

The Powerful Kindness of God

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[0 : 0 0] very well led by the musicians, so thank you for that. I was thinking whether I'd share this with you, and I think I will.

The first of the three songs we sang, I find a very difficult song. It's really good. I mean, the words are wonderful. But I won't go into details, but I was in a particularly difficult stage in my life with someone I loved very deeply, very sick.

And I went to church, and that song was sung. And the words were very helpful to me, but the tune, I think, doesn't work.

It's sort of too happy. You know, the words are taken from the book of Job, of course, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away.

That's the truth. And it's a wonderful truth and an important truth. But it's not a light-hearted truth. You know, we are thankful for what the Lord gives us, and what the Lord gives us, he can take away.

[1 : 1 5] And that can be very painful. Very, very painful. So, I don't know why I'm sharing this with you, but it's worth, and particularly musos, you did a great job this morning, but sometimes, you know, the songwriters have given us wonderful words, but the music doesn't quite match.

I find that tune just a little bit too boppy, to be singing about the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. That's so sombre. I'm not being critical of anyone, you understand.

I'm just sharing with you my own emotions. And I was standing there not singing. I was hoping no one would notice me not singing, but I was quite moved by just remembering the time when my loved one actually recovered, and the Lord did not take that loved one on that particular occasion.

But I was so caught up with not being able to cope with a song that, with its music, seemed to trivialise something so profound as the Lord gives and the Lord takes away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Again, I'm sorry. That's probably an utter irrelevance, so I apologise for that. So why I feel free to do that is that over this weekend, we've sort of shortened what we've been doing.

[2 : 3 0] I'm getting tired, you see, and I think you're getting tired as well. So we started looking at the books of 1 and 2 Kings, right? The first talk on Friday night, some of you weren't with us, but those of you who were, we looked at the whole of the book of 2 Kings and tried to get oriented to that.

And then yesterday morning, we looked at a long section of 2 Kings, chapter 2, which was quite a long narrative. And then yesterday in the second talk, we narrowed down and looked at two incidents, rather dramatic incidents.

Well, now we're just going to look at one incident, all right? I thought I had time to talk about my own personal experience in the beginning. I probably will turn out to regret that. But before we turn to 2 Kings, chapter 4, and the incident we want to look at there in the life of Elisha, I want to think again with you for a moment about the accounts of the life of Jesus in the New Testament.

Because if you were with us yesterday, you'll know that we're noticing connections and similarities between the life of Elisha and the life of Jesus. And those connections sometimes are quite remarkable and illuminating.

But one of the striking things, we noticed yesterday we were thinking about the miracles, the accounts of the miracles of Jesus and what we were to make of them. But there's another feature.

[3 : 51] I often feel I'd love to come to the Gospels as though I'd never seen them before. I wonder how I'd react. And it's hard to work it out, isn't it? Because most of us are so familiar with the Gospels.

And even if we're not familiar with the accounts of Jesus, most of us probably have a reasonable familiarity with the stories and the general kind of material. I'd love to come to it for the first time.

And sometimes you meet somebody who's never really heard about Jesus and they read a Gospel. And a whole lot of things strike them. And one of the remarkable things that I think, even if you don't notice it, probably strikes you, is the amount of space given in the account of the life of Jesus Christ.

The amount of space given to Jesus dealing with really, really ordinary people. Right? Here is the greatest man who has ever lived.

Undeniable, undebatable, that particular proposition. The greatest man who has ever lived. If you think it's debatable, please come up with an alternative.

[5 : 02] Who's greater? The greatest man who has ever lived. And as the story of his life is told, one of the things that is absolutely, perfectly crystal clear is that this man cared about the poor and the outcast and the troubled individuals who crossed his path and he encountered.

And I think this is curious. If you go back, you know, to the ancient world and really great figures that we know about, the biographies of great figures do not usually give a great deal of attention to encounters with insignificant people.

If you had an account, and of course there are plenty of them, sorry, there are a number of them, accounts of the life of Julius Caesar, someone like that, you won't find a lot of space given to how he dealt with powerless, unimportant individuals.

