

**Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> October 22**

**You will know that I am the Lord**

**1 Kings 20:1-43**

### **Ben-Hadad Attacks Samaria**

**20** Now Ben-Hadad king of Aram mustered his entire army. Accompanied by thirty-two kings with their horses and chariots, he went up and besieged Samaria and attacked it. <sup>2</sup> He sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of Israel, saying, "This is what Ben-Hadad says: <sup>3</sup> 'Your silver and gold are mine, and the best of your wives and children are mine.'"

<sup>4</sup> The king of Israel answered, "Just as you say, my lord the king. I and all I have are yours."

<sup>5</sup> The messengers came again and said, "This is what Ben-Hadad says: 'I sent to demand your silver and gold, your wives and your children. <sup>6</sup> But about this time tomorrow I am going to send my officials to search your palace and the houses of your officials. They will seize everything you value and carry it away.'"

<sup>7</sup> The king of Israel summoned all the elders of the land and said to them, "See how this man is looking for trouble! When he sent for my wives and my children, my silver and my gold, I did not refuse him."

<sup>8</sup> The elders and the people all answered, "Don't listen to him or agree to his demands."

<sup>9</sup> So he replied to Ben-Hadad's messengers, "Tell my lord the king, 'Your servant will do all you demanded the first time, but this demand I cannot meet.'" They left and took the answer back to Ben-Hadad.

<sup>10</sup> Then Ben-Hadad sent another message to Ahab: "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if enough dust remains in Samaria to give each of my men a handful."

<sup>11</sup> The king of Israel answered, "Tell him: 'One who puts on his Armor should not boast like one who takes it off.'"

<sup>12</sup> Ben-Hadad heard this message while he and the kings were drinking in their tents, and he ordered his men: "Prepare to attack." So, they prepared to attack the city.

### **Ahab Defeats Ben-Hadad**

<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile a prophet came to Ahab king of Israel and announced, "This is what the LORD says: 'Do you see this vast army? I will give it into your hand today, and then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

<sup>14</sup> "But who will do this?" asked Ahab.

The prophet replied, "This is what the LORD says: 'The junior officers under the provincial commanders will do it.'"

"And who will start the battle?" he asked.

The prophet answered, "You will."

<sup>15</sup> So Ahab summoned the 232 junior officers under the provincial commanders. Then he assembled the rest of the Israelites, 7,000 in all. <sup>16</sup> They set out at noon while Ben-Hadad and the 32 kings allied with him were in their tents getting drunk. <sup>17</sup> The junior officers under the provincial commanders went out first.

Now Ben-Hadad had dispatched scouts, who reported, "Men are advancing from Samaria."

<sup>18</sup> He said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; if they have come out for war, take them alive."

<sup>19</sup> The junior officers under the provincial commanders marched out of the city with the army behind them <sup>20</sup> and each one struck down his opponent. At that, the Arameans fled, with the Israelites in pursuit. But Ben-Hadad king of Aram escaped on horseback with some of his horsemen. <sup>21</sup> The king of Israel advanced and overpowered the horses and chariots and inflicted heavy losses on the Arameans.

<sup>22</sup> Afterward, the prophet came to the king of Israel and said, "Strengthen your position and see what must be done, because next spring the king of Aram will attack you again."

<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, the officials of the king of Aram advised him, "Their gods are gods of the hills. That is why they were too strong for us. But if we fight them on the plains, surely, we will be stronger than they. <sup>24</sup> Do this: Remove all the kings from their commands and replace them with other officers. <sup>25</sup> You must also raise an army like the one you lost—horse for horse and chariot for chariot—so we can fight Israel on the plains. Then surely, we will be stronger than they." He agreed with them and acted accordingly.

<sup>26</sup> The next spring Ben-Hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. <sup>27</sup> When the Israelites were also mustered and given provisions, they marched out to meet them. The Israelites camped opposite them like two small flocks of goats, while the Arameans covered the countryside.

<sup>28</sup> The man of God came up and told the king of Israel, "This is what the LORD says: 'Because the Arameans think the LORD is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the LORD.'"

<sup>29</sup> For seven days they camped opposite each other, and on the seventh day the battle was joined. The Israelites inflicted a hundred thousand casualties on the Aramean foot soldiers in one day. <sup>30</sup> The rest of them escaped to the city of Aphek, where the wall collapsed on twenty-seven thousand of them. And Ben-Hadad fled to the city and hid in an inner room.

<sup>31</sup> His officials said to him, "Look, we have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful. Let us go to the king of Israel with sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads. Perhaps he will spare your life."

