

## **WHEN THE MAN OF GOD IS WEeping**

II Kings 8: 7-15 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

This text is not a happy text, but a weeping text. If we were only to preach the happy texts, this passage in our Elijah-Elisha series would definitely be left out. Who wants us to preach on weeping texts? Beloved, the Lord reminds us in II Timothy 3: 16-17, as His servants, that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” Yet, without preaching on the rough, weeping texts, we will leave a wide chasm for all of God’s people, a chasm that will teach God’s flock that life is all roses, that there are no heartaches, no heartbreaks, and certainly nothing but blessings for the family of God. If we believe and preach such a false Gospel, what will we do when heartache comes, what will we do when heartbreaks come? Without all of Scripture, we will drown in the river of hardship and in the storms of this life. I simply love an old poem, called “The Bridge Builder,” by Will Allen Dromgoole. Listen! “An old man going a lone highway, Came, at the evening cold and gray, To a chasm vast and deep and wide. Through which was flowing a sullen tide. The old man crossed in the twilight dim; the sullen stream had no fear for him; But he turned when safe on the other side and built a bridge to span the tide. “Old man,” said a fellow pilgrim near, “You are wasting your strength with building here; Your journey will end with the ending day, you never again will pass this way; You’ve crossed the chasm, deep and wide, why build this bridge at evening tide?” The builder lifted his old gray head; “Good friend, in the path I have come,” he said, “There followed after me to-day A youth whose feet must pass this way. This chasm that has been as naught to me; To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be; He, too, must cross in the twilight dim; Good friend, I am building this bridge for him!” Today, I hope to build a bridge to help us respond wisely when men, women, boys and girls are weeping at what is happening before them.

This is a hard text. The anointing of Hazael, as the new king of Syria, as well as the soon anointing of Jehu to be the new king of the Israel, II Kings 9, those were commands God gave Elijah to fulfill as Elisha’s predecessor. Remember the commissioning of Elijah came after God assured him there were 7,000 other true believers in Israel, who had not bowed down to Baal, or kissed his image. Elijah was thinking he was the only prophet of God left in all Israel. Remember in I Kings 19: 15-16, we read, “And the Lord said to Elijah, “Go return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu, the son of Nimshi, you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha, the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.” Thus, we know from the Word of God that two of the commands given to Elijah were not immediately carried out.

I cannot tell you all the reasons, but one good reason perhaps, was because God had purposed to bring King Ahab to repentance. Knowing of Ahab's repentance, in I Kings 21: 25-29, God delayed judgment on Ahab's house until after his death. Who would have expected Ahab to repent and to be granted a delay in judgment? I cannot tell you for certain, but it is reasonable to believe, that God gave Elijah the command to anoint Hazael and Jehu in his lifetime but that God did not wish Elijah to know in advance that Ahab would repent. Apart from Ahab's repentance, the future that God had decreed and predicted for Ahab's house would certainly have come to pass in the lifetime of Elijah—and not in the lifetime of Elisha.

As we come to our text, the time arrived when the commission of God to Elijah, that must have been delegated to Elisha had to be completed; that time had come. The command to appoint and anoint Hazael to be the new king of Syria had arrived. As Elijah's successor, Elisha was given the responsibility to carry out Elijah's command. The elderly Syrian king, Benhadad, after a long reign, was very sick, and Elisha was told by God that Benhadad would not be the king for long. If Hazael was to be anointed king in Benhadad's lifetime, it was necessary for Elisha to get going from Samaria to Damascus. What a thankless job for Elisha to risk his life to carry on the job God gave to Elijah! Careless for his own safety, Elisha left the land of Israel and journeyed 120 miles northeast to the city of Dasmascus, where Benhadad on his sickbed, ruled over Syria. This obedience to the command of God to his master, that Elijah was not able to obey as he was translated, this obedience was a long obedience into treacherous territory, going into the territory where the Syrian king had only years earlier – in 893, BC, sought to kill the prophet. This time was around 885 BC—eight years later. Elisha had no idea how he would be received in Damascus. In some ways, Elisha had claims on Benhadad, as he was responsible for the healing of Naaman, his captain of Benhadad's army. Naaman had leprosy. Also, Elisha had talked king Jehoram of Israel into releasing without ransom a captured Syrian detachment, that Elisha commanded king Joram to give them a feast before sending them home. On the other hand, Benhadad knew Elisha was the one responsible for the inglorious and horrifying retreat of Benhadad's entire Syrian army that was besieging the city of Samaria—surrounding it. Be sure of this. It was at great risk that Elisha made the journey north to Damascus. Benhadad was glad Elisha had arrived in Damascus.

