

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 18, Part 2

2 Kings 3-4, Part 1

© 2024 John Oswalt and Ted Hildebrandt

But I want to talk about chapter four, verses eight through 37, the lady from Shunem. Shunem, and let's look at our map again. Shunem is right up here in the valley of Jezreel, rich agricultural land with all the possibilities of wealth and comfort.

Now, it's fascinating as we look at this passage that the husband is pretty much in the background all the way through the story. This is a woman who is clearly competent in her own right, perhaps wealthy in her own right. She has a husband.

They are cooperative. But we see her again and again taking action. This is not the picture of the woman who is merely a possession of her husband and merely putty in his hands to do with, as he wishes, a woman who has no rights, no privileges, no possessions of her own.

And I think this is awfully important for us as we think about these questions of the relation of the male and the female genders—two things I'd want to emphasize here. Number one, we're talking about a situation that is vastly different from ours.

And so, if the Bible does not depict women with the full level of rights that we might think of in our society, that's not because God somehow devalues women. What we really need to do is to look at the Bible's view of women in that cultural context. When we do that, as here, we discover that the Bible gives women value, position, and a level that is considerably above what we see in the surrounding culture.

That's the issue. What is the Bible saying in terms of the culture of that time? And this is an important piece of information and of insight with regard to the value of women in the sight of God. Again, the narrative is so interesting.

Elisha passes through the city of Shunem, and the wealthy woman urges him to stay for a meal. So he got in the habit of stopping in whenever he was passing by. And notice verse nine, she said to her husband, I know this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God.

Isn't that interesting? How did she know that? We're not told that he had ever done a miracle. We're not told that he had ever given her any prophecy. But there's something about his character.

There's something about his behavior that, for this sensitive woman, is unmistakable. What marks your character? What marks mine? Do people recognize in us a different

flavor, a different tone, a different approach to life? Now, maybe he had done some miracles. Maybe he had given her some prophecy.

We don't know that. But as far as the text is concerned, she's simply with spiritual perception, recognize there's something unique about this guy. He is a godly person, a holy person.

He's like Yahweh. He acts like Yahweh. Can that be said of you? Can that be said of me? God grant it.

God grant it. Let there be a flavor. Let there be a scent of life about us wherever we go.

So she says, let's make him a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay with us whenever he comes. Yes, I want that sort of person in my life.

I want connection with that kind of person. There's the scent of life about this person. I want them to be in my life.

Now, remember, of course, those houses were all flat-roofed. And so it's no problem to put a little room there on the roof. When we think of pitched roofs in our houses, that presents us with some problems.

But for a flat roof, it's no problem at all. So, I want you to notice two things in the story. Elisha first offers her, not anything miraculous.

He says, verse 13, you've gone to all this trouble for us. What can we do for you? Can we speak to the king on your behalf or to the commander of the army? I'm in a position to say a good word for you to the powers that be. Interesting.

He doesn't offer a miracle. He just offers to do something nice for her, put in a good word. And she says I'm fine.

I don't need anything particularly. Thank you. Now, Gehazi is going to come off poorly down the road in this narrative.

But at this point, it's interesting. He says she has no son, and her husband is old. He has some spiritual sensitivity.

He's able to see beyond what she says on the surface. He's able to look into her heart. And so, Elisha said, call her.

About this time next year, Elisha said, you'll hold a son in your arms. Does that remind you of anything? I hope it does. I hope you know your Bible well enough.

Do you remember back in Genesis? God came with two angels to visit Abraham, and he said these same words. I'm going to be back next year, and you're going to have a baby. Well, Sarah laughed.

This woman says, oh, don't get up my hopes like that. Don't say stuff like that. Interesting again.

She doesn't think of Elisha as a miracle worker. Oh, goody. Thank you so much.

No, don't do that to me. And he says, well, he doesn't respond to that. Please, man of God, don't mislead your servant.

Don't do that. Because, like Sarah with her laughter, this woman, this is not a possibility. Humanly speaking, this is not possible.

In the Bible, childlessness is a major theme running underneath. Remember that the first three mothers of Israel were all unable to have children. Sarah, Rachel, Rebecca.

What's the point? Oh, in the ancient world, especially, fertility was everything. Nature was the enemy. If you were not producing children like falling off a log, if your fields were not fertile, if your animals were not fertile, you were going to die.

You had no children. It would be as if you never lived. That's why the fertility religion was such a big deal with Baal and Asherah.

Asherah is the primal, fertile woman, voluptuous in her representations. Broad hips. She could have babies like anything.

Heavy breasts. Yes, yes. Fertility and Baal.

He's the one who can do it, but they can't. It is God who is the source of life. And so, over and over again in the Bible, there's this picture.

You want fertility. You can't manipulate Yahweh to produce it like you think you can, Baal and Asherah, but you can trust him. You can pour out your life to him.

You can allow him in his grace and in his mercy to do his work in your life. He can make you and me fruitful, not merely physically. And, of course, that's the point that is being driven home all the way through.

Physical is symbolic of spiritual. It is spiritually that he wants us to be life giving everywhere we go in everything we do. And so, the child is born.

But then, one day, it looks like it's sunstroke. He's out in the heat all day, and he says, my head, my head. He wasn't wearing a hat like he was supposed to.

I want you to notice the mother's faith and ability to take action. She does not fool around.

She went up, laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut the door, and went out. She called her husband and said, send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return. Well, why go today? It's not a religious holiday.

Never mind. I'm going. She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, lead on.

Don't slow down unless I tell you. A woman of action, a woman of faith. If I can get to that guy, it's going to be all right.

Like the woman with the issue of blood in the story of Jesus, if I can just touch his garment, I'll be all right. Faith.

Assurance, certainty. And so, she goes. And again, the story is just so interesting.

Gehazi, go find out what her problem is. I know who that woman is. She's that woman from Shunem that we stay with.

Gehazi goes, is it all right? She says, yes, everything is fine and keeps coming. She's not going to be put off by anything less than all that God can do for her. She falls on her face at the feet of the man.

And she says Gehazi attempts evidently to push her away. And he says, no, no, no, no, no. She's in deep distress.

I don't know what it is again. So interesting. She says I didn't ask you for a son.

Didn't I tell you don't raise my hopes? You know, I just says, Gehazi, grab the hem of your robe. Tuck it up in your belt. That's what it is to gird up your loins.

And you see what that is? That's instant Bermuda shorts. And run, run. Touching the boy with my staff doesn't do any good.

And Elisha lies down on the boy three times. Again, we want to say, what's that about? Why is that? The Bible says, never mind. And the boy recovers.

What are we talking about here? We're talking about God, who gives life. God who can restore life. God in whom all of life coheres.

Now, remember a similar story in the life of Elijah. The widow of Zarephath that he. Whose life he saved with the provision of.

Flower and oil. Her son died, and Elijah. Brought her son back to life in different ways, by different means in a different situation. But there it is. Yahweh is able. Baal is a failure. This world cannot produce what it promises. But Yahweh can.