

Skyland Conference 1979-03 Elisha

by Robert Constable

The sermon explores Elisha's transformative ministry in Jericho and Bethel, emphasizing the importance of faith, parental influence, and obedience to God.

Duration: 41:28

Scripture: 2 Kings 4:2, 2 Kings 4:6, Psalm 74:2, Psalm 78:4, Matthew 6:33, John 6:9, Hebrews 13:8

Topics: "Elisha"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of making room for God's blessings in our lives. He uses the story of a widow in debt to illustrate this point. The widow, whose husband was a student of the word of God, finds herself in a desperate situation with creditors threatening to take her two sons as bondmen. However, when she seeks help from the prophet Elisha, he asks her what she has in her house. She initially feels she has nothing, but eventually realizes she has a pot of oil. This parallels the New Testament story of Jesus feeding the multitude with just a few loaves and fishes. The preacher encourages the audience to not downplay what they have and to stop making excuses for not serving God.

Transcript

Last time we were sharing together, we were sharing about a miracle that Elisha performed in Jericho. And I think from my own background and what I've heard about Jericho in times gone by, that it may be that we have had various kinds of thoughts about Jericho as we've talked about it. Now, in our consideration of Elisha's ministry there, we have called it the place of need.

You remember that when Jericho was conquered by the children of Israel under Joshua, and the walls fell down, we all know that great story. It's recorded for us in 6th chapter of Jericho in the 26th verse, if you want to check it up. Joshua said that there would be a curse upon the city, and that if any man rebuilt the city, he would lose his oldest son and his youngest son in the process.

And so for a long time, nobody was going to rebuild Jericho. Then we have the record in 1st Kings chapter 16 and verse 34 of a man who undertook to rebuild Jericho. 1st Kings 16:34.

In his days, that's the days of Ahab, the king of Israel, in his days did Hiel, the Bethelite, build Jericho. He laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son, according to the word of the Lord which he spake by Joshua, the son of Nun. And so from that time on, we

have always thought that Jericho, of course, was the city of the curse.

And I've heard people preaching about the good Samaritan who observed that the man who was left for dead had been going from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he never should have been going there anyway, because Jericho was the place of the curse, and it says he went down to Jericho and made quite a play on this. As a matter of fact, we have been considering when that change was made. Under the ministry of Elisha, Jericho was changed from the place of the curse, the place of need, into the place of blessing.

So that for the rest of the time, Jericho to this day has been a place of blessing, a place of fruitfulness, a place of productiveness, and so on. So I don't think it's quite warranted to say that people overcome by the robbers and all shouldn't have been going down to Jericho. But I explain all this because I am concerned about our own attitude toward the world around us.

Jericho is often used as a type of the world, as the place of need. And there is, I think, some disposition among us to stay away from Jericho, to not only separate ourselves from the world as it were, but to insulate ourselves from the world in such a way that we do not come in touch with the need in the world. And we are admonished not to go down to Jericho.

I would like to suggest, for your thinking anyway tonight, that we ought to go down to Jericho. We ought to go into the world where men and women are that have been under the curse, where the need is, and meet that need as we find it, the way Elisha did. This is one of the lessons I hope that we take away with us about Elisha's ministry in the city of Jericho.

But now we're going to leave Jericho, and we're going to Bethel, quite a different place. 2 Kings, chapter 2, verse 23, And Elisha went up from thence, that is, he went up from Jericho unto Bethel. And as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head, go up, thou bald head.

And he turned back and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she-bears out of the woods, and tear forth again two children of them. So he went to Bethel, Bethel, the house of God.

Bethel, the place where Jacob had met the Lord. Bethel, the place of communion. Well, that's what it was at the beginning, but it had been considerably changed by now.

Because, you see, when Jeroboam was made the king of Israel, and he had Israel separated from Judah, and instead of one big kingdom of Israel, now there are two kingdoms, the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah. Jeroboam and his counselors, in talking things over, said, You know, if these people continue to go to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, it's not going to be very long before they're going to want the two countries brought back together again. And it will be the king in Judah that has preference.

So we'd better plan here to set up new places of worship, so our people don't have to go into Judah to worship the Lord. And we are told that they set up two places of worship, one in Bethel and one in Dan, and they made golden tabs, and they said to the people, Now come to Dan and to Bethel to worship the Lord. Don't bother to go to Jerusalem.

And they set up an entirely new priesthood that they had no warrant to set up from the word of God. It was their own idea. They made the basest of the people the priests of the nation, and this went on for some time.

