2 Kings - Commentaries by Amy Catherine (Deck) Walton

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 22: The Prophet in Tears (8:7-15)

2 Kings 8:7-15

Two ships meet on the wide ocean. They hail each other, they speak and for a short time they lie alongside. Then the wind rises and the ships part. One sails due east, the other due west, and they meet no more.

Sometimes our lives are like these two ships. We take a journey; we have a pleasant conversation with the person beside us on the bus or train. We enjoy getting to know them a little in the short time we are together. Then we part, often never again to see that person during this life. Perhaps we meet someone while on vacation. We pass a few days together, visiting, talking and sharing meals. But when our holiday time is over, like ships we part. We catch, while we are together, passing glimpses of their life, their feelings and their characters, and then we lose sight of them, and the rest of their history is unknown by us.

So it is with the men and women brought before us in the Bible. We get little glimpses of their lives; we grow deeply interested in their story; we long to know further details about them, but we get no more than a passing glimpse. We see our Lord healing Jairus' daughter, raising the widow's son, blessing the little children, giving sight to blind Bartimeus, and looking with loving, pitying eyes on the rich young man, and we long to know the later history of these people. God in perfect wisdom tells us nothing more about them. Someday, when we are all gathered together in God our Father's home, we shall know the rest of the story.

One interesting character brought before us in the life of Elisha is Naaman, the army captain of Ben-hadad, king of Syria. We saw him come from Syria to the land of Israel to be cured of his leprosy. We heard him tell Elisha that from that time on he would serve no God but the God of Israel. We heard him wondering how he could be faithful to Elisha's God when his master leaned on his arm and he was compelled to go with him to the house of the idol Rimmon, the god of his nation. We heard him say, "The Lord pardon thy servant in this thing," and we noticed Elisha's answer, "Go in peace." He knew that God would be with him and provide for him that he might be faithful when he returned home to Syria.

We long to know more of Naaman's history. What happened when he got home and spoke of what the God of Israel had done for him through His prophet Elisha? We cannot answer these questions, for God has not yet told us the rest of the story. But we do hear a great deal about King Ben-hadad. He comes again and again into the land of Israel. He besieges the city of Samaria, yet nowhere do we read of Naaman leading his armies.

Can it be that Naaman had refused to enter Rimmon's temple and had, in consequence, lost the king's favor? As we get further in Elisha's story, we do know Ben-hadad now had a new favorite — a man who appears to hold the very position once held by Naaman.

When the poor Shunammite returned home, after seven years' absence, she found no prophet of God to plead her cause. Elisha was at that very time many miles away. Old man though he was, he had crossed the Jordan traveling northwards. He passed by snowy Mount Lebanon and crossed the desert beyond. Then standing at the top of the hill, he could look down for the first time at the beautiful city of Damascus, the capital of Syria. There it lies by the two fine rivers, Abana and Pharpar, glittering in the sunlight.

The news of the arrival of Israel's prophet quickly spreads from house to house. Many of them have heard of his mighty deeds. Some of them had been with Naaman when he went to be healed. Others had been with the soldiers who were sent to apprehend Elisha at Dothan and had been led blind and trembling into Samaria. Some of them had been among that great Syrian host which had fled in wild confusion at the strange sound of chariot wheels and trampling horses during that night of terror.

Let us enter one of those magnificent houses in Damascus and let us pass into a room opening out of the courtyard. We must enter quietly, for there is a sick person in that room. The lattices are carefully closed to keep the hot sun off the sick man. All is quiet, for there he lies dangerously ill. He is wealthy; he is powerful; he, Ben-hadad, is king, but sickness and death enter the palace as well as the cottage and are no respecters of persons. By his side sits his current favorite, the one who has stepped into Naaman's place, the one on whose hand the king leans when he goes to the temple of Rimmon.

A servant enters the room with news from the city. A most unexpected visitor has entered their city—Elisha, the man of God, the prophet of Israel.

Ben-hadad is well acquainted with his wonder-working power. He had cured his general Naaman; there is no doubt of that. What if he could cure him? If he did not cure him, surely a man so wise as Elisha, who was always able to foretell the future, at least could tell him whether the illness from which he was suffering would prove fatal or not! He remembered how the prophet had, on multiple occasions, told the king of Israel what was about to happen when the Syrians had plotted in secret to attack the Israelites. Yes, Elisha's God certainly revealed to him the future.

So he turns to his current favorite, Hazael, and bids him to go at once to seek for the man of God. Take him a present and ask this question: "Shall I recover of this disease?" At once Hazael rises to do his royal master's bidding.

As soon as he meets the prophet, he delivers his message: “Thy son Ben-hadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?”

The king of Israel once said to Elisha, “My father, my father!” Now the king of Syria addresses him in the same way: “Thy son Ben-hadad.” Does it not show what respect a godly life can win? Elisha, as a young man, follows the plough in his father’s little farm, but he lives to hear kings calling him father.

“Shall I recover of this disease?” A solemn question. Who can tell? We ask the doctor, but he tells us little; even he cannot tell. One knows — God knows; that is enough. Oh, how blessed at such a time to be able to say, “Lord, not my will, but Thine be done; living or dying I am Thine!”

Ben-hadad had no such comfort, for Rimmon the idol was his god. He had prayed to Rimmon, trusted Rimmon, given many offerings to Rimmon, and now Rimmon had failed him — failed him utterly. Rimmon might seem to be sufficient for the time of health, but he was a miserable failure in time of sickness.

Elisha’s answer to the question is a very curious one. He says to Hazael, “Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die.” That is to say, your disease is not fatal. There is no reason, as far as your illness is concerned, why you should not recover. You may certainly recover.

Then he pauses, and after the pause he says quietly, “Howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die.”

What did Elisha mean? Was he answering the sick man’s question by a lie? No, it was perfectly true. The illness was not fatal; recovery had set in, and he would be well again. But God had showed Elisha that Ben-hadad’s end was near, though not through illness, but from another cause quite separate from it. Death was coming, but it was death by murder, not by sickness.

Even as Elisha spoke those words, he fixed his eyes on Hazael. Long and steadily he gazed at him. Not a word was spoken while that long, steady gaze was fixed on the courtier. When Hazael could stand it no longer, but colored in confusion and shame, Elisha, the old prophet, burst into tears.

What did it all mean? What was the significance of this strange behavior on the part of the prophet? Elisha had read Hazael’s guilty secret, just as, long before, he had read Gehazi’s guilty secret. Hazael had, in his inmost heart, conceived a plot. He planned, when left alone with his master, to murder him secretly, and then he would easily manage to get himself made king.

Hazael may not have told this guilty secret to anyone. Only God knew it. God had made it known to Elisha, and therefore he said, “Howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die.”

But the tears: Why were they shed? Was it for Ben-hadad that Elisha wept? No. Ben-hadad was only reaping the harvest he had sown of a life devoted to the god Rimmon. Elisha, as he stood by evil Hazael’s side, was looking into the future. He saw the murder committed; he saw Hazael made king, and then he saw the mischief he would do in the land of Israel, the awful tribulation he would bring on the prophet’s native land. Elisha saw it all as in a terrible picture — fortresses destroyed, armies defeated, and children and mothers put to death. No wonder, when he saw such scenes with his mind’s eye, that Elisha wept!

“And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord?” And the prophet told him what he saw of the future, which God had given him. Hazael could not believe it. Treacherous though he was to his master, he could not believe himself capable of committing wholesale murder or allowing such terrible acts of cruelty. “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” he indignantly exclaimed.

But when the foot is set on sin’s slide, who can say to what lengths that slide may lead? “Who knoweth what is in the heart of man?” The good John Bradford, when he saw a criminal led past his house on the way to the gallows, used to exclaim, “There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford.” And we have all need to cry earnestly, “Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.”

Hazael goes back to the king and alters the message to his own liking. Elisha had said, “Thou mayest certainly recover.” He delivers the message thus: “He told me that thou shouldest surely recover.”

The very next day Hazael accomplished his wicked purpose. While watching alone by the sickbed, Hazael soaked a heavy white quilt in water and held it firmly over the sleeping man’s face until he was smothered. There was no mark of violence on his body, and he was doubtless thought to have died of the disease from which he had been suffering. Then Hazael became king in place of Ben-hadad.

Elisha weeps, not for himself, but for the punishment he saw coming upon his nation. Does not that remind us of another scene? Can we not see the morning light streaming on the beloved city of Jerusalem? Can we not see upon the hillside, gazing upon this city, Jesus weeping for the sorrow and destruction which He saw coming upon His nation as the fruit of their sins?

“And when [Jesus] was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.”

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 21: The Unseen Hand (8:16)

2 Kings 8:1-6

Mr. Newton was a very punctual man. Nothing troubled him more than finding he was late for an appointment. One of his duties in London was to inspect a man-of-war, which rode at anchor in the Thames River. A little boat took him each day from the shore to the ship. One day the boatman was late. Five — ten — fifteen minutes passed away. At last Newton lost his temper. His love of punctuality made him angry with the man whose carelessness was making him late. But it was not long before he was shown that the delay was God's providence, for before he reached the vessel, a spark fell into the powder magazine, resulting in a loud explosion, and the ship was blown into a thousand pieces.

Surely there was an unseen hand guiding and overseeing the movements of this servant of the Lord, for does not God order even tiny events to work out His will for His people's good?

An instance of this is brought before us in 2 Kings 8. As we read the story, we come across one of whom we have heard before. It is the lady of Shunem — the kind and hospitable woman who lived in the beautiful house surrounded by gardens, who brought Elisha and Gehazi into her house, who planned the little room on the wall for the prophet, and who furnished it carefully with everything that might minister to his comfort. In return she received for her kindness to the prophet the welcome gift of a child and that child was restored to her after his sudden death.

She is a widow now, but her son is still with her. They are still dwelling at Samaria, when once more the prophet comes to see her and to occupy the little chamber on the wall. He has come to tell the Shunammite a secret, which has been made known to him by God. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and Elisha was one who lived very near to God.

The secret is this: A famine of long duration is coming. For seven years the harvests shall fail and bread shall be scarce. Is the famine coming by chance? No, says Elisha, not by chance; "the Lord hath called for a famine."

Let us grasp the comfort of these words. We can bear trouble better if we take it straight from His hands, the loving hands which blessed the little children and healed the sick, the very hands which were pierced by the nails. The Lord Himself has called the famine, the sickness, the bereavement or the sorrow. The Lord has called that affliction — that thorn in the flesh that is clouding our life. Let us look away from second causes to the source. "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good."

"Now," says Elisha, "seeing the Lord has called a famine, and that famine will last seven years, Shunem will become a wilderness. Pack up all you will need and go into another land until the seven years are over."

Does she believe him? How can she doubt him after the fulfillment of his wonderful promise about her child? At once she acts to carry out his advice. She gathers her possessions together, shuts up her house at Shunem, and goes with her son and her servants into a foreign land.

Where does she go? She goes to the fertile plain in the south of the country by the side of the Mediterranean where the Philistines dwelt. There Abraham went in time of famine; there too went Isaac. It was a land of cornfields, a land of plenty. There the lady of Shunem and her household spent the seven years of famine.

How fully the Shunammite is recompensed for her kindness to God's servant, the prophet! She gave him a candle; God gave her the boy to be the light of her life. She gave him a table; God in the time of famine spread before her a table of plenty. She gave him a stool to sit on and a bed on which to rest; God gave her a quiet, safe resting-place in the time of trouble.

Even the cup of cold water given in His name shall not lose its reward. No kindness, however small, done for the Lord's sake to the Lord's people, shall be unnoticed. God sees all, remembers all and rewards all, and the measure of His payment is this: "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

The seven years pass away, and the famine is over. Once more the thoughts of the lady of Shunem turn to her old home. She has no fear of returning, for the time mentioned by the prophet has expired. She is glad to leave the heathen land of the Philistines for the country given to the Lord's people. No house by the blue Mediterranean can ever be to her what her home among her people has always been. So she with her son travels northwards toward her hometown.

But a bitter disappointment awaits them. Instead of finding their home empty, they discover that it is occupied, and the doors are closed against her and her son. Others have seized her property during her absence.

The poor lady of Shunem and her son walk through the village, desolate and distressed. What will she do? There is only one thing she can do and that is to apply to the king. But will the king listen to her? Years ago Elisha had asked her, "Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" She had not needed it then. She had said, "I dwell among mine own people." But she needs it now.

Where is Elisha? If she knew, she would go to him, but he is evidently absent from the country. Her only hope is to go to the king herself and plead her own cause. Surely before she went to the king, she knelt down and put her cause in the Lord's hands, asking Him to undertake for her.

Now let us see what happened. Along the road leading to Samaria comes the poor widowed Shunammite and her son. At the same moment we see two men standing together, talking. The two are the king of Israel and Gehazi, once the servant of Elisha.

What, Gehazi the leper? Can it be that the great King Jehoram will condescend to talk to a poor, loathsome leper? How can we account for so strange an interview?

It is possible that Gehazi was one of the four lepers who discovered the flight of the Syrians and that the king was anxious to talk to one of them and to hear more about the particulars of their strange discovery, for the flight of the Syrians seems to have taken place just at the close of the seven years' famine and at the very time when the Shunammite and her son were on their way home. How natural, then, for Gehazi, in his conversation with the king, to mention his former connection with the wonder-working prophet, who had foretold the end, the

marvelous end, of the siege!

Perhaps Gehazi is no longer a leper. Could it be that the affliction had brought him to God, that he had mourned for his sin and repented of his deceit and lying, and that he had been mercifully forgiven and restored? God is very pitiful and of tender mercy. “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown,” cried Jonah. But when the Ninevites turned to God, He did not overthrow them at that time.

Whatever the reason, we find Gehazi talking to King Jehoram. He has evidently told the king that he was once Elisha’s servant and knew all about Elisha’s works. And the king, seeing their deliverance from the Syrian, is much interested in the question of the prophet’s miraculous power. He would like to hear more about the man who knows what is going to happen before it happens.

“Tell me, I pray thee,” he says to Gehazi, “all the great things that Elisha hath done.”

So Gehazi begins his story. He would tell of the Jordan River being divided by the mantle of Elijah, of the spring at Jericho healed, of the widow’s oil multiplied, and of the pot of soup made wholesome. And then he passes on to the most wonderful miracle of all. He speaks of Shunem, the lovely village. He tells of the kind lady who lived there and of her promised child. Then he describes the sudden and touching death of that child, the sorrow of the mother, her appeal to his master, and then the miracle of miracles, the boy restored to life and given back to his mother. King Jehoram listens, wondering and amazed, as he hears of the great things God has done through Elisha.

But just as Gehazi is picturing the joy of the Shunammite when her child was raised to life again, he looks up and to his astonishment he sees her. Yes, there she is. He has not seen her for years, but he recognizes her in a moment. “My lord, O king,” he cries in amazement, “this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life.”

At that very moment, when the king’s thoughts are fixed upon her and when the king’s interest is thoroughly aroused by her story, the Shunammite stands before him. She has come to tell him of her wrongs and to plead for his help. Had she come the week before or the day before or even an hour earlier, she might have pleaded in vain. But she arrived at the right moment. So touched by and interested in her history is King Jehoram that he is ready to do all she asks him. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord.”

The Shunammite pours out her sorrowful tale. At once the king calls an official and bids him see that she has her house and land restored to her. Not only so, but she is to be paid for whatever the fields have produced in her absence.

Very gladly, very thankfully, the Shunammite and her son return to their old home, to dwell once more among their own people.

See how wonderfully God had ordered the steps of that good woman. It was not by chance that on that particular day the king met Gehazi. It was not by chance that the conversation turned to Shunem. It was not by chance that she came up exactly at that moment. It was the hand of God.

The same Newton, who was so wonderfully saved from death by the delay of his boatman, said once, in a letter to a friend, that he could never doubt God’s hand in these little matters of daily life. One day he hesitated at a certain fork in the road, not certain which way he should go, seeing that both ways led to his destination. On that choice, though he knew it not, hung all his future life. In the street he chose, he met a certain person and that meeting altered all his plans for life.

Yes, our life is a chain, forged by the hand of God. The links of the chain are not all alike — some are large; others are very small — yet all the links are the work of the same Hand. The God who forges the greatest links forges also the most minute. Each tiny detail is arranged by the unerring hand of God.

Let us look up to Him quietly, humbly, thankfully, and bless Him that there is no such thing as chance. Let us, one by one, trust our individual future to our God. Let us say:

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 20: The Midnight Expedition (7:3-20)

2 Kings 7:3-20

When brave and trustful people do lose heart and courage, they are often very depressed. Martin Luther, the great Reformer, was a comforter of many. His bright, cheery face and his words of hope helped those who came to tell him their troubles. Before he listened to their tale of woe, he always said, “Let us sing together Psalm 46, and then we will talk about it.” Yet Martin Luther himself once lost faith and was terribly depressed. All seemed to be going wrong. His work, he thought, was a failure; his plans were upset; his hopes were disappointed; the future looked gloomy and dismal. He became disheartened and very miserable. His wife, troubled over it, determined, if possible, to show him his mistake. She did this in a very strange way. Luther had been away from home for several days, and on his return he expected to find his wife watching for him as she always did, but she was nowhere to be seen. He went upstairs and found her seated in her room, dressed in deep mourning and holding her handkerchief to her eyes. In great alarm and fearing that one of the children must be dead, he asked her what was the matter. Her answer was, “God is dead.” “What do you mean?” he asked, thinking that she must have gone out of her mind. “God must be dead,” she replied, “or you could not be so cast down.” Martin Luther accepted the lesson and remembered that God was indeed his refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Am I ever full of doubts or fears? Am I ever cast down and depressed? Let me ask myself this question: Is God dead? If not — if God Almighty still lives — “why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”

God has His own way, and His way is the best way. The unbelieving lord had mocked, saying, “If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?” but the people of Samaria found that God had His own way all ready.

Let us stand on the wall of Samaria and look around. All is going on just as we saw it before. Inside the walls are crying children and starving people; outside is the huge camp of the Syrians.

Just outside the city gate are four hungry and miserable men like those inside the city wall. They are outside, for they have the horrible disease of leprosy. It may be that so long as food remained in the city, bits had been thrown over the wall to them, but no morsels have been sent for a long time now.

They are discussing the matter. “What shall we do?” they say. “We cannot stay here any longer. A few more hours of this suffering will kill us. Let us make one last effort for our life. We are not allowed in the city, and it would not matter much if we were, for they are starving on that side of the wall, just as we are on this. Suppose we go down to the enemy’s camp. If we stay here, we must die. If we go there, we may die, but there is a chance of life. We will go.”

So these lepers, having argued the case out to their own satisfaction, gather their rags around their poor bodies, and as the night is coming on, they set off for the Syrian camp.

Tremblingly they start, leaving the walls of Samaria behind, standing out darkly against the evening sky. Very slowly they move, for at any moment — they know it; they feel it — they may fall into the enemy’s hands. They must surely be getting near the Syrian camp. Some sentinel may fall on them with his sword. They may have no time to explain why they have come and be killed immediately.

Still on they go, so far, in safety and no one disturbs them. Now they can see the white tents looming in the distance, yet no sentry has challenged them — no one has spoken to them. At length they are actually up to the enemy’s camp, yet they see no one and they hear nothing. They walk among the tents, but to their astonishment, they find that the tents are empty. The camp, which they had seen at sunset teeming with troops of soldiers, is deserted.

When no one appears and nothing terrible happens, they begin to grow braver. Stepping inside a tent, they find a meal spread out on a table. The poor, famished lepers gather around it and eagerly devour the meal that had been prepared by and for others.

When their cravings of hunger are satisfied, they begin to help themselves to other spoils. They take off their leprous rags and array themselves in fine Syrian garments. They help themselves to gold and silver and treasures of all kinds. They carry these outside the camp, find a hiding-place for them, and then return for more.

Finally one of the four cries out to his companions, “We ought to be ashamed of ourselves. Here we are, eating and drinking, while our countrymen are dying of starvation. In this camp is enough and to spare for them too, yet we are helping ourselves and leaving them to perish.”

“We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us.” “No good will come to us if we keep the matter secret. Let us go at once and tell the good news to the starving people in the city.”

As we watch those four lepers hurry back to the city, surely God would have us learn a lesson from them. God, in His wonderful mercy, has given to us food in abundance, food for the body and food for the soul. Many of us live in a so-called “Christian” land with the Word of God freely and publicly available to us. And many of us have tasted of the good food and can say, “Jesus has satisfied me; He is the Bread of Life to my soul. I have come to Him; He has clothed me in new raiment, His spotless righteousness. He has given me freely of His treasures — pardon, peace, comfort and blessing.” But do we also say, “That is all I want now. I am content; I can sit down and enjoy the good things God has given to my soul”?

Stand up and look around. What do you see? Close by lies a starving world, shut in by Satan and his mighty host; close by you are souls dying—perishing—for want of Christ, the Bread of Life. Will you be so selfish, so utterly heartless, that you will take no notice of them? Will you not say with the lepers, “We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace”? If we tarry till the morning light, when the Master shall come, what will the Master say? How shall we answer Him, if we have folded our hands and done nothing to bring others to Him?

But see, the lepers have reached the city gate. Now once more they are hammering on the door. They not only knock, but they call to the porter who keeps the gate and tell him their good news. Inside the city the king is roused from his sleep, and the lepers repeat what they said at the gate.

At first the people are inclined to laugh at the story. But the lepers urge them to accept their statement and bid them notice their appearance. They stand before them altered men, completely changed. Before they were starved; now they are satisfied. Before they were in rags; now they are arrayed in magnificent clothing.

And it is what we are more than what we say that influences others. If those around see us different from what we were before — happy where we used to be discontented — kind and unselfish where we used to be self-seeking and thoughtless — then they see what the Lord Jesus can do. What they see leads them to wish that He would do the same things for them also.

The king of Samaria thought himself very clever. He was quite prepared to explain the whole story. “Oh,” said he, “I see through it; do not listen to these lepers. It is a clever trick of the enemy. They know we are hungry, so they have left their camp, teeming with food, to tempt us to go out. No doubt they are nearby watching. As soon as we go out, they will destroy us.”

But the famine-stricken people are not at all ready to accept the king’s explanation. Let five horses left in the city be mounted and scouts sent out to examine the Syrian camp and surrounding country, to find out if it be safe to venture out of the city. At last the king consents to

allow two of the precious horses to go out.

“They took therefore two chariot horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see.”

What did they find? The camp was deserted; the Syrians were indeed gone. All along the road to the Jordan River they found garments and gold and silver vessels which the Syrians had thrown away in their haste to escape quickly. The two scouts return with their good news.

Yes, God, the Almighty God, had frightened those Syrians as easily as we could frighten a fly which had settled on our table. In the dusk of evening He had caused them to hear a noise of chariots and a noise of horses, the rolling and rumbling of wheels, the tramping and steady march of armed men. Hearing these sounds, they had said to each other, “Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.” They felt that not a moment was to be lost, and in mad haste they left their camp and fled towards the Jordan.

The Syrians were gone, the besieging army had vanished, and as the sun rises there is a mighty exodus from the famine-stricken city. The people are hurrying out to obtain the food for the lack of which they are dying. So great is their haste — so hungry are they for bread — that, as they crowd through the gateway, the man who was appointed to stand at the gate is trampled to death.

And who is he? He is the very lord who had sneered and scoffed at the Word of God, brought to him by the prophet. It is the very man who had said, “If the Lord should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be!” He saw it indeed with his eyes, as the prophet had foretold; he beheld plenty of food, abundance of bread coming into the city, but he never tasted it — he died before a single bite passed his lips.

“So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel [in the old marketplace, even the gate of the city], according to the word of the Lord.”

“Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass.”

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 19: Windows in Heaven (6:31-33)

2 Kings 6:31-7:2

We often speak of the sea of life, and surely those words bring a very true picture before us. Life is indeed like a great, wide sea, covered with countless little ships. Some are just starting on the voyage with new sails and new rigging, all trim and tidy; others have seen many a storm and are weather-beaten and old. Some cross the sea quickly and easily and soon gain the port; others are tossed about for a long, long time on the rough waters of life. Some are floating along in sunshine with the sea calm and the wind quiet while others are battling for life with the stormy wind and tempest.

