

AM 2 Kings 4:8-37 & 8:1-6 The Shunammite's Land Restored

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[0 : 00] Page numbers should be on your sheet here, page 370 if you're using one of the church bibles.! It's 2 Kings and the passages that we're reading are chapter 4, first of all, from verse 8 to 37.

So 2 Kings, chapter 4, starting at verse 8. It's quite a long section.

One day Elisha went to Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to eat some food. So whenever he passed that way, he would turn in there to eat food. And she said to her husband, Behold now, I know that this is a holy man of God who's continually passing her way.

Let us make a small room on the roof with walls and put there for him a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp, so that whenever he comes to us, he can go in there.

[1 : 03] One day he came there and he turned into the chamber and rested there. And he said to Gehazi, his servant, Call this Shunemite.

When he had called her, she stood before him. And he said to him, Say to her, say now to her, See, you've taken all this trouble for us. What's to be done for you?

Would you have a word spoken on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army? She answered, I dwell among my own people.

And he said, What then is to be done for her? Gehazi answered, Well, she has no son and her husband is old. He said, Call her.

And when he had called her, she stood in the doorway and he said, At this season, about this time next year, you shall embrace a son.

[2 : 01] And she said, No, my lord, O man of God, do not lie to your servant. But the woman conceived. And she bore a son about that time the following spring, as Elisha had said to her.

When the child had grown, he went out one day to his father among the reapers. And he said to his father, Oh, my head, my head. And the father said to his servant, Carry him to his mother.

And when he had lifted him and brought him to his mother, the child sat on her lap till noon. And then he died. And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God and shut the door behind him and went out.

And she called to her husband and said, Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys that I may quickly go to the man of God and come back again. And he said, Why will you go to him today?

It's neither new moon nor Sabbath. She said, All is well. And she saddled the donkey and said to her servant, Urge the animal on. Do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you.

[3 : 08] So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her coming, he said to Gehazi, his servant, Look, there is the Shunammite.

Run at once to meet her and say to her, Is all well with you? Is all well with your husband? Is all well with the child? And she answered, All is well. And when she came to the mountain, to the man of God, she caught hold of his feet.

And Gehazi came to push her away. But the man of God said, Leave her alone, for she is in bitter distress. And the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me.

Then she said, Did I ask the Lord for a son? Did I not say, Do not deceive me? He said to Gehazi, Tie up your garment and take my staff in your hand and go.

If you meet anyone, do not greet him. If anyone greets you, do not reply. And lay my staff on the face of the child. Then the mother of the child said, As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.

[4 : 18] So he arose and followed her. Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the face of the child. But there was no sound or sign of life.

Therefore he returned to meet him and told him, The child is not awakened. When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. So he went in, shut the door behind the two of them and prayed to the Lord.

Then he went up and lay on the child, putting his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands. And as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm.

Then he got up again and walked back and forth in the house and went and stretched himself upon him. The child sneezed seven times and the child opened his eyes.

Then he summoned Gehazi and said, Call the Shunammite. So he called her. And when she came to him, he said, Pick up your son.

[5 : 21] She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground. Then she picked up her son and went out. We're going to read another section from the same book in chapter 8.

Chapter 8, verses 1 to 6. So that's a few pages on, page 375. Chapter 8, 2 Kings, verses 1 to 6.

Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, Arise and depart with your household and sojourn wherever you can.

For the Lord has called for a famine and it will come upon the land for seven years. So the woman arose and did according to the word of the man of God.

She went with her household and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years. And at the end of the seven years, when the woman returned from the land of the Philistines, she went to appeal to the king for her house and her land.

[6 : 28] Now the king was talking with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me all the great things that Elisha has done. And while he was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, behold, the woman whose son he had restored to life appealed to the king for her house and her land.

And Gehazi said, My lord, oh king, here is the woman and here is her son whom Elisha restored to life. And when the king asked the woman, she told him.

So the king appointed an official for her, saying, Restore all that was hers, together with all the produce of the fields, from the day that she left the land until now.

Amen. This is God's holy word. Well, let's turn back again to 2 Kings chapter 8.

We're looking at this passage this morning, 2 Kings chapter 8. And this morning, we're in 2 Kings and we're thinking about some of the events of the life of the prophet Elisha.

