

Introduction: When the LORD appears to Abram, the LORD promises His presence to His people as their covenant God. He also reveals the affliction which His people face – not just in Egypt (Gen 15:13), but for all their sojourning in this world of suffering – throughout all their generations. Such affliction should not surprise us. But be comforted knowing that such times are accompanied by God’s purposes of blessing and grace – just as in the days of Elijah and Elisha.

Monday: 1 Kings 17:1-16 and 2 Kings 4:1-7. The common lot of believers (as suffering yet comforted by God; as cast down but still supported by their LORD; as penniless yet in the end richly provided for) is the common denominator in the stories of the widows to whom Elijah and Elisha minister. Strikingly, the reason why these prophets share many miracles of similar nature is because the same Spirit of power who indwelt Elijah’s life was poured out on Elisha as well, enabling him to do some of the very same miracles which Elijah performed.

For example, the widow of Zarephath, to whom Elijah is sent in 1 Kings 17, has only enough firewood, oil and flour to cook one last meal before she and her son die. That is her hopeless situation in 1 Kings 17:12. Yet, by the power of God, that small amount is miraculously enough for the widow to provide for herself, her son, and even Elijah for as long as the famine lasts (1 Kings 17:14).

Meditate and Pray: Do you believe in God’s ability to “provide a table for you in the presence of your enemies?” Do you believe He can rescue your life from the jaws of despair when you run out of all options for self-preservation? This is how the LORD our God works: He delights to lay bare His saving arm when all other help vanishes. He often waits until the 11th hour and then snatches victory for us from the jaws of defeat. As the hymn writer says, “...*this is My Father’s world, and though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet!*” Sing the lines of this great hymn # 111 whenever you are tempted to give up because of the misery and difficulty of your situation:

This is my Father's world,
and to my list'ning ears,
all nature sings, and round me rings
the music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
his hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world,
the birds their carols raise,
the morning light, the lily white,
declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world:
he shines in all that's fair;
in the rustling grass I hear him pass,
he speaks to me everywhere.

This is my Father's world,
O let me ne'er forget
that though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:
the battle is not done;
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,
and earth and heav'n be one.

Tues/Weds: 1 Kings 17:1-22 & 2 Kings 4:1-7. It is striking to see the confidence of Elijah in the face of every enemy, even death itself. He declares drought against Israel and king Ahab (1 Kings 17:1), provision for the widow and her son facing starvation (1 Kings 17:13-14), and, by the mighty prayer of faith, sees the widow’s son raised (1 Kings 17:22).

In a similar situation of desperate need (2 Kings 4:1-7), the widow cries out for help to Elisha, fearing the impending enslavement of her children. Elisha says in response, “What shall I do for you?” What Elisha seems to be saying is that in himself he has no ability to help. Like Isaac’s despair in being unable to give his oldest son a blessing (the same helpless question at the end of Gen 27:37), Elisha speaks out of a sense of real human weakness before problems that appear to have no solution!

Elisha appears initially to be at a loss – just as we also often face such despair! We simply don't know what to do or say! We don't know what words to offer in response to someone who comes to us with a gaping need! We lack the funds, the strength or the wisdom! “Oh, LORD, we believe you can do something,” we may say ... “but we surely don't know what!”

In just this way, Elisha's doubt continues. He does not know what is at hand *as a God-ordained means* for helping this desperate widow, so he says, “What do you have in your house?” Well now – look at the widow's reply in 2 Kings 4:2: She emphatically responds that she has, “nothing in her home at all.” The scene is bleak. The woman is a widow; her sons are soon to be taken and there is nothing in the house except one very small bottle of olive oil for anointing one's face, a common health or cosmetic practice in the ancient east. She sees her life as completely empty! And in his own estimate, Elisha recognizes that he *himself cannot humanly help her*. Her plight is beyond any *normal or expected human aid*.

Meditate and Pray: Learn this lesson from such bleak hopes, where mere human wisdom or effort cannot help: God alone is able to care for us in a world given over to judgment, destruction, suffering and injustice. In the face of all our sin and misery in Adam, we sing in hymn # 57 in our red Trinity hymnals:

1 Hallelujah, praise Jehovah,
O my soul, Jehovah praise;
I will sing the glorious praises
of my God through all my days.
**Put no confidence in princes,
nor for help on man depend;
he shall die, to dust returning,
and his purposes shall end.**

2 Happy is the man that chooses
Israel's God to be his aid;
he is blessed whose hope of blessing
on the Lord his God is stayed.
Heav'n and earth the Lord created,
seas and all that they contain;
he delivers from oppression,
righteousness he will maintain.

