

BORROW NOT A FEW

2 Kings 4:1-7

Bro. Ezekiel Oghenekaro

*A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves." ² So Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" ³ And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil." ⁴ Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels; do not gather just a few. ⁵ And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones." ⁶ So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured it out. ⁷ Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another vessel." So the oil ceased. ⁸ Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest." **2 Kings 4:1-7.***

There were many distressed people in the days of Elijah and Elisha, for Israel had fallen upon hard times. Some of the most oppressed people were the prophets. In addition to the great depression, they had also received the wrath of Jezebel and others who despised them (**Matthew 5:12**). In this text one sees a prophet's widow in deep poverty.

We know little about her, only what is revealed in these seven verses. Her identity by name is not made known. According to the Rabbis she was the wife of Obadiah, but their testimony is often unreliable. She was the wife of some prophet, however. (Good family connections do not save one from problems.) From little, one can learn much. This is not an insignificant incident recorded without purpose. Great principles are at work and practical lessons abound here.

1. **A WIDOW HAD A PROBLEM** (v. 1). She was bereaved. To lose one's companion is to lose part of one's self (**Ephesians 5:31**). Life's most difficult adjustment is often that of loneliness following the death of a companion. Her problem was compounded by having two sons to care for. She had the entire responsibility of both mother and father. She was in debt. It was not because of sinful living and sinful extravagance, for her husband was a good man. It may have been caused by: carelessness, unexpected calamity, failure on the part of others to meet their obligations to him, or some other just reason. It may have been because of his feeding the prophets or otherwise using what he had to do good. That would be in character for one of the prophets! It is unlikely that he simply lived beyond his means. How often this is done today. Note the outlook of the average young couple toward things and debts! This attitude causes many

problems now. She was in grave danger of bondage for her sons. She lived in a day when children could be taken and sold into slavery to pay a debt for the parents. This was sometimes enforced despite such passages as **Exodus 22:22-24**. Mercy was to be shown (**Leviticus 25:39**). Jesus gave an impressive example (**Matthew 18:23-35**). Facing such a problem, in reality, left her destitute!

2. **THE PREACHER COUNSELED HER** (v. 2). Elisha's advice was good. He was a man of God, inspired, and personally interested in her problem because of his association with her husband. Nowhere could she have found a better source of advice. However, we today have a better source of help (**1 Peter 5:7**). We need to follow her example and take our problems to one who can direct us (**Philippians 4:6**). She realized her need of help and went to him. Only those who realize their needs can receive help (**Revelation 3:20; Psalms 81:10**). His advice is good for us. He worked on principles which are eternal. Truly, this is written for our learning (**Romans 15:4**).
3. **AND ELISHA SAID TO HER, . . .** (vv. 3-7). (This can be seen better by a paraphrase.) If you will help yourself, I will help you. This is the best way to help the poor or any who need help. The welfare system today shows the failure of doing for others that which they can do for themselves. It often contributes to their delinquency (**2 Thessalonians 3:10**). What he told her to do was not as easy as it seemed at first! Imagine the neighbors' criticisms and laughter as they speculated on what she would do with empty vessels!

Trust in the Lord. God often tests our faith. He gives commands that we may see ourselves, and prove our faith to ourselves (e.g., Naaman, the blind man, Jericho, etc.). When failure comes, it is our faith that fails, not His promises. Peter could walk on water until he saw the dangers around (**Matthew 14:28-31**). But God's promises never fail! (**2 Peter 3:9**). Use what you have (v. 2). The way to increase that which one possesses is to use it – never bury it. Consider the parable of the talents. If one uses what he has and goes as far as he can go, God takes over then. He has never promised to take over until then! At this point many fails. Too often one hears a Christian say, If I can see my way clear, I will. . . . If one can see his way clear, he is walking by sight, not by faith! One must plan to walk by faith beyond the point where he can see his way clear and then go until his resources are exhausted. At that point, God will take over. And not until then! This can be applied to one's work for the Lord.

Pay You Debt: (You should be honest and do the right thing regardless of what others do) He was without mercy. He was going to take a widow's two sons! (They did not even offer to leave her one son.) (**James 2:13**). He was going to sell the sons into bondage! It is difficult to give money to a character like that. Willingness to do so is an indication of honesty. He who is honest with a crook is honest! One must do right even though others do wrong (**Romans 12:21**). A spirit of vengeance is tempting at times like that. But to seek vengeance is to play God (**Romans 12:19, 20**). Elisha never entertained an idea of showing her how to beat that debt.

Plan Big – Avoid Mediocrity (v. 3) **BORROW NOT A FEW!** Some oppose anything which is big because of the dangers involved. But there are dangers in little things too. Christ's work

is big. He died for every man (**Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2; Matthew 26:28**). He wants everyone saved (**2 Peter 3:9**). The gospel is to be preached to every creature (**Mark 16:15, 16**). One is to love everybody (**Matthew 22:37-39**). When one considers the worldwide scope of the gospel, how can he think small? Expect big things from God. God's promises seem impossible! Forgiveness (**Acts 2:38**). One can become as though he had never sinned! Consider Providence (**Matthew 10:29-31; 6:33; Romans 8:28**), Eternal salvation (**John 14:1-6; 2 Corinthians 5:1**). God gives more than we expect (**Ephesians 3:19-21; Psalm 23**). God gives more than we are able to receive (**Malachi 3:10**). The size of the blessing is determined by the size of our vessels. **Proverbs 3:9, 10** says, *Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy vats shall overflow with new wine.* God will give all one is prepared to receive, and that depends solely on the individual. God never limits us; we limit ourselves. God would have filled every vessel that the sons and widow provided no matter the number. The oil was stayed when the vessels were full, and so it is with us.

CONCLUSION

We may have problems, but God can do something about them. Plan big. May the church mature into that which God wants it to be. Inasmuch as this is God's church, bought with Christ's blood, what does He want it to be? He will make it that if we will provide the empty vessels!ⁱ

ⁱ Credit for this sermon goes to W.T Hamilton (Truth for Today, 1982, 2004)