

Introduction: What a mighty, and all-encompassing Savior we have in the eternally begotten Son of God! He became man in order to save us. His shadow is so tall that we see it fall on *every saving event and miracle of the Old Testament*. For example, listen to how Pastor Terry Johnson of Independent Presbyterian Church in Savannah Georgia describes the miracles in Elisha's day as fundamentally foreshadowing Christ's signs in the Gospels. (And I paraphrase):

Just as all the Bible is a revelation of the person and work of Jesus Christ in that "all the Scriptures speak of Him" (Luke 24:44 & John 5:39), so the miracles in 2 Kings 4-6 are messianic in nature. That is, they are anticipatory miracles that point directly to those which the Lord Jesus Christ would perform in His ministry. Whether the miracle of redemption, by which the widow is able to pay off her crushing debts (2 Kings 4:1-7); the miracle of feeding the starving prophets (2 Kings 4:38-44) or the miracle of raising the only son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:8-37), all these miracles speak of the redemption, the feedings and the resurrection-life which only Christ would accomplish and convey. That is why we call these miracles in Elisha's day "messianic" miracles, because they point to Christ the Messiah.

Monday: Read 2 Kings 4:8-17 and Hebrews 11:11-12. We begin the story of the Shunammite woman with her miraculous conception of a child, as promised by the prophet Elisha in 2 Kings 4:14-17. This miracle should be seen as the giving of a son to one who had been previously barren. Just as Sarah, Rebekah, Hannah, Samson's mother, Elisabeth the Baptist's mother – as well as others - by faith received power to conceive children in their barrenness, so God enabled the Shunammite to have a son as well. Though unasked for and unexpected, God provided a son who would prove to be a witness to God's grace and power even into his mother's old age!

Meditate and Pray: How wise it is to wait on God for His good gifts. Instead of harboring a bitterness to the LORD because she is unable to bear offspring, this woman is content with her life in her village, surrounded by those who love and care for her. (2 Kings 4:13) In such a place of contentment, God can freely act – since there is no danger that His gift of a son would be misinterpreted as a reward to a bitter and complaining woman.

Application: Have you ever pondered the danger of *spoiling God's good gifts with a demanding, bitter spirit of resentment against God*? In one sense, we tie God's hands when we complain against Him. Were He to give us the very thing we bemoan not having, would it not confirm us in our unbelieving spirit? What father, longing to give a good gift to his child, will do so in the midst of sinful wailing to daddy on the part of the little one? Something to think about.

Tues/Weds: read 2 Kings 4:18-28. The blessings of God are to move our hearts towards greater devotion to Him as the Giver of all good gifts, bestowed so freely. How this woman in Shunem must have found new meaning in her life, with an expanded heart of love, as she beheld this gift of a son grow up in a godly childhood! And how her heart must have broken to experience bereavement. We can understand why she speaks in her disappointment with these words: "Did I ask for this child? Did I not ask you, oh prophet of God, not to deceive me?"

Thus along with the Shunammite woman (and the widow of Zarephath too in 1 Kings 17:18) we can be tempted to distrust of God's character when tragedy strikes.

We can listen to that Satanic voice of despair, saying in our ear: "God has taken away your child in order to ambush you for prior sins." (or) "God intended to deceptively get your hopes up, planning all along to crush you and your child at your happiest moment."

David Powlison speaks of the spiritual danger for those angry at God in his devotional comments for November 15th:

Have they then become angry at a ‘disappointing’ God, even confusing His actions and motives with Satan’s and with evil people who imitate the devil’s cruelty?

Thus the believer in despair can begin to attribute to God Satanic qualities of harshness or even Divine pleasure in our sufferings.

Meditate and Pray: Ask God to reaffirm by His Spirit in you that He is all good, all the time. May He save us from distrusting His character. Though we don’t know what will be the outcome of our tragic heartbreaks, our faith can always hold onto the unchanging character of our God. As we sing in hymn # 94 in our red Trinity hymnals (with verses highlighted for emphasis):

1. How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in his excellent word!
What more can he say than to you he hath said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

2. "Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
for I am thy God and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen and help thee and cause thee to stand
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

3. "When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
the rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
for I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

4. "When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,
my grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;
the flame shall not hurt thee; **I only design**
thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

5. **"The soul that on Jesus still leans for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;**
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake."

