

**2 Kings 4:1-7 ESV (Pg. 176)** Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.” **2** And Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me; what have you in the house?” And she said, “Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil.” **3** Then he said, “Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not too few. **4** Then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels. And when one is full, set it aside.” **5** So she went from him and shut the door behind herself and her sons. And as she poured they brought the vessels to her. **6** When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” And he said to her, “There is not another.” Then the oil stopped flowing. **7** She came and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest.”

- I. Last week we looked at how God is a generous God. We saw this in the way he created the world by his own will, for his own glory<sup>1</sup>, and how he turned over dominion of it to the human race<sup>2</sup>. We saw that even after humanity failed in its mandate to rule and subdue, that God further demonstrated his generosity by promising a redemption that would surely come through Jesus<sup>3</sup>, and even by providing clothing for his exposed creatures as he sent them out into the earth<sup>4</sup>.
  - A. We also saw that God, his nature unchanging according to James 1:17<sup>5</sup>, also provides for us “every good gift and every perfect gift”. This includes things like shelter, food, and clothing; but also beneficial work, and satisfying relationships.
    1. God is the source of everything good in the life of every creature on the earth we inhabit. It is his delight to constantly demonstrate his everlasting goodness to all of humanity. **Matthew 5:45b ESV** For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
    2. Because of our limited, non-eternal perspective, we are sometimes oblivious to his goodness; not realizing that in his power he can both bring glory to himself, and provide good for us, out of the worst of circumstances. **Psalms 23:5a ESV** You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
  - B. Most importantly, we examined how God loved us so much that he gave us the most generous gift when he gave us Jesus<sup>6</sup>. When we were dead in sin<sup>7</sup>, “having no hope and without God in the world”<sup>8</sup>, Jesus became the perfect sacrifice for our sin, justifying us with his own righteousness by his death on the cross.
    1. There could be no greater example of God’s generosity than to exchange his perfect Son for a bunch of depraved, ungrateful sinners (as we all are).
    2. There could be no greater demonstration of love than Christ showed when he freely laid his life down as the sacrifice for the fallen men and women.
  - C. We saw how God provides everything that “pertains to life and godliness”<sup>9</sup>, so we might become “partakers of the divine nature”<sup>10</sup>. This includes power<sup>11</sup>, wisdom<sup>12</sup>, peace<sup>13</sup>, supernatural love<sup>14</sup>, etc. all given through the Holy Spirit in us.
- II. While we should never stop thanking God for his good provision for our daily needs of food and shelter<sup>15</sup>, or for his eternal provision of justification, sanctification and

glorification through Christ<sup>16</sup>, we want to look at a God who not only provides the things we all need generally, but also provides for us individually and specifically. The passage we read this morning helps us to see this truth beautifully.

- A. Elisha was a prophet about 800 years before the birth of Christ. He had been preceded and mentored by Elijah, another great prophet in Israel's history<sup>17</sup>. He began his ministry during a time of great national wickedness and idolatry, but God was with him, and many miracles were performed by him.
1. By this point in his story, Elisha had used Elijah's cloak to part the Jordan (recalling Israel's entry into the promised land)<sup>18</sup>. He had caused a poisoned well to miraculously provide drinkable water<sup>19</sup>. He'd seen 2 bears devour some children who had been mocking him<sup>20</sup>. He had caused water to be provided abundantly for a thirsty army and told them how to be victorious in battle<sup>21</sup>.
  2. All of this happened in just 2 chapters of the Bible! Many more miracles would mark Elisha's ministry. Even in death, God used his bones to bring a man back to life<sup>22</sup>. No prophet of Israel (besides Jesus) did more miracles.
- B. Part of his ministry was to lead a group of prophets (known as the Sons of the Prophets or School of Prophets)<sup>23</sup>, mentoring them like Elijah had done for him. These young men were the last hope of a sinful nation. They were faithful and courageous, dedicated to proclaiming God's Word, even at the risk of their lives.
1. "Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, 'Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.'"
  2. This woman was one of the "good guys". Her husband had proclaimed God's Word in an idol-worshipping nation that didn't want to hear it. Now, though he feared the Lord, he was dead. Worse, with his income gone, this woman could not pay her debts. Soon she would see creditors balance the past-due accounts by taking her sons (her only hope of income) as slaves.
    - a) If we're honest, this seems so unfair; like "no good deed goes unpunished". We rightly imagine that she should be honored and protected, but her life is turning to a nightmare before her very eyes.
    - b) Life is like that sometimes. People get sick. Spouses and children die. There's not enough money to take care of our most basic needs. We are the victims of injustice. But her story (and yours) is not over yet.
- C. "And Elisha said to her, 'What shall I do for you? Tell me; what have you in the house?' And she said, 'Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil.'" These are 2 crucial questions. Elisha is God's representative. I believe that God is always looking at us in our need and saying "What shall I do for you?"
1. But many of us can't hear the question because we're busy fretting over what we can do for our own need. God isn't considered as a viable option.
    - a) And this is a shame! As we saw last week, God loves to give generously, and although he provides rain for both the just and the unjust, he loves to be approached and asked in faith by the children he loves so much.
    - b) Aren't you like that with your kids? I loved providing the necessities for my children, but I loved it even more when my kids would ask me for

something special they needed or wanted. It was a joy to provide, when they trusted me to do so, and heartbreaking when I was unable to.

