

Elisha: Mighty in Word and Deed **2 Kings 3:1-4:44**

Our kids have been reading several small biographies. I love debriefing after they finish each volume. One evening Joshua was so excited to teach me about Abraham Lincoln. With serious and child-like happiness he said, "Papa, I've been reading about Abraham Lincoln. He was the sixteenth president. He was against slavery. But then he got shot and died. Now he's a statue." My drink went up my nose! After cleaning myself up, I commended him for his reading and his confidence, but tried to correct the last part of his lesson, reminding him that when you die, you do not turn into a statue. But he explained what he meant. He said, "People make a statue of you when you do something important. They want to remember you." We went on to talk about Lincoln's presidency, and how his influence indeed continues to be remembered in America.

We just finished the biography of Elijah in 2 Kings 2. The larger than life prophet died – well, sort of. He was taken up into heaven in a blaze of glory, and he reappears in the New Testament. Nevertheless he is gone, but his ministry is not gone. It continues on, particularly through the life of his successor, Elisha. Elijah passed on the prophetic mantle to him. In the opening chapters of 2 Kings, the sons of the prophets affirmed Elisha's ministry, and now Elisha will prove his ministry to king Jehoram and others in 2 Kings 3-4. From these chapters, we see how Elisha, like Elijah, was a God's special agent, sent to speak truth and display God's power.

But Elisha not only reminds us of his mentor. As the privileged readers of the Old and New Testaments, we also see how he foreshadows the ministry of Jesus. Elisha's ministry is a Messiah-like ministry. In fact, Elisha's ministry is closer to the ministry of Jesus than Elijah in some ways, particularly in the degree of compassion that he demonstrates (though Elijah too demonstrated compassion). Wiersbe overstates it, but points out the difference saying that Elijah was "a prophet of fire" but Elisha was a "pastor" and "minister to the people." Like Jesus, Elisha has compassion on those in need: a widow, a barren woman, a dead son, a hungry multitude, a leper, and those in difficulty (4:1-6:7).

Of course, Jesus' ministry was much greater than Elisha's ministry, so while we should look closely at the events recorded for us in 2 Kings we should not stop there. We should go on to look to the greater prophet-Savior, Jesus. The Elisha narratives make us love this heroic prophet. But these chapters should make love Jesus even more – our truth-speaking, bread-providing, compassion-showing, sickness-healing, death-defeating Savior.

Many Bible teachers treat chapter 3 by itself, and group 4:1-6:7 together. This makes sense. The mighty acts of Elisha are told in rapid-fire succession in 4:1-6:7, much like Mark's gospel shows the mighty acts of Jesus (cf., Mark 4:35-5:43). However, I have chosen to include chapter 3 in with this section, and treat half of the miracle stories of 4:1-6:7. While recognizing some discontinuity among chapter 3 and 4:1-6:7, I think there are some connections in the story of the Moabite revolt in chapter 3. Most relevantly is the fact that the point of chapter 3 seems to be to validate the *word* of the prophet Elisha. The following chapters go on to show *deeds* of

Elisha. I prefer to see these two sections together. Like Jesus, Elisha was mighty in word and deed (cf., Luke 24:19). So, let us look at Elisha's word and deed ministry by considering four ways that his ministry points us ahead to the ministry of Jesus.

ELISHA SPEAKS GOD'S WORD (3:1-27)

Chapter three contains a story of four kings: Jehoram, king of Israel; Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and the king of Edom. These three kings will go up against Mesha, the king of Moab in this unfamiliar and puzzling story.