Thursday: Read 2 Kings 4:29-31. We must not think that true old testament believers formed bonds of loyalty with the prophets *simply because of their personal charisma and power*. The reason why the Shunammite will not leave the side of Elisha (2 Kings 4:30) is because the Word of God rests on this prophet. This man of God is the one (in that day before the canonization of Scripture) through whom the Word of God comes. In fact, in order to hear the Word of God on a regular basis, this wealthy Shunammite and her husband were in the habit of travelling to hear Elisha on the Sabbath and during other religious festivals. (2 Kings 4:23) Think about what the Word of God through His servant Elisha must have taught this Shunammite woman:

1) She would have learned how God revealed Himself to Moses as the “LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty...” (Exodus 34:6-7)

Thus Elisha would have taught this woman God’s foundational promises and character. It is on this character that she rests in her time of bereavement and agony.

2) She would also have learned about the importance of the obedience of faith. God through Moses would have used Elisha's sermons to firmly implant in this woman of Shunem the importance of "loving God with all your soul, strength and mind" – no matter what difficult situation God brings upon you – even the death of a child.

Meditate and Pray: May the LORD continually impress upon us the centrality of the Word of God in our lives. May the LORD bless our children with hunger for that Word; our Sunday School and Bible study teachers with incisive and helpful teaching, and may He protect our pulpit from any offense against that Word. Please pray especially for God to provide pulpits for the several young interns we know who are beginning to seek for a call in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Friday: Read 2 Kings 4:23 & 4:29-33. The Shunammite woman and her husband learned foundational truths about God as they travelled each Sabbath to hear the Word of God on Elisha's lips. (2 Kings 4:23) Perhaps the most important and practically reassuring fact which Elisha taught this family, and which would have stood them in such good stead at their hour of greatest need, was that the LORD was the "living God", in contrast to the continual cycle of death that followers of Baal were compelled by their false religion to follow.

To the pagan way of thinking, every spring the prominent idol of fertility in the region, named Baal, would bring the spring rains if properly appeased by the hundreds of priests to Baal whom the house of Jezebel housed and fed. In this false religion, Baal had to be killed each spring by the more powerful god of death before he could be revived in order to pour rain on the crops.

But make no mistake: the god of death named Mot was more powerful than Baal. After all, Mot was the favorite son of the highest Semitic idol named El. In the Greek world of idols as well, the god of death, whose name was Hades, was mighty enough as to demand Persephone, the goddess of agriculture, to be his consort in the underworld. Thus her time as a goddess was split between good and evil, life and death. Thus it always is in pagan idolatry and religion: death has an equal say with life; death is part of who god is. The false idols of every age *need death and the sacrifice involved* in order to perpetuate their religion. Evil and death are just as eternal and necessary as Goodness and life.

But how different when we turn to the God of Elisha! No wonder, when followers of the LORD want to take an oath, they do so in the name of the living God, even as the Shunammite woman says when insisting that she won't leave the prophet until he sees her dead son: "As the LORD *lives*, I will not leave you."

Meditate and Pray: How wonderful that we have a Savior and Creator in whom there is no darkness, as James 1:17 declares. Sing about God's light-filled character, and His power to give life instead of corrupting and perverting life, using hymn # 25 in our red Trinity hymnal:

1 O Light that knew no dawn,
that shines to endless day,
all things in earth and heav'n
are lusted by thy ray;
no eye can to thy throne ascend,
nor mind thy brightness comprehend.

2 Thy grace, O Father, give,
that I may serve in fear;
above all boons, I pray,
grant me thy voice to hear;
from sin thy child in mercy free,
and let me dwell in light with thee:

3 That, cleansed from stain of sin,
I may meet homage give,
and, pure in heart, behold
thy beauty while I live;
clean hands in holy worship raise,
and thee, O Christ my Savior, praise.

