

Kings and Prophets 14-02-14b

We continue our study now in 2 Kings chapter 4, and this lady, beyond her wildest dreams and hopes, has conceived and born a son. And you can only imagine the joy and the enthusiasm that she has had with this child. He's old enough now to get around on his own.

He goes out to see his father in the field, grabs his head, is carried back to his mother by a servant, lays on her lap, which tells us he's kind of a medium-aged child. He's not like a strapping teenager at this point, because he lays in her lap and dies at noon. Here's what is really impressive about this lady.

She is thinking so clearly. When it says embrace a child, Elisha knows how much this is going to mean to her emotionally as well as spiritually and in every other way. And she has a deep, every mother, every natural, normal mother has a tremendous love and investment in their children.

And to lose one, there is nothing more tragic. There is nothing more tragic than losing a child. Bar none.

You think about Mary at the foot of the cross looking at her son, even though she knew that she would be pierced through from the prophecy of Simeon. But it's just the awfulest thing. But you look at how clearly this lady is thinking.

She doesn't lose her self-control. She recognizes that her husband is not going to be an asset in this situation. She tells him the minimum necessary.

I just need transportation. Notice she doesn't override or overrule his authority in this situation. He's the guy that controls the family assets and the servants and so on.

And she goes to him. He's the one that authorizes this. She doesn't say, well it's an emergency, all rules are canceled and all bets are off.

She's thinking so clearly. She knows that she has to get to the man of God. She does not send a messenger to the man of God.

She says, I will go myself. I must go myself. She wants to get face-to-face with the man of God.

And this should be our priority. When we've got a problem, we need to get face-to-face with the Lord God Himself. We don't have to work through the prophets as they did in these days.

But she doesn't take time to give a big long explanation to her husband. She doesn't cry on his shoulder. She doesn't expend valuable time.

She's got a priority. She's got a plan. She has a purpose.

And she is very diligently, very effectively implementing this at a time when many people would be distraught and carried away by emotion. It just isn't helpful to let that happen. This is one of

the benefits of the spiritual fruit of self-control.

In a crisis, falling apart doesn't help anyone. Needing assistance from others isn't the solution to a crisis. Being able to keep your head when all others might be losing theirs, this is a valuable trait.

And it reflects on her spiritual status. This is a godly woman. She says, well, notice it is as in italics.

She just says, well. And you know what the word is here? Shalom. It's shalom.

He says, why are you going to him today? She says, peace. Shalom. Now, did this mean hush? Did this mean it's for my peace? This is a wonderfully opaque answer.

It can mean whatever you think it ought to mean. To her, it's like, shut up. But shalom.

How can anybody argue with shalom? It's a universal greeting in Hebrew. It's the final God be with you in Hebrew. It's a universally useful word that says everything and nothing at the same time.

He says, well, what do you know? Shalom. Adios, husband. See you later.

So she saddled a donkey and said to her servant, drive and go forward. Do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you. Now, from where she is in Shunam to Carmel is 40 kilometers.

And if you do the math, that's 25 miles. You figure, what's a donkey's speed? Five miles an hour? This is, you know, if you're driving and not slackening, maybe you're going six or so. Let's say she gets seven miles an hour out of this donkey.

You know, saddle me your swiftest steed. It's a donkey. So, let's say she gets seven miles an hour out of this.

We're talking about a three and a half hour jaunt to get there. Drive and go forward. Do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you.

Priority. Urgency. No distractions.

Principle of application. When we find ourselves in distress, the priority and the urgent overriding purpose in our soul should be to get before the Lord. She doesn't assemble a crowd of mourners.

She doesn't start arranging for the funeral. She doesn't call for all of the soothsayers and the medicine quacky people. She's headed for the man of God.

She completely understands that this is a spiritual issue with a spiritual solution. This child is from God. He's a special child.

Do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you. And so she departed and went to the man of God out Mount Carmel. Notice, she knows where he is.

She is familiar with his itinerary, with his schedule. And this is a good thing. What if he had been off at Shiloh or off visiting the king or down at some other... She knows exactly where he is.

Therefore, she can go directly to his location without disappointment. Remember when Joseph went to look for his brothers? And, well, Dothan. He keeps going and they're not there.

She arrives at her... She knows exactly where he is. She knows exactly how to find him. And this is something that she has learned.

