**Don’t Ask for Just a Few**

**(Make Something out of Nothing)**

2 Kings 4:1-7,

Key Verse 4:3

Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few.”

 What do you believe and rely on? Let us practice some examples by filling a space here. When we have faith in the world, we will get what the world is capable of. When we have faith in America, we get what she is capable of. When we have faith in Money, we get what money can buy. When we have faith in ourselves, we basically get what we are able to do and NO more. But when we have faith in God, we get what He is capable of. There is nothing He can not do, I repeat NOTHING. HE is able to do what? Everything! He makes something out of nothing. Today Elisha helped a widow to have faith in God. “Don’t ask for just a few!” Do not limit God, His power, love and blessing! May God help us to grow in our faith so that we may obey and trust HIM always. Today I have 3 parts. Part 1, Your servant my husband is dead (v1) Part 2, Elisha’s help and instructions (v2-4) Part 3, Obedience and miracle (v5-7)

Part 1, Your servant my husband is dead. (1)

 In this part, we can think about her situation & the meaning of her suffering. Look at v1. “The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.” The story begins with a sorrowful widow. The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha. “Your servant, my husband is dead.” It indicates that he was involved in the ministry of Elisha. “You know that he revered the Lord.” Elisha must have known him in person. Tradition tells us that his name could be Obadiah. If that’s true, then we know that during the time of Ahab & Jezebel who were trying to kill the prophets, Obadiah, fearing God, hid 100 prophets in 2 caves and personally provided them with food & water. He might have gone extra miles by borrowing the money to help them. If indeed this was his wife, then she had so little because he gave so much, poured out his life, to meet the needs of others. In that culture women didn’t work outside the home. The legal system in Israel would not allow her to declare bankruptcy. She had to give her sons to her creditor as payment. What a cruel situation for her! Here let us put ourselves in her position. How must she have felt about her husband, Elisha, and the Lord? She might have loved her husband & revered him. But she might have felt bitter towards him, for he failed to fulfill his financial responsibility. Elisha could have paid her husband, but he did not do that. It seemed that Elisha was doing nothing but studying the Bible. She could have said, “Enough is enough.” She might have had complaints towards God. She might have suffered from an entitlement mentality, “you owe me” towards God & others who were beneficiaries of the sacrificial services her husband had made. But she was not victimized in such a way that she became more miserable. Rather she cried out to God for a while, now Elisha, the man of God who represented God. Money wise both of them were poor, but Elisha was super-rich in God’s eyes. When she was running out of everything, out of a husband, out of money, she turned to him and shared her agony. When we are deeply troubled, remember that we are not alone. We have Elisha-like servants who are willingly to help. We can humbly ask for their prayers & spiritual advice. God uses ordinary people to care for His people! Also during the time of crisis, nothing is more important than remembering God’s faithfulness. She must have believed all God’s promised words to be true. She chose to trust in the Lord and to exercise her personal faith! She must have believed that God will never fail to give her what is best. She believed that living by faith was never wasted! The Lord God loved her and found her worthy of receiving “faith” training so that she would grow as a woman of real faith. Truly, God is the one who creates something meaningful & valuable out of nothing. She must have believed that her 2 sons would be protected and grow as men of faith. What else can be a better blessing than this? Each time we have hardship, we better think about the Lord’s special love for us. What difficulty have you run into lately? God loves us so much that he has given us some difficulty as an opportunity to become a man & a woman of faith. Everything is for us as we keep our faith! In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose.

Part 2, Elisha’s help and instructions (2-4)

 In this 2nd part, Elisha helped her to stand on her own feet. Look at v2a. “Elisha replied to her, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?” Elisha was available to a poor widow as he was available to 3 kings. God shows no favoritism. He treats all men alike if they come to Him in faith. Elisha said to her “How can I help you?” He meant, “What do you want God to do for you through me? He further asked her, “Tell me. What do you have in your house?” Did Elisha give her money? No. Instead, she was asked to think about what she had in her house. Similarly, Jesus says in Mk6:37-38, “You give them something to eat. ”They said to him, “That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?” “How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.” When they found out, they said, “Five- & two fish.”” We need to go, see, & investigate what we have. Then we surrender them to God by trusting Him who would bless. It is our duty and responsibility to bring whatever we might have to Him by faith.

