

II Kings 4:1-7

As we look at the interesting story of the demonstration of God's power, which is recorded in II Kings 4:1-7, we see that it was in the day of the school of the prophets. The woman in the narrative was a widow of a theological student who had been in training for the ministry. This young couple and their two sons had been a happy family. They did not have any wealth, so the breadwinner probably worked on one of the farms nearby on a part-time basis. Being godly people, their home was one of contentment and joy for, as the New Testament tells us, "Godliness with contentment is great gain."

One sad day the father was suddenly taken away from them by death, and the heart-broken mother had to face the difficult task of keeping the home together and feeding and clothing those two growing lads. What made the situation even more difficult was that the deceased husband had incurred some indebtedness which was still unpaid, and she had to assume that financial obligation. She soon discovered that she would have to see some of the possessions which she prized very highly in order to purchase the bare necessities of life for her and her sons. It was not long until practically all of her possessions were disposed of by this process.

I. The Analysis.

1. She was fully aware of her great need.

Her husband had been a faithful servant of God, leaving behind him a reputation founded on the only basis which will stand. Like not a few of the Lord's true prophets, even in modern times, he had died in debt. And now the creditors were pressing the widow for payment, and, in the absence of all personal property, were preparing to enforce that provision of the Levitical law, which allowed a creditor to hold a debtor's children for servitude until the arrival of the year of Jubilee. Suddenly the creditor had demanded that she pay the debt, and, in lieu of the payment, he would take her sons and hold them as bondsmen. Her sorrow was increased greatly with the very thought of the possibility of losing her sons.

2. She very frankly confessed her great need.

In her trouble her first thought was of God as represented by His prophet. It was not a new thing for her to call upon God in the day of trouble. In her extremity and desperation this troubled woman went to God's servant, Elisha the prophet, told him the tragic story, described her condition, confessed her need, and asked him to do something for her. She was fortunate that there was a man of God to whom she could go in her need. When she went to him, she found that he was prepared to listen to her. So gracious was he that it is easy to understand her telling him the whole story without reservation. When she was driven by her need to a confession of her condition, it was a blessing that she went to the one who could sympathize with and help her.

Elisha looked at her, responded promptly, and quietly asked, "What shall I do for thee?" In other words, "What do you want me to do for you?" Without waiting for an answer, the prophet hastened to ask a second and even more personal question, "Tell me, what hast thou in the house?" Immediately she answered, "Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house." Then, as an afterthought, she added, "Save a pot of oil."

3. She was told to get many empty vessels.

God's servant said to the woman, "Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few." This command implied that she had something with which to fill them. The Lord had an abundance of blessings to give to this woman, but she had to prepare the vessels to receive and to contain them. When she told the prophet that she only had a little pot of oil, he told her to take what she had and use it, and in so doing she would get more through it. It was an extraordinary thing to do, but she was prepared to obey God's servant. So back home she went and began to visit her neighbors. Knowing that she needed money to pay her debts, doubtless her neighbors expected her to ask them for financial assistance in some form. Naturally, when one has occasion to go around to his neighbors to ask for money, he will not find them as cordial as under other circumstances. But this woman did not ask for money. Instead, she asked to borrow vessels. She did not specify what kind or shape the vessels must be. The only requirement was that they must be empty. Perhaps some of her neighbors thought that her sorrow had touched her brain, but they loaned her the vessels and she went back to her home, entered and shut the door behind herself and her sons, and fastened her neighbors out.

4. She filled all the empty vessels with oil.

Trusting God's prophet, and believing that he would neither deceive her nor tell her to do anything for which there was not a good reason, this woman began pouring oil out of the jar which she had into the empty vessels which she had borrowed, as God miraculously continued to replenish the supply. She continued to pour from her jar of oil until all of the vessels were filled. When all the vessels were filled she had to stop pouring. She could have filled many more vessels if she had only borrowed them.

Overwhelmed by her tremendous success, the woman sought Elisha, the prophet, and gave him a report on what had happened and inquired as to what she should do. The man of God said, "Go, sell the oil, and pay the debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest." With joyous satisfaction she had discovered that in the pot of oil, which she had considered to be extremely meager, she had all of the wealth for which she had wished, and more besides.

## II. The Application.

At the beginning of this remarkable story there was sorrow, poverty, need, and distress; with no prospect except disaster, bondage, and slavery. At the end of this story there was abundance, satisfaction, security, fearlessness of bondage and slavery, and a happy and united home. What brought about this wonderful change? With His miraculous power God had done a wonderful work which had met the need completely.

Perhaps this story clearly portrays some of you in this gathering. Are you poverty-stricken in the things of God, with but shallow peace, little joy, falling into sin again and again, prayerless, lacking in faith, and without any attempt at or power to lead a soul to Christ? If so, God wants to make a glorious change in you. He can do it by bringing to you the fulness of the Holy Spirit. This will bring to you peace, joy, victory over temptation, prayerfulness, faith, and the ability to introduce people to Christ.

