

## **THE MIRACULOUS AWE OF OBEYING**

II Kings 4: 1-7 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

I am always fascinated by the care of our Lord for widows and orphans. Our God of miracles is all about supplying for them. James 1: 27 is emboldened in my thinking as we read, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” Thank God He chooses to care for wives whose husbands are deceased and for children whose parents are deceased. No matter who we are, no matter what our difficult situation is, it is easy for us to feel both small, forgotten, and insignificant, feeling we have no purpose in the overall scheme of life on earth. Yet, in God’s eyes, there are no mistakes, no nonentities, and no forgotten people. Each one of us are gifts of God, given at just the right time, to be and to do something special and irreplaceable for God if we will surrender to His will. John Piper once said, “In all the setbacks of our lives as a believers, God is plotting for our joy.” How amazing!!! A wonderful Daily Bread author, Joanie Yoder, now Home with Jesus, wrote about her journey and how she felt her only remaining identity was as a woman dying of cancer. She wrote, “I have relinquished my destiny to God’s will. I may have cancer, but cancer doesn’t have me. God alone has me. My prayer is that Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.” The greatest miracle happened to Joanie when God took her Home. and Christ is now magnified in her body through her Homegoing. Today, we come to a private woman, probably few people knew or cared about. We have come to a private miracle in her life when the future looked impossible to her after her husband died. In this message today, I am asking God to speak gently but clearly into our lives today. I am asking Him to clarify difficult issues in our life, to open understanding in our heart about difficult matters, and to reveal the mystery of His will, and how He loves to work even behind closed doors. There are **ten exceedingly brief insights for godly families.** I hope these ten insights will reverse confusing and false opinions we get blinded by, and that they will make a glorious difference for us in each of our futures.

### **GODLY FAMILIES NEED TO SEEK GODLY HELP AND COUNSEL IN HARD TIMES.** (I.)

Notice II Kings 4: 1a. “Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, “Your servant, my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord.” Elisha has gone from helping three kings and their national armies experience a miraculous water supply in the wilderness of Edom. His next assignment was to listen to the wife of one of his seminary students whose husband had died. These prophets who attended the two schools of the prophets in Bethel and Jericho, were not celibate men, living monastic lives. They were married men who had houses and families of their own. This woman now faced the difficulties and the battles of life alone, without her security in her husband and in

his employment. Two of the greatest problems we all face in life are debts and death. This widow faced them both. What would she do?

She took it to the Lord in prayer and God led her to find the chief professor of this seminary, this school of the prophets. She went crying to Elisha. Many of the prophets were brutally murdered under the rule of Jezebel, or they fled for their lives from Jezebel. Some of these prophets, 100 of them, hid in caves and Obadiah, the godly chief of state for king Ahab, fed them. We don't know who this woman's husband was, but Jeremiah who probably wrote II Kings, tells us that her husband feared the Lord. Whether he died of disease or by dying a martyr's death at Jezebel's hand, he was a good and godly man. In this woman's time of trouble, due to no fault of her own, or her deceased husband, all human resources were gone from her. She cried out to God, the Helper of the helpless, the Defender of orphans and widows. By crying out to Elisha, God's divinely appointed spokesman in the seminary houses in the school of the prophets, she was running to receive counsel when all hope seemed lost. Seeking counsel and help from a biblical counselor, from a man or woman of God, or from one of your pastors is an insight this widow followed. God tells us in His word in Proverbs 15: 22, "Without counsel, plans fail, but with many advisors, they succeed." My only warning to us all is—"Be certain to find counsel from godly men and women, and not from the ungodly." (Psalm 1: 1) The counsel of the world is in direct opposition to the counsel of God. Don't be misled by counsel denying the truth and wisdom of God and His Word. Secondly,

### **GODLY FAMILIES OFTEN FACE DREADFULLY HARD TIMES. (II.)**

Notice II Kings 4: 1b. "But the creditor has come to take my two children...How hard can it get for us as we serve the Lord? It can get exceedingly hard. There is no immunity we have as believers that times will not become impossibly hard. This widow no longer had a godly husband to lead her. Her husband was known for his reverence for the Lord. This woman leaned on her husband strongly. She stood by her man, but now he was gone. His death ended whatever income he earned, and the widow had two sons. Even dedicated families who serve the Lord often face trials that are impossible. This man in the school of the prophets was obviously bi-vocational, going to school and still providing for his wife and sons, and the costs and extra time spent in schooling, plus the cost of living, was heavy. The boys were not old enough to go to work, and the creditor had come. Was he wanting rent paid on the house, or had they picked up groceries from him on credit? All we know is this family was financially out of business, going under. This woman reminds me of David who wrote Psalm 34: 6-7, in which he wrote, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them." Thirdly,

**GODLY FAMILIES NEED TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO AVOID BEING SOLD INTO ANY TYPE OF SLAVERY.** (III.) Notice II Kings 4: 1c.

