

Kings and Prophets 14-02-02a

This is Sunday, the 2nd of February, 2014. This morning we'll continue the study we began Friday night in 2 Kings chapter 4, in the career of Elisha. He has now encountered a widow with a problem, a widow of one of the sons of the prophets.

And immediately after that encounter we have the record of another woman in a different locale with a different set of parameters, a different issue. But these two are consciously and with malice aforethought presented juxtaposed in our passage and it is the comparison and the contrast that helps us understand the truth that you and I ought to derive and take unto ourselves for the purpose of reflection and application. Many times people think the Old Testament is just kind of a collection of stories and magic tricks by God, when in fact it is an enormous source of illumination to help us understand not only the New Testament and the work of Jesus Christ, but also how we should then live.

It's a tremendous benefit. If you have ever had an eye injury and had to operate for a few days with just one eye, if you ever had a patch over an eye, I've had a guy through a snowball and ripped the lens covering off my eye for a while. I had to walk around several days like a one-eyed man and it's amazing how much information your second eye, you can pick which one is the second one, it's amazing how much information your other eye gives you in terms of judging distance.

You haven't lived to, you've ridden in a van that has no front at all. You're right out there in front and the driver is a one-eyed man. This happened to me repeatedly, a wonderful, precious, believer in the Lord Jesus Christ man I used to work for had a glass eye and we would go to appointments, business appointments, and he would drive and we had a van with no front.

And one-eyed guys can't judge distance. You just can't judge distance. And so his brake shoes get replaced at twice the rate of anybody else because he doesn't really know he's getting close to a thing until he's just right on top of it.

He's got to judge the increase in size. That perspective gives us so much. This is what the Old Testament, in my mind, does for our New Testament understanding.

We say, well, we're church, we're body and bride of Christ, we're under the new covenant, the law, we're out from under all of that. So the Old Testament is kind of nice to know about Daniel and Joseph and Moses, but mainly I want to go over there and get those epistles. We are seeing, are we not, that as we go through these passages in the Old Testament, it sheds tremendous light as it foreshadows and details.

There are more details in the Old Testament about Jesus Christ than there are in the New. In my opinion, you cannot fully understand Jesus Christ without Old Testament. So it's a wonderful passage and we're going to continue in it this morning.

Let's take just a moment as we start to ensure that we recognize how important the ministry of God's Holy Spirit is. The extent to which our time this morning is valuable doesn't depend on how eloquent I am or how attentive you are. It depends on how tuned I am and you are to the Holy Spirit.

He is our teacher. These things are inaccessible to the human mind without his presence and his power and his illuminating ministry. And if we are not actively appreciating, recognizing, and cultivating his presence and power, these things will seem interesting and then they'll roll right off.

And tomorrow and the next day it won't matter if we heard this particular portion of God's Word or not. And that would be tragic. We're recognizing how important it is, we're spending the time, and we need to ensure that God can use it to maximum effect and maximum benefit in our lives.

If you come to church and it doesn't make a difference, why did you come? If I prepare this lesson and it doesn't communicate the truth of God, why did I prepare it? It's pointless and useless unless it changes us, unless we have a metanoia, a change of mind and a change of heart, and a change and an improvement in our walk before God. The time is short, the judgment is coming, the future kingdoms of God are coming, and again, this is how we prepare, this is how we train, this is how we get ready to serve and to reflect the glory of God. So there's nothing more important, not just in hearing, it's a great thing to hear, but the hearing doesn't get it done.

The hearing is preparatory, the hearing is preliminary. The real value of this Bible class this morning is what happens after it's over. But it begins with God the Holy Spirit, and the great thing is, He's here while we're learning and He will still be there when it's time to apply it.

And if He's present in both cases, that's when this is really going to accomplish its purpose. So it is no idle thing that we pause for prayer before our class. It's essential, and it is just as essential to do the same thing evening and morning and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud and He shall hear my voice.

