

Rags to Riches

by Denis Lyle

God is able to meet our needs and provide for us in times of trouble, and we can trust Him to supply all our needs.

Scripture: 2 Kings 4:1, Psalm 46:1, Psalm 50:15, Matthew 9:29, John 16:33, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 3:20, Philippians 4:19, Hebrews 7:25

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Gods Provision"

Description

Denis Lyle preaches on the story of the widow in 2 Kings 4:1-7, highlighting her journey from rags to riches through faith and obedience. He emphasizes the importance of turning to God in times of trouble, bringing our problems fervently, frankly, and fully to Him. Lyle encourages believers to trust and obey God, to use the resources they have, and to expect abundance in God's provision. Through the widow's story, he illustrates God's adequacy and ability to meet every need, urging listeners to have faith in God's power and provision.

Transcript

Reading: 2 Kings 4:1-7 FROM RAGS TO RICHES Arthur John Gossip was an outstanding Scottish preacher who died in 1954. When he was pastor of the Beechgrove Church in Aberdeen, Scotland his wife died. The year was 1927. On his first Sunday after he had buried his wife, Dr.Gossip preached in his church as usual. The message he brought that morning was entitled, "But when life tumbles in what then" It was probably the best message he had ever preached. Sustained by his strong faith, the lonely heartbroken pastor told his people, "I don't think you need to be afraid of life.

Our hearts are very frail and there are places where the road is very steep and lonely. But we have a wonderful God". An old Arabic proverb puts it like this: " Sooner or later the black camel kneels in front of every life". Life has never been easy. This world is a battleground, not a playground. The Lord Jesus said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world". (Jn 16:33) Certainly it takes courage to die, but sometimes it takes more courage to live.

When a believer dies, he goes to be with Christ, which is far better. But to live day after day, year after year, with pain or difficult circumstances is quite something else. Have you ever felt like throwing in the towel and quitting Have you ever come to your wit's end Are you there this... Are you ready to give up Do you feel that God has forgotten you Has the devil been whispering in your ear, "If God really loved you, this would never have happened!" I wonder is this exactly how this widow felt For when the curtain lifts in

(2 Kings ch 4) there is brought before us a scene of misery, impoverishment and despair.

One of the company of the prophets had died, and his widow had been left penniless. The poor woman was in a terrible state. Her money had gone, the family was in debt and her two sons were in jeopardy of being sold into slavery to pay off her remaining creditor. My, this woman was not only down, she was nearly out! Here was the widow of a prophet left in destitution. No doubt her husband had been persecuted (1 Kings 19:10) and having been, by oppression deprived of all that he had, it came to pass when he died he left his wife and children in distress.

Have you ever heard or known of such cases Cases where the prophet, the preacher, the pastor, the elder, has died and his widow has been forgotten Cases where the servants of God have been taken home to glory and his family have been put out on the street Instances where a godly elder has passed on, and his widow has been neglected Well, this was such a case. A woman who was living at wit's end corner, but who was brought FROM RAGS TO RICHES! Now as we consider this story together I want to notice 3 things. (1) THE TROUBLE THAT WAS BROUGHT TO ELISHA You see in turning to God's prophet Elisha, this woman was also turning to God in her trouble. Elisha was God's representative, and in making her plea to Elisha she was stating her needs to God. (Heb 1:1) Did you notice how she brought this problem and trouble to Elisha

She brought it FERVENTLY: Driven by despair, this woman CRIED unto Elisha. The word used here is the same word used in (Ps 77:1) where the psalmist says: " I cried unto God with my voice". Illus: An old preacher used to say, "Get desperate and God will bless you". Is this how you bring your problems to the Lord FERVENTLY. Notice: She brought her problem FRANKLY: There was an honest relating of the facts. And oh, that there were a like honesty in our coming to God. She also brought her problem FULLY: The woman told ALL her story to Elisha.

