

Lessons from the Life of Elisha, Part 3: 3 Kings and a Widow (2 Kings 3:1-4:1-7)

I. What is our goal as we read the OT?

- A. Fully equipped – All Scripture is God-breathed and useful (2 Tim. 3). What are we to learn from these stories?
- B. Heart of God is revealed in the OT.
- C. Good and bad examples: many colorful characters in the life of Elisha who we can learn from.
- D. Foreshadowing of Christ. Elisha as a type, Christ as antitype.

II. Last Lesson Recap

A. Miracle of the Healed Waters (2 Kings 2:19-22)

- 1. Israel is in a bad place spiritually, involved in false worship, led by a sinful king. Elisha could have come with judgment, like Joshua had (Joshua 6). Instead, Elisha performs a miracle, healing the sick waters with salt. Miracle of salt brings life to a barren land and to the people.
- 2. God's message of patience and hope for his people to turn back to him. This is a beautiful picture of God, who desires to heal his people. This was Jesus' ministry.
- 3. Jesus tells his followers: you are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13).
 - a) Salt is a seasoning, has a sharp taste.
 - b) Also a preserve for food, purifies and cleanses.
 - c) Also a fertilizer: makes things grow where they otherwise would not. Used as fertilizer in the ancient world and still today, including mixed with manure piles as it preserves the fertilizing properties of dung. We are not to "lose our saltiness, or we are not fit for the dung hill". (Luke 14:35)
 - d) We are to be salty, a fertilizer offer healing to others. How? Full of mercy, peacemakers, loving our enemies, pure, holy, kind, meek, the Sermon on the Mount, this is our saltiness, how we are to bring healing to the world.

B. 42 boys mauled by 2 bears (2 Kings 2:23-25)

- 1. Israel is a bad place – rebellion against God. Here we have the prophet coming into Bethel, and a group of young boys, running in a pack (a gang), are teasing and taunting the Lord's prophet. May have been a threat to Elisha physically.
 - a) Elisha does not lash out physically, take out his sword. Instead, calls down a curse and leaves things in God's hands. God responds swiftly.

- b) Tertullian (early church father writing late 100s, early 200s) uses this passage to make a defense against the accusation that the God of the Scriptures is responsible for the evil in the world.
- c) Tertullian says no, there are two types of evil:
 - (1) Sinful evil (which Satan authors), morally wrong (murder, deception, violence, etc.), and
 - (2) Penal evils (which God authors) and is used to punish man in order to bring about justice. Examples of these:
 - (a) The Flood and the fire of Sodom killed the unjust, those doing evil.
 - (b) 10 plagues sent against Egypt. "...Egypt, although most depraved and superstitious, and worse still, the harasser of its guest-population...."
 - (3) These punishments certainly seem like evil to those being punished, but this is justice, seek to stop their evil. He then goes on:
 - (a) "Even His own people did God visit in their ingratitude. Against young lads, too, did he send forth bears, for their irreverence to the prophet." ANF Bk 3, Pg. 309
 - (b) Parents may not repent when they face difficulties as a result of their sin, but parents may repent when they see their children going through suffering due to the parents' sin! Do you think this got the attention of the boys' parents and the community?
- d) We are to stand in awe of God and His power, to love him and obey Him.
- e) It is a blessing that God intervenes to get our and others' attention before the final judgment day. The reality is that often people only humble themselves and turn to God, when bad things happen.
- f) God is both a God of justice, and a God who desires to heal his people.

III. 3 Kings and Israel are Saved

A. Read 2 Kings 3:1-25

B. What happens?

1. Kings of Edom, Israel and Judah band together to fight Moab who stopped paying tribute.
2. They go out to battle with a really bad plan. Seem to get lost in the desert ("a circuitous route") with no water. They and their animals are weak, in big trouble, with enemy near. A really dire situation.
3. Jehoshaphat suggests they seek the prophet: the one who poured water on Elijah's hands. (Elisha must know where to find water!)

4. Elisha's response: who are you? Call on your own (false) prophets and god.
Don't look to me to help you.

5. **Read 3:13-15** But, Elisha gets involved for the sake of the king of Judah (Jehoshaphat).

- a) All three are in the same situation, all come to the prophet, all looking for guidance? Why does Elisha treat them differently?

(1) **2 Kings 3:1-2** Jehoram: "did evil in the eyes of the Lord.... He persisted in the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin; he did not depart from it."

- (a) God sees Jehoram as evil. He established a false system of worship, disobeyed God's commands as to the temple, built high places and his own houses of worship, put in place golden calves to worship, allowed anyone to serve as priests. Led the people astray from the commands of God.
- (b) Note, Jehoram was a bit better than his father and mother (Ahab and Jezebel). He removed at least some Baal worship.
- (c) Yet, Elisha would give him "no regard." "What do I have to do with you? Go to your own prophets (false ones)..."
- (d) So sad! God had given Jeroboam an amazing promise!
 - (i) 1 Kings 11:32-35. "But I will take the kingdom out of the hand of his son and give the ten tribes to you.... So I will receive you, and you shall reign over everything your heart desires. You shall be king over Israel. It shall be, if you hear and do everything I command you, and walk in My ways, and do what is right before Me, to keep My statutes and My commandments as My servant David did, then I shall be with you, and build you a house that shall endure, as I did for David."
 - (ii) Yet Jeroboam (and those who came after him) turned against God.

