

- Tragedy struck a few years later. When the young boy went out into the field to be with his father during the harvest, he suddenly became ill. Perhaps he suffered a sunstroke (Ps 121:6; Isa 49:10). His father had one of his servants carry the boy home to his mother and it was there, in his mother's lap, that the boy died. He was her only son, but she could not prevent death from claiming him.
- The Shunammite woman displayed incredible faith in God (3). Notice how calm and collected she was even when her only son had died right on her lap. She went up and laid the child on the bed of Elisha and shut the door behind her. She did not make any funeral arrangements. She placed her son on Elisha's bed, believing all the while that God would raise him from the dead. She prepared for the resurrection of her son, not his burial. This shows the faith of the woman. She closed the door and sent word to her husband, asking him for the use of a servant and a donkey so that she could go to Elisha. Her husband was perplexed and questioned why she should go to see the prophet when it was not a special religious day. She only answered her husband, "*It shall be well*" or "everything is all right". Her response of "*it shall be well*" shows her incredible faith. She then went to find Elisha
- As she approached Mount Carmel, Elisha saw her in the distance and told his servant Gehazi to run to meet her and ask if all was well. And she answered, *It is well*. She knew her only son was dead, a son she had grown to love. But she knew everything would be alright! That's faith! This woman knew her God, and she knew that whatever happened, it would be all right because there is a God in heaven who makes all things right in the lives of those who love Him. The number one reason this un-named woman is great in the eyes of God is her unshakeable faith! She lost her son, but she did not lose her faith.
- Bypassing Gehazi, this Shunammite woman went directly for Elisha & fell humbly at his feet. Gehazi tried to push her away but Elisha told him to leave her alone. Though God had not revealed the problem to Elisha, he knew that this woman was in deep distress. Note Elisha's humility in v27b - he did not yet know that her son had died. Elisha had an incredible gift of the word of knowledge (cf 6:12) but here, he's clueless. The prophets of the Lord only knew what they had been told.
- The woman unburdened her soul to the prophet, informing him of the death of her son in such a way as to appeal to the prophet for his recovery. In her distress, she blamed Elisha for her pain - why did he give her a son to love only to take away his life? Instead of going directly himself, Elisha sent his servant Gehazi with his staff to get to the boy. Gehazi was to run ahead of Elisha (and the boy's mother) and to place the staff of Elisha on the boy's face. We are not told the purpose of laying the staff on the boy's face. Perhaps it was expected that God would use this act alone to accomplish the resurrection of the boy.

## 2 Kings 4 – The Miracles of Elisha

- The ministry of Elisha is characterized by a plethora of miracles. God worked 16 miracles through Elisha (double that of Elijah). God was revealing His Word to men during this period. The prophets of Judah and Israel were beginning to write the words of their prophecies which will become a part of the canon of Scripture. Chapter 4 lists four miracles of Elisha. These miracles benefitted ordinary people and reveal God's care for His own people.

### 1. The Poor Widow's Unending Pot of Oil (4:1-7)

- Our God is a compassionate God who watches out for the widows and at times provides for them miraculously. A widow was in desperate straits and appealed to Elisha for help. This woman had been married to one of "the sons of the prophets". That the prophets were married shows how alien to the Bible is the notion of a celibate priesthood. Prophets were married, priests were married, the apostles, including Peter, were married (1 Cor 9:5; Mt 8:14). That God's priests, prophets and leaders should be married men is the normal expectation of Holy Scripture (1 Tim 3:2-5; Heb 13:4).
- This woman's husband had died, leaving behind debts and the widow had no means to pay them. With no way to pay it back, her 2 sons would be sold into slavery. The custom in those days was to put the family into slavery to pay off the debts (Lev 25:39-40; Ex 21:1-11).
- The woman looked to Elisha—and thus to God—for help. Elisha asked her, "*what shall I do for thee?*" and "*what hast thou in the house?*" The widow told Elisha that all she had was a small pot or jar of oil. This oil was probably a small amount of anointing oil used by the prophets. This small, insignificant jar of oil would be God's answer to her plight. The way God generally meets our needs is to take what we have and to multiply it as we turn our lives over to Him and obey the principles of His Word (cf John 6:1-14; Mt 17:24-27).
- Elisha told the widow to borrow all the empty vessels or containers she could from her neighbours, and then to go inside her house with her boys, shut the door, and pour from the oil she had into these empty vessels. Elisha instructed her – "*borrow not a few*"! By faith, the woman did as she was told, borrowed as many vessels as she possibly could. She filled the 1<sup>st</sup> vessel with oil. The oil miraculously multiplied when she began to pour it into the empty vessel until all the vessels were filled. Elisha then told her to sell the oil, pay off her debts, and to use the rest of the proceeds to pay for her living expenses.
  - *Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours*: Elisha made this woman commit herself in faith to God's provisions. God takes care to deliver His servants in ways that exercise their faith, for faith is the key that unlocks God's blessing. Lazily wishing & strenuously desiring are 2 different postures; the former gets nothing & the latter gets everything.