 Look at v 2b. “Your servant has nothing there at all,” she said, “except a small jar of olive oil.” She said, “Your servant has nothing there at all.” But she must have sensed where Elisha was coming from through his next one, “Tell me, What do you have in your house?” Then she began to remember what she had instead of what she did not have. With obedience, she paid more attention to anything available at home. Then she just remembered “a small jar of olive oil.” It was a flask oil for anointing that her husband left behind. Then she corrected herself by saying, “except for a small jar of olive oil.” The word “except’ is so subtle that it is as insignificant as nothing. But is it really nothing? No. It is really something in God’s eyes. Elisha saw an ocean of oil out of the “little” oil she had. Faith sees what the carnal eyes cannot see. It is called a paradigm shift or perspective change! To Elisha, the man of God, this “little oil” would soon become the capital to generate lots of oil. So he helped her not to overlook it, rather appreciate its value. Nothing is more important than appreciating what the Lord blesses us with already rather than being fatalistic, giving up or complaining about what we do not have! She could see & count God’s blessings like her life, health, personal faith, the ability to cry out, her 2 healthy boys & God’s promises and so on. Now she found oil. When we become thankful, the Lord God starts working for us and blesses us with a seemingly limited resource like oil. Here I have a Q for you. What could be ‘a little oil’ in us all? We have ‘something’ in common without exception! Can you try? It is the “Holy Spirit”. In OT, the HS was selectively given to a handful of people like prophets for special ministry. But now He is always available for all of us to pay attention to his presence and rely on him. We are prone to forget that he is within us. The Spirit always helps us in our weakness, even when we do not know how to pray. Jesus says in Jn 14:26, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” His presence may seem small compared to our big problem, but we must rely on Him who will remind us of everything Jesus had said through many Bible studies, especially in troubled times! That’s why we call HIM the spirit of TRUTH. Then the word of truth enlightens & guides us. Have you been? When we do it again & again, we surely see what’s going on in the spiritual realm. Importantly we’re being led out of all kinds of dark, neg. ideas, Satan’s lies & resume thankful hearts. So ‘tough’ time is a blessing in disguise and the high time for us to grow, rely on the Holy Spirit and struggle with God’s word until one word may be alive within us. What a great blessing it is for us to grow in His living word & become Bible teachers.

 Look at v3-4. “Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. 4 Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.” Let us think of Elisha’s words. He first made this woman commit herself to God’s provision by going around, taking actions instead of just waiting. To borrow jars from all her neighbors for empty jars requires many visits. She had to explain again & again why she needed the empty jars. Elisha further asked her, “Don’t ask for just a few.” She must ask for as many jars as possible. In this way, he asked her not to limit God! She needed food. Why empty jars? She might have thought that it did not make sense. To follow His instructions she needed to empty her own ideas, and believe each of his words as God’s word. It requires her personal faith, trust and obedience.

 Also here let’s think about how much she had to depend on the hospitality of her neighbours. Quite heavily actually! She had to ask ALL her neighbors for empty jars. Her local community’s involvement was so crucial that it was a key factor to make it happen too. Our culture is very good at creating self-made men and women. But we are now God’s children, belonging to His kingdom. That Kingdom is only realized through the loving community. So we can focus on not only what I can do but also what we can do together! No doubt the neighbors of the widow's community were glad to help her. Her sons must have kept bringing her jars. During the Covid 19 lockdown, one family among us had a newborn baby. They were happy but very limited. Many coworkers among us expressed their love for them by bringing food & helping them out. Praise God who blesses us with a believing community of love. We have overflowing joy in Jesus who fills all our needs for the church.