(2) Compare to Jehoshaphat. **2 Chronicles 17:1-6**

- (a) "Now the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the former ways of his father David and did not seek idols, but sought the Lord God of his father and walked in His commandments, and not according to the deeds of Israel. Therefore the Lord guided the kingdom by his hand.... His heart took delight in the ways of the Lord. And moreover, he removed the high places and groves from the land of Judah." 2 Chron. 17:3-6

b) Lesson for Us

- (1) We cannot compare ourselves to others, only to God and his standard.

- (a) Jehoram did better than his parents. "I tore down the Baal worship...." But God saw him as an evil king, gave him no regard. Jehoram was deceived. Not even close to God's standards.
- (b) Growing up, I thought I was a good guy. Better than others. This pride led to great self-deception! God would do much to demonstrate my desperate need for him.
- (c) Pride is a horrible sin. And it deceives.
- (d) Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord" shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."
- (e) I want to be on the look-out for examples around me, in my church, in other churches, of how to put all of Jesus' commands into practice.
- (2) God has regard for those who love him, who delight in His ways, like Jehoshaphat.
 - (a) I know there are some commands I find challenging, difficult, may carry out begrudgingly: Self-control, loving those who don't treat me like I wish to be treated.
 - (b) Yet, I am to delight in His ways. I want to have this heart. God listens and gives regard to those with this heart.

6. Elisha promises to provide water

- a) This would be impossible, to provide water in the desert.
- b) Yet, vs. 18 "this is easy in the eyes of the Lord"
- c) Nothing is impossible for God. See this over and over in Scripture.
 - (1) **Genesis 18:9-15** Sarah told she will have a child, but she is past the age of child-bearing. She laughs. Doesn't believe it. Rebuked.
 - (2) **Luke 1:30-38** Mary will have a child without knowing a man. Rejoices in God's promise!
 - (3) Sadly, I can relate more to Sarah than Mary. But I want to be like Mary!
 - (4) There is so much work God desires to do, miraculous work, to restore His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, in our individual lives and in the lives of the people around us. May we believe that the miracles of God are easy for him, and He desires to work them, even in our lives.
- d) Elisha provides water (by a miracle). It comes out of nowhere. It looks like blood. Moab is deceived and is beaten badly.
- e) In a sense, could we say that Israel is saved from death (thirst and the enemy) "by water and blood"? These sources of salvation should mean a lot to us as Christians!

- C. Elisha now turns from dealings with kings and nations to performing a series of miracles with ordinary, regular people. We'll look at the first one today.

IV. Justice for a Widow

A. Read 2 Kings 4:1-7

B. What happens?

1. A nameless widow comes to Elisha. She is about to lose her sons to her creditors. *My husband feared God.* I am about to lose my sons and my retirement plan (sons will provide for her when she is older). Help!
2. Elisha gives very specific instruction: find jars from neighbors, lock yourself in your house (close the door behind you), and pour out oil until it stops.
3. What would I have done? Would I have followed the instruction? She is desperation. At the verge of losing sons, no hope. Yet she does have hope! Takes the prophet at his word. Obeys.
4. This is like \$ being poured out of a jar! It keeps coming. What an incredibly intimate moment, this woman with her sons, alone in the room, pouring out oil from this little jar, filling the other jars. Imagine the scene! She was probably weeping with tears of joy as the miraculous oil keeps coming and she realizes she and her sons are being saved.
5. Elisha as a deliverer and redeemer.
 - a) He rescues her from injustice – two sons are about to be enslaved due to a debt. Elisha is a redeemer.
 - b) Redeem: “a releasing effected by payment of ransom”
 - c) The nameless widow needed a kinsman redeemer.
 - (1) **Lev. 25:25, 35, 47** – the Law allows close relative to step up and redeem their relatives debt.
 - (2) Ruth 4 - Boaz with Naomi and Ruth
 - (a) Boaz redeems Naomi's land, purchases/saves the bride, raises the name of the dead (husbands) and is called “the restorer of life”
 - (b) Why does God command his people to have a process for redemption? This is his heart! Beautiful picture of a quality and character of God himself.

C. God Himself as Redeemer.

1. Releases His people from bondage in Egypt
 - a) **Deut 7:6-11** “we are holy, chosen out of love... God redeemed you from the house of bondage” (from the house of Pharaoh).

