

Lessons from the Life of Elisha, Part 4: The Shunammite Woman (2 Kings 4:8-37)

I. Recap of Last Lesson in our Series on the Life of Elisha

- A. God rescues Israel in the desert by water and blood. Nothing is impossible with God. The prophet Elisha shows regard for righteous Jehoshaphat and saves Israel from death. (2 Kings 3:1-27)
- B. Elisha as redeemer, rescues a widow who is to lose her sons to her creditor. Miracle of oil, poured out behind closed doors. What an incredibly intimate scene as the oil fills the jars and brings salvation to her household (saving of sons and herself as they were her provision). (2 Kings 4:107) Jesus as our redeemer, rescued us from our own bondage.
- C. Turn to the story of another unnamed woman, from whom there is much to learn.

II. The Story

A. Read 2 Kings 4:8-37

B. What happens?

1. This woman is a “wealthy” or “persuasive” woman. From Shunem. Simply referred to as “the Shunammite Woman” or “the Shunammite.” She is married. Sees Elisha making the trek regularly past their home. She speaks with her husband and they prepare a room for Elisha and his servant on their roof. Elisha clearly needs a place to stay. Despite being a prophet (“profit”), he is very poor! A characteristic of many/most of the prophets – including Jesus, the great Prophet.
2. Elisha appears to make regular use of this room and wants to bless the woman.
3. Offers protection from the local rulers. Elisha says will talk to the king or the commander of the army. She says not needed and departs. Elisha asks his servant what she needs and he points out she has no son.
4. Elisha calls her and promises her a son! She is taken back and says “don’t lie to me.” (Too amazing to consider as her husband is old.) But she conceives and gives birth.
5. Child grows older, gets sick and dies.
6. She hurries to Elisha, who is on Mount Carmel, and will not leave him. She is desperate.
7. Elisha sends back his staff with his servant Gahazi to raise the boy from the dead. But no miracle happens.

8. Elisha himself returns from the mountain, comes into the room where the dead boy is laying, shuts the door and prays to God. He then puts his mouth and eyes on the mouth and eyes of the boy and his hands on his hands, and stretches himself upon the boy. The boy's flesh becomes warm. He gets up, does this again. The boy sneezes 7 times and opens his eyes.
9. Elisha calls in the woman, who falls at his feet. Picks up her young son and goes out.

III. Lessons for us

A. The Shunammite Woman's Example of Hospitality

1. Hospitality: *the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.*
2. The woman and husband work together, go to some trouble to provide for Elisha. Thoughtful, considerate, some expense, with no apparent desire for any kind of expectation from Elisha. Pure generosity. The prophet is determined to reward this! Why?
3. What does the Bible say about hospitality? (some examples and teaching from both old and new testaments)

a) Gen. 18:1-8

- (1) Abraham and Sarah welcome in 3 strangers (angels), who tell Sarah that she will have a son in the next year.
- (2) A fair amount of work. Like the Shunammite woman and her husband.

b) Job

- (1) "The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.'" Job. 1:8
- (2) Righteous Job, characterized by his hospitality, including to travelers and strangers: "But I was very kind. For the stranger did not spend the night outside; and my door was opened to everyone who came." (Septuagint – **Job 31:32**).

c) Why is hospitality a part of our personal righteousness? Why is this so important to God? **Read Proverbs 19:17**

- (1) Solomon tells us that "whoever is generous to the poor, lends to the Lord." What does this tell us about the heart of God? What is important to God? We are able to lend to Him?!
- (2) See also Matt. 25:40 "And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"

