

"The Widow's Oil"

2 Kings 4:1-7

Introduction: Considering the message that we looked at last week which came from 2 Kings 3 and "Digging Ditches" the opening of chapter 4 gives to us insight into the life of an Old Testament prophet. We go from Elisha being used by God to save the lives of the three kings and give them victory over the Moabites and then as we come to chapter 4 we see another situation presented to Elisha. Let me show you the words of Matthew Henry on the opening of chapter 4.

"Great service Elisha had done, in the foregoing chapter, for the three kings: to his prayers and prophecies they owed their lives and triumphs. One would have expected that the next chapter would tell us what honours and what dignities were conferred on Elisha for this, that he should immediately be preferred at court, and made prime-minister of state, that Jehoshaphat should take him home with him, and advance him in his kingdom. No, the wise man delivered the army, but no man remembered the wise man.

Ecclesiastes 9:15

¹⁵ Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

Or, if he had preferment offered him, he declined it: he preferred the honour of doing good in the schools of the prophets before that of being great in the courts of princes. God magnified him, and that sufficed him-magnified him indeed, for we have him here employed in working no fewer than five miracles in this chapter."

Elisha was not in the ministry for fame and fortune. He was all about serving God and being used in a way that honored and glorified his Lord.

Application:

This is true of every person whose heart is controlled by the Spirit of God. As servants of God our ministry should never be about money or fame. If a minister of God's Word is a man that is loved by the masses and is held in high esteem by his society then we can be sure that there has been compromise somewhere in his teaching. Let me show you the words of our Lord.

Luke 6:26

²⁶ Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.

When we proclaim the Truth of God's Word we can be sure that there will be many who are going to hate the message and the messenger. Notice the Words of Jesus in John 15.

John 15:18-21

¹⁸ *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*

¹⁹ *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

²⁰ *Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.*

²¹ *But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.*

Let us now get to the miracle before us and consider some valuable application for our lives.

I. **The Situation**

Notice 2 Kings 4:1

Elisha is now approached by a widow. Her husband was a servant of Elisha and he was a prophet in training under Elisha. Her husband has died, and she is now left with his debt and the one whom he was indebted to is about to take her sons away, so they can work off the debt that he owed. This man's actions toward the widow seems to be rather severe. He was permitted to have her sons work off the debt, but he was not permitted to treat them as "BONDMEN" which means "slaves". They were to be treated as hired servants.

Leviticus 25:39-44

³⁹ *And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant:*

⁴⁰ *But as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile.*

⁴¹ *And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return.*

⁴² *For they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen.*

⁴³ *Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God.*

⁴⁴ *Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids.*

Now, let me touch on the debt which this man had. If you read certain commentaries, you would see that there are several Bible teachers who are very quick to condemn the man who died because he died with debt. Some give the idea that he was living too far above his means and this should have never happened. I just want to state that we are not told that here. I think if we consider the surroundings of Elisha's day we will see that the man was most likely doing what he had to in order to provide for his family.

The prophets were supported in two ways. They would work and provide an income and they were supported by the people. In Elisha's day the prophets were not well like and were often not accepted especially when Ahab and Jezebel were alive.

1 Kings 18:1-4

And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.

² *And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria.*

³ *And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly:*

⁴ For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.)

We can be sure in Elisha's day there was very little financial support which came into the prophets. As far as the prophet's vocation I personally believe he managed, worked for, or even owned an olive grove and at the time that he died it appears it was a bad year for the crop. That is why his wife will have only a small bottle of oil and all the neighbor's jars are empty. Let me show you what God had said in Leviticus.

Leviticus 26:1-4, 14, 19-20

Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LORD your God.

² *Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.*

³ *If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them;*

⁴ *Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.*

¹⁴ *But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments;*

¹⁹ *And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass:*

²⁰ *And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits.*

At the time of Elisha, we know that idolatry was practiced so what the people were facing very well could have been the judgment of God's hand.

II. Elisha's Questions

Notice 2 Kings 4:2

Elisha asks her two questions, but it is the second question that we need to focus on. **He asks her what she has in her house?** Her reply is she has nothing except a pot of oil. As she faces her need she sees the pot of oil as being insignificant. Her reply reminds us of the words of Philip and Andrew.

John 6:5-9

⁵ *When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?*

⁶ *And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.*

⁷ *Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.*

⁸ *One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him,*

⁹ *There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?*

Application:

There are needs all around us in the lives of others today. There are people that we have contact with and their lives have been turned upside down by some means. God has placed them in contact with us so that we may reach out to them. As we stand, and we look at these needs God asks you and me, "What do you have to offer?"

Here is how we often answer; Nothing at all, except a little time. Nothing at all, except a little tongue for witnessing. Nothing at all, except a little gift. Nothing at all, except for a little opportunity for teaching. Nothing at all, except a little part in this ministry or that ministry. We just have a little oil.

