

THE INCREASE OF THE WIDOW'S OIL

TEXT: II KINGS 4:1-7

Introduction:

1. Elijah the prophet trained young men for the ministry, and Elisha, his successor, continued and expanded this vital ministry. These men are referred to in the Bible as “the sons of the prophets” (II Kings 4:1; cf. I Kings 20:35; II Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15, etc.).
2. In II Kings 4, we read that one young man from the school of the prophets passed away, leaving behind a wife and two sons.
3. The young widow appealed to the prophet Elisha for help. The young prophet’s unexpected death left her in an impoverished state, and the creditor was threatening to take her two sons into servitude.
4. According to Leviticus 25:40, these two young sons would have to serve as bondservants until the year of Jubilee.
5. Our Lord referred to this custom of servitude in His parable about forgiveness in Matthew 18. In verses 22-35, He describes a servant who owed the king ten thousand talents. In Matthew 18:25, our Lord said, “But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.”
6. This poor widow was destitute and so she went to Elisha for help. She was desperate. She had a huge debt and she was unable to pay.
7. Her husband was a man of God (II Kings 4:1), and so this desperate widow pleaded to Elisha the prophet for help.
8. Elisha asked the widow, “What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house?” (II Kings 4:2).
9. To this she replied, “Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil” (4:2).
10. Then Elisha instructed her to go and borrow some empty vessels from her neighbors – “borrow not a few” (4:3) meaning, “Get as many as you can.”
11. The widow obeyed Elisha and went out and borrowed some vessels, and she poured her oil into all of these borrowed vessels (4:4, 5).
12. This sets the stage for a great miracle, from which we can learn several lessons (4:6, 7).

I. THE AMOUNT OF OIL SHE RECEIVED WAS ONLY LIMITED BY THE NUMBER OF VESSELS SHE HAD

1. There came a time when “the oil stayed” (4:6). But if the widow would have had more vessels, the oil would have kept on flowing.
2. The oil stopped flowing, not because the source had dried up, but because the capacity to receive it had failed.

3. The limitation was not in the supply of oil, but in the lack of empty vessels to be filled.
4. One preacher put it this way, “God is sometimes limited in working on our behalf by our lack of faith, and the paucity of means we put at His disposal” (Howard F. Vos, *I, II Kings*).
5. This reminds us of another incident in the life of Elisha. In II Kings 13:15, Elisha told Joash the king of Israel to open the window eastward and shoot his arrow.
6. So King Joash shot his arrow, and then Elisha said, “The arrow of the LORD’S deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them” (II Kings 13:17).
7. Then Elisha said, “Take the arrows... (and) smite upon the ground.” The Bible says the king smote thrice, and stopped.
8. Elisha was wroth with King Joash for stopping, and said to him, “Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice” (II Kings 13:19).
9. Elisha did not tell King Joash how many times he should smite the ground. And he did not tell the widow the number of vessels to borrow. He simply said, “not a few” (II Kings 4:3).
10. There is no limit on what God can do, but we often cut God short by our unbelief. James 4:2 says, “Ye have not, because ye ask not.”
11. Our Lord said to the two blind men when he restored their sight, “According to your faith be it unto you” (Matt. 9:29).
12. Our Lord did not specify how long we should pray, but He said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Luke 11:9).
13. Our Lord did not say how much to give, but He said, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38).

II. GOD CAN ONLY FILL UP EMPTY VESSELS

1. Two weeks ago I preached from Haggai 1, and I pointed out that the people in Haggai’s day – like the people in our day – were full of themselves.
2. Ephesians 5:18 says, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”
3. But you cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit if you are full of self.
4. God cannot fill someone who is full of self, and full of pride, and full of covetousness, and full of worldliness, and full of lust, and full of foolishness, etc.

