

## 2 Kings 4:1-44

This chapter gives us various snap shots (if you will) into the miraculous ministry of Elisha. And though the miracles differ in each circumstance there are also some things that they all have in common. #1 They all minister on a personable level, when we were studying the life of Elijah it seemed as though the majority of the miracles that took place in his life were more on a national level. Set in order to turn the hearts of the people of Israel back to God, whether it be the 3 yr drought, then that miraculous monsoon, of course there was the fire from heaven consuming the sacrifice and the slaying of the prophets of Baal, then the fire that devoured the regiments of soldiers that came to contain him. Elijah seemed to deal more on the political/national level, but with Elisha, though he did deal with the king as we noted last week, by far the majority of the miraculous happenings in his life were more for the benefit of the individuals who feared the Lord within the nation. Elijah seemed to have that Evangelistic heart, just wanting the nation to repent at all costs, and turn to the Lord with their whole hearts. As to where Elisha seemed to have that Pastor/Shepherds heart that though he wanted the nation to turn to God, his primary focus seemed to lie in ministering to and nurturing those who were already believers in such an “apostate” type time in the nations history. He wanted to make sure that those who were trusting *in* the Lord, seeking to be pleasing *to* the Lord were well fed and taken care of. So the majority of his miracles didn’t really exist on the national/political level, but more on the personal level expressing the love of God for His own. Elijah’s ministry focused primarily on the love of God for the lost, how He alone could deliver them, and give to them the protection, direction and even correction that they needed, that He would guide them, provide for them, and forgive them if they would just turn to Him. But Elisha’s ministry focused primarily on the love of God for His own, demonstrating how God *did* provide, *did* protect, *did* watch out over and take care of those who feared Him and trusted *in* Him. And really both combine to give that balanced understanding of the heart of God towards the world, how He wants to deliver/save those who are lost, and how He tends to those whom He *has* delivered, those whom He *has* saved, and that’s what we’re seeing in ch 4, the moving of God in the miraculous to tend to and take care of His own in a personal way.

#2 These are all miracles of mercy, God intervening in the natural flow of a person or people’s lives so as to turn an unfortunate situation into a glorious manifestation of His mercy and grace. Kind of a practical picture of Jer 29:11 which as you know says, “*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*” And we see that principle pictured practically in the lives of each of these people in ch 4.

And of course perhaps the more obvious principle pictured in these miracles being the fact that with God nothing will be impossible, that He knows our needs and the deep desires of our hearts and He is well able to take care of us and even bless us beyond our own natural expectations. Because He’s a loving Father and Jesus said, “*If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*” Matt 7:11

And forgive me if I seem to take the liberty to go beyond what Jesus said, but I would venture to say that often times our loving Father who is in heaven gives good things even to those who *don't* ask Him. How many times will God just out of His goodness and mercy bless our lives? And we'll see that even in our text tonight. Ch 4 shows us how God desires to exercise our faith, trust in Him with all our heart, and lean not on our own understanding, in all our ways acknowledge Him and He will lead, guide, and provide for our lives.

Vs1-7

So in this case she received good things because she asked, just as Jesus said. James told us that so often our own pride or unwillingness to bring the details of our lives to God is the reason why we're lacking in a given area. He said, "...*you do not have because you do not ask.*"

Here this widow woman found herself in a financial bind, perhaps you can relate. Her husband had passed away and she was left holding the bag of debt with no way to pay for it. So the one who had lent to them was going to take the payment in the form of her sons until the debt could be worked off. And he was well within his legal rights to do that, Leviticus 25 states that if one were to become poor, though you couldn't enslave him, he could work for you to pay off the debt and he would serve you until the year of Jubilee. Now the year of Jubilee came around once every 50 yrs, and I don't know if at this point that was another 10 yrs, 2 yrs, or 45yrs, but you can see the predicament. Because in that day, women could do little to nothing to provide for themselves and if you were to take her sons, than any hope of livelihood would be lost.

But the bible is also clear that God has a "soft spot" for lack of a better way to put it, for widows and for the fatherless, and *both* were found in this particular house. God had said, "*You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.*" Ex 22:22-24 Regarding the NT James said, "*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*" James 1:27 The heart of God also goes out to the poor. So in this scenario we have a prime candidate for the Lord to do a work, a widowed poor woman with no dad for her sons, and to add to that her husband was one of those who were of the sons of the prophets, a godly man himself.