The Need for God's Word

The chapter opens by stating that Jehoram is the new king in Israel (1). His reign lasts for twelve years. He was the son of the wicked king Ahab, and the brother to Ahaziah who died in an accident. Jehoram is an awful king too, but not as awful on the awful scale. The writer says that while he did evil in God's sight, he put away "pillar of Baal that his father had made" (2). This does not mean that Baalism ceased to exist. Jehoram tolerates the Baal cult, though he apparently does not participate in it. This sacred stone remains in the land until the reign of Jehu (10:26-27). He turns away from the pillar of Baal, but he does not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam (3). In other words, he deserves judgment though he was not as evil as his dad. To say "I am more righteous than Ahab" is nothing to boast in. That is like saying, "He is the tallest hobbit" or "That team is better than the Astros." God's word reveals that the standard of holiness is God, and because of that, we are in great need.

We need God's word *to point out essential gospel truths* like the reality of our sinfulness. The doctrine of sin is not a popular doctrine, but it is a fundamental doctrine. While a person may not be as bad as they could be, no one is as righteous as they should be. We have failed to worship God alone and have been led astray to false gods. We have done evil in the sight of a holy God, and need to be made righteous by him. Only through Christ, can we receive righteousness and be accepted by God. Do not rely on your own efforts to be accepted by God. Sure, you may not be Ted Bundy, but you are not Jesus. Though you might have given up robbing banks, or cheating on your taxes, or committing adultery, you still have not merited salvation. You have sinned in thought, word, deed and motive. The good news of the gospel is that Christ died for sinners like you and me, and he alone makes us holy and acceptable in God's sight. The gospel says, "He did evil in God's sight, but then he trusted in Christ, and now he is accepted in God's sight."

We need God's word not only to point out essential gospel truths, but also *to give us personal guidance*. The story goes on to tell of Moab's revolt against Israel (mentioned in 2 Kings 1:1). After the death of Ahab, Mesha decides to stop being a vassal of Israel (4-5). He was a sheep breeder who paid tribute in lambs and wool. But he decides to do so no more. In response, Jeroham decides to exert his authority. Like his father before him, he asks Jehoshaphat to go with him (6-7). The story echoes of 1 Kings 22:4, where Ahab called on Jehoshaphat help

him. Jehoshaphat may be kind, but he is not very wise. In the case of his alliance with Ahab, though his alliance was questionable, at least Jehoshaphat sought counsel from the Lord (1 Kings 22:5). Here in 2 Kings, Jehoshaphat partners again with Israel's king, and does not inquire of the Lord until they get desperate – after the decision to go to war was already made. We are surprised by his failure to seek God first.

Let this serve as a reminder to us. We will be tempted to live by our impulses, rather than on God's word. We need to seek God's Word for all matters of life. Do not rush off into life without the essential resource: God's word. The Psalmist reminds us of its necessity when he says, "Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors" (119:24).

The war strategy involves marching through a wilderness of Edom, approaching Moab from the south (9). The king of Edom joins them (probably another vassal of Israel) and they all make a "circuitous march for seven days" and they run out of water (9). The account presented has many echoes of holy wars, like the battle of Jericho, and of the wilderness experience. Because the kings decide to march out without any divine instructions for this war, it should not surprise us that they will encounter disastrous results even before the war begins. No water. Complaining. Blaming God. It sounds like Exodus.

Jehoram blames God. He did not seek God's counsel in the first place, but he deems it appropriate to blame God for the result (10, 13). "It wasn't my fault" was the attitude. Sinful humanity has been following this pattern of blame-shifting since the garden (Gen 3:12; James 1:13-15). Jehoram may be "religious" but he does not love Yahweh. That is evidenced by his lack of submission to him.

Eventually, Jehoshaphat asks, "Is there no prophet of the LORD here, through whom we may inquire of the Lord?" (11). Elisha is then mentioned, as the one who "poured water on the hands of Elijah" (meaning that he was a servant to Elijah) and he is sought after (12). Surprisingly, Jehoram concurs in going to Elisha, unlike Ahab who resisted the prophet Micaiah.

