

# Skyland Conference 1979-04 Elisha

by Robert Constable

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*The sermon explores the faith and hospitality of the Shunammite woman and the miraculous blessings she received from God through Elisha.*

**Duration:** 40:40

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 4:8-10, 2 Kings 4:25-26, 2 Kings 4:37, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Elisha"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of Elisha and the great woman from 2 Kings chapter four. The preacher emphasizes the importance of listening to the word of God and following the example of the master. The story highlights the miraculous power of God as Elisha brings a dead child back to life. The preacher also emphasizes the lesson of letting go and trusting God with our impossible situations.

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## Transcript

One day, some years ago, I was driving from the city of New York to Chicago. It was on a Sunday. One of the men that was in the assembly in Chicago had gone to New York with me, and we were driving back that day, and we left at the same moment in the morning that the general left, that is, the Pennsylvania train left the Pennsylvania station in New York.

And we drove right straight through to Chicago, and we arrived at my house 17 hours after we left New York, and that's when the general was pulling into the station downtown in Chicago, so we made as good time as the train made anyway. But the significant thing about that trip was that from the time we left New York, we had the radio going in the car, and we had an evangelical Christian broadcast on that radio from the time we left New York till we got home. And we said to each other, where on earth except in the United States could a thing like that happen? Hearing the gospel halfway across the nation, every moment on that trip we had somebody preaching the gospel.

So thank God for a country like this one, where it is so free. Turn with me this morning to 2 Kings 4, and we'll go on from where we stopped last evening. 2 Kings 4, and we'll begin this morning at verse 8. And it fell on a day that Elisha passed to Shunem, where there was a great woman.

Remember, this is an inspired word of God. Shunem is a city, a little village, that's halfway between Haifa on the coast and Samaria, which is the capital of Israel. And it says that there was in this city a great woman.

Now, the Lord said this about this woman. She was a great woman. I wonder what he'd say about her.

You know, if the Lord was giving a record of something in our lives, how would the Lord describe us? This must have been a really remarkable woman, that when the Lord made reference to her, he said she was a great woman. I wonder how she was great, and in what ways she was great. This is God's estimate of this woman.

And it gives us the reason, too, why the Lord takes the time in his word to tell us about this woman, to give us the story of this experience in her life. She was a great woman. I don't know whether she was a rich woman.

She was apparently a woman of some means. She was certainly a woman given to hospitality, and that's something that the Lord greatly appreciates. That's why in the New Testament, we are told to be given to hospitality.

The Lord likes this in people. It's one of the things that make them great in his eyes. She was great in her relationship to her husband, which is another thing that the Lord appreciates.

Well, let's go on. There was a great woman, and she constrained him to eat bread. Now, this means that when Elisha would come by this village on his way from Samaria to Haifa or wherever, and he would go through this town, he would stop and have a time with the believers there, and this woman got to know him, and she invited him home for dinner.

This is a great thing. Have you ever noticed that in nearly every assembly there are one or two families that invite the preachers home, and the other families miss the blessing? Think about this. It is a great privilege to be able to bring the servants of God into your home, and great blessing will issue from this if you are given to this kind of hospitality.

And it's one of the practical things I think we can learn from this little episode in the life of Elisha. And so it was that as often as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. He formed the habit of stopping at this home and having his meals there.

And she said to her husband, Behold, now I perceive that this is a holy man of God which passes us by continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall, and let us set for him there a bed and a table and a stool and a candlestick, and it shall be when he cometh to us that he shall turn in thither. And here's where the prophet's chamber got started.

She wanted to make a place for this man. She saw the influence that he had. She enjoyed the things he had to say.

And so she made a place for him to turn in. And it fell on a day that he came thither and he turned into the chamber and he lay there and he said to Gehazi, his servant, Call the Shunammite. When he had called her, she stood before him and he said unto him, Say now to her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care.

What is to be done for thee? Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among thine own people. You know, Elisha was not an unappreciated guest. He appreciated what this woman did.

She made this provision for him. She took this good care of him. And as he thought about this and talked to his servant about it, he was impressed with this.

And he said, Rose, we ought to appreciate a woman like this. Now what could you suppose we could do for her? Let's ask her. And so they asked her and she answered in effect, I don't need a thing.

I'm perfectly happy here in my own situation, among my own people. You don't need to speak to the king about me. Now, Elisha could have spoken to the king about her and brought great privilege to her in the nation.