Or as she puts it, "... you know that your servant feared the Lord." Now a couple of Sundays ago we spoke of the fear of the Lord and how that creates purity in our lives, how the fear of the Lord is clean. And when I fear God I'm not likely to engage in sinful scenarios that I might otherwise indulge myself in, but the bible is clear that there's also a blessing to be found in the fear of the Lord. Not only is the life that fears God a pure life, it's also a blessed life, a life that invokes God's mercy. The bible says, "*For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;*" Ps 103:11 Again. "*But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting On those who fear Him,*" Ps 103:17

Ps 115:13 *“He will bless those who fear the LORD, Both small and great.”* 1 more, Ps 147:11 *“The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy.”*

So Elisha says, “What shall I do for you, what do you have in your house?” She answers, “I have one little flask of anointing oil that has enough for one anointing left.” A “widows mite” if you will, but here’s where she went wrong, she was seeking to *save* it for herself rather than *spend* it in faith towards the Lord. The key wasn’t to be found in storing it up, but rather in pouring it out as unto the Lord. God wasn’t going to just give her something out of nothing, but rather He was going to *utilize, maximize, and multiply* that which she already had. Kind of like the widow that Elijah ministered to regarding the flour bin and the jar of oil she had. But to pour out her last bit of oil would demand what? Faith, which with out it’s impossible to please God. And like we spoke last week regarding those men who were digging ditches in the desert for the waters that were to come with out the sight of wind or rain, sometimes God may lead you in a way that for the moment doesn’t seem to make sense. But He’s preparing you for how He wants to bless your life in the future. Elisha says, “Go borrow every empty vessel you can get your hands on, take them to your house, shut the door and begin to pour from that resource of oil that you have into those vessels.”

And there’s more than 1 lesson in this for you and me, #1 in God’s economy the blessing comes not in gathering, but in giving. If you notice to the degree she poured out, it came back to her, when the vessels were all gone, so was the oil. What did Jesus say? *“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”* Luke 6:38 You see we want it to be given to us, but we don’t want to give, Jesus says it doesn’t work that way. If we want God to entrust His resources to us, then we’ve got to be willing to invest those resources as unto Him, into the things pertaining to His Kingdom, His priorities, and His purposes.

#2 She wasn’t to draw attention to herself in the process, she was to shut the door behind her as she poured her resources out unto the Lord. Jesus said, *“...when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”* Matt 6:3-4 When you pour out your resources as unto the Lord, be it time, money, talents or whatever, don’t draw attention to yourself in it. Just “shut the door” behind you, do what you do in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. Everyone knew her situation, but when she just quietly did what she did as unto the Lord, you can know that everyone seen the work that the Lord did on her behalf. But Elisha was making sure that when she did what she did, it was because she trusted the Lord, not so that she could look so spiritual in pouring out her last bit of resource. She could’ve shut that door and went, “I don’t know, once this is gone, all I have is gone, there’s no way I can do this.” As to where if she were on the center stage of the communal eye, the pressure alone could’ve moved her to do it. But this way, it was as unto the Lord, or not at all.

#3 There's a spiritual picture here as well, as you know oil in the scriptures speaks of the Holy Spirit. Earthen vessels speaks of humanity, and the idea here is that if you want the oil to flow into and out through your life, than you're going to need to have contact with empty vessels that you might pour into them the resources of God's Spirit that He's given unto you. She had enough oil for herself, but God asked her to step out in faith and begin to pour that out into other empty vessels, and as long as she was pouring, the oil was flowing, when she quit pouring the oil quit flowing. And I say to you that if you want God to use your life, if you want the oil of God's Spirit to flow forth from you, you're going to need to find some empty vessels into which you can begin to pour out that oil that you have presently. She brought those vessels into her house, shut the door behind her, and spent time pouring into each of them until 1 by 1 they were filled as well. I'm going to venture out and say that there are more than likely all kinds of empty vessels in your work place, in your school, or around your home. Are you taking the time to pour into them, the resource that God by His Holy Spirit has invested into you? I think you'll find that as you begin to pour out what you have, God will keep that fresh supply of oil flowing.

She wanted all that God had for her so she got every empty vessel she could get her hands on, and when she followed through with the word of God for her life she told Elisha what she'd done and he said, "Go sell it, pay off your debt and use the rest for a little retirement nest egg." And the point is that God honors *your* faith as demonstrated by obedience to *His* Word, her faith was demonstrated in her works. She had to gather the jars and fill them, and as she obeyed, God blessed her life and took care of her every need. So we have here a picture of the principle found in Phil 4:19, "*And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*"

Vs8-17

Notice all the ways that this miracle contrasts with the previous one. We mentioned some of the things they all have in common, but there are also some contrasts.

