

2 Kings 4:8-37

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[0 : 00] Elisha was one of the many prophets in the Old Testament and a prophet was simply a minister. Not quite the same as a minister nowadays but a minister nonetheless. A prophet was a man who was called by God for a certain purpose and the prophet's work was to stand before God and listen to his voice and then God would send him to the people of Israel to deliver his message to the people. That was his job. It was a very simple job. It was straightforward but it was costly because often the prophet was not welcome amongst the people. Sometimes people didn't want to hear God's word. In fact God's word was the last thing they wanted to hear. Sometimes a prophet was persecuted and marginalized because of how unpopular God's word was among the people. Some prophets were even put to death because they were faithful to what God had given them to do. The first prophet was Moses and then thereafter all throughout the Old Testament the prophets their job was to like I say bring the message of God to the people. Elisha was one of the major prophets in the Old Testament. He was preceded by a man called Elijah who lived during the reign of Ahab an extraordinarily wicked king. So Elijah's job was an immensely difficult one. It was a time of famine. A time when God was judging his people severely because of the wickedness of Ahab and his evil wife Jezebel and how they had turned the minds and the hearts of the people of Israel astray and they began to worship idols. God was judging his people at that time. These were dark days but now Ahab and Jezebel were gone. They had died and Elijah had been taken away.

Elisha was his replacement and Elisha's ministry was a very different one from that of Elijah. Elisha's ministry was to bring life and hope and light where there had been darkness in the past. Anyone who thinks that Elisha and Elijah were similar needs to read the passages again because Elisha was very different. Elisha's message was to bring God's word of optimism, promise, future, and hope.

Hope to the people of Israel. His message from God was, I am still your God. I am your saviour. I want to restore my people to them, to myself.

The life of the prophet was a strange one. Often they had no real place they called their home because their job was to go, was to travel and preach from town to town and village to village and they were completely dependent on the goodwill of the people. Like this woman that we've just read about who appears to have been quite rich. She also appears to have been a woman of great faith, a person who loved God and who wanted to put God first. And she showed that by offering peculiar hospitality to Elisha. She recognized him as a man of God. She obviously listened to him, took him very seriously, and she wanted to do what she could for God's kingdom. So she arranged that there would be a special room built in her house so that any time that the prophet felt like it, he could come and make it his home in that room. It was very simple. There was a bed, there was a table, there was a chair, there was a lamp, but it was, it obviously meant the world to Elisha. It was a place where he could relax and rest, where he could pray, and where he could discover God's message to take to the people.

[4 : 39] This woman was obviously a very serious believer, and she contributed. She did what she could for the need of Israel.

This room in this chapter is really significant. It becomes the scene of four things.

Number one, the room was the scene of future promise for the woman. We read that Elisha called her and asked her if she needed anything. She replied by saying that she didn't feel she needed anything. She was content. She lived amongst her own people.

But then when he inquired further, he discovered that she had no son. So by God's power, he was able to bring this message to her. Next year, you will have a son. At first, it appears that that was impossible.

And she didn't want her hopes to be raised. But Elisha was insistent. No, he said, God says next year, you will have a son. God promised a son for this woman.

[6 : 05] And sure enough, that's what came to pass. I can't help thinking of how, when we give ourselves to God's kingdom, like this woman did, that we become recipients of God's promises.

But sometimes they come at a cost. Faith is always tested, just like this woman's faith was.

Because when she had her son, after a few years, I don't know how old he was, perhaps 10, perhaps 15, we don't know. But he became ill one day. And he went out to his father. He complained of illness.

He went in and he died. Little did she know that what was such a joyful promise originally would turn out to be such a tragedy.

And so she took the child after he had died. And instead of burying him as normally would have happened, she did the most extraordinary thing. She took him up to the room of the man of God and laid him on his bed. And he just didn't do that. A family member died. Then the first thing that would happen, particularly in that culture, was burial. But she didn't. She seems to have had the faith to take the child and to lay him on the bed of the man of God. That's the second scene.

[7 : 50] The room became the scene of extraordinary faith. A faith that seems to have worked out in her own mind that the God who promised this child is the God who would raise him up again.

This whole story appears to suggest that this woman's knowledge of God was a growing one as her knowledge was tested, as her faith was tested. And her faith extended beyond taking the child up to the room. Her faith led her, forced her, to make every effort to get to the man of God so that she could tell him what had happened. When she got there, she didn't stop. She wasn't content to pour out her heart to the servant, Gehazi. She had to go to the man of God himself, to Elisha himself.

And when he asked her, she poured out her heart to him. The story appears to become more and more extraordinary as it goes on, because his first reaction was to give his staff, which symbolized his work and his authority, his pastoral duty towards the people of Israel. He gave that staff to Gehazi and he told Gehazi to get back to her house right away, as soon as possible, and to lay the staff on the child's head.