The Messenger of God's Word

Elisha responds to king's inquiry, "What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother" (13). Elisha is struck by the sudden interest of the king, and response sarcastically and harsh. Jehoram is seeking God's counsel because of an emergency not out of whole-hearted loyalty to Yahweh. Jehoram is like today's pluralists; they do not acknowledge the Christ's exclusive Lordship, but in an emergency, they may try anything, including the Bible.

Do not treat God's word like an airbag in your car – only there in case of an accident. God calls us to life-long submission to his word, not to temporary, sporadic moments of interest.

We need his Word in the normal days of life, not just when we are dying of thirst in a wilderness. Are you really interested in a path of discipleship or just escape from trouble? (Davis, 45).

Surprisingly, instead of pronouncing doom, Elisha announces God's salvation. Behold the goodness of God again to undeserved people. Elisha first tells the king that the only reason that he will speak the word is because Jehoshaphat is present (14). Then he asks for a musician, and when one played, Elisha proceeded to speak (15). The prophets received their messages in a variety of ways, including through music (cf., 1 Sam 10:5). Then Elisha reports the good news:

16 And he said, "Thus says the Lord, 'I will make this dry streambed full of pools.' 17 For thus says the Lord, 'You shall not see wind or rain, but that streambed shall be filled with water, so that you shall drink, you, your livestock, and your animals.' 18 This is a light thing in the sight of the Lord. He will also give the Moabites into your hand, 19 and you shall attack every fortified city and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree and stop up all springs of water and ruin every good piece of land with stones."

A double promise is presented. God will provide water for the army and the livestock but he will also provide them with a victory. Can God give us water? Of course! It is a "light thing in the sight of God" (3:18). That is easy for Yahweh! Elisha also reports, that God can also do the heavy lifting. He says that God, in his abundant generosity, also provides a victory for them. What a gracious God, who can do "far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph 3:20).

Can God provide for your daily necessities? Of course! It is a light thing! "Cast your anxieties upon him for he cares for you" (1 Pet 5:7). Seek him for your provision. But he can do more than give you groceries. God has provided for your greatest need, namely salvation from your enemies of sin and death and the grave. God lavishes his grace on us. He gives us bread to eat, and he gives us eternal life in Christ. Perhaps you feel know need to ask God for "light things" because you are so immensely blessed with food and clothing. You should stop and thank him. So, what about your heavy things? How will you deal with your sin problem? Look to Jesus, who carried the cross for sinners, dying in their place, giving them life. God alone can deliver us from our greatest enemies.

In verses 20, we read that water came just as Elisha said. Then, in verses 21-25, the victory is described just as Elisha said. When the Moabites see the water, they are fooled into thinking that it is blood (more Exodus echoes) and that the kings have decided to fight each other (22-24). But when they came into the Israelite camp, the Israelites drive them back and act out Elisha's words (25).

Observe how God saved Israel in this story. The prophet tells of the promise of salvation to Jehoram. How will salvation come? It will come *by God's grace* (for Jehoram did not deserve it!). And it will come *because Jehoram is with the Davidic king, Jehoshaphat*. We are in the same position! We can be saved by God's grace alone, through our union with the ultimate Davidic King, Jesus. If we are in him, then we have received grace upon grace. How kind of God to grant sinners salvation!

Just when we think this story looks just like other victory stories, we read of the surprising twist. Mesha responds to his initial defeat in two ways. He first tries to break through the enemy lines (26), but he and 700 swordsmen could not get through. His second attempt involves him offering up his own son (and heir to the throne) as a sacrifice probably to the pagan god Chemosh in an apparent attempt to receive divine help (27a). Then we read that his sacrifice actually brought relief. The Israelites retreat to their own land and fail to get complete victory over Moab. Why? The writer says that after the child sacrifice a “great wrath [or “fury,” NIV] against [or “upon,” RSV] Israel.” Puzzling.

