

# Cling to the Man of God for Life

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     The first reading is from 2 Kings, chapter 4, verse 1 to 17. Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, Your servant, my husband, is dead.

And you know that your servant feared the Lord, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves. And Elisha said to her, What shall I do for you? Tell me, what have you in the house?

And she said, Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil. Then he said, Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not too few.

Then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels. And when one is full, set it aside. So she went from him and shut the door behind herself and her sons.

And as she poured, they brought the vessels to her. When the vessels were full, she said to her son, Bring me another vessel. And he said to her, There is not another.

[ 1 : 0 6 ]     Then the oil stopped flowing. She came and told the man of God, and he said, Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest. One day, Elisha went to the Shunam, 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 is continually passing our way.

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

And he said to Gehazi, his servant, Call this Shunamite. When he had called her, she stood before him. And he said to him, Say now to her, See, you have taken all this trouble for us.

What is 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.

[ 2 : 1 8 ]     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. 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 Elijah had said to her. Reading continues from 2 Kings 4, verse 18.

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.

The father said to his servant, Carry him to his mother. And when he'd lifted him and brought him to his mother, the child sat on her lap till noon, and then he died.

[ 3 : 25 ] And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door behind him, and went out. Then 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. Then she saddled the donkey, and she said to her servant, Urge the animal on, do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you.

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's 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.

[ 4 : 50 ] Then she said, Did I ask my Lord for a son? Did I not say, Do not deceive me? He said to Gehazi, Tie up your garment and go take my staff in your hand and go.

If you meet anyone, do not greet him. And 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.

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 has not awakened. When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed.

So he went in and 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 hand on his hands.

[ 6 : 05 ] And as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm. Then he got up again and walked once back and forth in the house and went up and stretched himself upon him.

The child sneezed seven times and the child opened his eyes. Then he summoned Gehazi and said, Call this Shunammite.

So he called her. And when she came to him, he said, Pick up your son. She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground.

Then she picked up her son and went out. And Elisha came again to Gilgal, where there was a famine in the land. And as the sons of the prophets were sitting before him, he said to his servant, Set on the large pot and boil stew for the sons of the prophets.

One of them went out into the field to gather herbs and found a wild vine and gathered from it his lap full of wild gourds and came and cut them up into the pot of stew, not knowing what they were.

[ 7 : 20 ] And they poured some out for the men to eat. But while they were eating of the stew, they cried out, Oh man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat it.

He said, Then bring flour. And he threw it into the pot and said, Pour some out for the men that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot.

A man came from Bel-Shalisha, bringing the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of grain in his sack.

And Elisha said, Give to the men that they may eat. But his servant said, How can I set this before a hundred men?

So he repeated, Give them to the men that they may eat, for thus says the Lord, They shall eat and have some left. So he set it before them.

[ 8 : 20 ] And they ate and had some left, according to the word of God. Forgive me for being blunt as we begin, but judgment is coming.

Acts 17, verse 31, tells us, God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world. There's no way to avoid it.

There's no way to dodge it. God is rightly angry that we've taken his good gifts, his good creation, and we've pushed him out. And just judgment is due to all of us.

It's a bleak place to start, isn't it? But it matters so much because we are all affected. By nature, we all stand under the shadow of judgment.

It seeps into every area of life as we slowly ruin our world, as we fight with one another, as we hurt ourselves. But most obviously and painfully, the shadow of judgment confronts us as we see death.

[ 9 : 33 ] See, Adam and Eve, they turned from the God of life and light, and ever since, we've done the same, and so we're all destined for death and darkness. Separation from God forever. judgment is due. But, but today is the day of salvation.

Whether you'd call yourself a Christian or not, these days, before Jesus returns, they are days of wonderful opportunity. As Jesus holds out the offer of salvation, to anyone who will come to him.

And this gospel story of salvation offered when judgment is due is played out in miniature in these chapters of 1 and 2 Kings that we've been looking at recently.

We were introduced to Elisha, God's prophet, as Mr. Judgment back in 1 Kings 19. It's there at the top of your service sheet if you want to glance over those verses.

[ 10 : 47 ] Elisha's sent to bring God's punishment of death to a people who have rejected God. And the shadow of judgment hangs over the people of Israel and every area of their lives too.

There's social injustice, there's poverty, there's famine, there's sickness. And when we get there, 2 Kings chapter 8 onwards shows us judgment falling on the people as enemy nations conquer them.