2. **Matthew 7:7 ESV** “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **8** For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. **9** Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? **10** Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? **11** If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!
- D. But the 2nd question Elisha asks is of equal importance: “Tell me; what have you in the house?” One of the biggest lies you’ll ever hear is “God helps those who help themselves,” I don’t think Elisha is asking about her resources because he wants her to help herself, but to know if she is willing to trust the Lord with the very little she does have. What can this teach us?
1. I’ve lost count of the people who have told me if they won the lottery, they would make sure the church never needed another nickel. I’m always skeptical. Usually people who say they’d entrust millions to God’s work are robbing Him of much less every week. It doesn’t become easier to give just because you have a lot. In fact, many people find it more difficult.
  2. **Luke 21:1 ESV** Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, **2** and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. **3** And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. **4** For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”
- E. The widow tells Elisha that she has nothing...nothing, that is, except a jar of oil. Her supply was so insignificant by any reasonable standard that she accounted it as “nothing”. It’s amazing what God can do with our nothing!
1. God asked Moses what he had in his hand and he said only a staff (a wooden stick!), but God used that staff to perform mighty miracles while freeing his people from slavery in Egypt<sup>24</sup>.
  2. Jesus took a little boy’s lunch, consisting of a few fish sticks and rolls, and feed over 5,000 people with it<sup>25</sup>. What could God do with your nothing?
    - a) When we acknowledge how little we have, we see how impossible our position is. But when we give it in faith, we will see God work through it.
    - b) What’s in your house? Your hand? Your lunchbox? To you, it may seem like nothing; but put it in God’s hand and see what he can do with it!
- F. **“Then he said, ‘Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not too few. Then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels. And when one is full, set it aside.’”**
1. Elisha tells her to collect every empty cup, bowl and Tupperware container in the neighborhood. Something unheard of was about to happen. She was to get behind closed doors, and pour out her little trickle of oil into the empty vessels. The promise was that the oil would not run out, but keep pouring. When one vessel was full, she was to set it aside and pour into the next.
  2. It must have been frightening to pour out her last little bit of supply, but it’s here we see an undeniable reality of the Christian life: God rarely moves until

we sacrificially let go of what we have. Perhaps we don't experience his power more often because we never let ourselves be out of options.

- a) Jesus said the one who wants to find his life will lose it. He said the one who would be his disciple is required to give up all that he has. A follower of Christ must relinquish title, reputation, desires, possessions, time, relationships, money, and a place in the world (literally and figuratively).
- b) But the mystery of belonging to Christ is that he who loses his life, not trying to save it, is one who truly saves it. It's not "faith" to believe God for a new house or car; faith is throwing your life away, believing in a Jewish carpenter, only to discover he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

III. "So she went from him and shut the door behind herself and her sons. And as she poured they brought the vessels to her. When the vessels were full, she said to her son, 'Bring me another vessel.' And he said to her, 'There is not another.' Then the oil stopped flowing." Losing your life in Jesus is always evidenced by obedience.

A. The woman did exactly what Elisha had commanded (silly as it seemed)! She got alone with her sons and started pouring until all the containers were full. When they were, the oil stopped. Can you imagine if she hadn't obeyed?

1. What if she only collected a few containers because she didn't want to look foolish, or the prophet's instructions made no sense to her? Surely the oil would have still poured, but she wouldn't have had enough. That would have surely been worse for her, knowing what **could** have been done by God!
2. What if she had collected every vessel in town, but never poured out the oil, because it struck her as ridiculous, or she was afraid to lose what she had? Where there's no obedience, faith isn't present. Where faith isn't present, no miracle can be expected. Faith is born, obedience responds, miracles occur.

B. But because faith and obedience were at work together, the promise was fulfilled, and her need was met. There was no lack. She had all she needed.

1. **James 2:17 ESV** So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. This is not to say that we work to earn anything from God. James said every good and perfect **gift** is from God. But it means God's goodness isn't passively received, but it is received by an obedient, trusting heart.
2. Paul speaks both of the free gift of God, and of obedience to the truth, or to his teaching. Whenever God speaks, our belief of what he has said is not valid until we have obeyed. Everything else is false or ineffective belief.

C. "She came and told the man of God, and he said, 'Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest.'" God provided her need, but this miracle was not intended to reoccur for her. She wasn't told to go into the miracle olive oil business. God won't be reduced to a formula! He will be known.

1. This is the grave fallacy of the prosperity gospel. It tells you there are secrets to unlock to get what you want from God. You don't have to ever relate to him, you just need to know how to pick his lock. But he's not a loan officer; He's a father who gives good gifts to his children, because he loves them.
2. We don't know what happened to this lady, but I suppose that her life and all her anxieties were forever impacted by meeting and knowing the God who provides, Have you met this God? Do you trust his Word? His power? Or do you trust your own abilities, your clever schemes, or the ways of the world?

D. **Psalm 37:25 ESV** I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread.

IV. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

V. **Benediction: Ephesians 3:20 ESV** Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, **21** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Revelation 4:11

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:26-28

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:15

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:21

<sup>5</sup> (ESV) “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

<sup>6</sup> John 3:16 ESV

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 2:1

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 2:12 ESV

<sup>9</sup> 2 Peter 1:3

<sup>10</sup> 2 Peter 1:4

<sup>11</sup> 2 Timothy 1:7

<sup>12</sup> James 1:5

<sup>13</sup> John 14:27

<sup>14</sup> 2 Timothy 1:7

<sup>15</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:18

<sup>16</sup> See Romans 8:29-30

<sup>17</sup> 1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2

<sup>18</sup> 2 Kings 2:14

<sup>19</sup> 2 Kings 2:19-22

<sup>20</sup> 2 Kings 2:23-24

<sup>21</sup> 2 Kings 3:15-27

<sup>22</sup> 2 Kings 13:20-21

<sup>23</sup> See 2 Kings 2:3, 15-18; 4:38-44; 6:1-7

<sup>24</sup> Exodus 4:1-9

<sup>25</sup> John 6:5-13