Now I say ordinary and insignificant, I use those sort of words, but it's perfectly clear from the records that that's not how Jesus regarded people. That's not how he saw people.

Again and again and again, when such a person crossed his path, he gave them his attention. He listened to them and he helped them.

[6 : 26] To him, they were very, very far from being insignificant. Mind you, you could misunderstand this. It's not as though Jesus was a kind of social activist who cared only for the less privileged in society.

You read the accounts and you see he didn't avoid the wealthy and the influential and the powerful. You think about his dealings with Nicodemus, who was a ruler of the Jews, or the young man who had great possessions, or Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue.

I'm simply drawing attention to the way in which the troubles of those without status and without wealth and without position were never dismissed as beneath Jesus or unworthy of his attention.

Indeed, this aspect of Jesus' treatment of people gained him a reputation among the so-called respectable people. He was called one who eats with and is a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

And that was not meant as a compliment. You might think of the way in which famously Jesus treated children. When those around him, his disciples, thought, we don't want Jesus bothered by the little ones.

[7 : 54] It wasn't Jesus' attitude, was it? Let the children come to me. In this humble kindness of Jesus, you see, you often think of things about Jesus that, you know, God among us.

That's what he was. And therefore, as you look at Jesus, you're learning about what God is like. I don't think we often think that this aspect of Jesus and his behaviour and his treatment of people was a display of what God his Father is like.

Many of Jesus' encounters with powerless, troubled individuals were occasions for a mighty work by Jesus, the kind of thing we were thinking about yesterday. He gave sight to blind people.

He gave strength to lame people. He gave hearing to deaf people. He even gave life to dead people. In Jesus, you see, the power of God was something that was not just a display that you say, wow, we've done that a couple of times.

It was not just a display that caused you to be overwhelmed with wonder and surprise and spectacle. No, the power of God in Jesus amplified God's kindness and his love towards ordinary people.

[9 : 31] Someone put it like this, God magnifies his goodness with his power. The power of God is not just raw power. It's power that magnifies his goodness and his kindness.

Now, I say all that because, once again, this aspect of the New Testament Gospels has a significant antecedent. where we look at the Old Testament stories of Elijah and even more so, the one who came after him, Elisha, include a surprising number of stories of the prophets' encounters with ordinary people.

Now, you don't find this so much with anyone else in the Old Testament. You might find it occasionally, but not to the same degree, not to the same extent as you find with Elijah and Elisha.

These prophets were major players in the political life of Israel. We're not looking today at 2 Kings chapter 3, but if you read 2 Kings chapter 3, that's exactly what you'll see.

You'll see Elisha involved in the nation's conflicts with the nation's roundabout, involved, in other words, with things as significant as wars. Elijah and Elisha were figures who would go and confront kings with their wicked ways.

[10 : 59] They would proclaim the word of the Lord to the nation's leaders at times of crisis. However, the record of their lives, Elijah and especially Elisha, also are marked by stories of their dealings with suffering, ordinary individuals.

And 2 Kings chapter 4 through to chapter 8, or the beginning of chapter 8 at least, we find a series of stories about Elisha's dealings with powerless people facing various troubles.

It's quite striking. If you were reading the story, we haven't had time to do this to work right through it, but if you're reading the story of 2 Kings and you were read through chapter 3 and it's sort of big political sort of games going on and Elisha involved at that level, and then the sudden movement from his very public role there in that major military campaign to now a whole series of stories of individuals and their needs, the shift is quite striking.

For in these stories, we once again see the power of God displayed for the sake of needy individuals. God's goodness magnified by his power.

God's power employed to display his goodness. Now, we are going to content ourselves this morning because you're tired and I'm tired with just listening to the first of these stories, but I do encourage you to read on and I know you've done that already, but after this weekend you might like to read through again and enjoy each of these remarkable narratives of Elisha's encounter with ordinary people.

