

2 Kings 4:1-36

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn back to the passage that we read together from 2 Kings chapter 4 and to the account of the bringing back to life of this young boy and the story that's connected with it.

Now just very briefly, I think it's significant to remember the importance of the Old Testament. It's a tremendously important part of the Bible. It's part of the all scripture is God breathed and is useful. It's the Bible that Jesus read.

And it's also full of Jesus Christ. There's a lot in the Old Testament that points forward to Jesus. That teaches us about Jesus. That predicts his coming. That speaks about his coming. That models his coming. And a lot of people, a lot of commentators, a lot of people who study the Bible look at the life of Elijah and Elisha.

[1 : 12] And they parallel their lives with John the Baptist and with Jesus. So that very often there are similarities between the message, the work, the emphasis, the direction of the lives of Elijah and Elisha.

That is similar to the lives of John the Baptist and Jesus. And so I'm using our New Testament knowledge and our New Testament experience to look back into the Old Testament.

And to use the benefit and the privilege that we have of having New Testament eyes. And to delve back into the teaching of the Old Testament and apply it in a Christian way.

And apply it to our own lives. And I want to do what I was saying that I would do with the children. I want to talk about the Christian life.

And I would like to talk about the cost of the Christian life. And the challenge of the Christian life. And what's involved in being a Christian.

[2 : 25] And part of the challenge that I throw out today is about being wholehearted for Christ.

And recognizing what it means to be a believer. And challenge anyone who is spectating. And who is not making that stand for Jesus Christ.

And also challenge those who might have rejected Jesus. And are trying to live an alternative way. Without Christ in their lives.

And without Christ in their souls. But I'd like to do it by looking first of all at the life of this woman. Who is spoken about in the chapter. The Shunammite woman.

She's not given a name. So we're going to call her Mrs. S. Just for simplicity. And it's shorter than the Shunammite woman all the time. And there's one specific thing that I would like to say about her.

[3 : 33] And that is that opening her life to God. As she did. Was a dangerous thing for her to do. It was dangerous for her to open her heart to God.

You know we come to church. We sing. We sit down. With fellowship. With a cup of tea and coffee. And we go away. And sometimes I think we have got to the stage where we regard God as the safe option.

That it's an easy life. That it's a plain, bland, ordinary thing to do to be a Christian. And that sometimes the invitation is come to Jesus and everything will be right.

And your life will be good and you'll know blessing. Which of course is the truth. But it's only half the truth. Because God isn't a safe option for us.

There's a double-edged reality about having God in our lives. That should come across. In the way we live. In the way we worship. And in the way that we progress spiritually.

[4 : 42] When we allow God into our lives. There is and continues to be a kind of spiritual earthquake. Because it's not the safe option necessarily.

At one level. And I hope I'll explain what I mean by that. Because we are allowing God into our lives. He can play havoc with our stability.

With our emotions. And with our experiences. So that. As it was in the case of the Shunammite woman. Mrs. S. Opening her life to God.

Plainly. Was dangerous. It was a costly decision. For her to open her life. To God. In verse 10 we're told that she discussed with her husband.

And said let's make a room on the roof. And put a bed and a table and a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can come and stay here. Whenever he comes to us. That kind of significant decision.

[5 : 45] Was to associate herself with this man of God. And with the message of this man of God. And with his teaching. And very much the prophet in the Old Testament.

Was a representative of God. And so. You'll find that I'll probably mix things a little bit. And talk about God. When I'm referring to Elisha. In the sense that.

You know. Elisha was a prophet. Was representative very much. Of God. She was. Making a commitment. To this man.

She was making a commitment. To be hospitable to this man. To listen. To what he had to say. And in so doing. Was making a commitment to his God. And would listen to what the message was from his God.

And that would have been known publicly. Where's the prophet staying? Oh he's staying at Mrs. S's house. Oh she must be. Someone who is sympathetic to. Their God. To his God.

[6 : 41] And to that message. She professed. A belief. And she associated. With God. And we don't know much.

In this story. It's kind of difficult sometimes. In the Old Testament stories. Because we don't know very much. About the story. Sometimes we have to. Think a little bit. Behind. The actual. Bare bones.

