

A Widow's Faith II Kings 4:1-7

Over the course of the next six weeks we will be considering how God provided in different situations and how each recipient learned to trust God through His provisions.

We will look at Abram's reward through some major life choices.

We will look at the story of Abraham and Isaac.

Then there is the rich man and Lazarus.

We will end with God's provision for our greatest need met through Christ.

Today we are going to ponder the story of the widow's oil.

Next week is going to be the story of Jeremiah as he writes to the exiled Jews in Babylon that God has a plan for them. Those plans may not always be what we want but they are His plans and His plans are never wrong. His plans for us require our trust.

We will be out of town attending a commissioning and pinning service for Michigan's newest and brightest Lieutenant. I have asked a friend to fill the pulpit for me. His testimony is one that fits well with the lesson of the passage. He was financially set and life was great, but then in a series of circumstances he lost everything. His world was turned topsy-turvy, but through it all he and his wife trusted God who provided for them and rewarded their faith. God had a plan for them. Some of you have met Don Freeze and I am eager for the rest of you to meet him as he shares from the Word.

I also want to encourage you if at all possible, to be here for Sunday school. There is a 10-15 minute video on each passage and a time of discussion in groups. This is a very relevant series in every respect as we consider God's provisions.

Finally, before we launch into this message if you only get one thing out of this series or if you are only going to be here this one time, you need to know one thing. Well, no, there are two things.

This is not a series the Board asked me to preach so that tithes and offerings will increase. That is not the reason for doing this series. If offerings increase, it's a testimony to the Lord. So here's what I want us to get. I want us to come to the place where we explicitly trust God – in everything. It's not just about finances. It's also about trusting Him in your work setting, or home setting, or school or for health concerns. You may think you already trust the Lord a great deal. I believe He wants to stretch our faith so we trust Him more. I want us to trust God and I believe the story of the widow's oil is an excellent place to begin.

During the years of 1962 and 1971 you may have watched the hilarious sitcom that started with this ballad:

Come listen to my story 'bout a man named Jed,
Poor mountaineer barely kept his family fed,
Then one day he was shootin' at some food,
Up from the ground came a bubblin' crude,
Oil that is, black gold, Texas tea.

Well the first thing you know ol' Jed's a millionaire
The kinfolk said "Jed move away from there."
They said Californy is the place you ought to be
So he loaded up the truck and moved to Beverly,
Hills that is, swimming pools, movie stars.

Is that what you call a windfall?

Have you ever been in a spot where you didn't think you had much?

As a matter of fact have you ever been in a spot where you didn't have much, something happened and you wondered where you were going to get the resources to take care of that need?

Take your Bibles and turn to the Old Testament book of **II Kings 4:1-7**. Would you honor God's Word by standing as I read this passage?

We will discuss the following from this passage:
From verse 1 there is the widow's distress.
From verse 2 there is the widow's dilemma.

From verses 3- 4 there is the widow's duty.
From verses 5-7 there is the widow's deliverance.

I. THE WIDOW'S DISTRESS – v. 1

Do you remember the questions I just asked?

Problems can overwhelm us faster than a flash flood. What we have seems so insignificant compared to the size of the problem. They can hit us and we can wonder how in the world we will ever recover, or get out from under the heavy load.

Where can we turn?

This woman was in great distress. You probably noticed several important pieces of information. We found out right away that her husband came from the company of the prophets. He was in ministry. Prophets were generally the guys who went around telling people they were living in sin and needed to get right with God. It wasn't a popular career path. Ministry can be tough, especially where they were living. Just a few chapters earlier we learn that Jezebel had put many of these guys to death. Consequently, this family didn't have much. They depended largely on the charitable gifts of others.

We also notice from the very first thing that comes out of her mouth that she was a widow. Her husband had died. We don't know how long she had been a widow, but in those days being a widow was difficult. She lost her source of income when her husband died. She was beside herself with grief dependent on the charity of others

She not only was a widow, she was also a mother. The verse says she had two sons living with her. Now in Bible times it was the responsibility of adult children to care for their widowed mother, so they must not have been old enough to provide for her. We also know from the Old Testament law given by Moses from God that when necessary the people were to also care for widows. That apparently wasn't happening either.

The time in which this is taking place is under the reign of King Joram, son of King Ahab. That should tell us a lot about the spiritual condition of the nation at that time. They were far from following God and His laws. They were apostate. So it's no wonder this widow was in distress. But as we see in this verse there were still some who followed God and revered Him. They trusted Him. That was the case for this family.

