

**2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 4: 38-44; “Wild Gourds & Good Bread”, Message # 7 in the series –  
“Elisha and the Prophets”, A Bible Study conducted by Pastor Paul  
Rendall on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018, for those gathered at his home.**

Elisha has returned to Gilgal for in that place there was a school of the prophets which he met with, and no doubt taught them in that school, which must have been something like a primitive Seminary, in those days. And it being a time of famine in the land, food provisions were very scarce. The incidents which are related in these verses which I have just read to you, are meant to show us the power of God to help his ministers during times of physical need, most certainly. But for us hearing this message here tonight, they are meant to speak to us about Christ’s great power, which is shown to New Testament pastors and preachers of the word, as they attempt to learn how they might better minister to those under their charge. In the 1<sup>st</sup> account we find that Elisha used the good means of flour to neutralize the poisonous effects of the wild gourds. (verses 38-41) And in the 2<sup>nd</sup> account we find that Elisha uses the good means of bread which was given by one man which he would multiply to feed all of them. Let us see how this applies to us here tonight. Let’s see how the prophet Elisha is set forth for us in this passage to be a type of Christ who helps all the ministers of the gospel to proclaim His sufficiency for their ministries.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – We find that Elisha used the good means of flour to neutralize the poisonous effects of the wild gourds.** (verses 38-41)

And after having taught them for some time, Elisha knew that they must be getting hungry, and so he said to some of the prophets who were sitting before him, “Put on the large pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets”. What did the prophets of that day feed upon? Well, it was not rich meats at a sumptuous feast, but rather simple fare, pottage which was cooked up from the herbs that a man went out and picked. Now, evidently this man did not have the discernment necessary to distinguish between edible herbs and wild gourds. He went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered from it a lapful of wild gourds, and came and sliced them into the pot of stew, and those helping in the cooking did not know what they were. They are the poisonous gourds of the coloquintida plant; so bitter that they were called “the gall of the earth”, Gill says. Well, Elisha desired to feed a hundred men; a hundred prophets, but what had been brought and put into the great pot, was not real pottage but real poison.

At this point, we must ask ourselves – What lesson can we learn from what I have mentioned so far? What spiritual truths can we glean from such an unusual occasion as this? What does this situation represent to us in New Testament terms? Well, let us think about the great pot first, and Elisha’s desire to feed all of these men. The great pot, I believe, represents undertaking of the common education and spiritual feeding of the men who are going to be ministers of the gospel. Elisha was eager and desirous to feed these young men. He commanded that stew would be boiled for them. And this was good. It is always good to desire to spiritual feed and teach those who are going to be teachers and preachers themselves. It is very important what any Christian spiritually feeds on. It is particularly important in a Seminary education, that the spiritual food be nutritious to the souls of the young men, and that nothing strange or poisonous be brought in, and partaken of.

The young man who gathered these poisonous gourds represents those who are well-meaning but ignorant of the importance of sound doctrine to nourish and strengthen the soul so that hardships. They do not take steps to look deeply into the scriptures to receive the orthodox truths which would profit their souls, or the souls of others around them. They have a general love for mankind, and a desire to be religious, and think that anything that looks beautiful must

be edible and nutritious, spiritually speaking. They go out to gather herbs which would be good to make the stew of a good education from, but inadvertently they pick wild gourds.

But turn with me over to Hebrews chapter 13, verses 7-11. “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.” “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” “Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines.” “For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.” “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.” “For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp.” “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.” “Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”

Now, let me see if I can relate this to our study this evening. This young man who went out to collect the food for the meal was remembering the one who ruled over him; even Elisha, the one who had spoken the word of God to him. He went out in faith to find the food that they all could eat. He searched and found the gourds of a very beautiful vine, and he concluded that these would be good for food. But he had not considered the fact that he needed instruction on how to discern what was a good herb, from a poisonous gourd. And evidently, others in the group, who helped prepare the food to go into the pot, did not understand the difference either. For they sliced them up and put them into the pot of stew. The difference between law and grace in terms of salvation and feeding people’s souls, is the difference between a poison gourd and a beneficial herb.

There is, you should understand, a great beauty to the ceremonial law that ought to draw our eyes to it. It is tempting for us to think that we can partake of the doctrines of the ceremonial law or in these New Testament times of Christ’s Church, a sacramental salvation, and think that we can be saved and made strong by these doctrines; that we can be established by them, but it is not so. You may think that rites and ceremonies like baptism and the Lord’s Supper, by partaking of them, you will find eternal life by your simply participating in the ceremonies. But no life is ever conveyed by a man performing a ceremony. Life is only conveyed to sinners through the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why it says that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It is only by His grace that any person can be saved and have eternal life. And it was on the altar of the cross that He laid down His life for sinful men and women, that they might partake of wholesome spiritual truths.

It is only Christ who has fulfilled the law; both moral and ceremonial, so that ministers preach him and not themselves. He establishes the heart by His grace, and does not send us back to be partaking of those foods of the beasts who were slain and their blood brought into an earthly sanctuary by the high priest, and whose bodies were burned outside of the camp. They were typical of what He alone could do, and what He alone could give – that is – His purchase of grace to be our food. He Himself then, in order that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. He was reproached for this by the legalistic Pharisees, and Scribes, and rulers of Israel. But we glory in it, because His sufferings were for us sinners who will trust in Him for salvation, and so we could have our sins forgiven and enter the gate of eternal life and the kingdom of God, and know God, and come to know and hold to, sound doctrine.