That we're given. But. This woman. Was well to do.

She was rich. She had lots of things going for her. But. There's hints in the story. That. Prayerfully. She had a deep. Seated.

Ake. Deep in her heart. A longing. For a child. Now we know that. That is a very real longing. And it can be a very real longing.

[7 : 40] For people. And we know particularly. In the society. In which. She would have been brought up in. The importance. Of a child. A first born. An inheritor.

Someone to take the family line on. A blessing from God. Was a very big burden. And she was getting older. She was a bit. Like Elizabeth. She was a bit.

Like other people. Who had. Sarah. Who had longed. For a child. And was now. As it were. Almost past. Childbearing age. And.

In her answer. To Elisha. When Elisha. Mentions. To her. This deep. Seated longing. About next time. You will hold a son. In your arms. She objects. No.

Please. Don't mislead your servant. Don't do it. Oh man of God. And then later on. Obviously. When trouble happens. There is another. Kind of. Exposing of her heart.

[8 : 36] And of the pain. In her heart. But. She finds that. In allowing God. Into her life. And. Being involved. In this way. All kinds of things.

Are going on. And there is all kinds of turmoil. Happening. She probably got to the stage. Where she was. Content. With not. Having a child. Or at least. Had.

Settled. In her heart. That that was going to happen. And then. The man of God comes. And. She is showing him. Blessed. Goodness. And so. He wants to return that. And so. He asks about.

This. Longing. That. She doesn't know. That he knows anything about. And then. You're there. She has this. This child.

Magnificent story. Absolutely brilliant. All that she ever wanted. She has now got this child. God has answered her prayers. Through Elisha. And. This little boy.

[9 : 32] Is the apple of her eye. And. He's growing up. And. Herself and her husband. And the child. Are having great times. And then. All of a sudden. A complete earthquake.

In her experience. Very emotional. A story. Where the little boy. Has some kind of. Major illness. Some major problem. Brain tumour.

Or something. A sore head. And he comes home. And. She killed him. And he just dies. In her arms.

Tremendously. Moving. Powerful. Story. And what does she do. With that child. I think it's significant. She lays the child.

On the bed. Of the man. Of God. On his couch. This is God's gift to me. She says. God gave me this child. And now God's taken it away.

[10:29] I'm laying on the man. Of God's couch. Because he's responsible. It is him. Who is involved. God has involved me. In all this pain. And suffering.

And she then. As well. Goes to. Elisha. Because she knows. That Elisha. Is the one. Representative. She has. Before God.

In her bitter distress. In her cries. It's to God. That she goes. And it's to God's servant. That she cries out. And you know. Doesn't she say it.

So powerful. In bitter distress. Did I ask you. For a son. She said. I didn't ask you. For anything. I didn't look. For all of this. Didn't I tell you. Don't raise my hopes.

Do you know the Bible. We think the Bible. Is clean cut. Don't we. We think it's all about. Great faith. And victory. And strength. And yet. Here's a woman. Crying out. Don't raise my hopes. Didn't I tell you.

[11:25] It's a disaster. Having allowed God. Into my life. In this way. Faith. Her faith. Is an extremity. It's a roller coaster.

And then of course. There's the interaction. Between Gehazi. And Elisha. And then Elisha. Goes to the home. Shuts her out of the door. There's the incredible. Account of.

The healing. The joy. And Elisha. Summoning the woman. Saying. Take your son. She falls at his feet.

And bows to the ground. A little bit like Job. At the end of. All his struggles. And suffering. Bowing down at the foot of God. Recognizing.

Who God is. She's changed. She's renewed. It's unbelievable. What God has happened. But we can't say it's easy. Can we? And we can't say.

[12:22] It's been a cake walk. It's been a roller coaster. Of experience. For her. Opening her life to God. Giving her life to God. Was a costly decision.

It was dangerous. We need to remember that. But also. We need to balance it out. Don't we? With the recognition that.

It was a life for her. Of incomparable value. Because she. Became somebody with faith in God. And a relationship with God.