She kept nothing back. Is this the approach you take when you are in a crisis Have you discovered that "God is your refuge and strength a very present help in trouble" (Ps 46:1) My, do you bring your trouble/problem to the Lord FERVENTLY FRANKLY FULLY (1) What was this trouble Well: (a) THERE WAS DEATH IN THE FAMILY: " Thy servant my husband is dead". (4:1) Now if we are to believe the voice of tradition as expressed by Josephus the Jewish historian then the husband of this widow was Obadiah!

Who was Obadiah Well, he was the Governor of Ahab's house. We read in Kings, " Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly". (1 Kings 18:3) Still again it was he who hid the prophets of the Lord. (1 Kings 18:13) Whether Obadiah was her husband or not we are uncertain. What we are certain about this is whoever he was he was dead! Her human Provider: her human Protector: her human Partner was gone and she felt it! Did you know that the Hebrew language contains at least 30 words that describe various kinds of trouble.

What kind of trouble are you in this... Does your trouble stem from the fact that there has been DEATH IN THE FAMILY As you look backward on 1996 do you recall a loved one's passing A death that perhaps you've never come to terms with! A death that causes you anguish and pain! Tell me... distressed Christian have you brought that trouble and laid at the Saviours feet Have you discovered that "Jesus knows all about your troubles" (a) (b) THERE WAS DEBT IN THE FAMILY: For she says, "And the creditor is come...

"(4:1) Although we are not told how the DEBT was incurred, it was nevertheless a real factor in the life of her family. This woman had seen all her belongings sold one by one to meet the demands of her creditor.

The furniture and the fixtures had all been parted with in an effort to meet the demands of the creditor, and now she faced the dreadful possibility of having to part with her two sons. All that was left in her home was a pot of oil! Fear, ruin, poverty, further bereavement and captivity all threatened her. (Lev 25:39) (b) Is your problem this... financial Has it to do with your job: your business!

My, one of the chief marks of a Christian is that he is honest. (Lk 8:15) The Bible says: "We are to provide things honest in the sight of all men", and to "owe no man anything". (Rom 12:17 13:8) Yet in certain exceptional cases even the most honest may run into debt. Here was a family that feared the Lord but there was (a) (b) and possibly: (c) THERE WAS DOUBT IN THE FAMILY: It would be wrong to dogmatise about this but the language of (4:1) hints that this woman was perplexed and perhaps even questioning God's wisdom in allowing such affliction to fall upon her home.

It was as though she said, "My husband was a prophet, he feared the Lord yet this has happened". (4:1) My, are your circumstances such this... that you question His Wisdom and doubt His Love Illus: The story is told of a minister who was called to the scene of a coal pit disaster. Someone placed in his hands a beautiful piece of embroidery on which the words "God is love", had been wrought. The minister held this up so that the stricken people could see the message which had been so perfectly worked according to a plan.

Then he turned the canvas round and all they could see where the tangled ends of thread that certainly did not seem to make any sense at all! I wonder this... does the why and wherefore of some trouble perplex and puzzle you Do you recall what Christ said to Peter, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter". (Jn 13:7) Job, whose trials were beyond anything that we are called upon to endure, said, "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold". (Job 23:10) My, trust Him even if you cannot understand. (2) THE TRUTH THAT WAS TAUGHT BY ELISHA For notice what Elisha said to her (4:2-4) Here was a preacher who had a genuine concern for this widow!

Now the Bible has a lot to say about God's CARE OF the Widow (Ps 68:5 146:9 Deut 10:18) and the Christians DUTY TO the Widow! Do you recall what James says "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this to visit and help and care for the orphans and widows in their affliction". (James 1:27) My, do you take a personal interest in and express loving concern for the orphans and widows (1 Tim 5:3) Have you a heart of compassion for them Have you a hand of practical helpfulness for them Elisha had.

Indeed he gave this widow his full attention. "How can I help you" he asked and then enquired, "Tell me what do you have in your house" Now at this stage the situation does not look very promising, for she has nothing but a little flask containing a little oil! But this proved to be the key to the situation! But what was it that Elisha was trying to teach her Firstly that: (a) SHE HAD TO DO WHAT SHE WAS TOLD: Fancy going to all her neighbours and borrowing empty vessels and then expecting to fill them with oil out of one tiny oil-flask, but she took the prophet at his word!