If that is a picture of life, it can also be a picture of a company of people. Some are young, full of health, strength and energy; others have weathered many a storm and are careworn and old. Some are sailing in sunshine and prosperity, without trouble or shadow, while others are being tossed to and fro by the rough waters, till they are ready to cry out to God, “All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me.”

But let us remember this: We may be sailing in brightest sunshine now, yet storms will surely come, for we live in a world of storms, and some come very suddenly. One moment all is bright — the sky is blue and the sea is calm — but the very next moment the clouds have gathered, and we find ourselves tossed to and fro in the agony of some great sorrow.

Now I want to ask you a question. It is a Bible question, which was asked by a heathen general 2700 years ago, but it is a question well worth remembering and to which it is all important to give an answer. The question is this: “Now on whom dost thou trust?”

When the sudden storm comes, what will you do? Have you any shelter in the time of storm? Who is your pilot? Who has His hand on the helm of your boat? Can you say:

It is a terrible thing when the storm of trouble comes and we have no friend to whom to turn. So King Jehoram found. He was in sore trouble. His city was besieged, his people were starving and he himself was suffering the pangs of hunger. A woman in Samaria had even eaten her own child. The storm had indeed broken over his head.

Now on whom do you lean, King Jehoram? What refuge do you have in trouble? He has none; he is utterly helpless. He paces the walls; he rends his garments; he fumes. But God is not his refuge and his strength. God is not his very present help in trouble. Instead of being able to turn to God and to lean on Him, he is angry with God for sending the trouble and angry with God’s Elisha — so angry that he gives orders for his immediate execution.

And what of Elisha, the man of God? He also is in great straits. He is feeling, in common with the rest of Samaria, the awful pangs of hunger. Has he a shelter in the time of storm? Now on whom do you trust, Elisha? Do you have any friend to whom you can turn? Confidently, Elisha could answer, “I trust in my God. My God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

And, accordingly, we find Elisha on the porch of his house, surrounded by a little company of men. The elders of the city have come to him in this time of trouble. As they pray, footsteps are heard entering the outer door. Whose steps are they? Elisha knows quite well. They are the steps of the messenger, sent by the king, to lead him out to execution. Had not Jehoram said on the wall, a few moments before, “God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day,” and had not God told Elisha the very words the king had uttered?

The prophet turns to the elders and says, “See ye how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away mine head? look, when the messenger cometh, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door: is not the sound of his master’s feet behind him?”

Yes, his master was following swiftly behind the messenger, so swiftly that no sooner has the soldier appeared than his master appears also, leaning on the arm of his favorite courtier.

Angrily he addresses Elisha. “I know who sends me all this trouble,” he says. “It is the Lord. Behold, this evil is of the Lord. Now I am weary of waiting for the Lord. He does not mean to help me, and I do not believe He ever will help me.”

No, Jehoram, if you got what you deserve, He would not help you. But in that city of Samaria God had His salt, His own faithful people. Elisha was there; these elders, his friends, were there, and as salt keeps meat from corruption, so these godly men kept Samaria.

Elisha answers by announcing wonderful news. He said, “Hear ye the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.”

Fine flour! There was none in the whole city! Barley! They had not a single grain! If thousands of dollars had been offered for a bit of grain, it could not have been found, nor was there any possibility of importing more into the city, for the Syrian host had shut them closely in for many long months.

Yet what does the Lord say? “Tomorrow, at this time, flour shall be cheap and barley shall be plentiful. A market shall be held in the old place, outside the city gate, and there abundance of corn shall be sold, tomorrow about this time.”

Then came a sneer, but not from the elders. They heard the news with glad and thankful hearts; they felt it was a direct answer to prayer. There was no sneer from the king; he stood amazed and utterly bewildered. The sneer came from the courtier, the lord on whose hand the king leaned.

Scornfully, unbelievingly, he said, “Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?” No bread can possibly come from earth. Windows in the sky and bread showered down into the city is the only way for such an absurd statement to come true. So he mocked in unbelief. He thought this was Elisha’s way of saving his life and gaining time. He deemed it utterly impossible for God to fulfill the word of His servant Elisha.

God not able! The Lord God Almighty who created all things out of nothing — He who made the stars — He who keeps them ever moving — God, the all-powerful, not able to supply one tiny city with bread! Oh the folly, the wicked folly of unbelief!

That unbelieving lord had his predecessors. One of them was a woman, an old woman of ninety. Standing in her tent, baking a cake, she heard a message from God. “Sarah,” said the messenger, “next spring shall have a son.” And Sarah laughed, not aloud, but within herself, the laugh of unbelief. “Impossible,” she thought. And God heard that laugh, and He answered it: “Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

Another predecessor was a man, poor Moses. Six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, were with him in a barren desert, miles from any shops or farms. They wanted meat, and God promised meat at once, meat for the whole multitude, enough to last for a month. And poor Moses could not see how it was to be done. He was ready to cry, “Impossible!”

To God he says, “The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and Thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them to suffice them?”

God heard that unbelieving question, and He had His answer ready: “And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord’s hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether My word shall come to pass unto thee or not.”

And the unbelieving lord has not only his predecessors, but, alas! he has also his followers today. Some of them are like himself, utterly unbelieving. They neither believe in God nor in His power. They sneer at those who believe. They turn into ridicule every attempt to acknowledge God in His dealings with man. In the office and on the street their laugh of unbelief is heard. They would ridicule all those around them out of their faith in God. Let us beware of allowing ourselves, even for a moment, to be shaken in our confidence. Those who join in the sneer of the unbeliever will share the unbeliever’s doom.

Elisha, in the name of his God, promises a good tomorrow — food and plenty, straight from God’s hand. That unbelieving lord sneers. He has his reward. Elisha says, “Behold, you shall see the glad tomorrow come but shall not enjoy it; you shall see the plenty but not taste it; you shall hear the rejoicing but never take part in it. A measure of fine flour shall be sold for a shekel and two measures of barley shall be sold for a shekel in yon city gate, but not a morsel of that plentiful supply shall pass your lips. ‘Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.’”

And just as Elisha said, so it came to pass. God’s Word, as always, proved true. The very next day a measure of fine flour and two measures of barley were sold at the cheap price foretold by the prophet, but the unbelieving lord was not allowed to share in the feast — before even a single bite passed his lips, he died.

The Word of the living God promises us just what Elisha promised Jehoram — a good tomorrow, fullness of joy forevermore, soul refreshment in that land where none shall ever hunger or thirst anymore. All this and more is promised to each humble believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Like Moses, some do not scoff, but they lose heart and become weak in faith. The situation seems so terrible when they cannot see a way out of their difficulties. They are quite ready to own that God has all power and all might, yet they act as if they did not believe it. How can God do it? They say, I do not see how the help is to come. I cannot imagine from what direction it will be brought to me.

Oh! how such unbelief must pain our loving God and Father! He gives us proof after proof of His love, and yet we doubt Him thus. Time after time He delivers us, yet when the next time comes we despair. Let the earnest prayer of our hearts be, “Lord, I believe; help Thou [cure Thou] mine unbelief.”

“God does not send money,” said a girl of eighteen, when money was scarce and the family was discussing its needs. Her mother had been quoting that verse, “My God shall supply all your need,” but her daughter refused to believe and to receive the comfort. She argued that while God sent patience, strength and spiritual blessings, He did not send money. She lived to regret and be ashamed of those unbelieving words. Soon after her marriage she had a serious illness and lay for six months in bed suffering pain. The expenses of the illness were enormous, and when God graciously restored her to health, she and her husband began to look at their finances. After carefully reckoning their income and their expenses, they came to the conclusion that they would be seriously in debt. This was a heavy sorrow to them, for they had never before owed a penny. Their income was so small that it would be a long time before they could pay it off. But the husband knelt by the side of his wife’s bed, and together they took the matter to the Lord. They left it entirely in His hands. The language of their hearts was this:

The very next day the answer came to their prayer. By the morning mail came a letter, in a handwriting which they did not know. It was addressed to the wife, and when she opened it, she found it was from a London lawyer telling her that a friend of her father, who had died some months before and whom she only knew very slightly, had left her a legacy. It was for just the amount needed to pay the medical bills. Can you wonder that, as she remembered her unbelieving words, “God does not send money,” she felt humbled and ashamed?

What is your difficulty? I do not know. It may be similar to hers or it may be something utterly different. I know not what it is, but I know this: The Lord will provide.

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 18: The Strange Feast (6:15-33)

2 Kings 6:15-33

On a tombstone, in the York Cemetery, are these beautiful words:

When we can say from the bottom of our heart that God’s way is best, there comes peace — peace which passes understanding. But, too often, when trouble comes, we are like that young servant to Elisha — we cry out in terror and dismay, “Alas, my master! how shall we do?” — or like poor old Jacob, who in his heart-breaking agony cried, “All these things are against me.” Yes, I can see no way out of my trouble — no possible escape from it. I am surrounded on every side. I have no means of avoiding what, sooner or later, must come upon me. What shall I do?

What shall you do? Do nothing. Leave the doing to God. You shall not need to fight this battle. “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” “The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” Only wait patiently for Him. Look up, open your eyes, for even now the angel ring is between you and your foes.

Are you feeling like that young man, almost in despair? What is your Syrian host? Is it a crowd of temptations, so strong you do not know how to withstand them? Is it a friend, urging you to do what conscience tells you is wrong? Is it the evil passions in your own sinful heart, fighting and struggling for the mastery?

Maybe your Syrian host takes quite another form. It may be an array of difficulties or worries. Is it a host of disappointed hopes and crushing sorrows? In the dismay of your heart, you cry out, “Alas, how shall I do?” But the Lord, if you are His, has His angel host ready to step in for you. Even now, “the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.”

“Alas, my master! how shall we do?” There is no need for you to do anything, young man of Elisha. Instead, open your eyes and see what God has done for you and for your master. Open your ears and listen to what God is about to do for your deliverance.

For his young servant Elisha prayed, “I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see.” But as the Syrian horsemen and foot soldiers came marching into Dothan, his prayer is the very opposite.

“And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray Thee, with blindness.”

For the one He asks for sight; for the others he asks for blindness. Sudden darkness falls upon the host of Syrians, and Elisha goes out to them. “You want to find Elisha,” he says. “Here you will never find him. If you want to see Elisha, follow me, and I will bring you to the man you seek.”

Bewildered and puzzled, like men in a dream, the Syrians allow him to lead them. Twelve miles southward the strange company of groping men is conducted. Where they are going they have not the faintest idea. Who is leading them they do not know.

After that long march, there comes a halt and they hear a man’s voice. The voice says, “Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see.”

The Lord opened their eyes, and once more they saw. And as they looked anxiously around, what did they see? Grand streets, busy shops, stately mansions and towering above them all a magnificent palace, a gem of architecture and beauty.

Where are they? Where has the mysterious guide led them? Oh! Horror of horrors, they are in Samaria in the very capital of their foes! High walls surround them; the massive gates shut them in. There, close beside them, is King Jehoram with his armed bands of soldiers, and there

is Elisha, the man whom they seek, very near them, and yet they dare not touch even a hair of his head.

They had surrounded him; now they themselves are surrounded. They had caught him in a trap; now they find themselves in a trap. As the quaint, old Scottish psalm has it:

But look at King Jehoram; he is filled with excitement. Here, he thinks, is a grand opportunity of getting rid of his foes. He will make short work of these Syrian soldiers. Not a man shall return alive to tell the tale in Damascus. Pressing eagerly forward, he cries to Elisha, “My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?”

Very firmly Elisha answered him, “Thou shalt not smite them.” Prisoners taken in war are not massacred in cold blood. “Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.”

The king dared not disobey, and he did even more than he was told to do. Elisha said, “Set bread and water before them,” but the king set out a grand feast. He prepared great provision for them. He gave them a magnificent entertainment; all the delicacies and dainties of Samaria were spread before the soldiers.

“If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.” And this was just the result in this present case, for we read, “So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.” The guerilla warfare was at an end. Elisha might go on his preaching tours in perfect safety, and his young man would no more have to cry out in terror, for no further effort was made to take him prisoner. The storm had blown over.

An old proverb says, “Write injuries in dust, and kindnesses in marble.” See a child with a rough stick write a word in the dust by the roadside. A few hours after the writing is all gone, blown away by the wind. But look at the sculptor; watch him at his work. Quietly, steadily, he toils on, carving letters in the hard marble. Hundreds of years may go by, but his writing will remain, for it was written in marble. Let us then see to it that we write injuries in dust and kindnesses in marble.

So it was so with the Syrians, for the next verse tells of war again, and this time it was regular war. The very Samaria which had fed the Syrians is besieged by them. The Israelites set great provision before the Syrians, but the Syrians so closely shut in the city that no provisions were left to the poor inhabitants, and famine in all its most awful and terrible forms was seen in the street.

It has been truly said, “We do well to thank God for delivering us out of troubles; we do better to thank Him for keeping us out of them.” In other words, we do well to thank God for our preservation. Let us thank God today for our preservation from famine. While others are in want, God has given us enough and to spare. Most of us know nothing, through His mercy, of the awful agonies of hunger.

The famine in Samaria was fearful. They had eaten everything good for food — the corn, vegetables, sheep, even horses had all been devoured. Now they had begun to eat refuse. We are told the prices of some of the articles offered for sale in the famine-stricken city. So great was the scarcity that the head of a donkey, which was an unclean animal to the Jews and the eating of which was forbidden by the law of Moses, cost eighty pieces of silver. Not only so, but even dove’s dung was being sold. Still the siege went on.

Very gloomily and miserably the king paced the wall of Samaria. Outside was the great Syrian host, their tents reaching as far as the eye could see. From inside the wall, there rose to his ear a wail of dying women and children and the agonized, heartrending cries for bread.

Who is this gaunt figure who stops him? Holding out her thin arms, she gasps forth a piteous cry, “Help, my lord, O king.” “Help you? No, I cannot do that,” responds the king. “I would if I could, but the grain storage is empty; nothing is left. The winepress is dry. I have nothing, and therefore I can give you nothing.”

But as the cry still went on, “Help, my lord, O king,” he asked her, “What aileth thee?”

And then came the terrible tale of horror. Pointing with her lean fingers to another beside her, whose hungry eyes are as ravenous as her own, she says, “This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son.”

What an awful tragedy! What love is like a mother’s love? “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?” Yet in the madness of famine they may forget — they may even destroy the very child most dear to them.

King Jehoram sees what fearful results the famine has brought and he tears his clothing. And the people on the wall notice that king is wearing next to his skin a coarse rough shirt made of sackcloth, a sign of the deepest sorrow and mourning.

Yes, he had sackcloth on his body, but he had none on his heart. He mourned the famine, but he never mourned the sin that caused the famine, his own sin, his mother’s sin, and the sin of his nation. Why did no angel host come between Samaria and the Syrians? Because the angel of the Lord only encamps around them that fear Him. Jehoram, his mother and the rulers did not fear Him, and no protecting angel host was placed between them and their foes.

But Jehoram never sees the true reason of his difficulties. He does not say, “I and my father’s house have sinned. Therefore is this evil come upon us.” But he does what so many others have done, ever since the days of our first parents — he tries to lay the blame on someone else.

“Ah,” he says, “this is Elisha’s fault; we have only him to blame for all this misery and distress. He has the power to help us, and he refuses to do so. There was a time when he was ready to give a helping hand in our troubles. When we were in danger from the Moabites and were dying of thirst, he not only supplied our wants, but he gave us a glorious victory. Yet now he will do nothing. If he gave us water then, why can he not give us bread? He made us feed these enemies, but he will not feed us now. I will not withhold my hand. ‘God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day.’”

There are plenty of people today who try to throw the blame on other shoulders than their own. They blame the way their parents brought them up or their companions or even God Himself as the cause of their backsliding and their sin. If they had been in other circumstances or had only had the opportunities of others, they would have been able to serve God and live a Christian life. But as they are and where they are, it is impossible to do so, and they surely cannot be blamed for it.

But in the last great day, when we all stand before the judgment seat of God, there will be no such thing as shifting the blame upon the shoulders of others or of charging it to our circumstances or surroundings. “What hast thou done?” will be the question asked of each, and we shall have to give a direct answer to the question.

How often are God’s motives questioned and His dealings judged to be unfair. Why did God send all this trouble and anxiety to King Jehoram? It was to draw him nearer to Himself. But Jehoram takes the very trouble sent by God for this purpose and allows it to drive him further from God. He is actually prepared to murder His prophet, the holy Elisha.

Let us take heed that we do not act like King Jehoram. God sends trouble into our life and our home. Why? To punish us? No. To vex us? No. To injure us? No, undoubtedly no. But for this reason, and this reason only — to draw us nearer, nearer to Himself. Let us see to it that the trouble does the work which God intends it to do.

It is sad how some treat the Lord’s dealings with them. The sorrow sent to soften them is made to harden; the loss, which He intended to draw them upward and homeward, drives them downward and into paths of danger.

God grant that when sorrow comes to us, as it must, we may let it draw us nearer to our God! Let the cry of our heart be:

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 16: The Ax Head That Swam (6:17)

2 Kings 6:1-7

A bucket is filled with water up to the very brim. But see, out of the large bucket we take one single drop, a tiny drop, as small as a drop of dew at the end of a blade of grass. And what does the drop represent? The men and women in this little world of ours. There are over five billion of them living today. They seem to us so many and so great. But to God, what are they? Only a tiny drop in the bucket of His great universe. Kings, emperors, politicians, men, women and children — all a drop in the bucket, nothing more, in the sight of the great God who rules all. So small, so few, so utterly insignificant are they, compared with the greatness of His universe.

“Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket.” Nay more, “All nations before Him are as nothing; and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity.”

Then, to God, what am I? If the entire world is but a drop in the bucket, if all the nations put together are less than nothing, what am I? What can I be in God’s sight? And yet, oh, wonderful thought! He cares for me. He knows the very hairs of my head. He understands every detail of my life. He enters into my very smallest sorrow or care. Am I tempted to doubt it? If so, let me look at Elisha’s history and take comfort.

The prophet is at Jericho on his tour of inspection. He has come to the Jericho college. Here are the young men who were so curious to see Elijah go up to heaven and so slow to believe he had really left them. Jezebel and her wicked son could not prevent a large number of the people fearing and loving God, and so with an increasing number of students the college has become overcrowded.

Elisha takes his place in the classroom, but he finds it crowded to the door. After the lesson, the sons of the prophets pour out their trouble in the ears of Elisha. He is always kind and sympathizing. When the people of their city had told him their difficulty about the poisonous spring, had he not at once come to their help?

“And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us.”

There was much that was praiseworthy in the behavior of these students. They possessed what is a rare virtue in young men — humility. They were willing to ask advice and to take the advice when given. They respected Elisha; they felt he was older and wiser than they were, and they were anxious to have his opinion. They will not set to work without leave and without direction. In these headstrong days, how little we see of this teachable, humble spirit! Surely the independent, self-reliant spirit of the age is directly opposed to it. But the young prophets of Jericho are willing to submit their plan humbly to Elisha. “Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell.”

They were economical in their requirements and in their scheme. Their idea was to get what was useful; they did not hanker after what was grand and imposing. They did not talk of sending for cedars from Lebanon or marble from the quarries to build a grand and imposing mansion. No, they will bring every man a beam and build their house as plainly and as swiftly as may be.

They were all willing to help. They were not all born woodcutters or trained to be builders, but all had willing hearts and willing hands. We do not read that a single student said, “It is not my work; I engaged to come here to be trained to teach and preach. I did not come to be a woodcutter.”

When all the preparations are made, when the tools are collected, when the donkeys and mules are ready, and when the group is about to start out, one of them comes to Elisha, and, acting as spokesman for the rest, begs him to go with them to the Jordan. Yes, they cling to him now. Once, he had only been to them Elisha who poured water over the hands of Elijah, and they had been reluctant to see in him the successor to their great prophet, but now they know him well, and the more they know him, the more they love him. They are very anxious that he should form one of the party. It will make all the difference if he is there. Oh! If he would only go with them!

“Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants.” Again we see the lovely picture. Elisha, the type of Jesus, the ever-tender, ever-sympathizing Friend. Oh! Let us say to our Elisha just what these students said to the prophet, “I pray Thee ... go with Thy servants.” As we begin each day, not knowing what it may bring forth, or as we enter upon any fresh stage of life’s journey, what wonderful help we should find by lifting up our hearts and uttering this short prayer: “Lord Jesus, go with Thy servant!”

And Elisha said, “I will go.”

Where? Five miles down to the Jordan — five miles on one of the hottest of all hot roads — five miles downhill to the deep hole, at the bottom of which rushes the muddy Jordan, the very river in which Naaman had so lately washed and had been made clean.

There are high banks on either side, covered with trees and shrubs and flowers. Near the river is a perfect jungle of tamarisks and willows, and below flows the stream, which is about one hundred feet wide and six feet deep. On either side of the river are trees, dipping their branches into the water.

The donkeys are tied up in the shade of the trees. The tools are taken out, and soon the quiet banks of the Jordan are resounding with the sound of tools and the voices of men. On all sides there is hacking, chopping, sawing and the shouts of the workmen among the branches. Each man would do his own part of the work. Some would carefully choose and mark suitable trees. Others would be hard at work with the ax; others would collect fallen branches. In the midst of them, going about from one to another, would be the prophet Elisha with his smiles and cheering words of encouragement.

But what has happened? One of the young men is in trouble. A moment before he was standing upon a tree which overhung the river, busily at work with his ax. Suddenly he has stopped and come down from the tree, gazing dismally into the water. Elisha comes quickly to the place to see what is the cause of his distress. It is his ax, which has broken; the head has flown off and has sunk beneath the muddy waters of the Jordan.

The poor young man is troubled about it, for it is not his own ax. Not having one of his own, he had borrowed it from a friend. He says to Elisha, as he looks ruefully into the water, “Alas, master! for it was borrowed.”

That student was an honest young man. He did not say that it was a poorly made tool. He did not say that it was an accident and not his fault. He did not say, “The ax is not mine, happily, so I will not take it to heart.” No, his neighbor’s goods were of more value to this honest young student than his own were. Responsible people are more careful of the goods of others than of their own. Their master’s property and their neighbor’s belongings are more carefully handled than even the things they can call their own.

The young prophet’s lament is seldom heard in these days: “Alas, master! for it was borrowed.” There is a tendency to care too little for the things of others. But God actually worked a miracle to restore a borrowed ax. He so fully approved of the honest distress of the young prophet that by the hand of Elisha a reward for his right feeling was given to him.

“Where fell it?” said Elisha. The poor young man pointed to the place. Seizing the ax belonging to another student, Elisha cut a stick from the tree and threw it into the water. And then came the miracle. The common stick acted as a wondrous rod, for the iron hidden from sight appeared; the lost ax head was immediately found. The God of nature reversed a law of nature; the heavy iron became as cork. Instead of lying six feet down in the water, it swam on the surface.

What is impossible with man is possible — is easy — with God. Nothing is sunk too low for Him to raise, blessed be His name. Your heart, my heart, so hard and so heavy, sunk so low in the mud of this world, in all the earthly desires and all the sinful surroundings of this life, God can raise. One word from Him and the iron will swim. God’s mighty word can raise you and me and cause us to float on the stream of life and see the face of heaven.

Only an ax head, and yet the great God of the universe, to whom all the nations of the world are but as a drop in a bucket, did not count it a little thing. And this, I think, for two reasons.

First, it was a borrowed ax, and God will have borrowed things taken care of. His eye watches the tiniest details of our business transactions. He notices what we, in our blindness, are apt to call trivial matters, and He would have His children to be careful to glorify Him and to bring honor to His name, by being upright and trustworthy even in small matters.

But, chiefly, I think, God noticed the loss of that ax head because, small though it was, it was a real trouble to that young prophet. God beheld the sorrow of his heart and had compassion on his distress.