<sup>32</sup> Wearing sackcloth around their waists and ropes around their heads, they went to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant Ben-Hadad says: 'Please let me live.'"

The king answered, "Is he still alive? He is my brother."

<sup>33</sup> The men took this as a good sign and were quick to pick up his word. "Yes, your brother Ben-Hadad!" they said.

"Go and get him," the king said. When Ben-Hadad came out, Ahab had him come up into his chariot.

<sup>34</sup> "I will return the cities my father took from your father," Ben-Hadad offered. "You may set up your own market areas in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria."

Ahab said, "On the basis of a treaty I will set you free." So, he made a treaty with him, and let him go.

### **A Prophet Condemns Ahab**

<sup>35</sup> By the word of the LORD one of the company of the prophets said to his companion, "Strike me with your weapon," but he refused.

<sup>36</sup> So the prophet said, "Because you have not obeyed the LORD, as soon as you leave me a lion will kill you." And after the man went away, a lion found him and killed him.

<sup>37</sup> The prophet found another man and said, "Strike me, please." So, the man struck him and wounded him. <sup>38</sup> Then the prophet went and stood by the road waiting for the king. He disguised himself with his headband down over his eyes. <sup>39</sup> As the king passed by, the prophet called out to him, "Your servant went into the thick of the battle, and someone came to me with a captive and said, 'Guard this man. If he is missing, it will be your life for his life, or you must pay a talent of silver.'" <sup>40</sup> While your servant was busy here and there, the man disappeared."

"That is your sentence," the king of Israel said. "You have pronounced it yourself."

<sup>41</sup> Then the prophet quickly removed the headband from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. <sup>42</sup> He said to the king, "This is what the LORD says: 'You have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore, it is your life for his life, your people for his people.'" <sup>43</sup> Sullen and angry, the king of Israel went to his palace in Samaria.

## Mark 9:42-48

### Causing to Stumble

<sup>42</sup> "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. <sup>43</sup> If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. <sup>[44]</sup> <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. <sup>[46]</sup> <sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup> where "the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched."

### Sermon: You will know I am the Lord

[It would be good to have your Bibles opened at 1 Kings chapter 20 – let me pray before we begin]

### Intro/Context (1 Kings 20:1-12)

We coming to **the last few chapters** of the book of **1 Kings**

The **writer** has **grouped** together chapters 20 to 22 – and they could be given the title ***King Ahab's failure***.

Today we're looking at chapter 20.

The **context** is a bit like a **boxing bout**

[Slide 1-Ben-Hadad and Ahab]



In the blue corner we have **King Ben-Hadad** of Aram (aka Syria) – with 32 kings and all their horses and chariots and he **attacks Samaria** in Israel (v1)

And in the red corner we have **King Ahab of Israel** – who's pretty weak – his wife Jezebel controls him – he's had 3 ½ years of drought – so his army is weakened

And we're meant to see that this **fight is a bit of a mismatch** – and in boxing terms – it's **likely to be a knockout in the first round** – and **Ben-Hadad will become the Heavyweight champion of the middle-east**

Look at v3 – **Ben-Hadad tells Ahab** – *“your silver and gold are mine, and the best of your wives and children are mine”*

And **Ahab lamely replies** in v4 – *“Just as you say, my Lord the King. I and all I have are yours”*

I wonder what Ahab's wife Jezebel would think of that wimpy reply?

And I wonder if Jezebel is one of the best wives – he'll be giving to Ben-Hadad?

Now because Ahab rolled over so quick – **Ben-Hadad ups the ante** – and in v6 – **Ben-Hadad vows** to send officials to search Ahab's palace and the houses of his officials – and they will **seize everything of value** and take it.

**Ahab picks himself off the canvas** – and comes to his senses a bit – and **consults the elders** of the land in v7

Notice – he didn't consult God?

The **elders advise Ahab** not to give in to Ben-Hadad's demands and so **Ahab replies** – in v9 – he'll cop the first demand but not the second.

**Them's fighting words** – so **Ben-Hadad vows to make Samaria dust** – v10

And you just **have to love Ahab's reply in v11** – *“one who puts on his armour should not boast like one who takes it off”* – the MSG puts it this way *“it's easier to start a fight than end one”*

And as **Ben-Hadad prepares to attack** in v12

We can't help feeling – this isn't going to end well for Ahab

Remember Ahab has rejected the one true God of Israel, married a foreign wife Jezebel, who's persuaded him into setting up a false religion of worshipping a false god Baal – and Ahab has never once obeyed God nor God's prophet Elijah. And Ahab wasn't even convinced by what God did through Elijah on Mount Carmel - when he discredited Baal and his false prophets at Mount Carmel

He's **pretty much done for** – isn't he?

