

The Lord Works Through Elisha's Prayer

2 Kings 6:1-7:20

Key Verse: 6:17

“And Elisha prayed, ‘O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.’ Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

In this passage Elisha was in the most challenging stage of his life, personally and nationally. Elisha, just one man, was attacked by the Aramean army. Later, the king of Israel blamed him for all the sufferings that came from a famine. Let's see how he overcame these challenges and shepherded his nation. We can also learn how the Lord had hope for the nation, even though there seemed to be no hope. The Lord worked through Elisha, when he prayed. Let's learn Elisha's prayer, so the the Lord may work through us.

I. Elisha prayed in the time of personal crisis (6:1-23)

First, Elisha shepherds the company of the prophets (1-7). Look at verse 1. "The company of the prophets said to Elisha, 'Look, the place where we meet with you is too small for us.'" So many people were coming to study the Bible and pray with Elisha that there was not enough room for them all. Many prophets were growing, even in that spiritually dark time. It was because Elisha gave his heart to raise spiritual leaders. Of course, he cared for kings, a widow, a well-to-do woman, and General Naaman. Yet mainly he took care of schools of prophets. Then God blessed his ministry and increased their number. It was an amazing spiritual revival. When the kingdom divided, all the Levites had moved to Judah, the southern kingdom. (2 Chr 11:13,14) No servants of God remained in the northern kingdom, and the kings were all ungodly. People were steeped in idolatry. However, God never abandoned them. God raised prophets in the northern kingdom, beginning with Elijah and Elisha. In this way, God shepherded his people.

In order to solve their space problem, the prophets discussed what to do, and decided to go to the Jordan and build a place to live. However, they were so poor that they had no building material or tools. Still, they did not complain about their situation. They dealt with this problem independently. Even so, they asked Elisha's permission, respecting God's servant. Elisha said, "Go." It sounded like he was sending them by themselves. They wanted him to go with them out of love and respect for him. Elisha must have been moved and said, "I will." He didn't make excuses, saying, "I am too busy." He didn't crush their initiative with his authority

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as the principal of the school. Elisha was humble and willing to work together with them. There was mutual love and respect. That is one reason for the great revival. The prophets' excursion to the Jordan was joyful, now that Elisha was with them. Upon arrival at the river, they went to work to build their house. As one of them swung his ax to cut down a big tree, the axhead came off and fell into the water. At that time iron axheads were rare and expensive. It was unlike today, when we can buy an axhead for a few dollars at Home Depot. So the prophet cried out, "Oh, my lord, it was borrowed!" Elisha could have rebuked him, saying, "Why did you do that?" Sometimes parents rebuke their children for breaking things. Then children may think their parents love material things more than them. Elisha loved the prophet more than the axhead. Elisha understood him and wanted to solve the problem. So he asked, "Where did it fall?" The prophet showed him, and Elisha cut a stick. Perhaps Elisha could not cut trees, but only a stick. Yet his stick was very powerful: the axhead floated. It was the power of God. The man retrieved it and the problem was solved. Here we see that Elisha took care of people one by one. Elisha paid attention to their real problems and solved them with the power of God. This may be the secret of spiritual revival. In this sense, one-to-one Bible study may be key to spiritual revival in our ministry.

Second, Elisha defeated the Aramean army through prayer (8-23). Elisha was a shepherd, not only for the prophets, but also for the king of Israel, Joram. Joram was not as evil as Ahab. However, he did not revere the Lord. He was always negative, and ready to blame God and God's servant. It is not easy to help such a person. Without a shepherd's heart, it is impossible. Look at verses 8-10. The king of Aram was at war with Israel. This was not a full-scale war, but a series of border clashes. Although Aram had allied with Israel and other nations to defeat the Assyrians, Aram now began to oppress and exploit their allies. They forgot that General Naaman was healed by Elisha. Ben-Hadad II, the king of Aram, was an ambitious king. He conferred with his officers to find the best location for his camp in order to carry out a surprise attack against Israel. As soon as he began to set up camp, Elisha warned the king of Israel, "Beware of that place," and the surprise attack was foiled. Elisha had perfect military intelligence without the help of satellites. He could see through his radar of prayer. It was the best radar, state-of-the-art at all times. Again and again, Elisha warned Joram to avoid the traps of Ben-Hadad II. This inside information was purely for defense, not offense. Elisha was the best defense system. King Joram could anticipate Ben-Hadad's every move. Why did Elisha do this? It must have been out of his shepherd's heart for the king and people of Israel. In fact, God had compassion for them.

