

## Making the Difference

## 2 Kings 6:8-23

### WRONG PERCEPTIONS

Last week we looked at the way by which people perceive Christians and church and also the way we perceive ourselves as God's people and as the church of Jesus Christ. What our illustrations from the OT reminded us was that it's common for people in the community to have a completely erroneous perception of what Church is about and what Christians are like.

The same is true of God's people too. We can also have a wrong view of God and ourselves. How Has this come about. I suggested some possible ways.

### INFLUENCED BY PAST EXPERIENCE

Firstly everyone is influenced by our past experiences of Christians, the church and of God. If the experience has been negative, then every contact with Christians and church may well end up as very negative.

### INFLUENCED BY OTHERS

It often isn't a personal experience of Christians or church that puts people off, it's the attitudes and stories that are in the experience of others that influence us. If those we love and trust say something's bad, then it's bad.

### INFLUENCED BY BACKGROUND

It's amazing how our upbringings can influence us even decades after our childhoods. Our values can be both shaped by our families and their lifestyle or be a reaction to them. My family went to a great family church. There were lots of young people there. But it also had some doctrines that I would say reflected law rather than grace: they were quite strict, but not as tough as many Brethren Assemblies at the time. One or two of my contemporaries reacted against this strictness and rebelled against church and left. That often happens in strict churches.

The rest of us found that our fellowship together built us up as Christians but we reacted to the strictness by looking at the Word of God and all gravitated towards churches which reflected something more open as we left home.

Most of us are now leaders in other churches and denominations - all evangelical, and invariably bringing our heritage of a very high view of scriptures, but without the doctrinaire approach we had been taught. It's interesting to see that our Bible-based background and polite rebellion have all brought us to the same position but in different denominations. We made the same journey but in slightly different ways.

### BREAKING FALSE PERCEPTIONS

However we all come across people who have been switched off by and to the Christian faith, and also those who have never been switched on. How do we get over the barrier? Similarly, we find so many Christians that lack confidence in their faith. How do we get over that barrier.

Traditionally we've tried to use reason. Show them the truth of God's word. Nothing wrong with that. I know of people who were like the Bereans and diligently search the scriptures and find truth.

In reality, most people don't seem to function that way. If we examine our attitudes, particularly before God we'll be staggered to discover that many will be based on

prejudice, stereotyping - we think that if one person is like it all are, ignorance and habit.

How do people change what may be the habit of a lifetime, or views strongly held that are just wrong?

#### DRAMATIC EVENTS

Generally, people change long-held opinions when change occurs in their lives that force them to rethink their ideas, attitudes and values. It's often during big changes like moving home, having a baby, losing a loved one, changing a job, friends moving away, losing a job. Think of what sorts of things have occurred in your life that have changed long-held opinions that you had.

You've noticed I've not mentioned God very much yet. When we are looking at people changing long-held opinions about Christians and church, then we need to explore the role of the Holy Spirit.

#### MAP OF ISRAEL

So I'm going to examine this through this story about Elisha this morning. This was a few years later than our story last week - possibly around 840BC. The Syrians/Arameans were in constant conflict with Israel, for the same reason as last week. The both claimed vast tracts of Gilead and what was later Galilee. Land switched hands frequently. The Syrians were quite aggressive. By this time Israel was under the rule of Jehoram, a bad ruler but who still listened and respected Elijah, but who ran after other gods as well.

#### CHANGING SYRIAN MINDS

How was the war going to be halted? How was peace going to happen? How was the mind of the Syrians going to be changed so they would cease their attacks on Israel. Well, let's explore shall we. What we find after the events of this chapter, that the Syrians' minds were changed. How? There wasn't one single factor, but a combination and behind each was God. I believe that we can learn from this as it gives us pointers as to how we should behave;

#### KNOWLEDGE

The Syrians got nowhere because Elisha was given divine knowledge of their military plans. So comprehensive was the knowledge that the Syrian king thought he had a mole in his inner military circle. It wasn't a mole, it was Elisha. The Lord had revealed the Syrian plans to him. Their interest was peeked and as we read, they paid him a visit.

How do we see change in people's perceptions of God? It starts when people realise that we have something that they don't, whether that be words or actions. Elisha acted as moved by God's Spirit.

If we are to see change in our community, then we need to allow God's Spirit to use us to speak and live our faith to others. As I've said many times before, it is the Holy Spirit that convinces men and women about Jesus but it's our lives and words that will make the impression. What impression are we bringing to our community. What message do our lives and words bring?

But there's something else about knowledge here.

When he was told that Elisha was in Dothan, *14 he sent a large force there with horses and chariots. They reached the town at night and surrounded it. 15 Early the next morning Elisha's servant got up, went out of the house, and saw the Syrian troops with their horses and chariots surrounding the town. He went back to Elisha and exclaimed,*

*“We are doomed, sir! What shall we do?”*

*16 “Don't be afraid,” Elisha answered. “We have more on our side than they have on theirs.” 17 Then he prayed, “O LORD, open his eyes and let him see!” The LORD answered his prayer, and Elisha's servant looked up and saw the hillside covered with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.*

Elisha wasn't bothered at all that the Syrians were surrounding Dothan - his servant was scared stiff. The difference? Elisha saw something different to his servant. His servant only saw the problem, Elisha could see the the possibilities.

It's coming up on 5 years that I've been minister of this church. One consistent theme that has come up from time to time is the sense of what we can't do - usually we don't have enough people, or we don't have enough people with that gift. There's this problem, there's that problem.

