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HOSPITALITY AND FAITH REWARDED.

– 2 KINGS 4:25-37. – OCT. 16. –

Golden Text: – "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." – Rom. 6:23.

ELISHA'S ministry as a prophet covered many years. Apparently his home was at Mount Carmel, but from thence he probably made visits to the various schools of the prophets and to the city of Samaria, the capital of Israel. The route by which he traveled led him near to the village of Shunem, where lived a woman described in the Scriptures as "great." She was evidently widely known as a good and wise woman, and probably, judging from the records, she possessed a large estate, which may have been of her birthright rather than her husband's. In those days there were no hotels, nor even what are now known as khans, in those parts – stopping-places at which travelers might rest, but usually without any arrangements for refreshments. This Shunemite woman, whose name is not given, but the story of whose hospitality and faith in the Lord have reached and blessed many of his people in many ages, noted the passing of the Prophet and urged upon him the hospitality of their home, desiring that Elisha and his [R3432 : page 284] servant Gehazi should stop and eat bread with them as he passed them in his journeys. Apparently this hospitality was partaken of on several occasions, and the woman's next step was to propose to her husband the building of a small guest chamber for the use of the Prophet and his servant, located upon the roof of their house, accessible from the outside stairway and furnished with a bed, a table, a stool and lamp. It was thus arranged, and thereafter the Prophet apparently made it one of his stopping-places in his journeys to and fro.

The Scriptures everywhere commend hospitality as exemplifying a condition of heart pleasing to the Lord. Thus in the New Testament the Apostle urges that those esteemed worthy of

-serving the Church as elders shall be given to hospitality, and again urges all, saying, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares," referring, doubtless, to Abraham's experience in this line. Our Lord also remarks that he that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. (Matt. 10:40,42; Rom. 12:13; I Tim. 3:2; Heb. 13:2.) Present-day arrangements for public hotels, lodgings, etc., are calculated to hinder the development of the spirit of hospitality: few would think to-day of entertaining strangers, nor would it be generally wise so to do. But the people of Israel were in a particular sense one family, much after the same manner that all who are the Lord's people to day are one in Christ Jesus. It is toward these brethren of Christ that we should be particularly careful to exercise hospitality, even though they be strangers to us, if we recognize in them the Master's likeness, his Spirit. No service or kindness rendered to one of the least of these will fail of his notice and appreciation and reward. Nevertheless the hospitably inclined may find it necessary to exercise prudence in their hospitality according to the natural disposition of the person entertained, as we have already suggested in DAWN, Vol. VI., Chapter xiv.

In the present case the woman recognized Elisha, not only as a brother Israelite, but specially as a consecrated man of God. She perceived, doubtless, that his life was given to the Lord's service, and hence whatever she attempted to do for him was done as unto the Lord. Her wisdom, too, was exemplified in the moderation and simplicity of the arrangements provided – they were comfortable, but not extravagant. It was during one of these visits that the Prophet sent his servant Gehazi to speak to their hostess and inquire whether or not he could render her some kindness in return – mentioning her favorably to the King or to the chief of the army if she had any favors to request from either quarter, but she had none. Elisha then queried his servant as to what they could do for the woman that would show their appreciation, and the latter remarked that he had noticed that the home was childless and that the husband was in advanced years,

intimating that, in harmony with the general views of the East, there could be no greater blessing come to the woman than to have a [R3432 : page 285] son; that otherwise her home was like the city of Jericho, beautiful for situation, but, nevertheless, having a great dearth or lack.

Elisha grasped the thought instantly, and sending for the Shunemite assured her that within a year she would clasp a son to her bosom. She could scarcely believe it, even though she had full confidence in the Prophet, but in due time the promise was fulfilled. It was years after this, the Prophet still using the guest chamber provided, that the son was with his father and the servants in the harvest field, and apparently had a sunstroke and was sent home in the care of a servant. Shortly after he died, and the mother, making known the fact to no one, laid him upon the Prophet's bed in the guest chamber and hastened to the Prophet's home on Mount Carmel. The boy was not really dead from her standpoint, for she had faith in God and in his Prophet Elisha. She reasoned that he who was able to give her the son was able now to restore him to her again, but she would communicate only with the Prophet. Avoiding the questions of his servant, she fell at Elisha's feet, her heart full of her sorrow, which, nevertheless, was well mixed with faith. Her inquiry was, "Did I desire a son of my Lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me?"