Whose wrath/fury was this? Was it “against” or “upon” Israel? Some suggest that it refers to divine wrath (either Chemosh’s or Yahweh’s), but the text never says that it was God’s wrath explicitly. I have a hard time believing Chemosh brought relief. Some suggest that Yahweh was angry because this war was never on his agenda; he simply gave them a partial victory. Others suggest it was human wrath, either referring to the Moabites’ fury or the Israelite’s indignation at the gruesome scene. House summarizes this strange ending well:

Given the nature of the author’s theology, however, it is much more likely either that the action inspired Moab’s army to fight more fiercely or that it caused Israel such indignation and sickness of heart that they lifted the siege. Though the exact meaning is unclear, the result is the same: Israel withdraws without further disaster yet also without control of a former vassal. (264)

As he says, while the meaning of the phrase is difficult to interpret, the result is at least clear: Israel does not achieve total victory. This seems to be another picture of the decline of Israel.

The ending of the story highlights at least two applications for us. One is that God is the God of surprise endings! Just when we think we know how this story is going to end, we meet something unusual. God does as pleases (Ps 115:3), and more than we can imagine (Eph 3:20-21). Just look at the story of Jesus. He was the innocent one, who cared for those in need, and spoke God’s word, yet the King of Kings is crucified horrifically at the end of the story. Not the ending most would expect – a king, crucified. But the story does not end there either. In three days, the Son of David vacates the tomb in triumph! I do not mean that we do not know how the story will end (for we can read it in Revelation!), I simply mean that God does not always work the way the world expects, and that we will see some surprising things as believers, both in this life and the next (like what person gets greatly honored in the coming kingdom). We do not always know what God is doing in this life (especially in hard times), but we know he is good, and therefore there is one thing to do: trust him (Leithart, 183). He is in control. He is good. Trust him.

We should also point out from this story the difference in following gods like Chemosh and following Christ. Jesus said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:28-29). Dead religion does not offer you liberty, they give you burdens and bondage. No one else can offer

you an easy yoke, but Jesus. When you submit your life to Jesus and his word, it actually frees you. When you follow pagan gods, or simply today's cultural idols of money, sex, power, or fame, it enslaves you, it crushes you. The word of God is liberating. Jesus said that his "truth will set you free" (John 8:32). You do not have to live enslaved, sacrificing a child, cutting yourself in attempt to get rid of guilt and shame; you do not have to live an oppressed life trying to pay God back for your sins. You can come to Jesus and experience his grace. We do not have to offer blood, for the blood of Jesus has saved us.

While Jehoram does not really improve the situation with Moab, he now knows that God's Word is with Elisha. He has seen Elijah's successor's word fulfilled in this partial victory.

ELISHA SHOWS GOD'S COMPASSION (4:1-44)

As we move into chapter four, we begin to see that Elisha is not just a truth-speaking prophet; he is also a compassionate servant of the people. Let us consider three displays of God's compassion.

1. Oil for a Desperate Widow (1-7)

Elisha's ministry continues to echo the ministry of Elijah. This story and the following one remind us of 1 Kings 17, with some differences. Here, a widow is desperate because of debt, not because of famine. She is an unnamed widow, who was the wife of one of the sons of the prophets (1). But he died, and she is in serious financial trouble. Since she cannot pay off her debts, her sons are to be taken as slaves (cf., Isa 50:1; Neh 5:4-5).

Her *faithful desperation* and Elisha's *compassion* stand out first. She cries out to Elisha (1). This is important. She is not turning away from God in crisis, but seeking God in crisis. Elisha responds, "What shall I do for you?" (2). Notice the compassion of Elisha. This response is quite different from the inquiry made by Jehoram. There, Elisha said, "What have I to do with you?" (3:13). Here, Elisha shows us that God cares about "nameless, ordinary people." You do not have to be high and mighty to seek God's help. The widow cries out to him, and he is eager to help. She prays like Jehoshaphat, "For we are powerless.... We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you" (2 Chron 20:12). Elisha responds like Jesus responded to blind Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 11:51). Elisha's kindness as a mediator points the way to our Savior, who stands ready to offer grace in times of need. Are you seeking him in your need? Are you answering the question, "What do you want me to do?" I am not advocating prosperity theology; I am simply encouraging you to present your needs (not your greed) to the God. God cares about big stuff in this world, and little stuff (and people!) in this life. He knows the plots of North Korea, and he knows about your car problem in North Carolina. Do you believe he cares and can help? If so, then follow this nameless widow to the throne of grace.