For instance there in vs 8 we read that this woman was "notable" perhaps your bible says "great." (The only woman in the scriptures given this title by the way). And it's a very broad term, it can speak of great importance, distinguished, great in regards to wealth, or influence. But the point is that she was either distinguished in some way, or a very wealthy lady, perhaps her husband married into the money in this case rather than the other way around. And what I want you to see is that in the last portion, the lady was very poor, in this case the lady seems to be rich, but God was concerned for them both. We've seen Elisha deal with kings, with common people, with men, with women, those who have plenty and those who are poor, and the picture that's being painted is that God is no respecter of persons; He's simply in love with humanity period and He wants to minister to the needs of the deep recesses of our hearts whatever that may be.

Also the previous woman sought the blessing *of* the Lord (no problem there) this woman however simply sought to be a blessing *to* the Lord. The previous woman received good things because she asked, but this woman received God's blessing even though she didn't ask, God just blessed her because she was blessing His servant.

But look at some of the attributes of this great/notable woman. The 1<sup>st</sup> thing the text points out to us is that she was a woman given to hospitality. When Elisha would pass by her place on route to Shunem she would see this tired and dusty fella walking by and persuade him to stop in. She didn't know who he was, "Elisha the great prophet of God" or anything like that. She was just a woman given to hospitality, taking in those in need, making sure they had rest and renewed energy before they journeyed on from her. The bible is big on hospitality, Paul told the Romans, "*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.*" Rom 12:10-13 We want to take in the "who's who," but true hospitality ministers to the "who's he?" Every time Elisha would pass by her house she took him in, made sure he was well rested and well fed.

It wasn't till the pattern evolved that began to realize the caliber of spirituality that was in Elisha (vs9). Then she told her husband, "Look, I know that this guy is a holy man of God, so lets build a little add on kind of study/bed for him so that when he comes by he can just stay here." She was a woman of hospitality, she was more discerning regarding spirituality than her husband, and when she realized what kind of a man Elisha was she translated all that into practicality. "Let's build a little room for him." And this whole time there's never an ulterior motive, she's not seeking to give *to* him, that she might eventually get something *from* him, she's just serving the Lord in serving His servant. She didn't run up to the room and seek to gain some form of platform in his life so that he might carry her opinions to the people or anything like that. She was just looking to bless his life.

And I love what happens in vs 11-12, because Elisha safeguards his own integrity in all this as well. Notice that he doesn't speak to her directly but he uses his servant as a mediator, there are no mixed signals in this relationship. But Elisha is overwhelmed at all that's going on and so he says, "Go ask her if there's anything I can do for her, perhaps speak to the king or the commander of the army." You know, "Go see if there's anything she needs worked out, or any problems that I can draw to the kings attention for her, maybe she'd like a lunch with the President or something." But I love what she says, "I dwell among my own people." That's a polite way of saying, "I'm not doing these things with a secret personal agenda, nor am I going to take advantage of an opportunity to do that, I'm doing this to serve and not to be served."

“Thanks but no thanks, I’m content where I’m at.” What a great woman, she’s simply content, it’s been said that the secret of contentment isn’t in having the most, its in needing the least. The bible says, “*Now godliness with contentment is great gain.*” 1 Tim 6:6 Continuing on, “*And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.*” 1 Tim 6:8-9 She refused to capitalize off this situation for her own personal gain, she only wanted to give, not get. She wouldn’t tell him anyway that he could help her.

Elisha’s all, “What can I do for her?” Gehazi his servant says, “Well, she doesn’t have a son, and her husband is old.” Meaning that from the natural perspective he couldn’t give her one kind of a reversal of the Ab and Sarah deal, she wasn’t the one who was unable to have kids, he was too old to give her one. So he calls her in, (And again notice she didn’t come beyond his door, kept the boundaries clear) and says, “You’re going to have a son about this time next year.”

She’s all, “Don’t mess with me like that I can’t take it.” It’s the cry of a desperate woman who’d long since given up hope. And I can relate a little bit with that having sought for 5 yrs to have our daughter and another 3 before we had our baby boy. There’s comes a point when you’ve exhausted every resource, you’re just so desperate to have a baby, things look good, then you’re let down. And over and over again until eventually you’re a mental/emotional mess, and even though inwardly you’re dying to have a baby, you’ve just all but resolved to give up. And that’s where she’s at, then Elisha says, “You’re going to have a son, and God blessed her with a son.”

Did she ask for a son? Not to Elisha, but God knows the deep-seated anguish of her heart, and in this case, in His mercy and grace, He just blesses her this way.

Vs18-21

2 Things quickly, #1 Don’t be deceived into thinking that when God blesses your life, that the blessing will be with out exception trouble free. “I thought God blessed me with this job, but now the boss is breathing down my neck...” “I thought the Lord blessed me with this car, I mean they just gave it to me, but I’ve only had it 6 months and the motor blew.” It rains on the just and the unjust, and troubled times visit us all blessing, or no blessing. God blessed her with this child, but now due to sunstroke, or an aneurysm or something he dies. But even if this boy wasn’t raised from the dead, it doesn’t mean that God didn’t bless her and that she won’t spend all of eternity with him. I don’t know the dynamics of heavenly relationships, but I’m glad to know that I have family that will be there with me, that’s a blessing to me.