But as we've seen over the last couple of weeks, before Elisha brings God's judgment, he holds out salvation. And so this morning, 2 Kings 4 shows us that in a world of death, when judgment kind of overshadows us and hangs over our head, the only way to have life is to cling to Elisha, the man of God.

And we're going to see that play out through these five miracles. Firstly, then, in a world of death, cling to the man of God like the widow staring poverty in the face.

Have a look at chapter 4 verse 1 to 11. Straight away, we're confronted by a desperate scene. 4 verse 1, Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, Your servant, my husband, is dead.

[ 12 : 11 ] And you know that your servant feared the Lord, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves. She's lost her husband, she's grieving, but worse still, the bailiffs are on their way and they're going to take away her children as payment.

If she loses them, she'll be alone but her future will be in jeopardy too. There'll be nobody to look after her later in life, nobody to provide for her when she's old.

So she's helpless and hopeless. What she's got, what she got, well, end of verse 2, there's nothing in the house except a jar of oil.

So will her instinct in verse 1 to cry to Elisha be of any use as her future hangs in the balance?

Elisha's instructions are simple, verse 3, go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbours, empty vessels and not too few, then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels and when one is full, set it aside.

[ 13 : 27 ] So she does, verse 5, and as she poured, they brought the vessels to her and the vessels were full, she said to her son, bring me another. And he said to her, there is not another.

Then the oil stopped flowing. Just picture the house before this, her, her sons, nothing else, completely barren, completely bare.

Now, every surface, every nook and cranny all across the floor, there's jars and vases and jugs full to the brim with oil, they are rich.

Verse 7, she came and told the man of God and he said, go, sell the oil and pay your debts and you and your sons can live on the rest.

As death overshadows her, she clings to the man of God for life, cries out to him and goes from barren to bursting. Number 2, in a world of death, cling to the man of God for life like the childless woman in 8 to 17.

[ 14 : 48 ] Verse 8, we're introduced to this wealthy woman who shows wonderful hospitality to Elisha. so much so that verse 9, she said to her husband, behold now, I know that this is a holy man of God who is continually passing our way.

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

But it's not a story about how we should use our resources to support gospel ministry though that is good. So Elisha, he wants to bless her for her care.

He offers to put in a good word for her with his connections but that's not of particular interest to her. So verse 14, he says, what then is to be done for her?

And Gehazi, his servant, replies, well, she has no son. And her husband is old. For whatever reason, whether her husband's infertile or she's barren, they are childless.

[ 15 : 59 ] They've got the advantage of wealth but what happens when her husband dies and she's alone? Who will look after her as she ages?

And if we're aware of the social injustice in Israel at the time, likely when she's a widow, she'll be at the mercy of all sorts of injustice and she'll have no security even though she's got money.

So as she stands in the doorway of the upstairs room, Elisha explains, verse 16, at this season, about this time next year, you shall embrace a son.

And she said, no, my lord, oh man of God, do not lie to your servant. She's in disbelief. But verse 17, the woman conceived and she bore a son about that time the following spring as Elisha had said to her.

Again, with the man of God, out of barrenness springs life. Where death threatens her future, this miraculous boy fights back.

[ 17 : 17 ] It's wonderful, it's joyful. but the joy doesn't last long because she'll be clinging to the man of God sooner than she'd hope.

Third, in a world of death, cling to the man of God for life like the woman with her now dead son. 18 to 37. Verse 18, 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. The father said to his servant, carry him to his mother.

And when he'd lifted him and brought him to his mother, the child sat on her lap till noon. And then he died. Just like that, the miraculous son of hope is no more.

faced with the death of her only son, the woman, she springs into action. She doesn't articulate what she expects or hopes for, but she goes in one direction.

[ 18 : 26 ] She lays her son on Elisha's bed and verse 22, 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.

She wants to see Elisha. And nothing is going to get in her way. Verse 23, she doesn't tell her husband why she's going. Verse 24, she's in a hurry so the animal is urged on.

And then Elisha, he spots her on her way. So he sends Gehazi to meet her, to check everything is okay, but she doesn't want the servant of Elisha, she wants him.

Verse 27, when she came to the mountain, to the man of God, she caught hold of his feet. She arrives and she throws herself at Elisha's feet.

She clings to him. Gehazi comes to try and push her away. But Elisha says, no, leave her alone. She's in bitter distress.