“to be his slaves.” The cry of this mother was like the cry of Moses’ mother Jocebed as she risked the life of her son, Moses and placed him in a basket bed in the Nile River which was infested with crocodiles. The creditor had come, and what did he want? He wanted payment in full or else. Else what? We read, “but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.” What a merciless creditor, ready to rob her of her two sons, to be his slaves. She might never see them again. It was heart-breaking to lose her husband, but to lose her sons to slavery was too much. This merciless creditor, according to Old Testament law, could take this mother’s two sons as collateral and force them into bondage as servants until the year of Jubilee. The sons would be forced to work off their father’s debt. The ultimate cry of this woman was, “Elisha, please help me. Save my sons from slavery, from being taken from me. They are too young to work now to pay off my husband’s debt. This creditor may make them do ghastly things that are wrong, things that may well kill off my sons before they are old enough to make a living themselves. Save my husband’s legacy. Don’t let this creditor take my sons away into slavery.” What a moving cry for help! The Hebrew word for slavery is **ebed** which means enslaved to work as slaves are compelled to do. Slavery is bondage on all sides, unable to go free, kept against one’s will.

Now you may rejoice that we don’t have to worry about slavery in America since the Civil War. Oh no, beloved, far beyond the massive scope of slavery and the awful things that have been done to Native Americans and African Americans in America is an insidious slavery ruining young boys, young girls and men and women of every stripe in our country. Over 40 million Americans are enslaved to porn addiction and to one or more of 42 million porn websites with over 370 million pages of porn. 47% of American families are enslaved by porn, which has spiked marital infidelity more than 300% in the last few years. Don’t think that Christians are immune. No, the slavery of pornography is knocking the breath out of godly marriages. You may be ready to talk to your sons and daughters about sexual matters at age 13-14. That’s too late to prevent their slavery. Age eleven is the average age that children in American start watching porn—94% of US children by age 14 have viewed porn. 55% of American men, including evangelical Christian men watch porn every month and 25% of all Christian women do too. Only 13% of Christian women report never watching porn. I have been crying out to God for Him to raise up help to break the bondage of this slavery, not only in America, but in our church. We are not immune. Only 7% of all churches in America have a program to help struggling enslaved men and women. Sadly, tens of thousands of Christian couples agree to watch porn together to enhance their intimacy. Godly families need to do everything possible to avoid being enslaved to this wicked slavery of lust that is destroying marriages. 4thly,

**GODLY FAMILIES MAY FACE HOPELESSNESS, BUT THEY HAVE IN THEIR HOMES SOMETHING GOD CAN USE TO DO HIS MIRACLES.**

(IV.) Notice II Kings 4: 2. “And Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me; what have you in the house?” And she said, “Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil.” Elisha like Peter who said to a lame man, “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I thee, In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk, Elisha knew he didn’t have the finances to pay off this widow’s debt. When he said, “What shall I do for you?”—he was talking to this widow and he was talking with God. Under the leading of the Holy Spirit, Elisha asked the woman, “What do you have in your house?” This woman was nearly broke, but not quite. She answered Elisha, saying, “Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil.” God begins His miracles with something we already have. Moses had a rod in his hand. The young boy had only 5 barley loaves and two fish. But I ask you—have you noticed little is much when God is in it? Yesterday, a man named Thomas John stopped at church in a nice Pilot Pick-up truck. He had finished a job and was headed home to Casper. When he stopped for gas, he realized he must have left his wallet back in Salt Lake City at a gas station. All he had was the ability to ask questions. He found a policeman and asked where he could find aid, and we were able to get his tank filled up so he could get home to Casper. But Thomas John had something, even though his wallet was gone. He was willing to ask for help. God used it to be his miracle to get home. God’s help takes its starting point from what we already have. In your marriage, what do you have that you can give that your spouse needs? Is it repentance? Is it forgiveness? Is it understanding? Is it something you can say, something you can do? Fifthly,

**GODLY FAMILIES ARE WILLING TO RECEIVE ASSISTANCE FROM OTHERS AND ARE NOT TOO PROUD TO ASK FOR HELP.**

(V.) Notice II Kings 4: 3. “Then Elisha said, “Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not too few.” God here ordained that this widow ask for help not only from Elisha, but she was to ask her neighbors to allow her to borrow every empty vessel they could spare her. This woman may have been a very private woman—she may have never borrowed from her neighbors before. She may have had a firm conviction against borrowing. She may have thought, “Why did I ever go to Elisha? I don’t want to do this.” Beloved, it’s a risky thing to obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit or the counsel of a man or woman of God. Yet faith always involves some measure of risk; otherwise it wouldn’t be faith in God. Nothing would have happened if this woman would have gotten her back up and said, “I’ll do anything but borrow. I’ve vowed never to beg, borrow, or steal.” It is possible we can find a Bible verse or a godly reason not to obey godly counsel. When Jesus asked the disciples what they had to eat in that crowd of 5,000 men plus women and children, He knew what was available, 5 barley loaves

and two fish. That was enough. Have the people sit down. Then Jesus prayed and started breaking the loaves and fish—until in that feast, everyone was fed with 12 large baskets of food left over. Are you too proud to give help or ask for help? The miracle happened, because this woman did as she was told. She must have filled her little seminary apartment with empty vessels. When we obey, then we can prepare for a miracle. When we find a way to withhold what God wants from us, we can prepare for a continued time of need. God will not rethink what He asks us to do, whether His request of us is our cup of tea or not. When we will not trust and obey, we have no right to expect God’s help in time of need. Yet, when we do what God asks of us, we have every right to expect God to bless us in our time of need, when we are careful to do exactly what God tells us to do. The command was, “Borrow from your neighbors, empty vessels, not a few!” Sixthly,