Why? Because in non-emergency times, she has gotten to know the man of God. She is prepared for this crisis by past experience, faithful contact with the man of God. She knows all about him.

She knows his routine. She knows his location. And we are best in a position to be blessed by God when we have been maintaining relationship with God all along.

We don't let it go slacken. We're not like the book of Judges where people get completely off the hook and then in horrible crisis. And at the last possible moment, cry out to God.

He sends a deliverer. You come back from the brink only to immediately slip back down the slope to the edge of the cliff. Call out to God.

Emergency rescue. You know, just gil gal, gil gal. This circular crisis to crisis to crisis living.

She's at the opposite end of that. And so when a crisis does hit, she knows what to do. She knows where to go.

She knows how to get there. And she makes it an urgent priority to get to the man of God. And she doesn't delegate.

She doesn't send a servant, go call for me the man of God. She says, I am going to personally get face to face with this guy. And what does she do when she gets there? The man of God sees her afar off and he says to Gehazi, look, Shunammite woman, please run down to meet her and start communicating with her.

He's going to have Gehazi run an ever-diminishing relay race. You go run to her because she's going as fast as a woman can go on a donkey. But apparently Gehazi is a pretty good runner, if not much else.

He can run to her, ask the question, come back with the reply. And this is also some deference on Elisha's part to the woman. That he doesn't want to just make her travel the whole distance.

Maybe she'll stop. He can do it at long distance with Gehazi. He seems to communicate with her

through Gehazi for whatever reason.

It has been suggested that this is propriety. She's a married woman. He's a single prophet.

And by maintaining a little bit of distance, there's no suggestion that there's anything improper. That's a thought I really don't know. At any rate, he sends Gehazi.

Run to meet her. Ask her, is it well? Is it well with you, your husband, your child? She answers, what? Very same thing she told her husband. Shalom.

Peace. This is what she says to Gehazi. Same thing she said to her husband.

I'm not talking to you. I'm not talking to you. Peace.

Shalom. It is well just doesn't get it. It just doesn't capture it.

They should have just transliterated it here. She says the very same thing. Husband's asking her a bunch of questions.

I haven't got time for your questions. Shalom. Gehazi comes up.

I got three questions for you. Shalom. Shalom.

You doing this? I want you to do this. Shalom. So when she came to the man of God at the hill, she caught him by the feet.

Contact. Grasp. I will not let you go until you bless me.

Gehazi came near to push her away. You're not supposed to be at this close quarters with the prophet. I'm your intermediary.

I'm the stops and starts guy. I will be your mediator. And she says no, no, no.

The man of God said let her alone for her soul is in deep distress. And is this not fascinating? The Lord has hidden it from me. Elisha would normally have an insight from God on what's going on.

And he says I got no idea. God has not imparted to me the nature of this distress. He has not told me.

And it's emphasized. He has hidden it from me and not told me. And Elisha is as mystified by this as anybody.

So what does she say? Oh, my son has died come quick. It's not what she says. This lady is the most extraordinary woman.

She says did I ask for a son from my Lord? Did I ask you for this over and above blessing that I have received? And didn't I say don't give me a false hope. Don't deceive me. And Elisha is

thinking well whatever this is it's got to do with the son.

Very clearly. But see she's thinking a step ahead. She doesn't say solve my immediate problem.

She says look this was a blessing I didn't ask for that was graciously granted. And I said if you're going to give this to me don't give me a false hope. If this is going to be granted it needs to be real.

And he says this is from the Lord and it is granted to you. And so in her mind you think she's had this trip. She's had three or four hours to think about this after she's underway.

She's done as much as she can do. She's on the way. But there's an enforced wait during this trip.

It's no accident that the prophet doesn't happen to be in town when the son dies. She has this probably four hour journey. And she's thinking the whole way.

And she has carefully composed her address to the prophet. She's not impulsive. She's not irrational.

She's not emotional. And this is her case. She's making a case for her son.

She's not just saying oh God it's awful I've lost my child you must fix it. She's thought it out. Did I ask for this? This was your idea.

You said this was from the Lord. I asked you to ensure that this wouldn't be a false hope. Is there any stronger case that she could possibly make? Remember when Moses stands between the Lord God and the people of Israel.

He says stand back Moses I'm going to obliterate them and I'll make a new nation out of you. What does Moses do? He applies the word of God that he knows. He makes a case.