Next, we observe her *insufficiency* and *God's sufficiency*. Elisha asks her, "What have you in the house?" (4:2b). Here modest response: "Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar

of oil" (4:2c). Notice the way God often works here. It is good for us to consider our inadequacy, for we see our great need for him. We have very little (and what we have comes from him!), but God is the all-sufficient provider, who loves to take what we have and multiply it (cf., 2 Kings 4:38-44; Mark 6:40-44).

Then we read about her *obedience* and God's *miraculous provision*. Elisha gives her specific instructions about how the problem will be solved (3-4). She is told to gather up vessels, go inside, shut the door and pour her little jar of oil into the vessels, and after each one is filled, she is to pour oil into the next one. She does everything the prophet says (5-6). Like in the Elijah encounter with the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7-16), her small amount is turned into abundance. God chooses to provide for a lowly widow through a miracle. Does God always do this? No. But he can. Regardless of whether it is through a miraculous provision, or God's "ordinary providences," he is still the one who provides for our daily bread.

Consider how this episode takes place in secret. Even though the neighbors would have known about the vessels, no one knows about what happened when she closed the door. God often does his great work in secret. Jesus told us to pray in secret and "your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matt 6:6). He said the same thing about giving to the needy (Matt 6:2-4). He said you do not need to blow a "trumpet before you" every time you do a righteous act (6:2). While a lot of the Christian life is public, we need to remember that not everything we do for the King needs to be on Social Media! You may couch your words with "to God be the glory" but much that is done in the name of "sharing your testimony" is self-exaltation. Love God in secret.

When the jars are filled, she tells Elisha and he says, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest" (4:7). See these simple instructions, and the amazing kindness of God. She not only can pay off her debts, but she has an abundance left over to live on.

God's faithful people matter to him, even if they are unknown to the vast majority of the world. One little lady cared for by Yahweh. Truly he is, "Father to the fatherless and protector of widows" (Ps 68:5).

2. A Child for a Barren Woman (2 Kings 4:8-37)

This story is filled with acts of *kindness*. First, we read of (yet another nameless) lady who displays kind hospitality to Elisha. She is a woman of means, who uses her wealth to bless others (8). Elisha accepted her hospitality whenever he passed through her area, like Jesus who accepted the hospitality of others. She asks her husband to build a modest guest room for the "holy man" (9-10).

Jesus had something to say about welcoming prophets. He told his disciples, "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me" (Matt 10:40). He

then added that the gracious host would receive a reward, "The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward" (10:41).

We need to remember the significance of hospitality ministry. Gracious hospitality is a trait of the righteous throughout the Bible (cf., Gen 18; 47; Job 31:32; James 2:25; Ruth 2:15; 1 Sam 25; Neh 5:14-19; Acts 16:11-15; 1 Tim 3:2). Of course, Jesus did not teach that we should only show hospitality to prophets. He also said that we should invite "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" to our parties (Luke 14:13). While they can never repay us, Jesus said, "You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just (14:14). We should be welcoming all people because we have been the recipients of God's gracious hospitality. He has welcomed us (cf., Rom 15:7). Jesus told his disciples that he is "going to prepare a place for us" (John 14:3).

We must welcome others, and when we do, we need to know that this is no small act. Let us do it as individual families and let us practice hospitality as a church family, welcoming others (cf., 1 Pet 4:9; Rom 12:13; Luke 10:9-10). This biblical ministry is often neglected because of ignorance (unaware of biblical teaching on it), carelessness (failure to plan on it), and greediness (people often want to pamper themselves instead of serve others), or fear (being intimidated by it). Follow this barren lady's example, if at all possible, and host people regularly.