3 Food he daily gives the hungry,
Sets the mourning prisoner free,
raises those bowed down with anguish,
makes the sightless eye to see.
Well Jehovah loves the righteous,
and the stranger he befriends,
helps the fatherless and widow,
judgment on the wicked sends.

4 Hallelujah, praise Jehovah,
O my soul, Jehovah praise;
I will sing the glorious praises
of my God through all my days.
Over all God reigns forever,
through all ages he is King;
unto him, your God, O Zion,
joyful hallelujahs sing.

Thurs/Fri: 2 Kings 4:2-7. In answer to the empty hopes and lack of possessions gripping this despairing widow and her family threatened with slavery, God brings abundance. What a shock it must have been for the widow when the prophet said to her, “Gather as many empty vessels as you can from your neighbors!” Listen to how one scholar, Yael Shemesh, describes the initial doubts running through this panicked woman's mind, followed by the prophet's promise:

“How can the widow be saved by *empty* vessels which seem to be part and parcel of the sad picture of her empty house? But when Elisha goes on, “pour oil into all the vessels, removing the *full* ones” (2 Kings 4:4), the mystery is solved. The story is raised to the level of the miraculous and the height of fullness! The prophet is telling the widow that a miracle will enable her to pour oil from the one small jug she has and fill an unlimited number of vessels...”

Meditate and Pray: What a reassuring and enduring lesson of God's superabundant power to “provide more than we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20-21). For the rest of history, this poor widow threatened by debt and slavery, will become a symbol of super-abundance! As Elisha promises in 2 Kings 4:7, the widow and her sons, after selling enough of this miraculous oil to pay off all their debts, are able to, “live on what is left.” Though this story started ominously, when the widow announces that her godly husband is now dead, it ends with Elisha's words, “Now you and your sons will *live* on the rest of God's provision.”

Incidentally, the same theme of abundant provision concludes this chapter of miracles performed by Elisha. In 2 Kings 4:42-44, the loaves offered to Elisha as a “first fruits offering” are generously and miraculously shared with one hundred

poor and starving disciples – so that they eat to the full and have some left over as well. Sing about God’s abundant provision, using hymn # 689:

1 Be still, my soul: the Lord is on your side;
bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
leave to your God to order and provide;
in ev’ry change he faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: your best, your heav’nly Friend
through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

2 Be still, my soul: your God will undertake
to guide the future as he has the past.
Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake;
all now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know
his voice who ruled them while he dwelt belo

3 Be still, my soul: when dearest friends depart,
and all is darkened in the vale of tears,
then shall you better know his love, his heart,
who comes to soothe your sorrow and your fears. Be
still, my soul: your Jesus can repay
from his own fullness all he takes away.

4 Be still, my soul: the hour is hast’ning on
when we shall be forever with the Lord,
when disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past, all safe
and blessed we shall meet at last.

Sat/Sun: read 2 Kings 4:38-44. God often leaves matters until they devolve into a desperate state before sending his “nick of time” salvation and aid. In terms of Psalm 23, though He waits until we are surrounded by enemies to “prepare His table for us,” the end result is that “our cup runneth over!” In other words, the heartache and grief of staring at our unmet needs until our hope almost dies; that discouragement, I say, is forgotten when the overwhelmingly generous and overflowing answer comes. In the end, God is no man’s debtor: His full answer is always worth waiting for because it is “more than we ask or imagine.”

Taking our clue again from 2 Kings 4, though the urgently needed stew is accidentally turned poisonous and made edible *only* when the prophet directs that *all* the precious and hoarded-in-time-of-famine flour is poured in (2 Kings 4:38-41), the miraculous result is *much needed nourishment* for all the prophets-in-training who were to succeed Elijah and Elisha one day. How could God’s purpose that the Word be spread throughout the land succeed if these “sons of the prophets” suffered an untimely death by accidental poisoning? How would there not be tragic disunity and blame heaped on *Elisha himself* (not to mention the terribly mistaken cook who poisoned the stew in the first place?) unless God restored the stew to nourish in times of famine? In the same way, it was only because God multiplied the tiny loaves of barley bread to again feed the disciples of Elisha in 2 Kings 4:42-44 that the survival of those called to teach and declare God’s Word with Elisha were spared.

