

The Elect of God, Chosen Vessels of Salvation, Filled With the Oil of Grace

by John Gill

The sermon explores the significance of the oil of grace in a figurative sense, and how it relates to the chosen vessels of salvation, who are filled with the graces of the Spirit.

Topics: "God's Grace", "Chosen Vessels"

Description

John Gill preaches on the theme of God's elect as chosen vessels of salvation, using the story of a widow and her miraculous supply of oil to illustrate how God's grace fills empty vessels. He emphasizes that while all humans are initially empty of grace, the elect are chosen to receive God's mercy and grace, which transforms them into vessels fit for His use. Gill explains that the oil symbolizes God's grace, which is abundant and everlasting, and that the filling of these vessels will continue until the last chosen vessel is filled. He encourages believers to trust in God's provision and to care for those in need, particularly the families of prophets.

Transcript

THE ELECT OF GOD,
CHOSEN VESSELS OF SALVATION,
FILLED WITH
THE OIL OF GRACE.
2 KINGS 4:6

And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed.

IN the context is related a very remarkable case. A certain widow of a prophet, applied unto Elisha for relief in her distressed circumstances; and in a very wonderful manner was delivered. Her husband was one of the sons of the prophets. Who he was, cannot with certainty be said. The Jews commonly suppose he was Obadiah; for no other reason, I conceive, but that of his fearing the Lord. Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest, that thy servant did fear the Lord. (2 Kings 4:1) It is said of Obadiah, that he

feared the Lord from his youth; (2 Kings 18:12) otherwise, he was a steward of Ahab's family, and so does not appear to be the son of a prophet.

Be this as it may, the prophet, the husband of this woman, was dead. This is the lot of prophets, as well as others. Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? (Zech. 1:5) This prophet, it seems, was a poor man; which was very frequently the lot of such persons. More than this, he died insolvent. His widow and children were therefore in great distress, on that account. The creditor, who was a severe man, took the two sons of the widow for bondmen, to sell them, in order to pay the debt; which was usual in those countries, at that time.

To which our Lord seems to refer in the parable of the king, who called his servants to account: one of whom owed ten thousand talents, and had nothing to pay. He therefore commanded him, his wife, and children, and all that he had to be sold, and payment to be made. In like manner the creditor of the husband of this poor widow was about to proceed. Therefore she applied to Elisha, being the chief of the prophets in those days, and who had great interest with God in prayer, and great gifts in performing miracles; so that she might conclude from one, or both these circumstances, that she might meet with relief from him.

After she had told her case, thus, Thy servant, my husband, is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord; and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons, to be bondmen. Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? what do you expect from me, a poor prophet? Tell me, what hast thou in thine house? and she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil. Then he orders her to go to borrow of her neighbours, empty vessels; and of those, not a few.

Then bids her, when she had got as many as she could, to go into the house, with her two sons, and pour out the oil into these empty vessels. She did so, and it was multiplied, as she poured it out. The pot, or vessel, was, no doubt, a small one; yet so miraculously was the oil multiplied, that it filled all the vessels she could get together. When she had filled them all, she asked for another vessel; one of her sons tells her there is no more. They were all full; and then the oil was stayed.

Now this being done, the prophet ordered her to sell this oil, to pay her debt, and live upon the rest. Thus she was extricated out of her present difficulties, and had a sufficient maintenance for herself and sons. A most wonderful event this! Having stated to you the connection of the text, with the preceding verses, and given you a short account of this remarkable part of Scripture history, what I shall endeavour further to do is, to accommodate the subject in the following way.

I. By considering the oil in a figurative sense; as expressive of the grace of God, to which it is sometimes in Scripture compared. II. By comparing these vessels to the chosen vessels of salvation; which, while in a state of nature, are empty ones. III. By shewing, that the oil of grace is put into them; and enquire when they may be said to be vessels full. And, IV. By observing, That when all the chosen vessels are full, the communication of the oil of grace will cease; and not till then.

I. I shall consider the oil in a figurative sense, as expressive of the grace of God. Sometimes indeed the word oil is used to signify temporal blessings. The land of Canaan, among other descriptions of it, has this for one, that it was a land of oil-olive: abounding with all temporal good things, both for conveniency and delight. When a famine is expressed, it is sometimes signified by the labour of the olive failing: while plenty of the things of this world is signified by that hyperbolical expression, rivers of oil.