We do not, as this man of our text did, go outside the camp ourselves, and bring back whatever spiritual food we might naturally think is right. Christ and His grace is the only spiritual food which will give us life and sound spiritual health so that we can see and hold to sound doctrine. We must trust in Christ alone, and our hearts are then established by His grace, and we do not then, hold to false or erroneous doctrines, partaking of them, or bring them back

into the assembly of the saints for them to feed upon. We believe in the One who suffered and died for our sins, and we believe that it is by His grace alone that we will be sustained and nourished and fortified in our souls, day by day, in living the Christian life. The gourds which this man brought back, I think, represent the moral law as well as the ceremonial law of God. You might think to yourself – What could be better to feed on than the Law of God which is good, and acceptable, and perfect, in itself? Well, it would be the perfect food, if we were able to keep the law perfectly in our heart and in our actions. But since we cannot, we are all under its curse. And remember that Eve, in the beginning, when she saw the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that it was good for food, and according to the serpent, it would make her wise, partook of it, and she gave some to Adam, and he partook of it, and they both died spiritually at that very moment. From that moment on, the earth itself was under a curse, and everyone who tried to be saved by the law would come to know the reality of this curse.

Well, what did Elisha have to do, then, when he realized that there was death in the pot? He said – “Then bring some flour.” He was led by the Spirit of God to have one of his students bring him some flour, and put it into the pot, and then he commanded that it be served to the people. What does this mean for us? Well, flour is the main ingredient which used to make bread, and Christ is the bread of life. Therefore, the main ingredient which was needed to make the poisonous food of the law into something which anyone will be able to eat, and benefit by, is grace. Grace from Christ transforms the law for us into something which we love to partake of us as our spiritual food. For we know that because of Christ we shall not be condemned by it because we are not perfect in our obedience. And grace has been purchased by Christ based upon His fulfillment of the law. Therefore, we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus. Since Christ has fulfilled the law, He has also sent His Spirit into our hearts, so that we would have life in ourselves; so that the poisonous doctrines of legalism and ritualism and ceremonialism will not poison our souls. We feed upon His grace and His faithfulness. There is nothing harmful in the pot of this kind of religious education when Christ and His grace are the ingredients in what is partaken of.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> – We find a miracle which brings life-sustaining provision to God’s prophets.**

(verses 42-44)

Verse 42 says – “Then a man came from Baal Shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley bread, and newly ripened grain in his knapsack.” “And he said, ‘Give it to the people, that they may eat.’” “But his servant said, ‘What?’” “Shall I set this before one hundred men?” “He said again, ‘Give it to the people, that they may eat; for thus says the Lord: ‘They shall eat and have some left over, according to the word of the Lord.’” One of the lessons that the Lord would first have us to see from these verses is that we should bring our offerings to the Lord as the firstfruits of our labors. Matthew Henry says – “It is said to be of the first-fruits, which was God’s due out of their increase; and when the priests and Levites were all at Jerusalem, out of their reach, the religious people among them, with good reason, looked upon the prophets as God’s receivers, and brought their first-fruits to them, which helped to maintain their schools.” The Commentator Lange says – “Since now there were no more legitimate priests and Levites in the kingdom of Israel (1<sup>st</sup> Kings 12: 31), this man, who was a faithful worshipper of Jehovah, brought his firstfruits to the “Man of God,” the head of the prophets.”

But 20 small loaves of bread did not seem to be nearly enough to feed 100 men, and so Elisha’s servant said – “What?” “Shall I set this before one hundred men?” He thought, perhaps, that it would mock their hunger if each person was only to get a few mouthfuls of bread. But Elisha is adamant, and says to him – “Give it to the people that they may eat; for the Lord says that they shall eat and have some left over.” And this indeed was what happened. How can we apply this to ourselves? I think that first of all that we should not be ashamed to

bring what we can as the firstfruits of our labors, to support the Lord's work. Even if it might seem to be so little in relation to really addressing the needs of so many, we still should bring what we can. Why? Because God is able to multiply what we give.

Turn with me over to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians chapter 9, verses 6-12. "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." "As it is written: 'HE HAS DISPERSED ABROAD, HE HAS GIVEN TO THE POOR; HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER.'" "Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God." "For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God."

This is perhaps the best description in all the word of God of the great benefit of giving what you are able to give, and God's ability to make all grace abound toward you; your having given to those in need. When all of the prophets partook of the bread and were satisfied, it says that they still had some left over. It reminds one of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. John chapter 5, and verse 9. "There is a lad here who as five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. And they still, after all that, had twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Then it says in verse 14 – "Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.'"

So, as we close our study tonight, let me impress upon you the truth that what you give to the Lord Jesus can be multiplied beyond anything that you might expect; looking at the size the gift, in relation to the need at hand. But this should not stop you from giving what you have, and doing what you can. He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, can supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness. Surely Elisha was only able to do what he did, in the multiplication of these 20 loaves, because the Spirit of Christ was with him to perform this sign. God is well able to do multiplication miracles in relation to his sustaining the lives of His people, and His being able to establish every good thing to them in Christ. Elisha was a type of our Savior in the many miracles that he did; showing forth the glory of the Christ who was to come in due time.