[7 : 50] And this part of the Bible, for me, is something that's exciting. And it's also full of emotion.

It's great to read these accounts of what happened in the life of Elisha, but sometimes we're so familiar with these stories that we miss how emotional they are.

To try and explain what I mean, just a quick flick through some of the events of 2 Kings so far. In chapter 2, we read about Elisha being taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire.

And whenever I read that, I see there's an account. We haven't time to read it just now, but Elisha gathers up the cloak of Elisha.

And Elisha has been taken up in a chariot of fire and he is returning back to the company of the prophets and he strikes the river Jordan with this cloak.

[8 : 57] And I picture him with tears streaming down his face as he says, Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah? He's been left to carry on this great work.

And he's living on the edge, as it were. He's living by faith, but it seems that the true worship of God hangs by a thread.

And he's been given this great task to carry on. And I imagine him in floods of tears as he cries out in that way.

And we read together in chapter 4 about this poor Shunammite woman who did not have a son and then had a son.

And she comes and you see the strong, strong emotion in her voice as she comes and says, Did I ask you for a son?

[10 : 01] One of the translations says, Didn't I say don't raise my hopes? Very, very emotionally charged part of the Bible.

Here is a woman who is a faithful worshipper of God and yet she's struggling to hold on to that hope that has been promised to her.

And it seems to stand for this. This is the experience of God's people at this point in history. They're slightly struggling, aren't they, to hold on to hope. And one more thing just before we come to our own passage.

2 Kings 5. Who? What human being could ever read of this poor little girl? So young that even in those barbaric times, too young to be sold off as a wife.

And so she's put to work in this military family. And yet she remains faithful. And bears witness to the power of the God of Israel.

[11 : 13] And yet, when we read of it, surely we think, Why should such a tragedy befall a faithful Israelite family at that point? That this raid of Syrians should carry away this poor little girl.

And we know nothing of what happens, of course, to her parents. But we assume they're perhaps killed in the Syrian raid. And now we come to this Shunammite woman.

And in chapter 8 we see her for the second time. And when we met her before, she was wealthy. When we met her before, when she was asked, Do you need someone to speak to the king?

The commander? I'll put in it. And she says, I dwell among my own people. She's saying, I don't need anything just now. I'm okay.

And now we meet her seven years after her exile amongst the Philistines. And she seems to be destitute. She seems to be turning up with nobody to put in a good word for her with the king.

[12 : 30] And is having to chance asking for her land and her house to be restored to her. She's in trouble.

We assume as well, Gehazi tells us that her husband is so old, more than seven years ago, that it seemed unlikely that she would have children naturally.

And so we assume she's probably a widow. Well, let's consider then these verses before us.

Because these are the scriptures that are able to make us wise to salvation.

And even as we come to do this, we could be praying that the Lord would open our hearts to hear what he would say to us this morning from this part of his word.

And I hope that we will see safety in a time of judgment for this woman. We'll meet again this son who's been restored to life.

[13 : 33] And we'll consider the reward that this woman enjoys as a result of the Lord's intervention.

Safety in a time of judgment then. I know that last week you were thinking about John the Baptist. And John the Baptist famously said to some who came to listen to his preaching, Who warned you to flee the wrath to come?

This woman was warned by Elisha of a coming judgment. And she took action.

And she escaped the wrath of this judgment. A seven year famine. I've recently started reading again a book that will be familiar to many of you perhaps.

[14 : 34] The Pilgrim's Progress. It's a very, very interesting book to read. But at the beginning of the book, Pilgrim, or Christian as his name is, he meets a man called Evangelist who warns him that the city in which he lives, which is called Destruction, is to be destroyed.

And he flees to save himself. Who warned you to flee the wrath to come? Well, in this part of the Bible and in many places, we see patterns which point us to Christ.

Patterns in the Old Testament perhaps that point us to Christ or teach us something about him. Last week in my own church, the preacher was again talking about John the Baptist and how at Jesus' baptism, Jesus passes through the Jordan and then goes to spend 40 days in the desert being tempted.

And the parallel with the children of Israel passing through the Jordan and spending 40 years in the desert is striking when we look and when we're familiar with the Bible and all of its content.

You can't help but notice these patterns. And these patterns point us to Christ. And there's a pattern here in 2 Kings. Because this is not the first time that there's been a famine announced as a judgment.