The great plenty Job possessed, before his troubles, is expressed by himself, in such language as this; The rock poured me out rivers of oil. (Job 29:6) That is, he was supplied with very great plenty of temporal things. Now, generally speaking, the vessels full of this sort of oil, are the children of this world; whose belly Jehovah is said to fill with his hidden treasures: and who have as much of this kind, as heart can wish.--Sometimes the term oil is but for spiritual blessings, and plenty of them.

Thus runs a prophecy of gospel times; They shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden: (Jer. 31:12) by all which are meant not the outward blessings of life; but inward and spiritual ones. Of which, when the souls of God's people are made partakers, they become like a watered garden; very prosperous and flourishing. By these may be meant, those spiritual blessings, with which the saints are blessed in heavenly things in Christ Jesus.

Happy those persons, who with Naphtali, are satisfied with the special grace of God, and are full of the blessings of the Lord. The Lord's people may say, as Jacob did, I have enough: or, as it is in the original text, I have all things. For a believer has all things pertaining to life and godliness. He has an interest in all the blessings of life and salvation. All are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's. (1 Cor. 3:23) Sometimes oil, in a figurative sense, intends the gospel, and the precious doctrines of it, So in Zechariah 4:11, 12, you read of two olive-trees standing before the Lord of the whole earth, which emptied the golden oil out of themselves, through the golden pipes or channels.

By these two olive-trees are meant the ministers of the gospel, the prophets of the Old Testament, and the apostles and ministers of the New. By the golden oil, emptied out of themselves, the gospel is meant, which they have in their earthen vessels and which they, through the ministration of the word and ordinances, empty out of themselves into other proper vessels, that are made so by the Lord. Such were the three thousand, who received the word gladly; and all others, into whose hearts it is brought, and it becomes the engrafted word.

They receive it, not as the word of man; but as it is in truth, the word of God. (1 Thess. 2:13) Sometimes oil designs, in a figurative sense, the Spirit of God, the gifts of the Spirit, and even the more extraordinary gifts of the Spirit; such with which the human nature of Christ was endowed without measure. Thus it is said in a prophecy of him: thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellow's. (Psa. 45:7) This the apostle Peter interprets of the Holy Ghost; for speaking of Christ, he says, Ye know how that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost. (Acts 10:38) That oil of gladness, is no other than the Holy Ghost: his gifts and graces, with which Christ was anointed above his fellows; or above the many brethren, among whom he is the first-born.

He received the Spirit of God and his gifts without measure, while they have them in measure. But in other places we find oil is made use of, to express the ordinary communications of the grace of God to his people. Thus we are to understand it in the parable of the virgins. The foolish virgins took no oil in their vessels with their lamps, as the wise ones did: they were not concerned about that, as the others were. By which oil in their vessels with their lamps, we are to understand the true grace of God in the heart, with the lamp of an external profession.

Now this is that anointing, that unction saints receive from the Holy One, Jesus Christ; or that grace which every one of them receives out of his fulness, even grace for grace; an abundance of grace, and the gift of righteousness. This is signified by oil; either in allusion to the holy anointing oil, made by divine

appointment for sacred uses, under the former dispensation; or in allusion to oil in common. The anointing oil, made by divine appointment for sacred uses, was a very peculiar composition.

It was made of the principal spices, with peculiar art, and none was to be made like unto it. The matter of it was the principal spices; such as myrrh, cinnamon, sweet calamus, cassia, and oil-olive. And it is easy to observe, that by each of these, the grace of the Spirit is signified in Scripture. Of that grace, myrrh, in the language of Scripture, is frequently an emblem. So Christ, in the communication of grace to his people, is said to be like a bundle of myrrh (Song 1:13) unto them; sweet smelling myrrh.

He is said (being ornamented with the graces of the Spirit) to be perfumed with myrrh and frankincense. (Song 3:6) It is said of the church, when the various graces of the Spirit were in exercise, that her hands dropped with myrrh, and her fingers with sweet smelling myrrh upon the handle of the lock. (Song 5:5) Christ, her beloved is said to come into his garden, and gather his myrrh with his spices: (Song 5:1) expressive of that peculiar pleasure he takes in the exercise of his own grace in the hearts of his people.

Cinnamon, was also a principal spice; very delightful and pleasant. It is reckoned among the chief spices. (Song 4:14) It was in former times more especially very rare. So grace is a rare thing; for the generality of men have it not; only those to whom it is given. Very refreshing and cheering this spice is and the Lord's people are, at times, filled with joy and peace in believing. It is very acceptable to God himself; and indeed, without faith, it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6) Another of the principal spices of which this anointing oil was made, was sweet calamus, or sweet canes, which come from a far country; as it is expressed in Jeremiah. (Jer. 6:20) Very proper, therefore, to express the grace of God by, which comes from heaven: for a man can receive nothing of this kind, unless it be given him from above.