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Look at verses 11-14. This enraged the king of Aram. So he summoned his officers and demanded to know which one was a spy. One of the officers explained, "None of us, my lord the king, but Elisha the prophet who is in Israel tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom." The king should have realized that God was working through Elisha and stopped attacking Israel. But he was very stubborn, and proud of his power and authority. So he sent his horses and chariots and a strong force to Dothan to arrest Elisha. They went by night, surrounded the city, and trapped Elisha. Figuratively speaking, the king of Aram is like Satan. Satan attacks believers from every angle without ceasing. So the Bible warns us to be spiritually alert at all times. 1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." We cannot win over the devil's schemes by our own cleverness or strength. Only through prayer and the words of God can we defeat them. (Eph 6:17,18)

Look at verses 15-17. Early the next morning, Elisha's servant saw that an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. Those in the city had no weapons; they seemed doomed to die. The servant did not see the God of Elisha, but only visible things. Then he despaired, "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Elisha saw that his servant was suffering from fear, not because they were surrounded by the enemy army, but because his spiritual eyes were not opened. So he prayed for his servant, "'O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.' Then the Lord opened his servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." Here we learn that we can see the same situation from totally different points of view. Through merely human eyes, the situation looked impossible and dangerous. Through spiritual eyes, God's power and protection were awesome, and there was no reason to be afraid. We should see through spiritual eyes, have faith in God, and depend on God.

Just after liberation from slavery in Egypt, the people of Israel were caught between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. Seeing only the impossible situation, they were terrified. They were sure that they would all die. Moses helped them to look at the Lord, saying, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." (Ex 14:13,14) Then, as we know, the Israelites crossed the Red Sea as on dry ground. But when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. (Heb 11:29) Later, at the border of entry, the Israelites sent twelve tribal leaders to spy out the promised land. They all saw the same thing. Yet they reacted very differently. Ten leaders saw the land without faith and spoke negatively: "We look like grasshoppers." On the other hand, two leaders, Caleb and Joshua, saw the land and people with faith

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and said, "We will swallow them up, because the Lord is with us. They look like delicious food." Thus, by faith, Caleb and Joshua entered the promised land. However, all those who gave negative reports out of unbelief died in the desert. (Nu 13:30-33) In the time of David, the enemy Goliath intimidated the people of Israel with his scary appearance and taunting, like a professional wrestler. The people of Israel were powerless and said, "Goliath is too big to hit." But David said, "Goliath is too big to miss." David defeated Goliath with a sling and a stone by faith.

When we see America's situation with human eyes, it seems to be dark. Economic recovery is slow; many people are losing their jobs and their houses. It is easy to complain and blame God. However, when we see with spiritual eyes, God is intervening in our history with a great shepherd's heart. God wants us to turn away from materialism and come back to him, so he can make us a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We need to see what God is doing. Our young people need to see what God is doing. So we pray, "O Lord, open our eyes so we may see!"

What happened? Look at verses 18-23. As the enemy came down to arrest him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, "Strike these people with blindness." The Lord heard his prayer and struck them with blindness. Suddenly the entire Aramean army was paralyzed. They became helpless, and as docile as lost sheep. Elisha could have killed them one by one. But he did not harm any of them. He led them like a shepherd into the city of Samaria, about twelve miles away. Then Elisha prayed, "Lord, open the eyes of these men so they can see." The Lord opened their eyes. They were inside Samaria! Elisha arrested the whole Aramean army without shedding one drop of blood. It was through prayer. God worked through the man of prayer, Elisha, to open eyes and to close eyes. The king of Israel called him, "My father," out of his excitement, then asked, "Shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" But Elisha said, "Do not kill them," and urged him to treat them with dignity. So he prepared a great feast for them. After they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master.

Here we can learn Elisha's character. He has the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. He forgave those who came to take his life. He embraced them, prayed for them, served them, and helped them return to their master. St. Paul said in Romans 12:17-21, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil...live at peace with everyone...Do not take revenge, but leave room for God's wrath...If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." If we repay evil with evil, we start a vicious cycle. If we hurt others because they hurt us, we become evil--just like them. But if we overcome evil with good, forgiving, loving and serving, then we can break the

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vicious cycle. This is why we pray for Muslim countries, love them, and send missionaries to them. Elisha did not have spears or swords. But he had something more powerful: prayer to God Almighty. Prayer does not destroy others; it saves others' lives. Those who pray to God do not hate others or hold grudges. They love, embrace, and serve others. Prayer to Almighty God is the weapon of love. We have two powerful weapons. One is prayer and the other is love. With these weapons we can be more than conquerors in all trials and hardships. Look at verse 23b. "So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory." When the Arameans received grace, they stopped attacking Israel.

II. Elisha shared the good news during a national crisis (6:24-7:20)

Look at verse 24. "Some time later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram mobilized his entire army and marched up and laid siege to Samaria." Samaria was the capital city of Northern Israel. The siege lasted a long time. Food prices skyrocketed. At that time, donkeys were regarded as unclean (Lev 11:2-7). A donkey's head was useless. But one donkey's head sold for 80 shekels of silver. In modern terms, it would be nearly \$600. A half pint of dove's dung sold for five shekels, or about \$36. The famine was indeed severe.