Have you a trouble which is worrying you now? A little trouble, a small anxiety or care? You would not, perhaps, like to tell it to any friend, for it seems so small a thing. Your friend might smile and think you foolish for being distressed about it. And yet you know it; you feel it; it is a trouble. You think of it as you go about your work; you turn it over in your mind when you lie awake at night. It comes over you like a dark cloud when you wake in the morning. God has taken notice of your trouble, your worry. It is not too small to bring to Him.

Do you ask why God takes notice of small cares and troubles?

Look at that father, hard at work in his study, occupied with important business. A scream is heard from his little boy, playing in the garden. At once he leaves his work and hurries to the child.

What has happened? No great matter — a very trivial misfortune. The child has fallen, and there is a small bruise, which is causing him all this distress. “It is nothing,” say those who pass by. But not so the father. It may be a little thing in the eyes of others, but it is not a small thing to the child, and, therefore, the father’s heart is touched, and his sympathy and love come out to his little son.

“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.” He has the Father’s heart, and, therefore, He has the Father’s sympathy. And “as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.” The Lord will be both father and mother to you, loving you with the parents’ love, being ready to sympathize with you in your smallest cares. He says, “Only come to Me and tell Me what your anxiety is. Leave it at My feet.”

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 15: The Smoking Flax (5:15-27)

2 Kings 5:15-27

An old Eastern proverb says, “Even the chicken after drinking looks up to heaven.” What does the proverb mean? Even the chicken is thankful; it drinks, and at once it looks upward, as if speaking its thanks to God.

How different is man, ungrateful man, who takes favors, blessings and comforts, hour by hour, day by day, year by year, from the hand of God, and so seldom looks up to say, “My God, I thank Thee!” There is nothing more lovely in the sight of God than a grateful heart. Let us look at that rare and beautiful sight as we take up our story.

We left Naaman standing on the high bank of the Jordan, a cleansed man. How delighted he is! How lighthearted, how full of joy and excitement he is! He longs to be at home so that he may tell the good news to his friends and relatives. His wife will shed tears of joy; the little captive maid will be the darling of the whole family; the whole city of Damascus will rejoice, and the king, his master, will be as pleased as anyone.

But, as we look again at the Syrian company, we see that, instead of going forward and hurrying towards Damascus, the horses’ heads are turned the other way. They are actually going back towards the land of Israel. What is the matter? Why are they returning? Because Naaman, like the chicken, wants to look up to heaven. He has a grateful heart. He cannot go home, much as he longs to do so, until he has given hearty thanks to the prophet. Thirty miles of rough, uneven road he has crossed since he left Samaria. He will add no less than sixty miles to his already long journey, rather than go home without returning thanks for his cure.

Once more, the grand procession enters the gate of Samaria and drives to the humble home of Elisha. This time the prophet will see him. He had kept himself in the background before that God might have all the glory and that Naaman might see that God’s hand unaided did the cure.

The result was just what Elisha hoped. Naaman was too wise to think either that the water had cured him or that the prophet had cured him. He looked above the muddy waters of the Jordan, above the prophet Elisha, up, higher still, to the God who made them both, that wondrous God of Israel, whose power must be vastly superior to and whose nature must be utterly different from that of his god Rimmon, whose temple he had attended from his childhood. Rimmon had never done anything for him; this God, the great God of Elisha, had completely healed him. He is able to say from the bottom of his heart, “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.”

Yet Naaman, in his deep gratitude, is very anxious to give the prophet a present. The prophet’s God is too high, too great; he can give nothing to Him, but he can reward His servant the prophet. “Now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.” Even as Naaman speaks, the servants are unloading the mules and unpacking and spreading out the ten brilliant robes, sparkling jewels and precious money.

Is Elisha pleased? No; he most solemnly declines to take anything. “As the Lord [Jehovah, the Everlasting One] liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none.” And though he urged him again and again, Elisha held firm to his decision. Not a single robe, not even a jewel, as a remembrance of his Syrian visitor, will the prophet accept.

In what different forms does pride show itself! There is the pride of family, the pride of wealth, the pride which cannot accept one word of blame, and there is also spiritual pride. We are all of us guilty of this sin. Some men and women are too proud to accept a favor. They are anxious to prove that they need no help from others, or, as they put it themselves, that they do not care to be indebted to anyone, and they persistently refuse every effort to give them pleasure or help.

Was it foolish pride of this kind which kept Elisha from accepting the gift? No, that was not the reason, for on other occasions we find Elisha receiving most gratefully what was given to him. When the Shunammite took him into her little chamber on the wall, he thankfully and gladly accepted her kindness. When the man of Baal-shalisha brought him twenty cakes and some of the new corn, he did not bid him pack his present up and take it home. No, he gratefully ate of it and enjoyed it.

Why then could he not accept the present of the Syrian chief? Because he wanted to keep Naaman’s eyes raised to the sky. It was God that had healed him, not the prophet. To God, then, was the gratitude due and to God must the gratitude offering be given.

And what does God require? Not money, not gold, not silver, not costly garments. He can accept none of these. Only one thing, Naaman, does He want of you, and that is yourself. Your body, now restored, must be devoted to Him. Worship Him, and Him alone. And Naaman understood, for his next words were, “Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules’ burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord.”

But why did he want two mules’ burden of earth? Because he believed that each country has its own god, and that god can only be worshipped in his own land; on no other soil, then, except on the soil of Israel, will the God of Israel hear me. I will therefore fill sacks with earth, and I will load two of these mules with it and take it home. Then I will erect upon it an altar to the God of Israel and He will allow me to worship Him and will hear my prayer.

But at once a difficulty arises in his mind. “Thy servant,” he has said, “will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord.” But what about his master, the king? His master, the king, will expect him to go into the temple of Rimmon and bow before the idol. What can he do? He feels, evidently, that he ought not to bow, for he says, “The Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.” He says, “I shall do it out of a spirit of loyalty to my master, but still I feel I ought not to do it. It is not right, and I own that such an act will need pardon from God.”

And Elisha says, “Go in peace.” He will not quench Naaman’s new desire to honor the true God, the God of Israel. Elisha knows that the God who has begun a good work in him will perfect it. The great Teacher will not leave him in the tests that lie ahead. Elisha can safely leave him to God and to his conscience, and so he bids him go in peace.

So Naaman departs. But as the conversation between him and the prophet has been carried on, there has been a listener, Gehazi, the prophet’s servant. He gazed with admiring eyes on the gold, the silver and the costly garments spread on the ground. How he wishes he was in his master’s place! He would not have refused such rich gifts. His heart craves what his master has refused.

Soon he chases after the Syrian chariots and overtakes them. Naaman sees him and stops his chariot to see what he wants. Naaman gets down from his chariot and asks, “Is all well?”

Gehazi tells him that there is nothing wrong. His master is well. “But,” he adds, “the prophet has just had two visitors. After you left, two poor young men arrived from Mount Ephraim. Now, while my master wants nothing for himself, he would be grateful if you would give a little help to these young men. Could you spare them a talent of silver and two changes of raiment?”

Naaman is delighted to be able to help. He gives Gehazi far more than he asked. And Gehazi, the hypocrite, pretended not to want to take it all, for we read that Naaman “urged him.” Then the Syrian captain ordered the gifts packed up and sent two servants back with Gehazi to carry them.

I’m sure Gehazi would have gladly done without those two servants. But he is obliged to take them, and as soon as they come within sight of the hill where Elisha lives he dismisses them, and quietly entering by a back door, he hides his ill-gotten goods in a secret place where he thinks no eye can see them. No one knows, he thinks, no one will know, where he obtained his new clothes and money. So he shakes the dust off his sandals, smooths out his garments and goes in to his master as if nothing had happened.

But he is met with a question. Solemnly, gravely, his master asks, “Whence comest thou, Gehazi?”

The first lie is always the hardest to tell. The path of falsehood is a slippery path. Lie follows lie so easily when once the first lie is told. Gehazi answered, “Thy servant went no whither”; in other words, he said, “I haven’t gone anywhere.” Having already lied to Naaman, he now takes another step downward into untold depths of deceit. God through Elisha was speaking to Gehazi’s conscience, giving him an opportunity to confess what he had done. Instead he adds sin to sin.

“Ah, Gehazi,” says Elisha, “you cannot deceive me. God has allowed me to see you just now. I know where you have been; I followed you every step of the way. I saw the chariot stop; I saw the Syrian get out and turn to meet you; I can tell you all that happened, for my God has showed it to me.”

Imagine Gehazi’s astonishment and terror as his master goes on to tell him, not only what he has done, but what he has thought, as he describes the very daydreams in which he has indulged on his way home. The vineyards he has bought in imagination, the servants he has pictured himself hiring, and his proud plans for the future all were seen — all were exposed.

Oh! Terrible revelation, to be followed by a terrible punishment. “The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed forever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.”

Let us remember that our God is a God who reads the secrets of the heart. Nothing is hidden from Him. He knows each guilty secret, each deed done in darkness. He knows even the evil thoughts of the heart. He sees all, He knows all, and one day He will bring all to light.

Our God is a God of truth. He hates deceit. May we dread the smallest approach to it. May we be open and upright in our smallest actions. May we daily pray, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.”

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 14: God's Mirror (5:5-14)

2 Kings 5:5-14

No one has ever seen his own face, yet everyone knows his own photograph. How can that be? Because, though he has not seen his own face, he has seen the reflection of that face in the mirror.

And, just so, while none of us have seen our own hearts, yet we may get to know our inner selves in the very same way, namely, by looking in the spiritual mirror — the Word of God, the most truthful of all mirrors. Let us hold up before us that spiritual mirror and let us look for our own reflection. Let us pray earnestly that God the Holy Spirit will show us what we are. If we look carefully, and in the spirit of prayer, we cannot fail to recognize ourselves.

We find ourselves, as we take up our story, in the capital city of Israel, Samaria. There is the high hill with the town built on its slopes. There is the broad wall around it and inside are the houses of white brick with rafters of sycamore and the grand stone mansions of the nobles with their roofs of cedar. Towering above all the rest is the splendid palace of King Jehoram.

A feeling of excitement fills the air. Crowds are collected in the streets and on the housetops; the tradesmen leave their shops to see what is going on. Everyone has heard that a party of foreigners has ridden in by the northern gate of the city. It is a very distinguished party — a splendid chariot followed by a troop of soldiers and servants. Followed by many eyes, the strange company passes through the street and makes for the magnificent palace of King Jehoram.

After a little time the report goes through the town that they are Syrians. This news is by no means cheering, for the Syrians, as everyone knows, are their worst enemies. And further inquiry alarms still more the citizens of Samaria. They are told that King Jehoram received a letter, read it and then tore his clothes, which was the greatest sign of sorrow and trouble, and gave his opinion that the letter meant war.

Who has brought the letter? Naaman, the commander-in-chief of the Syrian army. The letter from the king of Syria to Jehoram, king of Israel, ran as follows:

“Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.”

The king of Israel takes this view of the letter: This king of Syria wants to fight. This request is only an excuse. He asks me to do what is impossible, and he knows it. No one can cure a leper. Now I and my nation will be forced, against our will, into another war.

A messenger arrives at the palace gate. It is Gehazi, the servant of Elisha. He brings a message from his master. He bids him send the great Syrian to him.

“Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

The king most thankfully takes advantage of this opportunity of getting rid of the haughty Syrian warrior. Now, to his great relief, the procession moves away and goes towards the humble dwelling of the prophet.

So Naaman comes with his horses and with his chariots and stands at the door of the house of Elisha. No doubt he expects the prophet to come and respectfully greet him, for he is a great man. Perhaps he will offer up some long prayers, wave his hands over him and work a miraculous cure. Then Naaman will pay him well for his work. His servants will unload the mules with their load of gold and silver and garments. The prophet will be well paid and Naaman will be honored for his generosity.

And what happened? No prophet appeared. Naaman did not even see this man of whom he had heard so much. He only saw the prophet’s servant, who told him that his master had sent a message, bidding him drive to the Jordan River and dip seven times in its waters, promising that, if he did so, his leprosy would leave him.

The great and mighty Naaman condescends to come to the door of the humble Elisha, the poor prophet, and, instead of being invited in, the prophet just sends the message: “Go and wash in Jordan seven times.”

And what good can washing do him? No amount of water can remove disease, and, above all, such a terrible disease as leprosy. Wash where? In the Jordan River? That miserable little river which he had passed on his way to Samaria. It was just a muddy, insignificant stream, not to be even compared with the two clear rivers of Damascus, the beautiful Abana and Pharpar.

Yet he is bidden to dip seven times in the muddy waters of the Jordan. Surely the prophet is only mocking and insulting him. So in a great rage he throws himself back in his chariot and bids his servant drive on.

Did not Naaman want to be healed? Of course he did. He wanted it so much that he had brought thousands of dollars in gold, silver and clothes to pay for a cure. But take off his splendid robes to wade into that muddy water and then to put himself seven times under it? He feels it is quite beneath his dignity to think of such a thing. He imagines that the prophet must be trying to make a laughing-stock of him to the people of Israel.

So Naaman’s horses’ heads are turned homeward. But in order to reach Damascus, the Jordan must again be forded, and, as they draw near the despised river, Naaman’s servants venture to speak. They strive to persuade him to do what the prophet said. There could surely be no harm in making the attempt. To their great joy their master yields to their persuasions.

He obeys the prophet’s instructions. He enters the river. He dips once, twice. Seven times he goes under. Now he comes up for the seventh time. Has anything changed? Or is he still covered with his spots and sores?

Look, see how altered he is! He enters the water a poor leper, covered with a horrible disease, sickening and loathsome to look upon. He stands before his servants a new man, without a particle of disease, with flesh firmer and fairer than their own, for his flesh came again like the flesh of a little child.

Yes, Naaman obeys. He washes in the Jordan, and he is cleansed.

And now, as you read the story, have you looked in the mirror? If you have done so, you will have seen one of four images of your heart reflected back at you. In which of the four have you recognized your own reflection?

One image is the image of the leper — a person with the incurable disease still upon him. Is that you? Can that be you? Have you a disease, the incurable disease called sin eating away the very life of your soul? Oh, how like leprosy is that disease!

We look at our little infants, so pure and innocent they seem, but they inherit the disease of sin. In a very short time, the naughty tempers and acts of rebellion prove only too clearly that they are sinners, even as their parents were before them.

Sin, like leprosy, is loathsome and horrible in its effects on the one who suffers from it. No one wants to gaze at a leper, so revolting and painful is the sight. And God feels just the same as He looks upon the sinner. The sight is just as horrible to His holy eyes. The man covered with sin is to Him a painful object, a sight which He cannot bear to behold.

Sin, like leprosy, is utterly incurable except by God; only divine power can restore him to health. And it is God, and God alone, who can heal the disease of sin. Man can do nothing in the matter; it is utterly and entirely beyond his power. If that disease is ever to be cured, it must be by the hand of God.

That disease is yours; it is mine. We inherit our sinful nature from our parents. There never was a time when we were free from it. We may try to cover it up by religious observances or by acts of charity just as Naaman covered his spots with his splendid armor and his magnificent robes. But still, under all this and clearly seen by the eye of God, there is the plague of sin.

Who can deny that this is true? Then, if you have never been cured, if the spots remain upon you, when God calls you suddenly and unexpectedly out of this world, you would have to cry, in spite of all your moral behavior or religious profession, “Unclean, unclean.” There would be no heaven for you, for those inside its gates are without spot before the throne of God. The holy God cannot look on sin, and one single spot of the disease of sin is quite sufficient to keep any man out of heaven.

Is that your picture in the mirror — the picture of a leper unwashed, uncleansed, covered with the loathsome disease of sin?

See, another face appears in the mirror. It is the face of the one who wants to be cleansed. It is Naaman, with just one desire, one yearning in his heart, and that is to lose his leprosy. Oh, whose face is here? Would to God it might be the face of one who is reading this book! Is this your cry, “My sin, my sin, what shall I do with my sin? Oh, that I knew it was forgiven, and oh, that I could get rid of it. If I could only be certain that I was cleansed”? Thank God, if that face is yours, for to feel sin and your need of Him is the very first step towards obtaining the Great Physician’s help. It is all the fitness He requires. He has waited for you many a day, He is waiting for you still, and He waits that He may be gracious.

A third face is appearing in the mirror; look at it! It is the man who wants to be cleansed, but who goes about it in the wrong way. It is the man who comes in the wrong spirit to the Great Healer. It is Naaman, willing to pay thousands of dollars for his cure, but unwilling to follow the prophet’s instructions to simply wash and be clean. Is that your picture? You want to be forgiven, you hope to be forgiven, but you are going to get it done in your own way. You will do something to deserve God’s favor and to make Him forgive you. You will pray, read your Bible, attend services, do good works, and then, having done what you consider your part, expect God to heal you.

Will your plan work? No, it will be a dead failure. If Naaman had left all his money on Elisha’s doorstep, it would not have healed a single spot. And if you are ever to be saved, you must be saved in God’s own way, and that is just what you are unwilling to do.

Suppose an angel appeared to you and told you that if only you were willing to give $50 to some charity, you should go to heaven, you would do it immediately. Or, if he told you to attend every service and every prayer meeting for a year or two and then you could be sure of heaven, I feel sure that nothing would keep you away.

Yes, you want to be cleansed, you long earnestly for it, but you are not willing to take the simple remedy of the Great Physician. If He had bidden you do some great thing, undoubtedly you would have done it, but because the way is easy and the cure is without money and without price, you turn your back on it.

But, thank God, a fourth and last picture appears on the mirror, the picture of the cleansed leper. Is that your likeness? Can you say, Once I was full of sin, covered with leprosy, but now I am washed — made clean — by God’s own remedy for sin?

Does any anxious soul say, “Oh, I want that to be my picture! Tell me, how did you obtain that soul cleansing? Tell me very simply and very clearly, that I may obtain it too.”

Is that the cry of your heart? Then listen. We who have been made clean paid nothing for our cleansing. We did nothing to earn it. We simply followed Naaman’s example. The man of God told Naaman, “Go and wash in Jordan ... and thou shalt be clean.” Naaman took the man of God at his word, and the result was he was made clean.

And that is all we did. There was the word of the man of God: “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” We took that word, we trusted it and we acted upon it. Jesus Christ, God’s Son, was our Jordan. His atoning blood was the cleansing flood to our souls, and we were cleansed from all sin. Do you long to be saved from sin? Go and do likewise. Let that little prayer be the cry of your heart: “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow”!

Will He hear your prayer? Will He answer it? I know He will. Only go to Him today, and even today He will cleanse you. Do you say, like Naaman, “It is too simple; it is not the way I would have chosen”? Never mind that. It is His way, and it is the only way. Take it, try it, and never rest until you can say, “The blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son has cleansed me from all sin.”

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 13: The Ancient City (5:14)

2 Kings 5:1-4

How puzzling and bewildering it is when people have the same name! It is not only puzzling when the names are exactly the same, but it is also confusing when they are very similar. For instance, how often do we make mistakes in recalling the history of Jehoiakin and Jehoiachin or of Elijah and Elisha! The very same difficulty applies to the names of places. Some of these are so much alike that it is difficult to distinguish

clearly between them when we read of them in history.

Take, for example, two countries often mentioned in the Bible, two countries that are constantly cropping up as we read the history of the Jews — Syria and Assyria. How many Bible readers confound the two and even think of them as being names for the same place. And yet, as a matter of fact, they were utterly distinct countries, having different capitals, being ruled over by different kings, and lying no less than 450 miles apart from each other.

Syria lay due north of Palestine, among the mountains of Lebanon; its capital was Damascus. Assyria lay far away to the east; its capital was first Nineveh on the Tigris River and afterwards Babylon on the Euphrates River.

The ancient city of Damascus, the capital of Syria, was one of the loveliest spots in the world when Elijah and Elisha were living. At the gate of this old city, which dates back to the days of Abraham and which was at least eleven hundred years old even in Elisha's time, we see a band of horsemen, riding on richly decorated horses, well armed and thoroughly equipped for fighting.

Where are they going? They are setting forth to make a raid into the land of Israel. The Syrians and the Israelites are sworn enemies. There was constant war, ceaseless strife and incessant trouble between the two nations. These Syrian horsemen would ride swiftly over the border, burst suddenly upon some quiet Israelite village, and bring destruction wherever they went. Then they would swiftly return into their own country, bearing with them whatever spoil they had been able to lay hands on.

Among the hills in the kingdom of Israel lies a little peaceful village. How quiet are the country sounds that rise from it as we look down upon it! The lowing of cattle, the songs of the birds and the voices of children at play are the only sounds that fall upon our ear.

Over the hilltop comes a gleam of weapons, a cloud of dust and the glitter of helmets. It is the band of Syrian horsemen. They break in upon the peaceful scene and spoil it all. They trample underfoot the fields and neat gardens; they cut down and carry off the crops; they kill the chickens and the goats; they drive before them the cows and the sheep; they go into the houses and turn out the chests and shelves. The poor frightened people cower before them.

But now comes the worst part of all. As they prepare to leave, their leader spies a young girl. He bids his men to seize her, and they carry her off. She will become a slave girl for his wife. They put her on a mule and carry her swiftly off, away from her father and mother and home, away from everything she knows and from everyone she loves. Poor, friendless, desolate child!

She has a long ride in the hot sun before the ancient city, Damascus, comes in sight. What a lovely place it is: a pearl among emeralds, as it has been well described — white houses, towers and walls, surrounded by lovely green gardens! Oh, what gardens those are! The Israelite girl has seen none like them in her own country. The air is scented with the roses that abound in them; the fruit of countless trees overhangs the wayside. But surely the poor child can hardly look at any of these beauties, so sore and desolate is her heart.

At last they reach the old gateway of the city, and now she notices the respect shown by everyone to her master, the leader of the band of soldiers. He is evidently a great man in Damascus. Crowds come out to welcome him. The king himself praises him for his bravery, and the people bow in respect as he rides through the streets.

The child is at her journey's end at last. They stop before a grand house. She has never seen such a mansion before. There is a large courtyard, filled with pots in which grow lemons, oranges, all manner of lovely plants and a cool, refreshing fountain in the center. Everything that money can buy, everything that the skill of those days can make — everything is there in abundance.

And her mistress, before whom she is brought, is a grander lady than any she has seen before. She is dressed in all the splendor of the East — the brightest silks, the most costly jewels and the most expensive adornments.

Picture, if you can, the captive child's life when she first arrives in that strange place. She cannot understand a word that is said. Crowds of servants with strange faces and strange voices pass in all directions. There is nothing familiar in her surroundings. Worst of all, there is no one who worships her God, Jehovah, the God of Israel.

The people in that great house and in that ancient city are heathen. Rimmon is the god who is worshipped in Damascus. A large temple, built in his honor, stands in the principal street, and there, from time to time, she sees her master go in company with the king to bow down before the idol.

Here, then, is this Israelite girl, the only worshipper of God in that great city. Will she be faithful? Will she, child as she is, forget the past and fall into the heathen ways of those around her? She has no one to help her, no one to give her even a word of encouragement or a reminder. Will the child forget all her parents have taught her and learn to follow the heathen customs and practices of her new home?

Does she do so? No; the little maid remains faithful. She dries her eyes and sets to work to do her duty in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call her. She evidently wins the love of her mistress and the respect of her fellow servants.

Months pass by, and then trouble comes to the great house in Damascus. The master is smitten with the most horrible disease a man can have. It would be hushed up for a time. But at last the terrible news is spread. The master has the dread disease of leprosy. White spots and blotches are appearing on different parts of his body. Everyone knows what will follow: As time goes on, the disease will grow worse and worse until his whole body will become a rotten mass. Even his nearest and dearest friends will not want to get near him.

What a gloom has come over the house. No company is entertained in the beautiful rooms; no visitors are received; all is quiet and silent. The servants step softly, as if there had been a death in the place.

