

II Kings 4:8-17; Genesis 18:9-15; The Shunammite Becomes a Mother I. Her Hospitality II. Her Contentment III. Her Son

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, have you ever received an unexpected gift from someone- a present that you were not expecting which turns out to be exactly what you wanted? Perhaps you have experienced that before- when someone gave you a seemingly random gift but as soon as you open it you love it and can't imagine life without it! Well, today we begin to look at the Shunammite woman and the gift that God graciously gives her. Although she does not ask for this gift- she receives one of the greatest gifts that God can give in this life. I often read from the Bible when I visit new parents in the home- as they welcome their little one into their arms- these words- that "children are a gift, a heritage and a reward from the Lord" as Psalm 127. To receive a child from the Lord is to be blessed. But as we will see this next week, God can also use children to teach us and test our faith as well! So next week we will see how the LORD tests the faith of this woman- but this week we see how the LORD blesses this woman and moves her to praise Him for His unexpected gift! We consider this theme: Jesus Christ provides an unexpected child as a sign of His great kindness!

I. Her Hospitality

In our first point, we find that this Shunammite woman is a virtue of hospitality by which Elisha the prophet is greatly refreshed. Our passage opens in v. 8 where Elisha is traveling to Shunem. Now Shunem was a small village near Mt. Moreh. It was located in the central region of Israel- roughly between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. More importantly, it was on the route between Mt. Carmel- which was Elisha's permanent home- and the city of Samaria where the Kings of Israel ruled. On one of these circuit trips, Elisha stops at Shunem where he encounters a woman of noble character. Now this woman is a real Prov. 31 kind of woman. She compels the prophet to remain with her family- at her house every time he comes to town. She takes it upon herself to provide a place in v. 10- to construct a permanent room on their housetop to be a place of rest and refreshment for Elisha whenever he passed that way. It would be like adding a guest

bedroom in our basement today- so that whenever a guest preacher came by they could stay in your home. Now remember that there were no hotels or motels like there is today. Inns were not readily available in every place. So travellers would stop in the city square and wait for someone to invite them into their home- or they would spend the night in the open square. But this woman makes sure that Elisha has a place to go. We also know that this woman was a great woman- a woman of some means as she was wealthy. She was a prominent woman in the city- well known with sufficient means to built an extra structure and provide for Elisha's needs whenever he was in town. And here we find a major contrast between this passage and the one we looked at last week. Last week we found a poor widow who had nothing- this week we have a wealthy woman who is married to an older man who is still living. But the poor widow has something that money could not buy- the widow had two sons while this Shunammite woman had no children. And in the provision and blessing that woman of Shunem has- we see that God is not a respecter of persons. Both the poor widow and the rich woman of today were the recipients of God's blessings! God not only cares for the poor- but the rich also are provided for by His hand! Being poor does not make your closer to God- and being rich does not exclude you from the kingdom of heaven! So this wealthy woman of Shunem receives Elisha as her guest. And as Luke 10:5 instructs the disciples, when you travel into a city and you enter a home, first say "peace be to this home." If that place is worthy, let your peace rest upon that house. Well, as we will see, this is a worthy house and God's blessing and peace are going to fall upon her. She shows her faith in her generosity! And as Mt. 10 puts it, when you receive a prophet because they are a prophet of the LORD, you will receive a prophet's reward! So as our text continues, we find that the presence of God's prophet becomes the presence of God's peace and blessing!

II. Her Contentment

So the first characteristic of this godly woman is her hospitality and generosity. She is willing- she sets her heart on blessing the prophet by providing a place of rest and shelter anytime Elisha passes that way. But the second character trait that this Shunammite woman has is this- that she is content. So as our passage

continues in v. 11 we find that Elisha and his servant are rested in their newly built upper room, and the LORD lays it on Elisha's heart that some blessing or gift should be given to this godly woman. So the woman is called in and Elisha says in v. 13, look at all that you have done for me. All this trouble that you have gone to- what now can I do to repay you? Can I speak to the king or to an army general on your behalf? Basically, Elisha is saying that he would be willing to put in a good word for the sake of this woman- perhaps her taxes would be decreased, or justice secured. Maybe she would be given an audience with the powerful- or some dispute would be settled. Tell me, what troubles you? Where can I help- Elisha says. And now the woman's response is very telling- as she says in v. 13- I dwell among my own people. This Shunammite woman is not like Naomi- dwelling among strangers in an alien land. She is at home with her people- in her own land and lot- and more than that- she is in her own tribe and she serves the one true God- serving the God of Israel while living in the Land of Promise! The answer that she gives is one of complete contentment- I dwell among my own people. I have no need- my needs are supplied- my husband and I are very content here. We do not need anything done for us- we are satisfied with our lot and portion in life. Here in the land of promise I have been blessed by the LORD- and she testifies to this fact! She is at rest and finds peace in her place. Really, she displays the heart of godliness with contentment. She opens her hand to needy; she supplies for this prophet of God- and she has enough. Or as I Tim. 6:8 puts it, if you have food and water with these you shall be content. And she was- I have more than I deserve and I am happy- content to be here with my people. She has a community that supports her- a land in which her identity and portion is secure. The peace and blessing of God has been seen by her- and she is content with her lot in life. Where Ruth would say- your people will be my people and your God my God- this Shunammite says- I am with my people and I serve the One, true God! Now just to be clear here- it would not have been a sin for this woman to ask God for a child. It is entirely appropriate and pleasing to God when we ask for His blessings in prayer- when we pray for things that are God honoring and good gifts from his hand! So a couple that have not had children can pray for the gift of a child- absolutely. However, if the LORD withholds something, we are called to contentment! And this woman's husband was old