But 2<sup>ndly</sup> notice her great faith, she didn't prepare him for a funeral, but for a restoration of life. She went upstairs and placed him on Elisha's bed, probably so the husband wouldn't be suspicious or usurp her when he found out and just have the child buried. She believed that God could raise him, how do I know that? Heb 11:35, there in the hall of faith we read that it was by faith that "*Women received their dead raised to life again.*" In the entire OT there's only 2 women that received their dead raised to life again, the one Elijah raised, and this incident right here, so the plural form of the word woman in that vs has to include this gal right here who apparently was also great in faith. Now she was human, and overwhelmed, but she knew God could do the work.

Vs22-23

"Why are you going to church it's not Sunday?" She's all, "Everything's fine. I just need to go."

Vs24--27

"Back off captain discernment can't you see she's beside herself here?" But look at this, Elisha is actually surprised that the Lord hid something like this from Him. I tell ya, "I'm stoked when God reveals *anything* to me, would to God we would get to the place whereby we're so sensitive to the Spirit that it's more alarming when we're *unaware* than when we *are*."

Vs28-32

There are all kinds of speculation as to why this didn't work, I don't know that I'm prepared to endorse any of them. Perhaps God was dealing with Gehazi about some issues that were in his heart that needed to be made right. And we'll see how in the next ch that vs in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6 regarding greed and how it can destroy your life does just that with Gehazi. Maybe God was seeking to warn him of the need for *purity* if he's to experience *His power*. And we've spoke about that over the last couple of weeks. Could be that He wanted to use Elisha and not his staff to do the work, perhaps God was sending the clear signal that we are to look to Him for life. And that even His prophets aren't perfect, the power isn't in *them* or *their* word but in *Him* and *His Word*, I don't know but it didn't work so when Elisha came into the house the child was lying there dead on his bed.

Vs33-37

How is it that this child went from death to life? It began with prayer (notice that), then he got right up in his face, literally, he began to press in on him. Then the child began to warm up, seeing some positive signs, and so he began to pray more fervently, then he pressed in on the child again in a personal way. He sneezed 7 times (which I have no idea what that means other than the fact that there were signs of life there) then he presented the child to his mother alive. How is it that people will be brought to life in Christ through you? Begins with prayer, then press in on them, not vindictively or with attitude, Elisha pressed in on him out of love, wanted to see life in him. If they begin to warm up, pray harder, press in on them again, who knows perhaps they'll come to church (a sneeze if you will) and when its all said and done there will have been a miracle and they'll be born again, new life in Christ.

## Vs38-41

That's what people say after they eat my cooking, "Man of God there's death in the pot!" You know there's such a famine of God's word in the land, people who just teach the bible. In many seminaries and churches in our country there's "death in the pot" humanistic philosophies, psychology and all the rest. People just wanting to dip into the stew of God's Word and they're being poisoned. What do we do? How is that situation remedied? By simply reinstating the pure meal of the word, when people know the truth they recognize the lie. And by teaching the pure milk and meat of the Word, all that poisonous stuff will just be flushed out, add the unadulterated word of God to the equation and those poisons will be flushed out.

## Vs42-44

Sort of reminds us of the loaves that the Lord multiplied only in a much lesser way. This is sort of a foreshadowing of that. But the key phrase in this scenario is "1<sup>st</sup> fruits." Give God your castoffs and leftovers, what you have when everything else is taken care of and it pretty much stops there. But give to God your 1<sup>st</sup> fruits, be it of your time, your finances, your talents and abilities, and He multiplies your investments, you just can't out give God, and He honors our sacrifice unto Him. And I love that God uses the 1<sup>st</sup> fruits of this man to satisfy the hunger of 100 men, God is able to satisfy the hunger of all men, Jesus is the bread of life. And He gives us an opportunity to be a part of His work as we simply give of ourselves to Him in a 1<sup>st</sup> fruits kind of way, and really after everything He's done on our behalf, presenting ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice is really the only reasonable thing to do, its our reasonable service.

Prayer points: That we be those through whom you can flow, that you might pour the oil of your spirit into and out through us into the empty vessels around us. That we would be those willing to give, even as You *gave* your only begotten Son, that we would give to You our all, our everything. Being content with such things as we have, not serving people with an underlying agenda of what's in it for us, if there be any poison in our lives of the philosophies of man rather than the mind of Christ, purify us by Your Word, and give us the faith to give You our 1<sup>st</sup> fruits.