

ACCORDING TO THY FAITH.

– 2 KINGS 4:1-7. – OCTOBER 9. –

Golden Text: – "Trust in the Lord and do good: so shalt thou dwell in the land and verily thou shalt be fed." – Psa. 37:3.

ELISHA, recognized as Elijah's successor, and thus as a special prophet of the Lord, was naturally looked to by all the "schools of the prophets" as their leader and chancellor. Just the exact nature of these "schools of the prophets" we may not clearly discern. Apparently they were started in the time of the Prophet Samuel, and undoubtedly their members were Israelites who had a firm trust in God, and who, as the nation went more and more into idolatry, felt the need of fellowship one with another and of holding up a divine standard in their nation. It is quite probable that their gatherings were after the manner of what we to-day call summer schools – at times which did not conflict with their farming, husbandry, etc. From the fact that the principal actor in our lesson was the widow of [R3430 : page 282] a member of the school of the prophets indicates that they were not a monastic order, but rather, as we have intimated, that they attended ordinarily to the duties of life and had certain periods for assembling for religious study and worship.

The widow found herself distressed by her husband's debt and naturally appealed to Elisha for advice and assistance, as he might deem proper. She recited her case – that her husband had been a member of the school of the prophets; that he died, leaving her with two children; but so far from having left an estate, her husband had bequeathed a debt, and according to the customs of the Jews, in common with all other nations of the time, the families of the debtor could be called upon to render service equal to the debt, and that thus she was threatened with the loss of her two sons. Some have wondered that the divine law given at the hand of Moses should have sanctioned servitude for debt, which is esteemed to have been partial

slavery. We reply that God's dealings with Israel contained many lessons beyond what they fully comprehended. For instance, such an indebtedness represents how, as the Apostle expresses it, the whole world of Adam's family was sold under sin and obligated to pay the wages of sin, death, as the offspring of Adam. This permission of an attachment of persons and possessions for debt gave ground also for the arrangement of the Jubilee year of emancipation, freedom from all debt and release of all property – illustrating the glorious times of restitution coming, when, by the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, the great Atonement Day ending the grand year of Jubilee (the Millennial age) will be ushered in and witness the freedom of every creature from every liability and restraint now resting upon the world through the disobedience of Adam.

Josephus claims that this woman was the widow of Obadiah, Ahab's steward, and that the borrowed money mentioned in the text was that which he had expended in supporting the hundred prophets whom he hid from the wrath of Jezebel as he related to Elijah. (I Kings 18:4.) We know not by what tradition Josephus was guided in this statement, but nothing in the Scriptures connects the two incidents except the fact that the woman described her husband in much the same language as is used respecting Obadiah's faithfulness to the Lord. He said of himself, "I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth:" that is to say, he revered, worshipped and sought to serve the Lord and to live true to the Lord in all the conduct of life, and the widow gave just such an account of her deceased husband.

Elisha upon hearing the story took immediate steps for the widow's relief, and inquired what she still had in her possession. The reply that she had nothing but olive oil shows clearly that this was a genuine case of distress – that the woman, loyal to principle, had not appealed for aid until it was absolutely necessary. Undoubtedly this had something to do with the case – with the miracle which was wrought for her relief. Had she asked while she still had the wherewith to pay the debt, we might doubt that her petition would

have been responded to as it was. There is a lesson here for the Lord's people: we should do with our might what our hands find to do, [R3431 : page 282] and having done all in our power and being in extremity should consider that the proper time to appeal to the Lord, either directly or through his servants and representatives. Human necessities seem to be the occasion for divine aid. It was so with our Lord's miracles also, and we believe that this same rule still holds good.

The Apostle speaks of some whose prayers were not answered, saying, "Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your desires." (James 4:3.) Our hearts should be so full of appreciation, thankfulness and gratitude for blessings already received at the Lord's hands, temporal and spiritual, that we would hesitate to ask more than his wisdom has seen fit to provide – hesitate to ask more than the bare necessities, "daily bread." If, in the Lord's providence, we are permitted to come into straits, into actual want, we should cry unto the Lord without stipulating what help or what kind or degree of assistance we should have. We must learn to trust the Lord's wisdom as superior to our own, and if we were to be granted wealth or even competence it might not be the best thing for us. Our petition, therefore, to the Lord should be, Give what is best! And faith should firmly trust him, come what may.

This is in full accord with our Golden Text, "Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." Luxuries and dainties are not included in the promise, though these may be granted to us according to divine wisdom. We are not to set our hearts upon them nor to expect them, but, rather, to be content with such things as we have, and very thankful and specially zealous to do good – to use time, strength, energy and every blessing and opportunity in the service of the Lord and the household of faith, and in doing good to all men as we have opportunity.