Have you thought about how can you utilize your home to bless others? Adoption? Foster care? Itinerant ministers? Elderly widow? Welcoming that functionally fatherless kid down the street?

In response to her kindness, Elisha wants to return kindness (11-13; more reward is coming it seems. See 2 Kings 8:1-7). He serves as an example of "accepting hospitality." He treats their care of as a big deal, and wants to thank her. He does not say, "Oh, I'm a prophet. They should care for me."

But what do you give the lady who has everything? A suggestion is offered by Gehazi, "She has no son, and her husband is old" (14). Nothing is more valuable than a human life. Elisha likes the idea, so he calls the Shunammite lady and tells her, "At this season, about this time next year, you shall embrace a son" (16). She tells Elisha not to get her hopes up (16b), but sure enough, she conceives and gives birth to a son just as Elisha said (17).

This is not the only Bible story of a barren woman giving birth. Sarah, Rebekah, Rachael, Mrs. Manoah, Hannah, and Elizabeth all experience God's amazing provision. This story is different, however, in that the children of these ladies were all essential for the continuing of the covenant people or the child becomes a significant leader in a time of crisis. But here, we do not even know the child's name and there are numerous other children in Israel. So, why does God act? For one, he is pointing to the authenticity of Elisha's ministry. Elisha is a kind, miracle-working prophet. But perhaps God simply wants to show off his own goodness. Maybe he just wants to bless this lady (Davis, 63). It may be that simple. God is good, and he does good things. Paul says that God "richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (1 Tim 6:17b). Though God is

high and lofty, his exaltation does not make him remote from his children; it simply means that he has unlimited power to bless them. The Psalmist says:

[5] Who is like the LORD our God,
 who is seated on high,
[6] who looks far down
 on the heavens and the earth?
[7] He raises the poor from the dust
 and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
[8] to make them sit with princes,
 with the princes of his people.
[9] He gives the barren woman a home,
 making her the joyous mother of children.
Praise the LORD!
(Psalm 113:5-9 ESV)

God is swift to bless, but do not get the wrong idea. If you show hospitality, you will not necessarily be blessed with child! But do not miss the major idea: God rewards biblical hospitality. God will ultimately reward every single act of obedience that you do for the kingdom of God, because it demonstrates that you have welcomed the message of the gospel (cf., Matt 10:14, 42; Luke 14:13-14).

Thus, we have a story of the kindness of this lady, the kindness of Elijah, and the abundant kindness of God. Let us “praise God from whom all blessings flow.”

But the story is not over. Next we read of *mysterious sorrow*. After her son is grown, he dies tragically in her arms (2 Kings 4:18-20). She is not willing to accept this tragedy, though. She sits his body on the bed of Elisha and prepares to confront him (21). Her husband appears to be somewhat skeptical, maybe because he has not been told of the child’s death (22-23). He objects at the timing of her venture (23), but she goes off anyway some fifteen miles to Mt. Carmel (24-25). When Elisha sees her coming, he sends his servant to meet her, but she dismisses the inquiry with the same type of evasive response she gave to her husband (26). She finally reaches Elisha and grabs his feet and proceeds to pour out her heart to him (27-28). She refuses to leave him (30).

While she is upset and mystified by this tragedy, one should stop and commend her again for heading to the right person in time of crisis (like in the previous story). Elisha was God’s ambassador, and she knows that. She is essentially clinging to God. What do you call it, when you are dumbfounded by the difficult providences of God, but still cry out to him? Faith! (Davis, 65). Faith says, “The Lord gives and takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” She does not have the answers; she is grieved; but she has not turned away from God.

This lady is not the only one with limitations in this story. Did you notice what Elisha said, “The LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me” (27). He has limited knowledge of the event (Could he have also had limited knowledge of the events in chapter 3 also? I think so).