4 In supplication meek
to thee I bend the knee;
O Christ, when thou shalt come,
in love remember me,
and in thy kingdom, by thy grace,
grant me a humble servant's place.

Sat/Sun: Read 2 Kings 4:32-37 & Psalm 104:29-30. As we celebrate with the dead boy's mother in 2 Kings 4:36-37, we must also try to understand something of the actions which Elisha takes as part of his prayer for the child to be brought back to life. In 1 Kings 17:19-23 we see Elijah perform similar physical actions toward the dead son of the widow of Zarephath. Since Scripture does not waste words, there must be some edifying lessons behind these actions. Let's try and see what the Spirit of God teaches us here.

First of all, we must try to understand why Elisha lies upon the child, much like Elijah did in 1 Kings 17:21: eye-to-eye; hand-to-hand; mouth-to-mouth. Some scholars may see in this story a primitive belief in the power of a living body to impart life to a dead body. Today we know much more about the physical processes which lead to death and what must be done medically if someone is to be revived. Thus, as a mere superstition, this miracle would have no value, and therefore would not be included by God in His Word.

But this miracle does have significance - as a resurrection from the dead, not a mere physical resuscitation of a sick child. The touching of these dead bodies must surely show the prophets' desire to be in union with the dead child, so that the child could share *not merely* in their lives, breaths and heartbeats, but *in the Spirit of life which abided on them as prophets*. It was the Spirit of God which these prophets longed to pour on the people under their care. Just see Moses long for such an impartation of the Spirit when he says in Numbers 11:29:

Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!

Meditate and Pray: As hard as this connection between these prophets and these dead children is for us to understand, when we see the purpose of these miracles as pointing to the Messiah, *who would indeed pour out the Spirit of Life on all His people*, then we appreciate that Christ's incarnation, when Jesus took a real human body on Himself as the Son of God, is the ultimate fulfillment of the prophetic sign of conveying life from the dead by a mere touch and prayer.

For Scripture on the Spirit of God as the "LORD and giver of life" (as the Nicene Creed puts it in describing the Spirit of God's work) consider how it is the Holy Spirit in Psalm 104:29-30 who gives life to all creation:

When you hide your face, they (all God's creatures) are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.

³⁰ When you send forth your Spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.

Surely this longing for the Holy Spirit to come, with power to renew life, explains the prophets' dramatic acting out of their prayers. They were expressing a plea that the Spirit of God would be imparted in resurrection power

to the dead child. After all, as 2 Kings 2:9 & 2:15 point out, Elisha would have had no power to help the Shunammite's son if the "Spirit of Elijah" (the Holy Spirit of God who anointed and empowered these prophets) had not also rested on him!

Please sing this hymn by John Newton, asking for the Spirit's presence in our church families and as we gather for worship, with the following words:

Elisha, struck with grief and awe,
Cried, Ah! where now is Israel's stay?
When he his honored master saw
Borne by a fiery car away.

Where is Elijah's God? he cried,
And with the mantle smote the flood;
His word controlled the swelling tide,
Th'obedient waters upright stood.

When Peter first this mantle waved,
How soon it melted hearts of steel!
Sinners, by thousands, then were saved,
But now how few its virtues feel?

Assist Thy messenger to speak,
And while he aims to lisp Thy truth,
The bonds of sin and Satan break,
And pour Thy blessing on our youth.

But while he looked a last adieu,
His mantle, as it fell, he caught;
The Spirit rested on him too,
And equal miracles he wrought.

The wonder working Gospel, thus
From hand to hand, has been conveyed
We have the mantle still with us,
But where, O where, the Spirit's aid?

Where is Elijah's God, the Lord,
Thine Israel's hope, and joy, and boast!
Reveal Thine arm, confirm Thy Word,
Give us another Pentecost!

For them we now approach Thy throne,
Teach them to know and love Thy name,
Then shall Thy thankful people own
Elijah's God is still the same.

Amen! You can use the tune for # 608 (Rockingham Old) in our red hymnal to sing this wonderful prayer from John Newton. Let us especially sing with Newton's last verses, asking the LORD not to forget our covenant children and our need for reviving grace for each generation.