

2 Kings 4 – God will Provide for All our Needs

A Poor Widow and a Rich Woman

ELISHA was a great prophet to the people of Israel, but these were difficult times. The country was experiencing a great famine which caused many difficulties – **verse 38** “*there was a famine in the land*”. This woman was also affected for she was without any food, even although her husband was one of the “*sons of the prophets*”. This was a term for those who were studying God’s Word (**2 Kings 2:5, 7, 15**) - this was a school originally started by Samuel (**1 Samuel 19:20**). Her husband died leaving her without money and in debt. The creditor came to take her sons as slaves to satisfy what was owed. In great distress, the widow seeks out Elisha for help.

She had many Problems

There Was Despair In Her Family – She was extremely upset at what had occurred and “*cried*” to Elisha. This means *to weep uncontrollably; to cry out in grief*. She sought the help of Elisha, the man of God at the lowest moment of her life.

There Was Death In Her Family – She was married to one of the “*sons of the prophets*”. These were the men who were training under Elisha to be the prophets and teachers in Israel. Her husband, her friend, her provider and her protector, had been taken away from her in death and this led to great loss and sadness.

There Was Debt In Her Family – Since her husband was dead she could not pay her bills. As a result, her creditors came to take her sons away as slaves so they could work off the debt. This was allowed under the Jewish Law, (**Leviticus 25:39**). She had been deprived of her husband and now she is about to lose her sons as well! This was a very difficult circumstance with no immediate solution.

But there Was Devotion In Her Family – This is an important point, for in spite of all her problems, she retained her faith in God. She needed help, but she did not turn to her family or her friends. She did not try to find someone to loan more money from. In her desperation she turned to the man of God for help and reminded Elisha that her husband “*did fear the LORD*” **verse 1**, and similarly her life has been one of devotion to God. In spite of her problems and her despair, she still trusted and looked to God for the help she needed. This was an excellent attitude and Elisha showed her how God would assist.

Verse 2 “What do you have?”

While the widow felt she had nothing, Elisha taught her that God can use our talents, resources and abilities in amazing ways! She had one small vessel of oil in her house and God was going to use that vessel to assist and provide a solution to her problem.

Oil was used in the Tabernacle and placed in the lamps on the Lampstand to illuminate the darkness and provide a source of light, (**Exodus 27:20**), “*And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always.*” This oil represents the Word of God which needs to be stored in our minds, so that it will illuminate and show us a right pathway in life. **Psalm 119:105**, “*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*”

He also told her to **verse 4** “*shut the door.*” What does this mean? It teaches us that the world outside will never have a total solution to our problems. Paul says “*The wages of sin is death*” (**Romans 6:23**), and this is the only payment we will receive from the world. They have no solution, the end result is death for everyone. But inside the ecclesia and inside our homes when we shut the door and read God’s Word and pray, we can get satisfaction and hope. In our homes

we also have a container of oil, and as we read God's Word we are filling up our minds and this will become a resource to comfort us and help us find solutions to the difficulties of life.

Amazingly, the container of oil multiplied **verse 6**, and she filled many other containers. She had enough extra oil to sell and repay her debts. She and her sons would never be rich, or extremely wealthy, but they were satisfied with God's provision; *"Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content"* (**1 Timothy 6:6-8**).

There are times when we feel that life is very difficult. We worry about our problems. There doesn't seem to be any easy solutions. Perhaps we think *"If only I had a rich uncle that could give me some money"* or *"if only I had a very well paid job and could earn lots of money"*. God doesn't need lots of money, and neither do we! God starts with what we do have, and works with that. David didn't have extensive armour when he went out onto the battlefield against Goliath - just a simple shepherd's sling. God used what David had to destroy Goliath and save the nation of Israel! Jesus had a crowd of over 5,000 people to feed for lunch (**John 6:8-9**) and one of his disciples, Andrew, said unto him, *"There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?"* How could God feed so many people? Jesus took that boy's lunch, and fed 5,000 people with it!