So that the house of God became no longer the house of God, but it became a substitute house of God with no authority from the Lord whatever. Now, it's in that condition when Elisha goes there, and we've read about what happened. He went up from Pence to Bethel, and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city and mocked him and said to him, Go up thou bald head.

Now, this is an interesting background here, because where did these little children get any ideas that made them say to Elisha, Go up thou bald head, when they saw him? Incidentally, somebody asked me at one of our meals how old I thought Elisha was. And this is, you know, he was, depends on when you meet him, but it seems that he was a young man when he met Elijah, and he was called to be in Elijah's place. Then he went down to Jericho and he ministered there, and now he's going up to Bethel, and they say, Go up thou bald head.

He must have been like Dick Andrews, a fellow that had a lot of space up here while he was a boy, you know, just young yet. In any case, where did the children get the notion and the idea that they should mock him this way? Well, let's think back for a minute. Elisha had been out walking with Elijah, hadn't he? Out in the wilderness.

And he had been with Elijah when Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind and chariots of fire into heaven. And this had been observed by fifty of the sons of the prophets. And the word got around.

You know, what had happened? The same in those days as they are. When the word came to Bethel that the great prophet of God, Elijah, had been taken to heaven in a whirlwind and chariot of fire, they sort of smiled, you know. What next? You know, there's always people that are ready to take the supernatural out of religion.

There's always those people that are cynical about anything that happens in the economy of God. And the people at Bethel, of course, were this way. They had been brought up on a pseudo-religion.

At Bethel they tried to do everything the way they did it in Jerusalem. But it was just a pseudo setup. There was no vitality there.

There was no reality there. There was no presence of God there anymore. It was just going through the motions.

And those kind of people, of course, find it very hard to accept the supernatural. And so when the story came up Bethel way about what had happened to Elijah, everybody sort of smiled or laughed out loud and said, Well, some people will believe anything. And, of course, the children heard all this.

They heard what their parents said. And so they also had a supercilious idea about Elisha and his ministry. And so when he came along and they saw him, they said just what their parents would have said.

Go up, thou bald head! Why don't you do that trick too? You do a lot of other things that Elijah does. Why don't you do that one? And in saying this, they were mocking him. I want to take the time just now to pick this little lesson out of this.

The children are watching us. They're listening to what we say at home about what the word of God says. They're listening to our comments about what the ministry of the word of God says.

It's very easy sometimes, you know, for us to express ideas that are rather, they rather put down what has been said in the meeting. And the children hear this. And they pick up these things from their parents.

That's what happened at Bethel. It was an expression or an extension of the attitude of the parents that the children expressed. And your children are expressing an extension of your attitude at home about the things of God, about the supernatural things of God, about the ministry of the word of God.

And little pictures have big ears, and they get impressions. And very often in Christian homes, the young people grow up with this sort of a cynical attitude about Christian things and the things of God because of our unfortunate disposition sometimes to express that kind of an attitude in the privacy of our own home. And I mention this this evening just to put us on guard about this.

We must be careful what we say to the children. While I'm saying that, I want to turn to the 74th Psalm. I don't just want to tell you what not to say at home.

The 74th Psalm tells you what to say at home. I hope it's the 74th Psalm. Apparently it is not.

But maybe some of you know the verse, and you can tell me what it is, where the people of God are told to speak at home of the praises of the Lord and his strength and the wonderful things which he has done. Psalm 78, verse 4. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord and his strength and his wonderful works that he has done. Now, those are the things we are to fill the ears and the hearts of our children with.

And I ask you to think for a moment how long it is in your home since the children heard you praising the Lord, showing his praises, or have heard you talking about how God has undertaken for you in some great situation in your life so that the children get the idea, well, the Lord can solve any of the problems. Or how often have you spoken of the wonderful things that he has done? Because he has done something wonderful for each of us, hasn't he? And these things need to be spoken of and talked about, and the children need to get the idea from what we say at home that the Lord is worthy to be praised, he is strong enough to solve our problems, and he does great works for you. And it is as they learn these things at home that they will be preserved for the Lord.

Now, what happened at Bethel? They mocked him. They said, Go up, thou bald head. And he turned back and looked on them.

He did not respond angrily or quickly or out of pique because of what these children said. He looked at them, and he thought about them as he looked at them, and he realized that what they were doing was expressing exactly what they had heard at home. They were ridiculing the supernatural insofar as God was concerned.

And as he looked on them, he cursed them. It's nothing personal in this. He cursed them in the name of the Lord.

It was the Lord they were mocking, not him. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tear forty and two children of them. I've heard people declaim against Elisha because he was such a beast, to call these bears out of the wood to destroy these innocent children.

