

Elisha's Double Portion

Lesson #3 The God of Miracles

II Kings 4:1-44

Background:

After the death of Solomon, the nation of Israel was divided. Elijah and his successor, Elisha ministered in the Northern Kingdom (Israel). As our stories unfold in II Kings 3 and 4, Jehoram, the king in the north, Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, and the king of Edom banded together against their neighbor, the rebellious king of Moab, Mesha.

Elisha was reluctant to get involved, but he eventually prophesies against Mesha. God miraculously fills a valley with a series of ditches that He floods with water. The Moabites see those ditches as if they were filled with blood and respond in great fear. The Israelites invade the land and slaughter the Moabites.

And then we see a series of personal miracles performed by Elisha.

Miracle #1: The Widow's Oil (II Kings 4:1-7)

This may be the widow of the prophet Obadiah (the 1st century historian, Josephus thinks so). She is in financial distress and the creditor is about to take her two sons as slaves. (This is a standard OT practice-see Ex. 21:2-4)

Elisha offers to help. He asks the woman to take inventory. All she finds is a small anointing flask. So, Elisha gives her a task to gather other jars from her neighbors and then go inside. She starts pouring the small amount of oil that she has into all the extra jars.

She kept pouring until all the jars were filled. And then (not until then) the oil ran out. Elisha told her to go sell the oil and pay off her debts.

Miracle #2: The Shunammite's Son is Restored to Life (II Kings 4: 8-37)

Shunem is a small town southwest of the Sea of Galilee. Because Elisha so frequently visited a certain family, they decided to actually build him a comfortable room up on the roof.

Apparently, they had a such warm relationship that Elisha wanted to do them a favor. His servant, Gehazi mentioned that the Shunammite woman was barren and would love a child.

Elisha prophesied that she would become pregnant and have a child the following year. And she did.

Several years later, that boy became ill while working in the fields. Based on the description, he likely had a significant sun stroke and died. The mother wanted to go tell Elisha, but the father

discouraged her. He said that it wasn't a New Moon or the Sabbath. He was asserting that it was a work day and Elisha would not be available. But she went to Carmel anyway.

"When he saw her in a distance:" That phrase reminds me of the account of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). In that story, the father saw his son when he was far off as well. And responded in love. In this story, Elisha sent Gehazi to ask, "Are you alright? Is your husband alright? Is your son alright?"

Note her reply: "Everything is all right." She was saying, "All is well." Note her perspective, it is an eternal perspective and she knows very little about eternity. But then she displays her anguish with her rhetorical question, "Did I ask for a son?"

Elisha sent Gehazi on ahead to lay his staff on the boy. The staff was a symbol of God's power (see Ex. 4:1-4 and 17:8-13). But the boy did not respond. When Elisha arrived, he laid full length on top of the boy and the child began to respond. Elisha stretched himself out once more and the boy came back to life.

Note the occurrences of people being raised from the dead in the NT: Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:39-42), the widow's son (Luke 7:13-15), Lazarus (John 11:43-44) and Tabitha (Acts 9:36-43)

Miracle #3: Death in the Stew (II Kings 4:38-41)

Elisha has returned to Gilgal. There was a massive famine in the land. It was likely the famine mentioned in II Kings 8:1-3. Elisha was meeting with the men in the School of the Prophets so he asked his servant (likely Gehazi) to put on a pot of stew for them to eat.

Someone gathered some gourds for the stew, but they were poisonous. It was likely a wild cucumber (colocynth) that was normally ground up into a powder and added to certain dishes. Usually it might just cause some colic, but this time, they were afraid that it would cause death.

Elisha called for some flour (similar to what Elijah did in I Kings 17:14-16). Once the flour was added, the stew was edible.

Miracle #4 Feeding the 100 Men (II Kings 4:42-44)

A man came from Baal Shalishah (this may have been Bethlehem, but the term usually refers to a town connected with the Canaanite god of Baal). He brought 20 loaves of bread made from the first harvest of ripe grain.

This "first fruits" offering was normally reserved for the Lord and the priests or Levites (See Lev. 23:20, Numb. 18:13 and Deut. 18:4-5). Probably because there were no working priests in the Northern Kingdom, this offering was brought to Elisha.

Gehazi asked a key question (very similar to the question Philip asked in Mark 6:37):” How can I set this before a hundred men?” Notice his focus. It is on the situation, not the God of the situation.

Twice Elisha repeats, “Give it to the People.” His focus is on what the Lord is doing. He declares, “They will eat and have some left over.” And they do! God provides our daily bread (Matt. 6:11).

So What?

In these four little stories, God has much to teach us.

1. Bad things do happen to good people. Godly people can lack resources. God’s kids do lose their jobs. But these circumstances do not represent a lack of care by our heavenly Father (See Ps. 113:5-8). His plans are not always easy to understand, but they are always GOOD.
2. God cares when difficult things occur. He notices. We are known by Him (II Tim. 2:19, Matt. 6:26-30). He wants to intervene on our behalf. Remember though, His intervention is of His making, not ours.
3. The Lord wants to use the ordinary things of our lives to bring Him glory. He asks each of us the same question Elisha asked the widow: “What do you have?” And then He goes about the business of using that gift, resource, position, relationship or opportunity to influence others.

Remember:

- A. What we have must be made available to Him.
 - B. We need to empty ourselves. Vessels that are filled with self, leave no room for the Spirit of God to fill.
 - C. ” Little is much when God is in it!”
4. God is always looking for PARTICIPANTS, people who will get involved, join Him in His work.
See II Chronicles 16:9 “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him....”
See also Eze. 22:30: “I searched for a man among them to repair the wall and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, so that I should not destroy it. But I found no one.”

In these brief stories, Elisha had people involved. They were required to dig ditches, search out empty jars, answer questions, make dinner and feed the masses. God is still looking for those who will “get after it.”

Are you ready to be involved in some miracles?

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you thought much about the God of Miracles? Does He still do miracles? Can you attest to any?
2. Would you like the Lord to use you in a significant way? Would you like a “double portion” of His Spirit? Does that thought scare you? Excite you?
3. What things might you be doing, decisions you might make, plans you might initiate in order to make yourself more available to His Spirit?

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