Let's pray. Father, it's such a precious thing, it's such a wonderful blessing to have been given the information, to have been granted the knowledge of what it is to have a relationship with You, what it means, how it works, the mechanics, the procedures, the things that we do, the provisions that we take advantage of that You've made for us, so that our life has meaning and purpose, so that we know how to do these ideal things that are communicated for us in Your Word. You command us to be holy, You command us to walk in the light, You command us to flee from the desires of the flesh, You command us to love one another, and what a wonderful thing it is to not just have those commands but to be given the wherewithal to actually fulfill them.

We thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ who has made these things possible for us, who has

given them as gifts to us from You. We thank You for the Holy Spirit, we thank You for His enduring presence, we thank You for His illuminating power, we thank You for His faithful communication both of Your Word to us and of our prayers to You. We pray that this morning as we spend this time looking at Your Word that God the Holy Spirit will be our teacher, that these things will be impressed on us in a way that they will come back to our thinking and be a source of encouragement and motivation and guidance and wisdom in the time that remains to us in this life, that this will be time well spent, that our fellowship will be an encouragement, that our love for one another and the gifts that You've distributed in our midst will effectively work and that everything we say, everything we do will be a reflection of the glory and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray these things in His name. Amen. 2 Kings chapter 4, let's quickly review the first seven verses.

Somebody that missed Friday night, don't want to just be parachuting into the middle of the study, so we'll do a quick review of the terrain. A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets, I love prepositional phrases and you just get like a string of them there. A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, didn't speak, didn't supplicate, she hollered, Hey Elisha, probably saw him at a distance, began, Son of David, have mercy on me.

Well, this is Elisha, Elisha. She cried out. This is an active, urgent appeal, right? When you cry, there's something very proactive and something urgent.

She cried out to Elisha saying, Your servant, my husband is dead. And you know that your servant feared the Lord and the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slave. Three quick points that we detailed on Friday night.

Elisha knows this man, he is in a community called the sons of the prophets that are evidently sort of professional or semi-professional men of God, men of God in training perhaps that have set themselves apart. And this community is known to Elisha. This individual man is an acquaintance, at least of Elisha, because the woman says, You know that my husband feared the Lord while he was alive.

Secondly, the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves. This tells us several things. There is a crisis because of the death of this man.

Evidently, they have gone deeply into debt. This man was just keeping his nose above water, perhaps only able to pay the interest on the debt. But when he dies, now there is no further means of servicing this debt or staving off the consequences of failure to pay.

And so the creditor, rightly so, under the technical letter of the law in Israel, can come and impress these two young men into service as slaves. This is not abject, you know, tie him to a post and whip him slavery. This is indentured servitude, which is a legitimate way to discharge

your debts.

If you can't find a job or find a way to make money, then you are pressed into a situation where you can remunerate, where you can compensate the person that loaned you money and you're unable to pay it back any other way. It literally sort of comes out of your hide. You or someone in your family has to go serve and work off this debt.

So Elisha says to her, What shall I do for you? It would do no harm to circle that question. What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house? You get the idea that the answer to the question, What shall I do for you? She says, Well, I don't know. Do something.

I'm out of ideas. I've sold everything in the house. I've got one jug of oil.

That's all that's left. I'm out of ideas. I don't know, but I'm just throwing myself.

I don't know what to do. That's why I'm coming to you. So he says, What do you have in the house? Your maid servant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil.

So he says, Go borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors. She lives in a community. There are other people around.

Everywhere you can, from all your neighbors, borrow empty vessels. Notice, don't borrow full vessels. Borrow empty ones.

You say, Well, how does an empty vessel meet the need? Why wouldn't I borrow full ones? And then I could have some food to live on for another couple of weeks. Well, that's going to increase debt and not ultimately solve the problem, right? That wouldn't do no good, although that's what a lot of people do. Issue me a new credit card.

Give me a balance. Raise my balance. Doesn't solve the problem.

Empty vessels. When you have come in, verse 4, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons. Then pour it, the jar of oil, into all those vessels and set aside the full ones.

Now, I would love to see the film of how this happened. Because she went from him, shut the door behind her and her sons, who had brought the vessels to her, and she poured out. How do you suppose she did this? And he says, Put some in all the vessels.

