

DIFFICULT, IMPOSSIBLE, DONE!

Today's Text: 2 Kings 6: 25-33; 2 Kings 7: 1-20

Extracts:

1. **“And there was a great famine in Samaria and behold, they (the Syrians) besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver. And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, saying, Help, my lord, O king. And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow. So, we boiled my son and did eat him; and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him, and she hath hid her son. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh” [2 Kgs 6: 25-26, 28-30]**
2. **“Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel and two measures of barley for a shekel in the gate of Samaria” [2 Kgs 7: 1]**

Nigeria is a soccer-loving country. A defeat for its national team, the Green Eagles, can be a national day of mourning! That will tell you the passion the people have for the game. During the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, the Under-23 team faced Brazil in the semi-final. Fifteen minutes to the end of the game, Brazil was leading by 3-1. Most Nigerians believed that there was no more hope. So, they switched off their television sets and went to bed although they could not stomach the impending defeat. The next morning, they woke up to learn that Nigeria had defeated Brazil, 4-3! Unbelievable! How did that happen? A top official of the team was caught on TV saying, “It is a miracle!” Nigeria went on to beat Argentina, 3-2, to win the soccer gold medal, the first African country to do so.

Was it really a miracle? Some analysts claimed that Brazil got complacent, and that a match is never over until it is over. Some said the Junior Eagles were just lucky or that they feared the hostile reception they could face on their return. There was no unanimous position on the matter. Therefore, it was not a miracle. In a miracle, there is no debate. You cannot explain it. Some people may doubt it but nobody can explain it. It has three stages: difficult, impossible, and done! In today's lesson, we shall use the famine in Samaria in prophet Elisha's time as a case study.

1. Hardship does not respect anybody!

One of the mistakes we make as believers is to assume that, because we obey and serve God, we should not suffer any hardships. That is far from the truth for “strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life” [Matt. 7: 14]. The opposite of straight is “crooked.” We know that the river is crooked because it always follows the path of least resistance!¹ Therefore, we are bound to be bruised and battered in the process of going through the narrow way that leads to life.

The bruises may sometimes be self-inflicted, such as when we sin or disobey the word of God [Deut. 28: 15-68]. Most times, we may just be mere pawns or baits in the battles between God and Satan. Job did nothing wrong at the time that his family and wealth were destroyed [Job. 1: 6-19]. No matter what, we are required to count it all joy when we face trials and tribulations, “knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience” [Jam. 1: 2-3].

In recognition of the forgoing, believers are ably equipped to face hardships by avoiding fear and exercising the spirit of power, love and a sound mind [2 Tim. 1: 7]. However, that is easier said than done! When you hear of a plane crash in Siberia, you may *sympathise* with the Russians, but when you are awaiting your son’s arrival from Miami on an American Airlines flight and you hear of a hijack of the said plane, you will not know when you start pacing the arrival hall like a mad person!

There are some problems that we can take care of by ourselves because God has equipped us to be able to do so. For example, a college student who lacks funds has the hope that s(he) will one day graduate and be able to earn an income. So, s(he) can afford to bear the pain by taking a long-term student loan. A person who is temporarily unemployed can go hunting for a new one, while thriving on unemployment benefits for now. A person with a heavy credit card debt burden can take deliberate steps to pay off and cut up the cards. A person with a headache or mild cold can walk to the nearest drug store and buy medication off the counter. Therefore, there are many things that we can do for ourselves, although we still need to thank God for making that possible. The trouble comes when problems refuse to go away *in spite of our human efforts*. That is what triggers the process of asking for a miracle.

2. Stages of a miracle

A miracle can be regarded as a wonder that is beyond human comprehension. Magic is a wonder but it is not a miracle. Magic is performed by tricks or using the power of Satanic forces. Miracles come only by the power of God. You will

¹ Richard W. De Haan, “Refusing the Easy Way,” *Our Daily Bread* [2003 Annual Gift Edition: December 5, 2003]

recall that when Moses threw his rod before Pharaoh, it became a snake. That was a miracle because he relied on God's power. However, Pharaoh's magicians also threw their rods and they became serpents. To demonstrate that God's power exceeds that of Satan, Moses' rod swallowed up those of the magicians [Ex. 7: 8-12]. So, do not be deceived.