That morning in Dothan, Elisha could see all the possibilities and he wasn't afraid. Then Elisha prayed for his servant and then he saw the possibilities too.

When we are faced with any problem, let alone the challenge of reaching our community, let's ask God to open up our lives to see through the problems and on to the possibilities. There is no limit in human terms to what God can do. Let's pray that the Holy Spirit will open up our eyes afresh to see the presence and power of God in our lives - in the past and in the present, so that we fact the future with confidence in the way Elisha did.

## POWER

The second thing that made the Syrians take notice of Elisha and his God was the power experience they all went through. Just as the servant's eyes were opened, the Syrian soldiers were blinded. Amazing. They never even got to see Elisha, nut they experienced the power of God in being made blind. Not knowing what Elisha looked like, they accepted his offer to be taken to him! Of course, he leads them into Samaria where they became captives.

The power of God is very convincing. It may not be as dramatic as the story, but as God's people we should expect to see something of the power of God in our daily lives. We often do as we look back at answered prayer. God wants us to experience the miracles so that we may speak them out to others. He wants us to pray not just for miracles in the lives of Christians, but particularly to pray them into the lives of unbelievers.

Let's pray that we may be sensitive to what God is doing in our lives and in the lives of others. Pray for answered prayer and for the Holy Spirit to reveal the power of God in our lives and theirs, that their lives might be transformed.

## COMPASSION

But there's one more thing that did it for the Syrians; that would convince them that the Lord was with Elisha and Israel so that they would back off and not invade again. It wasn't miraculous, it wasn't a power event. It was this: *21 When the king of Israel saw the Syrians, he asked Elisha, “Shall I kill them, sir? Shall I kill them?” 22 “No,” he answered. “Not even soldiers you had captured in combat would you put to death. Give them something to eat and drink, and let them return to their king.” 23 So the king of Israel provided a great feast for them; and after they had eaten and drunk, he sent them back to the king of Syria. From then on the Syrians stopped raiding the*

*land of Israel.*

They were shown mercy. They could have been slaughtered, instead Elisha commanded the king to free them, give them a great feast and send them home.

I have a friend who has a healing ministry. I've often mentioned him to you. He's always amazed by the power of God. He sees the lives of both believers and unbelievers changed. He always preaches the gospel. But despite this there are many who do not immediately come to Christ.

However good the argument, however amazing the miracle, the thing that so often pushes people into the kingdom is that there was a person there who showed them compassion in a time of deep personal need. A friend to listen to them, a pair of hands to help, and an arm around them of consolation, someone to pray for them.

The Syrians saw the power but also experienced the compassion. That's really appropriate when we speak and live the Good News to people. Jesus spoke profound words, did remarkable miracles and people were attracted to Him, but what made the difference is that He showed compassion for them - and it was that compassion that drove Him to Calvary.

However impressive our words and actions may be, the Holy Spirit most of all speaks compassion into people's lives. He convinces people of their sin, shows them a loving God, reveals a Saviour, brings them forgiveness.

The three elements that Elisha showed that day are the three elements God brings to men and women today in our community - the word of truth, the power of God, but most of all the compassion and forgiveness that comes through Jesus.

Now as a church, we should be the same for our community and do the same:

- to speak the words of truth faithfully
- to reveal the power of God to men and women
- to show compassion that we are examples of how God wants to show compassion for them in Christ.

So are we speaking words of truth? May the Holy Spirit give us those words so that people may see Him in us.

PRAYER

Are we experiencing the power of God? May the Holy Spirit open our eyes to see just who He is and what He can do in people's lives and also in our lives

Are we living the compassion of God? Our lives should reflect the compassion that God shows us and everyone - let's pray that the Holy Spirit will do that work in us.

I believe as a Church God is wanting to challenge us to reach out and be relevant to this community of Walton. We have the equipment, we have words of life, we have the power of God. All we need now is the confidence that comes through His Spirit.



8 The king of Syria was at war with Israel. He consulted his officers and chose a place to set up his camp. 9 But Elisha sent word to the king of Israel, warning him not to go near that place, because the Syrians were waiting in ambush there. 10 So the king of Israel warned the people who lived in that place, and they were on guard. This happened several times.

11 The Syrian king became greatly upset over this; he called in his officers and asked them, "Which one of you is on the side of the king of Israel?"

12 One of them answered, "No one is, Your Majesty. The prophet Elisha tells the king of Israel what you say even in the privacy of your own room."

13 "Find out where he is," the king ordered, "and I will capture him."

When he was told that Elisha was in Dothan, 14 he sent a large force there with horses and chariots. They reached the town at night and surrounded it. 15 Early the next morning Elisha's servant got up, went out of the house, and saw the Syrian troops with their horses and chariots surrounding the town. He went back to Elisha and exclaimed, "We are doomed, sir! What shall we do?"

16 "Don't be afraid," Elisha answered. "We have more on our side than they have on theirs." 17 Then he prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes and let him see!" The LORD answered his prayer, and Elisha's servant looked up and saw the hillside covered with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

18 When the Syrians attacked, Elisha prayed, "O LORD, strike these men blind!" The LORD answered his prayer and struck them blind. 19 Then Elisha went to them and said, "You are on the wrong road; this is not the town you are looking for. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are after." And he led them to Samaria.

20 As soon as they had entered the city, Elisha prayed, "Open their eyes, LORD, and let them see." The LORD answered his prayer; he restored their sight, and they saw that they were inside Samaria.

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