So she's thinking, Well, you know, I got like a pint here. So here's this whole room full of vessels, jars, you know, knee-high, thigh-high jars, little pots and pitchers and stuff all over the place. So she's got this little syrup jug of oil.

So what would you do? Well, the man of God said, Pour into all the vessels. So just get the bottom wet. And as she looks, she says, A little more, a little more.

And as she's going, she begins to pour. And it just keeps pouring and pouring and pouring. I

don't think she went to the first vessel and just went like this.

Because she's following the instructions of the man of God. And what does he say? Pour into all those vessels. So she doesn't know.

We know what the miracle is. She doesn't know what it's going to be. She thinks, Well, maybe I'm going to pour a little in the bottom, and the vessel will just fill up.

And we don't really know how this happened. Maybe she did just put a drop in each one. And the drop, you know, did the level rise after she poured? Did it rise while she poured? I want to see the film.

I have no idea. I don't know how it happened. It just says she poured.

Now it came to pass when the vessels were full. Hey, wait a minute. You left out the big scene.

Come on, Hollywood director. Where's the, you know, sparkles and, you know, angelic choir noises and oohs and aahs? You know, electronic keyboard, they've got the oohs and the aahs. See, I'd be leaning on that key.

Ooh, and here's the, you know, liquid noises. And, you know, the people falling down prostrate and the woman almost dropping the jug. We don't get to see any of that.

It says she poured. And when the jugs were full, then you think, you missed the whole big dramatic. What kind of a story writer are you where you've got an opportunity to show this tremendously dramatic, unheard of thing, and it's, well, you just passed it by.

They're full. We don't even know. But isn't this consistent with the way this happens so many times? You remember in the earlier case in First Kings where Elijah is residing with another widow and the container of flour never runs out, and she, by the way, has a jug of oil that doesn't run dry.

Anyway, when they're full, she says to her son, bring me another vessel. He says, we're out. That's it.

That was the last one. There's not another vessel. And at that point, the oil ceases.

It either ceases bubbling up. It ceases replenishing the jar. I personally think it all happened in the jar.

I think she poured a little in each one. She got to the end, had some left, went back, and started doing a little more. And then she began to say, you know what? It doesn't matter how much I pour.

And she eventually just starts filling them up because she says, bring me another vessel, which means she thought there would be one that didn't have any oil in it. And he says, we're done.

They're all full.

So the oil ceased. And apparently, they had just enough room in there, you know, to open the door because she comes back out. She came and told the man of God.

She says, I did what you said. I've got a house full of jugs that are full of oil. He said, go sell the oil and pay your debt.

And you and your sons live on the rest. And evidently, there was a lot because this is enough money for them not only to discharge what was apparently a pretty significant debt, but they have money to live on pretty much. I mean, apparently, they've got enough to invest.

So that's the end of the story. Now, that's pretty much where we left off on Friday night. We saw some principles of application.

The primary one being, don't you think if she didn't really fill the room with those vessels, after all was done, she wished that she had. However many empty vessels, that's the extent to which she had oil to sell. And after paying off the debt, how much money did she have left over? Well, it depends on how fully she fulfilled the command to go get empty vessels because Elisha said, get them from everywhere.

Borrow from everybody you can find. But they've got to fit inside her house. I mean, there is a finite limit.

She doesn't have them sitting outside. Secondly, this happens inside. He says, shut the door.

Don't make a big David Copperfield TV special out of this. Go inside the house, shut the door, and where nobody but you and your sons can see, start filling the jugs. He doesn't even predict what's going to happen.

But our primary observation on Friday, the one I suggested to you, is the extent of deliverance is the extent of obedience. The extent of her obedience determines the extent of the deliverance, right? If she'd gotten two jugs, there would only be two full jugs of oil. If she's got 200 jugs, there's 200 jugs of oil.

How fully did she obey, not knowing what the outcome would be? Even after the jugs are full, she doesn't understand what the deliverance is yet. She has to go back to the man of God and says, okay, now what? Do I now get a barrel of flour and start a baking business, or what do you want me to do here? And he says, sell the oil. She didn't know.

This is blind obedience. It's not blind faith. She believes in the man of God.

