Sudden Blessings

By Dennis Pollock

One of the tests of faith that believers are sure to face involves long delay where there is no sign of improvement in our situation. We can usually endure delay as long as we have the encouragement that comes from an improving situation. But when each passing day brings no indication that God is at work on our case, we often despair. What we fail to realize is that one of the ways of God is to come to the aid of His people suddenly after a prolonged period of apparent inactivity, with little or no advanced tipoff. Just when we are ready to give up, when we are about to let go of our faith, suddenly God shows up and brings about a powerful deliverance.

A story from 2 Kings is a classic example of this. The story begins with the city of Samaria, which served as the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel, being besieged by a powerful Syrian army. Things were starting to get desperate as the siege wore on, and the people were not far from starvation. The Bible tells us:

And it happened after this that Ben-Hadad king of Syria gathered all his army, and went up and besieged Samaria; and there was a great famine in Samaria; and indeed they besieged it until 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.

Talk about inflation! A donkey's head is not going to be prized in almost any situation, but it had now become available only to the very rich. The kab of "dove droppings" is believed by most scholars to be a colorful term referring to a small quantity of seed pods, which would normally have sold for a few pennies. Five shekels was an outlandish price, but famine has a way of changing what men and women consider valuable. The Jews of Samaria were in a desperate situation, and if help didn't arise soon, they would either have to face unconditional surrender or starvation.

As the king of Israel went out for a walk through his beleaguered city, a woman came to him in obvious distress. She had a controversy with another woman she wanted the king to settle. She and the other lady had agreed to eat one another's babies. She had volunteered her baby, but when the time came for her friend to surrender up her own baby, she would not do it. She begged the king to provide justice for her. Hearing just how bad things had become, his instant response was to blame the prophet Elisha, who was dwelling in the city. He said to himself, "God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on him today!"

Strangely he blames the least blameworthy man in the whole city. Pressure has a way of leading to irrational decisions and statements, and this surely qualified as irrational. To kill the one man in the city who had God's ear and served as God's mouth would have brought utter ruin upon the king and his subjects. Nevertheless, he determined to persevere in his mad plan and sent a man to kill the prophet, saying, "Surely this calamity is from the LORD; why should I wait for the LORD any longer?" Now he is not only blaming Elisha, but Elisha's God as well. Waiting upon God for deliverance has become odious to him. If God meant to deliver him, He would have done it by now!

Most people would rather take action, any action, than wait. Waiting seems to place one in such a helpless position. When you act, you can be responsible for your success or failure, but when you wait, you are depending upon an outside source to bring your deliverance. And yet the Bible has so many positive things to say about waiting on the Lord. In Isaiah we read, "But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk
and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31). And in Psalms we are told, "Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!" (Psalms 27:14).

After sending an assassin to kill Elisha, the king decides to go to Elisha's house and see the outcome. When he arrives he find that Elisha and his friends have wisely shut the door and refused the assassin entrance. Elisha, however has a word from God for the king: "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.'"

What an incredibly brash prediction! Elisha declares that within twenty-four hours the bottom is going to drop out of the food prices. Nearly a gallon of fine flour will be sold for a shekel, and nearly two gallons of barley for the same amount. Elisha is predicting a miraculous change of situation for the people of this city. This is not a gradual improvement, which would be a lot more believable. The prophet announces: "Tomorrow about this time…"

Had the king and the rest of the city believed this prophecy it would have been the occasion for an incredible city-wide party. Deliverance was on the way; relief was coming. Elisha hadn't spelled out any of the details and probably didn't know them himself, but God must have a mighty big surprise up His sleeve. A faith response might have been to say, "Get out the food we've been hoarding, bring out the remaining wine; God is on the move!" But none of this happened. We don't have a response from the king, but we do have one from the officer who accompanied him: "Look, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, could this thing be?" This scenario seems so implausible, the king's officer questions whether God Himself could make it happen. What the man didn't realize is that changing negative conditions with blinding speed is God's specialty. He doesn't do this every day (if He did, there wouldn't be nothing amazing about it to us) but at special times He loves to bring about rapid deliverance and transformation and reveal His mighty hand.