But the little maid's mind is busy. Before she was taken as a slave, she heard her mother tell of the great Elisha, the prophet of her country, and of all the wonders he has done by the power of God. Did he not divide the Jordan and make a path through its rushing waters? Did he not

make the poisonous spring at Jericho wholesome? Did he not raise to life the Shunammite's dead son? Did he not cause the poisonous soup to become wholesome and make twenty cakes enough for one hundred men? Surely he could do something for the master.

The Syrian doctors can come to see him, they can charge him for their examinations, but they can do nothing for him.

One day the little maid can hold silence no longer. She can talk the Syrian language now, and as she waits on her mistress and sees her tear-stained face, she can no longer hide the earnest longing of her heart. "Oh!" she cries, "how I wish my master could go to see the prophet in Samaria; he could cure him of his leprosy — I know he could."

Another servant heard the remark made and evidently thought it was worth repeating to his master. He may have been Naaman's personal attendant who saw his suffering when no other eyes were watching. The servant repeats the words which he has heard the child say. She says — this Israelitish maid — that she knows a man, a prophet in her own country, who by the power of his God can do wonders and would be able, doubtless, to cure even the leprous.

Poor man. He will go anywhere, even to the world's end, in order to get relief. He must hear more of this and of what the little maid has said about her prophet and her prophet's God. Her words are a ray of light shining on his dark soul.

Small, insignificant and ignorant though she was, the young girl kindled fresh hope in his heart, and she led his thoughts towards a God of whom he had hitherto known nothing. What a flood of light was presently to burst in on Naaman's heart through that child's influence; what a blessing the little captive maid was to be to the whole household!

"Let your light so shine before men," even as this little captive maid's shone. Be faithful to your God, wherever you are and in whatever company. She was alone in a heathen land, yet she did not forget the God she served. And never say you are unable to do anything for your Lord. You may only be a small light, yet by God's grace you may shine light upon this dark world, heavenly sunshine which shall cheer and comfort hearts that are in darkness.

"The whole world lieth in wickedness," said John the Apostle, and how terribly then it needs those who will let God's own light shine upon it.

Surely the little maid teaches us one very important lesson in our work for God. If we would be really useful, we must have confidence in God's power, a firm belief in the One in whom we profess to trust. It has been well said that nothing is so convincing to others as a strong conviction. That child knew God could help; she was strong in her own belief. The servants might smile at the idea, the noblemen of Damascus might ridicule it, the king might pronounce it absurd, but the little maid carried the day. Master, mistress, servants, king and court are convinced at last, and her master actually makes up his mind to go to Samaria.

Let us be firm in our own mind; let us be able to say, "I know whom I have believed," and we shall find that others will feel the influence of our conviction.

William Hone, the infidel who scorned the Word of God, was converted to God in a very remarkable way. As he was riding in the country one hot summer's day, he stopped at the gate of a cottage to ask for a drink of water. Under a tree was seated a little girl, reading so intently a book that lay on her knee that at first she did not hear him when he called to her. He asked her to tell him what book she was reading.

"It is the Bible, sir," said the child.

"The Bible!" he repeated scornfully. "I suppose you are learning your lesson for school?"

"No, sir," said the little girl, "I have no lesson to learn."

"Then why," he asked, "do you leave your play this beautiful day to read the Bible?"

"Because I love it, sir," said the child simply.

Hone, the infidel, rode on, but he could not forget the words of that little girl. She was the little light which let in a flood of light on his soul. "She says she loves the Bible. There must be something in it which I have never seen in it. I will read it once through carefully that I may find out what that child can find to love in it." That reading of the Word was blessed by God to Hone's conversion, and he became a devoted follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let each of us then pray earnestly:

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 12: A Time of Famine (4:38-44)

2 Kings 4:38-44

A time of famine. Most of us have not lived through a famine, but we have read terrible accounts of famines in other countries. We have heard of whole villages, whole towns, dying of starvation. We have seen pictures of men, women and children reduced to skin and bones, dying from famine.

Famines in Eastern countries have been common occurrences. It is easy to see the reason for this. The whole fertility of the country, in so many places in the East, depends on the rainfall; if therefore the rain does not come, a famine must follow.

Palestine is, and always has been, dependent on the rainfall. There is no river in Palestine except the Jordan, and, being in a deep hollow, it has been little used for fertilizing the land. It is the rain, and the rain alone, which is counted upon to fill the streams and wells and to make the ground fit for the crops, and, consequently, if the rain does not fall in sufficient quantities, famine comes.

We read of famines in the time of Abraham, in the time of Isaac, in the time of Joseph, in the time of Ruth, in the time of David and in the time of Elijah, and we have now come to a famine in the days of Elisha.

We are told that there was a dearth in the land. The ground was parched and cracked, the flowers withered, the streams dry, the wells empty, and bread terribly scarce. Elisha is in Gilgal, where there was a school of the prophets, a college like the ones in Jericho and Bethel and which had been started in the days of Samuel. The prophets went about from school to school, instructing the young men. Elijah had been accustomed to travel from Jericho to Bethel and from Bethel to Gilgal, and now Elisha follows in his footsteps.

It is his day at Gilgal. Famine or no famine, he must continue with his work, though it is hard work teaching when the stomach is empty and the body weak. It is hard work learning also under these circumstances, and as Elisha teaches, seated on a high stool, and as the sons of the prophets listen, sitting on mats at his feet, just as teacher and scholars still sit in the East, he notices how white and exhausted they look.

Elisha is touched by their suffering. How can they learn when they are so hungry? “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” It is useless to expect them to profit from his instructions while they are feeling faint and ill. He stops his teaching and prepares to provide for their needs.

What a lovely picture of Jesus, our great Elisha, always pitiful, always tender, ever ready to be touched even by bodily necessities! Can you not hear Him saying to the apostles, as He looks with compassionate eyes on the hungry crowd which has listened to Him all day, “If I send them away fasting to their own houses they will faint by the way.” Therefore, He fed them.

And the Christ changes not. He is “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” “He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.” He feels for us in all the weakness and weariness of the flesh. He knows that the body drags us down and hinders us in our attempts at prayer and service. He understands how often the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Let us remember for our comfort that He is no hard Master but is a loving, pitiful Lord. And in our weary moments let us turn to Him and let us feel assured of His gentle care, His constant sympathy and His ever-ready help.

Elisha calls his servant Gehazi and bids him at once prepare a meal for the hungry students. “Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets.” What is there to put in the soup? Not much of anything, but in soup a little goes a long way.

The fire is made on the ground; the kettle is slung across it, and all the scraps that can be found are thrown into it. Elisha brings out the whole of his little store, and the pot is filled with water. The sons of the prophets would only be too glad to help in getting the meal ready. Some would gather dry sticks for the fire. One would stir the broth with a long wooden spoon, while another goes out into the fields to gather any wild herbs that have not been scorched to death by the sun that he may throw them in the soup to add flavor.

One man comes in from the fields carrying some bright green leaves — a wild vine, he calls it. It has gourds of fruit on it about the size of an orange. The man evidently thinks he has made an uncommonly good discovery, and with great joy he shreds the yellow fruit with his knife and throws the pieces into the steaming soup.

Now the bowls must be filled with the steaming soup. It is ladled out, and the hungry young men gladly begin to eat. But the gladness is soon changed into sorrow. They are seized with pain and sickness; evidently there is something wrong with the soup. A cry of distress goes up: “O thou man of God, there is death in the pot”!

Yes, the gourds were a mistake after all; instead of adding to the value of the soup, they spoil it all. They were the fruit of the colocynth, a poisonous plant, which is not fit to be eaten or even tasted.

That young man was very earnest and very willing with very good intentions, but still he did serious harm. He intended to help make good broth. He thought he was gathering the right sort of herb, but in spite of that he nearly poisoned his companions, the prophet and himself.

We often hear that a certain preacher or teacher is thoroughly sincere and earnest, and the conclusion which is drawn from such a statement is that therefore his doctrine must be correct and his statements the truth of God. But surely that is a wrong conclusion, for a sincere man and an earnest man may, like the young man with the gourds, be doing great harm.

Let us bring all teaching to the test of God’s Word. Let us see to it that there are no wild gourds of error in the pot — no poisonous, false doctrines mingled with the teaching to which we listen, for of many an earnest, impressive sermon the cry may be raised, “O thou man of God, there is death in the pot.” There is much that is good, wholesome and profitable, but a little error, a small quantity of poison, spoils all. Thus, in spite of the intention of the preacher or teacher, souls are hindered and not helped. The pure milk of the Word is adulterated and made harmful. Let us then remember our Lord’s solemn warning: “Take heed what ye hear.”

Did you ever notice how God’s help and God’s deliverance often come at the very moment of extremity? When man can do absolutely nothing, God steps in. When they had no wine, when the wine jars were drained to the very last drop, the Lord Jesus came to the rescue and made more. When Abraham’s knife was actually raised to slay his son, then, and not till then, the angel of God cried to him from heaven. Not when the Israelites stood on the very brink of Jordan, but only when the priests who led the way actually put their feet in the water did the path open for them to cross over.

So, when the soup was made, when the bowls were filled, and when the effect of the poison was beginning to be felt, then comes God’s moment to help. He steps in and delivers them. As soon as the cry of distress went up, it was heard and answered.

It is interesting to notice not only when the help came, but how it came. Elisha did not speak to the soup and say to it, “Be wholesome; be free from poison.” No, he bade the sons of the prophets do their part of the work. He said to the young men, “Bring meal.”

God often uses man in doing His work. The servants at the wedding must fill the waterpots with water; those standing by the grave must roll away the stone for Lazarus; Moses must stretch his hand over the Red Sea. God could have done without man’s aid. The waterpots might have been found full of wine; Lazarus could have been raised without human hands touching the stone; the sea could have been divided without Moses’s rod.

But God has chosen to use us to work for Him. It is when we are ready to do His will that He works through us and by us. God will have no drones in His hive. He trains all His children to be busy. He does not need their help. He can act quite as well without them; yet, for their own sakes, He gives them a share in the work and encourages them to do what they can to help forward the end He has in view.

The meal is brought. It is cast into the pot; a fresh supply is served out, and the last is better than the first; it is wholesome, healing and nutritious.

Of what is the meal an emblem? Is it not a picture of the pure Word of God — the bread of life, the food of hungry souls? There is no poison in the Word; no error is to be found in its pages; all it teaches is healthful, life-giving and true.

That was not the last meal that Elisha and the students had together. Soon after this, a visitor arrived at Gilgal. He had traveled a long distance from Baal-shalisha, a village to the west of Bethel. The traveler is a friend of Elisha — a man who has great love for the prophet and who has evidently been concerned about him in the time of famine.

He has come with a present — twenty beautiful cakes, made of the new corn. The very first part of his field that had ripened, on the sunniest spot, where the ears had been golden while the rest of the field was green — there this man had reaped. He had grown the corn and baked these cakes as an offering for the prophet: bread of the firstfruits of the barley. Then, fearing that if he made more bread, it would become dry before Elisha could eat it, he brought corn in the ear, so the prophet could make more when the twenty cakes were finished.

What a proof we have here of the truth of our Lord’s words: “Give, and it shall be given unto you”! Elisha had given all he had to the sons of the prophets; now he meets with kindness in return. And surely it is ever so. “The liberal soul shall be made fat.” Generous people meet with generosity, kindly people with kindliness. On the other hand, grudging, selfish people meet with the same treatment from others. “With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

What will Elisha do with his present? What a boon it will be! Surely he will go to his own box, lock it up, and bring out loaf after loaf for himself and for Gehazi. That is how some would have acted, but not Elisha. He bids them prepare a great feast, so that everyone shall partake of the nourishing food. Everyone is invited; not one is to be left out.

“Why,” says Gehazi, looking at the twenty cakes, “shall I set this small supply before one hundred men, and they hungry and famishing? If five men divide one small cake among them, each will get a mere mouthful.”

But Elisha says again, “Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof.”

Was it not the foreshadowing of a far greater miracle? Can we not see the five thousand men sitting in rows on the green grass? Can we not hear the voice of the Lord Jesus, uttering the very same words as Elisha: “Give ye them to eat”? “And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.”

One hundred men were fed by Elisha — five thousand by Christ. One loaf supplied the needs of five men at Gilgal; one loaf was sufficient for one thousand at Bethsaida. Only a little was left at Elisha’s feast; twelve baskets full were collected by the apostles after the supper on the grass. Yet, still, Elisha’s miracle was a sample of grand and glorious things to come.

As we leave the happy party at Gilgal feasting on Elisha’s store, surely we cannot help feeling what a lovely thing unselfishness is, and yet how rare a plant it is in the soil of this world. In how few hearts does it bloom and bring forth fruit; how few homes are filled with its sweet fragrance!

On the other hand, how many hearts and homes are made miserable by the spirit of selfishness. Oh, for grace to follow Elisha in the cultivation of the lovely plant of unselfishness. Oh, to follow a greater than Elisha — Christ Jesus — for in every footstep of His we see the mark of the spirit of self-sacrifice. Of every action of His life we may say truly, “Even Christ pleased not Himself.”

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men” — while we have time, and how long will that be? Who can tell? It may be that the Lord, who alone knows the number of our days, may see that their number is becoming very small.

Let us, then, take each day from His hands and use that day as may best please Him. While we have time, let us live for Christ. In all the tiny details of our everyday life let us strive to please Him. Above all, let us pray that the lovely plant — unselfishness — may grow and blossom in our hearts, so that of us, as of our Master, it may be said that he “pleased not himself.”

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 11: Sorrow in the Valley (4:18-37)

What a difference a child makes in the home. “Always something needs fixing, little mouths need feeding, clothes getting too small and needing replacing. And everything takes money,” says the hard-worked father. “Dirty footmarks on the clean steps, black fingermarks on the walls, washing, cleaning, mending and cooking from morning till night,” says the tired mother.

“Schooling to be paid for, increased doctor bills, dentist bills, food bills,” groans the anxious father, as he compares his bankbook with that of his childless neighbor. A never-ending round of busy days with no peace or quiet or repose, from early morning till late at night, sometimes sighs the weary mother, as she thinks of her family cares.

Never mind, you would not be without them! You know that. What would the house be without their merry voices? What would your life be if the little bits of sunshine left it?

The lady of Shunem thought she had enjoyed a happy life before, but she found it very different after the child came. There was more work, certainly, more noise undoubtedly, less order and neatness in the great house, but the mother’s love made up for it all. And as the child grew, he became more and more dear, an increasing joy to the heart.

Can you picture the welcome Elisha would receive when he visited Shunem? What a cheer that child must have been to the childless prophet! The little feet would run to meet the holy man of God; the little hand would be slipped into his as they climbed the hill towards the great house, and the child would sit on his knee and listen with wondering eyes fixed upon him, as the great prophet spoke of the love of Jehovah God.

Suddenly one day a great change came to the house at Shunem. Oh! These days of earth, how uncertain they are! “Boast not thyself,” says the wise man, “of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” We know not how soon it may be true of us, as it was true of the Shunammite. Perhaps it may come to us as suddenly, as unexpectedly, as it came to her. Who knows what is coming? We do not know, and we do not wish to know. Only One knows, but He does know, He is all wise, all love and all tenderness, and we can trust Him.

The morning began as an ordinary day. It was harvesttime at Shunem. The flowers on the hillside were faded and dead. There was not a cyclamen or a scarlet anemone or a purple crocus to be seen; the hot Eastern sun had laid them all low. Not a breath of air was stirring, and not a cloud was in the sky.

The Shunammite’s son, the little boy of promise, went out to his father to see the reapers gathering in the corn. With that small hand locked in his, the father went about from one field to another, giving directions to his men and superintending their work in the harvest field. The child watched his every movement and listened to his every word. But suddenly, the grasp of the little hand slackened, the hand went up to the head, and a pitiful cry came from the child’s lips.

“And he said unto his father, My head, my head!” His father said to the servant who had care of the boy, “Carry him to his mother.” So he carried him home to his mother, while the father, thinking it was only a headache due to the intense heat, continued his work in the field.

But the hot sun had struck another flower, the fairest flower of all; it had struck and laid it low. He sat on her knees till noon, and then, in the very hottest part of that hot day, the child died.

Yes, the child of promise is taken away, and the mother has to watch that life ebbing away which had been so dear to her. What does she do? Does she rush out into the fields and call her husband? No; see her climb the stairs with that little lifeless form in her arms.

Where is she going? To the chamber on the wall — the prophet’s chamber. There, on the prophet’s bed, she lays the body of her child, and having done this, she leaves it and shuts the door. How awfully still the house seems as she goes downstairs again! She hears no merry laugh, no sound of little feet, no happy childish voice — all is hushed and silent.

The lady of Shunem goes out down the hill into the valley below where her husband is still busy in the harvest field. How will she break to him the sad news? She does not say a single word about it. Instead she says, “Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again.” She wants one of the young men and one of the donkeys that she may ride to Carmel to see the prophet.

She has great faith in the prophet’s power to help. Surely, surely that gift he had been so pleased to give her would not thus be taken from her. She will go and tell him of her heavy trouble.

Perhaps she heard him tell how God had used his master Elijah to revive a widow’s boy who had died. He had told how Elijah, weary and hungry, had been welcomed into a poor widow’s house in the land of Tyre and had stayed with her during the time of famine. Then he had told how, sometime afterwards, her only boy had died, but in answer to Elijah’s prayer, the soul of the child had come into him again, and he had revived. And where had Elijah laid the widow’s son? On his own bed in the loft where he slept. So, she would lay her little one on the prophet’s bed in the little chamber on the wall.

Elijah was gone, it was true, but what the God of Elijah, the great and good God, had done through one servant He could do through another.

The husband is surprised at her request. It is harvesttime, the busiest time in all the year, and she wants a donkey and a servant to go on a journey — and this at twelve o’clock, the very hottest time of all the hot Eastern day.

So he asks her, “Wherefore wilt thou go to him today? it is neither new moon, nor Sabbath.”

On the Sabbath and on the first of every month the prophet had a service. Silver trumpets were blown and the people came together to hear the Word of God. And though Carmel, where these services were held, was twelve miles away, the Shunammite was evidently in the habit of attending them. She did not think twelve miles too far to go to get food for her soul.

Do we have the same thirst and make the same effort to hear the Word of God? Some let weeks go by and never take the trouble to provide their souls with a single meal; they never seize any opportunity of hearing the Word of God. And for what trivial reasons do we sometimes stay away? A rainy day or a windy day, a little heat or a little snow, or a slight headache is too often made use of as an excuse for staying at home. Surely the lady of Shunem, beneath the intense heat of an Eastern sky, traveling no less than twenty-four miles on a donkey in order to attend a single service, puts many of us to shame. “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”

But today no service is going on, so her husband cannot understand why, in the heat and at harvesttime, she must needs travel to Carmel. But she answers him, “It shall be well.” In other words, “Peace, it is all right.” The Shunammite was one of those wives in whom the heart of her husband could safely trust, so he asks no more questions, but lets her go.

She rides on the donkey, and a servant runs by her side in Eastern fashion. Oh, how anxious she is to get there! If no help comes before evening, her child must be buried out of her sight. There is no time to be lost, and it is a long, hot ride to Carmel. She urges her servant to make haste. “Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee.” That is, “Do not hold the donkey in; urge him on.” Surely the road is longer than ever today, each mile appears to be lengthened into two, and it seems as if Carmel will never come into sight.

At last Carmel comes in sight. Elisha has a house on the side of the mountain, and looking out of his window, he can see all across the fertile Plain of Esdraelon, which stretches from the Mediterranean to the Jordan. As he gazes out over the plain, he notices two figures coming through the cornfields and crossing an ancient river, the river Kishon, which flows through the plain. Who are they? One is riding and the other is running by the side of the donkey.

Elisha recognizes her, and he says to Gehazi his servant, “Behold, yonder is that Shunammite.” Does it seem to our ears a strange way in which to speak of her? It is not strange in the East, for there everyone is called by his nationality or his occupation or by some peculiarity in his appearance. You hear such names constantly: Max Ungar or Max of Hungary, Mustapha the Turk, Abraham the lame, and the Armenian.

Elisha seems surprised to see her at such a time, and at once he sends Gehazi to meet her and to enquire: “Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?”

He goes to meet her and enquires. She answers, “It is well.” Yes, to the eye of sense all things were against her; all was ill, not well. Her son, her only child, was dead; her husband and she were again childless. Yet still faith enables her to say, “It is well.”

“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” It is well — He is too wise to err, too good to be unkind. It was not what she would have chosen, but as God had chosen it, it must be well.

But this was not all; her faith went further than this. God had promised her that son. God had given him to her. Surely He meant the child to be for her joy and not for her deepest distress by his death. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. She felt this; she grasped it thoroughly, and so she said, “It is well,” and hastened on to the prophet.

Then, seeing Elisha, she ran forward and fell at his feet. The poor mother’s whole soul was, in her agony, yearning and craving for help.

In later days women came around the Lord Jesus and brought their children to be blessed by Him. But the apostles tried to drive them away, saying roughly to them, “Trouble not the Master.” So now Gehazi comes near to thrust the poor Shunammite away. But Elisha, like the tender, gentle Saviour of whom he was a type, has compassion for the mother’s love.

“Let her alone,” he says, “for her soul is vexed within her: and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.”

Then she appeals to him: “Did I desire a son of my lord?” I never asked for this child; he was freely given me of the Lord, yet now — . She had no need to say more; Elisha understood.

Gehazi is sent off at once. He is bidden to lose no time on the way. But the mother clings to the prophet. Women often see into character more quickly than men, and perhaps, with her woman’s discernment, she saw through Gehazi, the hypocrite, sooner than his good master did.

So they two go on together, while in front Gehazi hurries into the chamber on the wall and lays his staff on the dead child. But it is quite useless; the boy is as cold and still and motionless as before.

So Gehazi comes back to meet them and says, “The child is not awaked.” The mother expected little or nothing from Gehazi, so she is not disappointed, but she clings the closer to Elisha for comfort and support.

At length they reach the house, and Elisha goes up to the chamber on the wall. He enters it, shuts the door and prays unto the Lord. It was not the first time he had done that in that very room. Often had he entered into his room, shut his door and prayed to his God in secret.

But Elisha could do nothing by his own power. He must cry, and cry earnestly, for help. Elisha cannot call the dead to life, as the Lord Christ did. He, the Son of God, spake as one having authority, as one who had life in Himself. He had no need of staff or rod; there was no lying on the dead body, no restless walking to and fro; no prayer was needed, for He Himself was the Life-giver.

Elisha’s cry to the Lord was not in vain. “The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.”

Then Gehazi is sent for the mother. Oh, how anxiously is she watching below. With what terrible earnestness she must have gazed into the prophet’s face as he walked back and forth in the house, afraid by word or look or motion to disturb him! But her faith is rewarded, and the day of sorrow ends in a night of joy.

Is it well with you? It is well. Yes, if you are His, it is well even though you may be passing through deep waters, for the Lord is there. The Lord of life, the Lord of power, the Lord of all comfort is with you. You love Him, and you trust Him, and you know that all things work together for good to them that love God. Therefore, it is well — it must be well.

Is it well with the child? There are some to whom this question comes as it cannot come to others. It is easy to say it is well with the child when that child is in the earthly home sheltered by the parents' care. It needs no faith then to say, "It is well."

But has the Lord taken your child away from the home nest? Can you see him no more? Is he gone to the land that is very far off? Then it does need faith, a strong faith, to say, "It is well with the child." Yet if we could only see — if we could only for one brief moment gaze through the gate of paradise and catch but a passing glimpse of the glory within, it would surely not be difficult to answer through our tears, "It is well with the child."

And the day is coming — it may be nearer than we think — when we shall not look from without upon the fair vistas of the Father's garden, but when we ourselves shall pass within, into the joy and the sunshine, of which the brightness of earth is but a dim, uncertain picture. Then indeed we shall sing together, "It is well." Meanwhile, let us trust and not be afraid.