Lord you can't do that. What will the surrounding nations say? What will your word be worth? The value of your promises. This is the way to be effective in your faith, prayer, life.

Make a case. Apply the word of God that you know. This is why God puts these circumstances before us.

To teach us to think. First thing they do. Why do they have boot camp? Why do they have West Point cadets and Naval Academy midshipmen and Air Force zoomies and all these other.

Why do they have these training programs? Teach you to think under pressure. Purposely. Create false kinds of pressure.

Give you upperclassmen that are just very petty and vicious. And turn their little sin natures loose on you. And they do this knowingly.

They know these guys are going to be abusive. They know they're going to abuse their authority. They know they're going to carry too far.

They know they're going to do insane things. Well, Mr. Hall, why don't you hang around and listen to music? And next thing you know, you're on the shower bar, hanging there, listening to music. I'm just hanging around, listening to music.

Why? Think under pressure. And that's a part of our faith progress and our faith growth. Is to have our faith stretched and tested.

And it's not just blind, oh God, I know you can do something. God wants thinking children. He wants mature individuals who can put together the information that He has belabored and has taught us over time.

And has invested in us with His Spirit. That we will put it to use. That we will deduce and reason and draw conclusions.

We will begin to think the way God thinks. And understand the way God understands. Did I ask a son of my Lord? Did I not say, do not deceive me? Oh Lord, you have promised that you would make provision.

I have been, to the best of my ability, bringing my life before you on a daily basis. I have been seeking to learn and grow. I have acknowledged my known sins to you.

And Lord, here is this situation. I believe that this is a test of my faith because I believe I am doing what you want me to do. If I am wrong in that assumption, pray like David.

Show me my secret faults. Reveal what is hidden within me. Reveal the rocks in my soul that need to be plowed up.

I don't want to be hard soiled that the word cannot penetrate. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

Renew a right spirit within me. Show me my secret faults. I want to live my life to please you.

And Lord, you know this because I tell you this every day. And I come to you in humility. I want to be teachable.

If you'll show me what I need to do, Lord, I will do it. And I take this as from you. And if it is for my growth, bring to my heart and to my mind the things that I have learned that will sustain me.

The truths that you want me to focus on and to have live and flame in my heart so that I can reflect your glory in this circumstance. Not my will, but yours be done. Commit it to the Lord and move on.

But these things are to enhance and to flesh out and make live and breathe our faith life. It brings the esoteric and the abstract and the ephemeral and the aesthetic down to real life. Boots on the ground.

Shovel in the hand. Spade digging our particular row in the field. Bringing in whatever harvest of righteousness by faith that we're supposed to bring in.

But everything for us is a spiritual issue. This lady understands that. And look how carefully she has thought about it.

How carefully she speaks. She's made up her mind. I'm going to talk to nobody but the man of God about this.

Not my husband. Not this Gehazi character. The man of God.

And I'm going to grab him and I will not let him go until I have said my piece. So Elisha begins to understand what's going on. He says to Gehazi, Get yourself ready and take my staff in your hand and be on your way.

If you meet anyone, don't greet him. If anyone greets you, do not answer him. But lay my staff on the face of the child.

Now, this is really interesting. Gehazi, you're a fast runner. You got to the woman, you know.

You're faster than the donkey and the servant and all. So you run and take my staff. This is not the right answer.

This is one of the few times you see Elisha doing something that's really ineffectual. And the key here is, I think, in the word staff. There are several different words in Hebrew for staff.

And I think you've got in your New King James. Do you have a text note where it says lay my staff? And it's got like Exodus 7.19 and 14.16. Is that a New King James text reference in verse 29? Yeah. Well, ignore that.

Here's the problem. Exodus 7.19 and 14.16 and these others are a different word for staff. And this is a different kind of staff.

And they just amalgamate this. Even your Bible dictionaries and commentaries say, well, you know, a staff is a staff. There are several different words for staff.

It's a rod. It's a, you know, no, no, no. There's a big difference here.

This particular word for staff is mishenet. Mish, M-I-S-H-E-N-E-T or T-H depending on how picky you want to be about the transliteration. But this is a fascinating word because this particular kind of staff is only mentioned a few times in Scripture.

