

“The Shunammite”  
2 Kings 4:8-37  
(Preached at Trinity, January 3, 2022)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In this passage we continue to follow the life of Elisha, God’s prophet. The author wants us to see that Elisha was the successor to Elijah and shows us several of the validating miracles. These are historic narratives, actual accounts of the supernatural work of God.
  - A. Preaching the narratives has its challenges. It is improper to simply spiritualize the narrative without any regard for the original intent of the author. They do offer us, however, insight into the nature of God as well as the condition of our humanity. We can witness first-hand God’s work in the lives of men.
  - B. Last time we saw the miracle of the supply of oil that flowed from a single jar as the widow filled the many jars she had borrowed from her neighbors. God used this to satisfy the widows debt and give her what was needed to supply her needs. It was testimony to God’s gracious and loving care for His people.
2. Now the author suddenly takes us to another account. There is no indication of how much time had elapsed – “Now there came a day”  
Elisha had moved into Shunem, a small village of the tribe of Issachar about 15 miles from the Sea of Galilee. As Elisha traveled about he often passed by the home of a particular woman and her husband.
  - A. She remains nameless – only referred to as the Shunammite. Abishag who cared for David in his old age was also referred to as a Shunammite.
  - B. She is described as being prominent – the word means “great.” Her family was probably wealthy and she was very hospitable. She was considerably younger than her husband. In fact, he is described in **Verse 14** as being “old.” Her husband seems distant in our story, but agreeable and attentive to the needs of his wife.
3. Elisha often passed through this village. Perhaps there was a circuit where he would travel and preaching and teaching the Word of God. This woman would sit and carefully listen to his words.
  - I. The first thing we see is the rich hospitality of this woman
    - A. As Elisha passed by this woman’s house she wanted to meet his needs.
      1. She modeled one whose heart had been opened to the glories of God.
        - a. Our natural heart is to look to our own needs first. She was concerned to the needs of Elijah.
        - b. The author tells us her motivation.  
**2 Kings 4:9 NAU** - "Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God passing by us continually."
        - c. She was convinced he was a man of God. After several visits by Elisha the woman convinced her husband to prepare him a furnished upper room where he could stay whenever he traveled near their home.

2. The “walls” suggest permanence.  
This woman was a model of gracious hospitality, not only providing Elisha with the necessary provisions but actually setting up a permanent room where he could lodge.
  3. There was no expectation of any return for her kindness. She simply desired to care for God’s servant.
- B. This was hospitality on display.
1. Hospitality is a wonderful Christian grace. Paul wrote in Romans 12 - **Romans 12:9-13 NAU** - "*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; <sup>11</sup> not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; <sup>12</sup> rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, <sup>13</sup> contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.*"
    - a. The word for hospitality is φιλονεξία.  
This word literally means “to love strangers.”
    - b. To love strangers is a virtue, but how much more should we love the brethren? The Shunammite woman loves Elisha because he was the holy man of God. He represented God and she saw her hospitality as service to God.
  2. Jesus described this as the distinction between the sheep and goats. **Matthew 25:35-36 NAU** - "*For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; <sup>36</sup> naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.*"  
**Matthew 25:40 NAU** - "*Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.*"
- II. The second thing we see here is an example of God’s simple grace
- A. Elisha was thankful for her graciousness and wanted to repay her.  
It is good to show grace for grace.
1. He obviously had connections. He could go to the king or to the general and lift up her name for commendation. She refused any form of repayment, saying she had everything she needed among her own people. In other words, her good works were not offered with any expectation of reward.  
Elisha’s influence will be significant in the life of this woman in **Chapter 8**.
  2. This is the heart of the Parable of the Sheep and Goats. The sheep served the Master without knowing they were doing so. They simply served.
  3. Elisha took matters into his own hands and asked his servant, Gehazi, for recommendations. This is the first mention of Gehazi. He will become prominent in the following chapters serving as a warning against greed. Elisha would serve as God’s agent for providing the woman with what she did not have and had no means of gaining – a child. **Verses 14-16**

- B. God opened the womb of this childless woman.
1. Elisha prophesied that she would be with child, but this was an act of God. God is able to open barren wombs.
    - a. We saw it with Sara and Rebecca and Rachel. All of these mothers were barren and all of the births were of great significance.
    - b. We also saw it with Hannah, the mother of Samuel—another significant birth.
    - c. And of course with Elizabeth in the NT, the mother of John the Baptist. In all of these cases the births were of significant covenantal consequence.
  2. This time, however, we find the birth of a child who would not have a dramatic impact on redemptive history. The mother is nameless. And the child is nameless. We have no history of his life, only that he grew, he died, and he was brought back to life. God was simply rewarding the gracious service of this kind, nameless, Shunammite woman.
  3. On the other hand, no life is insignificant, and no act of God is without purpose.
- C. You may see your life as insignificant and your good works as unimportant.
1. Your life may not have the same dramatic impact as perhaps Martin Luther or a famous ruler of a nation. You may be a nameless dot upon the annals of history.
  2. Yet, God blesses you continually with simple grace. Grace granted because it pleases God to do so.
  3. The Shunammite woman did not expect repayment for her kindness. She didn't want any form of repayment. And neither should you.
    - a. Do you become discouraged because others don't give you credit for what you do? Or don't help or encourage you?
    - b. You serve Christ simply because you delight in doing so. God will repay you, often beyond your expectations.