[12 : 45] The first one read to us a moment ago is this encounter with a poor troubled widow who brought her a need to the attention of Elisha and the story we're just going to follow it carefully and see how it unfolds in three simple scenes but I think we will see it reveals more than first meets the eye.

So come with me to witness this first little incident. Scene one begins like this. We're at 2 Kings chapter four verse one. Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets.

That's who we meet. The wife of one of the sons of the prophets. We don't know precisely where this took place but if you were with us yesterday we've heard of these group the sons of the prophets who were followers of Elijah and then Elisha.

I like to think of them and describe them as disciples of Elijah and Elisha. We met a group of them in Bethel and we met another group of them in Jericho but there were probably others in various locations throughout the land of Israel so we don't know exactly where this happened but here we learn that the sons of the prophets had wives and families.

They were not sort of monastic people. They were apparently not cut off from the ordinary social and economic life of the community. the woman's connection to the sons of the prophets is important because she too we might say was a follower of Elijah and Elisha.

[14 : 20] In our comparison with the gospels this story is like the stories of Jesus' dealings with those who followed him. However the wording and literally it says this listen to this how it goes literally and a certain woman from the wives of the sons of the prophets and the wording sort of suggests she's not a particularly important person she's sort of obscure nobody's really heard of her she's not even named and her name doesn't seem to be even been remembered from this story and to all to all appearances she's a very unimportant person.

Well the woman came to the prophet with a pressing problem. she, verse 1 again she cried to Elisha your servant my husband is dead and you know that your servant feared the Lord that's my her husband feared the Lord but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.

Let's try and understand the situation this poor woman was in. This was a cry for help and directing her cry to the prophet was an act of faith we might say in effect her cry was a prayer and as we listen to the woman's cry we learn that she was a widow evidently recently bereaved she was in a state of grief my husband is dead she says and twice we hear her refer to her husband as Elisha's servant.

prophet this is part of the evidence that leads me to conclude that the sons of the prophet were that little phrase the sons of the prophets they were people committed to Elisha and previously to Elijah and furthermore as though to underline her point her husband she says feared the Lord that you'll be aware if you're a Bible reader is not an uncommon phrase in the Old Testament particularly in the Old Testament and it's a very important phrase feared the Lord it doesn't mean you're a person who's going around frightened of God that's not what it means and it means it talks about the attitude of your heart you you bow to the greatness and the goodness of God you accept you take him seriously and you're heart and mind is is so shaped by your taking God seriously that you live trusting him and you live obeying him this man this woman's husband feared the Lord and we learn here that Elisha knew him

Elisha knew this man and knew his faithfulness and again we're given the impression of a close relationship between Elisha and the sons of the prophets he knew his disciples individually and personally the grieving widow's distress was intensified so she's grieving but on top of that there is a threat now of her losing her children because of a debt that had been incurred presumably by her husband we don't know the circumstances behind this however the creditor was now pressing what he saw as his legal rights and demanding that the woman's two children now become his slaves because of what she owed him what a terrible situation that is isn't it just imagine being in that situation if you don't pay off your Master card they come and get your kids well debt's a pretty serious thing and it's interesting the Old

[18 : 23] Testament law I've been given a glimpse of the questions that are coming up in Q&A; later on I thought they were going to be sifted so they'd only be easy ones didn't work no wonder Dave's gone off sticky I could have a go at him for not actually sifting them and only having easy ones coming through but there is a question there I can't remember the details and we'll look at it later on but about Old Testament law and Old Testament law needs to be read with care Old Testament law is not law for today today we're not living in Israel we're not living in the ancient world that Israel inhabited that's one of the things to say about reading the ancient law but the Old Testament law is God given for Israel in Old Testament times no getting away from that it's God given law it's God's law therefore it's worth reading without saying we are under this law that we're supposed to keep this law in all its details but certainly it's worth reading because it's God given it's worth reading in its context and so on and so it's interesting to do a little bit of a study and I did and I've summarised the results on your notes there you can look up the references we're not going to do that now but let me just summarise what I learnt by having a little bit of a look at debt and Old

