

2nd Kings 8: 1-6; “The Lord’s Watchcare”, Message # 13 in the series – “Elisha and the Prophets”, A Bible Study conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 14th, 2018, for those gathered at his home.

Next week on Thursday we will be celebrating Thanksgiving Day in our nation. This is a good thing, I believe, because we ought to be thankful as a nation for the Lord’s mercies to us, just as much as we are thankful for everything that the Lord does for us in providing for our many needs individually and as families, in things both physical and spiritual, every day of our lives. But, we as Christians, ought to be those who are particularly thankful for the Lord’s watchcare over our lives, all through our lives, from beginning to end. I am speaking of the Lord’s providentially so ordering things in our lives that it becomes apparent to us that the Lord is working all things together for our good, and for His glory in the particular places that He leads us, and in the way that He brings to other people’s attention, the great things that He has done for us, so that we become witnesses to His loving care for us. We see this watchcare recounted for us in the history of the Shunammite’s life, culminating in her interview with the king and the restoration of her lands. Tonight we want to look, 1st of all, at the Lord’s watchcare over this notable woman of Shunem, during the time of a famine in Israel. 2nd – We want to think together about the Lord’s watchcare when the king asked Gehazi about the great things which Elisha had done for the Shunammite. And 3rd – We want to consider the Lord’s watchcare over the Shunammite lady’s lands while she was away from them. May the Lord, through this study, convince us of His great care over our lives.

1st – The Lord’s watchcare over the notable woman of Shunem during the time of a famine in Israel. (verses 1 and 2)

“Then Elisha spoke to the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, ‘Arise and go, you and your household, and stay wherever you can; for the Lord has called for a famine, and furthermore, it will come upon the land for seven years.’” We should notice first off, here, that Elisha the prophet was given a word from the Lord that the Lord was calling for a famine, and it would come upon the land for seven years; that is, it would come upon the land of Israel in particular. Will you not notice with me how sovereign God is over all things created. How carefully God considers the welfare of any nation. If He calls for a famine, it will most certainly come no matter what any man says or thinks about it. Look over at Ezekiel chapter 14, and verse 12. “The word of the Lord came again to me, saying: ‘Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it.’” “Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness,” says the Lord God.”

What is the significant reason why the Lord was calling for a famine at this point in time in Israel’s history? It was because of their persistent unfaithfulness. Specifically, it was because they refused to repent of their idolatry. He had brought a three and a half year judgment of drought upon the land in the days of Elijah, and since the people did not repent thoroughly, to turn back to Him, and confess their sins and amend their ways, then he would now bring a seven year famine upon the land. We should learn from this about how God deals with a sinful nation that will not repent. He will continue to lay His hand of temporal judgments upon them in a heavier and heavier way until they either repent, or He will bring them into captivity or destroy them altogether. It says – “If a land”; by which He means any country, and any land, but in this case He was especially eyeing His own people.

Look over at Amos chapter 3, and verse 1. “Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought out of Egypt, saying: ‘you only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.’” It was because Israel was given so much revelation of God; it was because she had been given the prophets to tell her what His will was, that when she kept running after idols, that He would punish her as a nation. With greater light comes greater accountability. What other reason could there be for God’s

calling for a famine? Well, look with me over at Haggai chapter 1, and verses 7-11 – “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified,’ says the LORD. “You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away.” “Why?” says the LORD of hosts.” “Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit.” “For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.”

What was God looking for from His ancient people the Jews at this time? He was looking to see if they would simply work to build or improve their own houses or whether they would build His house? We can apply this to our day by saying that God is very concerned whether we are involved in helping to build the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and making attempts to advance His kingdom. He is interested to see as to whether we will only spend our money and time on worldly interests and pursuits or whether we will invest in things which will bear fruit and yield eternal dividends. Matthew Henry says – “It seems the famine was peculiar to the land of Israel, and other countries that joined close to them had plenty at the same time, which plainly showed the immediate hand of God in it (as in the plagues of Egypt, when they distinguished between the Israelites and the Egyptians) and that the sins of Israel, against whom this judgment was directly levelled, were more provoking to God than the sins of their neighbors, because of their profession of relation to God.”