The lesson here is that God will meet our needs and help us to grow spiritually by using whatever we have. This story is designed to teach us that our problems, while they may appear to be insurmountable in our eyes, can be used by God to teach us important lessons. No matter what we have to face in this life, we learn to first turn to God for the help we need. He cares! Not a single thing is hidden from His view.

"Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." **1 Peter 5:7**

"Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (**Luke 12:29-32**)

Like that earthen vessel we must empty ourselves of wrong attitudes, priorities, pursuits, or goals and be filled (controlled) by the Word of God. If our lives are cluttered with grumbling, selfishness and a preoccupation with the things of this world, God may stop the supply of oil. We should not be focussed on ourselves, but the needs of others to assist them. *"Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith"* (**Galatians 6:9-10**).

A Contrasting Story – A Rich Woman who had no Sons! (Verses 8-37)

This second event shows the loving care of God for all His people whether young or old, rich or poor, weak or powerful. Those who love the Truth will eventually receive blessings that triumph even over death!

As Elisha went about teaching he visited the town of Shunem (verse 8) where there was a *"great woman."* The word "great" is sometimes used of wealth, influence or character (**1 Samuel 25:2; 2 Samuel 19:32**). From our passage it is easy to see that she was a prominent woman, was reasonably wealthy and had a lovely spiritual perception and Godly character. She was a great lady for a number of reasons - she was full of faith and good works and had a great love and respect for the teaching of God's Word.

She was great because her respect for the Word was seen in her hospitality. She willingly opened her home to those in need. She extended her hand to the needy; she shared in the good things God had given her (**Proverbs 31:20**).

She was great because she was interested in and wanted to promote the preaching of the Word of God. She did what she could for Elisha because she recognised that he was a man of God, a prophet teaching the Word of God and doing the work of God (**verse 9**). By her concern and her actions she was actually helping in the preaching of the Word.

She was great because she was thoughtful for others in a practical way. She was not simply satisfied with a place for Elisha to sleep. She knew he needed food, a private place to pray, study and be alone with God. She had the wealth to assist in all this and so she did not delay to help where she could.

God's Reward for her service (verses 12-17)

Elisha was very appreciative and thankful for what this woman had done for him and his servant. One of the outcomes of a life dedicated to God and the study of His Word is a thankfulness and appreciation, firstly to God for His goodness and salvation, and also to others for the help and support they give.

Colossians 3:17 *“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*

Elisha was not just thankful verbally, he wanted to express it in practical terms, so he asked if there was anything he could do for her. People cannot read our minds, we need to say and do things to express our appreciation. Have you expressed to God and others how thankful you are? Especially those who have helped you in the Truth - let's not just take people for granted, they are really gifts from God. **2 Thessalonians 1:3** *“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.”*

Sadly, in **verse 19** we read that the boy died, perhaps due to heat exposure in the hot sun. Again this situation shows her remarkable faith. She accepted that natural events and difficulties would still occur – she wasn't protected or isolated from sorrows and sicknesses. Just because she believed in God did not mean that everything would go well and that she would never have any problems. However, when they did occur, she was not angry with God for her loss nor did she complain or lose her faith and trust in God. Notice she placed the dead boy in his room (**verse 21**), and instructed her servant to immediately prepare transport so she could personally appeal again to the “*man of God*” for help.

This teaches us that although there are wonderful blessings in the Truth we will continue to experience sorrow, loss and sickness. But by remaining faithful to God and accepting His guidance, one day when Christ returns, we too will have the blessing of a life that is no longer subject to sin, disease or death. Our beloved brothers and sisters who have died will be raised from the dead and given the reward of life in the Kingdom of Christ. May we have the courage of this remarkable woman, whose determination and faith is commended in **Hebrews 11:35**, *“Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life”*

As we partake of these memorials, the bread and the wine, may we remember another “son” who died and was raised by God's remarkable power. This Son is no longer subject to death or disease and he will return very soon. May we all have the courage and the enduring faith of these two remarkable women as we await the return of the Son of God.

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