He also has limited power. Notice that when he sends Ghazi to lay his staff on the head of the child, nothing happens (26, 28). Now, Elisha was God's prophet, but he was not God. He has limitations. The only thing he can do is pray (Davis, 66). When Elisha comes to the house, the writer says, "So he went in and shut the door behind the two of them and prayed to the LORD" (33). While Elisha does some physical actions in verse 34-35, the whole episode illustrates his desperation in prayer.

While we hold some up as marvelous Christian leaders, we are reminded that even the most gifted servants are limited. If Elisha is desperate, how much more are we? Recognize your limitations, and pour out your heart to God, who is unlimited in power. We will fail to pray when we do the reverse. When we think we are powerful enough to handle problems, and God is small, then we will not pray like this. We are powerless, but God is powerful. Seek him.

The child eventually sneezes seven times (a sign of complete restoration?) and opens his eyes. Elisha then calls the mother, and gives her son, similar to the story of Elijah and the widow's son (1 Kings 17:17-24).

Thus, another miracle has been performed in secret; Elisha is shown to be an agent of God's compassion and power, who can raise the dead like Elijah; and the recipient of this gift bows to the ground in gratitude (4:37).

We pointed this out in 1 Kings 17, but there is a very similar story in Luke 7, concerning a "widow of Nain." Jesus "had compassion" on her, and raises the child. The difference in Elijah and Elisha and Jesus, is that they *pray*, but Jesus simply *speaks*. "Young man, arise" he says. Jesus is greater than Elijah and Elisha. He is our ultimate hope of resurrection. Perhaps you wonder, why God does not raise the dead today. Well, in these cases, these children would eventually die again. God has done something greater for us. He has promised that everyone in Christ will be raised permanently! (1 Thess 4:13-18). Elijah and Elisha were giving us a sneak preview of the resurrection power of Christ. When Christ was on earth, he was giving us a sneak preview of the ultimate resurrection to come. This lady looked to Elisha in desperate trust, but we look to Jesus, who has triumphed over the grave.

In two stories, we have two unnamed ladies receiving daily bread, a child, and a sneak preview of the resurrection power of Jesus. Elisha is putting the compassionate of God on display. Prophets were not just brash speakers of truth; they were also agents of God's mercy. How much more so with the Savior. John he says that he was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

3. Food for the Hungry (38-44)

Elisha displays God's compassion next to the sons of the prophets. In a time of famine, Elisha instructs his servant to prepare a large pot of stew for them (38). This story too reminds us of the previous Elijah narrative, where God provided for the prophets in a time of famine (17:1-24; 18:1-15), and of chapter two, where Elisha purifies the water (2 Kings 2:19-22).

A problem emerges when one of the men goes looking for some herbs, and decides to take add some wild gourds to the stew, not knowing what they were (39-40). The result is disastrous. The men take a bite of these vicious vittles and cry to Elisha, "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" (40). It is hard to know if the wild gourds could have literally killed them or if it only tasted horribly. Perhaps it was both. Elisha responds in compassion and wisdom. He knows what to add to the pot to cure it. He says, "Then bring flour" (41). They do so and there was "no harm in the pot" (41).

Should we take as our application the need to know how to cook? Was Elisha a miracle worker and a master chef? While I do recommend learning how to cook, I think the simple application, once again, is that God provides daily bread for his people. "Give us this day our daily bread" was and is a desperate and regular prayer for those living in agrarian cultures, and in poor regions. Those of us in America may have a hard time identifying with this. When we need food, we go to the grocery store. We complain if we have to stand in line longer than three minutes! In agrarian cultures, it was not easy and simple. Starvation and hunger were very real problems. Add to this, we read of a time of famine. The people are thus doubly desperate. Yet, God is takes care of them.