But the Lord’s watchcare was over this woman from Shunem who had done so much for Elisha over the years. She had fed him when he came to her house. She had added on a room to her house that he could stay in, and most importantly of all, she listened to the word that He preached, and was not merely a hearer of the word, but also a doer. When Elisha told her to arise and go and stay wherever she could; she did not argue with him about how inconvenient this would be for her. She went because it was God’s word. Psalm 119, verse 35-38 says – “Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it.” “Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness.” “Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your ways.” “Establish Your word to Your servant who is devoted to fearing You.” Let us realize that God’s leading us may take us into paths which we would not necessarily choose for ourselves. But He will always establish us in what will be best for us.

You will remember that it says of Abraham in Genesis 20 that he “journeyed to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur. And he convinced his wife to take up the bad policy of saying that she was his sister, because he was afraid that the men of the place would kill him on account of the fact that Sarah was beautiful. All of this policy backfired, and in verse 10 Abimelech called Abraham to him and said to him, “What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?” “And Abraham said, ‘Because I thought, surely the fear of the Lord is not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife.’” In verse 13 he says – “And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, that I said to her, ‘This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, ‘He is my brother.’” I want you to see Who it was who caused Abraham to wander; it was God. And God had the best of intentions for this time of wandering, although He would test Abraham to see whether he would do what was right in the places that he wandered, whether he would live by faith in Him and keep His commandments to him, or whether he would succumb to lying about his wife and bring himself and Sarah into great danger and difficulty. God has purposes in relation to His people’s sanctification when He “causes them to wander”.

In this case, it was to see if this notable woman of Shunem would heed His word to her and leave everything that was familiar to her, to go and wander into the land of the Philistines, and dwell there with them for the seven year time period of the famine. It would be for her good and even a great blessing to her during that time of the famine. This she was willing to do because it was the will of the Lord for her during that time. And we should understand that this word spoken to her was for her good. Is there something from the New Testament from the lips of our Lord that is comparable to

this? Yes, there is. Turn with me over to Luke 18: 28. Jesus has just finished talking to the rich young ruler about entering the kingdom of God. He didn't want to leave his wealth and riches behind to follow Jesus. And here in verse 28 Peter responds and says – “See we have left all and followed You.” “So He said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.’” Well, this Shunammite woman was probably wealthy in house and lands, but she didn't hesitate to leave it when the Lord's word came to her to do it. She knew that it would be hard, but it would be for her good. She would live by faith. Will you?

2nd – We want to think together about God's watchcare over her when the king asked Gehazi about the great things which Elisha had done for the Shunammite.

Verses 3 and 4 say – “It came to pass, at the end of seven years, that the woman returned from the land of the Philistines; and she went to make an appeal to the king for her house and for her land.” “Then the king talked with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, “Tell me, please, all the great things Elisha has done.” It seems probable that after this dear woman left her house and her lands and went into the land of the Philistines, that her relatives or neighbors who were supposed to watch over them in her absence, decided that she was not coming back and so they took them for themselves. Or possibly, the possession of them automatically went to the king and to the state after a certain amount of time, and this is why she must needs go to talk to king Jehoram about this matter. Some commentators have tried to say that this account is out of place, and that this event had to take place sometime before Gehazi became a leper because the king would not be able to associate with a leper. But this could hardly be possible since such a long time had passed, as this seven year famine was.

I think that it is more likely that the king could indeed speak with Elisha's former servant, even if he was leprous, if he kept a certain distance. And it seems possible that Gehazi had repented of his sin of covetousness and had been restored to favor with God, and even with Elisha, otherwise why would he want to tell of all the great things that Elisha had done? Now, we need to understand that it was no accident that Jehoram suddenly took an interest in Elisha. The famine had indeed ended after seven years, and this proved to Jehoram that Elisha was a man of God and that the word of God was in his mouth. This event of the famine ending exactly after seven years caused king Jehoram to want to know more about this prophet Elisha. And so he called Elisha's former servant Gehazi to some neutral place where they could talk face to face with a certain distance between them. And there, Gehazi was relating to the king how Elisha had restored the Shunammite's dead son back to life, which certainly was an extraordinary event, and it displayed the power of God which had been given to the prophet.

