

# GOD PORTRAYS MORE WOMEN

by

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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THE PROPHET'S WIDOW

(II Kings 4)

THE TRUE PROPHET OF GOD is interested not only in national problems, but in the everyday concerns of the Lord's people. Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elijah saying: **"Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord; and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen"** (4:1).

Tradition has it that her husband was Obadiah, the governor of Ahab's house, who feared the Lord. It pays kings to have among their servants those who love the Lord. To protect the hunted prophets of the Lord, he had fed one hundred of these men bread and water while hiding them in two caves, and to do so borrowed a great deal of money. When Jezebel learned that he had helped the Lord's prophets, she had him dismissed from the royal service. He overworked in his effort to make restitution, ruined his health, and died.

Be that as it may, the widow was not only bereaved of her husband and burdened with his debt, but was in an agony lest she be deprived of her remaining support—her two boys. The creditor had come to take them for bondmen. The laws that covered debt were of remarkable severity in the Old Testament. In fact, even in our Lord's day, the man who owed ten thousand talents of silver was required to sell his wife and children and all that he had that the payment might be made.

She reminded Elisha of her husband's piety and godly life. She no doubt felt God would take note of it and, for her husband's sake and honor, He would intervene. She did not know how, and demanded nothing, merely stating the case. She evidently thought Elisha would intercede for her. It is a disgrace to the Christians when God's faithful servants are not properly supported.

And Elisha said unto her, **"What shall I do for thee?"**

He wanted her to tell him exactly what she would like him to do. When she did not reply he asked, **"What hast thou in the house?"** (4:2). Had she heard of that other widow at Zarephath, of her poverty, and the way God sustained Elijah, her son, and her when she had only a handful of meal and a little oil in the cruse? Did she reason, "If God came to the rescue of a heathen woman, surely He will care for me and mine"?

We are reminded of the Lord's question to Philip, **"Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"** (John 6:5) when the hungry five thousand were present. He would have Philip concerned about the need of the multitude. Philip took a look at the treasury and said it could not be done. Even two hundred pennyworth would not be nearly enough. Andrew, in half-faith, suggested: **"There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?"** (John 6:9).

It is evident that Elisha did not protest against the hardness of heart of the creditor, or of the injustice and oppression of the widow. Neither did he take up a collection for her nor a subscription from the schools of the prophets. They were as penniless as she, like Peter and John. Though they were in the Lord's service, Peter had to say, **"Silver and gold have I none"**—thank God they didn't stop there—**"but such as I have give I thee"** (Acts 3:6).

The prophet had no "poor" fund to draw from. He acknowledged the debt and the obligation to pay. Paul commands us to **"provide things honest in the sight of all men"** (Romans 12:17). He sought **"to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward man"** (Acts 24:16). Again he said: **"Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you"** (II Thessalonians 3:8).

When the collectors of the tribute money asked Peter, **"Doth not your master pay tribute?"** the Lord did not quarrel with the government but told Peter: **"Go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee"** (Matthew 17:27).

It is deplorable to find Christians indifferent and careless about meeting their obligations and paying their just debts. Their testimony for Christ would be worthless. I have seen a home placarded with texts, yet I knew that the owners made no attempt to pay their money obligations. These things ought not so to be.

**"What hast thou in the house?"** The prophet expected her to do something about the situation. He did not take the matter out of her hands. And she said, **"Thine handmaid hath not anything in the house, save a pot of oil"** (4:2). She evidently had sold everything else to meet the creditor's demand. Oil was used for anointing after bathing, and to anoint the dead, and was "kept" for her burial.

Moses was asked, **"What is that in thine hand?"** It was a rod. Cast down and taken up again at God's command, it became God's rod. We are to bring out our resources and place them at God's disposal.

We are not to grumble that we have so little, like the man with one pound, that we refuse to use it. We frequently hear, "If I had more money, more time, more gifts, I would do great things." God does not ask for what you have not; He does expect us to use what we have. How sweet to our ears it would be to hear Him say, **"She hath done what she could"**! It is God's plan to start with what we have.

A man told Mr. Moody he was praying for money to start an orphanage for five hundred children. "Friends," said Mr. Moody, "start with one."

Then he said: **"Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest"** (4:3-7).

The prophet did not go into the widow's house. The miracle was performed behind closed doors. Elisha awakened her expectancy in commanding her to borrow vessels not a few. He wanted her to look to God for herself and expect great things. The Lord says, **"Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it"** (Psalm 81:10).

Not only was the widow to look only to God in this emergency, but her sons were also to prove the Lord in their young lives. Sometimes parents, seeking to save their children all anxiety, rob them of learning what the Lord can be to them in time of trouble, which is a mistaken kindness.

This procedure of the widow sounds so like the New Testament: **"When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly"** (Matthew 6:5, 6). Our private dealings with God are very important.

This widow acted in faith. She began to use what she had and to pour it out. The five loaves and two fishes put in the Lord's hands were blessed and, as they were dispensed, the need of the many was met. It is God's plan to start with what we have. Shamgar used the ox goad he had in his hand; Dorcas, her needle to the blessing of many.

Someone has said, "Whoever comes by Christ to God and brings his wagon of necessity will never return empty or without freight." There is no waste with God. The miraculous is not continuous. When the need was met, the oil stayed. When the children of Israel reached Canaan, the manna ceased.

The oil ceased to flow when there was no vessel to receive it. Oil in the Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit. Is it because we do not hunger and thirst that there is not more outflowing of the Holy Spirit? There is no stagnation where the Spirit of God is free to work; He is spoken of as **"rivers of living water"** (John 7:38), an upspringing well (John 4:14).

Let us see that we are vessels available, usable to the Lord, and that we are occupied until He comes.

Then she came and told the man of God. Her heart was filled with gratitude; she returned for instructions for the next step. We are not given a glimpse of the whole path, but the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord.

Her first responsibility was to meet her obligations to the creditor. **“Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt.”** Thus she obtained a conscience void of offense toward man. She could meet the creditor and look at him unashamed as a child of God. But God did not merely save her embarrassment from the world, but provided for their future needs, saving her sons from slavery to be the support and comfort of their widowed mother.

We have a most compassionate Lord. **“A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation”** (Psalm 68:5). Could those boys ever forget their experience behind the closed door? How could they doubt the Lord’s ability to care for them? They learned by experience that day the meaning of those words, **“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you”** (I Peter 5:7) —not only for material things, but for you!

It is interesting, too, to note that their neighbors had many empty vessels.

Many of our friends are conscious of their insufficiency. We who have been blessed by God himself, and have proved what He is to our own souls, can ask ourselves, Are we content to have only our own little vessel filled, or do we gather in the neighbors, not a few, to share the blessing the Lord desires to pour out without stint on each of their hungry souls? It is only the empty vessels that God can fill.

Do we limit God because we do not go after the hungry and thirsty and bring them to the fountain of living water?

His Word says: **“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness”** (Isaiah 55: 1,2).

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