- *Pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full:* Elisha told the woman to take what she had - one jar of oil (all that she had) - and to pour that out in faith into the borrowed vessels. As she did this, the oil miraculously kept pouring from the jar until all the borrowed vessels were filled. Elisha made her do this; he knew that she had to trust God herself.
- *And the oil stayed (ceased):* The woman kept pouring out oil until she filled the last vessel, and then the oil stopped flowing. The miracle was given according to the measure of her faith in borrowing vessels. God's supply was as large as the woman's faith and obedience.
- 2 important lessons:
  - The Lesson of Obedience. The woman was to obey what God commanded even though it did not make sense to her, and even though she did not know the outcome. She was to obey God's command without being told why. Many of God's commands are not accompanied with detailed explanation. But if we love our Lord, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15). As Christians, we know that God is good, and that He causes all things to work out for our good, and for His glory (Rom 8:28). We must trust God because we love Him, and because we know His character and attributes. We must obey His commandments, not because He has explained why He has instructed us to act in a particular way, but because He is God, and we are His servants.
  - The Lesson of God's Provisions. By means of this miracle, God not only provided for this widow's immediate needs, but He also made provision for her long-term needs as well. God will do exactly what He has promised to do. Elisha promised that the Lord would fill the vessels, and He did! God will keep all of His promises to you too! His supply is far more than sufficient! That is the kind of ability our God possesses (Eph 3:20). His provision is limited by nothing but our faith and obedience.
- This miracle is similar to the miracle which Elijah had performed with the Phoenician widow from Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16). God was making it clear to Israel that Elisha is His replacement for Elijah.

## 2. Raising of the Shunammite Woman's Son (4:8-37)

- The Scriptures call the Shunammite woman a "great woman". The word "great" is sometimes used of wealth, or influence or character. It is likely that she was a woman of some wealth and she sought to meet the needs of Elisha. Why is this Shunammite woman great in the sight of God? 3 reasons:
  - The woman of Shunem is a wonderful example of godly piety & kindness (1). The first thing this woman did was to persuade Elisha to stop by her house to eat some food – out of a heart of love. Her hospitality was very hearty: "*she constrained him to eat bread*". Perceiving that Elisha was a holy man of God,

she realized she could do more. She persuaded her husband to make a special room and furnish it for Elisha in their home in which Elisha could regularly rest whenever he came passing by. And Elisha benefited greatly from her kindness.

- These simple acts of kindness & hospitality speak volumes concerning this woman, and her piety towards God; no wonder she is called great (cf Mt 20:25-26). This Shunammite woman was great because she reached out and ministered to the prophet Elisha. She was willing to give generously of her means in order to ensure that Elisha's prophetic ministry in Israel was well supported, and that Elisha himself was well provided for. This is the first reason for her greatness - it was her piety towards God as seen in her simple acts of kindness & hospitality towards God's servant (Luke 8:2,3; Acts 9:36). Serving God & being a pious Christian is not all about talents & spiritual gifts; it is about having a generous heart and willing hands (cf Acts 21:15-16). The Shunammite woman recognized that the prophet Elisha was a man of God & she ministered to him. She was a godly woman, given to acts of kindness.
- The Shunammite woman had a good understanding of what is truly valuable – godly contentment (2). Elisha wanted to repay her for her kindness. Yet this Shunammite woman turned his offer down with the simple reply: "*I dwell among mine own people*" - that is to say, "I have a home among my own people." Her reply echoed the contentment of her heart. She was content and satisfied with her present lot. And her ministry or kindness to Elisha wasn't done with any ulterior motives. She was content with what God had provided her and with her place of ministry in the community. And this despite nursing a deep longing within her.
- Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, pointed out to Elisha that this Shunammite woman was childless and her husband was old. In her culture, for a woman to be barren was looked upon as a tragedy, for there would be no heir, and no one to care for her when old or widowed. A woman found fulfilment in bearing children. Yet this Shunammite woman had learned to be content even though there was a void in her heart. No doubt she had deeply desired a son, but had come to the point of being content without one, trusting in the Lord. Genuine contentment is not self-sufficiency but Christ-sufficiency (Phil 4:11-13). Contentment grows out of a trust in God's provisions & expresses a confidence in God to take care of all that we need. The Shunammite woman was looking at what she had rather than griping about what she didn't have (1 Tim 6:6)!
- The Lord blessed this Shunammite woman richly (Mt 10:41-42). She received this wonderful promise from God's prophet—that a year from that time, she would have precious son. Her reaction to his prediction is interesting (v16b) – it expresses polite skepticism. True enough, in the course of time, "*the woman conceived, and bare a son*". Her contentment was greatly rewarded. This woman was rewarded for her kindness shown to the prophet of God.