A pot of olive oil would be an unusual thing in the home of a poor family of today amongst us, but it was different in Palestine, where oil was one of the indispensables, not only for light and for cooking, but [R3431 : page 283] frequently used also after the manner in which we use butter. The immense quantities of oil produced in Palestine in those days is well illustrated by the fact that King Solomon sent as a present to Hiram, king of Tyre, about 200,000 gallons every year during the period of the building of the Temple. (I Kings 5:11.) It was to the people of Palestine a household necessity and an article of ready sale.

Under the Prophet's direction the widow sent her sons in every direction amongst her neighbors to borrow vessels that would hold oil, and was instructed to secure many of them. The fact that she was able to borrow from her neighbors implies a good reputation among them for honesty, for they must have known that she was poor. When the vessels had been gathered under the Prophet's direction she and her two sons went into an inner room and shut the door and began pouring oil from her pot of oil into all those vessels, the sons assisting her; and the supply of oil miraculously increased until every vessel was full. The fact that there was sufficient oil to pay the debt and to leave a comfortable sum of money for her further aid, implies that the woman's faith was great and the vessels she borrowed were indeed "not a few."

It is proper that we should notice the great difference between the miracles of Scripture and those of fiction, such as are recited in "Arabian Nights," etc. The miracles of Scripture are not merely frolics and freaks but useful and full of meaning. Whether we take the miracles of our Lord and the apostles or this miracle of Elisha and others of Old Testament times, they had a reasonable and proper purpose and illustrate as well a great truth.

In the case under consideration we can see that the woman was helped and blessed by the processes of this miracle. Her faith in the

Lord was called out by the extreme condition in which she found herself – in poverty and threatened with the loss of her sons. Her cry to the Prophet of the Lord was a cry to the Lord himself, and the answer through the Prophet was undoubtedly accepted as a direct answer from the Lord himself. Her faith was tested and developed by the Prophet's requirement that she and her sons should cooperate in the borrowing of vessels. Again her faith and that of her sons was tested in respect to the pouring of the oil into the vessels beyond the closed door, without even the Prophet's presence with them. The lesson so learned we may be sure was a great blessing both to the widow and her sons for the remainder of life, and it has been a blessing to many a widow and orphan since as they have remembered that the same God, who was able and willing to help the poor in olden times, is still willing to hear the cry of those who have confidence in him and entreat his favor in times of like distress.

The Lord uses olive oil in the Scriptures as a symbol of the holy Spirit, the source both of spiritual nourishment and enlightenment to his people. The anointing which we receive of him comes down from our Head and Master and Redeemer, our Lord Jesus. The pot of oil and the pouring out into all the vessels that could be secured remind us of the Lord's testimony through the Prophet Joel that while in these days – during the Gospel age – the holy Spirit is poured out only upon the Lord's servants and hand-maidens, only upon the specially favored ones, nevertheless by and by, during the Millennial age, his Spirit shall be poured out upon all flesh, every vessel fitted for its reception shall be filled with the Spirit to its full – the whole world shall be brought under the influence of the Spirit of God, the spirit of holiness, the spirit of righteousness, the spirit of Truth. And under the influence of that Spirit, and under the teachings of the great glorified Teacher and his earthly representatives, the ancient worthies, a blessing of release shall come to the whole human family, releasing from the sin-and-death conditions which have prevailed during the six great thousand-year days of evil.

As we thus think of the Lord's goodness promised to the world in general in his own due time, in the sweet by and by, and as we look back also and see his gracious care over those of ancient times who trusted him, what shall we say respecting ourselves of this Gospel age, who have much advantage every way over those of olden times as well as over those of the age to come, in that we have the special favor and blessing of the Lord in the knowledge of his gracious plan and an adoption into his family? Shall we not reckon that he who was careful in the past, who will delight in giving blessings in the future, is now ready and willing to pour out to each of us as his children blessings, specially spiritual, to the extent of our willingness and faith to receive? If while we were yet sinners God loved us so as to redeem us, much more now that we are forgiven and accepted into his family, and adopted and made joint-heirs with our Lord Jesus prospectively, may we not expect of the Lord continually, day by day, the blessings and favors which he assures us he is well pleased to bestow upon us. Surely faith can trust him, come what may. While the Lord is now pouring out of his Spirit upon his servants and handmaidens, it is for them to see that they are emptied vessels – empty that he may fill them – enlarged more and more that they may be more **[R3431 : page 283]** and more filled with the Spirit of God. The poet has beautifully said: –

"Pour forth the oil, pour boldly forth; it will not fail until
Thou failest vessels to provide, which it may freely fill.

"Dig channels for the streams of love, where they may broadly run;
And love has overflowing streams, to fill them every one.

"But if at any time thou cease such channels to provide,
The very streams of love, for thee, will soon be parched and dried.

"For we must share if we would keep that good thing from above:
Failing to give, we cease to have – such is the law of Love.

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