

# **Elisha, the Prophet of Grace**

## **4) Empty Vessels**

***'A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves." So Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil." Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels; do not gather just a few. And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones..."***

*'...So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured it out. Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another vessel." So the oil ceased. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest"'*

**(2 Kings 4:1-7)**

- ✓ **Elisha was used by God in the deliverance of the 3 kings, and their victory. Now it seems he is forgotten by them. 'There was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man' (Ecc.9:14-15)**

**Or, maybe some reward or position was offered to him but he declined it, avoiding an unholy alliance**

***'Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure with trouble'***

**(Prov.15:16)**

***'...men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth... suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. Now godliness with contentment is great gain'***

**(1 Tim.6:5-6)**

- ✓ **He chose rather to be with the sons of the prophets. That's where the next miracle finds him, meeting the needs of a desperate widow**

- ✓ **Not only was the widow bereft of her husband but she was left destitute, in debt and without any means of paying it. She was also now in danger of losing her two sons**
- ✓ **No maintenance was provided in the law for a prophet, as there was for a priest. He was dependent upon the gifts of those who appreciated his ministry, or upon his own land**
- ✓ **It is possible that the widow's late husband got his subsistence from the oil obtained from an olive grove, and that there had been a failure of the crop for a year or two, because the widow borrowed from her neighbors 'not a few empty vessels'**



- ✓ **The Hebrew word for 'creditor' here signifies one who exacts what is justly due to him. He acted within his rights according to the law**
- ✓ **The widow was unable to pay her creditor. The legal system in Israel would not allow her to declare bankruptcy; she had to give her sons as forced servants to her creditor to pay her debts**
- ✓ ***'What shall I do for you?' Elisha had nothing himself. Only the Lord could do her good. Paul described himself, '...as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things' (2 Cor.6:10)***

✓ **She, like us, could rely only on God's grace.**  
***'Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus' (Rom.3:24)***

✓ **Yet it was a grace that was wrought through righteousness, 'grace reigns through righteousness' (Rom.5:21)**

✓ **The freedom of the widow's sons was secured not by mercy, but by paying the full debt of her creditor (the law)**

✓ **The gospel reveals the righteousness of God**

✓ **Jesus didn't sweep our sin, or the law, under the carpet - He fulfilled the law's demands in its entirety**



✓ **God is 'just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Christ' (Rom.3:26)**

✓ **We are not mercified, we are justified**

✓ **He is 'faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9)**

✓ **The resurrection is the receipt that our sins have been paid for, 'It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification' (Rom.4:24-25)**

✓ **He asks, 'What do you have?' She had a jar of oil'. 'Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels; do not gather just a few"'**

✓ **If you are an empty vessel, God can pour His grace into you**

✓ **That's the great thing about the Christian life. All we need do is bring our emptiness to God. And He will fill us with His grace**

✓ **Whether it is salvation, or our Christian walk, or our ministry the principle is the same**

✓ **An empty vessel is something from which you can get nothing out, but can put anything in**

✓ **Jesus was an empty vessel**

✓ *'Most assuredly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son does in like manner'* **(Jn.5:19)**

✓ *'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us'* **(2 Cor.4:7)**

✓ **No doubt there were different shapes and types.  
But all were empty**

***'From everywhere...all your neighbours...not a few'. There was no lack on the part of the oil. The oil only ceased when there were no more empty vessels***

✓ **The principle of authentic ministry is not the amassing of vessels. It would have been no good to bring full vessels**

✓ **Authentic ministry is to bring empty vessels to Jesus to be filled with His fulness. And then for these to find more empty vessels to be filled with His grace**

✓ **She poured the oil until every empty vessel was filled**

**The oil did two things - paid off her debt and enables her to live off the rest**