What do you have? Oh, Lord, I don't have very much. I don't have a lot of skills or gifts or abilities. I don't have fame and fortune. I cannot preach like Peter and I cannot pray like Paul.

Here is what our answer should be; Lord, I don't have much to offer you, but what I have I give to you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. There's an old hymn that says, "Little is much when God is in it." We often under estimate the power of God and we often live like God's power is limited because of what we have to offer. The Bible has many examples of what a little in the hands of God can accomplish. With 5 loaves and 2 small fish Jesus fed over 5000 people. With a small tear in the eye of Moses God melted the heart of Pharaoh's daughter and preserved the life of Moses.

III. **Elisha's Command**

Notice 2 Kings 4:3-4

The widow was to go abroad and borrow as many empty jars as she possible could. She was then to shut the door on herself and her sons and she was to take her little pot of oil and begin to pour it into the empty jars.

Application:

God asks us to take the little bit that we have and to pour it out. You and I are little pots of oil; and oil in the Bible represents the Holy Spirit; and we're called on to pour ourselves out in ministry and sacrifice and evangelism for the world.

Sometimes we grow tired and weary and wonder if we can press on. Sometimes in the Lord's work, our souls are vexed, our nerves are stained, and our strength is small. But the Bible says, "Pour oil into all the jars." All around us are empty vessels, and we must be alert to opportunities, even if we must be broken and spilled out. Let me share a story as told by another Bible teacher;

This is a story about a lady named Jill Briscoe, who, with her husband Stuart, traveled the world for the cause of Christ. In one of her books Jill tells about a time when she and Stuart had just started out as missionaries, and Jill ran terribly low in stamina, patience, and the inner resources for the job. But nearby was a senior missionary's wife, and one day Jill went to see her and poured out all her frustration. She told her about Stuart's many extended travels, about his long absences from home, about her worries for the children,

about the difficulties of juggling the roles of missionary, wife, and mother. Jill felt a certain amount of resentment as well as confusion and emptiness.

The senior missionary wife listened kindly and patiently, and then she firmly directed Jill's attention to the little pot of oil within her. She had forgotten her greatest resource; she had discounted the work of the Holy Spirit.

"You have all that you need within you, Jill," said this woman, "in the person of the Holy Spirit. You have heavenly help a heartbeat away."

"How does it work?" asked Jill.

"It works as you begin to appropriate what you have," replied the woman. "Go home, shut the door, and spend time with the Lord. Then begin to pour out whatever you have into the empty vessels of your neighbors."

Well, that wasn't exactly what Jill expected to hear. She was already depleted; how could she empty herself further? She felt she had nothing; how could she give what little she already had away? But she decided to do it. She went home, shut the door, prayed, and asked God to show her where to begin pouring out. "Give me an idea, Lord," she prayed. Then she got up from her knees, called in a babysitter, and took off to the town center of their town. Now, I need to tell you that Jill has always had a very engaging way with young people, and she went to one of the trouble spots where teenagers like to hang out, and she just started talking to kids. She began to connect with high-risk young people, and she said, "As I began to talk to these beautiful kids, I was able to draw on the limitless power of the Holy Spirit, and as I poured out, He poured in. It was one of the most incredible evenings of my life."

That evening was just the beginning of a long and fruitful ministry of working with young people, and even her children became involved—just like the children in the story in 2 Kings. They watched the oil begin to flow and saw the vessels fill up one by one. Mother and children begin to minister to troubled young people, and they saw kids come off drugs, sign up for Bible studies, and have their lives transformed. In fact, many years ago, Jill described this period in her life, still amazed at the young lives that were transformed. And Jill now says that the years since have been just one moment after another of pouring herself out for the needs of others, and seeing God multiply the oil until the vessels are filled.

IV. The Miracle

Notice 2 Kings 4:6-7

God multiplied the oil so that every jar was filled. The need was met by the power of God and by her willingness to give what little she had.

Application:

It is very easy to become so focused upon ourselves that we have little concern for the needs of others. We must step back at times and look at what it is that we are focused on. There are many empty vessels around us every day. There are times when there are opportunities to reach out but in many of those times we may have only a little energy to step out or we may only have something very small to offer and because of either or both we do nothing. In our choice to do nothing we have neglected to appropriate the power of the Holy Spirit that lives within us. There are times we need to shut the door to the distractions around us and spend time with our Lord and then go through the open doors and pour out what God has given to us, trusting the Spirit to use us.

Let me point out two very important points about this miracle;

1. It was based upon the actions of the woman to go and gather the empty vessels. She had to do her part before God would perform the miracle.
2. She had to pour out what she had before the supply was replenished.

Conclusion:

We must do all we can, and we must be willing to be poured out for the cause of Jesus Christ trusting that the Holy Spirit will give to us that which we need. At the end of Paul's life he wrote these words to Timothy.

2 Timothy 4:6-7

⁶ *For I am now ready to be offered [poured out], and the time of my departure is at hand.*

⁷ *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:*