God is not distant and remote. He is involved in our lives. He takes interest in a pot of soup, not just ruling the solar system. God is interested in providing poor students with washing machines and furniture. God understands us. God loves us. God is near to us. God is real to us. God is good to us. God faithfully provides for us. Bless the Lord! Do not forget his benefits (Ps 103).

This same application continues in the next episode. The faithfulness of God shines as Elisha multiplies twenty loaves of bread and feeds one hundred people. The food comes from an unnamed man from Baal-shalishah. He brought Elisha what was to be offered to the priests, "bread of the firstfruits, twenty barley loaves and fresh ears grain" (42; cf., Ex 23:19; Lev 23:20; Num 18:13; and Deut 18:4-5). Why does he not give them to the priests? Apparently it was because of the corruption in the priesthood in Northern Israel. He bypasses them and gives it to the man of God instead. He was a "separatist" you might say. God had a remnant of loyal followers, and he was one of them (cf., 1 Kings 19:18).

Ghazi does the math and says that such provision is impossible (43a). Feed 100 people with 20 loaves of bread? That is either some tiny people or some big bread! However, Elisha insists, "Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left'" (43b). So what happens? Yahweh fulfills his word. The writer says, "So he set it before them. And they ate and had some left, according to the word of the LORD" (44). God does what he promises. God multiplies what they brought him (cf., 2 Cor 9:10).

While we must remember that being a Christian does not exempt you from trouble, even starvation. God may choose not to provide for some people for his own sovereign reasons. But when provision comes, we should bless his name. And we need to remember that God does always keep his word. Those who are in Christ will one day enjoy the new heavens and the new

earth, where all the needs of his people are met gloriously, fully and eternally. Praise him for daily bread; and rest in his eternal promises.

One Greater Than Elisha Is Here

We are left to admire Elisha. He speaks truth in an evil day. He cares for a widow in great need. He provides a child to a barren woman. He raises the dead. He feeds a multitude. He is a compassionate prophet who points us to Jesus.

Jesus was in Elisha-mode on several occasions. He fed 5,000 (e.g., Mark 6:30-44) and 4,000 (e.g., Mark 8:1-10) and also had food left over. The feeding of the 5,000 appears in all four gospels. In John's gospel, Andrew reflects the concern of Elisha's servant. After finding the young lad with five loaves and two fish, Andrew says, "What are they among so many?" (John 6:8). While Andrew has his doubts, Jesus commands the people to sit down in groups. Then Jesus multiplies fewer loaves than Elisha had, and fed a greater number of people (e.g., Mark 6:39-44). Some in the audience surely reflected on this Elisha story. John says that some said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is come into the world" (John 6:14). Surely, some thought "one greater than Elisha is here."

The problem in Jesus' day was also like the problem of Elisha's day. Some looked to Jesus only for miracles, not for true spiritual transformation. The miracles should have sent people to embrace him by faith as Lord, yet they simply looked to him to help them in a temporary emergency instead. Jesus said, "Do not labor for food that perishes, but for the good that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him, God the Father has set his seal" (John 6:27). He told them that if they come to him by faith that "they will never hunger" (6:35) He called them to believe him for eternal life, and receive the assurance that he will "raise them up on the last day" (6:40). But sadly, when Jesus finished his discourse, many turned away. A faithful few received Jesus, but many rejected him. Elisha experienced a similar result. While he was able to provide for the faithful remnant, his ministry did not lead to an overall change in the nation. Many ignored or rejected him, like others later did with Jesus – and like many do today.

What will you do with Jesus? Will you embrace him as Lord? Or, will you turn away from the one who has had his body torn like bread, and his blood poured out like wine, in order to grant hungry sinners forgiveness, freedom, eternal life and joy? May God open your eyes to embrace the One "mighty in word and deed" (Luke 24:19), who conquered death, fulfilling everything written of him in "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms" (24:44), and now grants grace to sinners, and clothes them with power to tell the world of his salvation (48-50).