- b) **Isaiah 51:9-16** – delivered and redeemed from slavery of Pharaoh by the great and awesome Lord.
- 2. **Psalm 19:13-15** “Who will understand his transgressions? Cleanse me from hidden sins, and spare your servant from unnatural sins; If they have no dominion over me, then I shall be blameless, and I shall be cleansed from great sin. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always pleasing before You, O Lord, my helper and my redeemer.”
 - a) God ransoms us, redeems us from sin.
- 3. **Psalm 130**
 - a) The desperation of the writer to be forgiven, redeemed, freed (like the widow in 2 Kings 4 in physical desperation)
 - b) “and with him is abundant redemption...” vs. 7
- 4. Jesus as our Redeemer.
 - a) **Luke 1:67-79** “visited and redeemed by God.”
 - b) **Luke 4:16-22** Jesus came to proclaim liberty to the captives.
 - c) **Col. 1:13-14** We are delivered from darkness and conveyed us into the Son of his love.. redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.
 - (1) Redeemed by the blood of Jesus. We were purchased. A ransom paid for our freedom from sin.
 - (2) From one kingdom (of darkness) to another kingdom (of His Son)
 - d) When are we redeemed?
 - (1) Christians have been redeemed
 - (a) Romans 6, Acts 2:38 We are buried with Christ in baptism and raised to a new life, our sins forgiven and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. No longer slaves to sin, but freed from sin.
 - (b) **Eph. 1:7-12** In Him we have redemption, but
 - (2) Christians are also living in this broken world, still awaiting our redemption:
 - (a) **Eph. 1:13-14** “we will be redeemed” in a future time!
 - (b) **Eph. 4:30** “the day of redemption” is in the future
 - (c) **Luke 21:27-28** “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”
 - (i) We will be redeemed when Jesus returns.

(d) **Rom. 8:15, 23** “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out Abba, Father.... Not only that, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our bodies...”

5. The widow was redeemed – how?

- a) Realized she was in big trouble! She was enslaved.
- b) She was desperate, sought the prophet for help.
- c) She was told what to do. And did it. Her faith was demonstrated by her actions, just like it says in James 2. She trusted the prophet, and obeyed.
- d) God did his work through the prophet. The widow is redeemed, purchased out of debt to freedom.

6. What a beautiful picture for us!

- a) She realized she was in trouble. Enslaved. Many of us took quite a while to come to this realization. But when we did, we became desperate and sought out God, or at least He reached out and found us!
- b) She sought help from the prophet. Our Prophet is Jesus. His teachings point the way to freedom, to redemption, to deliverance from sin.
- c) She took the Prophet at his word and obeyed. This is what the Bible describes as “saving faith”. (James 2:18-26). We are to do the same.
- d) God promises to deliver us – now (in baptism) and in the future (upon Jesus’ return).

D. Lessons for Us

- 1. Elisha can walk with Kings and widows. He can deal with the power players of this world without compromise. He gives equal concern and care to a nameless widow, those who the world might suggest have a lower status. (James 2). This was Elisha’s heart. This was Jesus’ heart and life. This is God’s heart.
- 2. Elisha as redeemer. Stepped up to meet the physical / earthly needs of this widow. This was Jesus’ life and example. We are called to redeem others as well. Physically, in poverty, slavery, depression, elderly, those who are forgotten, hurting, abused. Jesus spent significant time ministering to those with physical needs. I am called higher to get out of my bubble in Arlington and Belmont, and care for those who are being hammered by injustice, are being exploited, who are in desperate straits. There are opportunities around us if we are to open our eyes and take them.
- 3. Jesus came to redeem, to purchase us / ransom us back into His Kingdom. The ransom was costly, Jesus’ blood. Done so in love. This is the good news of the Kingdom. The message Jesus commanded us to take to all nations.

4. Elisha is a disciple of Elijah. This miracle of the widow and the oil is similar to Elijah who helped the Widow of Zarephath, ready to die with only a little jug of water and handful of flour, and little oil in a jar, but the flour was not used up **and the jar of oil did not run dry.** (1 Kings 17) It does not appear that Elisha had been with Elijah for this miracle, but does a similar miracle, has the same spirit as his Master! We are to have Christ's heart, his character, and do the words he commands us. We have been given His Spirit. In John 14 Jesus says we will do greater things than He because he will do whatever we ask in His name. Really exciting and challenging to me.
5. Widow's faith in action – done out of desperation. I am called higher to be desperate for the things God sees as desperate, and to exercise my faith in action accordingly.
6. This great miracle was performed for the widow and her sons, behind closed doors.
 - a) Not before the masses, but done quietly. Jesus so often performed miracles and then said: "Don't tell anyone."
 - b) But when one person really believes and God has worked, God gets the glory, lives are transformed and the Kingdom of God takes root and spreads. Quietly, like the seed that grows when men sleep, like the little mustard seed that grows into a tree that the birds can perch on.
 - c) So many things are to be done behind closed doors in this world. Really bad, ugly, devastating things. But for Christians we are to have a secret life behind our closed doors: our prayer life (Matthew 6:6), our giving (Matthew 6:3-4). God will honor our secret lives.
7. We'll pick up the story of Elisha as God gives the opportunity!