We need to see from this that God is the One who orders all things according to the counsel of His own will, and according to exact timing of things, so that His own glory can be promoted and help be given to His dear people, and His purposes be completely accomplished. God had watched over this dear believing lady, by giving to her, through the prophetic ministry of Elisha, word concerning the famine, and how she ought to go wherever she could, to find food and shelter for her and for her household, so that their lives would be preserved and that they would even be well preserved during that time. I believe that her husband had probably died just before or sometime during the famine, and thus she and her household had fallen under the Lord's special care which he gives to widows and orphans. Proverbs 15: 25 – “The Lord will destroy the house of the proud, but He will establish the boundary of the widow.” You can see here from this verse that the Lord will bring down those persons who are proud to destruction. Their houses which they think will last forever, it will not be the case. But the boundary of the widow is the border of her property and the inheritance which He shall give her, and establish to her.

This would come about through Gehazi's witness to the king about the great things that Elisha had done for her. We should apply this in this way; that Elisha is a type of Christ, and every repentant sinner ought to be able to tell of the great things that Christ has done, even as Gehazi told the king of

the great things that Elisha had done, and how it affected the people who trusted in His word, for their good. Christ is for them, even as Elisha sought to do this woman good who had trusted in his word to her. Turn over to Isaiah 43: 10-12. “You are My witnesses,” says the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He.” “Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.” “I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior.” “I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are My witnesses, ‘Says the LORD, ‘that I am God.’” I hope that you can see here that God’s witnesses are those who can tell of the great things that God’s servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, has done. There is no God formed by man that is true. There is no one who is a savior either in a literal physical and bodily way, or in a spiritual way, other than our God through our Lord Jesus Christ. When a great person, such as a king, or someone in authority asks you about the great things that Christ has done, will you be ready to given them an answer for the hope that is within you?

3rd – We want to consider the Lord’s watchcare over this Shunammite lady’s lands while she was away from them. (verses 5-8)

“Now it happened, as he was telling the king how he had restored the dead to life, that there was the woman whose son he had restored to life, appealing to the king for her house and for her land.” “And Gehazi said, ‘My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life.’” “And when the king asked the woman, she told him.” “So the king appointed a certain officer for her, saying, ‘Restore all that was hers, and all the proceeds of the field from the day that she left the land until now.’” What providential timing! Our God knows how to do these things perfectly! Just when Gehazi is telling the king about what Elisha had done for her, she appears to make her own appeal to the king! Gehazi introduces her to the king, and she had her son with her who Elisha had restored to life, and it was such an impressive thing to the king that he didn’t hesitate for one moment to command that a certain officer should be appointed for her, saying to him, “Restore all that was hers and all the proceeds of the field from the day that she left the land until now.” Wow! Even the proceeds for the whole past time of the famine. God was certainly looking out for her, and watching over all of her interests.

It is very evident from this passage that Elisha really showed the love of Christ to this dear woman; but even more evident is the providential care of God over this dear woman’s life. Even so, we ought to be thankful for God’s watchcare over our lives through our Lord Jesus Christ. In Romans 8: 35 it says – “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” “Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine?” And in verse 37 it says – “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” Because of God’s watchcare we become conquerors through Him who purchased for us an eternal inheritance. Ephesians 1: 13 and 14 mentions this. “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” While we are in this world, we are in the country of the Philistines. God has caused us to wander, and to have no lasting possession here. But there will come a time when the King will command, and all that Christ has purchased will be redeemed, and all that we thought might have been lost will be restored.

Let us remember this as we go through various trying times as a result of the sins of our society and nation, let us remember Psalm 107: 39-43 – “When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, affliction and sorrow, He pours contempt on princes, and causes them to wander in the wilderness where there is no way; Yet He sets the poor on high, far from affliction, and makes their families like a flock.” “The righteous see it and rejoice, and all iniquity stops its mouth.” “Whoever is wise will observe these things, And they will understand the lovingkindness of the LORD.”