Testament law about debt it's taken seriously that's the first thing I notice in Old Testament law and it is a serious matter and it is something that can lead to serious social problems in any society and I do find myself occasionally encouraging young people who are living in a society where a whole lot of people are really anxious to get you into debt they give you very very easy credit you can get into a lot of trouble and it's not a bad idea to see again I'm not being legalistic about this but to see how much you can take your path through life without getting into debt if you can't afford it don't buy it don't get into debt now there are circumstances in which our society has been structured in such a way as debt is necessary buying homes and things like that I understand that I'm not saying this is an absolute law but in your lifestyle live within your means don't run up your credit card account don't get into trouble and a lot of people do get into serious trouble in that area and then have to go and get help from other people and they're a burden on other people which they wouldn't necessarily have been if they'd lived within their means so the first thing I notice and if you look up all those references you see that is that debt is a serious matter and can cause serious social problems serious problems for individuals and in Israel we have God's law with a number of provisions around debt and lending and you get the impression or I get the impression that the

Old Testament law God's law about lending in Old Testament Israel is generally designed to protect the poor and the vulnerable from exploitation which is the very thing that happens in our society.

The easiest credit to get in our society I suspect I don't think there can be anything easier than a credit card and because it's easy and lots of people will get caught up in it those who issue the credit cards charge an unbelievable rate of interest that you are sort of many people are sort of unaware of as they start using these things and there's a terrific trap there.

I'm not really meaning to go on about credit cards so stop me doing that. But it's worth noting briefly what God's law in the Old Testament had to say about debt because debt lies behind this story that's before us and four points and you can follow up the references on the notes as I say.

[22 : 29] The first point is that while lending to a poor person was permitted and actually even encouraged in the Old Testament law charging interest on the loan in such circumstances was forbidden.

You can look up those references. The word that we have in our little narrative creditor anybody got an NIV what word do they have there instead of creditor?

They have creditor? The word is elsewhere in Old Testament law money lender. It's the same Hebrew word and when that word is used it almost always refers to an unscrupulous profit oriented form of lending.

The kind of lending that you get when you use your credit card. Directed specifically at one's needy fellow citizens. So this creditor in this story was really on the wrong side of God's law to start with.

Because you're not meant to be lending to poor people and then charging interest. Lend to poor people by all means to help them but you don't exploit them.

[23 : 44] The second aspect that you learn in God's law is that when a loan is made on the basis of some item given as security the needs of the borrower must still be respected.

And I've got a number of references there you can see how that is unpacked. It's not as though you then just ignore the needs of the person who is in debt to you. You take those into account.

Thirdly according to Deuteronomy 15 verse 2 at the end of every seven years a creditor was required to release his creditors from their debt. Goodness me the banks wouldn't do too well with that would they?

Our society is built on a completely different basis but this is part of the way in which Israel was meant to function. Every seven years those in debt would be released from their debt.

And there were even laws to say now you'd be very careful that you don't if you're lending you don't take note of that and refuse to lend to someone because the seventh year is about to come up.

[24 : 48] You know there's laws around that as well. And fourth in the extreme case where a person pledges himself or family members as security for a loan they may not be made slaves but may serve as hired servants until the year of Jubilee.

And again you can see the references there. Now that's interesting isn't it? There's an ancient society you don't say we should be obeying there have been groups of Christians over the years have said this we really ought to be a society in which we keep all of God's Old Testament laws.

No they weren't given for that purpose. They weren't given for today's world they were given for Israel in the ancient world and it's very interesting scholars have done this I haven't done it but I just read some of the things that they've written comparing ancient law codes with other law codes.