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 10: A Myrtle Still (4:8-17)

2 Kings 4:8-17

"A myrtle in the desert will be a myrtle still." So runs the old Jewish proverb. What does it mean? It means this, that a man's character is the same, whatever his surroundings may be. Sweet myrtle can only be sweet myrtle, regardless of the soil it grows in. The God-fearing man, even when he is surrounded by nothing that is helpful to godliness, will still be a God-fearing man. Wherever he dwells, in whatever company he is found, he will be a myrtle still; all shall know that he is indeed a servant of God.

Elisha, the prophet, was a myrtle tree; his surroundings did not alter him. We have seen him the companion of the old prophet Elijah; we have also seen him surrounded by the young sons of the prophets. We have heard him addressing the three rich kings, and we have also noticed his words to the poor widow. But wherever we have seen him, we have found him acting as a true man of God, God's myrtle tree, shedding a holy sweetness on all around.

We are now to see Elisha out visiting, and we shall find him at meals what we have found him elsewhere, a holy man of God. Look at him; he is on a journey, staff in hand. By his side walks a young man who waits upon him, as he waited upon Elijah. The young man's name is Gehazi, and he is known to all as the servant who pours water on the hands of Elisha.

Elisha and Gehazi walk across a fertile plain called the Plain of Esdraelon. Grain fields are on each side of the path. Wild flowers line the edge of the road, for it is the time of spring. On their left is a conical hill, Mount Tabor, a well-known hill in Jewish history. As they pass it, surely Elisha will remember the wonderful battle which took place on that very spot when Deborah and Barak assembled their forces on Mount Tabor and came down to fight upon the very plain that he and his servant were crossing.

Then, as the two men look ahead, they see Jezreel, standing on the spur of the mountains of Gilboa. In that fashionable city still lives the wicked Jezebel, who hated and ill-treated his master; that building, glittering in the sunshine, is her ivory palace, and there, close by it, is that coveted vineyard of Naboth.

They are nearing the village of Shunem. There it lies, nestling on the hillside at the foot of Little Hermon. All around it are high hedges of prickly pear; close to it are lovely gardens, full of the choicest fruit. The master and the servant make their way through these and turn towards the khan. A khan is something like a large compound, with a roof overhead to shade travelers from the sun. In some places those who enter the khan are supplied with food by the village, according to the laws of eastern hospitality.

In the village of Shunem, as Elisha saw it, would be a number of small, flat-roofed houses, built one above another on the hillside, and there would be one house, much larger than the rest, belonging to the sheik or chief man of the village.

Unknown to themselves, the two travelers are being watched by the wife of the sheik. And as they approach the khan, they hear footsteps following them. Turning around, they see approaching them the wife of the sheik, the most important woman in the village.

What does she want? She has come to entreat the weary travelers to go to her house and rest. She wants Elisha to dine with her. She tells him she has often seen him pass before in his journeyings to Jezreel and to the Jordan, and she asks him to give her the honor of his company at dinner in the great house on the hill.

Elisha seems at first to have hesitated; he cared not to be found in great men's houses. But we read, "She constrained him," that is, she earnestly urged him.

At last Elisha consented to come. That very day found him sitting at the table in the great house on the hillside. It would be a thoroughly Eastern house, all the rooms on one floor, built around a courtyard, and in the dining room would be no carpet but divans on which to recline and a table in the middle. It would be a very quiet house; no children's voices would be heard nor merry shouts nor little feet running up and down the stone floor, for the lady of Shunem is childless.

Before them would be spread beautiful fruits from the gardens of Shunem: figs and olives, prickly pears and melons with piles of cakes baked on the hearth. There would not be much meat of any kind, perhaps a kid from the flock of goats which climbed up Little Hermon or some chickens from the lady of Shunem's poultry-yard. But there would be nuts and sweetmeats of all kinds in abundance.

As they ate they would talk, and Elisha would speak to them of his God and instruct them more perfectly in the things of Jehovah. This man and his wife were godly people, although they lived in bad days. The wicked Jehoram was king and the wretched Jezebel was queen-mother; the worship of Baal was the popular worship, and all Israel was going astray after idols.

Elijah had once complained sorrowfully, “I, even I only, am left,” I only serve the true God in the midst of this perverse nation. But God had let him know that there were no less than seven thousand true, devoted men and women who still served Jehovah. Two of these faithful ones were living in the great house of Shunem. The lady of Shunem and her husband feared and loved the God of Israel, and so they welcomed His prophet into their home.

Elisha seems to have enjoyed his visit, and as he often passed through Shunem, he turned into the great house to be welcomed to the hospitable table of the lady of Shunem. This Shunammite women found him a blessing to her house. She says to her husband, “Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.”

Yes, Elisha was the myrtle tree, whatever his surroundings. His talk at the dinner table evidently agreed with his discourse as a prophet. His conduct in the family was the same as his conduct when on his prophetic mission. By his words and his behavior, the Shunammite could see that he was a holy man of God.

How is it with us? Are we the same on weekdays as we are on Sundays? Do others recognize that we are one of God’s children? Is our light burning clear and steady? Can those in our own homes and those with whom we mix daily take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus? Do our words and our actions show whose we are and whom we mean to serve?

But Elisha improved on acquaintance. The more the Shunammite saw of him, the more she liked him; the oftener he sat at her table, the more sure she felt that he was indeed a holy man of God.

To this woman, Elisha’s visits seemed all too short. Night came on, and the prophet must go on his way. He must gird up his loins, take his staff in his hand and continue his journey. After much consideration, she, in the largeness of her heart, devises a plan for his further comfort, but before she carries it out, like a good wife, she consults her husband. To him she says, “Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.”

She prepares most carefully for the prophet’s comfort. Eastern houses have generally nothing but a bed in the sleeping room, but the lady of Shunem wishes the chamber on the wall to serve as a little study for him also. Even the earthenware lamp, filled with olive oil, is not forgotten, that Elisha may have a light in his room after sunset so that he may read or write in quiet, as he sits on the wooden stool by his little table.

Are we like the lady of Shunem? Do we love to show kindness to the people of God? The Lord’s instructions to us are very clear on this point: “Do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” Let us then remember His Word. We are to be good to all and are specially to show kindness to those who belong to the Lord, His dear children. When we care for them, the Lord says, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.” If the Master were on earth now, how gladly would we minister to Him!

The heavens have received Him; the white cloud has borne Him out of our sight. We cannot wash His feet with our tears or anoint Him with sweet ointment or follow Him during His preaching tours that we may minister to His comfort or welcome Him to our house and to our table. But He has left behind Him His representatives, and each act of kindness done to these brings joy to His heart.

So the chamber is prepared. The bed is made. The stool, table and candlestick are ready. When the prophet came again to Shunem, what a pleasant surprise awaited him! A neat little room which he could call his own, into which he could turn when hot, dusty and tired, and where he could enjoy quiet rest in spite of the hot midday sun. Elisha’s heart is full of gratitude to the Shunammite.

Holy men are grateful men. Ingratitude is sin. It is a sin which we specially need to guard against, for it is one of the characteristics of the end of this age. Elisha felt grateful; he did more — he said he was grateful; he did more still — he proved he was grateful. (He gives us an example well worth following.) In gratitude he said unto her, “Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?”

Elisha knew that the king owed his life and the life of his army to him. He knew that the captain of the host would be more than willing to grant any request of his. Had he not brought water to save the king, the captain of the host and the whole army in the Valley of Salt? Had he not prayed to God for deliverance from Mesha, king of Moab? Surely, then, a word from him would be sure to have influence and would bring the Shunammite into notice at court.

But the lady of Shunem was not ambitious. “I dwell,” she said, “among mine own people.” I have no desire to be introduced at court or to shine in Jezreel. I am content with my own life at home, among my own people, my neighbors, my friends and my household. She was a true woman, this lady of Shunem, and a good wife, a stayer at home and a minder of her own business, doing her duty in that state of life into which it had pleased God to call her.

Elisha’s speech to the Shunammite was no mere compliment. He did not at once dismiss the subject, feeling that he had done his duty by asking her the question. He really desired to give her pleasure, so he holds another consultation with his servant. Gehazi has noticed the one great want of the house. Money, rank, a beautiful home, a kind husband: all these the lady of Shunem had, but she had no child. There was no heir to the estate at Shunem; there was no loving and beloved child to be the joy and sunshine of the home. And this was a very special trial to a Jewish father and mother, who hoped, above all else, to be among the number of those honored parents from whom, in regular descent, the Messiah should spring.

The Shunammite is called, and to her astonishment she is told that springtime next year, when all nature is bursting forth into life, she will embrace a son. It seems too good to be true, and the woman can hardly bring herself to believe it. But she found, as we ourselves have found again and again, that nothing is too hard for the Lord.

Let us look at the village of Shunem a year later at springtime. The fig tree is putting out its tender shoots, the gardens are once more covered with green, the plain of Esdraelon is full of young corn, and on the slopes of Little Hermon the flowers of spring, the scarlet anemone, the delicate cyclamen, the bright pheasant's eye and the lilac crocus, are clothing the ground with beauty. The world is full of young life; it is the time of life.

At the Shunammite's house, we shall find the fairest flower of all. God's word by His prophet has come true; the Shunammite has a son. What rejoicing there is! The whole village is feasting; the father is sending presents to all his friends that they may rejoice with him. So the lady of Shunem had her reward for her kindness to the holy man of God. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."

What does our work amount to? Oh, how little do any of us do for Christ! It has been well said that we stand up and sing,

And then, because the whole realm of nature is not ours, we do nothing and give nothing at all — and this, in spite of all His wonderful love to us, in spite of His blood shed and His life given!

Let us say, as we think of what He has done for us, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits?"

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 9: The Quiet Stream (4:17)

2 Kings 4:1-7

Picture in your mind the side of a mountain, high, steep and rugged. Tearing down from its heights into the valley below is a stream, dashing, foaming and driving all before it — a mountain torrent. Follow the stream, watch it carefully as it reaches the valley and it flows into the grassy plain. What a change comes over it! It trickles peacefully on, watering the flowers and ferns, giving drink to the birds and insects — a quiet, calm stream. It is the same stream as the mountain torrent, yet oh, how changed!

That stream is a very good representation of the two prophets, Elijah and Elisha, and of the work God gave them to do. Elijah is the stream on the mountainside, bearing down on injustice and sin by his stern rebukes and by his bold remonstrance. Elisha is like the stream on the grassy plain, going quietly and peacefully on his way, bringing joy, happiness and comfort to all around him. Elijah upholds the righteousness of God's law while Elisha displays God's grace.

And yet, just as the stream was one stream, the same on the mountain as on the plain, so Elisha's work, although differing from Elijah's, was still the same work flowing from the same source. The same God used bold Elijah and gentle Elisha; both carried out His commands. And the work of Elijah led to the work of Elisha.

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." How much happier we should be if we remembered this! As the old German hymn says,

We are not all called to do the same work. And God does not call us to do the work He has given to others. He has a separate plan for each of us. There is one way and one way only in which we can please Him, and that is the way in which He has called us to work for Him. It may be that He has given us no great, startling work. It may be He would have us be like the quiet stream, going on our way and doing our work for Him almost unobserved, with no bustle or noise, but still working for Christ by little acts of kindness, by words of help or comfort, in the home or the shop, at school or the office.

And who shall say that Elisha's work was less than Elijah's? In the Master's eyes that work is great which is done because of love to Him and in obedience to His directions. Even the cup of cold water wins a word of praise from His lips, if it is given in His name. Let each of us then look up to heaven, and say from the bottom of our hearts:

Do any of us feel that we are ready to do great things for God? If He calls us to go out as a missionary or to die as a martyr, we will gladly obey the call! But what about the work that God has given us to do? Are we doing it? He would have us "more careful not to serve Him much, but to please Him perfectly." For "he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

Let us follow Elisha, the quiet stream, in his peaceful work of grace for Jehovah. The story opens with a funeral, or rather with what happens after the funeral. The body has been carried out for burial, followed doubtless by the mourners. At the head of the procession would be the poor widow, supported on either side by her two sons. Then would follow her neighbors, touched at the sight of her grief. They would be glad to show respect for the dead husband, as well as sympathy for his widow. Then would come the young men from the college, the sons of the prophets. Was not the dead man one of their number? Was he not one of the faithful seven thousand who had never bowed the knee to Baal?

The mourning friends have departed; the chief mourners, the poor widow and her boys are alone. Look at her. She has lost her husband who is dearer to her than life itself. Yet that is not all. She has to face the future, and a very dark future it is, for her husband has died in debt. Now the funeral expenses must be added to the long list of debts that went before.

The widow's creditor wants payment. Perhaps he is a worshipper of the golden calf and cares little for this poor servant of Jehovah. She cannot pay and he knows it. Still he presses his claim, and as payment he demands her two boys whom he can sell as slaves. Poor woman!

No wonder she is downcast.

This is a world of trouble, and we all have our share of it. This man was a servant of God, and yet sorrow came to his home. God's children have trouble just as others have. Sickness, poverty and death come to Christians just as they come to others. Yet here lies the great difference: God's children always have a refuge to which they can flee. There never was a trouble too hard for God. They know God to be their refuge and strength, their very present help in trouble.

The poor widow knows where to turn. She does not set off for Samaria to ask help of Queen Jezebel; she does not plead her cause with the king; she does not go around begging to the neighbors; she does not appeal to the priests of the calves. She goes to the right person; she goes straight to Elisha, the prophet of God.

She goes to him, but she asks for nothing, she proposes nothing and she hints at nothing; she simply and solely states her case and pours out her trouble into Elisha's ears. If you have a trouble — and who in this world doesn't? — go and do likewise. No, Elisha is not available, but Elisha is but a feeble picture of the One who is always ready and able to help. Go to the loving, feeling, sympathizing Christ. Tell Him all about it in your own words. Pour out your heart before Him. There is no need to ask Him for anything or to plan out in what way the help shall come. Simply lay it before Him and leave Him to settle the means in which the aid shall be given. Leave it completely in His hands. "O Lord I am oppressed; undertake for me." That is quite enough, and that is the firm trust and confidence which the Lord looks for.

At once Elisha's sympathies are aroused. "What shall I do for thee?" he asks. "Tell me, what hast thou in the house?" The poor widow's mind goes back to the poor, little home. What is there? Nothing of value — no jewels, no furniture worth selling, no food even, nothing but a jar of oil and the boys.

Only a pot of oil! That is all she has. If she had had any money laid by in the house or any valuables that she could have sold, she would have been told to part with them, for we are apt to forget what Elisha did not forget — that what we owe to another is not our own. "Owe no man anything," God's Word says.

Having heard what she has, Elisha gives her a strange command: "Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few." She hurries away to obey his word. She calls at the neighbors' houses, borrowing pots of all kinds, sizes and shapes.

Maybe some asked, "What are you going to do with them?" She did not know; she could only say, "I'm doing what the prophet told me to do." She could not satisfy their curiosity and they were not to see what was going to happen next. Elisha gave strict orders: "Shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons." No neighbor was to see the miracle happen; they would see only the result.

The widow does not reason; she obeys. From her pot of oil she pours into the rest of the vessels, and the wondrous supply seems inexhaustible. The boys bring vessel after vessel, and as long as the vessels last, the oil lasts too. Not until the boy said, "There is not a vessel more," did the supply come to an end.

What must have been the joy of the poor widow, as she saw her need so wonderfully supplied? How does she act? Does she rush out in the street and proclaim it? Does she call upon her neighbors to wonder and to admire? No, she runs straight to the prophet's door; she gratefully tells him what has happened and waits for further directions. She does not decide for herself what to do next; she goes to the prophet for further instructions.

We, too, must not run ahead of God's leading. We must take no step, however plain it seems, without taking counsel of God. Day by day, nay, in fact, moment by moment, we must go to Him for orders: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

Elisha directs her: "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest." First, pay thy debt. It was no sin to owe when she had nothing, but the moment she had the oil, the first responsibility was to pay the debt. It would be well if those three words were put up in many a Christian home: "Pay Thy Debt." The Lord notices each unpaid debt, and if we are able to pay it, even though it be by means of self-denial, He bids us, "Pay Thy Debt."

What a happy gathering there would be in that little home that evening! Without fear and trembling the widow could now look upon her boys. There was no fear of separation, no dread of poverty, no shrinking from what the future might bring. The debts were all paid and enough was left to live on. Elisha, the prophet, was used as God's quiet stream of blessing, the one who had been allowed to bring comfort and help to the sorrowing ones in that household.

So much for the simple story, but oh, what a wondrous lesson it contains for us who love the Lord! It shows us that God's blessings are only limited by our capacity to receive them. So long as the vessels lasted, the oil was more than sufficient to fill them. This is always the way in which God gives. "Open thy mouth wide," He says, "and I will fill it."

Often our hearts are not opened to receive what God is more than willing — is longing — to give us. Depend upon it, when God stays His hand, the vessel is full. "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 8: The Wonderful Stone (3:21-27)

2 Kings 3:21-27

Is God's Word true? What an all-important question! Can I, dare I, take the Bible and say confidently, I believe it all? In these latter days the Holy Scriptures have been exposed to a torrent of unfriendly criticism. Men have tried to find flaws in them and have endeavored to hold them up to ridicule and contempt. But God has had His answer all ready. Silent witnesses have, during the last century, borne their

incontrovertible testimony to the truth of the eternal Word. To one of these witnesses we now turn our attention.

For thousands of years, there had been in God's Book the history of Mesha, king of Moab. But did such a man ever exist? Or was this story in 2 Kings 3 a mere fabrication? Who could tell whether Mesha ever reigned and whether he fought with the king of Israel? Those who believe in the truth of the Bible receive the history, as they receive all other portions of Holy Scripture. The Bible is the only perfectly accurate statement of history ever written. Man must continually update his history books as he learns more even about current events. God who alone knows all never changes what He has inspired to be written.

However, from time to time God has allowed man to discover bits of history which give witness to the truth of His Word and which show the folly of doubting it. We thank God for such things, for they encourage us and often help us to understand a portion of the Word better. But we also know that a person with a heart of unbelief, when proven wrong in one point, will only find something else to doubt, unless He repents of His rebellion of heart against the God who cannot lie.

For several thousand years God preserved a hidden witness to what happened when the armies from Israel attacked Mesha, king of Moab. In 1868 God gave a German missionary named Mr. Klein the privilege of finding that witness in the land of Moab. Mr. Klein crossed the Jordan into the land of Moab under the guardianship of an Arab chief named Ngattam. In the course of their journey they visited a place named Diban. The sheik of Diban welcomed them; carpets and cushions were spread in his tent for them to sit on and cups of black coffee were handed around for them to drink.

As they sat, Ngattam, who knew that part of the country well, mentioned that, lying among the ruins, only about ten minutes' walk from where they were, there was a curious old stone with letters upon it, which no one had ever been able to read. "Let's go see it," Ngattam suggested.

Mr. Klein was excited and wished to set off at once. But Ngattam was relaxing on his soft couch and was in no hurry to leave yet. Besides, the old sheik expected "backsheesh" — a tip of some money to be given to him. Finally Ngattam rose and took Klein to the spot.

There, among the rubbish, lay the stone. It was oblong, rounded at both ends, 3½ feet high, 2 feet wide and 2 feet thick. It was in splendid condition with not one single piece broken off. All over the stone was strange writing, which Mr. Klein could not read. There were thirty-four lines of these curious characters. Sitting down at once, he drew a careful picture of the stone and copied part of the inscription that he might be able to discover in what language it was written.

When Mr. Klein returned to Jerusalem, he showed his sketches to the German consul. The Royal Museum at Berlin was contacted. He was instructed to buy the stone and authorized to pay a hundred napoleons for it. Ngattam's father promised to help influence the chiefs who owned the stone to sell it, but nothing came of his efforts. A second messenger with money was sent to Diban to buy the stone, but he too failed. He reported that the Arabs who owned it had hidden it. And having discovered that the Europeans badly wanted to get possession of their stone, they said they would not sell it for less than 1000 napoleons.

The German government got the old sheik on whose property the stone rested to agree to sell it for 120 napoleons. Then other chiefs appeared, who claimed also to have an interest in it and who refused to let it be transported through their country. An Arab, acting for the French government, arrived and offered more money. While viewing the stone, he was able to make an impression on paper of the letters inscribed on it.

While he was hurriedly pressing his damp paper against the stone, two parties of Arabs stood by, quarrelling with each other as to which party the stone belonged. They shouted and shook their fists at each other. Then they turned upon the unfortunate Arab, and he barely escaped with his life. His paper impression was torn and crumpled, but he managed to bring seven fragments of it safely away.

The Turkish Government ordered the Arabs to give up the stone at once. So they lighted a huge fire around it till they had made it red-hot. Then they poured cold water on it and broke it to pieces, after which they distributed the fragments among the different families of the tribe. In time and after much negotiation, six-sevenths of the stone fragments were obtained and a translation made.

They concluded that the stone was carved about 890 B.C., making it over 2500 years old. The inscription was in the Moabite language, which is similar to Hebrew. This is not surprising since the Moabites are the descendents of Lot, the nephew of Abraham. The author of the stone turned out to be Mesha, the king of Moab.

The inscription said:

"I, Mesha, am son of Chemoshgad, king of Moab, the Dibonite. My father reigned over Moab thirty years, and I reigned after my father. And I erected this stone to Chemosh at Korcha, for he saved me from all despoilers and let me see my desire upon all my enemies. Now Omri, king of Israel, he oppressed Moab many days, for Chemosh was angry with his land. His son succeeded him, and he also said, I will oppress Moab. In my days he said, Let us go, and I will see my desire on him and his house, and Israel said, I shall destroy it forever. Now Omri took the land, and occupied it in his days and in his son's days forty years."

Does this date agree with the Scriptural record? It does exactly, for we read Omri reigned twelve years, Ahab twenty-two and Ahaziah two, making a total of thirty-six, and we find that early in Jehoram's reign the Moabites revolted. He would be some little time making ready to attack them, so that four years of his reign may be allowed before they threw off his yoke altogether, which would bring the Bible account exactly to the forty years of the Moabite stone.

Since we know the Bible is always true and accurate, we conclude that Mesha was telling the truth on his stone. The stone does not show us the Bible is true; rather, the Bible shows us that the stone record is true.

We saw in the last chapter that Omri and Ahab his son oppressed Moab. When the Moabites rebelled against Ahab's son, Jehoram, the armies of Israel and Judah set off to punish Mesha for his revolt. We noticed that the nearest and easiest way into the land of Moab was by the

Jericho road at the north of the Dead Sea, but that the kings decided to take a roundabout course through a terrible wilderness rather than to go by the ordinary route. No one knew why until the Moabite stone was discovered. Then it was shown that there were wise heads in that council of war.

From the stone, it appears that as soon as Mesha rebelled he strongly fortified all his towns north of the Dead Sea in order to prevent the entrance of the king of Israel. Had the armies from Israel gone that way, they would have been stopped by fortress after fortress. The walled cities of Nebo, Baal-meon, Astaroth and Kirjathaim would all have impeded their progress. It would have been most unwise for the army to attempt to enter the country by that road. The Israelites certainly showed their wisdom by going south around the Dead Sea, where Mesha had no strong fenced city and where there were no fortresses into which his soldiers might retreat.

We saw the Israelites, by the power of God, win a wonderful victory in the Valley of Salt.

We read, “They beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone.” That land is covered with stones, and the first thing in cultivation is to gather out the stones. (See Isaiah 5:2.) These stones are left in heaps at the edge of the field, and it is very easy therefore to spoil the fields by knocking down the heaps and throwing the stones once more over the field. We also read, “They stopped all the wells of water” so the Moabites would have no water supply. And they “felled all the good trees,” so there would be no lumber for construction or for fuel.

Only one place was now left to be taken, the fortress of Kir-haraseth. Here King Mesha made a last effort to withstand them. The armies of Israel surrounded the fortress, occupied by Mesha and his troops. He tried with 700 warriors to break through their hosts, but he tried in vain.

Then a horrible thing happened. Thinking to appease the Moabite god called Chemosh and to ensure his help, Mesha offered a human sacrifice upon the walls, and the offering was no other than his son and heir. At that point the Israelites, instead of following up their victory, left Moab. “They departed from him, and returned to their own land.”

