

II Kings 4:1-7; Luke 9: 10-17; The Miraculous Fountain of Oil I. The Enslaving Problem II. The Liberating Solution

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, when is the last time that God has provided for your needs in unexpected way? That may not be easy to answer- but how about provision in a normal way? That seems a little easier to answer, doesn't it! Well, God has provided for my needs this morning- after a night of rest the LORD provided food for breakfast- so I guess this morning was the last time that God provided for my needs. But do we think about it that way- do we see the very food we eat as a provision from His hand? All provision- ordinary and extraordinary- are gifts from His hand! He can make bread fall from heaven- and grain to grow in the field! Water from a well- and water from a rock! Although God usually uses normal or secondary means to meet our needs- occasionally He does use extraordinary means- or an abnormal process by which to meet the needs of His people. Today we find one such example where the LORD used extra-ordinary means for the provision of His people. Although not on a scale of the miraculous water from the rock or water for 3 armies, this miracle is no less gracious to this woman in need. So today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ keeps His follower from slavery as He provides miraculous oil for her needs. In our study last week, we saw that God controls the rise and fall of nations- giving water to an army. This week we see the rise and fall of a widow with the need of one house in view. We find a no-named widow who is the object of God's special care! Insignificant on the world's stage- but no less important in the eyes of the LORD!

I. The Enslaving Problem

In our first point, we find the enslaving problem encountered in our text. In v. 1 we find a widow who is on the brink of losing it all. Not only is her husband dead, she is behind on her bills and the creditor is threatening to take her sons and employ them in order to pay off her bills. Now this seems like an extreme situation- but we have to keep the culture in mind. During this time there was no social security program, no food stamps to use. There were no life insurance policies to depend on, and no government mandate that guaranteed you could not be evicted. The family of this widow would normally take her in, but they are not present in our passage so they may have been unable or unwilling. This is not all that surprising, because remember who her husband was. Her

husband was one of the so-called sons of the prophets. This was a group of men located in various cities- such as in Bethel and Jericho back in chapter 2. These groups were not formal prophets like Elijah and Elisha were, but they were followers of the LORD and they provided aid and support to Elijah and Elisha. They were kind of a seminary of sorts- or like the synagogues in the NT. Places of godly instruction and teaching. However, we need to remember that we are still in the Northern tribes of Israel. Joram is still king- and there has not been a national revival in the North- so it was very likely that this widow's family had forsaken her because of her husband's devotion to the LORD God as worshipped in Jerusalem and not the worship of the golden calf at Bethel. Anyways, her husband has died and left her and her 2 young boys alone- without the provision and protection that the husband would provide. So we enter the context of death, loss, great need and impending slavery. This widow has incurred a great debt- we don't know how- but she is in serious red. The only way widows could hope for daily provision was by gleaning or begging- neither of which brings in substantial income. So the debts are due and the widow- as v. 2 states- has nothing. She has no family heirloom to sell, no expensive furniture or perfume to barter- nothing but a little oil. So the creditor has called in the loan- if she does not pay even her boys will be taken away. These two young lads sold into slavery- forced to work in order to pay back their mother's debt. This widow would truly be left all alone. Now Scripture does warn about the dangers of borrowing- as Prov. 22 puts it, the borrower is slaver to the lender. But we do not read that this woman- this widow did anything unwise. She may not have had a choice- in order to get money to live on she may have had to seek out a loan shark. But now there is no more that can be done. So the bondage of her children seems inevitable- there is nothing that she can do- no hope except to call upon the LORD and His prophet! She is hopeless- further death and bondage seem inevitable- so she goes to Elisha in her grief and she calls upon the LORD for aid! And as Psalm 68 puts it, God is the God of the fatherless and the protector of the widow. Or as James 1 puts it, religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. So our God is concerned with the welfare of the vulnerable among His people. Although we are not surprised to read of a desperate situation like this- the fact remains that God did not make the world to be like this! We have become desensitized to the loss

and bondage around us. Living in a fallen world we are not surprised to see death- loss and destruction- bondage and slavery- these things do not shock us anymore. But this is not how it was supposed to be! So here we have a woman of faith- married to a Godly man- who becomes a widow- on the brink of losing everything- even her children. It is as if we are traveling backwards in time to Egypt! God brought His people out of bondage- out of the house of slavery! The Israelites had nothing while they were slaves- even their children were being taken from them and cast into the Nile! Israel was brought out of the bondage and death- and now this poor widow is going back to that same futility and bondage. Imagine having your own sons forcefully taken from your arms and placed in chains- to work off your debt! But there is hope- because God sees and He hears the cry of His child!