And I'd like to adhere to you that he did not call the bears out of the wood. The Lord brought the bears out of the wood and tear the children. And those people in Bethel lost their children.

And there are many and many a Christian home where they have lost their children because of the attitude of the parents about the things of God. And when we have families, we have a grave responsibility in this regard. I think that's the reason this record is left here of what happened when Elisha went up to Bethel.

Then it says, and he went from Pence to Mount Carmel, and from Pence he returned to Samaria. Now, that doesn't say a great deal, except it says this, that having been in the place of need and having manifest the supernatural power of God in the house of God where it was supposed to be recognized, he went back to the place of victory. Carmel was where Elijah had had the great victory of the generation when he called down fire from heaven and destroyed the prophets of Baal.

And Samaria was the capital of the nation. It was the place of work. So he went back and got into a regular stream of things at that time.

Now, let's move on to another place that he went. As I said the other day, apparently Elijah and Elisha had these schools of prophets at various places. We know there were over 50 such men at Jericho, because the said 50 of the sons of the prophets watched Elijah and Elisha as they went out into the wilderness.

And there was a group like that, very likely, in Bethel, and another group like that in Gilgal, and another group like that in Samaria. And this is the way that he was able to teach these young people and bring them on for a ministry for the Lord. Now, turn to 2 Kings, chapter 4. Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha.

Let's stop right there so that we have ourselves oriented. This means that the wife of one of the students at the seminary. That's the way you'd put it in our modern language.

These are the young men that are gathered together to learn how to be the servants of God and to speak the word of God, and some of them are married. And we're reading about one of these wives. There cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant, my husband, is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord, and the creditor is come unto take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.

Are you there? Are you seeing this situation, this poor girl? This young woman with two small boys, her husband who was a student learning to minister the word of God, has been taken away. She's left a young widow with two small children, and she finds herself encumbered with debt as well as she might. A lot of students in the seminaries these days and in the Bible schools are encumbered with debt and are struggling to get along.

This was such a couple. And the man died, and the poor girl is left. What else can she do? She goes to the president of the school, and she pours out her heart and says, You know what happened? You know about my husband? He loved the Lord, and the Lord has taken him away, and I'm left, and I haven't got a thing, and the people that we owe the money to are coming, and they say they're going to take my two little boys and make slaves out of them in payment of the debt.

And your heart goes out to this girl, doesn't it? She had a problem. And so Elisha gets up, I suppose, in his office, and he walks back and forth, and he thinks about this situation. What do you do for a girl like this? He can't be paying everybody's bills, you know.

If he's like every other Bible school I know anything about, he doesn't have any money either. And what to do? So he says to the girl, What shall I do for thee? Tell me, what hast thou in the house? These are stealing around, you know, trying to find an idea somewhere. And so he asks this question, What do you have in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not anything in the house except a pot of oil, except a pot of oil.

That's a familiar ring, isn't it, to people who read the New Testament? Remember one day the Lord looked out on the congregation that he had on the side of the hill there, and he had compassion for them, and they were hungry. They'd been out with him for a long time. He said, Let's get them something to eat.

Now, what have we got? And Andrew said, We've got two loaves and five fishes. What is that among so many? What is that? You can't feed a crowd like this with that. This girl had that kind of an attitude too.

She said, I haven't got anything in the house save a pot of oil. And how often do we do this? How often do we do this? There comes an opportunity to do something for God, and the question comes to us, Well, what have you got? And we say, I don't have anything. We'd better get so-and-so to handle this situation.

We are always downplaying what we have. We are always taking the position that we can't do anything, not us. Yes, we do, and many of you do.

Many of you are not doing a great deal for the Lord because of this very attitude. Let somebody else do it that's got more pizzazz than I have, or got more strength than I have, or got more money than I have, or got more schooling than I have, or you name it. The Lord couldn't use me.

Don't you feel that way sometimes? And isn't that the reason sometimes you let things go undone that you might do? We all do this. And so this girl said, Thy handmaid hath not anything in the house save a pot of oil. Save a pot of oil.

Oil, a symbol in Scripture of the Holy Spirit. All you and I have got is the Holy Spirit. A man came into my office one time, and he said to me when I was working, he said to me, I wonder if it would be possible for you to let us have some old, scratched, moody films for you.

I said, what in the world would you want old, scratched, moody films for? Well, he said, you know, we're missionaries, and we're out in the mission field, and we don't have any money, and we think these films would be great, but we haven't got the money to buy new films, and if you would give us some nice old, scratched ones, we could use those. And I said, you know, I feel real sorry for you. And he sort of sat up and said, what do you mean? I said, all you've got is God Almighty.