Did Israel go home victorious? The Bible does not tell us; it only gives us a hint. It says, “There was great indignation against Israel.” What does that mean? The Moabite Stone explains it all. Evidently, there was such a storm of indignation against Israel among the besieged men after the dreadful sacrifice of Mesha’s son to Chemosh that the Moabites, roused to desperation, drove the Israelites from their walls and sent them back to their own country.

King Mesha on his stone says not a word about his defeats but only gives the account of his victory. He says, “The king of Israel fortified Jahaz and occupied it when he made war against me, and Chemosh drove him out before me.” He goes on to tell of the cities he took and the towns he fortified after the Israelites had left his country.

The Bible is the Word of God. Let us firmly anchor all our hopes on that unerring Word. Our hopes for time, our hopes for eternity, our hopes of salvation, our hopes of heaven, our hopes of all that is bright in eternity — all these hopes are safe if they hang on the Word of Truth. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away.”

Is there anything in God’s Word which puzzles you? Is there anything in God’s ways with you which seem mysterious and altogether inexplicable? If so, be patient. God will make it all plain someday. Just as now, after more than 2000 years, we can see the difficulties with regard to this chapter cleared away, so the day is coming when every difficulty in God’s Word and in God’s providence will be made plain.

Always remember this: We may judge the accuracy of man’s history books by the Bible. If they disagree, then man’s record is wrong. We know God always tells the truth, but man’s knowledge of events is often incomplete and motivated by his sinful heart. Sometimes he intentionally gives a false report.

Meanwhile,

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 7: Among the Soldiers (3:1-20)

2 Kings 3:1-20

A large encampment — thousands of tents — a grand military array — for all the tents are filled with soldiers. We hear warlike sounds everywhere: the clash of swords, the tramp of sentinels and the notes of military music. And, in the very midst of the camp, surrounded by the soldiers, we find the very last man we should expect to find there — Elisha, the man of grace and peace.

We have seen him following the plough; we have watched him leading a quiet life at his father’s farm. We have noticed him in the caves and lonely valleys, hiding away from Jezebel with his master Elijah. We have seen him surrounded by quiet citizens, by thoughtful young students and by peaceful country folk. Now we are to see Elisha among the military.

Why was he there? Let us take up the history of the times, and we shall see. Wicked King Ahab was dead, but Jezebel his wife still lived. Ahab had left two sons. The eldest, Ahaziah, had succeeded him. He had reigned two years and then died of a terrible accident. His brother, Jehoram, now came to the throne. He was startled by his brother’s death, and he did not dare follow entirely in his brother’s wicked footsteps. He put away the great statue of Baal, which his father had made. He did not worship Baal nor did he encourage his people to do so. But Jezebel, the queen mother, still kept her heathen priests, while the king went to Bethel, bowed before the golden calf and called that worshipping Jehovah. It was a poor, miserable attempt at reformation, and in God’s sight it was a dead failure.

God said, “He wrought evil in the sight of the Lord; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made. Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.”

Many people are like Jehoram. Perhaps there is a sudden death in their family, and they are frightened. For a time they alter their behavior. They leave off any glaring sin in which they may have indulged; they attend church services and, after their own fashion, they serve God. But the golden calf — self — is still worshipped in their heart. They fondly dream that they are worshipping God, but, after all, it is the golden calf — self — that rules supreme. There is in them, as there was in Jehoram, no real turning to God, no true repentance.

Over the Jordan among the blue mountains lived the Moabites who were the descendants of Lot. Years ago, in the days of Omri, Ahab's father, the Israelites had attacked Moab, defeated their king and made them pay a yearly tax. The tax was 100,000 rams and 100,000 lambs, with the wool.

All through the reigns of Omri and Ahab this tax had been paid. It was a very heavy tribute for the Moabites to raise, seeing that their whole country was only the size of an average-sized English county. So it's not surprising that as soon as the news of Ahab's death reached them, the Moabites rose in revolt and determined not to pay the tax any longer.

King Jehoram was very indignant. He was determined to punish these Moabites for their rebellion. He did not dare, however, to attack them alone, so he sent a message to the king of the southern kingdom of Judah, Jehoshaphat, the king of Jerusalem, to ask for his help against the Moabites.

Jehoshaphat was very willing to assist him, for he had his own private grudge against the Moabites. Only the year before they had marched into Judea and Jehoshaphat had trembled before them, for they had brought a great host to attack him, and he saw no way of escape. But he had turned to God in his trouble. God had helped him, and the Moabites had been driven back into their own country.

Still, Jehoshaphat felt that at any time they might return, and so he was ready to join with Jehoram to try and break their power. He sent this message back to Jehoram: "I will go up: I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses." In other words, he said, "Use my people and my horses as if they were your own. I place myself and my people completely at your disposal."

They held a council of war to plan their attack on Moab. Two courses lay open to them. Two roads lead into the land of Moab. One was close at hand, easy and straightforward. Elijah and Elisha took this road as they passed through Jericho and went down to the Jordan, crossing it a few miles north of the Dead Sea. But, to our surprise, we find that the kings decided to go quite a different way.

One asked, "Which way shall we go up?" The other answered, "The way through the wilderness of Edom."

Through Edom. Then they must go through a fearful wilderness on the western shores of the Dead Sea. They must make for the southern boundary of that sea, and then they must work around it, through the land of Edom, northwards again into Moab. What a roundabout way to take! Surely there were no wise men at that council of war. What was their idea? What possible reason could they have had for taking such an extraordinary course? No one knew or could make out their motive for going so far out of their way, along such a terrible road. Some have suggested that it was because they were anxious to get the king of Edom to help them, and they wished to pass through his country that their forces might be joined to his. But surely, instead of dragging two large armies all that terrible way, it would have been far simpler for the king of Edom to meet them, and then for all of them to enter Moab by the easy road at the north of the Dead Sea.

The decision of these kings always seemed strange and mysterious and no one was able to understand it until the year 1870. Then it was discovered that the men in this council of war were not foolish but were wise men. We shall see presently how this discovery was made.

We are told, "They fetched a compass," that is, they went around the land of Edom. They had only one hundred miles to go before they reached the southern limit of the Dead Sea, where rose Mount Seir, the rocky home of the Edomites. Yet, although they had so short a distance to travel, the way was so rough and the heat so great that it was a week before they had crossed the wilderness and had reached inhabited country.

At the end of the week came trouble. They had used up their water. So far they had carried water with them in leather bottles, slung across their mules and camels. For seven weary days they tramped through the hot desert. The air was filled with salt from the Dead Sea, making their mouths and nostrils dry, making their tongues parched, and causing their skin to crack and peel.

But they had held on, drinking as little as possible. They were trying to make the water hold out until they reached a certain valley at the south of the Dead Sea. There was a well-known spring of water, much prized, for even in the hottest season it had never been known to dry up.

When they reached this spot, to their intense horror and dismay they found that the spring had, contrary to all their expectation, dried up. The stream that flowed from the spring was dry and parched with not a single drop of water in it. The plants and flowers which grew on its banks were fast dying beneath the fearful heat of the sun.

In this valley, the Valley of Salt, the armies of Israel and Judah encamped, and here they seem to have met with the king of Edom. Many were the sighs and groans of the soldiers as, with tongues cleaving to the roofs of their mouths, they unloaded their mules and put up their tents.

How little most of us know of thirst! I once saw a party return from a trip into this very wilderness on the west of the Dead Sea. I shall never forget the awful condition they were in. They had lost their way and had wandered many miles without water in the intense glare of the sun. Almost dying of thirst, they at length reached a village, but so parched were their tongues that it was some time before they could make the Arab inhabitants understand what they wanted. When I heard their tale, I began to realize what are the horrors of thirst.

Here, then, in the Valley of Salt, were three armies, surrounded by the wilderness, without a drop to drink, and with no hope whatever of getting any water.

At that moment, conscience was busy. Is it not at times like this that the sleeping conscience wakes up? In days of sorrow or pain as we lie on our bed, in days of bereavement when we mourn one who was to us as life itself, in days of intense anxiety and care — at such times the

hand of God arouses the long-dormant conscience, and we are compelled, whether we wish it or not, to ask ourselves, Why is this? What does it mean? Why has God sent me this trouble?

Jehoram had a sleeping conscience, but it woke up that dreadful day in the Valley of Salt. He felt God had sent the trouble as a punishment for his sin. Perhaps his thoughts flew guiltily to the golden calf at Bethel as he cried, “Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!”

Then Jehoshaphat, the servant of God and the king of Judah, spoke up. He knew where to turn in the time of trouble. Only a year before God had delivered him in a most marvelous way from these very Moabites. He had good reason to say, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” He said, “Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?”

A prophet of the Lord among the soldiers? “Yes,” says one of the king of Israel’s servants. There in the camp, unnoticed by the leaders, there among the common soldiers was Elisha who had poured water on the hands of Elijah.

“Ah,” says Jehoshaphat, “he will do; I know him well by report. The word of the Lord is with him. He is not one of the prophets of Baal or of the golden calves; his advice is worth having; his assistance is just what we need.”

Where is Elisha? He is not close at hand, near the royal tent; he is at the other end of the camp. Do they send for him? No, they go to him. The three kings so deeply feel their need — so earnestly long for help — that instead of summoning him into their presence, they condescend to go down to him.

At once Elisha turns to Jehoram. It was his grandfather who led Israel into idolatry. It was his father who hunted Elisha’s beloved master Elijah from place to place, who set a price upon his head and who would gladly have murdered him. His mother was even now sheltering, feeding and encouraging the priests of Baal. He himself was upholding the idolatry of Bethel, maintaining the worship of the golden calves. So Elisha turns to him and says, “What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother.”

Some people today are just like Jehoram. The sailor who swears in fine weather may be down on his knees in the storm; the man who in perfect health declares that there is no God may cry out in terror to that very God when the hand of death is upon him. Man’s self-sufficiency will not stand rough weather. It does well enough when the sun shines, but it is a dead failure in the time of storm.

The prophets of Jehoram’s father and mother could do nothing for him now, and no one knew it better than he did. “Nay,” he says; “reproach me not, since I am in a sore strait, and not only I, but these two other kings also. The Lord Jehovah is about to deliver us into the hand of Moab. If you cannot or will not help me, at least do not reproach me.”

And Elisha said, “As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.” He lets Jehoram know very plainly that the coming deliverance will be given, not for his sake nor because he has asked for it, but solely because of the presence of Jehoshaphat.

“Ye,” says our Lord to His people, “are the salt of the earth.” He would teach us that just as salt keeps meat from decaying, so do God’s people preserve this evil world from being destroyed. “I cannot do anything,” said the destroying angel to Lot, “till thou be come thither.” Till you are removed to a place of safety, my hand is stayed. Not until Lot was in Zoar did God’s judgments on the wicked cities fall.

For Jehoshaphat’s sake the deliverance shall be given. “Bring me a minstrel,” says Elisha. The bystanders listen in dead silence as the sweet tones of the harp and the low, quiet song of the minstrel fall upon the ear. Then, as the music goes on, the hand of the Lord comes upon Elisha, and the message of the Lord is given to the three kings.

At once the soldiers are turned out to dig trenches or pits across the valley. Empty pits, dry pits and useless pits they seemed when the work was done. Then came a quiet, still night. There was no sign of rain, for in that country if there is no wind, there will be no rain. Our Lord connects the two when He said, “The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew.”

Although no rain fell during the night, in the morning the ditches were full of water. A stream of water had come rushing from the land of Edom, and the country was filled with water.

Oh, how thankful the soldiers must have been as they took a long drink of the cool waters and as they led their exhausted cattle and mules to drink at the ditches which, while they slept, had been filled to overflowing!

Then they prepare to face their enemies. They had seen them, the day before, standing in battle array, the great host of the Moabites, drawn up on the north side of the valley. It was a mighty host; everyone who could put on armor had been pressed into service.

But a great change has come over the Moabite army. Early in the morning they had risen from sleep, eager for battle. They had looked across the valley in the direction of their foes. But what had they seen? The whole country appeared to them to be filled with blood. They saw pools, where there were no pools yesterday. The wilderness, the dry wilderness, was broken up by them. Surely the pools were pools of blood, thought the Moabites, as they reflected the rosy light of the rising sun.

Surely the same thing has happened to them as happened to us Moabites a year ago when we went against Jehoshaphat. Then, we and our allies quarreled and began to kill one another. Now these Edomites, Israelites and men of Judah have evidently done the same. No rain can have fallen, for we have heard no wind. Surely then the pools are filled with the blood of the slain.

So, in mad haste, the Moabites rush out in confusion to the Israelite camp, and the three armies who are drawn up in battle array win an easy victory. King Mesha is beaten and driven back into the land of Moab.

Surely we have in this story a picture of ourselves. Here we are in the wilderness of this world. Our hearts are dry and parched, and some of us have, it may be, begun to feel it. Some of us are longing for a blessing, craving for something which shall make our souls very different from what they are now, which shall satisfy the heart thirst that comes over us even when we seem most happy, yearning to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Listen, if such be the cry of your heart, to the voice of God. He bids you do, too, as Elisha instructed, “Make this valley full of ditches.” If those soldiers had not worked with their spades, the water would never have come. And if you do not open your heart to receive it, be sure of this, you will never be filled with the blessing.

Even today the stream is on its way from the land of Edom. Quietly, silently, the Spirit moves. “Ye shall not see wind neither shall ye see rain.” All unseen, the blessed flood of spiritual life comes on its way. Oh! Make ready for it. Make your valley, the valley of your heart, full of ditches to receive it.

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 2: The Heir Becomes a Servant (3:11)

2 Kings 3:11

“Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” So said the wisest of men, King Solomon. Never were his words truer than in the case of young Elisha. On one bright morning he awoke in the comfortable farm in the Valley of the Dance — a rich man, for he was the heir to that pleasant estate — a powerful man, for he was placed over his father’s many servants — a comfortable man, having a good home, all the food he could wish and every luxury available.

Yet, when the next day dawned, how did it find him? It found him an outcast, the servant of an outcast. It found him with the lonely cave for his shelter, wild fruits and herbs for his food, a hunted man for his master, and wild beasts for his companions. Elisha the young master, the heir of Abel-meholah, has become simply this: the servant who pours water on the hands of Elijah.

What a remarkable change, what a wonderful descent, what a transformation of every detail of the young man’s life! Instead of being the one to give orders to others, he is the one to obey. Instead of being waited upon, he waits upon another. Instead of the servants bringing the basin to their young master when he comes in from work and respectfully pouring the water over his hands and feet, it is he, Elisha, who pours water over the hands of another. He, the heir, has become the servant.

One born in a hot, Eastern land washes often. So stifling is the heat and so thick is the dust that the greatest refreshment which a person can enjoy is the free use of cold water. In the early morning he takes his bath, but that amount of washing is not sufficient for the day. Two parts of the body are constantly exposed to the heat and dust: the hands and the feet. Therefore, water is kept always ready, standing in stone or brass vessels by the door, to be used in the frequent washing of the hands and feet.

Since no shoes are worn, but only sandals, the upper part of the foot becomes covered with dust and dirt as the man trudges over the roads. When he returns home, before he enters, he must have the dirt and defilement of the filthy streets washed from his feet.

When dinnertime comes, before he eats, he must carefully wash, for he will have no knife or fork or spoon. He will eat with his fingers. Not only so, but he will have no plate of his own. Food will be placed on a small, round table, and all will eat out of the same dish. How very necessary then that he should wash before he partakes of food!

Now the work of washing the hands was always done by the servant or one who took the servant’s place. In families where no servant was kept, the youngest in the household performed the office. But in larger houses it was always the slave’s work. He brought the brass basin, poured water upon the master’s feet and carefully dried them with the towel.

And this is exactly the position which Elisha took in following Elijah. This is the very work he did; he did it so often that he became known by it. Some years afterwards, when the servant of a king of Israel wanted to describe him, he could find no better words than these: “Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.”

Elisha did not know it, but this change in his life from master to servant was a picture of the great Coming One, the Christ, the Messiah! Elijah, his master, was like John the Baptist in so many ways. He dwelt in the wilderness, feeding on wild fruits and herbs, dressing in the skins of beasts, and preaching repentance to his nation. And, just as Elijah was the picture of John, so his successor, Elisha, tells us of our Lord Jesus Christ who left His home and place in heaven to come down into the world and become a servant.

His very name is almost the same. Jah Oshea — Jesus — means “Jehovah saves.” El Oshea — Elisha — means “God saves.” His manner of life, as we shall see, was the same, for when he began his work as the successor of Elijah, he left the wilderness and the secluded cave to live the life of an ordinary citizen, even as our Lord dwelt in Nazareth and in Capernaum. His character of grace, too, foreshadowed that of the loving, sympathizing Saviour who, touched with the feeling of our infirmities, was ever ready to help all in distress or sorrow.

Still more clearly can we trace this descent of Elisha from riches to poverty, from being master to becoming the servant, from being looked up to and waited upon as the heir of Abel-meholah to being thought of and spoken of as merely Elisha who “poured water on the hands of Elijah.”

O Lord Jesus, how Thou didst stoop for us! One day in heaven — Thou, the Son, waited on by hosts of angels, surrounded on every side by glory, loveliness and holiness — the next day entering the world as a poor infant, of no account in the world, which gave Thee no welcome, a world of sorrow and sin.

“Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.” For our sakes He left riches, honor and glory to become the homeless One who had not where to lay His head, the despised One — despised and rejected of men, the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. For our sakes He made this fearful descent.

Would you know how low He stooped? “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant.”

Yes, the Heir of Glory, the Lord of the universe, becomes a servant, and, being a servant, He does the servant’s work. It is evening. Our Lord and His disciples are in the upstairs room of a house in Jerusalem. They have taken off their dusty sandals and left them at the door. Close by the door stands the earthenware jar of water used to wash the feet of those who have entered the room. But who is to pour the water? Who is to carry the brass basin around and pour water over the feet of the rest? That is the servant’s work, and they have no servant with them. Who will take the place of the slave and do this work?

Who carries the basin? It is the Lord. He has taken off His robe, wrapped a towel around His waist for a girdle, just as the slaves did, and He goes around, washing one and then another. There is silence in the room. Only impetuous Peter attempts to speak the feelings of his heart.

Then, when the washing is finished and the servant’s work is done, the Lord puts down the basin by the door, takes off the towel, puts on His outer robe again, and takes His seat at the table. He then asks them a question: “Know ye what I have done to you?”

Then he explains the lesson. “Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.” Each of them was to learn to serve his brother and to care for his spiritual feet as well as his physical feet.

What a tendency there is among Christian workers today, instead of treading in the footsteps of the Master, to follow in the track of that Christian of whom the Apostle John spoke: “Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence.” How many in the Lord’s vineyard want to be the head of all, the leaders of the rest. How few are willing to be just what the Master would have them be, to do just what He calls them to do, even though it be to wait as a servant upon the rest! They love to have the preeminence, and if they cannot have it, they will leave the work to take care of itself. They are not content to be like the Lord or like Elisha, who pours water on the hands of Elijah.

What does the Lord say to us today? He asks us the very question which He asked the twelve: “Know ye what I have done to you?” I have given you an example, and I bid you follow Me. “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

For no less than seven years Elisha attended the great prophet as his servant. For seven years he washed his hands and waited on him in all the ups and downs and the discomforts of his pilgrim life. Where they spent those seven years is uncertain. Most of the time they appear to have been hidden, avoiding the cities and keeping out of sight of Jezebel’s spies and emissaries. But now and again his master boldly came forward, and the burning and shining light was seen flashing across the darkness of his country.

Did Elisha repent his choice? Was he sorry that he had left all for his God? Did the young heir regret that he had become a servant? Surely not. Nothing is ever really lost when left at God’s call. If Elisha became poorer as to worldly substance, he at the same time became richer in spiritual life. Consider what sweet communion those two, the master and the servant, must have had together. How many holy lessons the elder servant of God must have imparted to the younger! How wonderfully Elisha’s faith and courage must have grown year by year as he saw his master’s devotion to Jehovah! And oh, how he must have loved the old prophet! Surely he would count it no disgrace, but rather a high honor, to be known among the people as Elisha who “poured water on the hands of Elijah.”

A young Jewess, who was turned out of her home and shut out from everything that had once been dear to her, because she confessed Christ and wished to follow Him, went out as a missionary to Egypt. There she lived in a close, stifling back street of Cairo, laboring patiently for the Master. Once she lay very ill on her bed, weak and suffering, exhausted by heat, tormented by flies, very lonely and desolate. She was tempted to think of the old home and of the comforts she had left behind. There, had she been ill, she would have been waited on and cared for; there tempting dishes would have been brought to her and everything that money could buy would have been at her service. Here she was deprived of all that to which she had been accustomed. But, even as this thought crossed her mind, she remembered our Lord’s words, “Everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.”

And she felt that she had indeed received the hundredfold — joy and peace in her heart, God’s smile upon her life, the sunshine of Christ’s presence in her little home, and beyond this life the joy of going to be with Christ in the Father’s house.

Few of us are called upon to make the sacrifices she made. God graciously leaves us the home love and the home comforts. They are but small sacrifices to which He calls us — tiny self-denials, which yet seem to us far from easy.

What is it the Lord calls me to do? Whatever it be that the Lord requires of me, that will I do. For my sake the Heir of all things became a servant; for His sake I will take up my little cross and follow Him. Is this your resolve? Then listen: “If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honor.”

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 6: Bethel Becomes Beth-Aven (2:23-25)

We live over nineteen hundred years after Christ lived on earth. About eighteen hundred years before Christ was born, a solitary man lay down in a solitary place to spend a solitary night. Alone and utterly miserable, he fell asleep. But during the night he made a discovery. It was this: He was not alone. God was there, close to him, speaking to him, caring for him, watching over him. Rising from his hard bed and his stony pillow, Jacob gave the lonely place a name. He called it Bethel, which means “House of God.”

House of God! What a beautiful name for a place to have! From that day Bethel became a holy place to Jacob and his descendants. When Jacob came back from his long years with Laban, his father-in-law, and was settling down among the heathen Canaanites, God sent him to Bethel that He might meet with him there (Gen. 35:1). There again he drew near to God, and God drew near to him. “He built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el,” which means “God — House of God.”

Years went by. The Israelites went down to Egypt, and Bethel was left desolate. But no sooner did Jacob’s descendants take the land of Canaan than Bethel became again the “House of God.” It was no longer called by its old name, Luz, but become known as Bethel.

In the times of the judges we read, “The children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God,” or, as it is in the Hebrew, “went up to Bethel” (Judg. 20:18). There was the ark; there was the altar of sacrifice; there lived Phinehas, the High Priest, the grandson of Aaron; there the children of Israel inquired of the Lord. Bethel was, in those troubled times, the center of life and godliness in the land of Israel.

Later, dark days came to Bethel. Jeroboam, who rebelled against King Rehoboam and who made Israel to sin, actually chose Bethel, the House of God, as the place of his idol worship. He set up in Bethel a golden calf, and here he bid the people in the southern part of his kingdom to come to worship. Here he made the lowest of his people priests and bid them cry aloud to this calf just what Aaron had said of the golden calf at Sinai: “Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”

So the House of God became the House of Idols. God gave it, in consequence, a new name. He called it not Bethel, but Beth-aven; not House of God, but House of Vanity. Hosea said, “The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beth-aven,” not Bethel (Hosea 10:5).

Bethel, as man called it — Beth-aven, as God called it — was a large and important place in the days of Elisha, filled with people who had been brought up in the stronghold of idolatry and who had been taught from childhood to despise the true followers of Jehovah. The priests of Jezebel had many followers in Bethel, and these did all in their power to make the inhabitants of that city as idolatrous and godless as they were themselves. The man who defied the Word of God by rebuilding Jericho was a native of Bethel. Hiel, the Bethelite, was not afraid to disobey the direct command of Jehovah.