### III. Faith in the midst of tragedy

- A. Life sometimes comes face to face with calamity.
1. The child had grown up – most likely this is referring to being weaned which could be as late as four years old. The text implies he was young enough to be easily picked up and carried.  
**2 Kings 4:36 NAU** - "So he called her. And when she came in to him, he said, "Take up your son."
  2. On this day the child fell ill and died. It was sudden and unexpected. We aren't told exactly the cause of death; only that it involved severe head pain. It came on suddenly and at first it didn't seem life-threatening. His father told his servant to carry the boy home.  
**2 Kings 4:19** - "And he said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother."
  3. Perhaps it was a heat-stroke, or an aneurism, or any other number of possibilities. What we know is the boy's condition deteriorated quickly and by noon he had died to the great grief of his mother.

- B. How did the Shunammite woman respond?
1. First, there was an air of confidence.
    - a. She laid him on the bed of Elisha, the man of God.
    - b. She asked her husband to have a donkey saddled for her. He was confused as to why she wanted to seek the prophet. Apparently, it was customary for the faithful to gather at the homes of the prophets for worship on holy days—further testimony to the spiritual condition of this Sunammite woman.  
**2 Kings 4:23 NAU** - "Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath."
    - c. Her response is summarized in one word. The English translations offer widespread meanings but the word is simple and clear: **שָׁלוֹם**. She simply said, "Peace."
    - d. In other words, although her heart was torn and broken, she was at peace with God.
  2. She knew she needed to go to God's prophet—who was God's representative.  
**2 Kings 4:22 NAU** - "Please send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God and return."  
"Run" denotes haste, speed,  
**2 Kings 4:24 NAU** - "Drive and go forward; do not slow down the pace for me unless I tell you."
  3. Her plan was to go quickly and return – presumably with the man of God in tow.
    - a. Completing her journey she simply fell at the feet of Elisha.  
**2 Kings 4:27 NAU** - "When she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught hold of his feet."
    - b. Remember, Elisha represented God. It wasn't that she was worshipping Elisha, but He was God's prophet. God spoke through His prophet. She was fleeing to God through His prophet.
    - c. She would not depart from Elisha until he returned with her to her child.  
**2 Kings 4:30 NAU** - "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." And he arose and followed her."
  4. Notice, when Gehazi asked her if all was well her response was, "well" or shalom – peace. Of course, all wasn't well. Her child had just died. But in her trust of Yahweh all was well—peace.
  5. This must be the heart of God's people. Yes, we face times of calamity - but as we come into the presence of God all is well - **שָׁלוֹם**  
Horatio Spafford our familiar hymn after experiencing his own tragedy and loss –  
*When peace like a river attendeth my way  
When sorrows like sea billows roll  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say  
It is well, it is well with my soul*

#### IV. The prayer of faith

- A. Elisha was facing his own crisis
1. He was a man of God – the expression “man of God” is used 28 times in **Chapters 4-8**
  2. He worshipped God, served God, trusted God. But Elisha was still a man. God didn’t reveal everything to him. Like every other man, he had limited knowledge and limited power and was totally dependent upon God.  
**2 Kings 4:27 NAU** - "the man of God said, "Let her alone, for her soul is troubled within her; and the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me."
  3. The first act of Elisha upon arriving at the corpse of the young child was to pray.  
**2 Kings 4:33 NAU** - "So he entered and shut the door behind them both and prayed to the LORD."
  4. His prayer was not absent from his personal involvement.
    - a. He sent Gehazi with his staff – which was not effective.
    - b. He then prayed, and laid on the child, and walked back and forth in the house – all physical actions of faith in God.
- B. There was much to kindle doubts within the heart of Elisha
1. He had to endure the pleadings of a grief stricken mother  
**2 Kings 4:28 NAU** - "Did I ask for a son from my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?"
  2. He sent his servant Gehazi ahead, but there was no change in the child
  3. He entered the room and prayed and laid on the child and the child warmed, but still there was no response.
  4. He paced back and forth in the house. What were his thoughts, his pleadings? The child was dead. Death is final. Yet he prayed. Elisha’s faith was fixed upon the power and grace of God. The same God who gave the child to this mother could also restore his life.
  5. Elisha returned again to the child and the child was restored.

#### Conclusion:

1. This is an account of the gracious service of a Godly woman. The gracious care of a loving God. And the faith of God’s people in His gracious acts.
2. It teaches us of how unfathomable God’s ways are. He blessed this lady with a child only to then take him away. How can we comprehend God’s ways?  
This story helps us as we consider the suffering we face in this life.  
We can see how kind God is in the richness of His blessings. And we can see how He works in so many ways to strengthen our faith and draw us nearer to Him, often through adversity.  
He is indeed working all things for our good.
3. May this passage serve to strengthen our own faith.