And God. Touched her life. And God. Answered her prayers. And God. Involved herself. In the deepest longings. Of her heart. And God. Had fellowship with her.

And she had trust in him. And she knew great trouble. But she knew where to take that great trouble. And her prayer was answered. And she experienced a miracle. There was.

[13:21] Restoration. There was. Lessons learned. There was blessing renewed. It was an unbelievable experience. That she went through. And it was a life. Of incomparable value.

That she wouldn't change. Or swap. And it was a life. That would go on. Eternally. In fellowship. With God. And I just want to interject. Into this Old Testament story.

For a moment. And remind ourselves. Of how it points forward. To Jesus. For ourselves. Because Elisha does. Point forward. To Jesus Christ.

Most of the miracles. That Elisha does. Are healing miracles. Of one sort. Or another. Very similar. To some of Jesus miracles. And there is a great. Anticipatory restoration.

In his ministry. That much of it. Is about life. From death. Healing. And restoration.

[14:20] And it's not only Elisha. That speaks of that. But there's many. Aspects. To the Old Testament. That are pointing forward. To this life. From death. That is going to come.

With Jesus. Whether it's Abraham. And Isaac. Whether it's Elijah. Whether it's here. Or whether it's Job. There's all kinds of. Anticipation. Of blessing.

And life. Coming. Through. The Messiah. Through the one. Who would be the Savior. But we reminded ourselves. Of the cost. Even in a little.

Very little way. In a shadowy way. Of what Jesus. Has done for us. Because. It wasn't good enough. In terms of the healing. Of this little boy. For Elisha. To send Gehazi. We'll talk about Gehazi.

In a minute. Gehazi's. Staff. Laid on the child. Didn't make any difference. It couldn't be. Healing once removed. It couldn't be. Just. Through. Gehazi.

[15:16] Elisha. Went. Himself. Elisha. Went into the room. Himself. And. Elisha. Had to. Lie on the child. Eyeball. Eyeball. Eyeball.

Eyeball. Eyeball. Mouth to mouth. Nose to nose. Body to body. Anticipating. That the Savior. Who would come. Had to be face to face.

With death. In order to bring us. To life. And to offer us. Salvation. It just. Gently points forward. To the fact.

That Jesus himself. Had to come. That God himself. Had to come. It wasn't good enough. For God to announce. Salvation from heaven. On you go. Yeah. There will be a Savior.

Somehow. Or there will be a salvation. Christ had to come. He had to be born. He had to enter the womb. He had to live the life. Then he had to face death. And he had to experience death.

[16:11] On our behalf. In our place. That's the glory. Of the cost. Of our salvation. And the wonder. Of the incomparable value.

Of what we have. The Old Testament speaks of life and restoration. And we need to remember that as Christians. That we have life.

And restoration. I'll go into that briefly. As I apply the story. At the end. It was a life of incomparable value. That she had.

In God. And it was also one that was very costly. And dangerous. But can I also say that for her. And for us. And for Gehazi.

And for other people. Spectating. Was useless. It was useless for her to be a spectator. She had seen the man of God. She had heard the man of God.

[17:09] And so she committed herself. To being involved with God. And with his representative. By inviting him. Into her home.

Even though she may not have realized. The implications of that. In her life. You know. When he first asks. If there's anything that he can do for her.

She says no. No. I've got a home among my own people. I'm quite content. She maybe didn't quite realize. What it was involving. To open her heart. To God. In this way.

But. Gehazi is interesting. Not so much in this story. It's not that much about Gehazi. In this story.

But in the. All the other stories. About Elisha. And round about him. You get a picture of Gehazi.

Elisha's servant. Who was a bit of a hanger on. He was a bit of a spectator. He was uncommitted. Even though he was Elisha's servant.

[18:05] He didn't really believe in Elisha's God. And he didn't really believe in the miracles. And in the personal nature of faith. And in his need for forgiveness.

It was almost as if Gehazi was along there. Just for the show. He wanted to be involved. Because he might get some blessing out. But it might have been an insurance policy for him. Well if I stick along with Elisha.

I'll be okay. God will accept me. Because well I've been with this man of God. And it seems to be that he always looked out for himself. And he didn't truly understand what faith was about.

