

Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 18, Part 3

2 Kings 3-4, Part 3

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Why has the first one been separated from the second and the third? I think the answer is to be found by looking back again at Kings, excuse me, First Kings. First Kings chapter 17 verses eight and following. What do we have? We have the story of the provision for the widow of Zarephath, the provision of oil and flour, followed by the story of the deliverance of the son.

If we look now back to Kings, 2 Kings, and chapter four, we find a similar story in four one to seven of provision for a widow providing oil for her. Then, there is the story of the woman from Shunem and the restoration of her son to life. So I'm suggesting to you that four one to seven may not have actually occurred before his acquaintance with the woman from Shunem, but that the story of the miraculous provision of oil has been put before the story of the resurrection of a son in order to reinforce in our minds, the ministry of Elisha and the ministry of Elijah are part of a single whole.

Now, there are those who will say, oh, well, actually, there's only one story. Some unnamed prophets of Israel supposedly provided oil or flour and oil for some widows, and some other unnamed prophets of Israel supposedly raised a kid from the dead. Those two stories have been developed, put together, and doubled.

I see no reason to go there. Partly because the stories are so different that it seems to me if you were going to simply take one story and double it for two different guys, you would, in fact, make them more similar than they are. The data here is different enough that if somebody or if simply the tales were told as is often suggested, I think it's difficult to explain how the details get this much different.

No, I think the point is that the ministry of Elisha and the ministry of Elijah are part of the same activity of God, and what one man can do, the other man can do in a different way and in a different setting. But the point is made: God is at work here from Elijah through Elisha, and it's one ministry. We look at the account, and when we put it together, that's four to seven with four, 38 to 44, and we see similarities in the three of them.

In all three cases, God is providing for persons in need. The point is being made again and again, God is the gracious provider, not Baal. Baal cannot do these kinds of things, but Yahweh can.

We begin with the widow. Here again, is one of the great themes of the Bible. Who are God's favorites? People whom society looks upon as throwaways.

People whom society considers unnecessary baggage. And God says, no, they are persons in my image, and as such, their status in life is not determined by their wealth; it's not determined by their ability to contribute; it is determined by the fact that they're my beloved sons and daughters. And so, widows, orphans, and immigrants are looked upon with special favor in the Bible precisely because they are helpless.

So, she is a widow. My husband is dead, and now that his credit, now his creditor, her husband's debts are being charged to her, and he's going to come and take my two boys as his slave. So he says, what do you have in your house? This is interesting in all of these miracles, the first two in particular. He uses something, and we'll see it again in later miracles that he does.

Why? I don't know. But again, it's that touch of biblical narrative that tells you we're talking about real events. We're not talking about legendary events, but we're talking about specific kinds of actions.

So, she says, well, I don't have anything except a little olive oil. Good enough. What do you have? Oh, I don't have anything.

I'm not intelligent. I'm not rich. I'm not able to make big contributions to the church.

I don't have anything. What do you have? What do you have? Will you let God use it? Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few.

Again, what a wonderful figure of speech there is here. I think when she got to the end, I think she probably said, Man, we should have asked for a bunch more jars. As many jars as there were, there was that much oil.

That's our God. That's our God. What do you have, and how much are you willing to have that expanded? How much are you willing for God to have that used? It's easy to say, well, that's all I got.

I can't afford to give that to God. You can't. Why not? He will, in the words of E. Stanley Jones, in return for your all, give you his all.

Stanley Jones said I spent the rest of my life hugging myself for making such a deal. Yes, yes. So that's the first one.

The second miracle is that there's a famine in the region, and I think that applies to both the second and the third. There's a famine. Again, need.

We need bale to show up here. We need bale to produce rainfall that'll bring the plants up. Everything's drying out and dead.

Come on, bale. While the company of prophets was meeting him, he told his servant to put on a large pot and cook some stew for this company. I can imagine Gehazi saying, sir, sir, we don't have very much.

He says, put it in the pot, feed this company. Well, it's all we've got. Let's give it all.