She Obeyed IMMEDIATELY: As soon as she received direction she acted. She Obeyed IMPLICITLY: Even though the orders were unusual, she didn't worry about what the neighbours would think! She Obeyed INCLUSIVELY: Step by step she carried out Elisha's instructions! My, more than anything else do you know what the Lord wants from you He wants you simply to "trust and obey". Do you recall the Saviours words, "According to your faith be it unto you". (Matt 9:29) Oh, He is able to wonderful things for us but we must Him to do them.

Tell me: in times of trouble do you take God at His Word Do you rest on His promises Do you believe that He will fulfil what He has promised (a) (b) SHE HAD TO USE WHAT SHE HAD: It seemed silly, pouring out her few fluid ounces of oil from one vessel to another. But she used what she had, not what she had not. She stepped out with little and God turned into much. (Lk 17:6) My, in serving the Lord and in facing the trials of life we've got to use the resources we have and God will do the rest.

Is it not the little things that God is pleased to use A little pebble from the brook overthrew the great Goliath! A little cloud was enough to produce a great rain A little maid was able to point Naaman in the direction of Elisha! My, are you small enough for God to use (1 Sam 15:17) (a) (b) (c) SHE HAD TO PREPARE IN ABUNDANCE: Elisha told her, "Don't ask for just a few". (4:3) Expect an abundance! It would appear she cleared the village out of every pot, pan, jar and bottle she could find.

God wanted to give this woman as much oil as she asked for, or at least as much oil as she made provision for! My, have you got rid of your "just a few mentality" Today we think that a church of 250 people is a big church. We think small, we believe small and our expectations are trivial. Do you know something Our expectancy may be the only limitation on what God is prepared to do for us! Illus: A preacher came to C.H. Spurgeon and said, "Mr.Spurgeon I'am seeing very few people saved.

" Spurgeon said, "Why, do you expect to see folk saved every time you preach" " Why, no". Spurgeon said, "That's why you don't!" My, have we lost our sense of expectancy Our sense of anticipation. Have we lost sight of the Greatness and Powerfulness of our God Well, there was (1) (2) (3) THE TRIUMPH THAT WAS WROUGHT FOR ELISHA Can you imagine the headlines in the local newspaper " Company widow discovers Oil!" What "A Rag to Riches", story. You see her was a woman who: (a) PROVED THE ADEQUACY OF GOD: Can you picture her With her little oil flask going from vessel to vessel to vessel to vessel and so on and so forth until she says to her boy, "Bring me yet a vessel." (4:6) And he said, "There is not a jar left".

It was not the oil that ran out: it was the vessels! (a) What's your problem this... Has your trouble stemmed from the fact that there has been DEATH IN THE FAMILY: DEBT IN THE FAMILY: DOUBT IN THE FAMILY! Listen: Is God not adequate for your need When there was hunger in Israel God filled up barns in Egypt and directed Pharaoh to feed His people! (Gen 42:2) When the water was bitter at Marah and His people were thirsty God turned Marah into a refreshing pool. (Exod 15:23) When three Hebrew lads were thrown into a fiery furnace in Babylon did God desert them Not at all!

He was with them. (Dan 3:25) My, can you not say with Paul this... "Our sufficiency is of God". (2 Cor 3:5) God is adequate for your spiritual: material: physical emotional needs! (a) (b) PROVED THE ABILITY OF GOD: God was ABLE to meet HER CRITICAL NEED: Elisha said, "Sell the oil and pay thy debt". (4:7) God was ABLE to meet HER CONSTANT NEED: " Live thou of the rest". (4:7) God was ABLE to meet HER COLLECTIVE NEED: "Live thou and thy Children of the rest". (4:7) My, Has God changed Is God ABLE Is He able to provide (Phil 4:19) Is He able to deliver (Ps 50:15) Is He able to strengthen (2 Cor 12:9) Is He able to save (Heb 7:25) My, God is ABLE and God is ADEQUATE for every need of yours this ...! Trust Him for "He is able to do exceeding abundantly... ask or think". (Eph 3:20)

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