[16 : 19] Elisha's predecessor, Elijah, he was a man just like us as we're told in James. And yet he prayed that it would not rain.

And famously, it did not rain for three and a half years. A terrible judgment. Well now here is Elisha. And Elisha announces a coming judgment. But it's seven years long. The judgment that Elisha announces is twice as severe.

As the judgment that Elijah had announced. There's a kind of an intensifying with everything as you move from Elijah to Elisha.

And this is a pattern which is to draw our attention so that it's much more obvious when we come to see John the Baptist and then Jesus. That there is a fulfillment of these patterns even in these events that are recorded for us.

[17 : 28] And so when John the Baptist comes and reminds us that the anointed one who is to come is one who will come with his winnowing fork in his hand and will burn up the chaff with an unquenchable fire.

A fire that can't be put out. A judgment that can't be escaped. All of these patterns are supposed to have shown us that we need to pay great, great attention to God's anointed one who is coming.

In my work I do a lot of driving. And it hasn't happened for a while but sometimes when you're driving along a road a car coming the other way might flash its lights at you.

A couple of times perhaps. And you might carry on. And another car also flashes its lights at you.

And then sure enough you come round a corner and there is a police speed trap with the speed gun pointing right at your car.

The people coming towards you were warning you that there is a trap ahead and if you don't obey the law you will be in trouble. It's maybe not I don't know if that's a good illustration or not obviously nobody should be breaking the law by driving too fast.

[18 : 56] But the point is they're warning you of a judgment. And it's the same. All of these judgments in the Old Testament are like people coming the other way flashing their lights at you saying there is a judgment to come which cannot be avoided.

Because as Psalm 2 says God's anointed son will come to bring judgment to judge the world in righteousness he is the anointed one who comes and blessed are all who take refuge in him.

So there's safety in a time of judgment for this woman because she heeds the warning that the prophet gives her. But there's something else that points us to Jesus here because there's a son who is restored to life.

We're reading here about Elisha and we see all of these events and there are these parallels and patterns and another thing that's very very striking when you read the whole of kings together you'll see that there are only three places two or three maybe in the whole of the Old Testament where anyone has ever returned to life resurrected Elijah brings back to life the widow of Zarephath's son and in an amazingly similar way Elisha brings back to life this Shunammite woman's son they both die and they are both raised to life and it's a pattern it's showing us something it's drawing our attention to something and so we pay attention now to what happens to this son because we meet him again don't we in the verses that we read here in chapter 8 and this is something astonishing to me this woman has escaped this famine and now she's come back to try to recover what she's lost she's lost her property and we don't know what happened possibly the king himself had taken over that farm and that house and said well that'll be mine now possibly some squatters had moved in possibly she had made an arrangement and rented the land to somebody for seven years and they were now not willing to give it back we just don't know but the point is she had lost her property and as we read there's this amazing instance of providence that just at that moment when Gehazi has been speaking about these events that the woman appears and the king now has two eyewitnesses to this resurrection

Gehazi has been saying I saw it with my own eyes and now here is this woman who says yes she tells the king about it doesn't she she says the king asked the woman and she told him so he's received these two eyewitness testimonies to this resurrection but more than that in verse 5 we see this detail while he's telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life and so on and Gehazi says my lord oh king here is the woman and here is her son two eyewitness testimonies and you can see the son for yourself it's something surely that should remind us of the significance of the eyewitness testimony that we have for ourselves about God's son the son the son of God who came to take away the sin of the world but as a slight aside let's think also about the there's a there's just a more minor detail there for us about God's providence it was not an accident that the woman turned up just at the moment

[23 : 44] Gehazi had been talking about these events but how often in our own lives when we are praying for things a prayer is answered and aren't we so prone maybe I hope it's not just me who's sometimes sort of tempted to think well I think maybe that was going to happen anyway it's a stupid way to think isn't it God's providence we ignore it we disregard it and we minimize it when God's