Sorry comparing the Old Testament law code the God given law code with other law codes around in the world at the time and it's astonishing even from our perspective you can see how good they are and even this just looking at a debt you can say that's that's not a bad system is it particularly in the ancient world where a lot of things that have developed now in the modern world hadn't developed and some of the things in the modern world could learn a thing or two from God's Old Testament law not to adopt the law directly like that but to learn in principle how do you deal with debt how do you deal with people in need how do you and to learn like that now the provisions of God's law in Israel as Israel actually lived in history so you've got God's law given in the days of Moses and then you've got the history of Israel that followed well pretty often and indeed most of the time God's law was not kept and again and again it was broken and abused in Israel leading to a great deal of hardship for needy people you only have to read the books of the prophets the most famous of them but most of them will touch on this is Amos who has words to say about a society which has disregarded about

Israel when they had disregarded God's law and caused a great deal of suffering now we're in a situation here in this story where this widow had a creditor who had lent money presumably to her husband and the creditor was exploiting the situation to his own advantage he may have seen himself as within his legal rights by you know that kind of selective reading of the law kind of thing we often do with our Bibles we read the bits that we really like and that suit us but if something is a little bit challenging we skip over that bit well he may have been that kind of person in terms of reading God's law but he he was taking no account of the changed circumstances of this family no account of the fact that the husband and father had died he appears to be a person who was showing no mercy towards the widow and her children he came the language of verse 1 is quite telling he came to take he came to take well Elisha responded with two questions the first one verse 2 what shall I do for you wouldn't that have been nice to hear for the widow to hear see he signals first to the poor troubled widow he he signals his willingness to help what can I do for you then he asks another question which is a little bit more puzzling tell me what have you in your house what do you got what's in the house the answer was not much see Elisha drew was drawing the woman into what he was about to do for her

[29 : 06] I think this is a right thing to do some of you might want to challenge me on this but as I read these Elisha stories I keep hearing echoes of the gospel stories and sort of say how like do you remember when Jesus was confronted by the needs of the great crowd and feeding the crowd he said to the disciples how many loaves have you got what have you got it's sort of drawing them in to what he's about to do and so Elisha seems to be doing something similar and the widow's reply indicated her utter inability to satisfy this creditor see what she says in verse 2 your servant has nothing in the house there's nothing there we haven't got a thing except this jar of oil and the emphasis in that sentence is on the word nothing her jar of oil almost certainly was a little flask I don't know how big but a little flask of ointment that would be used for anointing the body that was probably all it was all she had all she had was a little bit of oil and again it sort of reminds me of the response of the disciples to Jesus what do you got five loaves and two fish that's all we got that's all they had that's all she had well Elisha responded with clear but very strange instructions verse 3 then he said go outside borrow vessels from all your neighbours empty vessels and not too few love that phrase and then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your son and behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels and when one is full set it aside so first she's got to go out and ask her neighbours for all the empty containers that could be found not too few suggests an unusual effort was to be made collecting as many vessels as possible you can't imagine the neighbours saying what on earth is she doing what does she want with all these dishes and bowls and pots and jugs and basins and flasks and saucepans and whatever and second well she's got to collect all those as many as she can get from her neighbours and then she's to go inside with her sons and all the empty vessels that she's managed to gather and shut the door

Elisha's not going to be directly involved in what's going to happen what was about to happen would take some time and it was not to be a kind of spectacle that would attract crowds and onlookers it would happen behind closed doors quietly and then third what she was to do behind closed doors was to pour into these vessels the language is concise but one by one presumably the pouring is from the little flask of oil that's all she had that has been mentioned and Elisha's instructions implied that the oil would fill vessel after vessel I've got to admit that if I try and imagine myself in that situation being that poor widow I think my reaction would be you've got to be kidding yeah yeah well the astonishing story now unfolds quite quickly scene 2 begins with the widow's obedience she doesn't say you've got to be kidding verse 5 says so she went from him she went to do precisely what the prophet had told her to do her efforts going around from all the houses round about collecting as many empty vessels as possible that's passed over without a word that's not actually described it's obvious she did it but it's not described it must have taken some time and would have been very perplexing to anyone who was watching this funny little old lady going from house to house collecting all the containers that she could we're taken straight to the moment that the woman went inside verse 5 says and she shut the door so all that's happened that's just presumed to have happened shut the door behind herself and her sons all the containers are there piled up high sort of imagining them in one of her rooms and her sons are with her to help and they begin perhaps they're in the room next door and as she poured they brought the vessels to her there's an emphasis here on the activity of the boys and their mother the continuous activity in this room they were bringing vessel after vessel after vessel after vessel and she was pouring and pouring and pouring and pouring it went on for some time until at last the woman was surrounded trying to imagine it with containers of various shapes and sizes each one full of oil and then she said to one of her sons bring me another vessel and he replied there's none left and at that moment the oil stopped flowing she said oh it's not flowing anymore there's none left now just look at all that oil it was almost certainly in the context of the time this would have been olive oil normally produced by crushing olives with a mortar or in a rock press sometimes it was produced by treading them like grapes in a wine press oil was used with a number of uses it included cooking anointing the skin just treating your dry skin to make it nice and smooth particularly the head and the face were often rubbed with this kind of oil it was used as a fuel in lamps and it was sometimes used for soothing wounds if you had a scratch or a cut the oil would soothe the pain and I suppose stop the exposure to the air

