

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday June 1, 2022 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



ELISHA AND THE WIDOW'S OIL “God’s Supply in the Midst of Poverty” 2 Kings 4:1-7

We began our study on the life of Elisha several weeks ago, one of the great prophets of God. Elisha’s life and ministry is a powerful follow up to his predecessor and mentor Elijah. Here are some of the important background facts that may help to firmly establish in our minds who Elisha was and where he came from.

5 Important Background Facts About Elisha to Remember:

1. The name Elisha means “God is Salvation” and gives us an idea of the purpose of His ministry (v.19) -
2. Elisha was the son of a farmer named Shaphat, and was himself a farmer when God called him (v.19) –
3. Elisha was from the town of Abel-Meholah in Israel which means “Meadow of Dancing” which may reflect something of Elisha’s personality (*which was one of compassion, mercy and joy*) (v.19) – That is where Elijah found Elisha plowing the fields. Verse 16 tell us the was from Abel-Meholah, “...*And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place.*” Remember that where as Elijah had been more firey and stern as a prophet, Elisha was characterized as being somewhat kinder, more joyful, full of compassion and mercy, which we shall see in our study of his life.
4. Elisha’s call to ministry was from God not man, and was issued through the Prophet Elijah (v.19) – An important note here is that Elijah didn’t call Elisha, God did. Elijah, throughout his ministry was simply the messenger of God, and no less here was Elijah the messenger to Elisha of God’s call on his life. Look up at verse 16 in 1 Kings 19, “*Also you (Elijah) shall appoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place.*” God calls! If you are not called of God, but rather called by man your ministry will fail.
5. When God called Elisha he surrendered his life fully to God’s call, no turning back (v.20-21) – Listen to it again in our passage in verses 20-21, “*20 And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, “Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?” 21 So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen’s equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.*” Some have questioned Elisha’s reluctance to follow as indicated in verse 20 by his desire to turn back and kiss his mother and father. But that is a misread of this passage. Notice more importantly in verse 21 that Elisha indicated his fully surrender to God’s call on his life with not turning back by the fact that he slaughtered his work animals

and burned his plows in order to dedicate his life to God in worship and adoration... and surrender. He burned up his previous work equipment to surrender himself to God. He had nothing to go back to. Elisha was a fully surrendered prophet of God. He was all in... and that is what it takes to build an persevering faith.

One more important fact about Elisha's life that might be of interest to you and that sets him apart from other prophets in the Old Testament... Elisha was incredibly blessed by God. He did more miracles in the Old Testament than anyone except Moses.



Characteristics of Miracles: (Norman Geisler's "False Miracles," Baker Encyclopaedia of Christian Apologetics)
There are clear characteristics of true miracles...

1. **Miracles are a direct intervention in nature** - Rather than simply being a weird or unusual event, a miracle would never occur without God stepping in and making it happen. In other words, nature would never give rise to a miracle since by definition miracles are *supernatural*.
2. **True miracles are immediate** - Whereas natural events take a certain amount of time, miracles happen instantly. Medicine heals over time; miracles happen all at once. (Geisler explains that even when Jesus once healed a blind man in two steps, each step was instantaneous.)
3. **Miracles bring glory to God** - They are not done merely for wowing people or being showy. They show the power of God and draw people to him. They are never people-centered. They are done to show God's power and grace, which in turn brings honor and glory to him.
4. **Miracles don't fail** - They are always successful in what God sets out to accomplish. This does not mean people will not suffer physical ailments or death after experiencing a miracle; but it does mean that as opposed to medicine, miracles are always successful.
5. **Miracles are obviously miracles** - Many times today people claim that a healing or event was a miracle. It is sometimes debated, even by people who may have witnessed the event or know about it.

There is no debating a clear miracle. While the Pharisees thought Jesus was doing his works from an ungodly source, they recognized he was doing something real. There is no doubting a real miracle. I am not suggesting people will not doubt a miracle if they simply hear about it, but real miracles are obviously not wrought by medicine, nor are they merely unexplained events. They are clearly miraculous.