Our verse also tells us that creditors had visited her demanding payment for her husband's debts. No one likes getting calls or mail from creditors demanding money, especially when you don't have the financial means to pay the debt off. Somehow he had amassed a debt that was beyond his and her ability to pay off. Maybe she knew about the debt, maybe not. We aren't even told how big the debt was. What we do know is that it was outstanding.

Being a God-fearing man we can make an assumption though that he did not live frivolously or luxuriously. He didn't go out and spend whatever money he had foolishly and he didn't live high on the hog with a lavish lifestyle. We know this to be the case because later on when she was asked what she had her response was she had nothing.

The creditors demanded payment for his outstanding debt and if it wasn't paid they would return and take her sons as slaves. Now according to the Old Testament law it was perfectly within their right to do this. The catch was that he could only serve for 6 years and was to be released in the 7th along with whatever debt was left outstanding.

Exodus 21:1-2

Leviticus 25:29-41

Deuteronomy 15:1-11

The law was also very clear that they were not to be treated as slaves, but as someone hired. Additionally the Israelite was to do all he could to help the poor. You will remember the treatment

Boaz gave Ruth and Naomi. That wasn't happening here and in many cases they abused the law, because after all, they weren't following God.

In her desperation she sought out Elisha who was the leader of this band of prophets. The widow would have known him, and he would have known her plight. Our verse says that she **“cried out to Elisha.”** That word means to call out for help under great distress. It means to moan, to weep uncontrollably, to shriek out of grief. She didn't casually call him up or stroll through town to his house and calmly tell him she had a little problem she hoped he could help with. She was desperate.

Maybe you know what I mean. Maybe you have or are right now facing such a monumental problem that you just cry out to God in agony.

I have told you the story when David was just six months old and Robyn was in the hospital. It was a Sunday I preached here for Pastor Don. David developed a fever during church and when I got him home and was changing him he just vomited all over and became listless. Immediately in desperation I cried out “Oh Jesus, help me.”

For the woman there was death.

There was debt.

There was distress.

Her petition was made.

Her problem was monumental.

She came to Elisha in desperation.

I'm willing to guess that many of you have been in such a place. Some of you might be there right now. All of us at some time in our life will be there. **Who will you turn to in such a crisis?**

You need to remember that God knows all about your need, God intimately cares about you, and God has a wonderful plan.

II. THE WIDOW'S DILEMMA – v. 2

I'm not sure what she expected Elisha to do. After all he was a prophet as well. We don't get the impression that he was rolling in dough where he could pay her debt for her. It doesn't sound like there was a food bank or Prophet's fund that she could benefit from. She doesn't ask him to go and speak to the creditors and ask to have the debt forgiven.

One thing I'm sure she did know is that Elisha had a connection with God to do miracles.

There is in this verse a simple inquiry.

A. There Is A Simple Inquiry

Elisha asked what he could do, but followed it up with a rather strange question. **“What do you have in your house?”**

It is at this point that God is going to use her in the provision of her own miracle. The question was posed in such a way in order to expand her faith. The two questions asked by Elisha showed the woman the size of her need and the smallness of her own resources. She needed much but had so very little. While it was a simple inquiry, she has a sense of inferiority.

B. There Is A Sense Of Inferiority

Maybe that's how you feel about whatever it is you are facing or have faced or will face. The problem is too big for me. I believe that God wants to bring us to a place where our self-sufficiency is stripped away. In the past we have tried to meet our needs with our own skills or resources and God brings us to a place where we realize we have nothing to meet that need so that all we can do is rely on Him, trust in Him to provide. He brings us to a place to honestly see our need and our inability to meet it. Think about it for a moment. **As long as we think we can handle things, why should we look to the Lord? But isn't that the time we need Him most?**

When we stop and honestly answer the same two questions she was asked we will realize that we need far more than we will ever be able to supply by ourselves. We have to give up our pride and self-sufficiency in order to cry out to Him, but let's not wait to cry out to Him as a last resort. She went right away. God wants to erase faith in ourselves so we will have faith in Him.

That's what happened in the battle of Ai. Israel soundly defeated Jericho. In just a matter of a couple of days they forgot who really won the battle – that it was all God's doing. So they said, "Ai is just a small town. There isn't any need to send out the whole army. Let's only send up a few troops." Their pride along with Achan's sin defeated them. They failed to look to the Lord to provide victory.