This shews the nature of the grace of God in the hearts of his people, especially when in exercise. It is a sweet smelling savour to the Lord himself. Thou hast ravished mine heart with one of thine eyes, (says Christ, meaning faith) with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thing ointments than all spices! (Song 4:10) For like reasons also, the grace of God may be signified by cassia, a sweet smelling herb, or plant, mentioned among other odoriferous ones.

All thy garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia. (Psa. 45:8) To these were added, oil-olives. Now, as the church is sometimes compared to the olive-tree, so our Lord Jesus Christ is the true olive-tree, from whom this oil springs; or grace from his fulness, is received. As the sacred anointing oil was a composition of various spices, so the grace of God in the heart, consists of faith, hope, love, and other fruits of the Spirit. As that compound was to be put together, according to the art of the apothecary, as we are told; (Exod. 30:25) so the grace of God is a curious piece of workmanship; exceedingly delightful; and is not made by man, but by the Lord himself.

For regenerating grace is not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God. He only works in us to will and to do, of his own good pleasure. There was nothing to he made like unto this composition; signifying, that counterfeit grace is not to be accounted as grace. A feigned faith may be, where there is no grace. There may be a hypocritical hope, which is as the giving up of the ghost; and there may be dissembled love, which is in word only, and not in deed, and in truth; but no account is to he made of such counterfeit graces.

The nature of this oil was such, that it is said to be holy, and durable. It is called the holy anointing oil; so grace is, in its own nature, and in its effects, holy. The several graces of the Spirit of God make up that

work of grace upon the heart, which is commonly called by the name, Sanctification. Every grace is holy. Faith is holy, in its nature and effects. It works by love, and is productive of good works. It purifies the heart, as it deals with the precious blood of Jesus.

He that has a good hope through grace; founded on the person, righteousness, and sacrifice of Christ; purifies himself, by dealing with that blood and righteousness, even as he is pure. Love influences men to obey the commandments and ordinances of a blessed Redeemer. If ye love me, keep my commandments. And as that holy anointing oil was throughout the generations of Israel, always to continue; so the graces of the Spirit of God are abiding. Now abideth these three, faith, hope, and charity, or love.

These always continue. The grace of God in the hearts of his people, is a fountain of living water, springing up to everlasting life: an immortal seed. As to the use of this oil; there is an agreement between that, and the grace of God. It was to anoint the tabernacle, the vessels thereof, and divers persons. To anoint the tabernacle, typical of the human nature of Christ; that tabernacle which God pitched, and not man. The Holy One was filled with the graces of the Spirit above measure, to anoint his people: who are sometimes called tabernacles, are the Lord's anointed ones, and go by the name of Christians, from their anointing.

The holy oil was also to anoint the various vessels of the Sanctuary: and, by the grace of God, the chosen vessels of salvation are anointed; the vessels of mercy afore prepared for glory. By this the Lord's people are made vessels meet for their Master's use. This oil was intended also to anoint persons with; namely, Aaron and his sons, the priests, typical of our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is consecrated for ever more. And as the ointment was poured upon Aaron's head, and ran down to his beard and to the skirts of his garments; so the grace of God which is poured upon the head of our great High Priest, from him descends to all the members of his mystical body.

And as the High Priests were consecrated with this oil; so are all believers: for they are made priests unto God; to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Nay, in virtue of this, they present themselves a holy and acceptable sacrifice to God, which is their reasonable service. The prophets of old were also anointed with oil, to point them out as persons intended for that office: and our Lord Jesus Christ was anointed for that purpose, according to Isaiah 61:1.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me: because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek. So all the Lord's people are, by the grace of the Spirit, made, in some sense, prophets; for that anointing which they receive teaches them all things. The people of God not only learn much by reading the word of God, and hearing it preached by the ministers thereof; but also by their own experience. Those who have received the grace of God, have a witness in themselves to the truth of what they read and hear; and thereby are qualified, in some sort, to teach others, by conference and conversation.

Moreover, as Kings were anointed with oil; so our Lord Jesus Christ is for the same reason called the Messiah, or the anointed one: I have set, or anointed, my King over my holy hill of Sion. So all the saints are made kings, as well as prophets. They are all anointed, by the grace of God, as kings. And this grace reigns in them, through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. Thus, in allusion to the holy anointing oil, the grace of God is frequently expressed by the word oil.