 What is next? “Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons.” Here the closed door means the principle of privacy. Without any distractions she & her sons could focus on God & set their hearts upon Him fully. To be alone with God is one of the vital things of any believer at any time. In the days of trouble, we are easily distracted with all the unbelieving words and noise. Psa 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God” Are you getting alone with God daily? It is critical to have personal Bible reading, prayer, reflection, and meditation. One of the reasons we often do not see God working is because we first fail to do so. Even Elisha’s absence helped her to rely on God only. Then “pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.” God’s instructions through Elisha were step by step command. Each step should not skip it. Humble obedience & trust are required to see God’s intervention who makes something out of nothing.

Part 3, Obedience and miracle (5-7)

 In this last part, God richly blessed their obedience. What did the widow and her sons do? Look at v 5-6a. “She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. 6 When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.” Although the author did not describe how she borrowed empty jars from all her neighbors, she must have obeyed as Elisha had said. She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “bring me another one.” We notice that Elisha made her do this from A to Z by herself. At least he might have been tempted to gather the jars and pour the oil by himself. But he knew that she HERSELF had to trust God. Her own faith including her son’s obedience was required. In this way she trusts God and does focus on doing what she could do and leave the rest in God’s hands. Look at v 6b. “But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing.” What can we learn from the fact that the oil stopped flowing when there was no jar left? The miracle was given according to the measure of her faith in borrowing jars. Had she borrowed more, more would have been given. That’s why Elisha told her to not ask for just a few from the beginning. The size of her blessing was directly related to how obedient she had been in getting the jars. Obedience leads to blessings. As long as the boys kept bringing, God kept blessing. Jesus says in Mt 9:29, “According to your faith will it be done to you.” The oil did not pour out on the ground. It was intended for a prepared empty jar. Each jar had to be gathered & assembled in the right position. God’s powerful provision always invites our hard work.

 Look at v 7. “She went and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.” She went and told Elisha about what happened. Then he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, you and your sons can live on what is left.” What can we learn from this final instruction? God provided her with abundant oil to pay debt & to prepare the future. God wants us to work hard on what he is going to bless us with. She can use the leftovers as capital to make a living. This miracle might have been well spread to Israel. But the greatest work must be in the hearts of her 2 sons. They must have received a valuable experience that can never be taken away from them. Who knows? They might become prophets like..

Let's read the key verse again! Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few.” Let us practice this again! When we have faith in America, we get what she is capable of. When we have faith in Money, we get what money can buy. When we have faith in ourselves, we basically get what we are able to do and NO more. When we have faith in God, we will surely get what the Almighty God is capable of. There is nothing he can not do, I repeat, NOTHING. HE is Capable Of? Everything! We have to empty ourselves & erase our wrong objects of faith. We are God’s children and co-heirs with Jesus Christ. God is happy to be with us through the Spirit and answer our prayers & provide us ALL. God even called us friends. We are blessed with believing brothers & sisters in our loving community. We are “rich” in God’s family of love. So we are not victimized by troubles, rather we can set them aside. We are eager to serve others. Then little oil like the Spirit of Truth in us will work. We will be filled with joy. The pouring comes from the spirit within us, not from outside.Then our life problem becomes much smaller and His limitless power of the Spirit and truth will guide us & empower us to live a bold life of resurrection faith. When we have this personal experience, we will never be the same again.

 I personally learned through the passage that I can also live without limit in my GOD. Don’t ask for just a few! While we are here on earth until we breathe our last, we will never run out of opportunities to pour out into the lives of others. Elisha used to pour out water on Elijah’s hands. I believe that he found the meaning and purpose of his life through pouring out his life to others in God who is without limit. In fact, pouring out to others is the reason we are here on earth in the 1st place. My father used to ask me to have titles and positions in this limited world. But I found thro Bible that my life purpose in God is to become a drink offering like Jesus. OUR JOB IS TO POUR OUT FOR OTHERS THE LOVE THAT HAS TRANSFORMED OUR OWN LIVES TOO. It is win win! Our Almighty God who is capable of everything will do it & never disappoint us like the widow and her husband who trusted & obeyed Him to the end. Our church will be a paradise with people who are willing to pour out life, for God will fill everything for us. May God help us to live a life of great richness in God. **One Word: Don’t ask for just a few**