This is not the staff that Moses had. This is not the staff, the rod of Aaron that budded. That

word for staff, Aaron and Moses parting the Red Sea and all of that, the word for that staff, that rod, is based on the verb that means to stretch out.

It's the word for branch. A branch is a piece of wood stretching out from the tree. Stretch out the rod.

You know, it's the rod of authority. It's the rod that goes out and invokes authority and the power of God. It's from the word that means to stretch out.

I thought about giving you that but I'm not going to. This is a different one. This is mishen or mishan, M-I-S-H-A-N or M-I-S-H-E-N.

And this is from a different verb. This verb is the word that means to lean. And this kind of staff is a staff of support.

It's a staff of support. So you find this verb, sha'an, and remember you can take a verb and turn it into a noun in Hebrew a lot of times by putting an M in front of it. From, M, meim means from.

It's the preposition that means from. And then you've got sha'an which means to lean. So from leaning you get the staff, mashan.

And it shortens and compresses to mashan. Sha'an is the nifal and it's the reflexive. It has the idea of lean yourself, support yourself with this thing.

I could give you all kinds of places for this but you can look it up in your strong's or whatever. Let me just tell you this. When it comes to this particular staff in the Old Testament, this is a staff of support.

And so it's not the Aaron's rod. It's not the Moses rod. This is the one that is used, for example, in Exodus 21-19.

Talking about a guy that's been injured because you've goofed him up. And your punishment depends on whether he recovers or not. So you can read the context in Exodus 21.

But when you get to 21-19, if he, this guy that you've damaged in some way, if he rises again and walks about outside with his staff, then he who struck him shall be acquitted. He shall only pay for the loss of his time and shall provide for him to be thoroughly healed. So if the guy recovers and he's walking around outside on a crutch, on a cane, on a staff, he needs this staff for support because he's dinged up.

That's his mishan, that's his lean on staff. Interestingly, the angel of the Lord that visits in Judges 6, Gideon is wanting assurances from God that this is the real deal. So the angel of the Lord comes and says, Hail mighty man of God.

You remember he's all covered with the chaff. He's been trying to thrash indoors. So he says, I

want to make an offering.

He's said it before you. And the angel says, I will wait to you. Come back.

Gideon prepares a goat, unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he puts in a basket. He puts the broth in a pot.

Brought them out to him under the cherubim tree. Presented them. 620 of Judges, the angel of God said to him, Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock and pour out the broth.

We're going to make an offering because I'm an intermediary. I'm an angel. You're really wanting to make an offering to God.

We'll make an offering out of this meal. So he says, put it on the rock and pour out the broth. So Gideon does so.

Then, verse 21, the angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight.

But this is not a staff of authority. This is not a rod of, you know, like a scepter. This angel of the Lord has this to lean on.

It is a staff of support. And he touches it with his staff of support. That's the word that we have here.

You can find this again in Zechariah 8, verse 4, just to complete the picture. Thus says the Lord of hosts, Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. Talking about the blessings on Jerusalem, the peace that it has, and people will grow old there.

You're going to see these old timers leaning on their canes, on their staff. This is the staff that Elisha has. It's not a Moses rod with magical powers.

This is what he leans on. Now, here's why this is important. I'll try to finish quickly here in the time we have left.

The reason this is important is because the woman understands that the presence of Elisha, as close as she can get to God, is required. Elisha thinks, I'll send the staff. The staff that I lean on, that God supports me with, so to speak, I'll send the staff with Gehazi.

And what I lean on for support, we'll put it in contact, we'll lay it on the face of the child, and that'll do it. Point of application. We have been sustained, in many cases, by the Word of God, by the provision of God, by the blessing of God, and we can recount, this is what they like to call in the traditional church, your witness.

And somebody's got a problem. And they come to us and they say, I've got this problem. And you say, well, let me tell you what God did when I had that problem.

And we try to hand them our staff. That's not the idea. Who would be glorified if that actually provided them comfort and strength? And they say, well, you know, Sam got through that awful thing quoting Psalm 23.1 or whatever.

So, by the way, Psalm 23.4, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Guess what word is used there? Mishan. It's the only other place in the Bible you find Mishan in Psalm 23.4. Thy rod and thy staff of support.

Not the whacking staff, not the scepter staff to part the Red Sea. Your rod comforts me personally. It doesn't say the staff of David comforts me.