One of them went out into the fields to gather herbs and found a wild vine, and he put the gourds in the stew, and the stew was deadly. Man of God. And I've mentioned this before.

I mentioned again, right through these accounts, Elijah and Elisha are not so much called prophets. They're called men of God, men whom God is able to use for his good purposes in the land. That's what I want to be.

I want to be a man of God. I want to be a man who belongs to God. How about you? Do you want to be a woman of God? You want to be a man of God? Don't be double-minded.

Sell out your all for his all death in the stew. And Elisha said, get some flour. He put it in the pot and said, serve it to the people to eat.

And there was nothing evil in the pot. Yes. Yes.

Oh, can your life be like that? Can you go into situations where evil is prevailing? And with the presence of your flour, your leaven, your whatever it is, somehow defuse that situation? Somehow defang it? Oh, if God is in you, God is in me, and we can bring peace into situations. We can bring hope into situations. If God is in us, he is able.

The third, I think again, is in this famine situation. A man came from Baal Shalisha, who brought the man of God. There it is.

Twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. Give it to the people to eat, Elisha said. And his servant, presumably this is our friend Gehazi again.

How can I set this before a hundred men? 20 loaves of bread, and a hundred people? That didn't work. That mathematics doesn't care what you do.

That's not going to work. Elisha answered, give it to the people to eat. For this is what the Lord says, they will eat and have some left over.

I'm sure, I'm sure that reminds you of those incidents in the gospels. One of them in Mark chapter 8, feeding the 4,000. Well, all we've got is five.

They didn't have 20 loaves, and they had five loaves. They didn't have a hundred men, they had 4,000. And they had stuff left over.

That's our God. That's our God. He loves to work in abundance.

You look at the world around you, and you may say, well, I don't have much abundance in my life. Let me guarantee you that if you are living for the Lord, you have more abundance spiritually than you would have without him. And that's what we're after here, folks.

Blessing in the Old Testament is almost exclusively physical and material. And a whole lot of bad theology has been based simply on the Old Testament. Well, if you're serving God, you're going to be rich, you're going to be healthy, you're going to be comfortable.

And if you're not rich and healthy and comfortable, then obviously there's something wrong in your devotion. May I say it reverently? Hogwash. Yes, yes, God is concerned about our physical, temporal, and material needs.

God wants to use what we are and have. God wants to bless us in these areas. But that's not what he's primarily concerned about.

And that's what we see when we move into the New Testament. We see where the Old Testament was pointing. It is spiritual abundance that he wants to give us.

And as we look at the great saints of the Christian faith, we see again and again people who have almost nothing of this world's goods and yet are rich in the Lord. That's what he wants to do in our lives. He wants to make you and me abundant.

He wants to make you and me overflowing, not withered and drawn up in our needs to take care of ourselves, but free. Free to give away the abundance that he pours onto us and thus feed the nations. Now, again, I do not want to draw a hard and fast line.

The Old Testament is about physical, material, temporal blessings. And that has nothing to do with spiritual blessing. I do not mean to say that at all.

But I say this: if the Lord blesses you spiritually, you will be able to rejoice in whatever physical or material goods he gives you in ways that the rich worldling never can. He wants to bless us. He means to bless us.

And when he has truly accomplished his work in our souls, we will find joy in whatever he gives to us. That's his business. A joy that is glad, but a joy that is solely dependent upon what he has done in our souls.

These miracles then teach us God cares. He cares about our needs. He cares about us.

They teach us that he is able. He is able to defeat evil at every turn. They teach us that he's the God of abundance, who wants to give over and above what we ask and what we need.

So we think of the great shepherd psalm, Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be in want.

Hmm. You see, that has to do with attitude. That has to do with spirit.

Oh, I want, I want. If that's your spirit, I'm here to tell you that you will never have enough. But if you say, oh Lord, I want to be your sheep.

I want to be in your hands. You will find he provides. He provides in abundance because he cares.

Bless you.