So it may also, in allusion to oil in common; which is of a very refreshing delightful nature. Hence it was made use of in ancient times, and in the eastern countries more especially, for the refreshment of travelers

after their journey, and for the pleasure of guests, at a feast: to the latter of which David alludes, when he says, Thou anointest my head with oil: my cup runneth over. So the disciples of Christ enjoy the grace of God, with spiritual pleasure and delight. Jehovah fills them with joy and peace in believing; for which reason, the grace of God is sometimes called the oil of joy that is given for mourning.

Oil was made use of to beautify persons: as Esther and others made use of the oil of myrrh: so grace makes beautiful. It made the human nature of Christ beautiful: hence it is said, Thou art fairer than the children of men. How came he to be so, as a man? why it follows, Grace is poured into thy lips. Grace without measure bestowed upon him, made him fairer than all the sons of men. And in proportion as it is bestowed upon any of the sons of Adam, it makes them beautiful. The king's daughters are all fair: they appear in the beauty of holiness.--Grace, like oil, is of a fattening nature.

Those who are partakers of it, in the exercise thereof, become fat and flourishing: fruitful in the house of the Lord our God. Oil is of a supplying and healing nature. Hence where it is observed of the people of Israel, that the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint; it is added, They have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment, or oil. So the man that had fallen into the hands of thieves, the Samaritan that found him, poured oil and wine into his wounds, for the healing of them.

Grace, and particularly pardoning grace, is of this nature, so that the inhabitants of Sion, who are partakers thereof, have no reason to say, I am sick; for the people that dwell therein are forgiven their iniquities.--Once more, Oil is of such a nature that it will not mix with any other liquids, neither will grace mix with the corruption of our nature. Though grace and sin dwell in the same heart, they will not mix together; they will continue and appear to be distinct principles.

The one is called the law in the members; the other, the law of the mind The one, the old man; the other, the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. The one is called the flesh, and the other is called the spirit, and these two are contrary the one to the other, so that a man cannot do the thing that he would. I proceed now, II. To observe, that the empty vessels into which this oil of grace is put, are no other than the elect of God, who, in themselves, are like empty vessels.

They are often called vessels, with different epithets, though expressive of the same thing. Sometimes, chosen vessels; so Paul is said to be a chosen vessel, to bear the name of Christ, that is, the gospel. He was chosen, indeed, to something higher than saints in common: chosen to be an apostle, to have extraordinary gifts, and to do extraordinary work; but all the saints are in a sense chosen vessels also; chosen to enjoy grace here, and glory hereafter. In consequence of this choice they are, sooner or later, filled with the grace of God.

For as many as were ordained to eternal life believed; they had the grace of God bestowed upon them, which is called the faith of God's elect. And they are not only chosen to that grace, but to all others. They are chosen to holiness in general; to sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. These are insured unto them by their being chosen, and they most certainly partake thereof, in order to enjoy eternal happiness. They are also called vessels of mercy, (Rom. 9:23) afore prepared unto glory.

Vessels of mercy, not that they deserve the mercy of God more than others; for they are in no wise better than others, being all under sin. But they are vessels of mercy, through the sovereign good will of God to them; who will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. They are vessels filled with the mercy of God, in regeneration: when they, who had not obtained mercy, openly and visibly obtain mercy. The mercy of God is in a manifest way displayed in their regeneration and conversion.

God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved them, quickens them when dead in trespasses and sins; and, according to his abundant mercy, begets them again to a lively hope of a glorious inheritance. Likewise through the grace of God bestowed upon them in conversion, they become vessels meet for their master's use, as the apostle expresses it. (2 Tim. 2:21) Now men, in a state of unregeneracy, are unmeet for every good work; but when persons are called by the grace of God, they are ready to every good work.

They only are able and sufficient persons for that purpose, being created in Christ Jesus unto good works; having the Spirit of God bestowed upon them, to enable them to walk in the ways of the Lord, and to keep his statutes, and do them. Some vessels are of a larger, and some of smaller size; but all are sooner or later filled. Some are strong in faith, and have a larger measure of that grace than others: some are weak in faith, and have a less degree of it. Some are newborn babes; some are young men, and some fathers in Christ; but all in their natural state were empty vessels had nothing good in them.