I suppose that was happening so oil was a useful commodity but generally speaking in relatively small amounts that's why I presume the woman just had this little jar in the house nobody had a large amount of it and this abundant supply of oil filling many vessels in the widow's house obviously produced obviously produced by as the woman and her sons could see nobody else knew at this stage but a remarkable act of God but is it not an extraordinary testimony to God's abundant kindness here's God's goodness on display this is what God's power does it it magnifies his goodness it's not just power it's power of one who is infinitely good and here you see it it's small it's insignificant hardly worth writing in the history book we don't even know the woman's name no this was a display of the goodness of God magnified by his power and it really is worth remembering and so it's recorded but of course the question does arise what is she going to do with all this oil and I think she might have been wondering the same thing in scene three we follow her out of the house again as she returned to

Elisha verse seven she came out and she told the man of God that is she reported everything that had happened to Elisha but just notice by the way and I hope you don't mind us reading as slowly as we're reading I love the details the details are brilliant I think this is the first time that Elisha is called man of God the man of God it won't be the last indeed in the Old Testament Elisha is called man of God more than anyone else but man of God is a very weighty expression it doesn't just mean oh he was a godly man he was a man of God we use that phrase a little bit sometimes don't we when we describe someone a man of God I don't think we use it very much these days but I think the general sense of it a godly person a person of true faith in God now it's more than that man of God in the way in which it's used in the Old Testament means a man from

God right a man who speaks and acts for God a man of God is a very weighty expression well she came to the man of God she doesn't just come to Elisha she came to the man of God and Elisha brings this episode to a close by spelling out the consequences of what had happened he said verse 7 again go sell the oil oh that's a good idea and pay your debts and you and your sons can live on the rest so for the reasons that I outlined a moment ago oil was a tradable commodity and its usefulness in small quantities suggests that the vast quantity that the woman now had access to would have had considerable value people were happy to have oil in small quantities and pay for it well what she had would have had very significant value you see the

[39 : 24] Lord had provided and his provision enabled the woman now to be free both from debt and poverty the Lord's provision was not small not a few containers not trivial people the Lord's provision well I think it's a wonderful little story and there are many like it in the pages that follow but let's think as we close about what this story teaches us and the first thing I think we should notice is that like the accounts of Jesus dealing with vulnerable suffering people the response of Elisha the response of the man of God whose name means my God saves Elisha's response to the widow is a wonderful demonstration of the extravagant kindness of God friends I want us just to reflect on the fact you read this story please understand this is what

God is like do you ever feel like a nobody let you in on a secret most people do and it's not a bad thing to feel you know if you strut around through life thinking you're a somebody tell you one thing you probably won't have many friends people don't like people very much who think that they're somebody it's not a bad thing in itself to think of yourself as a nobody and it's particularly good to think of yourself as a nobody when you know what God is like he cares about nobodies that's what God is like see whatever you think of yourself here this morning however you think of yourself you know most of us have some sort of striving to be significant to do something significant a whole lot of our world today is messed up because people are competing to be significant to do significant things to gain some kind of status and to find you know it doesn't work there's lots of good things for us to do in the world