He could have spoken to the captain of the host. Elisha had an open door to these people. He had contact in Israel.

And he could have done her great good in a political way, perhaps. Now, she wasn't interested in that. She was just doing this out of the fullness of her heart, not for anything that she could get out of it.

And he said, what then is to be done for her? He said to Gehazi, his servant. And Gehazi said, verily she hath no child and her husband is old. Just the right thing.

Every woman in Israel wants that. The Israelitish people have a very great sense of history. Among the Gentile nations, it's generally considered that history goes in big cycles and circles.

And you've heard before, but it's just... The Jews never had a concept of history like that. The Jews have always had a concept that history went in a straight line because it was going someplace. That God had a purpose in mankind.

And he was taking men somewhere. And so, according to the Hebrew concept of history, it moved in a straight line. And every Hebrew mother appreciated the possibility that her children would count in this march forward in the purpose of God through the ages.

A great sense of history. And when a Hebrew woman did not have children, she was greatly disappointed. And so, Gehazi made a very good suggestion here.

He said to Elisha, she hasn't got any children. The greatest aspiration of her heart has never... And Elisha said, great, that's a good idea. Call her in.

And so, Gehazi called her back. And it says, and when he called her, she stood in the door. She came when she was called, and she stood in the door of the guest room and waited for what Elisha had to say to her.

And he said, about this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. You know, it couldn't say anything to a Hebrew woman of more significance. But this woman was really and truly a humble woman that did not aspire for things for herself.

And she said, no, my lord, thou man of God, putting it this way sounds pretty... You know what happened, don't you? She was standing there in the door the next year, and she said to him, in effect, bless your heart. I know you mean well, but you know that's not for me. So don't try to kid me.

And the woman conceived and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life. So she had her son. I'm glad that Elisha didn't take things for granted, what this woman did for

her.

He told her what was going to happen. She couldn't take it in. And very often this is the way it is with us.

We may not particularly think very much of what we're doing for the Lord in the ordinary course of events. I'm sure this is the case with these dear people, these women who invite the Lord's servants to come out themselves out this way. They don't think much of their heart.

But the Lord appreciates this. And the Lord is going to reward this kind of thing. He does reward it, and He rewards it in ways that are way out and beyond them to do.

I'm glad we've got a Lord like that, that expresses His appreciation for what we do for Him in terms beyond our thinking. And it is a shame when given a story like this, that we go on with our strange inability to realize how ready God is to bless us. As though we have to wring a blessing out of a reluctant God.

We do not. He is going to return to us far and above anything we ever could do for Him. And He loves to do this.

And He did it in this instance. So she had her son, and you can believe there was great rejoicing in that home, and a great appreciation on the part of this woman. We'll go on.

And when the child was grown, it fell on a day that he went up to his father, to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother.

And when he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till night. And doesn't a big question come into your mind? Wouldn't she have had the child and then lifted it, dropped right down and moved the little boy? She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God and shut the door upon him. And she called unto her husband and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men and one of the... She said, It is well.

It shall be well. Then she saddled an ass and said to her servant, Drive and go forward. Slack not thy riding for me except I bid thee.

So she went and came unto the man of God to Mount Carmel. And it came to pass when the man of God saw her afar off that he said to Gehazi, his servant, Run now, I pray thee, to meet her and say unto her, Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? And she answered, It is well. And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet.

But Gehazi came near to thrust her away and the man of God said, Let her alone, for her soul is vexed within her and the Lord hath hid it from me and hath not told me. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my Lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me? You see, that's the question she had. What an anti-climax.

Why has God given me this boy at all if he's going to take him away from me like this while he's still a child? This is a great puzzle to her. And she comes to the place where she can get the answer. You notice, she didn't have anything to say to Gehazi.

Gehazi rode up to meet her and he asked her the questions that Elisha suggested that he ask her. But she didn't bother to talk to Gehazi at all. She just said, It's all right, it's all right.

And kept going until she got to Elisha. And when she got to Elisha where she knew she'd get the answers from the Lord, then she poured out her problems. She came to the word of God for her answers.

And there she knew she would find the answers. Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins and take my staff in thine hand and go thy way. If thou meet any man, salute him not.

And if any man salute thee, answer him not again. Lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.

And Elisha arose and followed her. Now here's another reason this woman's a great woman. She has come to headquarters.

She's come to Elisha. She's not going to bother herself answering the questions of his servant. She's going straight to headquarters and she gets to Elisha.