You say you're out on faith, and so you want old, scratched films. What kind of faith is that, anyway? And his wife, she was in tears, and she got up and walked out of my office. But he sat there and cried.

He said, brother, that's our problem. We don't have the faith. Yes, that is our problem.

We don't have the faith. We haven't got anything. Just a pot of oil.

We here don't have anything. Only the spirit of the living God. That's all you've got.

I feel sorry for you. Then Elisha said, go and borrow the vessels abroad of all my neighbors. Even empty vessels.

Borrow not a few. And probably the first reaction this girl had was, borrow who, Jim? We've been borrowing all over the place. Nobody will give me anything anymore.

But you know, she didn't say that. She might have thought that. Elisha went on and said, and when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy son, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full.

Now listen to this. So she went from him and shut the door upon her and upon her son, who brought the vessels to her, and she poured out. I said the other day, in connection with one of his other miracles, that little obediences bring great issues, great results.

This girl went out. She didn't know what she was getting into. The president of the school said, go and borrow some empty vessels.

And that doesn't make a lot of sense when it comes to paying your bills. But make sense or not, she responded to what she was told by the man of God to do. And she sent her boys out and said, I want you to go to all the houses in the neighborhood now and borrow all the cans you can borrow, and all the bottles, and all the jugs.

And these boys went out and they began bringing jugs. Pretty soon the inside of the house looked like it was moving. And when they had all the vessels they could gather and put into the house, she shut the door upon herself and her two boys.

Now, this is a very private thing. This is what Elisha told her to do. When she gathered all the vessels, she should shut the door.

What was the gathering of the vessels for? It was to make room for blessings. And we have to make room for blessings. When God tells us to do something, we do it.

Whether it seems to make sense or not, the obedience is the way to make room for blessings. The empty vessels wouldn't pay her debts, but they would make room for the blessings. So when they were all gathered in the house and the little boys said, we can't get any more pops, Ma.

She said, all right, shut the door. And the miracle happened between her, the door was shut. None of the neighbors knew what was going on.

Nobody else knew anything that was going to happen. They were shut out. They loaned the pots, but they were shut out.

And what did happen? The vessels were all filled with oil. She took the little pot she had and she began pouring this oil out into these other containers all over the room and piling them on top of each other. It was great.

More and more oil until she had all the vessels full of oil. 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. The blessing stopped in proportion to the room that she had made for the blessing. Then she came and told the man of God.

Now, isn't that an interesting thing? Can you imagine this woman at this stage of the game? You know, here now, she said to him before, I don't have anything in the house save a little pot of oil. Now she's going to tell him she's got oil all over the place. And he said, go sell the oil and pay thy debt and live thou and thy children of the rest.

I love this answer. Her need was met. Pay your debt.

That was the first thing to do. Then God had provided for her to meet this need of paying her debt so she was going to keep her boys. Now, that was the big thing.

But that's not all. God didn't leave her a pauper with two boys to support. No, the man of God said, live thou of the rest.

And this means really live, you know. You've got all you need now. Live it up.

Enjoy this. Enter into what God has done for you. And as we close this evening, I want to remind you that I think the lesson of this little episode is that we must make room for blessing in our hearts from God.

And he is ready to pour out his Spirit into our hearts and fill them up exactly in proportion to the room we make for him. And when he does, we won't have anything else to worry about. Our lives will overflow with richness and wholeness and fulfillment and gladness and all the fruits of the Spirit.

That's the kind of God we've got. And that's why he keeps this story in the Old Testament for you and me to read. He's still that kind of God.

And he says to you and to me tonight, through this little episode in the life of Elisha, this little episode in the life of this student's wife, that he loves to bless. And he's ready to bless. And he will bless, if we let him, and in proportion as we make room for him to bless us.

Does your wife need blessing tonight? Do you have a need tonight? Is there a vacancy or an empty place in your life tonight? There is a God in heaven that knows about it. And that if you will come to his word, as this girl did, and respond with obedience to what he says to you, the blessing will be poured out more than you can contain. God grant.

Oh, we thank thee, our Heavenly Father, for all we learn of the kind of God thou art from these episodes in the Old Testament. And we thank thee that thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever. Thou dost not change.

It is thy will to bless. Oh, give us the disposition to call down the blessing from thyself, to make room for the blessing in our lives, and to rejoice and live as a consequence of thy blessing. Help us to enter into all that thou hast done for us, not to hoard the oil away, but to live as we pray in Jesus' name.

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