The question Elisha asked was designed to teach her that what she had may have been small, that she didn't have much, but even that can be used by God. She didn't see it but God had already given her what she needed to meet her need.

All she had was a little oil. In the KJV it describes it as a pot of oil. The word there refers to a little flask that was used by prophets to anoint people with. The point is it wasn't much. Maybe it sat on a little table as a reminder to her of her husband. It was all she had.

Philippians 4:19 hadn't been written yet, but it certainly applied in her situation and it applies today for us. If you haven't yet, underline it. If you don't know it, memorize it.

"But my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Do we believe it? Do we practice it? Do we trust God? Do you know that we can miss out on the blessings of God because we fail to claim His promises? We might even think that our problem is too big for God. But if you believe God will keep

His Word, then rise up and claim His promises, but remember this: *His promises come with our faith.*

Our problems can look so large and our possessions can look so small and God places us in situations where our faith can be expanded.

She had a great need, but believed she had so very little to meet it. Here's where her faith is tested.

The widow was in distress.

The widow had a dilemma.

III. THE WIDOW'S DUTY – v. 3-4

I want you to understand up front that the instrument of her blessing was something she already had, not something she would receive. That little bit of oil was what God would use to deliver her from her dilemma, but first she had to exercise some faith. She was given a duty by Elisha. She was told to do three things.

A. Others Were To Be Petitioned

"Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few."

It doesn't state whether or not she told her neighbors why she needed the jars. Maybe some were inquisitive and she may have told them. The request seems a little strange. How would you respond if your neighbor came and asked to borrow some empty jars from you?

"Well, sure I guess, what do you need them for?"

"I'm supposed to fill them with oil."

"Where are you going to get this oil?"

"From a little oil I already have."

"Well, okay, here are a couple of pitchers."

If she came to our house, I suppose we could give her some Tupperware bowls, and we have a 10 gallon crockpot my Great Grandma used to make sauerkraut in. And Robyn has about 50 empty quart

jars for canning, but bring them back soon, because it's canning season.

She was to go around and get as many jars as she could. That was her first duty and test of faith. The second duty and test of faith was this:

B. The Occasion Was To Be Private

“Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons.”

After they had collected as many jars as possible, Elisha's instructions were for her and her sons to go inside and shut the door behind them. No one else to be a part of what they did, not even Elisha.

It was to be a time of privacy.

It was to be a time of prayer.

It was to be a time of praise.

Here's the scene. Mom and her two sons are sitting around a sparse house except for all the jars they had collected stacked on top of each other. The door is closed, the shades are drawn. No one else was to see what was about to take place. It was for their eyes only. Often times I think that the lessons God wants to teach us about faith are to be private. They are just for us.

When Jesus was approached by Jairus about the health of his little girl, He followed the man home with His disciples. He put everyone outside the house except the parents and Peter, James and John when He performed the miracle of raising her from the dead.

When the widow of Zarephath reported to Elijah that her son had died, he took him up into a room alone and cried out to God and he was brought back to life.

No one else was around when God provided the ram on the mountain at the time Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac.

I'd like to think that before this widow did the third step that she and her two sons placed the little flask of oil on the table before them and prayed over it in faith even though they didn't know what He would do and then gave thanks for whatever God was about to do. They had to demonstrate faith.

How strong is yours? Do you demonstrate the same degree of faith in private as you say you do in public? Do you believe God?

Others were to be petitioned.

The occasion was to be private.

The oil was to be poured out.

C. The Oil Was To Be Poured Out

“Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.”

How is that for a test of faith? Take what little oil you have and pour it into the other jars. **Would you do it? Would I do it? Would we have enough faith?** This is where the rubber meets the road. She could have argued with Elijah that what little oil was in the house was all she had. “Can't God just give the word and just fill all the jars miraculously without touching the little bit I have?” Sure He could, but would it have really stretched her faith.

It would be like me coming to God and telling Him that my house is about to be foreclosed if I don't make a payment by the end of the day expecting God to miraculously put \$1,000 in my account.

I know some of you have had this experience where you saw someone else with a need and God nudged you to give some money even though it was all you had. Sometimes that's our argument with God. Lord, it's all I have and I need gas for the week or I need groceries or I need... (and you fill in the blank). **Do we trust God enough to give what we have believing that because He told us to do it He will in turn meet our need?**

Pour what you have in the jars. **Had she come to the place of totally being stripped of her self-sufficiency to believe God could help her?**

Does God know your need?