[ 19 : 33 ] And in her anguish, she says, verse 28, did I ask my Lord for a son? Did I not say, do not deceive me?

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. And she wishes it had all just never happened. Life sprang from her and now death has taken another victim and she's distraught, understandably.

And this woman, she's a model for us. She supports Elisha's ministry, but much more, she's a model for us in the way she responds in suffering.

She doesn't wait till she's got it all together before she goes to the man of God for help. In the middle of her distress, she runs to him.

And she doesn't tell the man of God what to do and make demands of the Lord, but she does cry out with her honest, heart-wrenching questions.

[ 20 : 42 ] Why? Let's see what happens next. Verse 29, Elisha sends Gehazi off to suss the scene. The woman, she's still clinging to Elisha.

Verse 30, as the Lord lives and as you yourself live, Elisha, I will not leave you. So off they go, back to her home.

Gehazi gets there first, makes no progress with the staff, the boy really is dead. So verse 32, when Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed.

So he went in and 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 once back and forth in the house and went up and stretched himself upon him.

[ 21 : 55 ] The child sneezed seven times and the child opened his eyes. It might all seem a bit strange to us, but as Elisha lies on the boy, life passes from the man of God to the cold corpse.

And then you don't get much more alive than seven sneezes and eyes open, do you? His mother, understandably delighted, verse 37, she bows down at Elisha's feet and embraces her alive again boy.

The miraculous son, he died. The woman ran and clung to the man of God. And as we might have guessed, he brings life from a deathly situation.

Fourth, then, in a world of death, cling to the man of God for life like the famine-stricken people with their death stew. 38, 42, 41.

Verse 38, we're now in Gilgal, there's famine, but it shouldn't surprise us because God warned that would be the consequence for rejecting him, the source of life.

[ 23 : 17 ] But Elisha is on hand as provider to those who cling to him, and he gets them cooking a large stew. Only the chef, in his haste and perhaps desperation, he gathers and adds some unknown fruit and veg to the pot.

Bad idea. Verse 40, the result. While they were eating of the stew, they cried out, oh, man of God, there's death in the pot.

Don't know whether a couple of them took a sip and collapsed on the floor, convulsing, or whether it just tasted so bad nobody could stomach it, but they have to stick a hazardous label on the pot, and then the whole thing is made ready for the bin.

In a famine, perhaps the only thing worse than no food is inedible food. So again, like in the other desperate situations, their first port of call is to cry out to the man of God.

And verse 41, he said, then bring flour. And he threw it into the pot and said, pour some out for the men that they may eat.

[ 24 : 35 ] And there was no harm in the pot. Another deathly situation, and again the man of God brings life. Fifth, in a world of death, cling to the man of God for life, like the famine-stricken people with not enough bread.

42 to 44. we're in the middle of famine. What could be more exciting then than the first fruits of harvest this year?

They actually arrive. Verse 42, a man came from Baal, Shalisha, bringing the man of God bread of the first fruits, 20 loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack.

Well, Elisha, understandably, he's keen that they get eating. So he says, give it to the men that they may eat. But verse 43, his servant said, how can I set this before a hundred men?

It's not even close to enough food. The servant, he's just stating the obvious. But Elisha repeats, give them to the men that they may eat, for thus says the Lord, they shall eat and have some left.

[ 25 : 56 ] Maybe you can imagine the servant dishing out the food starts off a bit embarrassed, like a waiter who knows he shouldn't be serving you this burnt dish.

But verse 44, he set it before them and they ate and they had some left according to the word of the Lord.

It is miraculous provision again. And maybe we're not surprised anymore, but through Elisha, the man of God, the Lord brings life and goodness to his people, even though they deserve judgment.

2 Kings chapter 4, five deathly situations, five amazing miracles, five times Elisha, the man of God, comes to the rescue. He how do you survive in a world of death and judgment?

2 Kings 4 says cling to the man of God. And it's wonderful here to glimpse God's character, the way he helps needy people who cry to him for help, the way it's in his nature to provide more than enough.

[ 27 : 10 ] But there's more going on here as we draw the stories together. Because I guess as we read a passage like this, a chapter full of miracles, we might be tempted to be a bit disappointed and to wonder why no miracles today.

But the truth is, whilst God can work extraordinary miracles today, they're never the norm, and they're not actually the norm through the Bible. There are loads of miracles in the Bible, miracles, but they're clustered around certain people.

