

2nd Kings 4: 1-7; “Vessels Not a Few”, Message # 4 in the series – “Elisha and the Prophets”, A Bible Study conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall on May 16th, 2018, for those gathered at his home.

We find here in these verses another indication of the prophet of Elisha’s having received a double portion of the spirit of Elijah. The miracle here reminds me of our Lord’s multiplying the loaves and the fishes, for here (as in that account) everyone did what they could, and God multiplied what they gave, to the sustaining of all concerned. Here Elisha is approached by a widow of one of the sons of the prophets, and she tells him that her husband has died and the creditors were coming to take their two sons to be his slaves, as they had not been able to pay their bills since the bread-winner had died. There was this great need, and no apparent way for her to provide for herself. So she comes to Elisha with her problem, and he will help her solve it by pointing her to the human means and to be used, and the miraculous means to be given. This evening I want to bring to your attention the fact that your being provided for, and your ability to pay all of your bills is from the Lord. That is what this passage is teaching. And so I want to set before you the reasons that God considered her plight, and the means that He used to help this woman, so that she and her family would be brought out of debt and provided for during the lean times which they were experiencing.

1st of all – God considered her plight because the head of the household was a man who feared the Lord.

Verse 1 says – “A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets 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 slaves.” Now, it is important for every Christian person to remember that God will always have respect the needs of those fear Him. This woman uses this argument with Elisha as to why she believes that he should help her. And, indeed we can also say to those who may not know the Lord, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Psalm 111, verse 10 – “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments.” “His praise endures forever.” It is the beginning of wisdom in that God is really considered as the One who created us, to begin with. And He is also the One who sustains us, provides for us, and who keeps us in life. It is interesting to note that when this woman comes to Elisha that she does not mention the fact that he was a prophet, but that he was a man who was a servant and that he feared the Lord. Prophets and ministers of the gospel are to see themselves as servants. If they fear the Lord; that is they have regard for God’s word and His commandments to keep them, they will be provided for by God.

It is true that it is possible that a person could be a prophet and yet not fear the Lord as he should. But the testimony of this widow, the person who knew him better than anyone else did, was that he was a man who feared the Lord. And she also reminds Elisha that he knew that her husband, this prophet, feared the Lord. How important it is that the man who is the head of a household, fear the Lord. But this man had died, and now his family was in need. And so his widow turns to Elisha the prophet for help. Turn with me over to Psalm 103, verses 15-18. “As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes, for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.” “But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children’s children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them.”

Now, I want you to see how quickly that things can change if the head of the household dies, and those who remain come to need help from those around them, and from God Himself. The days of man are like grass, and the flower of the field, and for a time he flourishes, , but then he

dies; the wind then passes over his place, and he is gone. Such is the brevity of life. You might say – Why was it that this man took out loans and incurred debt, which if he died, he would not be able to repay? It was no doubt because of the times of great draught which happened in the times of Elijah when it did not rain for 3 and a half years. There were no doubt many poor people in land who needed to take out loans to be able to pay for their needs. Was it wrong for them to take out these loans? No, I do not believe so. You will recall that the people in the land of Egypt, when the famine became great when Joseph was ruling over the land, came to him and sold themselves to him because they had no other choice. He had all of the money in the land of Egypt. No, I do not believe that the Bible teaches that it is wrong to take out loans, but it does condemn those who do not pay back is borrowed. Psalm 37: 21 – “The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives.” And look also at verse 25 - “I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.”

Well, you may say, this woman was begging bread, wasn't she? No, she was simply trying to find help. It was not as though she could do nothing to work, or that she would not have looked to find work if that was possible. She was looking for wise counsel from Elisha, and he was going to give it to her. You may say to me the words of Romans chapter 13, verse 8 – “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who love another has fulfilled the law.” You say, “See – It says here that we should owe no man anything, so therefore we should never take out loans. Well, it is always a great thing to be debt-free, but it is not always possible to be debt free. It is also to be understood that purchasing of items on credit which you are not taking steps to pay back, is a wicked practice. It is only when you owe someone, a bank or a private person loans you money, and you do not take steps to see to it that they will be paid back in a timely fashion, that that is when it is positively sinful.

The righteous will, if he fears the Lord, always have sufficient for his real needs even if he is very poor, and he will go about to take definite actions to repay whoever he may owe money to. If borrowing money was wrong, then it would also be wrong for the Christian to lend others money. But the Christian who is stable in their own income and does have the means will indeed lend when he believes that it is the right thing to do. Turn with me over to Psalm 112, verses 1-9. “Praise the Lord!” “Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments.” “His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed.” “Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.” “Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; he is gracious and full of compassion, and righteous.” “A good man deals graciously and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion.” “Surely he will never be shaken; the righteous will be in everlasting remembrance.” “He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.” “His heart is established; he will not be afraid, until he sees his desire upon his enemies.” “He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever; his horn will be exalted with honor.”

Now, this shows us the truth concerning this whole matter. A good man deals gracious and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion. That is, he will be ready to show compassion to those in need, and he will show discretion (he will think through the whole matter, of what would be best for the person that he lending money to, just as much as he will think about his own interests. He is not going to be charging interest unless there is some compelling need for it. He is thinking about how he can serve the Lord in his lending to others. He knows that the Lord will bless him for doing this. Proverbs 19: 17 – “He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given.” This is the man who fears the Lord – a person who is gracious and lends, a person when he is in need, and loans money, will take definite steps to pay it back according to any contract made. Similarly, when any Christian person, any person

who fears the Lord, is in need God will most certainly consider their plight and act to bring them aid.