Meditate and Pray: Ask the LORD to feed and nourish us as His own people – by providing our daily needs by His good Providence, yes – *but especially* by feeding our souls every day on the Promises of His Word! Sing about those promises as they nourish our souls, using the following hymns this weekend (#’s 146; 139 & 142):

*1 Break thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me,
as thou didst break the loaves beside the sea;
throughout the sacred page I seek thee, Lord,
my spirit pants for thee, O living Word*

*2 Bless thou the truth, dear Lord, to me, to me,
as thou didst bless the bread by Galilee;
then shall all bondage cease, all fetters fall;
and I shall find my peace, my All in al*

*3 Thou art the Bread of Life, O Lord, to me,
thy holy Word the truth that saveth me;
give me to eat and live with thee above;
teach me to love thy truth, for thou art love.*

*4 O send thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me,
that he may touch mine eyes, and make me see:
show me the truth concealed within thy Word,
and in thy Book revealed I see the Lord.*

*1 Your Word is like a garden, Lord,
with flowers bright and fair;
and everyone who seeks may pluck
a lovely cluster there.*

*Your Word is like a deep, deep mine;
and jewels rich and rare
are hidden in its mighty depths
for every searcher there*

*2 Your Word is like a starry host;
a thousand rays of light
are seen to guide the traveler,
and make his pathway bright.
Your Word is like an armory,
where soldiers may repair,
and find, for life's long battle day,
all needful weapons there.*

1 Lord, thy Word abideth and our footsteps guideth;
who its truth believeth light and joy receiveth.
When our foes are near us, then thy Word doth cheer us;
word of consolation, message of salvation.

2 When the storms are o'er us, and dark clouds before us,
then its light directeth, and our way protecteth.
Who can tell the pleasure, who recount the treasure,
by thy Word imparted to the simple-hearted?

3 Word of mercy, giving succor to the living;
Word of life, supplying comfort to the dying!
O that we, discerning its most holy learning,
Lord, may love and fear thee, evermore be near thee.

Closing Prayer: *Oh God of Elijah, God of Elisha:*

“Thank you for the three great miracle-working epochs of Bible history. Thank you for the days of the Exodus, when through Moses’ rod you turned the Nile bloody, brought heavy plagues on every facet of Egyptian life and split the Red Sea so your people could safely cross on dry land. Thank you most of all for how you showed your adopting love to call your people out of Egypt to be your son in the wilderness, leading them eventually to the Promised Land.

Thank you that in the days of wicked Ahab and Jezebel and their evil rule over the land of Israel, you showed your power to raise the dead through Elijah and Elisha’s prayers. Thank you that you cared about each individual believer, ensuring that all who refused to bow the knee to Baal were under your constant watch-care and enjoyed your provision.

Thank you most of all, that in the days of our LORD Jesus Christ, you once again confronted the powers of darkness – only this time, defeating them once and for all on the Cross of your Son. Thank you that the great prophets like Elijah, Elisha and John the Baptist all prepared the way for your coming. Thank you, LORD Jesus, that you are God’s last prophet, and final Word of salvation to lost mankind.

Help us, therefore our Savior - in every moment of our lives – to trust in your wise judgment and power over every breath and step that we take. Help us not to pine *for the old days of prophetic miracles*, since now you have performed the greatest miracle of all in defeating our sin, raising us with yourself into newness of life, and in indwelling us with your Spirit. Help us to trust you and to trust the still, small voice of your Spirit. Whenever we are discouraged and long for days of dramatic Divine action, help us to remember that it is, “not by might, nor by power, but by your Spirit” that you bring the Kingdom of God into our world. In the name of Jesus we pray, the one who has poured out His Spirit onto every moment of our lives, and every inch of our inward man, Amen.” Closing words from hymn 334:

1 Breathe on me, Breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love,
and do what thou wouldst do.

3 Breathe on me, Breath of God,
till I am wholly thine,
until this earthly part of me
glows with thy fire divine.