Hazael, soon to be anointed king of Syria, became to Israel back in 885 BC what ISIS is right now to the world. Why tears? Why did the man of God, Elisha, weep as he stared deeply into the eyes and face of Hazael? What lessons does God have for us in this difficult, weeping text? That's our message today. What did Elisha see that made him weep? What do we need to see that should make us weep? I want to share with us three powerful truths about the human heart that Elisha saw.

## **ALL HUMAN HEARTS ARE CAPABLE OF DOING HORRIBLE SINS. (I.)**

Notice verse 7-12. This interview between Elisha and King Benhadad's high ranking servant, Hazael came about because of the awful illness Benhadad was suffering. The Syrian king sent this apparent high-ranking captain with profuse gifts to inquire if he would recover from his disease. Here this king that Naaman said was trusting in the idol in the house of Rimmon in Damascus, now was seeking help in his time of weakness and anxiety, as he feared death. He remembered the healing of his right-hand man, Naaman by the prophecy of Elisha the prophet. Elisha gave to Hazael a ready answer. Elisha said, "Go, say to him, "You shall certainly recover, but the Lord has shown me that he shall certainly die." Elisha wasn't willing to accept this gift of 40 camel loads of all the fine things of Damascus. Benhadad had humbly told Hazael to call himself Elisha's son—v. 9. What Elisha was telling Hazael was that Benhadad would surely recover from his malady, but he would be die; he would be murdered. By the vision of God that Elisha was given, Elisha could see that Hazael would murder Benhadad, his master and Syria's king. Elisha never told Hazael that he as this wicked scoundrel of a man would kill his master, but Elisha knew Hazael would.

This man, Hazael, is confirmed by Assyrian records that he controlled Syria, and that he was known as a usurper, "the son of nobody." When Elisha told Hazael that Benhadad would recover but die, Elisha stopped and stared into the face and eyes of Hazael until Hazael could no longer look into the eyes of the prophet. Elisha was looking into Hazael's soul. God was revealing the secret thoughts of Hazael's heart to the prophet. No wonder Hazael could no longer look into the face of the prophet. He was too ashamed to do so. Oh, beloved, oh how capable of doing horrible sins was Hazael, and how capable of doing horrible sins am I and also you. It may have been as Elisha looked into the face of Hazael, that his penetrating look was similar to Jesus looking into the face and heart of Judas Iscariot before Judas went out into the night to betray Jesus. Hazael did not know what to do when under the staring gaze and stare of the prophet.

In this exposing of Hazael's heart to Elisha, God was doing one last call for Hazael to repent of his evil. Don't miss this call of God to Hazael. Elisha traveled to enemy territory to give God's Word to Syria, to people there, and their king who did not believe in God. Elisha obeyed God's voice. Elisha could have been killed for his obedience to God. There is no reason we should believe Hazael wanted anyone to know about his insidious scheme to kill his master. Be certain, Elisha loved Benhadad, Hazael and all Syria enough to go and even to weep over their future. I ask you—do you love and trust the Lord enough to obey Him? Do you love people enough to tell them the word of Christ? Anointing Hazael king of Syria may have been one of the hardest things Elisha ever did. In the middle of this appointing and anointing of Hazael, Elisha began to sob, and he began to weep

uncontrollably. Don't mistake Elisha as Elisha looked into Hazael's face, eyes and soul? It was a call of God Hazael will have to answer for when he stands some days before God. Hazael finally blurted out his concern before Elisha, "Why does my lord weep? Elisha held nothing back telling Hazael, v. 12, "I know the evil that you will do to the people of Israel. You will set on fire their fortresses, and you will kill their young men with the sword and dash in pieces their little ones and rip open their pregnant women." Hazael could tell the man of God could see deep into his heart, maybe even deeper than Hazael at the time thought he would ever go. This was a final call of God to this evil man.