5. Our Lord said in Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”
6. The reason we are not filled is we are not hungering and we are not thirsting for the things of God.
7. Isaiah 44:3 says, “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.”
8. Notice Elisha told the widow, “Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few” (II Kings 4:3).
9. Elisha was preparing her for a great blessing – “borrow not a few.”
10. Elisha did not put any limit on the vessels. The oil could have kept flowing if the widow had more empty vessels.
11. The widow had faith, and God in His grace and mercy made sure there was enough oil to pay off her debt and provide for her struggling family (II Kings 4:6, 7).
12. Psalm 146:9 says, The LORD “relieveth the fatherless and widow.”
13. Psalm 68:5 says, God is a “father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows.” This Scripture was a great encouragement to George Muller as he trusted the Lord to feed the thousands of orphans under his care.
14. Let me go a little further with this and say, God not only fills up empty vessels – He only fills clean vessels. Isaiah 52:11 says, “Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.”
15. God wants a clean vessel. Many Christians fail at this point because of besetting sins.
16. There is no reason for a Christian to be dragged down by besetting sin. Romans 6:2 says we are “dead to sin.”
17. Romans 6:6 says, “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”
18. Romans 6:7 says, “For he that is dead is freed from sin.”
19. Romans 6:14 says, “For sin shall not have dominion over you.”
20. “I am crucified with Jesus, And the cross has set me free;
I have risen again with Jesus, And He lives and reigns in me!
It is sweet to die with Jesus, To the world, and self, and sin.
It is sweet to live with Jesus, As He lives and reigns within.”
21. People tell me, “It is hard to live the Christian life.” Well, it is certainly hard to live the Christian life in the flesh, but God does not want us to live in the flesh – He wants us to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
22. When we walk in the Spirit, we appropriate by faith all that Christ has provided for us through His death and resurrection.

23. Romans 8:11 says, “But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.”
24. The power of the Holy Spirit that raised up Jesus from the dead is the same power that operates in our lives. That is why Colossians 2:12 and 3:1 say we are “risen with Christ.”
25. Over 50 years ago, Duncan Campbell was part of a great heaven-sent revival in the Hebrides Islands. He said this, “The crisis of conversion is ever to be regarded as a conviction of guilt, but the crisis of sanctification is a conviction of want.”
26. We come to Christ when we are convinced we need salvation. Then we come again and again when we convinced we need revival.
27. One has to recognize his desperate need for God before God can fill him. The widow knew she was desperate and destitute.
28. Duncan Campbell said, “I think again of those people in the Hebrides. How they longed and how they prayed and how they waited and how they cried, ‘Oh God, rend the heavens and come down.’ And all the time God was handling them, all the time God was dealing with them. The process of cleansing went on until the moment came when angels and archangels looking over the battlements of glory cried, ‘God, the vessels are clean, the miracle can happen now.’”

III. THE WIDOW HAD GREAT FAITH

1. The widow cried out to Elisha, the man of God (II Kings 4:1).
2. The word “cried” indicates her desperate condition and her earnest appeal.
3. Elisha performed many miracles, and all these great miracles were done to demonstrate that God cares for His people, that God answers the prayers of His people, and that God undertakes for His people.
4. This miracle is a wonderful lesson on faith. The vessels had to be borrowed in order to be filled. The greater her faith, the greater number of vessels, and the greater number of vessels meant more oil.
5. How would you feel if you had nothing in your house but one pot of oil, and the creditor was getting ready to take your children away from you and turn them into his slaves?
6. You only had but one pot of oil in the house, and now the man of God is telling you to go and borrow some empty vessels.
7. On the surface, it appeared very strange. But the widow did not ask any questions. She simply obeyed Elisha.
8. If our Lord can keep the oil coming till every vessel is full, then He can take care of you and me.

9. If our Lord can feed five thousand men, beside women and children, with just five loaves, and the two fishes, he can take care of you and me.
10. By the way, there remained twelve baskets full. (Matt. 14:20).
11. This is divine mathematics.
12. Faith obeys God. Faith trusts God. Faith submits to God.
13. Remember when Elisha sent a messenger to Naaman, the captain of the host of the king of Syria, and told him, “Go and wash in Jordan seven times”?
14. Second Kings 5:11 says, “But Naaman was wroth, and went away.” Eventually Naaman learned how to submit to God, and God healed him of his leprosy.
15. Remember when the LORD told Gideon, “The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me” (Judges 7:2)?
16. God reduced their army from over 22,000 to a mere 300 men. And this little army went after the large Midianite and the Amalekite armies, who were covering the valley “like grasshoppers for multitude.”
17. Gideon’s little band went forward with trumpets and empty pitchers and lamps inside their pitchers, and God gave them a great victory.
18. We need that kind of faith – the faith of Gideon, and the faith of this widow, who cried out to Elisha (II Kings 4:1).

CONCLUSION:

1. This widow woman had a great need. Let me ask you this question: do you have a need today?
2. This woman was desperate. She had no one to turn to but God. What about you?
3. This widow believed God would meet her need. That is why she went to Elisha. Do you believe God can meet your need today?
4. Why don’t you bring your empty vessel to the Lord and ask Him to fill it up?