The Purpose of Miracles in the Bible

- (1) **Miracles (in the Bible) authenticate a message/messenger of God -**
- (2) **Miracles are not performed in the Bible for entertainment -**
- (3) **Miracles are performed to prove something -** For example, Peter exclaims, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know . . .” (Acts 2:22).
- (4) **Miracles (contrary to popular belief) did not happen frequently in biblical times -** While the Bible spans about 1500 years from the writings of Moses to the close of the NT, most of the miracles center around **Moses/Aaron, Elijah/Elisha, and Jesus/the Apostles**. There are huge gaps of time between these people’s lives. (One person who did the math said that if we add all the miracles up and divide by the number of years the Bible spans, it is about one miracle every eight years.) **Miracles are extremely rare** - In biblical times they did not happen often. If they did, people would not be amazed at them. Further, if they happened all of the time today, people would not be amazed at them.
- (5) **Miracles are special events caused by God that have a specific purpose -** It should be clear that based on the characteristics listed above. **The reason miracles occurred at specific times (Moses/Aaron, Elijah/Elisha, Jesus/Apostles) is because they all had a specific message for God’s people and others** - That Yahweh is the true God and Jesus is God in the flesh... the long awaited Messiah. **Other miracles happened outside of these specific times (Moses/Aaron, Elijah/Elisha, Jesus/Apostles), but always for specific reasons** - Such as the conquest of the land or accomplishing certain goals for God’s people.

Current Views on Miracles – “Study: Fewer Americans Believe in God and Miracles”

A recent article caught my attention. The article headline read, “Study: Fewer American’s Believe in God and Miracles.” Let me just read a part of this article... “A new study has revealed that more and more Americans are leaving church, and one of the reasons is lack of belief in miracles. The Washington Examiner reports that a Pew Research Center study revealed that half of Americans who have left church say they no longer believe in God. The number of people in the country who don’t believe in God is also reportedly growing. These so-called “nones” say they left church and stopped believing in God for a number of reasons, some of which include not liking organized religion, “common sense,” and believing science trumps miracles. Representatives from the study also interviewed participants in order to determine the reason for this trend. “About half of current religious ‘nones’ who were raised in a religion (49%) indicate that a lack of belief led them to move away from religion. This includes many respondents who mention ‘science’ as the reason they do not believe in religious teachings, including one who said ‘I’m a scientist now, and I don’t believe in miracles.’ Others reference ‘common sense,’ ‘logic’ or a ‘lack of evidence’ – or simply say they do not believe in God,” researchers reported.”

- *What do you think of that article... what is your reaction to that article?*
- *Why do you think that fewer Americans believe in God and miracles?*
- *What do you think is the cause behind especially the lack of believe in miracles?*
- *What are the ramification of this for our nation?*

INTRODUCTION

Elisha’s prophetic ministry, which is especially highlighted in chapters 4-8, clearly demonstrates that God cares for His people and that He sometimes works in sovereign and mighty ways that extend far beyond

that which we are able to do or think as He reaches out to meet needs according to His will. But before we look at the details of this story, we should note the contrast between chapter 3 and chapters 4-8.

- We are taken from the prophet's ministry before royalty to that of the very poor.
- In chapter 3 God used him to save these kings from death and defeat... that's what we looked at last time in chapter 2 of 2 Kings.
- Without the ministry of a man like Elisha, where would the kings be? Dying of thirst in the desert!
- We would expect that they might have at least tried to honor him in some way, but if they did, it is certainly not mentioned in Scripture.
- I rather suspect no such honor or even thank you was offered.
- As Matthew Henry comments, "No, the wise man (Elisha) delivered the army, but no man remembered the wise man." Listen to this interesting verse from the wise writer of Ecclesiastes 9:15, "Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man." Why is that do you think... why did they fail to give honor to the one who essentially saved their life? What does this say about man in general? What does this say about our own heart and life when we have been blessed, delivered saved, yet take it fore granted? What specific steps can we (must) we take to ensure that this isn't a picture of our lives?