Vain man, (says Zophar, Job 11:12) or, as it may be rendered, EMPTY man, would be wise, though was born like the wild ass's colt. It is said of the house of unclean spirits, that when the man returned into it, he found it empty, swept and garnished. This is the case even with external professors, outwardly righteous men, who are destitute of the grace of God. For, however they may be garnished with some external performances, or outward professions, they are empty of the grace of God.

Indeed, the elect of God, while in a state of unregeneracy, are without Christ and without God in the world. They are destitute of the image of God, in which our first parents were formed. God made man after his own image, and in his likeness; but that image is greatly defaced, and obliterated. All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; which lay chiefly in righteousness, and holiness. God made man upright; but he hath sought out many inventions. There is none righteous, no not one.

Man hath nothing that deserves the name of righteousness, that will stand him in any stead to justify him in the sight of God. He is empty of righteousness, and full of all unrighteousness. He is empty of all that is good: for, if the apostle says of himself, that in him, that is, in his flesh, dwells no good thing: how can it be thought, that there should be any good thing in an unregenerate man. He is destitute of the fear of God; it is neither before his eyes, nor in his heart.

As Abraham said of a certain town, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; so it may be said of every unregenerate man's heart, The fear of God is not in it.--Carnal men are empty of the true knowledge of God; without any knowledge of him, especially as he is revealed in Christ Jesus. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. So far from it, that the language of their souls is, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. They are without Christ; and empty of the knowledge of him: of faith in him, of love to him; and so of the Spirit, and his various graces.

Sensual, not having the Spirit. (Jude 19) This now is the real condition of all men naturally. They are empty vessels not having the grace of God in them. Now, in conversion, the Lord's people are made to see, that they are these empty creatures; and as such they come to Christ, and to his fulness to be filled from thence. No others, indeed, can receive out of his fulness; for if they are full, what can they receive from Christ? Paul, when addressing some vain, conceited professors in the church at Corinth, says: ye are full, ye are rich; like the Laodicean members, who thought they were rich, and increased in goods, and stood in need of nothing, when they were poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked.

Now let such persons come to Christ, what does it signify? They are so full, they can receive nothing from him; and they are sent away empty as they come. The rich he hath sent empty away. They came rich in their own conceit, and go away empty; but sensible souls, who see their emptiness of the grace of God, and the need they stand in of coming to Christ, are filled. He filleth the hungry with good things. III. I am to take some notice of the vessels being filled. We have compared the oil to the grace of God, and the empty vessels to the chosen vessels of salvation.

Now let us enquire when they may be said to be full vessels? I answer, when they are filled with the Holy Ghost, as some persons in Scripture are said to be. The first churches were ordered to look out such men for deacons. Acts 6:3. And Stephen, one of them, is said to be, Acts 7:55. The same is said of Peter and others, which, as it relates to them, denotes that they had superior gifts of the Spirit, whereby they are capable of defending the truth against opposers, with boldness, courage and intrepidity of mind; and as at that time the church consisted of all nations, who spake different languages, so they were filled with the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, especially that of speaking with divers tongues.

But while some have been filled with the gifts and graces of the Spirit in an extraordinary way, others have been so, in an ordinary way, as common believers: and who may be said to be so when the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts by the Spirit; when they are full of joy and peace in believing, and are filled with the knowledge of the will of God in Christ, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. In a word, then may the chosen vessels of salvation be said to be filled, when they have received so much grace from Christ (in whom the fullness of it dwells) as shall make them meet for heaven; for out of his fullness they do receive grace in this life, in order to the perfection of grace, or glory, in the other.

IV. When all the vessels of salvation are thus filled, then will cease to flow the communications of grace, and not till then. Grace has been running ever since the fall of Adam. It has been flowing from the beginning of time, before the flood, and since the flood; and how many millions of vessels have been filled since grace began to be poured out! It is still flowing; and every vessel of mercy shall be sooner or later filled. Grace will continue to be dispensed till the last chosen vessel is called and filled.

And then (to refer to the language of the prophet, when the head stone is brought forth) there will be general shoutings, crying, Grace, Grace, unto it. On the whole, you have, related in the text and context, a most surprising fact. A miracle is wrought for the supply of a prophet's widow and her family. We hence see what notice God takes of the families of his prophets. Let widows be encouraged, and prophets' widows especially, to trust in the Lord, and to leave their fatherless children with him.

Let it be an instruction to us all to pay an attention to such persons and their families. We are to imitate God, and though we cannot work miracles, yet we are to do good and to communicate, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

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