I'm not against people doing significant things or anything like that but that's not how you find your significance you're like me you're a nobody you really are a nobody in the scheme of things I mean you're one person you know how many millions there are in the world and you're just one I'm just one you find your significance by discovering the wonderful truth of what God is like and God is the God who is kind to nobodies that's a wonderful story isn't it I mean if you stop there it would be worth reading the story wouldn't it just saying you know there are senses in which I'm just like that widow I really am I haven't got much I got more than she has but I could lose it tomorrow yeah what God is like in our weaknesses and in our inadequacies and in our hardships and when we find actually I'm finding it really hard to cope

I think it's not a bad idea to say I'm like that widow and I want to be reminded as I read the story of that widow of the powerful kindness of God the New Testament puts it like this he cares for you do you hear that that's what God is like I don't know whether this is getting through to you but I find it deeply moving to learn that that is what God is like he cares for you and he invites us to be like that widow and to cast all our anxieties on him because he cares for you let's take it a little bit further because the widow's experience is a wonderful picture of what can be our experience and I'm just going to take the words of

Philippians chapter 4 verses 6 and 7 just listen to this do not be and as you listen to this see how they sort of fit what the widow did and see how they then directly are a call to us the words are these Philippians 4 verses 6 and 7 do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God to what the widow did didn't she by coming to Elisha let your requests be made known to God whatever's on your heart whatever your anxieties about life are whatever your yeah whatever you're going through let your requests be made known to God and here's the promise and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ

[45 : 34] Jesus what God is like he cares for you well then notice that the story of the widow also presents us with a model of discipleship so it shows us what God is like it also shows us what a disciple is like she saw herself like her husband as a servant of the man of God no doubt she like her husband feared the Lord she brought her need to the man of God and she listened to his word she trusted him and she obeyed him and she received more than she asked for now if you're a Christian believer this morning as I know many of us here are and if you're not yet a Christian believer this morning listen to this because this is what a Christian believer is and if

I could talk with you and I'd be very happy to do so I'd want to know why on earth aren't you why wouldn't you be why wouldn't you trust this God what are you mucking around for what are you waiting for what do you want him to do watch this woman closely and I want to say we follow her example and just as she found the Lord's provision surpassed anything she could possibly have hoped for so you will find as you come to the Lord Jesus the one who is greater than Elisha come to the Lord Jesus listen to his word trust him and obey him and you will find as the

New Testament puts it that he is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work within us we're moving from an Old Testament story to the experience of Christian believers it's a big jump but it's an appropriate movement but it is a movement we are living on this side of the death and the resurrection of Jesus we live in the light of the death and the resurrection of Jesus and we must understand that the fulfilment surpasses the shadow and our Old Testament stories are shadows of the fulfilment in which we now live the widow's request for help in her desperate plight and the Lord's overflowing provision for her is but a shadow of the request that the Apostle Paul had in mind when he thought of far more abundantly

I want to close by asking you to listen carefully to Paul's prayer to the God who provided so abundantly for that widow he prayed like this for people like us that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith and that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints all the Christians what is the breadth and the length and the height and the depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with the fullness of God I'm blown away by this story what a

God we share with the widow of our story with blessings bigger better and longer lasting than her gallons and gallons of oil will you pray with me our heavenly father we thank you for this poor lady so long ago in her grief and in her fear and in her anxiety for her kids in a situation where she was being exploited and bullied thank you so much for the way in which you responded to that need as she brought it to the man of God what a picture that is and help us to see ourselves and how much we are like her in our need in our inability really to cope our inability to control our circumstances our insignificance our nobodiness we pray heavenly father that every each one of us this morning be able to turn to the man of

[51 : 23] God the Lord Jesus and bring our anxieties to him and experience the wonder of your promises to us fulfilled and I want to pray now for any one of us and there may be just one who has not yet turned to Jesus in that way ever I want to pray that that person or those persons might do that today what could they possibly be waiting for we pray this in Jesus name Amen He were doing

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