Specific Steps We can Take to Keep From This Self-Absorbed (Self-Centered) Tendency:

- (1) **Learn to give thanks for all things** – Listen to these words from the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18, "¹² And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴ Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. ¹⁵ See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."
- (2) **Don't forget who we are or where we were when God found us** – 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, "⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." There but by the grace of God go I. If God had not pulled us out we would be lost. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:1-10, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."
- (3) **Be humble, broken and filled with gratitude before God** – Listen again to the word of Paul in Philippians 2:1-11, "Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³ Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out

not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

- We don't know, but if Elisha had acknowledgment 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.
- So often people in ministry, especially those in the public eye, are more concerned with their reputation and popularity than they are for meeting the needs of people. Unfortunately, our pulpits and other places of public ministry are too often filled with those who love to have first place, and the recognition and praise of men.
- But the prophet Elisha was not concerned with the praise of men nor with position or power or prestige.
- ★ • Though his ministry was filled with miracles they were for edification, not for show. Like the Savior, he came not to be ministered to, but to minister.

Also, remember that Elisha's day was a time of great national degeneracy and apostasy, much like the times in which we live. The world as a whole was unsympathetic to God's people and to the ministry of His Word. It was tough to be a believer and to stand for the things of God. For many believers it was often hard to even make ends meet.

Such was the case with the widow in our passage. She was evidently a believer and her husband had been a prophet, a man of God who was involved in the ministry and teaching of Elisha. But one of the lessons of the passage is that regardless of the times in which we live and the problems we face there is no problem or need which God cannot meet if we will simply trust and obey Him. God cares... in fact as 1 Peter 5:6-7 says it, "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for he cares for you."

The real issue is not the problem, but in our response to the Lord in the face of problems. How do we respond or react? This is the crucial issue!

Though the lessons of the passage are many, it does deal with a financial problem or need and as such it particularly speaks to our physical needs. Let notice our passage... look with me at our passage in 2 Kings 4:1-7 **(READ: 2 Kings 4:1-7)**

"¹A 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." 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." ³ Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels; do not gather just a few. ⁴ 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." ⁵ So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured it out. ⁶ Now it came to pass, when the vessels were

full, that she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another vessel." So the oil ceased.⁷ Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest." -2 Kings 4:1-7 (NKJV)

THE WIDOW CRIES OUT FOR HELP (VS. 1)

Notice verse 1, "¹A 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.'" In verse one we are simply told "a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha" for help. Then, in her statement to the prophet, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord," we learn a few more details about this widow, exactly who this woman was is simply not disclosed. There are a number of principles to glean from these verses...

2 Encouraging Principles of 2 Kings 4:1 for Every Life:

(1) Principle #1: We are not unknown to God – Think of this... though she is not identified in the text and was not on the "who's who" list of Israel's prominent people (as most of us are not), the principle is she was not unknown to God. *What does this mean for our lives as well as other? How does this make you feel personally?*

Each one of us are personally known and loved of God; we are the personal objects of His love. Listen to these verses as they are shared and reflect on how each one make you feel personally...

- Psalm 147:4, "**He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name**" -He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them.
- Psalm 50:11, "**I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine.**"
- Matthew 6:26-30, "²⁶Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ²⁸So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; ²⁹and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"
- Matthew 10:29-31, "²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. ³⁰But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

- ★ • 2 Timothy 2:19, "¹⁹Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Our needs are never unknown to our sovereign Lord. Though our God is transcendent, above and sovereign over this world, He is also immanent, very much involved with His creation and with His people and the details of their lives. This will be clearly emphasized in the story of the ax head that will follow in chapter 6. Since her husband was one who feared the Lord and since she appealed to the prophet, she was certainly a believer, an Old Testament saint who had a relationship with God. As an Old Testament believer she was the special recipient of God's very personal care as one of His special children (Phil 4:19).

(2) Principle #2: God uses us to help others in His name - Though her appeal here was ultimately to the Lord, she sought help through Elisha. Her appeal was based on two facts:

The widow's appeal was based on 2 facts:

1. As one of the sons of the prophets, her husband had been a servant and student of Elisha
2. Also, her husband had revered (had been faithful to) the Lord.