You know in the story later on. Where he tries to get money. Sneak some money. For the healing of Naaman. That Elisha had done. Naaman had offered money. Naaman said no it's a free gift.

But Gehazi ran after Naaman. After Naaman said. I'll take some. But you know kind of lied about it as well. Because he didn't grasp what Elisha was offering.

[19:05] And he didn't grasp God. And he was useless in the story. When he was sent. God couldn't use him. To heal the boy. For whatever reason.

But he seems to have missed out on the blessings. He missed out on the personal nature of faith. And it seems to be that he was just a spectator.

So much so that God brings judgment on him. At the end of the account of Naaman. Spectating was useless for Mrs. S.

It was also useless for Gehazi. Now can I just briefly apply the principles. Broaden the story. Broaden it up. Or retrospectively. Or however you want to term it.

Into our own situation. I don't know if you've got Google Earth on your computer. It's a great thing that you can. While away. Hours and hours. Just looking at. If you want to type in.

[20:02] Easter Road Edinburgh. And it goes. It comes all the way from New York. And it spins around the world. And eventually. Home's in on Easter Road Edinburgh. But the same can happen. And opposite.

It can spin away back up. And you can go right into outer space. And all you can see is the world. And that's what I'm wanting to do. I'm wanting to. Kind of broaden the whole picture. With the benefit of the New Testament. And apply the principles of the story.

With New Testament eyes. As it were. To ourselves. And I'd like to say. That the Christian life. Is costly. We need to tell that. Part of the Christian message.

That we can't pretend. That coming to Christ. Is all nice. And all easy. And all sweet. There should be a level of fear.

In our lives. When we open it up to God. There's a danger of it. All ending up. Terribly pedestrian. And terribly nice.

[21 : 01] And terribly correct. And neat. And ordered. But when we open our life to God. When we invite him in to save us. It's the most significant thing we will do.

But allowing his lordship. To rule in our hearts. Is like a bomb exploding there. Because he will affect our consciousness.

He will rattle our selfishness. He will change our responsibilities. He will expose our fears. He will bring out the deep healings that we need to address.

And he will deal with that great Sinatra song in us all. I'll do it my way. Because in Christ we can't do it our own way.

We can't live our own way. And just take Christ as a kind of aperitif. God.

[21 : 57] In his graciousness and in his love. As he wants to mold us and channel us and change us. Will push us over the edge of the cliff. So that we will fly.

He will flick us out of the nest. So that we will soar on wings. He will let go of our hands. So that we will learn to walk.

But we will receive all the bruising alongside that. Of falling by the wayside. Grace. As I'm sure has often been said from this Pope.

It is free. But it isn't cheap. And we need to recognize that the God of the universe chooses to enter into our lives and our hearts.

The God of the universe. And do we expect that to happen? With ease and with comfort and with no change and with no drama and with no transformation.

[22 : 55] I'd like to read a very brief quote from C.S. Lewis. It's from the Four Loves. And I have it in a booklet that I've got.

That I do a marriage course with people who are getting. Who I'm performing their marriage ceremony. And I go through a six or seven week course with them. And this is in one of the chapters.

It's kind of in a little box. And it's a very powerful quote. And it explains well what I'm trying to say. In terms of allowing God's love into our hearts.

And you know we often talk about that in emotional terms. You know we allow God's love. God loves me. He loves me. It's wonderful to be loved by God. But here C.S. Lewis said to love at all is to be vulnerable.

Love anything in your heart will certainly be wrung. Possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact. You must give your heart to no one. Not even an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies.

[23 : 56] And little luxuries. Avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket. Or the coffin of your selfishness.

And in that casket. Safe. Dark. Motionless. And airless. It will change. It will not be broken. But it will become unbreakable.

Unbreakable. Impenetrable. Irredeemable. And that is a reality for us in our Christian lives. That God's love in our hearts.

Does change us. And isn't the easy option at one level. There is a great cost to being a Christian. And allowing God into our lives.

And you see if we don't say that. Then sometimes. Particularly maybe young people. Will be brought along on the draft of fellowship.