She pours out her heart and her questions to Elisha. And then Elisha says, to Gehazi, Go put my staff on his face. And she says, I'm not leaving you.

I'm going to suggest this to you. And I'm all for all the reverence that we can give to the servant. But sometimes, you know, we come to the servants of God and we ask and then we hang on the answers of Gehazi.

And when we give answers from ourselves, we do what we can in counseling and in helping the people. And I don't want to disagree. This woman went to headquarters and stayed there.

She said, I won't leave you. I'm depending upon the word of God. And as a consequence, Elisha arose and followed her.

And Gehazi passed on before them and laid the staff upon the face of the child. But there was neither voice nor hearing. Wherefore, he went again to meet him and told him, saying, The child is not awake.

You see, in this instance, the servant did not. The servant went and did what he was bidden to do. But nothing happened.

And all he could do is come back and report that nothing happened. All of us who are the servants of God have had this experience where we have thought out of ourselves all the people of God and have wanted to help them. And again, the idea that it is the word of God we must go to and not just to God.

Anyway, nothing happened in this case. The child is not awake. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead and laid upon his bed.

He went in, therefore, and shut the door upon them twain. He went in and he shut the door and the only people were left. Do you suppose that if you were the mother, you would have stayed out? Elisha comes into the house.

He goes into the room and he shuts the door and he says in a... He needed to quiet. He needed to be alone with God. And so this is the first thing he did.

And he went up and he lay upon the child and put his mouth upon his mouth and his eyes upon his eyes and his hands upon his hands and he stretched himself upon the child and the flesh of the child waxed

warm. Well, you remember he had been Elisha's servant. And there had been a situation like this long ago when he was with Elisha.

When Elisha was living in the home of the widow of Zarephath and her son died and this is exactly what Elisha had done. And I have no question whatever in my mind that Elisha had told Elisha all about this experience that he had and what he had done in the case of the young man there. And this came back into the mind of Elisha at this time in Shunem.

And he thought now Elisha said that that is what he did and I am going to do what he did. I think we made the point the other day that it was very valuable for the servant to follow the master and to do as the master did. And Elisha was good at this.

He did just as Elisha did at the Jordan. He did just as Elisha did at Shunem. And that is what we are called upon to do just as our master.

And if we wonder what course what to follow, the course he followed. And be followers of him and do things the way he did them. And this impresses upon me and I hope it impresses upon you the importance of our knowing how the Lord Jesus reacted to the situations into which he entered.

Because he wants us to react the same way. And how are we going to be like the Lord Jesus if we don't know how the Lord Jesus acted? Or how he responded? Or if we haven't thought deeply about why the Lord Jesus did what he did when he did it? Underlines for us, I believe, the importance of listening to the word of God as it tells us the way the master went and what he did. So he did exactly what Elijah did.

Then he returned, Elisha, and walked in the house to and fro. And went up and stretched himself upon him and the child sneezed seven times. And the child opened his eyes at that moment.

It's interesting what it says about this child. The child became worn at the beginning. Life began to flow back into this lifeless body.

And then he sneezed seven times. Do you know what he did when he sneezed seven times? He cleared his head. Nothing will clear your head like a good sneeze.

And this is one of the things that when we come back to, come to life in Christ, you know, we need to have our heads clear. And then he opened his eyes and that gave him vision. And so this great miracle is accomplished.

And he called Gehazi and said, Call Eshunamite. So he called her. And when she would come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son.

And she went in and fell at his feet and bowed herself to the ground and took up her son and went up. Boy, I tell you, you ought to spend an hour on this verse. Just allowing yourself to soak it up.

And allow yourself to get into the room there and feel the feelings of the people in that room and sense how this woman was responding to what had been done for her. She knew her son. She knew her son lived.

And oh, what joy! Thrilled the heart and the soul of this woman as God repaid her again for what she was. What did he repay her for in this instance? He paid her for her faith. Now, this woman believed that God had given her this child for a reason.

Not just to have a little boy in the house for a few years and then lose him. She couldn't accept this. She believed God had given her this son for a purpose.

And she really believed that. And that drove her to the word of God to find out what this purpose was and to solve this puzzle. And so her faith was bold.

She didn't hesitate to ask right out to Elisha, What's going on here? I didn't ask for a son. This wasn't my idea. I wish we could learn to talk that way to the Lord, you know, to really open up our hearts and say exactly what we think.

We have been taught to revere the Lord and to respect Him. This inhibits us in our prayers. And the Lord knows how we really feel.