This scenario reminds us of how God usually meets the needs of His people through people, especially believers ministering to other believers. That we have such a caring responsibility to one another is one of the great themes of the New Testament, but this especially draws attention to our need to be more involved in the needs of those in our personal care or in our ministry.

Paul writes in Galatians 6:9-10, *"⁹ And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."*

This widow's plight is spelled out in her statement, *"and the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves."* That her husband was a man who revered the Lord indicates the problem she faced was not caused by her husband's folly, but by circumstances imposed upon him as a believer in his day of apostasy. According to the Old Testament Law, a person in debt and without the means of repayment or collateral could be forced into bondage as a servant (or his sons) until the year of Jubilee. The sons would have to work off their father's debt (see Leviticus 25:39ff)

ELISHA RESPONDS TO THE WIDOW'S NEED (VSS. 2-4)

Notice our passage again... look at verses 2-4 with me, *"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." ³ Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels; do not gather just a few. ⁴ 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."*

Did you notice Elisha's question for the widow... "What shall I do for you?" As a man of God, Elisha was as available to a poor widow woman as he was with kings, so he was quick to come to her aid. As God shows no favoritism, but treats all men alike if they will come to Him in faith, so the people of God should show no favoritism and be just as available to minister to the poor as to the rich and the powerful.

James, remember, warns us of the sin of partiality in James 2:1-9, *"My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. ² For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, ³ and you ^{1a}pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," ⁴ have you not ^{1a}shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; ⁹ but if you ^{1a}show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors."*

The qualifications for elders, deacons, or for putting widows on the list for support relate only to Christian character or marks of maturity; they have nothing to do with position, power, or wealth.

Perhaps an illustration will help: A Chicago bank once asked for a letter of recommendation on a young Bostonian being considered for employment. The Boston investment house could not say enough about the young man. His father, they wrote, was a Cabot; his mother was a Lowell. Further back was a happy blend

of Saltonstalls, Peabodys, and others of Boston's finest families. His recommendation was given without hesitation. Several days later, the Chicago bank sent a note saying the information supplied was altogether inadequate. It read: "We are not contemplating using the young man for breeding purposes. Just for work."

As we think about Elisha's question, "What shall I do for you?," we need to remember that Elisha was no ordinary prophet because of his many miracles. In a very unique way, he represented the person, power, and care of God. The widow, as the wife of one of the prophets under Elisha's ministry, must have been familiar with what God had been doing through the prophet Elisha. In essence, then, she was seeking God's provision through the prophet.

In those dark days of apostasy, God had acted powerfully first in Elijah and then in Elisha to authenticate His covenant care of Israel and the nation's special purpose in the plan of God. When Elisha asked, "What shall I do for you?," he was in essence saying, what do you want God to do for you through me? This question reminds us of James' warning, "you do not have because you do not ask" in James 4:2. Of course, it is also true that often we do not have because we ask with selfish motives that are based on self-centered living (James 4:3).

There is no question that one of our great failures is our failure in prayer. *Why is one of great failure our failure in prayer, do you think?* Though we are always to ask according to the will of God and godly motives, we are still commanded to take our needs to the Lord and to entreat others to pray for us. Here are some of the great Bible/scripture promises concerning prayer, and the power of prayer... promises we should lean upon, and commands we should be diligent and urgent in obeying. Listen as each of the following verses/passage are read: *How do these relate to the widow on our story and to Elisha? How do they similarly relate to us?*

- John 14:13, "And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."
- Matthew 21:22, "And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive."
- John 15:7, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."
- Matthew 7:7-11, "⁷ '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 he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, being 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!'"
- Ephesians 6:18-19, "¹⁸ Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— ¹⁹ and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel."

★ God wants us to come to Him as His children and in faith, with His glory always in view, to ask for our needs according to the will of God. Too often we either take Him for granted or act as though He does not care. He does care, and He will answer our prayer(s)!

Interestingly, Elisha did not wait for an answer, at least one is not recorded. Why? Well, because her needs were obvious and she had already come to him and declared her problem which also indicated her request-income to pay off her financial obligation and save her sons from slavery. I am reminded of Matthew 6:8 and 32. Matthew 6:8, "⁸ 'Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have

need of before you ask Him.” And then Matthew 6:32, “³² For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.”