A miracle tends to pass through the following stages:

a) *Difficult*

At this stage, we still nurse some hope that we can deal with the problem through our own effort. If it is cancer, we religiously listen to the doctors and go through tedious chemotherapy. If it is barrenness, we are ready to go to the latest and best fertility clinic in the world. If it is unemployment, we step up the distribution of our résumés (CVs), and brush up our interviewing techniques. If it is an unhappy marriage, we are ready to go to the marriage counselor or our priest. Meanwhile, we are burning up our resources: money, time and patience.

Joseph had been put in prison without trial for the offence that he did not commit. Then, he met Pharaoh's baker and butler whom he helped. He expected them to reciprocate by putting in a word for him with the king so that he could be set free. *Two clear years* after the butler's release, Joseph was still in prison [Gen. 40: 1-23].

b) *Impossible*

In spite of all that we have done, the situation gets worse and we begin to lose hope in our ability to deal with the problem by human expertise. The doctors tell you that the chemotherapy is not working and that the cancer is spreading. They advise you to go home and prepare for death in a matter of days. The divorce process has been completed in the law court, and the marriage is over. The fertility doctors have advised that you go and adopt if you want children because you can never have your own. The welfare officer tells you that, in spite of all their efforts, they cannot find your only child who strayed out of the special care hospital three years ago. At that stage, those who do not know God can commit suicide. A doctor has been jailed in America who specialized in assisting people to kill themselves!

The woman with the issue of blood for *twelve years* "had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any" [Lk 8: 43]. Peter had been arrested by Herod to be killed after Easter (i.e., the Passover). On the eve of his execution, Peter was still in chains in prison [Acts 12: 3-5]. Lazarus had been in his grave for four days. Therefore, he was "too dead" to come back to life [Jn 11: 17-21]. Those are impossible situations that

are beyond human effort. Those who trust in God will have to leave Him to deal with such situations.

c) *Done!*

This stage has no bearing of any kind with the prior stages. You may not even attempt to explain it because you cannot! This stage belongs to God and Him alone.

There was a lady in my church in Lagos, a lawyer by profession. Her doctor told her and her husband that she had a tumour in her womb, that it was not a pregnancy. When she came to the church, two prophets (at different occasions) told her that she was pregnant and that she would have a son. The only condition was that she should come under God's protection in the church premises *for the duration of her pregnancy*. She obeyed the word of God. Each time that she went for her medical check up, the doctors warned her that she was taking a big risk with her life. However, each time she was inside the church, she could feel the movement of the baby! In due course, she went into labour and had the baby in the church with the assistance of nurses and doctors in the congregation. When she brought her son to the same hospital that had told her all along that there was no pregnancy, the doctors were baffled. All they could do was to write on the cover of the boy's file, "This is a miracle baby!"

The woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of Jesus' garment and she became healed [Lk 8: 43-44]. At the point that Peter should be killed, an angel came and rescued him [Acts 12: 7]. Joseph moved from being prisoner to governor of Egypt *in an instant* [Gen. 41: 9-44]. In deed, with God nothing shall be impossible! Let us now examine the story of the famine in Samaria that was miraculously dealt with *overnight*.

3. Famine in Israel: from gloom to bloom overnight!

The king of Syria, Benhadad, came with all his troops and besieged Samaria, the capital city of the Northern kingdom of Israel. Since food and supplies could not be brought in, famine of the worst type soon set in. People began to feed on their animal stock and the dung of birds, which were very expensive where available. Desperate women even made devilish deals with other women to kill and feed on each other's children [2 Kgs 6: 24-29]. Those were *difficult times*.