How did people respond? Look at verses 26-29. As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him, "Help me, my lord the king!" He replied, "If the Lord does not help you, where can I get help for you?" He was helpless. He should have sought the Lord's will and repented his sins. However, he blamed the Lord and became powerless. Anyway, she explained, "This woman said to me, 'Give up your son so we may eat him today, and tomorrow we'll eat my son.' So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, 'Give up your son so we may eat him,' but she had hidden him." She appealed for justice. The king was utterly frustrated and tore his robes. He had sackcloth on his body. Usually tearing robes and sackcloth are an expression of repentance. But he was not repentant. He was angry against the Lord and against God's servant Elisha. We have to think about why this disaster happened to Israel. It was because the people were unfaithful to the Lord. (1 Ki 8:35-40) The Lord wanted them to repent and come back to him. However, the king became more wicked, and decided to kill Elisha (31). He thought that Elisha was the source of all their troubles. Perhaps he thought that they should have killed the Aramean army when they were prisoners in Samaria. Then, this would not have happened. The king forgot all the good things God had done for him and his people through Elisha, and only wanted to kill him. Why was he so foolish and wicked? Even though he knew God, he did not glorify God or give thanks to God. So his heart became foolish and dark (Ro 1:21)

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Proverbs 19:3 says, "A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord." As Christians, we should not blame the Lord or his servants in the time of crisis. We must remember God's grace, seek his will, repent of our sins and give thanks to God. That is a Christian's basic attitude. (1 Th 5:18)

Now Elisha was sitting in his house with the elders (32). He must have had a prayer meeting to ask God's mercy upon Israel. Elisha knew that the king was trying to kill him. Then the king came and said, "This disaster is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" It seems that Elisha was counseling the king to wait on the Lord, repenting his sins. Perhaps that is why the king wore sackcloth. But he did not repent or truly wait on the Lord. He felt abandoned by the Lord. Now he wanted to surrender. He was helpless and it seemed there was no hope in Israel. There was no way out.

Look at 7:1. "Elisha said, 'Hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says: About this time tomorrow, a seah of flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.'" A seah of flour is nearly two gallons of flour. It would sell for about \$6. It was unbelievable. Samaria's economy would recover; food would be abundant overnight. The king of Israel could not expect any help from anywhere. But help came from the Lord. When man's strength and wisdom end, God begins to intervene. When we cannot find any hope or any help, it is the time to hear the word of the Lord. God will help us. The situation will turn around completely. Let's hear the word of the Lord and find hope in God at this time of crisis!

When Elisha gave them the words of hope, one officer, on whose arm the king was leaning, said to the man of God, "Look, even if the Lord should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?" Elisha answered, "You will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat any of it." Those who have no faith in God cannot enjoy God's grace.

How did God fulfill what he had said through Elisha? First of all, God moved the hearts of four lepers who were outside the city gate. They discussed among themselves, "Why stay here until we die? Let's surrender to the Arameans. If they spare us, we will live. Otherwise, we die anyway." They had a "do or die" spirit. They did not yield to the desperate situation, but wanted to do something. Then God caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses of a great army. So they panicked and ran for their lives. There was no one attacking them, but with great sound effects, the Lord terrified them and they fled. The Lord works in mysterious ways.

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When the lepers entered the camp, they had a feast. They ate and drank and carried off silver and gold and clothes. They must have high-fived each other and celebrated with great gusto. But soon they realized that they were not doing right. The good news should be shared with all people in Samaria who were suffering from the famine. So they called the gatekeepers, who woke up the king, and soon everyone in Samaria knew what the lepers had found. After the king verified this, the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a seah of flour sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley sold for a shekel, as the Lord had said. As the people flooded through the city gates to enjoy the plunder, the officer of the king was trampled in the city gate and died, just as the man of God had said to him. Everything was done according to the word of the Lord spoken by Elisha. God's word is trustworthy. Even in the most difficult situation or circumstance, we can believe God's word is true. However, those who do not trust God's word cannot receive God's grace.

As we have studied, Elisha went through the most challenging time in his life and in his nation. At such times, most people despair, give up, and blame the Lord or others. But Elisha did not blame anyone. He trusted the Lord, sought the Lord's will, and was very patient. Also, he earnestly prayed. He challenged the impossible situations through prayer. Indeed, he was a man of prayer.

God was pleased with Elisha. God heard his prayer and shepherded his people. The Lord loved northern Israel, even though they had abandoned the Lord. So the Lord worked to reveal himself to them and to help them seek him and restore their relationship with him. The Lord used Elisha, a man of prayer, to shepherd his people. The Lord is seeking to use men and women of prayer in these days as well to shepherd our nation. Let's learn to pray in times of hardship, instead of complaining, so that we may grow to be useful to the Lord. Then God can use us to raise up a kingdom of priests and a holy nation for his glory.