- d) **Isaiah 58:6-7** fasting is to include sharing your bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless into your home.
- e) **Luke 14:13** – Jesus has some things to say about hospitality!
 - (1) Context: Jesus has been invited to eat with a ruler of the Pharisees.
 - (2) “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”
 - (3) This was like the Shunammite woman! (providing for a poor, Godly man who could not repay. She seems most blessed. And, she is rewarded at her son’s resurrection!)
- f) **Romans 12:13** “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”
- g) Hebrews 13:2 “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” (likely a reference to Abraham)
- h) Qualification for elders (but not deacons): to be hospitable to God’s people (1 Tim. 3:2) and to strangers (Titus 1:8)
- i) Qualification for widows who are to be supported by the church, includes being hospitable to strangers (1 Tim. 5:10)
- j) **Luke 10:38-42** Great example: Martha and Mary
 - (1) Martha welcomes the Lord in! (she often gets a bad rap.)
 - (2) But hospitality – Mary does even better: sitting at the feet of and connecting with the Lord.
 - (3) Hospitality does take effort, preparations, work! Goal, provide for their needs, and to connect as Mary did with the Lord.
 - (4) My experience
 - (a) Our lives are to be characterized by hospitality to both strangers and to other Christians.
 - (b) But, we can’t meet everyone’s need. We can wear ourselves out, be frazzled, stressed out, like Martha. That’s not what the Scriptures are pointing to.
 - (c) I appreciate that the Shunammite woman, who sought to be united with her husband about their hospitality toward Elisha. Making a commitment of time and resources. Important to be united on this with our spouses so we can practice hospitality joyfully, not under compulsion.
 - (d) I find the challenge is to slow life down, to take the opportunities to

- spend time with others. It takes effort in our busy society to “create space” and time to connect with people!
- (e) What an amazing blessing to share a meal with someone, to talk, to connect heart-to-heart.
 - (f) We are called to do this consistently. God is really pleased. This is really important to God. Needs to be important to us.

B. The Shunammite Woman’s Example of Faith

1. Hebrews 11:35

- a) Appears to be a reference to two unnamed, overlooked heroes: the Shunammite woman and the widow of Zarephath whose son Elijah raises from the dead (1 Kings 17:17).
 - b) Hebrews 11 is the Hall of Faith. The saving faith we are to imitate so that we can make it to the very end.
2. What do we see in the character of the Shunammite woman, who is lifted up as an example of faith for us, to help us make it to the end? (**Read 2 Kings 4:24-31 again**)
- a) She knows who can raise her son!
 - (1) Urges her servant to take her to the prophet in haste
 - (2) Passes by Gehazi
 - (3) Goes to the prophet and grabs his feet in desperation
 - (4) Not sure about the staff thing with Gehazi. But knows that the prophet can heal her son. “I will not leave you.”
 - b) Her humility
 - (1) Serves the prophet expected nothing in return.
 - (2) Falls at the prophet’s feet. To be our posture before the Lord.
 - (3) Goes to the prophet, nothing else will do
 - (a) So easy to seek help from others, our own efforts and abilities.
 - (4) Speaks openly, honestly.
 - (a) “Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say do not deceive me?”
 - (b) She seems to be saying: “I was fine until you gave me my heart’s desire. Now you have taken away him I so desperately love.”
 - (c) Reminds me of Christ in the garden. Lays it all bear, agonizing, sweating blood, “Not my will, but yours be done.”
 - (d) Our prayer life to be the same. Lay it all out before God. Accept whatever may be His will. Brutally honest, hopeful, submissive,

surrendered.

3. What about Elisha's faith?

- a) "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit." James 5:17-18
 - (1) Elisha was trained by Elijah. He was a man just like us, and he was powerful in prayer.
 - (2) Elisha was faithful. Sends his servant with his staff to raise the boy. Confident, faithful plan, which does not happen to work! But he persists, returns with the woman to see the boy himself, and....
 - (3) 2 Kings 4:33 "[Elisha] went into the room and shut the door against the other two, and prayed to the Lord."
 - (4) Elisha was a man powerful in prayer, just like his master Elijah.
- b) Elisha has great compassion for this woman and her son. Moved deeply by her loss. This reminds me of Jesus' love for the sinful woman who washes his feet (Luke 7) and Jesus weeping over the death of Lazarus (John 11).
- c) Elisha's faith is characterized by compassion, love, prayer, persistence, and confidence in God's power and goodness.