She understands what the fear of the Lord is. She recognized it in her husband. She comes to Elisha and cries out to him.

She's got that much figured out. And based on her obedience in faith, it's proportional. The

deliverance is directly proportional to her obedience in faith.

That's about as much as we... That's a summary of what we covered on Friday. Now, let me offer you a bit of a further suggestion on this. Why is this a woman? I see you smiling.

You think I'm going into dangerous territory. I'm going to be politically incorrect, start talking about the role of women in Israel and the patriarchal society. But just go this far.

Why is this story about a woman and not a man? What if the son of the prophet had not died? What if he was still alive? And he's in this huge debt, doesn't know what to do, at his wits end. The creditor is coming to take him and his two sons off into slavery. He cries out to the prophet.

Why isn't that the story? I would suggest to you that there is a very specific reason why the guy is dead. And this crisis occurs after his death. Who ought to be handling the crisis but isn't able to because he's not on the scene? The man.

The husband. The head of the house. The son of the prophets.

He's dead. And he is responsible for this problem. Because this problem preexisted.

It doesn't come to a crisis where the creditor is going to press people into slavery until his death. But this debt didn't happen between the time he died and the time she cries out to the prophet. This problem is his fault.

This is implicit in the story, right? Let me suggest something to you. And this has wider provenance than just this story. The man is responsible.

In a marriage. In the nation of Israel. The man is responsible.

He's got a leadership assignment. If he fails in it, if he screws it up, other people suffer. In the nation of Israel, when the leadership fails, when the king fails, when the elders and the princes and the priests and the prophets fail, who suffers? It's the nation.

Is the nation of Israel, even though it is named Israel and it's named for Jacob, how is Israel consistently pictured in Old Testament scripture? What gender is assigned to Israel consistently? She. Her. Israel is God's wife and she's been unfaithful.

And, you know, Gomer is a representation of unfaithfulness and being taken back despite this. And it's there is a in the relationship with God. The human race ends up being feminine.

There is leadership and authority and provision and sustenance on the male side. There is response and implementation and support and relationship on the feminine side. Why is there God the father and there is God the son and there is no God the mother? What is the heinous part of this whole feminine God notion? It completely misses the point that the human race is feminine gender.

Jesus is the God man. He partakes of humanity, which is the mother side. He is the seed of the woman.

Get it? God the father. Humanity fills the maternal role in this analogical picture. And the Lord Jesus Christ is the true God, true humanity mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Well, to cut to the chase here a little bit. In Israel, when there is failure of leadership, when there is spiritual apathy and indifference, when the prophets and the priests and the kings foul up, God will begin to turn to and feature and communicate through women. Think Deborah.

Here, the communication value of the story is, Who is the king in northern Israel at this point? Jehoram, Omride king, descendant of Omri, Ahab, wicked evil, idol worshipping. Not quite as bad as Manasseh and so on, but pretty darn bad. And they've got this bull worship going on up there and discouraging anybody from going down to Jerusalem to observe the feasts.

And it's a really bad failure of leadership. Well, the nation is the woman. The woman is widowed.

The man, in terms of spiritual function and his provision, has incurred a big debt and then died. Okay, that's sort of the value here. So, what happens? What can the woman do? What can the nation do? Well, there is a man of God.

There is a prophet of God. And when the woman cries out to the prophet and says, I'm about to be carried away captive. My sons are about to be carried away captive.

Isn't this the fate of a nation that incurs this enormous debt, and the leadership doesn't step up and meet that, solve that, keep that from ever happening? They're effectively dead. They're functionally dead. What happens? What did God predict? You will be carried away captive.

Well, the creditor is on the way. They're at the point of what we like to call the fifth cycle of discipline, going back to that whole description in the law, right? So, do you see the picture? Do you see the setup here? Who the widow is and what she represents? What the sons represent? This is the future of the dynasty, so to speak, of the family. And it's about to be carried away.

So, the appeal is made to the prophet. The prophet says, well, what's left? What's left in the nation? The nation's got a little bit of oil. There is a remnant in the house of something.

Right? All right. We'll work with that. If we can multiply that.