II. The Liberating Solution

So this godly widow comes to Elisha- and Elisha says- what can I do for you and what do you have- as he says in v. 2. Just a little oil- and that is exactly what the LORD is going to use to bring about a mighty work of deliverance and provision! So in keeping with the words of the prophet, this widow and her boys gather as many empty jugs, vessels, pots and pitchers and they bring them into their little home. They shut the door and the mom starts pouring. Children, have you ever played with those magic baby bottles that look like they are filled with milk? You hold them over the doll's mouth and it appears that the milk drains and empties- only when you set the bottle down it magically fills again- right? Well, this miracle is no ploy- no slide of hand or ruse. The oil really continues to flow- like a fountain- and the boys bring another vessel- another pot- another pitcher- another vase- anything that can hold oil. Here is another one, mom. And the oil keeps flowing until there is no more room! No more empty vessels can be found as v. 6 says- the boys say- there are no more pots. Nothing empty in the house- they have all been filled! Oil was usually used for cooking during this time- we still use olive or vegetable oil in many recipes. But oil was also used on wounds and dry skin- to heal and refresh- as a radiant face was said to shine like oil. This oil was also used for anointing and it was burned to light lamps as well. Much more than it is today- olive oil was a staple of society. It was costly as well- and this olive oil becomes a symbol of both health and prosperity. So this widow's oil becomes both her liberty and prosperity! Both aspects are present. Not only

is the bondage of these two sons averted, their continued provision and financial security is also provided. As we read in v. 7, sell the oil and pay your debts! The sons will not have to go the creditor because their loan will be paid in full. But added to that, Elisha continues, you can live on the rest. You and your sons can be provided for until the time that they are old enough to work for themselves. There is the promise of liberty and a future! In this way, the LORD acts as if He was the closest kin- doing what the widow's family could not or would not do! Doing what faithful husband would do! Our Lord entered into her suffering and spoke kindness to her in her sorrow! He redeems her life from the pit- securing the liberty of her sons- and returning joy to her home! The Kinsman Redeemer of Israel saves his daughter- to stop her from going back to poverty and bondage!

There are clear similarities between this miracle and the one recorded back in I Kings 17 with Elijah and the widow of Zarephath. Back in I Kings 17 during the drought, Elijah, the widow and her son were all provided for as the oil and the flour never ran out. So the widow of Zarephath enjoyed a constant supply of oil until the rain came and the drought ended. In our text, the widow and her two sons are graciously provided for. But we also read from Luke 9 earlier where we found Jesus with the miraculous provision of bread and fish. As Jesus took up the bread, blessed it and broke it, He provided for the immediate needs of the people and even more than what was needed- as 12 baskets were gathered up after everyone's hunger was satisfied. Jesus' miracle on the shores of Galilee was to provide fish and bread for the sake of the hungry and weary. In this we learn that our God can and does graciously provide for His people- as a shepherd provides for His sheep! Although our God normally meets our needs in a more common fashion, that does not diminish the fact that He is still the author of every gift and the fountain of all good. As we have seen, He can use ravens to bring us food, and He can use miraculous oil to supply our need. Water from a rock and water from a spring- but every gift comes down to us from the Father of Lights. So the first level of application is to teach us to depend on God- and to look to His hand alone for all that need.

But there is more going on here than the lesson of learning to depend on God. When we remember that this miracle took place in the Northern Tribes- under the wicked son of Ahab Jehoram. We learn something about

election- even in the midst of wicked and perverse generation, here we find a godly widow who suffers the death of her beloved husband. But even after this loss, this widow still trusts in the LORD and looks to His hand to provide! She still calls upon and believes in the God of Abraham. This single widow- insignificant in the eyes of the world- is not forsaken or forgotten by the LORD. Last week we saw the miraculous provision of water to the army of 3 kings- this week the miraculous provision of oil to a family of 3. And putting this in the context of redemptive history, we learn something about the future reign of Christ and the coming Kingdom of God. As we saw last week, when Jesus comes back there will be streams of living water and complete victory over the foe- secured by His hand. This week, we have the gracious deliverance from bondage and the sustenance of an abundant life from His hand! So water and wine- victory and liberty- all come from the hand of our King and will be enjoyed in the Kingdom to come!

To conclude, when the Israelites were brought out of bondage, the LORD delivered them out of Egypt- the house of slavery. The LORD set His people free, but that freedom needed to be protected. For freedom Christ has set us free as Gal. 5 puts it. In the NT, the history of Israel being brought out of Egypt is used to picture what Christ has done for us. The freedom that the Israelites enjoyed- that this widow was preserved in- was always a picture of a greater freedom to come. Freedom not from creditors- freedom not from the cruel taskmasters in Egypt- but freedom from sin, misery and hell! Free from the bonds of Satan. The physical bondage that Israel was brought out of is a picture of the liberty we now have in Christ! As Gal. 5 puts it, stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. Sin enslaves- and brings a bondage far worse than anything Israel experienced in Egypt. We are granted freedom from slavery in Christ- and we are called to freedom in Him! Let those who have been set free by Christ not go back to the slavery of the old way and the life of sin. Sin should be as repulsive to us as the bondage of her sons was repulsive to this widow mother! And in God's grace, this widow and her sons were kept from experiencing that bondage. As our theme stated: Jesus Christ keeps His follower from slavery as He provides miraculous oil for her needs. So Jesus keeps us from slavery to sin by sending us His Spirit of liberty and bounty. May we all rejoice in the blessed provision that we receive from His hand.