God knows our needs before we ask; in fact, He has known them from all eternity. Then why do we need to ask? Because it causes us to be dependent on Him; it demonstrates our faith and demonstrates that it is He who ultimately meets our needs.

In verse two Elisha says, “Tell me, what do you have . . . nothing except a jar of oil.”

- Oil was a very important commodity; it was like money or gold.
- Oil is often a picture or type of the Holy Spirit inasmuch as the Old Testament practice of anointing priests and kings served as a type of the ministry of the Spirit.
- Oil as a type of the Spirit is clearly in view in Zechariah 4 where the constant flow of oil from the lampstand depicted the constant flow of God’s power and is interpreted as such by the words, “not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit” in verse 6.
- ★ • But that does not seem to be the emphasis here... rather, the focus in this passage is on the way the Lord takes what He has given us like our talents, gifts, physical abilities, financial provisions and multiplies them if we have faith to trust Him to take what we have and multiply it.
- She was so destitute, that the only thing she had was this oil, which was used for anointing the body or for cooking--or she may have been saving it for her burial.
- ★ • But there is a **PRINCIPLE** here which we find repeated in Scripture: **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. This is true of our talents, gifts, finances, or physical assets.**
- We need to investigate what we have in all areas and then, using those blessings as good stewards of God’s grace, however small they may seem, surrender them to the Lord and trust the Lord to bless and provide as He sees fit.
- But many today want to win the sweepstakes or lottery rather than have to trust God with whatever He has allotted them. Sometimes God does supply from places unknown and in ways beyond our imagination. But our responsibility is to take what we have no matter how small or large and turn it over to Him.

Look at verses 3-4, “³ Then he said, “Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels; do not gather just a few. ⁴ 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.”

In verse 3 the widow was told to go and borrow “empty vessels.” Think of these “empty vessels”...

- Full vessels are heavy to carry, but that’s not the point is it?
- God can’t or will not put anything into full vessels without at least emptying the vessels first.
- As long as there were empty vessels there was God’s supply to fill them with the oil.
- The oil only stopped flowing when there were no more empty vessels to fill.

There are some important lessons for us here from these “empty vessels:

3 Important Lessons From the Empty Vessels:

- (1) **The number of empty vessels brought into the house showed the woman’s faith, obedience, and her submission to God and His promise to her through the prophet -**
- (2) **If we find that the supply of God stops, then either the need has been supplied according to His will, or there are no more empty vessels -** If she had brought only a few, that would suggest there was insufficient faith, obedience or submission to God as her sovereign Lord and supplier of her need. Note that she was not requested to gather a specific number of vessels; God wanted her to act in faith.

For this reason Elisha warned, *“do not get a few.”* In other words, bring as many as you have faith that God will fill. Through the prophet, God was telling her (and us), “Believe me for your total need. Don’t skimp on my ability and willingness to do super abundantly to meet your need”

Listen to Paul’s words in Ephesians 3:20-21, *“²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹ to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”* *How does this verse perhaps apply to our story? To our own lives?*

“The limitation was not in the supply of oil but in the lack of empty vessels to be filled. We can always come in faith to God’s abundance of grace with our empty vessels to receive of His fullness of grace.”
– Merrill Unger

- (3) **God’s supply would be (and was) as large as her faith and obedience, without greediness** - The moment we become greedy and selfish in our request, we not only stop the flow of God’s provision (Jam. 4:3), but we end up going in circles like a dog chasing his tail. The widow woman was to consider all of her needs--her debts, living expenses, ministry--and then act in faith accordingly, but without a spirit of greediness which, for one thing, would demonstrate, not faith in the Lord, but in what He supplied. Do I seek God, the *Giver* because I want to know Him, or do I seek the *gifts* God gives as though He were simply my genie?

I believe this godly woman brought vessels sufficient for her needs and stopped before greed took over. The amount of vessels was limited by the size of her room. God has promised to meet our need, but not our greed. But I wonder what I would have done? Would I have gone out and borrowed and borrowed until my whole house and yard was full?