The Prophet understood that her son was ailing or dead, and sent his own staff by the hand of his servant to lay it upon the child's face – much after the same style that the Apostle Paul sent napkins and handkerchiefs to the sick. But the woman would not leave the Prophet, not having full confidence in the results of the servant's doings, possibly realizing that the servant was not such a man as his master in any sense of the word, as later on was manifest in his conduct. The woman's faith had its reward; the Prophet went with her.

We are not of those who claim that sickness and pain, sorrow, suffering and dying, are indispensable or in any sense of the word blessings. On the contrary we hold that all of these things are parts of the "curse," which affect more or less every member of the human family; but we do hold that the Lord frequently gives experiences of this kind, sickness, pain, sorrow, death, to those of his people who trust him, – as agents by which to develop meekness, patience, faith. Apparently it was so in the case of the Shunemite. Had her son not taken sick, had he not died, she would have lacked that chapter in life's experiences which we doubt not proved to her a great blessing, which developed in her more and more of faith in the Lord and appreciation of his favors. While deeply agitated at heart, her faith in the Lord's goodness through his Prophet preserved her from excessive grief, and apparently from all outward manifestations such as tears, and thus the Apostle exhorts us who are of the household of faith in this Gospel dispensation, saying, that we should sorrow not as those who have no hope.

This woman had faith and hope that the Lord through the Prophet would restore her son. We well may have stronger and better hope that our dear ones going down to the tomb will in due time be recovered from it, because from our standpoint we perceive that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and a redemption has been accomplished for the sins of the whole world; and that it is the purpose of God, the plan of God, that in due time those who sleep in Jesus will be brought by him and through him from the tomb, from the prison-house of death. The Shunemite's faith in the Prophet corresponds very well to our faith in the Lord Jesus, as God's power and instrumentality for our relief. And so we read that in answer to the prayer of the Prophet and the instrumentalities he used in harmony therewith, the child was restored to life and to its mother.

The fact of this miracle does not prove that it is the will of God to grant a miracle of recovery in every case. In Elisha's long experience this is the only case of the kind. We may even suppose

that this woman's husband died shortly after this without any interposition of divine providence on his behalf, for we find the Prophet instructing the woman that there would be a seven-years' famine in the land of Israel and advising her to sojourn for the time in another country. On her return seven years later with her son she found her property in the possession of others, and called upon the king to repossess her of it, and her husband is not mentioned in connection with the going or the return. It was at this time that the blessing of the Lord through Elisha served her a secondary reward for her hospitality and her faith, because the king had just been talking with Elisha's servant respecting the mighty works which his master had performed in the name of the Lord, and when the woman cried to the king, the servant immediately informed him that this was the mother of the boy whom Elisha restored to life. Thus her case was brought directly to the king's notice and she received again the possession of her property.

Hospitality and faith may not always be thus promptly rewarded in the present time; the Lord's people may even suffer evil for good and be persecuted and hated by those whom they seek to serve and benefit. But a blessing, nevertheless, is sure to be theirs – not only a blessing at the Lord's hand in the future for what they did or endeavored to do, that will more than compensate them, but even in this present life they receive a blessing with the persecutions [**R3432 : page 286**] in that their own hearts are enriched and refreshed, made more Christ-like, and they are thereby better prepared for the heavenly Kingdom and glorious things which the Lord has in reservation for all who shall be copies of his Son.

Our Golden Text in connection with this lesson gives us the suggestion that while the heavenly Father may not be pleased to grant us either for ourselves or for our children immunity from pain, suffering and death, nevertheless he has made a still grander and more glorious provision for us through our Lord Jesus Christ – a provision for our eternal life. But this gift is reserved for those who

either now or in the future shall cultivate and exemplify hospitality, generosity, faith, love toward God and man. Blessed are we whose eyes and ears of understanding are now open to know the grace of God, to appreciate the same, – we who are now in the school of Christ to develop the fruits and graces of his Spirit, the likeness of our Lord. For such is the Kingdom, the joint-heirship and blessings and privileges not only of eternal life, but of joint-heirship with Christ. As for the world in general, it will be required of them during the Millennial age that they also shall develop the fruits and graces of the Lord's Spirit if they would be accounted worthy of his gift of eternal life. Sonship implies likeness, and none are to have eternal life except those acceptable as sons.