I remember one day, Moody Bible Institute, from home, and he said to me, I wish the Lord had quit me. And he said, What do you mean? Tell Him to quit bugging you. Because He knows what you're thinking.

You might as well come right out into the open and say it, you know. So, this week, you say to the Lord, Quit bugging me! Get out of my way! And the next Sunday, I was driving him back again. I said, How'd you get along? He said, What do you mean? I said, Last Sunday, when we were driving down here, you said that you wished the Lord had quit bugging you.

Did you tell Him so, as I suggested? And he turned in the seat of the car and he looked right at me. And you know, when it came really to saying it, well, then he found out that isn't really what... And sometimes this is the effect. We'll just level with the Lord.

He'll let us know that's not what we want at all. And that's why it's a great exercise to level with the Lord. To tell Him.

Ask Him, What's going on here? Tell Him, I don't like this. Get an answer from Him. This is the kind of communion He wants to have with us and He wants us to have with Him.

He isn't particularly, you know, impressed by our phraseology and by our being careful what we say and how we say it. But He is mightily impressed and it comes right out into the open. So she said it and she got her answer.

And she believed the answer would be right from the beginning. She said to her husband, before she ever saw Elisha, It will be all right. When she saw Gehazi, she said, It's all right.

It's well. She wasn't worried about the Lord. All she needed to do was get to His Word.

And she drove hard and fast and got there and hung in there over the discouragement of the whale. She knew the joy of answered prayer. Great lesson here.

She wasn't satisfied with a second. She wasn't satisfied to have Gehazi come to the house. What if she had gone off when Elisha said, Well, thank you very much.

And she had started home. And then she got home. And this is a great story.

She didn't get from somebody else. She went directly to headquarters and she stayed in there until she had the answer. And then when she got back to the house, she left it with Elisha.

Go into the room and shut her out. It was the Lord's business. Now it was turned over to Him.

It was His responsibility. And she left it there. This is a great lesson to learn.

Letting go and letting God. Instead of that, when we pray, we usually want to be standing around and doing something, you know. Busy, busy, busy.

Lord, You take care of it. I think there's something to be said in this story about how would you react by opportunities that God put in His way. And He didn't know what to do.

And He walked up and down in the room, it says. And He didn't know what to do. But His dependence was on the Lord.

And now what was He going to have to do? He was going to have to identify with a dead body. Oh, this is gorgeous. But He had to identify with this body.

Put His mouth, put His hands on the hands of the boys. Identify with Him as totally as He could identify with Him. If He was going to... How about our identification? There are several people in the New Testament about whom we read.

You know, I wouldn't think of doing this. We read about two of them in the story of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the leader. And we are very much this way.

We hold off. And I find this in my own heart. And I get upset about it sometimes.

We see people in the world that are dead in trespasses and sin. And sometimes they're vile. And sometimes the sin is repelling and repugnant to us.

And, you know, we find it hard to identify with these people. But if we're going to reach them and bring them life from God, we've got to identify with people. We've got to meet them where they are.

We've got to share with them and put our experience up alongside of theirs. Story after story in the Word of God tells us the importance there is in our identification with those that we are to bless. We must make their case our case, as Elisha made this boy's case his case.

Paul did this. He said, I could wish myself a curse from Christ in order that I might win my brethren. It says here that Elisha walked to and fro in the room.

It was a time of great excitement in Elisha's own mind and heart. He realized God was about to do something through him he had never done before. He stayed in there and he identified.

He didn't have any problem. It's not said if you do like Elisha did, you'll get Elisha's result. In fact, Elisha very clearly says the Lord hid these things from him.

He didn't tell him about this. He had to go into it cold. And so, he didn't know what to do.

All he could do was depend upon the character of God who does not change nor act as being sickle. He said, God is God. And what this woman says is true.

He didn't give her this son in order to take him away from her. God has got a purpose in all of this. And this purpose is being frustrated.

And I'm going to trust God to bring this through to his own purpose and his own glory. And so, he stayed with it in spite of the fact he had an absolutely impossible situation. I'm saying to you and me this morning, I believe there are many situations in our lives that are practically impossible, that it is very difficult to know.

We have great questions about it. We are encouraged by this episode to come to the word of God, to let it speak to our hearts, to let it operate in our lives, and to let God do what he would do, and take our hands off and see him do great and mighty things. Thank you, Lord, for this reminder again in the circumstances of our lives.

And lead us, oh, lead us through our...

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