You did not mess with Old Testament prophets. These fierce, independent agents of YHWH carried lighting in their hands and thunder on their lips. Elisha's response to the unbelieving mockery of the officer was simple and harsh: "In fact, you shall see it with your eyes, but you shall not eat of it."

Shortly after this some lepers who were sitting at the gates of the city had a conversation. They reasoned that if they sat where they were they would surely die. It seemed more reasonable to surrender to the Syrians and see if they would show them mercy. They made their way to the Syrian camp but to their astonishment they found it deserted. The Scriptures tell us the reason for this: "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." They had assumed a mighty army was about to charge them and fled for their lives in a panic – leaving their tents and all their goods intact!

The lepers gladly helped themselves to some of the food and treasures they found in the empty tents of these wealthy Syrian soldiers. After a while they decided they had better report their findings to the king. The king and his officials could hardly believe this and sent some men to check it out. They found the road leading away from the camp strewn with garments and weapons which the Syrians had thrown away as they ran for their lives. How simply had this deliverance come about! Just a few divine sound effects and the fearsome Syrian army was routed.

Suddenly, the people of Samaria had come to the end of their trial. Deliverance had arrived in a moment. The pressure was off and relief had come. It didn't take the people of the city long to make their way out to the massive Syrian army campsite and start plundering their enemies' treasures. Wheat and barley, gold and silver, swords and jewelry were flying every which way. Poor people became rich, starving people
had more than they could eat, and surprise, surprise, the Bible tells us: "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." And what about that officer that had mocked the prophet, and asked, "If the LORD would make windows in heaven, could this thing be?" The Bible tells us that the king put him in charge of the gate, and the man was trampled and killed by the eager crowds as they poured out of the city toward the Syrian camp. Just as Elisha had predicted, he had seen God's deliverance but did not taste it.

Suddenly…

The Bible is filled with many examples of sudden deliverances for the people of God. We find this exciting to read about, but we fail to appreciate the long periods of drought and desperate need that invariably precede these moments of divine breakthrough. But there can be no breakthrough until there has first been a lengthy season where a breakthrough is needed. Joseph received deliverance from prison and promotion to being the second in command of Egypt, but first he must endure thirteen long years of slavery and prison. On the first Passover the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt overnight, but this was only after they had served as slaves for centuries. God may make us wait and wait and wait, but in His time, He is the God of sudden breakthroughs. No matter how dark our circumstances, no matter how hopeless our condition, no matter how many people advise us to give up our expectation of any good outcome, our deliverance is in God's hands. He can bring it to pass so rapidly and so thoroughly, that within a twenty-four hour period we can go from despair to elation, from famine to feast, from utter lack to total abundance, from crushing oppression to glorious freedom.

The principle behind this has to do with the "piling up" effect of prayer. In Luke Jesus gives us a parable about prayer and at the beginning He gives us the main point of the parable: "that men always ought to pray and not to lose heart." He tells of a poor widow who keeps coming to an indifferent judge again and again for justice. The judge, although "not fearing God or man" finally grants the widow's request, due to her stubborn perseverance. The point of this teaching is that, in the realm of prayer, we must not give up! Just as making deposits in a savings account will eventually add up to a significant amount of money, so praying, petitioning God, and claiming His promises will pile up and eventually lead to incredible acts of deliverance and blessing. Sometimes the blessings will come gradually, but at other times God will wait and bring them all at once.

Those who put their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior have been given many promises of deliverance and provision. Yet we are often called to wait on the Lord for these to be manifested in our lives and situations. We would prefer it if God would answer immediately, or if, as we pray, we would see consistent signs of improvement. Yet God sometimes delights to withhold all help until the time of His choosing. Malachi tells us, "And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple…" (Malachi 3:1).

God is the God of suddenly. And He loves to suddenly transform the lives of His children when they call upon Him, as they come to Him in the name of Jesus Christ, and clothed in Jesus' perfect righteousness. How much difference a day can make, when God arises to answer our believing prayers!

And if you do not belong to Christ, how suddenly your life can change, how suddenly your sins can be forgiven, how suddenly you can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and how suddenly you can possess eternal life. The Lord Jesus died on a cross for your sins and rose again the third day to give you the wealth of heaven. And it can happen for you in a moment. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.