IV. Foreshadowing of Christ

A. Do we see Christ in this story? Others have throughout the centuries.

1. The miraculous birth.

- a) John Chrysostom, 4th century preacher in Constantinople (Istanbul where Chuck and Alison were last week) states this:
 - (1) "For, because no one would easily have believed that a virgin could bear a child, barren women first did so, then such as were not only barren, but aged also... to prepare the way for belief in the Virgin's travail."
 - (2) So, just like the Shunammite woman found favor with God and a child was given to her who was barren, also Mary found favor with God and she received a child, the Christ. This was preparation for the Jews to come to faith. (Many other miraculous births: Sarah, Hannah, etc.)

2. The staff not working to raise the boy from the dead.

- a) Elisha's intent was to raise the boy from the dead with his staff through his servant Gahazi. But this didn't work. What is this all about? Various thinking on this throughout the centuries:
 - (1) We will learn soon in a few chapters that Gahazi was covetous, loved

money, so perhaps his unrighteousness prevented the miracle from happening;

- (2) Second, some Christians saw the staff as symbolic of the law, which was unable to save (Romans 8:3). (See Augustine, *Exposition on Psalm 70 (Exposition 1)*.19.)
- (3) Third, the early Christians saw references in Old Testament Scripture to wood, as pointing to the cross of Christ. Here, Elisha's staff has been seen as foreshadowing the cross. Yet, Elisha's staff, without the prophet Elisha himself, was powerless to save the young boy. Likewise, the cross of Christ, without Jesus, is powerless to save; (see, for example, Caesarius of Arles, who lived in the 6th century, *Exposition 1 of Psalm 70*.19.)
- (4) Fourth, and related to the above, Elisha comes down from Mount Carmel to meet with the boy in person (in his flesh). Elisha then contorts his body (places his hands on his hands, his eyes on his eyes, his mouth on his mouth), and humbles himself to "become like the child".

This has been seen as foreshadowing Jesus, who "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man." Jesus humbles himself by coming down from heaven, to become like us, in order to save us. (Phil. 2:6-8) (See, for example, Jerome, *Homilies on the Psalms 25*; and Caesarius of Arles, *Sermon 128.8*.)

- (5) This passage reminds me of Jesus coming down from a mountain in Matthew 17. Jesus' disciples can't heal a boy having seizures and possessed by a demon. Jesus casts it out. His disciples ask why they couldn't cast the demon out. Jesus says, "This one only comes out through prayer and fasting."

Gehazi can't raise the boy with the staff, but Elisha raises him from the dead, but only through prayer.

3. The resurrection of the dead

- a) The resurrection of the dead is introduced, declared, and proclaimed throughout the OT. Here is just one example.
 - (1) For more prophecies of the resurrection, see *Prove It (Part 4): He Would be Raised on the Third Day* by Chuck Pike, at www.walking-by-faith.org/berean-blog/2016/3/26/prove-it-part-4-he-would-be-raised-on-the-third-day.
- b) Elisha was given power over death. He points us to Jesus:
 - (1) **Hebrews 2:14-16** – "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime

subject to bondage.”

- (2) **Rev. 1:18** – “Do not be afraid: I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.”
- (3) Elisha points us to Christ, who has promised that the dead bodies of his faithful followers will be raised up at the day of judgment, and we will live forevermore. (1 Cor. 15) That through Christ, we have conquered death itself.
- (4) **1 Cor. 15:54-55** - “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come to pass: “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”
 - (a) For more on the bodily resurrection, see *1 Cor. 15, Pt. 1, The Resurrection of the Dead*, by Chuck Pike, at <http://walking-by-faith.org/berean-blog/2016/10/9/1-corinthians-15-the-resurrection-of-the-dead>.