Take Moses in the Exodus, loads of miracles. Joshua, miracles, Elijah, miracles, Elisha, miracles, they're clustered. Because throughout the Bible, miracles mark the man of God.

Like a giant sign post from God saying, listen to the man of God, this one, this one in front of you, listen to him, pay attention to him, he's my man.

So if we're excited by Elisha, and if we're excited by miracles, when Jesus shows up, it should make us wide-eyed. In Luke's Gospel, chapters 4 to 9, read a bit like a kind of maxed out sequel to 2 Kings chapter 4.

[ 28 : 41 ] If you've got a Bible handy, turn to Luke chapter 4 with me. To get our bearings, in Luke 3, John has just commissioned Jesus for ministry at the Jordan, just like Elijah did with Elisha, and the Spirit is seen to rest on Jesus, like with Elisha.

And Jesus' ministry, it begins with announcements of judgment, but before judgment, he offers salvation. Jesus, he's just like Elisha.

Only when we turn to Luke 4, the miracles, they explode, and it is abundantly clear, this is a better Elisha. So, Luke chapter 4, verse 31 to 37, Jesus casts out evil spirits.

Verse 38 to 40, he heals a lot of people. Chapter 5, verse 17 to 26, he heals a paralyzed man. Chapter 6, verse 6 to 11, he sees a man with a withered hand and restores it to health.

In chapter 7, verses 1 to 10, he heals a centurion servant. And then if you've got it open, notice what Jesus does in Luke 7, verse 11 to 17.

[ 30 : 13 ] He meets a funeral and he stops it in his tracks and he raises a widow's only son, not with slightly strange bodily contact like Elisha, but with a word, arise, and he's alive.

Then having calmed a storm, cast out another demon, healed a bleeding woman and a rich man's daughter in Luke 8, we find Jesus in Luke 9, verse 10 to 17.

What is he doing? He is feeding. Not a hundred men with twenty loaves, that is easy. but five thousand plus, with five loaves and two fish.

The point? Jesus saves from much bigger danger and distress than Elisha and he does it way more.

And he saves, not just temporarily as with the miracles we've just glanced at, because all the ways Jesus saves in these miracles, they're little tasters. of his eternal saving work.

[ 31 : 36 ] And if I made you read on all the way through Luke's Gospel and we got to chapter 23, we'd see Jesus as he dies on the cross, taking on himself the judgment of God deserved by a rebellious people.

There, the shadow of judgment hangs over him and lands on him. There, arms outstretched, he holds out his ultimate offer of life.

But not safety and security and abundance in this life now. No, permanent, eternal, restored relationship with God life in a new creation forever.

forever. How do you survive in a world of death when judgment hangs over you? Through 2 Kings 4, God points us beyond Elisha and says, in a world of death and judgment, cling to Jesus for life.

life. So as we each stand under the shadow of judgment as death hangs over us, there is only one way to have eternal safety.

[ 32 : 57 ] We're all invited to come and cling to Jesus, the man of God, for life. If you're trusting Jesus, already clinging to him, then you can be confident you will be safe when Jesus returns to bring God's final judgment.

So morning to evening, week to week, year to year, hold tight to Jesus and his promises, listen to his word, cry out to him in joy and in pain, and wait patiently for his return.

And while you cling to him, you can sing before the throne of God above, that song we sang earlier, with great gusto and confidence. One with my Lord, I cannot die.

my soul is purchased by his blood. My life is safe with Christ on high, with Christ my Saviour and my God.

It might be though you're just exploring Christian things. Please would you heed the warning of one and two kings and the warning of Jesus. Judgment is coming.

[ 34 : 07 ] But for today, until Jesus returns, salvation is on offer. Take it.

Come to Jesus, grab hold of him, cling to him like the woman we saw earlier. Come and seek the Saviour while he can be found today.

And as we take communion together shortly, let it be a tangible opportunity to remind ourselves and each other that we need Jesus' body and blood for eternal safety.

Eat it and drink it today as a demonstration that you are clinging to him and don't stop clinging. Let's pray. Amen. Thank you, our Father, that when judgment is due, you offer salvation.

Please help us all to heed that warning and cling to Jesus for life. Thank you for the sure promise that all who cling to Jesus will be eternally safe and will meet you and see you face to face and enjoy a new creation where no more death or grief is there that we enjoy your presence for all eternity.

[ 35 : 38 ] Help us long for that day. Help us cling to Jesus while we wait for it. In his name we pray. Amen.