[24 : 53] And of what everyone else is doing. And then when trouble comes. Bang. They will not be able to cope. I thought God loved me. I thought coming to Christ was the best thing to happen.

And there can be deep trouble. And deep difficulties. Because we haven't recognized that God exposes our heart. God deals with us. Who would have thought. Did the Sunni-Mite woman.

Think that. Elisha was going to offer her a child. Miraculously. This deep seated longing. God involving himself. In her life.

It is costly. But it is also a life of incomparable value. And we must never forget that. We must always remember. The anticipation.

Of this story. What is anticipated. In this story. The love of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ. The offer of Christ. The gift of Christ.

[25 : 53] Life. Spiritual life. Spiritual fullness. Fellowship with God. What could be greater? Stravaking around in this life.

What could be greater? Fellowship with God. Intimacy with God. Conversation with God. Deepest requests made known to God.

Deepest hurts dealt with by God. Forgiveness. Hope. Love. Direction. Living as we were intended. Living life to the full. A doorway to glory. The recognition that death isn't the end. That we can say as believers today.

Whatever befalls. Without any sense of complacency. All is well with my soul. Magnificent hope.

[26 : 53] Incomparable value. What then do we do with the Bible? What do we do with the story? What do we do with the message? What do we do with Jesus Christ?

Well I can only invite you. To take Jesus Christ. As your saviour. To count the cost. But not walk away.

Count the cost and accept. Why? Well. Because confidently. I can assure you that. He enables us. To carry and bear that cost. He enables us. To do. He empowers us. By the indwelling of the spirit. To live his way. Commit your life to him.

Receive the Holy Spirit. In repentance. And faith. Do what Mrs. S did. Open the door of her life. Of her heart.

[27 : 53] Of her family. Of her home. Be whole hearted. Give yourself to Christ. Can encourage you. If you're in that position. I'm not sure. If there will be anyone here.

In that position. But. To get off the fence. Spiritually. And. Speak to Jesus Christ. And invite him. Into your soul.

Recognizing. The healing. And the power. And the grace. And the goodness. And. Facing up to the healing. That's required.

Sin. And. Brokenness. That is there. Without him. Deal with that. You know. You can have analogies to that. Of. Facing up to serious illness.

And going. For the medication. And for the healing. You know. Sometimes. We would rather not. Face up to that. But if we know. That there is a cure. Then we.

[28 : 51] Bite the bullet. And we go through the pain. Now. It's. Not a great analogy. In many ways. Because. You don't want to make. Christ. Like a. A bad medicine.

Because he's glorious. But he is real. And he is God. And he will transform our lives. And we must count the cost of sin. And we must deal with it in our lives.

Live grace. Because it will blow us away. It will change our perceptions. And. And. There is healing in its wings. But we must.

Recognize. The cost. Of God being in our lives. But we must also. Beware of the danger of spectating.

Particularly in a church environment. Easy to spectate. Easy to be a hanger on. To be somebody who. Believes in the Bible.

[29 : 51] And believes about Jesus. But has never committed. Your heart. And soul. And mind. And will. To Jesus Christ.

To keep Jesus at arm's length. And his people at arm's length. To see church going. And cold belief. As some kind of insurance policy.

Hoping for the benefits of salvation. Without the cost of salvation. Hoping that you'll just be accepted. On somebody else's coattails.

Who you've sat beside. Or who your parents have been. Or what your church attendance has been like. Associating with Christian things.

But. Not. Personally. With Christ. It's dishonouring. To the Christ who died.

[30 : 51] On the cross. For your sins. It's dangerous. Because there's no guarantee of salvation there. And it's.

Probably from a practical point of view. Most of all. Unsatisfactory. It's miserable. It's powerless. It's unmiraculous.

It's insensitive to God. It's the worst of all places. Isn't it? You can see Christ. But you haven't appropriated Christ. It's the worst of all positions. Because you get a kind of. Skewed idea. Of what it's about. It's a lukewarm place. A place that. That misses out on all the blessings. Like. Poor Gehazi. Scurrying about. And laying his staff on. Nothing happening. No usefulness. Not a servant of God. Just being around it all. But just as a spectator.