But into the ring steps God...

If we were to give chapter 20 a title this morning it would be: “Watch me, Ahab – then you will know that I am the Lord”

So, what will Ahab – and us - **learn about God** in this chapter?

[Slide 2-Heading]

Three things...

1. The wonders of the Lord's Grace – vv13-22
2. The scope of the Lord's power – vv23-30
3. And that the Lord's Judgment is certain (vv31-43)

## The Wonders of The Lord's Grace (vv13-22)

1<sup>st</sup> then – the wonders of Lord's grace

[Slide 2a-grace]

Look at v13 – out of nowhere **up pops a prophet** (unnamed) and tells Ahab that **God promises he will give Ben-Hadad's vast army into Ahab's hands** – and then you will know, Ahab, that I am the Lord.

That's truly **amazing grace**, isn't it?

**Ahab deserves NOTHING** – but the Lord promises him victory.

We shouldn't be surprised - **God's grace is always amazing** – isn't it?

And the **manner of how the victory** will be **accomplished** is also amazing!

Ahab is to use 232 junior officers – v15 – accompanied by a relatively **small army of 7000 soldiers**. Especially when we read later than **Arameans** had over **100,000 casualties**.

Using these junior officers is a bit **like fielding a reserve grade side against the best team in the comp!** It reminded me of how - in the book of Judges, **Gideon**, with only 300 men, defeated the Midianite army (Judges 7).

What we are meant to see is that **it's God's war, God's timing, God's way** and **God's victory** for His people.

Application: For us it means that we're pretty much in the same position as Ahab – **we are done for** – our sinful nature means – we face the prospect of **physical death and spiritual death** (aka eternal separation from God – which means Hell) – and Satan is rubbing his hands in glee.

But God says – **No!** The **battle is not over yet!** I am the Lord God – so the Lord God – in His amazing grace – God says – **I'll send my Son Jesus** – He'll deal with sin – on a cruel cross – and He'll take the punishment for people's sin off them – He'll die their death – and then they will be forgiven of their sins – if they follow Jesus. And then the Lord says

– **to show that I am the Lord – I will raise my Son to life – and so death is no longer a problem – **Satan loses the war** – and all who believe in Jesus – **gain victory** – and **get eternal life in Heaven.****

**That's grace – undeserved – unearned – but given freely by Jesus.**

That's the grace extended to Ahab – and to us!

That's the first point – **the wonders of the Lord's Grace!**

### **The Scope of the Lord's Power (vv23-30)**

Even though Ben-Hadad has suffered defeat – we **get the feeling** he's not going to give up in a hurry

Sure, enough in v22 – the **prophet comes to Ahab again** and says you **better start strengthening your position** – Ben-Hadad will come back again in the spring – when he's regrouped and the weather fines up!

**Satan is a bit like Ben-Hadad** – even though Jesus has defeated Satan on the cross – **Satan won't give up** – and he causes a fair bit of havoc in this world – we **must remember though** – **he is defeated and his time is limited** – which is why he goes around lying and deceiving people.

Ben-Hadad's **officials** come up with some **incorrect theology about God** in verse 23 – they think Israel's gods (plural) are "gods of the hills" only and so they believe if next time they fight on the plains, they'll win!

Their theology is wrong in two ways – they **think Israel has many gods** rather than **ONE God** – and **they limit God to only being affective on the hills.**

Application – can't we be a bit like that – **we limit God** – and maybe we think God helped us say with our job - but he's not going to help us with our family – or with our current illness.

**Sometimes we can reduce God** – so that God is made in our image – rather than the other way around. **We think of God in human terms** instead of understanding He is the

God who created everything just by speaking – the God who created the universe, the planets and the stars – and also the God who knits together a baby in their mother's womb. **He is the God of the big picture and the minute detail. We should NEVER limit what God can do!**

**Charles Spurgeon** puts it this way:

*Many today think that God is a God of hills but not of the plains. They think God is a God of the past but not of the present. They think God is a God of a few special favourites but not of all His people. They think that God is God of one kind of trial, but not of another kind. "Depend upon it, since Satan could not kill the church by roaring at her like a lion, he is now trying to crush her by hugging her like a bear. There is truth in this, but it is not all the truth. Do you really think, my brethren, that God cannot preserve his Church in the particular trial through which she is now passing? Is he the God of the hills of persecution, but not the God of the valleys of prosperity?"*

[Slide 2b-Power]

Which is our second point – **this story shows** – **the Scope of God's Power.**

Back to the story...