Can God meet your need?

What do you have in the house? A little oil?

Pour it out in obedience if that is His command.

Both faith and obedience are required.

The widow was in distress.

The widow had a dilemma.

The widow was given a duty.

IV. THE WIDOW'S DELIVERANCE – v. 5-7

Imagine her sitting at the table with the bowl in her hand and saying a soft prayer - something like “Okay, Lord, here we are. We are ready to do what you have asked. We are going to trust you to provide even though we don't know how.”

We see first that her faith is revealed.

A. Her Faith Is Revealed – v. 5-6

They shut the doors, her sons began to bring her the jars and she began to pour. **Do you wonder what must have been going through her mind about then?** I can just see the eyes of her sons getting bigger and bigger as the oil continued to pour from the flask filling the first jar, then they brought her another.

When I was around 8 I sent in some cereal box tops and got a little magic kit. One of the items was a jug. The trick was to fill it with water and then throughout the rest of the show pour water from it into a container. It would appear that the jug would be empty, you would set it aside and a few minutes later pour more from it. I'll tell you the secret. Inside the jug was a cylinder with a whole in the bottom. Inside there were two reservoirs for water. On the top of the jug on the outside was a hole. When you poured the water out you would put your thumb over the hole. What was in the cylinder

would empty out. When you set the jug down and took your thumb off the hole the water on the inside of the jug would flow through the hole in the bottom of the inside cylinder and fill it up so when you poured it again it appeared that the jug magically filled up.

That's not what happened with the widow's oil. She kept pouring and pouring and pouring and oil continued to flow, filling all the jars.

Now here is the extent of her faith. There was enough oil to fill all the jars and when all the jars were full, the oil stopped flowing.

Were God's resources limited?

We have a song in our hymnal. The end of the song is this: “**For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again!**”

Like the title of another hymn “Little is much when God is in it.” It was just 5 loaves and 2 small fish that fed a multitude. Some estimate as many as 15,000 people.

A small stone brought down a big giant.

Was the woman's faith limited?

She had to come to a place of total dependence on God. The extent of her faith is seen in the number of jars she borrowed. At the end of the day, a widow and her two sons in the privacy of their home learned that God is all-powerful and able to meet their need beyond their expectation.

What is your faith measured by?

Someone has said that God delights in our emptiness because He is a God who wants to fill us up with good things. He asks that we believe and obey.

She could believe in God all she wanted, but there was something she had to do as well by faith, and God performed a miracle for her that day. And when God performs a miracle, you can't keep it quiet. You have to tell somebody.

That leads us to the second point, her faith was not only revealed her faith was rewarded.

B. Her Faith Was Rewarded – v. 7

She sought after and found Elisha. He gave her a final instruction. Go and sell the oil to pay your debt. What would be left over would be enough for her and her sons to live on. Her reward was to have her debts paid and her daily needs provided for.

The miracle was not to be hoarded. She was not to keep the oil. She was to go and sell it. Now I want you to get something very important here. So listen. *God not only met her need, He gave her more than she needed and asked.* All she wanted was the debt to be taken care of but God rewarded her faith with more than enough. God can do above what we ask.

Ephesians 3:20-21 “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen!”

Jeremiah 32:17 declares that there is nothing too hard for God.

I Corinthians 2:9-10 “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”

God will do exactly what He has promised He would do. **Do we have enough faith to trust Him and obey what He asks us to do?** The widow did.

Just as God told Paul so it is for us to remember that His grace is sufficient for all our needs.

Borrowing empty vessels was an exercise of faith.

Going into the house and shutting the doors was an exercise of faith.

Pouring out the oil was an exercise of faith.

Selling it all to pay her debt and provide for her dependents was an exercise in faith.

Faith often times doesn't make sense, but then I suppose if it did it wouldn't be called faith.

She poured and God provided!

What is it today that God is asking you to step out in faith for so that He can provide? Is pride or self-sufficiency holding you back from receiving God's abundantly blessings?

Often times we go to God asking for something. I think God expects us to bring something that demonstrates our faith. When she exercised her faith God provided beyond her need. She willingly gave what she had for God to use which teaches us that whatever we have, no matter how little or insignificant it may seem to us, it is enough for God.

Someone has said that God has boundless resources. The only limit is in us: our asking, our thinking, our praying, our faith may be too small. Our expectations may be too limited.

What will our faith be measured by this week? Are we willing to trust God with all we have even if it seems small to us? Remember, He owns it all anyway.