Remember what Jehoshaphat did down in the southern kingdom? What did he do? He succeeded some bad kings, but what did he do? He took what was left and cultivated it, worked with it, expanded it, got it to grow, sent teachers throughout the southern kingdom to teach and to preach and to build some spiritual maturity and rebuild relationship with God, encourage valid worship, get rid of the old stuff. He's a pretty darn good king. And notice this

widow is not down south.

She's up north. The prophet is up north. So, this appeal is made.

So, get vessels. Find the 7,000 that haven't bowed the knee to Baal and cultivate them, fill them, work with them. This oil often represents the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Does it not? We know this in hindsight. When you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you. Why? How does God deal in Old Testament days? It's in Israel.

I am sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This is the nation where God works. It doesn't expand beyond.

If you want relationship with God, you want blessing from God, Naaman's got to come from Syria to Israel. Ruth has got to come from Moab to Israel. Bathsheba's husband Uriah the Hittite has got to come to Israel.

This is the place of God's blessing and provision. So, it takes place in the house. Shut the door.

This doesn't go to the outside, so to speak. And it's an internal thing. It's a private thing.

This is almost one-on-one here with the power of God. Now, once the need is met, what is the response? What's the aftermath? Does the woman, is it like the tenth leper that turns around and comes back to Jesus to give thanks after he heals all ten and sends them off to go see the priest, and one of them turns around and he's like a Samaritan. What's the aftermath? What is the relationship? Let me put it this way.

What's the relationship between Elisha and this widow? Has he had any dealings with her before? She says, well, you knew my husband. You knew he was a man of God. Is there any indication that she has a relationship with him afterward? It's in the depth of crisis.

The creditor is on the way. I'm about to have my sons taken off into captivity. Oh, God help.

All right, I've met the need. Nothing before, nothing after. It's just this one episode, right? But there was sufficient faith and obedience that the captivity is staved off.

And that's it. Now, we're going to pause and take our break. When we come back, we're going to go forward.

You'll see in your Bible that beginning in verse 8, we have Elisha raises the Shunammite's son. All of these features that we have observed now with the certain widow and her jug of oil are going to have a corresponding feature with the Shunammite woman. But I want you to notice something.

Just look at your Bible. Look at the physical layout of this chapter. How many verses are dedicated to the widow with the jug of oil? You've got seven verses, right? One through seven.

How many verses are dedicated to the Shunammite woman? You've got 29 verses. Okay? It's like four times the size. And that's your first clue, where there is a lot more to be seen and observed and interpreted in the second woman's case than in the first.

There are things that are the same. One of the first things you see that's the same is neither woman is named. One woman is defined by her relationship to her dead husband, and the other one is defined by where she lives.

And that's... They're both anonymous, you can say that. And that's almost where the comparisons end. So, looking now and summarizing the first widow, God is faithful and just.

He will honor faith and obedience wherever it is found. But the larger question for you and me is, are we only going to exploit this faith and obedience thing at the point of crisis where the creditor is on the way to carry off our sons? We're going to go to the prophet, get a solution. Yes, it is from God.

Yes, it is proportional to our obedience. And, okay, I'm content with that. I've got money to live on.

I'm done. There's going to be a stark, stark contrast in this next woman that we look at. Also a woman.

Think nation when you see woman. And this applies in a lot of different contexts beyond this one, where when you see women coming to the fore, God is showing His dealings with, His attitude toward, His preservation of women when the husband has abdicated his responsibility. This can work the other way.

But you think about Nabal. You think about, by way of contrast, Jezebel. It is possible for it to work the other way.

Jezebel is an infectious, negative, deleterious influence on her husband who doesn't have much going for him to begin with, but she makes it ten times worse. But this is the picture. There is authority assigned to the man when he somehow fails that.

You've got people who suffer as a consequence. And God will preserve them in spite of this other failure. And there's quite a bit going on there.

We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to pick up in verse 8. We're going to endeavor to get all the way through the end of this chapter. I'm going to have to talk a lot faster than I have been.

All the way through to verse 37. So two-thirds of the way through the chapter. We're going to cover 8 through 37 when we come back and look at the Shunammite woman.

Let's pause here and take our break.