When he did so, nothing happened. Which is the third scene. The room was a scene of failure. What's extraordinary about this is that Elisha seems to have fully expected the child to rise again when the staff was placed upon him by Gehazi, and it didn't work. It's the only place in the, correct me if I'm wrong, but it's the only place in the Bible where a miracle doesn't work, where what is expected doesn't come to pass. And I'm so intrigued as to why it didn't work.

Could it be that Elisha perhaps had slipped into complacency as a prophet? Perhaps he lost sight of the importance of his own involvement in his work. Perhaps he had become too used to telling his servant Gehazi to do this, and he would do it. After all, that's what servants are for.

In any case, Elisha wasn't a perfect man. Neither had Elijah been before him. And this may well have been God teaching Elisha, reminding him of his own responsibility to be personally involved in his own ministry. We don't know. But it seems as if Elisha was learning as much about God as the woman was. The room became a scene of failure. Undeterred, Elisha made his way with the woman back to the house. He went upstairs, shut the door, and did something that we would regard as quite strange. He prayed, first of all, which you would think was enough. After all, if this boy is going to be raised from the dead, it's got to be by God's divine intervention. But he did more than pray.

[11 : 51] He stretched out on top of the boy, eyes to eyes, nose to nose, mouth to mouth. This wasn't resuscitation, by the way. The boy was dead. There was nothing normally and naturally that could be done for him. He lay on top of the boy, stretching himself out on top of him. Now, this, by the way, had been done beforehand by Elijah. There was a similar incident in his life. So it could have been that he remembered what Elijah had done. Nonetheless, it was absolutely essential that he did this in order for the boy to rise again. And sure enough, after pacing the floor, no doubt praying to God again, and after lying on top of the boy a second time, the boy sneezed seven times, which of course demonstrated that God had given his life back to him. And this is one of the several resurrections in the Bible.

There are not that many of them, by the way. But he is one of the several resurrections that we read about in the Bible, where someone who was dead comes back to life again. This is the fourth scene.

And this scene I'm going to call a foreshadowing. Why am I saying that? Because remember that the whole Bible points in one direction. It points in the direction of Jesus Christ.

And this passage, this story, this peculiar miracle is no exception. I can't help being struck by the fact that it was only by Elisha coming into contact with death that death was transformed to life. And that is exactly what Jesus came to do. There are many similarities between Elisha and Jesus. Remember how we said that Elisha, as a minister of God, was the Word. He represented God's message, God's Word. He was almost, we could almost say that he was God's Word in the flesh. Every time you saw Elisha, you saw this was God's Word, because you knew that he was a prophet, you knew that his work, you knew that his work was to deliver God's message to the people.

[14:47] Remember what the Bible says about Jesus, that he too was the Word. That he was ultimately the Word made flesh.

John goes on to tell us that he dwelt among us and we saw his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Son, full of grace and truth.

But the Gospels tell us that Jesus didn't stop there. The reason he was born was to die. And by dying, he came into contact with death to a greater extent than Elisha had done.

Elisha touched death. He came into contact with death. But Jesus actually became dead himself. So that we could live. So that there could be new life amongst us. So that he could create the life that we've never had.

[16:19] Life from the dead. The Bible tells us that all of us are dead in trespasses and sins. And the only hope we have is Jesus' touch.

Jesus' salvation. Jesus' healing. Jesus' resurrection. And he brought that about by himself, becoming dead and rising again, just like we saw this morning.

In his resurrection, there is newness, abundance of life. And I believe that this little story, this extraordinary story, was a pointer to what Jesus would one day do by himself as the ultimate prophet.

The ultimate man of God. The ultimate holiness of God. Who came into the world to die himself. And thus come into contact with death. Our sin. And so that that death could be removed.

[17:39] So that the guilt of our sin could be removed. And so that we could rise to newness of life. And that's the life that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we believe and if we trust in him. I believe that stories like this. True stories. I don't doubt this for a moment. But that they didn't just show that God was with his people.

But they showed that what God was doing amongst his people. He was breathing new life into them through his word. And I believe that this story pointed the people to give them a glimpse of what he would one day do in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the Jesus that we worship this evening. That we glory in this evening. That we love right now. And so let's rest in Jesus and what he has done.

Let's take what he has done. Because he gives it to us freely. And by his power he will raise each one of us who believe in him from the dead.

[18:52] And will take us to be with himself. We already have newness of life even in this world by believing in him. At least I hope we have. And if you don't then ask him for it.

And take what he offers you in himself. Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven we thank you that in the Old Testament. That we have these signs. These glimpses of what Jesus would one day do. And we do pray now. As we reflect upon the greatness of Jesus. And how he came into the world to seek and to save and to raise to newness of life.

We pray to believe in him. To trust in him. And to love him. With all our heart. In Jesus name. Amen.