The people approached the king of Israel for an urgent solution to the problem but *he had none*. He came from a lineage of bad kings because Elisha the prophet called him "this son of a murderer" [v. 32]. Therefore, the famine might have been God's punishment for Israel, which worshipped Baal and other idols instead of the true God. However, there was evidence that the king had begun to seek the

Lord's face, that he had been fasting, because when the people saw him on the wall, they observed that "he had sackcloth " underneath his outer garment [v. 30]. In those days, the sackcloth was an expression of sorrow [Gen. 37: 34], fasting [Is. 58:5], or repentance [Joel 1: 8, 13], among other uses. In recognition of the fact that he had *no human solutions* to deal with the crisis, the king went looking for the man of God, Elisha. The problem had reached the *impossible stage*.

Through Elisha, God promised an answer which defied logic: that by the next day, prices of food would tumble significantly because there would be more sellers than buyers [2 Kgs 7: 1]! Let us do the mathematics. Currently, the head of an ass was sold for 80 pieces of silver [2 Kgs 6: 25]. A silver shekel was worth the equivalent of 4 days' wages.² In other words, to buy a mere head of an ass would cost you almost a whole year's pay! Now, God was saying through His prophet that from the next day, that is, in twenty-four hours' time, better quality food, such as flour and barley, that would last your family for a long time, would cost you a mere 2-4 days' pay! The king's ADC could not take that and he told Elisha, "Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" [2 Kgs 7: 2].

If you think that you are different from the king's ADC (aide-de-camp) who did not believe such "fairy tale," then you have not passed through a long and faith-stretching hardship. You will have cried to the point of having deep gullies on your cheeks. People have laughed you to scorn. You have prayed so hard that your knees have become hard like a camel's hoofs. There is a dull feeling deep down in you, hovering between doubts and hope. However, in the end, when you realize that the best option is still to leave it to God, you can recover from skepticism and give God a chance. You can *never* work it out how He will do it.

The people went to bed and God went to work! Using the feeble legs of four starving lepers, God stirred up such a loud noise of marching troops that the Syrian army feared. Here is how the Bible describes it [2 Kgs 7: 6]:

For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host; and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to come upon us.

So, they fled for their lives and left behind food and supplies! When the four lepers got there early the next morning, they ate and ate and took and took, and yet, there was so much left. They went back to report to the king of Israel. After much hesitation and probing if the Syrians were luring them into an ambush, the people rushed to the Syrian camp and helped themselves to food, drinks, clothes, much more than they needed. Everybody became a small business owner, selling food and supplies. Understandably, prices tumbled as the Lord had said [vv. 3-16].

² *The New Open Bible* [Study Edition], Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1990; p. 354

Meanwhile, the king's ADC tried to put some order to the stampede. He tried to man the gates but the people were beyond control. In the process, he was trampled under their feet and he died. Again, that was in line with the word of God spoken by the prophet that the ADC would see the miracle but that he would not benefit from it [**vv. 2, 18-20**]. That is the reason that we must never doubt God or His word.

4. Lessons

Miracles glorify God. However, He has promised us "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, *thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end*. Then shall ye *call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you*" [**Jer. 29: 11-12**]. Therefore, we should pay attention to the following lessons from today's study:

- Rule out fatal attractions from sinful conduct by ensuring that you are the temple of the living God *on a routine basis*. In other words, why attract to yourself God's anger and punishment by disobeying Him or obeying haphazardly? If you cannot be for Him, don't pretend that you are!
- Bear in mind that even in circumstances where you can do it by yourself, you are still relying on His grace. Therefore, you do not need to reach the desperate point *before* you start praying. Pray without ceasing, in good times and bad times.
- Learn to appreciate and to thank God. In everything, give thanks [**1 Thes. 5: 18**]. In fact, when you thank God during periods of hardship, miracles pour at you. Jehosaphat went to war singing, "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endureth for ever." He did not throw a single weapon to win a major victory! [**2 Chron. 20: 21-26**].
- If you don't have faith, go and get one! Happily, you can receive it as a gift of the Holy Spirit [**1 Cor. 12: 9**], or you can nurture it as a fruit of the Holy Spirit [**Gal. 5: 22**].

Miracles still happen. However, remember the process: difficult, impossible, done! May God grant you the patience to receive your miracle.