

bible briefing

“Oil Prophets”

Second Kings 4:1-7

2 Kings 4:1 A 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 Kings 4:2 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."

2 Kings 4:3 Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors - empty vessels; do not gather just a few."

2 Kings 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."

2 Kings 4:5 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.

2 Kings 4:6 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.

2 Kings 4:7 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."

Introduction

This woman's husband was a **prophet**. It was not uncommon for prophets to support their families through the harvest and sale of olive oil. Hence: **He was an oil-prophet!**

In her great distress, the prophet's widow seeks out Elisha for help. Her husband had died leaving her penniless and in debt. The creditor was coming to take her sons into servitude to satisfy what was owed.

In light of her predicament, Elisha's initial comments seem almost cold as he says,

2 Kings 4:2 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."

He seems at first glance to be saying, "Don't look to me for help - look to your own resources."

Not at all. There is a lesson to be learned. His response is led by the Spirit of God to teach this widow a precious lesson in the school of faith: She must use what she already has and then God will increase what she has!

It is a favorite lesson in the Scriptures. Do you remember, for example, the feeding of the five thousand in the Gospel of Matthew? The disciples told Jesus they had only five loaves and two fish. He said, **Bring them here to Me**, then multiplied them to feed the multitudes. The disciples must use what they already have and then God will increase what they have.

It is a favorite lesson in the Scriptures... *And it is a favorite lesson in your life!* You are often called upon to use what you already have before God will grant the increase.

There are times in your walk with the Lord, times of great distress or perceived need, when you will go to Him and He will ask you, "What shall I do for you? Tell Me, what do you have in the house?"

Before I came to Hanford I was at Calvary Chapel of San Bernardino, where we had just purchased a building. We were naive, thinking we could use the building and remodel it as we went along. The city inspectors had other plans! Until many major modifications were made we could not assemble there.

We needed money. We didn't know Chuck Smith well enough to ask for money, but we did know Don McClure. I'll never forget our meeting with Don. After we laid out our need, he described a similar situation he had faced when converting an orange packing warehouse into a building for Calvary Chapel of Redlands. At one difficult financial impasse he had mortgaged his own home in order to secure funds. You see, God had already provided the money - but not in the way you would immediately think of!

It wasn't hard to read between the lines of what Don was saying to us. In our need he was saying, "What shall I do for you? Tell me,

what do you have in the house?" We were to look to our own body - indeed, to our own personal finances - in order to see the increase.

It's a tough but valuable lesson.

The widow in our text was not without resources. She had one small vessel of oil in her house. She was saving it rather than spending it. What did she have to lose by saving it rather than spending it? Quite a lot: **She stood to lose her sons!**

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Her husband had died, leaving her penniless and in debt. What would we say about such a man? Would we say he worse than an infidel, having not properly provided for his family? Would we say he ought to have spent more time learning the stock market? Or finding out about mutual funds? In other words, would we criticize him?

We might; but his widow calls him, and Elisha considers him, a "servant" who "feared the Lord."

If you are in debt due to riotous living, or due to the sin of materialism, or due to slothfulness, or some such thing, then you would do well to repent and seek godly counseling regarding your finances. But to the rest of us I say this: Sometimes God's people can find themselves in financial distress!

As I said, the prophets supported themselves and their families by harvesting and selling oil. That's why this woman and her neighbors had so many oil vessels. But the vessels were mostly empty - indicating a poor harvest due to circumstances beyond their control. In essence, he had lost his livelihood similarly to someone today who loses his or her job through no fault of their own.

I don't want to excuse everyone's financial difficulties as being beyond your control. But I've never heard anyone say that there might be times when you will suffer financially, and it's *not* your fault.

So I want to say it - to comfort and encourage all those who find themselves in financial distress, who are doing all that they can to climb out of debt but who find the going difficult.

2 Kings 4:2 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."

I have nothing, but... She did have something - something she was saving. God called upon her to spend it.

2 Kings 4:3 Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors - empty vessels; do not gather just a few.

2 Kings 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."

This is obviously a test of her faith. How could the little amount of oil in one small vessel be poured into many empty vessels? She must believe and obey. She must be willing to let go of what she has in her house.

We rarely challenge folks in the area of giving - and for good reason. Churches have abused the trust people have in them by begging for money. But the principle remains true and biblical. God calls upon you to give and there may come a point in your life where, if you decide to save what is God's rather than spend it, God will say, "What shall I do for you? What do you have in the house?"

It's not limited to money, of course. God could ask you these questions about your time, and about your talents. The point is: If you seek to save what God is asking you to spend, you will lose.

Don't be a los-er! Look around at your things... at your talents... at your time... What do you have in your house - in your life - that you ought to pour out for God, trusting Him for an increase?

The widow stepped-out in faith and began to pour out what she had been saving:

2 Kings 4:5 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.

God chose to reveal these things to her and her sons privately, without a great commotion in the community. I think God does some of His greatest work in the home as godly parents are an example to their children of putting Scriptural truth into action in everyday circumstances.

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2 Kings 4:7 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."

She had enough to satisfy her debt and to provide for her and her sons. She would never be rich; indeed, they never were - even when her husband had been alive. But godliness with contentment was great gain for them, and they were satisfied with God's provision.

What do you have to use for God? Whatever realm it is in - things, time, or talent - God can multiply it as you spend it for Him.

Conclusion

You know what you have that God is asking you for. You can save it and lose; or you can spend it, use it, for God's glory and the furthering of the Gospel.