But God had not left the Bethelites without witness or without any means of grace. In their very midst had been erected one of the colleges in which young men were trained to be teachers. The very presence of this college was a testimony against the ungodliness of the Bethelites. Not only so, but the prophets who superintended these colleges were constantly in Bethel. But the bulk of the people seem to have taken little notice of their instructions. They went on in their scoffing, God-forgetting ways.

One day news arrives in Bethel, and most everyone likes to hear the news. Through the forest, which lay east of the city, winding up the long hill which reaches from Jericho to Bethel, come mules and donkeys and camels, bringing goods from the city of palm trees to sell in the streets of Bethel — oranges and lemons, sweet-scented herbs, and salt from the Dead Sea. These men of Jericho bring something besides merchandise; they bring two pieces of news.

The first piece of news is this: Elijah, the great prophet, well-known to all of them, had disappeared, and the report was that he had been carried alive up to heaven.

How was this news received in the streets of Bethel? We are not told, but knowing the kind of people who lived in the city, we can guess. Who ever heard of such a thing as a man taken up to heaven without dying? What an unlikely, ridiculous tale! How improbable! How impossible! What evidence was there that it had taken place?

The Jericho traders would have to admit that the story only rested on the word of one man. Who was the man? Elisha. What? That servant of his? Was he the one who had started this extraordinary story? They would not believe it for a moment!

The second item of news pleases the Bethelites no better. Elijah has disappeared, and they feel thankful to be rid of him. They cannot stand his stern rebukes and his solemn warnings. But now what? They find that another has stepped into his place. A new prophet has come to annoy them by his visits and his remarks! A new prophet, and he is no other than that servant, that Elisha. Who is he that he should lay down the law to the Bethelites and find fault with their proceedings? The first time he dares to come near Bethel, they will let him know what they think of him.

Some days later the report reaches them that Elisha was on his way. He had left Jericho and was coming up the long, steep hill, a climb of three thousand feet, to the stony heights of Bethel. As he passed through the forest, the boys and girls of these godless parents rushed out and began to insult him. They started calling him “bald head.” It was a common term of reproach among the Jews.

Was Elisha’s head bald? Undoubtedly not. In those days every nation in the East except the Jews shaved the head. The heat is so intense that it is a cool and cleanly custom. But the Jews were forbidden to shave their heads. It was one of the countless ways in which they were to be distinguished from their Gentile neighbors. God wanted them to be separate from the heathen around them. The Gentiles shaved the hair off their heads; the Jews kept their hair on. The only two exceptions to this rule were the leper who was to shave his head and the Nazarite if he was defiled by someone dying near him.

Not only so, but even had Elisha been bald-headed, no one could have seen it, for in those hot countries the head is always closely covered by the thick turban which is worn while one is out in the sun.

To call a man in those days a “bald head” was equivalent to calling him a Gentile dog, a heathen outsider. No good Jew would like such a name — one of reproach and scorn.

Out of the city came the crowd of Bethelite children mocking him and shouting, “Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.” In other words, “Go up, like your master has gone up. We are well rid of him. He has gone up, so you say. You go too, bald head.”

The Bethelites never dared to insult Elijah in such a way. They would have quailed before the great prophet, for they knew the mighty power of God was with him. But this was only Elisha, the servant. They could mock and laugh at him.

How did Elisha act? He turned around and looked at this crowd of mocking, insulting children. Then Elisha committed his cause to God. Speaking with God’s authority and as God’s mouthpiece, he cursed them for defiance of God and His prophet. Without a moment’s delay, God acted.

Out of the forest came two she-bears, sent by God. Elisha did not call them. It was God’s doing. They came and tore forty-two of them. Only forty-two, not the whole company. There may have been more than a hundred children there.

Those killed were the elder ones of the party, the more responsible ones. When all are mentioned, they are called “little children.” But quite a different word is used of those who were killed. The Hebrew word means “young men.” The very same word is used in 1 Kings 12:8,14 of the young men who were brought up with Rehoboam. He was no child, for at that time he was forty-one years of age. Evidently it was upon the leaders — the ungodly, infidel young men of the place — that the judgment of God fell.

Where did these children, especially the young ones, learn to mock and heap insults upon Elisha? Their parents are responsible. Upon them, therefore, falls heavy, heart-breaking sorrow, as they have to mourn bitterly the loss of the very children whom they had stirred up to sin.

As it was in the days of Elisha, so it is still true today. Whatever children are not, they undoubtedly are good imitators. What my father does, that will I do — what my mother says, that will I say — is the rule which most children follow. If the child hears true religion lightly spoken of at home, if he is accustomed to hear God’s ministers or God’s Word ridiculed, he may soon grow up to do exactly the same. Let us, then, who are parents walk very carefully. Bright eyes are on us, watching our every movement, scrutinizing our every action; quick ears are listening to us, hearing and storing up in the memory each careless, thoughtless word. Those eyes are our children’s eyes, those ears are our children’s ears, and each of those children is a trust, put into our hands by God, and of each such trust we shall be called upon to give an account.

Did we ever ask ourselves this question: Why does God allow His children to meet with opposition? Why is it that young Christians, those who are just starting to live for Christ, so often have to encounter opposition and difficulty? If God chose, He could make the path of life for each Christian like a beautiful garden enjoying sunshine and pleasant rain. Instead, His plants often endure storms of opposition, surrounded by thorns and briars.

And God knows better than to let His children have nothing but easy times and prosperous circumstances. Even the biting words and cutting speeches and the cold, chilling repulsion of the worldly relative or friend has its purpose in God’s perfect ways for our spiritual development. Such things are certainly not pleasant, but they may be profitable. They may, if used aright, stablish, strengthen and settle us and help to make us useful.

In the museum of Namur, in Belgium, there is a very extraordinary statue called “The Headless Man.” The statue represents a young knight in armor. He has no head, but in his outstretched hand he holds a skull. Underneath the figure is an inscription, carved in the blue stone. The words are very remarkable: “AN HOUR WILL COME WHICH WILL PAY FOR ALL.”

The statue, more than four hundred years old, was erected to the memory of a young knight who died for his faith during an awful period of persecution in the Netherlands. For the sake of Christ that young man had lost his head, and his sorrowing family put up this blue statue to his memory. For many years it stood in the knight’s home before being placed in the museum at Namur.

An hour is coming which will pay for all. What hour will that be which will repay each servant of Christ for all that he has borne for his Master’s sake on earth? Will it not be that hour when he shall stand before the throne and shall hear the voice of the King of Glory saying to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant. ... Enter thou into the joy of thy lord”?

Then, and not till then, shall we fully know what this verse means: “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 5: The Pleasant City (2:19-22)

2 Kings 2:19-22

What different lives people live! Where we are born determines many things about the life we will live. For instance, if we had been born in Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, what a different life we should lead! We should become accustomed to a very short summer and to a long, cold winter. We should dwell for many months of the year in almost endless night and in intense cold; much of our food would come from the sea. It would not include the variety of fresh vegetables that many of us enjoy. Why would this be? Simply because Reykjavik happens to be situated on a cold, treeless island.

But let us visit in thought a place which I would call the pleasant city, pleasant on account of its situation. Every man of that city could say, and could say truly, “The situation of this city is pleasant.”

How then was it situated? It stood on a broad plain, crossed by an abundant river. Around the city grew groves of beautiful palm trees, which were so numerous and so famous that, even as early as the days of Moses, it had been named “The City of Palm Trees.”

As we enter the city we notice that it is well supplied with water. Not only does the rapid river flow only five miles away, but a stream of water runs close to the town itself, on its way to join the river.

We notice something else. It is not only the city of abundant water, but it is the city of sweet scents. The air is laden with perfume, for under the palm trees and in the gardens grow sweet-scented shrubs, and the air, especially in the evening when the dew is falling, is filled with their fragrance.

There is one very strange thing about this pleasantly situated city. It is as old as the days of Moses, and yet, when we walk down its streets in imagination in the time of Elisha, we see that it is an entirely new place; there is not a single old house to be seen. The town has evidently been just built, and it is quite fresh and modern in style.

The pleasant city, so pleasantly situated, is no other than Jericho, the walls of which had fallen down when the Israelites marched around them. For 500 years Jericho had lain desolate, for had not Joshua uttered a terrible denunciation on the man who should dare to rebuild it? But only a few years before Elisha visited it, a man of Bethel named Hiel had ventured to rebuild it. He had vainly hoped that God had forgotten His word, but he had found to his terrible cost and sorrow that God never forgets (Josh. 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34).

Jericho was a grand, flourishing town in Elisha's day. There stood the great college for training young men to be teachers; there lived also a daily increasing population, who chose Jericho as their place of residence because the situation of it was pleasant.

Yet the city had a drawback, a very serious one. Let us stand by the gate of the city very early in the morning. The daylight has not yet broken on the plain, though there is light on the blue hills of Moab. At the gate we see an enormous crowd of donkeys and mules. On their backs are slung numbers of goatskin bottles, and by them are standing a large party of donkey-drivers and mule-drivers.

Where are they going at this early hour of the morning? They are going where they go every morning of their lives, down to the Jordan River, that rushing, muddy river which tears across the plain just five miles from the city.

Why do they make this daily pilgrimage to the river? In order that they may fill those numerous skins with water so that, by this means, they may supply the whole city of Jericho with water. They start early, because it will be too hot to go when the sun is high in the cloudless heavens, and their journey is of the utmost importance, for, until they have traveled five miles there and five miles back again, the people of the pleasant city cannot have fresh water for the new day.

We must live in the East in order to know the value of water. In the West we turn on the tap and draw as much as we please; there every drop is precious. We can picture to ourselves the care which the people of Jericho would take of that precious water, when the donkeys returned with it from the Jordan.

The water, which has required so much labor to bring it to the city, must on no account be wasted. The children of Jericho are not allowed to spill a drop of it; it is carefully measured out, and as little as possible is used. Still, even with the greatest care, the supply sometimes falls short, and no more water can be obtained until the next day, when the donkeys and mules once more return from the river.

But those who have been to Jericho tell us that close to the city, at the very gates, is an abundant spring; there it comes, bubbling, rushing out of the rock; there it flows in all its coolness, an inexhaustible fountain. This stream is named "Ein Sultan," and it flows on unceasingly year-round. Was this spring not there in Elisha's time? Undoubtedly it was, and it was as full of water 3000 years ago, when the prophet stood on its bank, as it is today.

Why, then, did the people of Jericho pass by an abundant stream of clear spring water, running close to their very doors, and toil, day after day, no less than ten miles over the hot plain, in order to bring into the city a supply of the muddy water of the Jordan?

Let us stop one of the mule-drivers and ask him why he does not fill his leathern bottles at the spring, thereby saving himself the labor of his long, tiring journey.

He will tell us that the water of the stream is utterly useless; it is bad and unwholesome; the goats and the cattle that stray to its side are made ill by it, if they attempt to drink it; even the plants that spring up on its banks lose their fertility and die. The people of Jericho dare not touch a drop of it.

But a visitor is staying in Jericho. Elisha, the new prophet, is there — Elisha, who has already been wondrously owned of God and who undoubtedly possesses the miraculous power granted to his predecessor, the great Elijah.

They will tell Elisha their trouble. They will not ask for help; they will merely state their difficulty. Surely he will be touched at once by their tale, and will, if possible, bring them relief. So some of the chief men in the town come to him and tell him what has been for so long a trouble and a discomfort to them. They say to Elisha, "Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the ground barren."

Elisha listens to their complaint, and then he sends for a new earthenware bottle. This he orders to be filled with salt from the Dead Sea, which is nearby. Then, taking the bottle of salt in his hand, he leaves the house. Amazed and wondering, the citizens of Jericho follow him. He passes through the city gate and proceeds to the source of the poisonous stream. When he reaches the place where it comes bubbling up out of the ground, he stops. He pours the salt from the bottle into his hand, and then strews it upon the spring. As he does so, he solemnly pronounces the words of healing: "Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land."

The stream by which Elisha the prophet and the wondering company of Jericho citizens stood that day is still running. All around it is a barren wilderness, but as you cross the dreary plain, you suddenly come upon this spring, bursting out of the rock, forming a large pool, and then flowing out in three streams of the purest spring water. The banks of these streams are lovely to look upon, for they are thick with oleander,

bamboo and lemon trees. The whole place is a beautiful picture of the most luxuriant tropical vegetation, a lovely oasis in the midst of a desert. Such is the spring today, “Elisha’s Spring,” as it is still called.

And in that spring we have a picture, a double picture. We can see in it, if we will look, a very good representation of a great many people’s lives.

The lives of some are like that stream before Elisha visited it: going on through this world of sin and sorrow and misery, and yet doing no good to anyone, carrying misery and spiritual barrenness wherever they go. They are living for self, and they have no care for those around them; they bring unpleasantness and not comfort into the hearts of others. Their example is evil and not good; their influence is on the side of this present evil world, with all its sinful and God-forgetting ways.

But the lives of others are strangely and wonderfully different. They resemble Elisha’s stream, not as it was in the days of its barrenness, but as it was after the prophet visited it. They are like Elisha’s stream at the present day. They carry joy and comfort and refreshment wherever they go. They are a blessing to everyone. They cheer all within their reach. They bring ease to the weary, encourage the weak-hearted, and visit the lonely. Wherever they go, they are a quiet power for good, a source of goodness and joy, a lovely stream causing an oasis in the desert life around them.

Let us ask ourselves, Which life is mine? Am I like the stream as it was in its barren days, a useless one in God’s world, bringing no joy or gladness to those around me, the aid of spiritual life and fruitfulness to no one, or am I like the lovely, beautiful stream — a helper of many, a blessing in the world? Thank God that just as the Jericho stream by the power of God was changed in its nature, so can our lives be changed.

Elisha gives us the recipe for changing a useless, harmful life into a useful and blessed one. It is the same recipe which the Master gives us in Mark 9:50, where He bids us, “Have salt in yourselves.” The salt, put upon the waters of Elisha’s spring, entirely changed its character, and the purifying grace of God can change my life from being an empty, frivolous, useless, mischievous life to being one which will be a blessing to all around me, because of its utter unselfishness.

But one thing we must carefully notice, and that is the place in which Elisha put the salt upon the water. He did not cast it on the waters of the stream half a mile or a mile from the spring. He was careful to go to the source and to cast it on the water at the very spot from which it came bubbling out of the rock. So the Lord would have me learn that if my life is to be different, my heart must be different. If I am to live a changed life, it must be because the source, my innermost heart, has first been changed by the grace of God.

Is not this a lesson that we often forget? Do we not too often overlook the fact that reformation is useless without conversion, that the life cannot be right unless the heart is right, and that therefore a changed heart must always be the source of a changed life? We often sing,

But, before we can offer that prayer, we must first, as Jesus says, “be born again” to receive a new life and heart.

A young girl, just on the verge of womanhood, was asked by a friend, “What are you going to do with your life?” She didn’t answer, but the words gripped her. As she walked home, as she sat at her work and as she lay on her bed, she repeated the question to herself: What am I going to do with my life? I am doing nothing with it at present. I have no definite aim or object in it. Day by day passes away, and I pass the time as well as I can. I have no particular object in view, no special purpose to which my life is devoted. Yet God has given me this life for a certain reason, to be used for Him. I have no right, then, to waste it or to fritter it away.

What am I going to do with my life? She decided in her heart, I will give it to God to be used as He shall please.

What are you and I doing with our lives? Is my life like Jericho when Elisha visited it — very pleasant? Can I say, “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage”? Yet, alas! In spite of all God’s love and wonderful kindness to me, “The water is naught, and the ground barren.” I am doing nothing for Him.

Is that the cry of my heart? Then I will do as the people of Jericho did. They went and told Elisha. He must have known it before, for he had been some days in their city, and he must surely have seen the water brought up from the Jordan. But the water would never have been healed had they not gone to Elisha and told him about it.

And if I would have my life different, I must go and tell Jesus. Elisha, as we have seen, was the type of the tender, loving Saviour. I will go to Him today. I will lay it before Him. “Lord, the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, but I am doing nothing for Thee; my life is not what it ought to be.” And even today I shall hear Him pronounce the blessed words of healing: “Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land.”

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 4: Left Behind (2:12-18)

2 Kings 2:12-18

Two men were in the field long years ago, a green field, where grew the pink oleander and the bushy tamarisk by the side of the rushing river. One man, Elijah, the master, was taken up from earth and carried into the presence of his Lord. The other man, Elisha, the servant, was left behind, left desolate and alone in the empty field.

Have you ever tried to picture what it will be like just after God’s people are taken suddenly away? In one house all will be Christ’s except one — the one who is left behind. All around will be others as desolate as he is, husbands left without wives, friends left friendless. How blessed to be the one taken; how desolate to be the one left! So Elisha felt, as he stood looking up into the cloudless blue, into which the whirlwind had borne his master.

Yet what a difference between the one left on the Jordan banks and those who will be left when Christ comes for His own! Elisha hoped to see his master again; the parting was only for a time. He could look up and say, “God be with you till we meet again.” But in the awful day that is coming, it will be an eternal parting.

Elisha cried, as Elijah disappeared, “My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof! And he saw him no more.” The face he had loved so many years, the hands over which he had so often poured water, the feet which had trod with him so many weary miles, the voice which was dear to him, and the loving heart whose every care and anxiety he had shared were all gone, and he was left behind.

And, in the desolation of his grief, he took his long cloak in which he was traveling and the linen tunic which he wore beneath it and he tore them in two — the Eastern sign of mourning and loss.

But as he looked sorrowfully around, he saw something. Lying on the grass close to his feet was a short, rough sheepskin cloak. It was Elijah’s mantle, the prophet’s garb — the very cloak he had cast over Elisha, as he walked over the newly-ploughed field, as a sign that he had come to call him to the work of God — the very cloak in which he had seen him every day of the seven years they had been together, the very cloak which, only a short time before, had divided the Jordan and made a path through the rushing waters.

As Elijah rose, the cloak had fallen from his shoulders and was left behind for Elisha. The young man knew what it signified. He must do Elijah’s work. He must be to the world what his master had been, a burning and a shining light. He was no longer the prophet’s servant; he himself was now the prophet of God, and as such he must wear the prophet’s garb.

Elisha stooped and took up the cloak and took up at the same time all the responsibility which it entailed. Then he turned back to do that which was to be his life work. Soon he found himself standing where he had stood by his master’s side a short time before, on the banks of the rushing Jordan.

Then Elisha remembered the wonderful path and how they two had trod it together. Could it be that the wonderful power which God had given his master had been passed on to him? Would God be with him as He had been with Elijah? He would prove it. Standing by the rushing stream, Elisha cried aloud, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” and, as he cried, he smote the waters with the mantle which he carried. At once, God answered, for the waters divided, and Elisha went over. With a happy and thankful heart he could cross the stream! The God of Elijah was with him, working by him, working through him.

Thank God that He is to us what He was to Elijah, “a very present help”! Did you ever grasp the beauty and the comfort of those words, “A very present help”?

Recently, three men were on an island in the Arctic, trapped by a snowstorm and running out of food. By man’s wonderful, modern means of communication they could talk to their friends and tell them of their need. But none could help; no man could be “a very present help.”

But, thank God, He can always hear and is always able to help in time of need. Not a single moment is lost. “The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him.” “A very present help in [time of] trouble.”

“Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” Elisha cried, and found Him as he cried. And so it is with us. We cry to Him and He answers before we call.

Yes, it is God Himself who puts the holy thought of prayer into our hearts with one hand, while with the other He holds out the very blessing for which He is prompting us to ask. “Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

Where is Elijah’s God? He is close beside us as we go about our daily work, as we walk down the crowded street, as we lie sleepless on our bed by night, or as we hurry through a crowd of difficult duties by day. Elijah’s God is by our side; the very present help is close at hand.

There were spectators that day as Elisha crossed the river. Standing on a hill overlooking the Jordan valley was a party of young men. Who were they? They were the students from the college at Jericho, and they had watched Elisha and his master from the top of the hill. They had traced the two along the hot dusty road; they had seen the Jordan smitten and had watched the master and servant crossing the river, dry-shod, and then disappear from sight among the acacia trees on the other side.

Still the little company of young men had stood watching on the hilltop. And after some time — how long we are not told — they had seen a solitary figure coming down towards the river. Two had gone up the bank; one comes back alone. It is only Elisha, the servant; Elijah, the master, is gone.

How will Elisha cross the foaming, rushing river? It was an easy matter for Elijah, the mighty, wonder-working prophet. He had received food from the hungry ravens; he had brought down fire from heaven; he had even waked the dead — he could cross that rapid stream by God’s power.

But Elisha, the servant, was only one of themselves; in fact, he was inferior to them, for he merely poured water over the hands of Elijah. He was simply a servant; they were the students of the college at Jericho. How then will Elisha, the servant, cross the river?

To their utter astonishment he crosses it just as his master had done. In his hand is the mantle they know so well, and with it he strikes the water; it divides before him, and he crosses on dry ground. Awestruck by this wonderful sign, the inquisitive young men exclaim, “The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha,” and, coming to meet him, they do him reverence as the new prophet.

But, while acknowledging his office, they urge him to do something to find Elijah. He, as they well knew, had often before disappeared mysteriously. God had again and again caused him to disappear for a time. Alone and unseen, he had passed through the whole country in the time of famine, at the very time when Jezebel was searching for him. Nor was this the only time when this had happened. Obadiah, the governor of Ahab’s house, knew of it, for he once said to Elijah, “It shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me.”

The sons of the prophets suggest that this may be the explanation of Elijah's absence. Once more, as before, the Spirit of the Lord may have carried him away. Let us, they say, send fifty strong, brave men to climb every mountain and search every valley until they find the lost prophet.

Elisha knows where his master has gone; he has passed from the seen into the unseen; he has ascended up above the mountains and above the valleys; he has passed into the presence of the King of glory. How useless, then, to search for him! How fruitless would their efforts to find him prove! How utterly useless to look for him on earth, when he has passed from earth into heaven.

So Elisha says, "Ye shall not send." But the persistent sons of the prophets are not content to do as he says. They evidently think they know better than he does. They press him again and again. They urge him repeatedly to allow them to make the search.

"They urged him till he was ashamed." They pressed him and worried him, till at last he said, "Send."

The fifty strong ones went out and began their search while Elisha waited at Jericho until their return. Three days went by and finally the search party returned. Slowly they came up the hot ascent from the Jordan to report to Elisha that they had been unsuccessful. And he responds, "Did I not say unto you, Go not?"

Now, Elisha takes up the responsibility God has given him — that of God's messenger to His nation. Like Elisha, there are times when we too look at the responsibilities of life which lie ahead of us. We may see twelve unknown months of duty and care, waiting for us with all their unknown possibilities. Do we not often give a sigh, as we think of what may be coming to us, silently but surely? But I do not think Elisha sighed that day; he set forth to meet the future hopefully and thankfully. The Lord God of Elijah was by his side, and he could say, "I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me."

I think that Elisha trusted in what David calls the "saving strength of His right hand." There lies the secret of all success in our work and of all comfort in our lives. We are weak, but beside us walks the Strong One. We are powerless, but the right hand of power is stretched out on our behalf. There is saving strength in that right hand. It can ward off all dangers; it can protect us from all enemies; it can shield us in every time of need. "The Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save."

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 3: The Will of an Outcast (2:1-11)

2 Kings 2:1-11

Have you made your will? What do you have to give to your loved ones? In our minds let's go together to a hospital where a man is dying. On the bed lies a poor homeless man, alone in the world, possessing nothing but the ragged, tattered clothes which he wore as he tramped the muddy roads or slept under a bridge or in an abandoned building.

The man is dying; let him make his will. Do you say he cannot do it? The poor man has nothing to leave but his wretched clothes; no one can hope to get much from that man's death.

Yet this chapter is about a will, the will of an outcast — a man who was homeless and nearly friendless, whose shelter was a cave, and who for years had wandered about like a tramp from place to place. He has no houses or lands or money, yet he makes his will. He had no children, yet he leaves an inheritance to one who calls him father. He is a penniless man, yet he leaves behind a priceless possession.