[31 : 50] It's the worst place of all. It's like sitting. In front of this glorious meal. And not being able to eat it. Or choosing not to eat it. It's the worst of all.

Isn't it? If you're a hungry horse like me. It is anyway. Get out of that position. That spectating position.

You have to commit your life to Christ. You have to. I can't do it for you. Your elders can't do it for you. Nobody else can do it for you. You must invite Christ to be your Lord.

And your Saviour. And I suppose there's a third alternative to the message. And to the gospel. And to Jesus. So you don't turn up at all. As you don't even spectate.

But you decide to walk away. That you look at the cost. And that maybe even self-righteously. You think. Well. I've looked at the cost. And I've gone into every angle.

[32 : 53] And I think. I'm not ready. I can't do it. The pain. The cost is too great. So you walk away from Christ. And it seems noble. In many ways. In fact.

It's more noble than lukewarmness. In a sense. God says. I'd rather you're hot or cold. Because you're lukewarm. Spew you out of my mouth. But nonetheless. It's still.

Not an option. Because all you're left with. If you choose to reject Jesus today. Is a bare life. A bare life.

Yes. It's life. Yes. There'll be happiness. Yes. There'll be laughter. Yes. There'll be enjoyment.

Because these are all God's gifts. But there will not be full life. There will not be spiritual life.

You will continue to live under the shadow of death. Which will be your victor. And you will face that death. All alone. Entering into an eternal.

[33 : 50] Aloneness. In this post-modern world. I don't know really. Sometimes what hell is. What hell is about. And how to describe it.

And how to deal with it. But I do understand and appreciate. That it is an aloneness. Alone.

And separated. Outside of Christ. Outside of God. Outside of his love. Outside of his goodness. And his gifts. And it's a terrible place.

It's the root of all our spiritual need. Is separation. And the loneliness that brings separation. You have one life to live.

You have one choice to make. And I encourage you with all my heart. To face up to the truth. To face up to Jesus Christ. And his outstanding love for you.

[34 : 52] And his provision on your behalf. And not just to spectate. But to commit your life to him. And I assure you. You will never regret it.

It will not be the easiest life. But it will be the best life. And you will have his companionship in life. And in the valley of the shadow of death. And eternally.

In his company. Amen. Can we bow our heads in prayer. Gracious God. We ask and pray your blessing. On us today.

We pray that your word would challenge us. And encourage us. And bring us closer to you. We pray that you would enable this congregation.

To be united in love for Jesus Christ. That you would bless them. In their fellowship. In the way they participate in worship.

[35 : 50] As they listen. As they sing. As they hear the voice of God. As they pray for God to speak. As they. A wider level.

As they look. And seek a pastor. For themselves. We pray that you would. Anoint them with your wisdom. And with your patience. And grace. And knowledge.

We pray that Lord God. That you would sustain. Them. With your great. Master shepherding. And that you would. Show them the way.

Keep us Lord. Above all things. From being. Callous. Or complacent. Or pedestrian. In our Christian lives. For thinking God is ordinary.

Or plain. Or dull. And for thinking that our Christian lives. Are simply. Philosophical choices.

[36 : 45] Or moralistic living. Enable us to realize. The difference. That the Holy Spirit will make. Who brings us from death. To life.

And may we experience. His life. And the. Eruption. Of life. That so often. Disrupts. Our. The. Peace. Of sin. And the peace. Of the graveyard. In our hearts. Help us Lord God. To be. Transformed. And. Continue.

To be transformed. By. Your grace. And may we find. The pleasure. Of God's spirit. In our lives. Thrilling. And uplifting.

And encouraging. We ask it. In Jesus name. Amen. Now may the grace. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the love of God the Father. And the fellowship.

[37 : 40] Of the Holy Spirit. Be with us all now. And forevermore. We ask for the Father. If it is. If it is. If it is. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. If it is. If it is. It is. If it is. Sure. If it is.

May ElebreatINO. Once. Somehow. Await. Will His Son. May Ele■ nicely. May lil- May need. May or me. May Orang Huw. Will his Son. May into the peace. May ke assaulted. May victories. May irre vincent.