**GODLY FAMILIES REALIZE THAT THEIR OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS OFTEN WISELY A PRIVATE OBEDIENCE BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.**

(VI.) Notice II Kings 4: 4-5a. “Then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels. And when one is full, set it aside. So, she went from him and shut the door behind herself and her sons.” God works miracles never to show off, but to meet needs, not for fanfare and publicity, but to heal. The nature of God’s miracles are such, that the general public may debate them, see them as some sort of vulgar wonder, and misinterpret them, or scoff at the idea of what God is going to do. Nevertheless, remember Jesus is the Master of miracles behind closed doors. When Jesus healed Jairus’ daughter in Luke 8: 40-56, “when He came to the house, He allowed no one to enter with Him, except Peter, James, and John, and Jairus and his wife, the mother of the 12-year old girl. Elijah and Elisha prayed behind closed doors for dead young boys that God brought back to life. When miracles are about to happen, there needs to be no parade to snatch the bloom off the flowers of God’s grace. Night before last, we had 7 buck deer sleeping in our back yard. They rob the flowers off every flower stem that starts blooming. Obedience to God doesn’t demand a crowd, just obedience where those God has called to obey Him, can witness the miraculous awe of obeying. 7thly,

**GODLY FAMILIES MUST YEILD TO ONE ANOTHER IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD’S WILL AND PROMPTINGS TO DO WHAT GOD REQUIRES.**

(VII.) Notice II Kings 4: 5b. “And as she poured, they brought the vessels to her.” It’s a glorious gift of God, when our family, all the children, the wife and husband are present to yield to each other, to help each other, and watch how God works miracles when we all work together. One boy was holding the empty vessel as his Mom poured out the oil. The other boy was setting a full vessel down and getting another empty vessel. This little private trio, behind closed doors were not arguing about who would pour, who would bring the empty vessels or who would carry the full vessels away as the miracle was going on. Notice there is no mention of the

boys debating Mom's borrowing from the neighbors. They probably were at her side to carry the vessels from their neighbors. There is no mention of this little family debating the wisdom or lack of wisdom of Elisha's command. There is no mention of one of them saying, "I doubt that this is God's will," or "I'm not saying it won't work, but I don't think it will," or "I question the wisdom of this being the answer to our need." This Mom and her boys yielded to each other in obedience to God's will, and Elisha's command. The miracle was happening! 8th,

**GODLY FAMILIES FIND THAT THE POSSIBILITIES ARE UNLIMITED WHEN THEY ALLOW GOD TO USE WHAT THEY HAVE.** (VIII.) Notice II

Kings 4: 6a. "When the vessels were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel. And he said to her, "There is not another." I love the look of the Mom and the two young boys as they saw God's gold pouring out of that same little jar with only a little oil in it. The sufficiency of God's supply was limited only by the number of vessels, not a few—that means—a lot of borrowed vessels. God will honor every draft we make on His promises by faith. When the last vessel was filled and the mother said, "Bring me another vessel," the one son said, "Mom, that's it!" There behind closed doors, that Mom and her two sons looked at God's supply all over that floor of their home. Ninthly,

**GODLY FAMILIES LEARN THAT GOD'S SUPPLY IS AWESOME, AND AS LARGE AS THEIR FAITH AND THEIR OBEDIENCE.** (IX.) Notice II

Kings 4: 6b. "Then the oil stopped flowing." Grace pays our debts. There were no more vessels to fill. Their faith had been great. They had borrowed no doubt dozens of vessels—enough to supply all their needs, not all their greed. When the mother said, "We have enough vessels, that's when the doors were shut, and the miracle of oil started flowing. Now the oil stopped flowing. Had there been more vessels, the divine miracle would have flowed on. You can bet that this oil was like Jesus' first miracle—turning water to wine—the best wine was kept til' the last. This was the best extra virgin olive oil in the world, unlike any olive oil we could buy in the store today. God always gives the best—and His grace is without measure, and it flows where we have exercised faith and obedience.

**GODLY FAMILIES TRUST GOD TO PAY THEIR DEBTS, KNOWING GOD'S PROVISION IS ENOUGH TO LIVE ON THE REST.** (X.) Notice II

Kings 4: 7. "She came and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest." There was no problem getting a good price for this oil. It was enough to pay her debt, because God wants us paying our debts—all of them. But the miracle of oil did more than pay the debt. It was enough for this widow to raise her sons to adulthood on—God takes care of the rest. The righteous were not forsaken nor were His seed begging bread—Psalm 37: 25. God supplied all their need and more. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord. Amen.