as v. 14 says. Having an aged husband, she has come to grips with the fact that it appears God will not give them a child- so she has calmed her heart in this fact. But Gahazi, Elisha's servant, knows what this woman does not have. She does not have a son! She does not have the one thing that money cannot buy- a child of her own. Remember that her husband is old- and when the husband dies as we found out last week- the sons are the ones who take care of their widow mother. But without a son, who will carry on the family name? Who will care for this woman after her aged husband dies? So the prophet calls in his benefactor- Elisha speaks to this woman and promises a gift greater than could be hoped for.

III. Her Son

So Elisha says to this woman in v. 16, at this time next year you will have a son! Now why was God going to give her a son? There are many examples in the Bible of miraculous births- but almost every single one of these children born would be called to a significant role in redemptive history. Their names would live on in the annals of Israel's history forever. But here we have an unnamed woman married to an unnamed man who gives birth to an unnamed son. Why does this woman receive a child? There is no redemptive historical reason- we don't even know his name! Well, we could ask why does God give us any of His gifts and blessings? Why did you receive children from His hand? What are children born in the household of faith? Well, as I said in the introduction, Psalm 127 calls children a gift, heritage and reward from God's hand. Could it be that this woman was given a child simply because God is gracious and kind? For no other reason than to bless this family and give them a reason to rejoice? As LD 10 puts it, when God smiles on you in His providence, your response is to be thankful! To rejoice in the gifts that God has given you! He is the fount and source of every good and perfect gift- these coming to us from the Father of light! But we also see that there are echoes of redemptive history in this birth as well. In his birth we are reminded of other births recorded. We read earlier from Gen. 18- and we can't read of this son being born without thinking back to the birth of Isaac. So the Shunammite woman is like another Sarah- the parallels are clear and specific. Both Sarah and this woman had old husbands and no child. Sarah and the Shunammite were called to come forth. Both were

godly women of faith- serving and supporting the man of God in their midst. Generous- opening their homes to travellers. Calling the man of God their lord. Both Sarah and this woman stood in the doorway as they received the message from the LORD. Both were promised a son in 1 year's time. In fact, the same words of v. 16 are found in Gen. 18- at that season- in that time next year you will have a son. And both women doubted this promised- where Sarah laughed in Gen. 18- the Shunammite woman said, no my lord, do not lie to your servant. But although both doubted- they both received a son just as the man of God had promised. And this really is a pattern that we find in Scriptures- the pattern of the unexpected and miraculous birth. We find the power of God to open wombs- to cause the aged, baren and even the virgin to conceive. Just think of not only Sarah, but Rebekah and Hannah. Menoah's wife and the Shunamite woman of today. Down to Elizabeth – and culminating in Mary who gave birth to the child of the promise. And from these mothers we have the birth of Isaac, Joseph, Samuel, Sampson, John and of course Jesus. All these prove that God's hand is not too short to bring about a miraculous birth! God has the power to do what man thinks is impossible- and He causes the childless one to become a mother and to sing for joy to the praise of the God who gives!

To conclude, our time with the Shunammite has just begun- so far she has been set up as an example of virtue and the recipient of God's grace! And the arrival of this son causes us to both look back and to look ahead- we look back and see Sarah and we look forward to see Mary. And as we come back next week we can look to see how this son- the firstborn of the Shunammite woman- how this son will be like Isaac and like Jesus. We will look for both joy and sorrow- life, death and resurrection as well. But that will have to wait till next week! As our theme stated, Jesus Christ provides an unexpected child as a sign of His great kindness! But Jesus not only provides an unexpected child- He is the unexpected child! Virgins do not conceive and give birth! But this unexpected child is the greatest sign of God's kindness to us! So may we rejoice not only the gift of children in general- but praise God for THEE child of the promise whom we receive specifically! The Christ Child by whom we receive every blessing from God! He is the one who gives us a home and makes us into the family of God!