the king's household the story. Tell of God, who made them; tell of God, who sustains them; tell of God, who has promised help in times of need. And above all, tell of the Redeemer, who bled and died for them, so that through Christ they may live in glory and bliss eternally.

Tell them also of the Holy Spirit, who with His gracious power wants to kindle faith in their hearts and fill them with that peace from heaven which passes all understanding.

And to conclude, tell them in the words of that great Prophet of old, "*Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.*"² *Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance.*"³ *Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you -- The sure mercies of David.*"⁵ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Kings 6:25

² Psalm 73

³ Hymn 407, Georg Neumark, "If you but trust in God to guide you" ALHB 411

⁴ Philippians 4:19

⁵ Isaiah 55:1-3