With some minor adjustments – **Ben Hadad** – **removes the kings from their leadership role in battle and replaces them with experienced army officers (v24) and strengthens his army (v25)**

And when spring comes, **Ben-Hadad** musters his army to attack Israel again (v26)

Meanwhile – the Israelites muster their army and meet Ben-Hadad's army at Aphek (v27). And again, it's a **total mismatch** – **Ben-Hadad's army covers the whole countryside -whilst Ahab's army is like two small flocks of goats!** It's David versus Goliath stuff!

But **God's not worried** – in fact He's a bit cheesed off with the Arameans for thinking He is a God of the hills only – and **up pops another man of God (v28)** – to tell Ahab – that

the Lord “*will deliver this vast army into your hands – and you will know that I am the Lord*”

And that’s precisely what happens – **we see the scope of the Lord’s power**

The Israelites inflicted **100,000 casualties** on the Aramean soldiers (v29) and even though some escaped to the city of Aphek – a wall collapsed on 27,000 of them – and Ben-Hadad himself fled and hid in an inner room (v30).

**What a victory** –

**Ahab can surely have no doubt who the Lord God of Israel is!**

The scope of the Lord’s power has been shown – He’s not the **god of the hills** – He’s the **God of everywhere!**

**The Lord’s Judgment is Certain (vv31-43)**

The fight is not quite over though – **Ben-Hadad’s in hiding!**

The **officials** of Ben-Hadad come up with a **plan** (v31) – they’ve **heard that the kings of Israel can be merciful** – so they go to King Ahab – **wearing sackcloth** (as a sign of remorse and grieve and sorrow) – and **wearing ropes around their heads** (as a sign of submission and servitude – and a sign that they are submitting to King Ahab) – and they **plead for mercy – to spare Ben-Hadad’s life** (v32)

**Ahab gets sucked in by their sorrow** – and amazingly says “*Is he still alive? He is my brother.*”

The **officials** of Ben-Hadad **can’t believe their luck** – and they whip Ben-Hadad out of hiding quick as a flash and before we know it – **Ahab and Ben-Hadad are bosom pals – sharing a chariot – setting up trade deals – and a treaty – and Ben-Had is free to fight another day!** (vv33-34)

At this stage – **the chapter could end nicely**. The **war is over**. **Peace** has been **restored** – and everyone is going to live happily ever after – just like in the classic Disney movies!

And we could be thinking – isn't Ahab a nice guy – showing such grace and mercy to Ben-Hadad – and in any case isn't that what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount – **turn the other cheek – love your enemies – and so on.** Isn't Ahab being like Jesus?

(pause)

Well let's take a current day problem – let's say somehow – the countries that make up NATO managed to capture Vladimir Putin – and they stopped the war in the Ukraine. How would we feel, if NATO – said – *Okay Mister Putin – hop in my chariot – let's make a treaty – and off you go back to Russia – it's all good now! Would anyone be happy with that?*

(pause)

And for another example: **would we be happy with sending a battered wife back to her husband to bash her again and again?**

(pause)

When Jesus talks about *turning the other cheek and loving our enemies and about forgiveness* – he's saying – yes - we must forgive those who have hurt us and not hate them and not want revenge for them – yes we must love them so we can pray for them to be saved - but they still have to face the consequences of what they've done which may mean time in jail and may mean losing relationships they once had – and it may mean they are not being able to be trusted again in some circles - **these are all consequences – but by us loving them and praying for them - they still have the opportunity to repent and come to Jesus and be saved. But godly wisdom says – we don't have to put up with their bad behaviour and mistreatment – grace does not mean being a door mat!**

**There is such a thing as Godly wisdom - and Ben-Hadad should never have been let go free.**

To prove the point – if we skip forward to 1 Kings 22:31 – here’s what Ben-Hadad did a while later:

*Now the king of Aram [Ben-Hadad] had ordered his thirty-two chariot commanders, “Do not fight with anyone, small or great, except the king of Israel.”*

**God’s not happy with Ahab’s decision** to release Ben-Hadad back into the community – because God knows Ben-Hadad is not going to give up – just like Satan won’t give up whilst he has time!

Look at **v35 – up pops one of the prophets again!**

And it’s a bizarre little story – the prophet wants to pretend to be someone who was in the battle and has been wounded.

So, he asks one of his companions to wound him.