It was a gift of oil that made all the difference to the needy woman in this scripture, and oil in God's Word speaks of the Holy Spirit. God delights to give the fulness of the Spirit to those who desire this wonderful blessing. The resources of the Holy Spirit are limited by our unbelief. If we would be filled with the Holy Spirit, we

must bring to Him the vessel of desire. He cannot make us wise unless and until we desire for holiness. We have the power of God in our lives according to the measure of our desire for it. It is our negligence and disobedience that chokes the channel through which God's power can flow to us.

When all the empty vessels had been collected and the widow and her sons had entered the home, as God's prophet had commanded, she began to pour oil from the jar into the borrowed vessels. As long as she continued to pour the oil the supply was miraculously replenished. The oil flowed until all of the empty vessels were filled, no matter what their size, whether small or large. When no more vessels were provided, God stopped working a miracle. Had additional vessels been made available, more oil would have been given. This widow had at her disposal the power to limit or to increase the amount of the oil supply. Even so, you and I have much to do with the measure of the mercies and blessings which we receive. What was it that stopped the flow of oil? Was it because God ceased giving, or was it because there was no more capacity to receive? It was because there was no more capacity to receive, of course. What stops God's blessings from flowing into our lives today? Is the hindrance on our side or on God's side? We are the ones who do the measuring, and not God. If your capacity were bigger, you would get more. If your faith were greater, God would give you more blessings.

In working with and for people, God uses them and their possessions as far as they will go. Often a person goes to God for help, when he is in abject need, feeling that he does not have anything with which to help himself, and is surprised and amazed when he is told to go back and look over his resources. This woman had never thought of paying her debt with the oil which she had in the house. When there is something to be done, something for you to do, God says to you, "What do you have with which to do it?" And very likely you will say, "Nothing, absolutely nothing," but that may not be the case. When Christ was preparing to feed the multitudes, He inquired as to what food was available. He was told, "There is a lad here, with five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?" They were enough and more than enough, when Christ had added to them His power. But the point is that Christ began with what the disciples had. He multiplies as we pour out.

The woman in our scripture lesson had faith enough to obey the prophet's order to go and borrow all the vessels that she could from her neighbors. What her experience was going to be she did not know; what God might be going to do, she did not know; what she had to do, she did not know. She simply did her work, and left God to do His in His own way and time. Oh, if each of us would only get hold of this simple law of living, the law of the obedience of faith, how much life would be enriched! The responsibility for results is God's when we do what He commands. The power is His, so the Christian should draw on it and use it. The woman was about to receive a great blessing from God, but she did not have room enough to receive it. Many times God cannot bless us as richly as He would because we are not prepared to receive a large blessing.

The oil that the woman had was not much, but that was what the Lord used. You and I are like that; we do not have but a little; but with God a little is great, for He is the God of the extraordinary. The thing to do is to keep pouring out. Do not keep the oil which you have, but pour it out and you will be astonished at what God will do. If you will pour out what you have as God tells you, you will find that He will keep on pouring in, and never fail you. Use the grace that He has given you, and He will give you more and more grace.

Borrowing vessels is often needful before we are prepared to receive some of God's best gifts. For instance, there is the preparation which comes in the development of a larger sense of need. Men must have great wants and needs before they will ever make great requests. Frequently their needs are scantily supplied because they seek only certain familiar and comparatively small ones. Many people are so well supplied in their own esteem that their range of conscious needs is very limited. God does such people a great service when He leads them outside the little space which is hemmed in by their conceit and self-satisfaction, and shows them the great empty spaces in their lives. Then they quickly ask for large things.

God is willing and ready to bless us when we are willing and prepared to receive the blessings. However, the vessels we place before Him to receive the blessings must be empty and clean. The Lord will not fill a life with His Spirit if self is reigning there. He will never give His power for the glory of self. One must remove the lid on the vessel, or the hindrance, before God will pour in His blessings. Sometimes the hindrance is unbelief or lack of faith. At other times, it is an unwillingness to make things right, or worldliness, or gross sin; these can hinder a person being filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered for service. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient for every need. There is no circumstance in which we shall find ourselves, either by the directive or permissive will of God, but what the grace of the Lord will prove sufficient for us. In Christ we find forgiveness, purity, victory and power.

Our blessings are limited by our capacity and willingness to receive. There is no limit to God's love and His power to bless. We frequently limit the number of blessings we receive by our failure to use aright some that we have already received. God will not waste additional blessings by giving them to those who have been misusing the ones they have.

If there is a lack of peace, joy, love, prayer, and spiritual power in your life, it is strictly your own fault. You may gripe about this, that, and the other, which is not to your liking, but your condition spiritually is due to your unwillingness to bring your empty vessels to the Lord and let Him fill them.

Our house happens to be heated by electricity. If the house is not comfortable, it is not the fault of the Murray Electric System or its employees. If I am too lazy or too stingy to turn up the thermostat, and I am not warm, it is strictly my own fault. If I am thirsty because I will not turn on the faucet and get enough water to quench my thirst, I have no right to criticize the Murray Water System, for I alone am responsible for my condition. If someone does not get anything out of the church services, it is strictly his own fault. If you do not receive the blessings of God, it is because you refuse to bring empty and clean spiritual vessels to Him for Him to fill.