Now notice verse 4, *“⁴ 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.”* The closed door suggests the principle of privacy. What she did was to be done without distractions so she and her sons could focus on the Lord and set their hearts upon Him in faith. *Why might this have been important and what might the lesson for us in this?*

To be alone with God is one of the vital needs of any believer in any time, but it is especially true in the days in which we live with all the noise and extreme busyness. One of the reasons we often do not see God multiplying our gifts and abilities is because we fail to get alone with Him individually and corporately to call upon Him and to focus our hearts upon His grace and supply.

Furthermore, Elisha’s absence when the miracle took place would demonstrate that the power came from God alone, not Elisha. This was certainly designed to encourage her to greater faith and dependence on the Lord. Devout faith and obedience produces an abundance of spiritual blessings.

THE WIDOW’S OBEDIENCE AND GOD’S SUPPLY (VSS. 5-7)

These verses draw our attention to the nature of God’s person as powerful, loving, gracious, merciful, and like a Father to His children--they display the goodness of the Lord. He is the Father of the orphan, the friend of the widow, the Shepherd of the sheep, and the Protector of His undershepherds and their families

CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

2 IMPORTANT APPLICATIONS IN CONCLUSION:

(1) FOR INDIVIDUALS –

- ***Am I available to be used by God in the lives of others?*** - Elisha was a man who had a heart for serving others whether wealthy or poor. He did not minister to people based on how they might promote him or provide for him. He was only concerned that people might know and experience God's grace and power in their lives. How available am I to do the same?
- ***Am I by faith bring to God myself as an empty vessel and letting Him supply my needs?*** - Like the poor widow, we all have certain needs--spiritual, emotional, and physical, but God knows those needs completely and He cares about them personally. Our most fundamental need is to come to him in faith, but with empty vessels that He might multiply our lives according to His purposes. While trusting Him to meet our need and never our greed, let us come not with just a few vessels.
- ***Am I limiting God by what I fail to being to Him, looking to Him and trusting Him?*** In other words, let's not limit our loving and gracious God by our lack of faith and obedience to Him. He is the One who is able to do superabundantly above all we ask or think, but He has promised to do as the Psalmist said, in due season, in His own timing according to His perfect understanding.

- (2) FOR THE CHURCH** - Local bodies of believers have many needs--both spiritual and physical, both large and small. We live in a world which is basically antagonistic to the work of God, but the problem we face is not in God's supply of the oil or in people's ability to meet needs. The real problem lies in our faith, in our obedience and submission corporately and individually. Please note the emphasis here: As earthen vessels, we must empty ourselves of wrong mental attitudes, priorities, pursuits, or goals, and present ourselves as vessels of God to be filled (controlled) by the word and the Spirit of God. If our lives are cluttered with bad mental attitudes, with grumbling, with selfishness, preoccupation with the things of the world and there is indifference to God's work, God may stop the supply of oil. And one reason the supply is stopped is that believers stop coming to Him. Carnal believers do not seek the cause of God and the supply of God, they are too caught up with their own world. I believe this must begin with an evaluation of our own stewardship of giving, believing God that our giving will not be our lack. This means evaluating our own use of the funds God has allowed us to have. We need to begin with the oil we have individually and corporately. But this also means in addition to our own financial responsibilities with the oil we have, looking to God to supply from other sources according to the wealth of His might, if that is what is needed. We must not turn this around and ignore the responsibility we have with our resources. It is our responsibility to ask God to multiply those resources for the purpose of greater giving and not simply pray for a miracle. In other words, we can't simply pray for God to supply the oil, and ignore our responsibility to use the oil we have. We must first take the oil we have, trust God to multiply it, and then as the Lord supplies, not only pay our debts, and expenses, but give unto the Lord a return on His investment in us. Remember, the oil was a very valuable commodity and stands for the valuable resources God has given us whether talents, spiritual gifts, physical abilities, or financial blessings, etc. Let us not limit the Lord. Let's believe God. Let's bring empty vessels, and not a few.