It doesn't say the staff of Elisha comforts me. Well, this is the staff I got from Elijah. The mantle fell one way, the staff fell the other, and it's magical.

It's a talisman. It'll convey magical power. We'll send the staff.

Do not think that what helped me in a time of crisis can just be handed to someone else and will help them. And they'll say, wow, Sam, thank you for handing me that staff. Thank you for sending Gehazi with that staff.

You hand him a tract. The tract has got the support in it. This is Gehazi with the support.

Well, read this. Here's streams in the desert. Here's my utmost for his heist.

Here's a devotional book. Here's promises for a time of crisis. Just read this because this helped me.

You cannot hand off your staff of support to someone else. The woman understands this better than Elisha does. Now, what happens because of this? This is a crutch-type staff that Elisha regularly carries.

What does this tell you about Elisha? He needs the thing. He has sent it with Gehazi, thinking that laying it on the face of the child is going to do some good, and it manifestly does not. What does this do? How long is it going to take Elisha to get there now? Because he gave away his staff.

If he wants to get there quickly, he ought to be, you know, we've got the Winter Olympics going on, these guys on skis, they've got those poles, right? Push, push, you know. Let's get with it. Use the staff and get down the road.

He's going to be a couple of miles an hour slower because he's limping along. He's sent his staff foolishly ahead that does nothing. And in my view, I suggest to you, Elisha goofed here.

The staff doesn't do anything. It lays there on a dead kid. It's a dead staff laying on a dead child.

That staff is only good for one thing, and that's supporting Elisha. And he sent it to do a meaningless task, and now he doesn't have it to do his task. Application.

The support that supports us, if we are going to be of benefit and a blessing and of use to others, we need to be leaning on our own support as we are able to help others. We don't hand our support to them and sit back at Carmel or slowly stump along without our support, delaying the actual contact that is necessary. What is required in this situation? Elisha has to be there, and there's a really interesting reason why.

You never see it coming. It took me two weeks to figure this out. It's probably why I had to miss a week of class so I could try to dope this out.

There is a reason why Elisha has to be there. Do you think God could have said, well Moses, even though you struck the rock, I'll have the water come out anyway. Even though you sent the staff and that wasn't the right thing, I'll wake the kid up anyway.

No. Elisha has to be there. It's critical that he be there, and he needs to get there as quick as possible.

And he just delays the process by sending the stick with Gehazi and hopping along on one leg down the road for 25 miles to get to this kid without his staff. It's just nuts. This woman is much more level-headed and spiritually oriented at this point, seemingly, than Elisha is.

Well, I leave you with this. Don't hand away your spiritual support. Your support isn't going to be what someone else necessarily needs, and you can't just hand it off.

Well try this first. Try this book. Try this staff.

It really helped me. It is presence. It is fellowship.

It is prayer support. It is shared communion with God in person, on the scene. This is what makes a difference.

Don't just hand somebody something. Don't send it along without your presence. Our fellowship is of a contact nature.

It is presence. It is being there. It is bearing with.

It is weeping with those who weep, rejoicing with those who rejoice, praying with those who pray, speaking the truth to one another in love. This is contact. This is fellowship where you're there, where you're present.

And, of course, we've got lots of options now with the kinds of communication we have. It doesn't necessarily, in our age, mean physical presence, but you've got to be actively engaged

in communion and in fellowship. You don't just send somebody an aphorism or a poem or a hymn lyric or play this CD.

This will comfort you. It really meant something to me. You can't send the staff.

It's presence. It is our genuine love for one another that sacrifices schedule, sacrifices time, sacrifices other priorities to be with those who need us in a time of trial. And there is no substitute for Elisha being in the room with the door shut with that child to address this situation.

The staff doesn't cut it. The messenger doesn't cut it. It's his presence that is required.

And we're going to see why next time. It's fascinating. But we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the tremendous way that your word communicates to us. It is so graphic. It is so powerful in its imagery, in its ability to strike the cords of our hearts with your truth, truth that is powerful, that is transformational, that is energizing and motivating.

We pray that as we think on these things that God the Holy Spirit will minister them to our hearts so that we can fully express our love for you in faith and obedience. We can fully express our love for one another in fellowship, in being a blessing through the function of the gifts that you've distributed to each of us, and that as we grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus, we will be a reflection of his presence. We will be his body on this earth until the day he returns to take us to himself.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.