Do you know how evil the human heart can be? God can penetrate the human heart, as He penetrated Hazael's heart that sad day. Hazael never repented, but he felt God's tug on his evil heart. Penn Jillette, a famous atheist, magician, TV personality, and actor three years ago, made a video explaining he had no respect for born again Christians who do not evangelize. In 2016, Jillette recorded a short video you can listen to as I have, about a businessman who came to talk to him after one of his magic shows. He said the guy was about his age and had participated in one of the acts as an audience member. This businessman brought this Hazael of a man a little Gideon Psalms and New Testament. The short video is called – "A Gift of a Bible. The businessman kindly complimented Penn Jillette on his show and on his decent language. Then he said, "I brought this for you." The man held up a small book. It was a New Testament with the Psalms, something that could fit in a person's pocket. "I wrote in the front of it," the man said, "and I wanted you to have this." The man explained he was a businessman and not crazy. Jillette, moved by the man's gesture, wiping a tear from his eye, recalled: "He was kind, and nice, and sane, and looked me in the eyes, and talked to me, and then gave me this Bible." "I've always said," "I don't respect people who don't proselytize. I don't respect that at all. If you believe there is a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward. "How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate someone to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?" Jillette then offered this example to illustrate his point: "If I believed, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn't believe it, that that truck was bearing down on you, there's a certain point that I tackle you, and this is more important than that." After seeing his video, I am praying for this atheist, Penn Jillette. A Gideon looked into his eyes as Elisha looked into Hazael's eyes, and the man is under conviction. There is a second lesson.

**ALL HUMAN HEARTS ARE QUICK TO DISMISS THE POSSIBILITIES OF SIN WE ARE ALL CAPABLE OF DOING.** (II.) You may have dismissed having anything in you that compares to Hazael. But look at Hazael in verse 13.

“And Hazael said, “What is your servant, who is but a dog, that he should do this great thing?” He dismissed that Elisha was speaking truth. Beloved, the possibility of sin in born again believers as well as in unregenerate men and women is great. At conversion, the old nature is not taken away. I dare you to memorize Romans 7: 1-25. The apostle Paul made it crystal clear that he refused to dismiss the evil waging war on his born-again soul. He wrote under divine Holy Spirit inspiration in Romans 7: 18, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” In Romans 7: 23, he wrote, “But I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.” What, then, is the difference between a Christian and an unregenerate man or woman? There are possibilities of evil in them both, but we as Christians strive against the evil, while the unregenerate man or woman yields to sin and loves it. The Christian may fall, but if so, the true believer is repentant. Yes; there are possibilities of evil, there are actualities of evil, in the best of us. Jesus might still say to our church or any of His churches, "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone at a fallen sister or an erring brother."

But I hear the protest in our hearts. I don't have Hazael's ability to do evil. Do you think I am that kind of a dog? Hazael did not become a murderer all at once. None of us become suddenly wicked. If Elisha had told Hazael that he would be a murderer, or that he would rip open pregnant women, he would have been highly offended. Hazael before Elisha, evil as he was, perhaps already plotting his master's murder, still asked Elisha, "What is your servant, this dog, that he should do this great thing?" Hazael did not know of all he was capable of doing. It is a dangerous thing to tamper with temptation. Getting temptation close to the sin lurking in our hearts is like getting gunpowder next to a spark. The excellent pastor Clarke Huston Irwin said about temptation, “We first endure it, then look with pity, on it, and then embrace it.” It is a foolish thing to make light of the guilt of sin in God's sight. It is a foolish thing to make light of the power of sin in our own hearts. Why else did Jesus call us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation?" I warn each of you as I warn myself today, Don't boast about what sins you would never do. The Word of God is clear in Proverbs 14: 9, “Fools mock at sin or guilt offerings—that is, they mock at confession of sin, and repentance from sin, but among the righteous, there is favor or grace.” I Corinthians 10: 12 is a dangerous verse to overlook or to minimize. “Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. The third and last lesson I bring to us from Hazael is:

**ALL HUMAN HEARTS ARE ABLE TO AVOID SIN ONLY BY THE TRANSFORMING, RESTRAINING GRACE AND POWER OF GOD.** (III.)

Notice verses 14-15. Follow me as I read it. What keeps us from becoming just like Hazael? Is it the good in us that we boast in like the Pharisees? Is it the good

record of our past behavior that we are leaning on? There is no way for any of us to avoid sin except by the transforming and restraining grace and power of God. It is only by the blood of Jesus. There is no other safeguard against me ending up becoming a Hazael myself. Hazael, the Syrian, the son of nobody as he was called, knew nothing of the transforming and restraining grace and power of God.

Temptation upon temptation came crowding into his mind and now, after being with Elisha, he had been anointed as the next Syrian king. What made him do what he did in murdering Benhadad? Within him, (1) was a fierce ambition to be great and to be the Syrian king. That temptation took complete possession of his mind and heart and soul and spirit. (2) Then he came to the sick king and was tempted to tell the king a false message of what Elisha said. Benhadad trusted him. He must not tell all Elisha said, so when the king asked, “What did Elisha say to you?” – Hazael yielded to saying only a half truth, “He told me that you would certainly recover.” (3) Hazael was shrewd. He wanted to make sure that Benhadad would not make any arrangements for his succession, the way kings do, when death is imminent. So, he lied big time saying, “All is well. Prepare to keep reigning.”

Then (4) realizing he had better act quickly, there came the temptation to take away his master's life. It was a strong temptation. Benhadad was now a fooled, falsely trusting, helpless weak king, upon his bed of sickness. That made the distance between Hazael and the Syrian throne as close as two-sheets in the wind. One little thing he would do, and his ambitions would be realized. No one would suspect him, and the object of his ambition would be his. He did the deed with a bed cloth dipped in water and he smothered his master.

Why did Hazael fall? Why was he so evil? It was because of the power of sin within the human heart. He had experienced no new birth to transform him and no restraining power to stop him. We need more than human determination to conquer Satan's power of sin. We need the grace of God. The hymnwriter Henry F. Lyte wrote the hymn, “Abide with Me.” In verse three, he wrote, “I need Thy presence every passing hour—What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power. Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be? Through cloud and sunshine, Oh, abide with me.” Hazael had no restraining power to check his evil desires, no resisting power to stop temptation at the door of his heart. Hazael seemed ashamed, and embarrassed at the gaze of Elisha, v. 11. That godly gaze unnerved him and confused him. Shame cannot conquer lust and covetousness. Shame could not stop his evil ambition, his desire for power, and his willingness to murder. Hazael never had Joseph's power of God, His grace to resist an affair with Potiphar's wife. Joseph had that power to run and to tell her as he ran, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” God's law was in Joseph's heart, as he had a personal relationship with God, and he revered God and feared to offend his holy God. Joseph would not grieve the loving heavenly Father who had watched

over him when his own brothers forsook him. As I close, I commend you all to turn your lives over completely to the transforming, restraining power of God and His grace to overcome sin. Be on guard against the first beginnings of evil in your thoughts and mind, no matter how small or insignificant. Stop temptation in its track with God's grace and overcoming power. Beloved, be loving and prayerful towards those who are failing and sinning. Consider yourself, prayerfully, for you and I still can be tempted. If you know you are moving towards bringing tears to the heart of God or to those who love and pray for you, pray with David afresh in Psalm 51: 10-12, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence. Take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation; and uphold me with a willing spirit."