The companion refuses God’s prophet and **ends up as cat meat** (v36)

So, the **prophet asks a second man to wound him** – and **this man agrees** (v37)

The **prophet** then **disguises himself** as a wounded man with a headband over his eyes and waits for King Ahab to come by (v38)

As the **King passed by**, the **prophet** told a simple **parable** - the prophet said – *“he was in the thick of the battle when someone asked him to guard a prisoner with his life – but whilst he was busy here and there, the prisoner disappeared”* (v39-40)

The **King had no hesitation** in saying that the prophet should pay with his life for allowing the prisoner to escape.

But like all parables – there’s a **twist** – v41 – the prophet whips off his disguise and tells the King – **the parable is basically about you King Ahab** –and v42 God says because you Ahab have let Ben-Hadad go – it will cost you your life – and your people’s lives!

**The Lord judges** that Ahab needs to be held accountable for releasing the man [Ben-Hadad] that Lord had determined should die.

You see - when God said He would deliver Ben-Hadad and his army into Ahab's hand – it was so that Ben-Hadad would be stopped and not able to ever attack and hurt the Lord's people again!

God does not want His people corrupted by the surrounding nations who worship false gods – we have already seen what has happened to Israel because they have been influenced by foreigners worshipping gods like Baal.

[Slide 2c-judgment]

Which is our third point – **The Lord's judgment is certain!**

Application: For us we too can be certain of God's judgment on evil – As **Acts 7:31** says: *God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed [That's Jesus]. God has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."*

And on that day – evil will be dealt with finally - and Satan will be banished forever!

In this chapter of 1 Kings 20 - the Lord **balances** His **desire to deal with sin** with His **desire to show grace and mercy.**

God always balances His judgment on sin with His wonderful grace – and **He always does it perfectly.**

In any sinful situation - **there is always the option to repent – this won't alter consequences - but it will save one's soul!**

But look how King Ahab reacts to this judgment from God in **verse 43**

**Ahab is sullen and angry** – and he skulks off to his palace!

Could he have **responded differently?**

Yes indeed.

Which brings us to our **NT passage** and our **response** this morning.

## Our Response (Mark 9:42-48)

[Slide 3-Heading/remove sin]

In Mark 9:42-48 - **Jesus warns us about what might cause us to stumble and to sin;** and **He tells us to remove (cut it off) whatever causes us to sin; so that we don't get into a habit of continually sinning which leads to hell. **He says - It's much better for us to go to heaven crippled than to end up in hell!****

You see - **Ahab wanted to please Ben-Hadad more than God**

This was **Ahab's problem all along.**

Ahab pleased himself rather than pleasing God and **married a foreign wife who worshipped Baal**

Ahab pleased Jezebel rather than God, so **he worshipped Asherah and Baal instead of God.**

All these obstacles of sin - had to be removed from Ahab's life! But he wasn't prepared to do it. Even what he saw on Mount Carmel didn't convince him! Even though God had won a most unlikely and amazing victory against Ben-Hadad, **he still didn't come back to God!**

**What could King Ahab have done differently?**

Instead of sulking and being angry when God confronted him – he could have repented! Isn't that what we all must do?

[Slide 3b-repent and believe]

Isn't that what **Jesus is saying in Mark 1:14-15** – which we will finish with

*Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

For King Ahab, the Kingdom of God had come so near to him – through God's Words given by Elijah, through what happened at Mount Carmel, through the prophet who told him of the pending victory, through the prophet who confronted him for sparing

Ben-Hadad. **But Ahab couldn't bring himself to submit to God and couldn't bring himself to repent and believe.**

For all of us – **the Kingdom of God has come near – let us repent and believe the Good News – that Jesus died for us to go to Heaven!**

Let's pray...

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the lessons we have learnt from this story of King Ahab. Thank you for your wonderful grace in sending Jesus. Thank you that you are all powerful and nothing is impossible for you. Thank you that you always balance your need to deal with sin with your grace and mercy. Help us to examine our hearts this morning and remove anything in our lives which causes us to sin. Help us to be quick to repent and believe in the Good News of Jesus! In His name we pray, Amen.*

### **Benediction (Proverbs 3:5-8)**

Let's finish with some words from Proverbs which show us how we can live a life that is the **opposite to the way Ahab lived his life.**

From **Proverbs 3:5-7:**

<sup>5</sup> *Trust in the LORD with all your heart*

*and lean not on your own understanding;*

<sup>6</sup> *in all your ways submit to him,*

*and he will make your paths straight.*

<sup>7</sup> *Do not be wise in your own eyes;*

*fear the LORD and shun evil.*

<sup>8</sup> *This will bring health to your body*

*and nourishment to your bones. AMEN.*