answers are prayers and it takes it takes shocking and just incontrovertible things before we're willing to say well that must have been God's providence let's commit ourselves to give thanks for every answered prayer to recognize God's perfection of timing in every aspect of our lives because just like this woman whose life seemed very difficult actually it was part of God's plan for her and here we are talking about it today and so in a way even when things are difficult they may still be indeed they are things that will bring glory to God and to honour to his son so the king's presented with this request and whether or not he was initially going to grant the request we'll never know but now he's confronted isn't he with this evidence the son who was dead and is alive again so surely surely this is the main point this morning please believe me there will come a time in all of our lives where we will appear before a king looking for a judgment expecting a judgment in fact getting a judgment that no person can ever escape from and there will be no hope for us in a sense if I press the metaphor if we're standing on our own we need to be standing beside a son who was raised to life we need to be in a position where the king has taken an interest in that son and in the relationship between that son who was raised to life and you because just as the king rules decisively in this woman's favour and as we'll see in a moment gives much more than she could have expected humanly speaking so the

Lord the God the judge of all the earth will rule decisively in your favour if you are standing close as it were to his son who was raised to life because he is the son who lives forevermore he loves loved me and gave himself for me well time's getting away a little bit but we've seen that this woman escaped judgment because she heeded the warning from the word of God and we've seen that she received a judgment in her favour her because she was beside the son who was raised to life again but we'll also see that there is what you might call as our third point restoration plus God's providence is so rich she's given many many good things by the king notice notice that she's given a royal official to make absolutely sure that the judgment that has been given is carried out she has real certainty now the king has issued his judgment and he's given her an official to say make sure this happens restore all that was hers!

together with all the produce of the fields from the day she left the land until now so she gets access to her property which is what she wanted but she also gets all the produce of the last seven years now if someone had moved in illegally and was squatting on her farm the tables have been turned all together on these people they've now become her slaves working for free for her and this judgment comes from a king who has authority to grant it and power to ensure that it is carried out and so whoever these people might be they can't resist the authority of the king and that royal official who comes in the king's name some of the commentators think it might have been the king himself who took that away in which case this is an irrelevant discussion it's already granted the king has said it's yours and so it's yours and you might think well is that unfair on whoever was working the land while she was away for seven years escaping the harsh famine

I would remind you of what Jesus says about the parable of the workers in the vineyard but if we ask questions of fairness fairness might have just been to give this woman back her land and that would be that as I say she gets more because of this special son because the king was interested in this case because of the son well what have we lost our original father was Adam and we have lost communion with God we've been excluded from God's nearer presence and there's a sense in which we live in a kind of spiritual exile now in a kind of spiritual desert we know that the ground is cursed because of sin we inherit a sinful nature we live in rebellion against God we live in an environment where even the beauty of his creation is marred and spoiled in many ways and most of us don't need anyone to tell us that we can see it can't we for our own eyes and at times we ourselves behave in ways that are almost self-destructive we do such stupid things and that's not to begin mentioning the obvious sins of others around us that cause us harm or distress this

[31 : 25] Shunammite woman had been well to do and she's just asking for her land back but we've been rebels and sinners against God and you might think that all we could ask for is for God to forgive our sins but God gives us so much more in what's called sometimes the economy of grace what we receive from God through Christ is much more than that because the king the king of kings in our case is interested and all of the years of our rebellion are completely forgotten in the judgment that he issues in our favour as we close let's consider some of these benefits that we enjoy from the ruling of the king of kings well first and foremost of course our sins are forgiven

God's anger is turned aside our sins are atoned for on the cross Jesus takes the punishment that would have been ours but he does much more than that he doesn't just cancel our debts in the

same way as the Shunammite women didn't just get an empty field and wasn't just told to start again Jesus cancels our debts but gives us the perfect righteousness of his flawless sinless beautiful life a perfect gift of infinite value and gives us that in place of our own sinful and worthless lives he willingly gives away all of his hard work in that sense and there are so many other benefits we haven't really even time we're given the benefit of adoption we're made not just people who come asking for a judgment we're given the benefit of becoming children of God a new permanent security a status a citizenship of heaven which can't be revoked we are now sons and daughters of the king of kings and because God's image is renewed in us in that sense enables us then to die to sin and live to Christ and as we'll see tonight that means that we can know real peace in our hearts we can know true joy and gladness in the Holy Spirit we have the power to continue in these graces all the way to the end of our lives and hope that is sure and certain to look forward to heaven where we will enjoy all of these great blessings restored to us in a perfect way forever and ever and it's that hope that I want us to sing about as we bring our service to a close in Psalm 36 thanks
Thank you.