That old man and the young one who calls him father may be seen walking side by side, coming out of that little village of Gilgal. They are walking together down the stony road that leaves Gilgal on the south and runs northwest towards Jerusalem.

Who are they? The younger one is Elisha, the servant, who for seven years has been pouring water on the hands of his master and waiting on him in various ways. He is a young, strong, active man, just starting on the battle of life, just beginning to run the race, just taking up the service of Jehovah. There is indeed plenty of promise in young Elisha.

And by his side we see the old prophet of God, the tried and proven servant of Jehovah, ready now to be called up to meet his Master.

There is a striking contrast between those two, the master and the servant. Elijah, the master, a rugged, strangely dressed man, attracts the notice of all who pass him on the road while Elisha, the servant, neatly dressed with smooth, well-shorn hair and beard has nothing peculiar in his appearance to make others notice him.

But, if there was a contrast in their personal appearance, there was surely a still more marked contrast in their character: Elijah, the master, is bold, stern, unflinching and uncompromising; Elisha, the servant, is gentle, loving, meek and tender-hearted.

Their natural characters were opposite to each other, but oh, how they loved each other! Often we admire in others those characteristics which we do not ourselves possess. While Elijah and Elisha were utterly different, the tie between them was a very strong one, and the love between them had grown and strengthened during those seven years of companionship.

For seven years Elisha had been the faithful servant and friend of the old prophet. He had shared all his wanderings; he had listened to all his anxieties; he had borne, for his sake, hunger and weariness and care; he had suffered much in his behalf, and all this had only made him love his master the more tenderly. There had been terrible times for Elisha during those seven years. When God had sent Elijah into Naboth's vineyard to speak the doom of the wicked Ahab, oh, how Elisha must have trembled for his dear friend's safety! Cannot you picture him hidden away in a cave on the hillside, hardly able to breathe till Elijah came back in safety? Yes, they had weathered many a storm together, those two, master and servant.

But now the end is drawing near. The time has come when Elijah and Elisha must part, when the hearts so closely bound together in love and friendship must be severed. And they know it. As they walk out of Gilgal that day, they know that the parting is drawing near.

As the master and the servant leave the gate of Gilgal and as they are walking down the rough road, Elijah suddenly stops. As he stands still, his eyes would rest upon the scene of his old labors. Mount Carmel, Samaria and Jezreel lie before him, and he looks upon them for the last time. Then, turning to Elisha, his faithful servant and friend, he says, “Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel.”

It is eight miles from Gilgal to Bethel. The road first goes down a steep hill into a long valley or narrow gorge between the hills, which runs on for four miles, as far as an ancient spring now named “The Robbers’ Well.” So far the road is comparatively easy, but from that spot there is no road, save the rocky bed of a dried-up river, until the foot of the hill, on which Bethel stands, is reached. So, says Elijah, “tarry here, Elisha, while I go along this rugged, toilsome path to Bethel.”

But it seems to me that while his mouth said, “Tarry,” his heart said, “Come.” He said it simply as a test of his young friend’s willingness to follow his master. He felt he was drawing near the most solemn moment in his life, and his human soul must surely have longed for sympathy and companionship. Anyhow, Elisha answered at once, “As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.”

It was well he went, for, oh, how terrible would have been Elisha’s loss if he had stayed behind!

So they went down to Bethel, along the valley and across the rough watercourse, a long, weary way. Yet I doubt if the eight miles seemed long to Elisha: Every moment with his master was precious; every word he spoke was treasured in his faithful servant’s memory.

But I do not think they talked much as they went along. Elijah was drawing very near the end of his life on earth, and he knew it. Elisha was losing the friend who was to him as a father, and he knew it too. And at such times we cannot talk much; the heart is too full for words.

Who are these coming out of Bethel to meet them? Down the hill come a company of young men, students in one of the colleges which had been established by the prophet Samuel in the land for training young men for the service of Jehovah. These colleges had been visited from time to time by the prophet Elijah, and he was well-known to all the students. They come up to the two travelers as they begin to climb the hill. To the old man they say nothing, but they look at him, maybe, with awestruck faces. Then, drawing the young Elisha aside, they whisper to him, “Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today?” And he said, “Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.” It was as if he would say, “He is going away from me; I know it only too well. There is no need to remind me of it; hold your peace.”

The young students draw back, and the two pass on together. As they leave Bethel, the old man once more turns to his young servant. Elijah said unto him, “Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho.” Did he speak thus just to draw out the loving tender reply, “As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee”?

As they near Jericho, the city of palm trees, once more young students are seen coming out to meet them, for there is another school of the prophets in that place. Elisha sees them; he knows they are expecting them; he knows before they speak what they are going to say.

Yes, there it is again, the same whispered question, “Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today?” and once more, the sorrowful Elisha answers, “Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.”

Leaving the city of palm trees, once more Elijah speaks to the faithful soul by his side and says to him, “Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan.” And a third time the faithful Elisha replies, “As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.”

And they two went on. They two. How many a road had they two traveled side by side! But this was their last walk together. Soon, very soon, Elijah would be gone, and Elisha would have to travel alone. Very quietly, very solemnly, they two went on together.

Seven miles lie between Jericho and the Jordan River, yet they two still went on, mile after mile, till at last the waters of the river are heard in the distance. It is a hot, tiring walk; there is no shade, there is not a breath of wind. They are walking on heavy, loose sand, which is hot and burning beneath their feet, while the air is filled with fine particles of salt blown from the Dead Sea, which cause thirst to the throat and pain to the eyes of the travelers. But what cares Elisha for the heat or the dust or the salt, if only he can be near his beloved master a little longer?

At length the two reach the river. Breaking their way through the tall reeds and rich undergrowth, they stand on the bank of that river which for 3000 years has been a picture of death. Rapidly, fiercely, the muddy river rushes along at their feet, but Elijah is not to struggle through the deep, dark waters of death, and therefore he will not have to stem the current of Jordan, the current of death.

Taking off his rough sheepskin cloak, he rolls it together like a miraculous staff, and he smites with it the rushing river. At once the waters divide, a path opens through it, and they two pass over on dry ground.

Now the old man feels that his last hour on earth is come; he is nearly home. By faith he can see in the distance the fair city of God waiting to receive him; he can almost hear the shouts of welcome of those who are coming out to meet him. Only a few more earthly steps have to be taken before his feet leave this earth to be with his Master.

Now he breaks the long, solemn silence, and turning to Elisha he says to him, “Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.”

It is as if he would say, “You have been a faithful servant to me, Elisha; nay, you have been more than a servant — you have been a son. You have ministered to me for seven years, you have loved me with true and faithful love, you have comforted and cheered me at all times. And now I am going to leave you. What shall I give you? How can I reward you? Ask what I shall do for you before I be taken away from you.”

Elisha answers at once; he has one wish, and one wish only, in his heart: “I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.”

When a Jewish father left his property to be divided among his children, each son had a share, but the firstborn had a double portion, twice as much as any of the rest. And this is just what Elisha asks for. He does not ask to have twice as much of the Spirit of God as rested upon his master, but he pleads for the firstborn's share, the double portion, the special inheritance of the eldest son.

And Elijah said, "Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so."

Then they walked on, their last walk, and they talked on, their last talk. And as they walked and as they talked, the parting came. There appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire and parted them both asunder. Thus were the two friends divided. Then came a whirlwind, and in the tempest this grand prophet went up to heaven.

But he left a legacy. Penniless and childless, a homeless outcast though he was, he left a legacy to one who called him father, even to the young Elisha, and that legacy was the most valuable thing in the world to Elisha.

It was a twofold legacy. There were two things left to Elisha: his master's spirit and his master's work. Without the spirit he could not possibly do the work; having the spirit, he had untold riches, and the most difficult task was easy to him. Now he could go forth and could carry on the glorious work for God which Elijah had begun.

Nearly two thousand years ago, a little group of men, on the Mount of Olives, saw a sight as wonderful as that which Elisha saw. They were gathered around their Master, who was dearer to them than Elijah was to Elisha. He was saying His last words to them, when suddenly He was parted from them; He rose higher and higher into the blue sky until a cloud received Him out of their sight, and He was taken noiselessly, quietly, peacefully, up into heaven.

But He left behind Him a legacy, a double legacy. He left it to the company of disciples who saw Him ascend, but, thank God, He left it not only to them, but to the church of God in all ages.

What was the twofold legacy which Christ left to His people? He left them His Spirit and His work.

And that legacy is the inheritance of each one who is a servant of Christ. The legacy has been left to each of us. The question is, Have we received it?

The postman leaves a letter at our door, which tells us that a legacy of $10,000 has been left to us and instructs us to apply at a certain place where the money will be handed over to us. That money is left to us, but we must apply for it before we can receive it.

God's letter is in our hands today, His Word of truth. In it we read of the Lord's legacy, left to us. Have we ever applied for it? Have we ever received it?

Have we received Christ as our Saviour and received the first part of the legacy, the Spirit of God? Are we sealed and filled with the Spirit? Is the Spirit moving us, strengthening us, filling us with divine power?

And what about the work? What are we doing for the Master? Are we carrying on His work? Are we day by day serving Him and toiling for Him?

No one can be poor who has such a glorious legacy. His Spirit must make us rich; His work must make us happy. Have we claimed the legacy? Or does the Lord say to us today, as He said to His disciples, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full"?

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 24: A Strange Funeral (13:20-21)

2 Kings 13:20-21

In the little churchyard of Lydd near Dungeness in England there is a nameless grave. A stone stands at the head of the small mound, and on the stone is an inscription. Only two words are engraved on that little headstone, and the words are these: "GOD KNOWS." How did that happen? Some years ago there was a shipwreck in the English Channel. The great ship, Northfleet, went down, and all on board were drowned. Only one body washed ashore, and it was the body of a little child. No one knew or could discover that child's name. The village carpenter asked what name he should put on the coffin. "God knows" was his answer, and the man, taking him at his word, put those two words on the coffin lid. Later the same two words were carved on the child's little gravestone.

Now attend with me in thought a funeral — a nameless one. Here is the mournful funeral procession, making its way out of the village with the body wrapped in grave-clothes but not enclosed in a coffin. It is laid on a wooden platform, carried on the shoulders of the villagers. Let us join the procession and attend the funeral, a most unusual one.

Who is being buried? I do not know; we shall never know in this world. It is the funeral of a man, but who he was, we cannot know.

The men who are carrying the body walk hastily and look about them anxiously, as if they expect to hear footsteps. The mourners not only look sad, but afraid as well.

Of what are they afraid? To the east in full view of their village is a line of blue mountains, standing like a wall against the sky. In those mountains lives a race of men called the Moabites. They are descendants of Lot, cousins of the Israelites, but they have always proved

themselves most unfriendly relatives. There is certainly no love between the two branches of the family.

David's great-grandmother, Ruth the Moabitess, was of that nation. When David was being pursued by Saul, he sent his father and mother across the Jordan to those blue mountains that they might be out of reach of Saul's anger and might find a resting-place with his great-grandmother's family (1 Sam. 22:34).

For a long time there had been bad feeling between Israel and Moab. We saw King Jehoram going forth against Mesha, king of Moab, and we noticed how Elisha helped him to win a glorious victory at the south end of the Dead Sea (2 Kings 3:2425). But after that the tide turned, and Mesha, as he tells us on the Moabite Stone, began to get the upper hand. From the days of Jehoram onwards, whenever Israel was weak, the Moabites invaded their land and harassed the people.

Around the time of our funeral, King Hazael of Syria attacked Israel on the north. The Moabites then took the opportunity of rushing into the country, robbing and murdering. Bands of marauding Moabites have been seen in the neighborhood not long before the funeral, so the mourners go quickly, keeping their eyes open for trouble.

The village is left behind and the burial ground is reached safely. It is not at all like an English or American cemetery. The graves are not holes dug in the ground; they are caves hewn out of the solid rock of a hillside. Some have a large stone placed at the entrance of the cave. The entry to some is so low that you have to creep inside on hands and knees. Then you find yourself in a chamber, with shelves on each side, on which the bodies were placed. Sometimes a cave has several chambers of bodies in it.

Suddenly a cry of horror is raised by one of the mourners. Glancing up to the top of the rocky valley, he spies men, armed men, the feared Moabites!

What is to be done? There is no time to take the body to its assigned cave. The Moabites will be upon them. "Put him in anywhere," cries one of the mourners. "Any cave will do."

So hastily and fearfully they run into the nearest cave on the hillside. They lay down the body and rush out, down into the valley towards their homes in the village.

But they are followed; someone is behind them. They look back, fully expecting to see a Moabite soldier. But it is none other than the dead man, the man whom they had just buried. And he is not dead, but alive.

Put yourself in their place. Which would startle you more? The sight of a Moabite soldier or the man you had just buried?

Can you guess what happened? In their great haste, those carrying the dead body had not stopped to select a place for it, but they had put it into the first available cave and that was the cave where Elisha was buried. In fact, they had laid the body down in such haste that it touched the bones of Elisha, the prophet who had raised the Shunamite's son from the dead.

It was only his body. His soul was already with his Lord. Remember the beggar we read about in Luke's Gospel who sat at the gate of the rich man. He "died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." In spirit Elisha was with the Lord, enjoying the rest and the glory of the Lord's presence, while his body rested quietly in the cave in the valley.

But what happened that spring day at that strange funeral? No sooner did the dead body of the man touch the bones of Elisha than that very touch resulted in a wonderful miracle. Out of death there came life; the dead man was raised to life and stood on his feet.

Elisha, being dead, yet spoke. When he closed his eyes in that little chamber where King Joash visited him, he may have thought that nothing more would come from his life. But what a person is and has done often speaks long after they are dead. What was the sermon that Elisha's bones preached? They said, as plainly as possible, God lives.

The poor Israelites were in terrible straits. The Syrians were oppressing them; the Moabites were worrying them. Over and over again they may have sighed, "If only Elisha were still living and here to help us. But he is dead. There is no help, no hope." But Elisha's bones said to them, "I, Elisha, am dead, but God lives. He is your refuge and strength. It is His power, not mine, that helps you. Look to Him, trust in Him, and all will yet be well."

It seems to me that the Israelites listened to that unusual sermon and learned their lesson from God that day, for we read, "The Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them ... because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast He them from His presence as yet."

We may die before the Lord comes for us. And if we do, we might think that our lives will not matter anymore. But consider what it says in Revelation 14:13: "Their works do follow them." What does it mean? Here is a broad, smooth pond. You stand beside it, and, taking up a stone, you throw it into the center of it. The stone disappears. Where is it? It is gone; it has sunk to the bottom; you will not see it again. But its works do follow it; circles are starting on the smooth surface of the water — rippling circles, which will go on spreading and widening until they reach the very margin of the pond.

Think of the lives of Adam and Cain and Moses and Peter and Paul and countless others. Do not their lives still speak to us? Think of those we have known in our family or at school or work who have died. Is not the influence of their lives still with us? Some of those lives are to encourage us; others are to be a warning to us. All of them should speak to us. We are to think about the faith of believers who have died and are to imitate not their failings but their faith.

Often God uses one life to be a stepping-stone in his work of grace in the lives that follow. The results of one life often spread and one after another benefit or are affected by it. Long after they have died the circle of blessing, which by God's grace they were permitted to start, widens and spreads.

A certain peddler sold Richard Baxter's father a religious book. Through it he was converted. He later wrote a book entitled, The Saints' Rest. Many, including the great Doddridge, were saved through it. He, in turn, wrote a book named, The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul, and reading that book was the turning point in the life of William Wilberforce, the statesman through whose influence slavery was abolished. Wilberforce was also an author, and his book, The Practical View, was used by God to bring Legh Richmond to Himself. Legh wrote The Dairyman's Daughter, a book which, fifty years ago, was the means of the conversion of hundreds. These, in their turn, brought souls to the Saviour. So the circle of blessing still widens, and we shall never know, till we reach eternity, what have been the grand and glorious results of that one act of the Christian peddler. Truly his works do follow him.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

Elisha: God's Messenger of Grace, Chapter 23: The Prophet's Deathbed (13:14-19)

2 Kings 13:14-19

When we lived in Jerusalem, we had an old Arab servant. She was very ignorant, and although she professed to be a member of the Greek Church, she had never heard the name of Jesus. She knew nothing of the ways and customs of the West. She had never seen a train or a ship of any kind. She had never even heard of gas. One day I received a present which amazed her very much. It was a sewing machine. She had never seen one before, and she stood with wide-eyed amazement as it ran. At first she would not believe that it could really sew, and when she found that it could, she cried out in tones of admiration, "You Europeans can do everything, except one thing — you cannot conquer death."

She was right about death. We find graves in civilized London, just as we find graves in her little native town, Bethlehem. We see deathbeds and funerals throughout the world. Adam and Eve led the mournful processions of death. They dug the first grave; they buried the first dead body. Age after age has gone, and oh how many have followed them in death. Wonderful discoveries and marvelous inventions have been made, but no one has ever found out how to conquer death.

But, thank God, the Lord Jesus has triumphed over it, and, even now, He teaches us to sing, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" And soon, very soon, death will be one of those former things which have passed away. God's day is coming when "there shall be no more death."

Let us visit in thought a deathbed that we read of in Bible days. Where shall we go to find it? To a quiet little village in Palestine. We enter a small, flat-roofed house, and inside we find the dying man lying on the bed. He is an old man, more than ninety years old, with white hair and beard. Is he afraid to die? No, he is not afraid. Who is the old man? It is Elisha, the prophet of God.

We have traced him through all the changes of his changeful life. We saw him following the plough, the heir of Abel-meholah. We heard Elijah call him. We watched him going up and down with the homeless prophet, known by all as Elijah's servant. Then we saw Elijah go up in a whirlwind to heaven. We saw Elisha made prophet in his place. We watched his marvelous miracles of love and mercy. We saw him live to be honored and respected. Today we see the close of that long and useful life. We stand in thought by Elisha's deathbed.

Listen! There are footsteps in the courtyard. Some one enters the chamber of death. It is a young man, glowing with health and strength, very handsomely dressed. He is armed with a bow slung over his shoulder and a quiver of arrows hanging by his side.

Who is this young man? He is the king of Israel, the king who lives in the ivory palace in Samaria — not King Jehoram; he has been dead and buried long ago. God had borne long with him, but Jehoram would not come to Him, so the judgment came. The stroke of God fell on the guilty family. Jezebel was killed; Jehoram was dethroned and slain. All Ahab's wicked race was swept away. A new man who was no relative whatever to Jehoram was placed on the throne. He was Jehu, captain in the army. This young king who stood by Elisha's deathbed was Jehu's grandson, Joash.

As he watches the dying old man, lying on his bed, weak and feeble, Joash weeps. Why is he so troubled? The prophet is not related to him, nor has Elisha been to him a dear friend. Why, then, this distress and tears? Because the young man was in trouble. His father had been a bad man, doing evil in the sight of the Lord, and God had once more given the country over to the Syrians. Hazael was king of Syria, and Hazael was doing the very things which he had refused to believe were possible for him to do, the very things about which he had cried in horror, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this?"

The Syrians were masters in the land when young Joash came to the throne, and since then his circumstances have become still more dismal and hopeless. His chief cities have been destroyed; his fortresses have been burnt; his people have been ground down to slavery, and the once-fine army of Israel has been reduced to a miserable little company of ten chariots and fifty horsemen.

At last, when his people are brought very low and all hope seems gone, his thoughts turn to Elisha, the prophet of God. Had all gone well with him and his kingdom had prospered, he might have left the prophet alone and unnoticed, but now that he is in difficulties he remembers him. He calls to mind all that he has heard of the wonders Elisha performed. He remembers how at one time he had smitten the Syrian host with blindness and how on another occasion the armies of Ben-hadad had been driven in panic from the very gate of Samaria.

If only he could persuade Elisha to help his nation once more! If only he would come and encourage the feeble army of Israel and then confound the Syrian hosts of Hazael! Joash feels that nothing short of a miracle can deliver him from his enemies. The young king determines that he will seek Elisha and see what he will do for him. He feels that it is his last hope. So he comes to Elisha only to find that he is sick and dying.

What a terrible disappointment! Elisha cannot come to help him; he is too weak, too ill. In distress at his bitter disappointment, the young king sobs aloud. And as he weeps he speaks, and the words are very strange ones: “My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.”

Do you remember? We have heard those very words before! Joash was not the first man who had uttered them. Sixty years before this, those words had been spoken by a young man, by the very man who is now lying upon that bed, Elisha, who had cried out the very words which now fall upon his ears: “My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.”

When had he said these words? When he stood on the other side of Jordan with Elijah and saw appear a chariot and horses of fire, which parted him from his master. “And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.” It was as if he said, “My father, you are going, and I must bid you farewell, for here comes the chariot which is to take you away from me. My father, my father, you and I must part.”

Now, Elisha is dying, and the same chariot has come for him. The angels of God have come into that room of death to receive Elisha, as before they had received Elijah. And as the young king sees this, he cries in dismay, “My father, my father, you cannot help me; you will never be able to give me the assistance I so urgently need, for here is the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.”

But the old prophet looks up and bids the king do a strange thing. He tells him to take his bow and arrows and to go to the window. Then he bids him throw open the window and shoot.

The king opens the window and looks eastward towards the very part of his country which had been seized by the Syrians. “Now,” says Elisha, “put thine hand upon the bow.” Joash obeys. He lays his hand on the bow, ready to shoot.

When Alexander the Great landed on the shores of Asia Minor, he took a dart in his hand and, looking in the direction of Persia, he threw the dart, as a sign that he intended to subdue that land towards which the dart pointed. Just so, the old prophet bids Joash shoot the arrow of victory and deliverance against the Syrian forts on the east of Jordan.

Joash stands at the window; the bow is in his hands, but before he uses it the prophet rises and lays his hands on the young king’s hands, while Joash pulls out the bow with the arrow ready fixed on the string. An old man, ninety years of age, weak and dying: Of what use will his assistance be? Surely he will rather hinder than help the strong young soldier! Surely Joash will feel that he can shoot an arrow without the help of an old, sick man who is dying.

But Elisha wants to teach him a lesson. If Joash is ever to conquer the Syrians, it must be by other power than his own. Without help, divine help, he can do nothing, but if God is with him, helping him and fighting for him, he will indeed be more than conqueror.

Oh! to learn Joash’s lesson! Oh, to sit down in God’s school and with God’s lesson book in our hand to learn this one truth: “Without Me ye can do nothing”! How often we forget the lesson, even if we have once learned it! We think that we can help ourselves. We will keep clear of our old temptation. We will cease to be led by one who has an evil influence over us. We will resist manfully the world, the flesh and the devil.

But we quickly find out our mistake. We are weak as a reed, helpless as a newborn babe. We are no match for our mighty foes; we can do nothing; we have no power at all. Do you say, “If that is the case, we may as well give up the fight at once. If we can do nothing, it is no use attempting to do anything.”

Listen to the voice of Jesus. “Without Me ye can do nothing.” But with Me — ah, what can you do with Me? The Apostle Paul cries, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

What is our besetting sin? Whatever it be, we can be sure that we cannot tackle it alone. It will master us again and again. Only Christ can make us strong to resist it. If His hands are laid upon our hands, victory must follow. There, and there alone, is the secret of our success.

The arrows are shot. Elisha called them, “The arrow of the Lord’s deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria.” Then Elisha bids the young king to go outside, collect them and return. He has another lesson to teach him. The king obeys. He gathers the arrows and returns again to Elisha’s bedside.

And now, what is he to do? “Smite upon the ground,” says the prophet. Joash smites the ground three times and stops. Elisha is angry with him and says, “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.”

Elisha had shown Joash that the arrows spoke of the Lord’s deliverance over their enemy Syria. But Joash shows that his heart and faith in the Lord were slight, for he only strikes three times. And Elisha was angry with him.

Too often we are like Joash. We know we cannot conquer the enemy on our own and we turn to the Lord for help. But then we don’t trust him fully. We, like Joash, only count upon him to deliver us the three times and not the five or six times. We should count upon Him to deliver every time. May we be more like Paul when he said, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

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