Now 2nd – God considered her plight because she listened to the word of counsel from Elisha on what to do with the oil which she had.

Verse 2 – “So Elisha said to her, ‘What shall I do for you?’” “Tell me, what do you have in the house?” “And she said, ‘Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil.’” “Then he said, ‘Go borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors – empty vessels; do not gather just a few.’” “And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels and set aside the full ones.” As one believer coming to the prophet of the Lord, this woman was seeking counsel from Elisha as to what she should do. He asks her – “What shall I do for you?” He means in his official capacity as the one who would deliver the word of the Lord to her, on His behalf. He first of all asks her what does she have in the house? Is there anything at all of substance that you have; anything of substance or value? And she answers that there was nothing in the house but a jar of oil. Elisha immediately realizes by the power of the Holy Spirit giving him wisdom, that this is the means by which the Lord will enable her to pay her debts. This was the means that her sons would be saved from being forced into slavery.

So he says to her – “Go, Borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors – empty vessels; do not gather just a few.” Let us understand that she alone had this one jar of oil, and it was of great value. What does it represent for us? I believe that this woman was given this jar of oil as a gift from some person of wealth and means at the time of her husband’s death. Even so, I believe that it represents the gospel of grace of Christ. It is of great value in that when a person has it in their heart, in their vessel. If a person has the grace of Christ they are saved from their sins and filled with the oil of gladness because they have Christ with them, the hope of glory. And they have been anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit’s valuable and spiritual working of that grace and power into their soul. This oil which is mentioned in this text represents the one thing needful for any person to be able spiritually live in the sight of God; the grace and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ; the only thing of value that this woman had, but it was enough for herself and her sons. She simply needed to know what to do with the gospel. And Elisha told her that she would use it as a means to pay off her debts and save her sons from slavery, by making a good improvement upon this gift of grace which she had been given.

She would not simply be keeping the oil of the gospel to herself, but by collecting the empty vessels of her neighbors around her, she would see them filled with the message of the grace of God, too, multiplying the effects of what she would give to the creditors; that is those who she owed money to. You and I need to understand that we as Christians owe a debt which we cannot pay. But Christ has fulfilled the law (the creditor in this case) and He has paid our sin debt. Elisha was the prophet who was representing Christ to this woman. He had given her the word concerning this gospel of grace, and she responded to it. She and her sons were those who had this gospel grace, but they could not just sit on it, or store it up for themselves alone. They did need to do something with it so that they could show forth the fact that they truly understood what Christ had done for them in giving them this gift. They were to gather the empty vessels of people around them, and then Elisha had instructed them concerning what they should do with them. They would shut the door behind them and pour the contents of their jar of oil into all of these other vessels. They would then set aside the full ones, and they would keep doing this until all the vessels were filled. And when there was no more vessels to fill, then the oil would cease.

This should show us the importance of prayer in relation to the sharing of the gospel with others around us. Matthew chapter 6, verse 6 – “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” People all around us, our neighbors all

around us, have many empty vessels which they may be willing to give to us, so that we can fill them with the gospel of grace. The gospel of grace is the good news that Christ can save people from their sins and fill them with His Holy Spirit so they will live for Him and glorify God in the way that they live their lives. We who have the gospel must be willing to go to our neighbors and ask them for their empty vessels. We must ask them whether they have experienced emptiness in living their life because they have not actually found the meaning of life. We must ask them to give us their empty vessels; to relate to us the many situations where life has disappointed them, where sin has deceived and wounded them, where people have failed them and forsaken them. And we must be willing to take these empty vessels back home with us and pour out our hearts in secret prayer for them, and then fill those vessels with the love of Christ which we have come to know. And so then, in living in this holy way, having gone and sold everything that we have for Christ, we can live on the grace which is left.

Turn with me over to Luke 16: 1-10a. In our text we have been talking about a poor widow who needed Elisha's help and counsel concerning what God would do for her if she was faithful with what she had. Here we have the parable of the unjust steward, who was not faithful with what he had at first but later thought of how he could truly serve his master. There is a parallel that I want to draw between these two accounts. "And He also said to His disciples: 'There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods.'" "So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you?'" "Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward." "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do?'" "For my master is taking the stewardship away from me." "I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg." "I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses."

"So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'" "And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.'" "So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'" "Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?'" "So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.'" "And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'" So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly." "For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light." "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much...."

The comparison that I want to make in closing is this. The unjust steward was not someone who knew the Lord, or who even came to know the Lord through his shrewd work of asking how much his master's debtors owed him, and then making their bill less. That is not just, and it is not the right way to deal with what has been entrusted to us. But in speaking to his disciples Jesus is telling them that if they are faithful in what is least, they will be faithful also in much. To be faithful, in the context, is for Christ's disciples to go about to share the gospel and to attempt to show people around us the way that they can deal with their sin debt to God. It is, in this good way, to preach to them the gospel of how grace can pay their sin debts and make their burden to be light. It is to make friends for ourselves by giving to the poor, so that they will see that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the best and most reasonable way to live your life, and that sin is something which must be repented of, in order to find the true meaning of life. This then is the meaning of the jar of oil, and gathering vessels from our neighbors, not a few.