

Elisha's Ministry
Miracle Worker
2 Kings 4:1-6:7

Miracle worker . . . What comes to mind when you hear that phrase? Does anyone recall the story of Helen Keller? She was the deaf, mute, blind girl that was unteachable because of her stubborn and unruly behavior until she encountered Anne Sullivan, her miracle worker, who would engage her pupil in such a way that she would learn and change the course of her life. Anne Sullivan was able to perform the miracle because she decided to enter Helen's world . . . to engage with her pupil instead of the other way around. Her actions were aligned with what she said and believed as noted in this excerpt of her valedictory speech:

"...duty bids us go forth into active life. Let us go cheerfully, hopefully, and earnestly, and set ourselves to find our especial part. When we have found it, willingly and faithfully perform it; for every obstacle we overcome, every success we achieve tends to bring man closer to God and make life more as He would have it."

What is a miracle worker? My definition of a miracle worker is someone who sets in motion something for the benefit of another. Webster defines it as "an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs." To the recipient it may seem to be physically impossible or impossible to confirm by nature.

Have any of you ever had an encounter that seemed miraculous or met a real life miracle worker?

In this week's reading of 2 Kings 4:1- 6:7, we reviewed the Old Testament miracle worker Elisha, who succeeded Elijah in ministry. After inheriting the double portion of Elijah's spirit he'd asked for, he came to be known as the greatest healer and miracle worker of his time working in the Northern Kingdom during the reign of the evil kings Joram, Jehu, Johahaz, and Jehoash. This was a time of great apostasy, where the people of Israel had turned away from God and what it meant to be in covenant faithfulness with and to God. The people had abandoned God; yet, in today's reading we see God had not abandoned them as He continued to show His grace and mercy through the several miracles of our lesson.

Although Elisha appears to be the main character in the stories of his miraculous works, the stories actually emphasize the heart of God; that the God of Israel is in all facets of life, wanting to be involved in the details of our everyday life. He is a God who cares about us, personally and individually, and will use miracles, or those beneficial events that may be physically impossible or impossible to confirm by nature, to show us the depth of His love in wanting to transform the trajectory of our lives into that which He knows benefits us and brings Him glory.

For nearly 60 years Elisha was involved with individuals in all sectors of society; on the national, political, religious, communal and personal levels, but having greatest interest in the personal needs and details of the people in the communities he served. He is remembered in the Bible as a man of wisdom as well as a worker of miracles on behalf of his nation in times of crisis and in the lives of individuals in times of need. His ministry reveals God's love for the abandoned and marginalized as well as God's control of all political, economic and social affairs in the desire to make Himself known to all peoples. It reflects how God always seeks to bring salvation and blessing regardless of social status or nationality, and will do so to those who will respond.

We see the most profound expression of the tenderness of God's heart in the miracles done on a personal level. We see the greatest trajectories of lives taking place in the common people. But these examples of bringing God up close and personal cannot take place without a willing vessel to be the hands, feet, ears, eyes and voice of God. Without Elisha "stepping up and stepping in" when it mattered, the faithful of Israel could have lost hope in the fact that God had not abandoned them even though they were living in a era of national moral decay.

Elisha was connected to God through prayer, meditation and reflection; asking, listening and contemplating the direction and instructions God would have him take. As a person of integrity, whose

message and walk was consistent and whose actions were aligned with what he said and believed, he was a miracle worker that was present . . . in the moment, listening, asking the right questions, and responding without delay. Because of this, Elisha knew what to do, when to do it, and how to do it.

We've already learned about Elisha's miracles on a national - political level, and in this week's reading of chapters 4:1-6:7, we see how God shows up on a personal level in an equally powerful way. Let's begin with . . .

*** The Widow and the Oil (2 Kings 4:1-7)**

Chapter 4 begins with Elisha ministering to the widow of a prophet who was left with a debt, and with the risk of losing her two sons to slavery. Servitude for debt, as spoken about in Exodus 21:2-4 and Deuteronomy 15:12-18, was a custom of the day. The death of her husband had left the widow vulnerable, and losing her sons would surely leave her destitute. Her need was great, and her need for rescue, greater. She cried out to the father of the prophets for help, and did so in faith and reliance upon God's promise that neither she nor her sons would be forsaken. ~Proverbs 10:3 "The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but He denies the craving of the wicked." And in Psalm 37:28 "For the Lord loves justice and will not forsake His saints. They are preserved forever..." It's comforting to know that we can expect help from God because we are His children.

Elisha asked the widow, “What shall I do for you? What do you have in your house?” Her need was apparent to him, as was his natural inability to meet it. As he waited for her answer, he waited on God’s direction to speak the instructions that would benefit her most.

Her response in verse 2, “Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a small jar of oil,” reflects her belief that what she had was not enough. Too often we have the same tendency to identify what we have as insufficient, as being “not good enough” for God to use, and this leads us to become discouraged and even feel useless. We have to remember that God takes what we have and accomplishes great things according to His purpose; He is able to multiply what we have, our talents, gifts, finances, and physical abilities if we surrender it to Him in faith.

God wanted to meet her needs by employing her active faith, and her response to Elisha’s instruction to “go and borrow many vessels - empty vessels from all your neighbors, not just a few,” depicts her faith, obedience, and submission to God and His promise to meet her needs. The act of going to her neighbors and asking for empty vessels was probably a humbling act; she now needed to reach out to others, and show the extent of her vulnerabilities. But God would take this act of humility and bless her publicly; her neighbors would know clearly that God is a God of provision.

She obediently shut the door behind her and her sons as Elisha had instructed her to do. This was a private matter, and often times it's the spectators around our situation that will attempt to discourage us.

There are times in our life when we “really need a breakthrough” and we will need to “shut the door” to get alone with God, shut off the noise of discouragement and distractions brought by others, and watch God manifest the miracles we really need. We cannot let the people on the outside stop our experiencing of His flow, His Spirit, and His anointing in our lives. That is why we are to do as it says in Matthew 6:6, “ But when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. “

So the oil continued to flow as long as there was an empty vessel. Not being told how many vessels to gather left it up to her to determine the size of the blessing she would receive; it's all about faith. How mighty is the God of your faith? God pours blessings into empty vessels. He wants us to trust Him . . . that He will not skimp on His ability to supernaturally and abundantly meet our needs. Our faith, or lack thereof, is what limits our abundance. God wants us to give Him what we have; our hopes, desires, dreams, needs; everything. Through her faith, God through Elisha ministered to her and her sons, proving the compassion and provision of God is for both the exalted and the lowly. Her distress was relieved in a practical way that positioned her to pay

her debt and support herself and her sons. Next we have Elisha's encounter with . . .

*** The Shunammite Woman (2 Kings 4:8-37)**

In verses 8 through 17, we learn about the Shunammite woman, who was a woman of social prominence and great wealth and who, upon noticing the frequency in which the prophet of God was coming to her town, took it upon herself to invite him to dine at her house as often as he passed by and, with the permission of her husband, created for the prophet a lodging space where he could find rest, study, read, write and contemplate, as prophets often did. In great gratitude for her care and concern of him, Elisha considered how he might bless her.

In verse 13, he offered to use his interest for her in the king's court, but she declined the offer stating, "I dwell among my own people." She was content and confident. She did not and would not need preferential treatment.

Through his assistant Gehazi he learned "...she has no son and her husband is old." Elisha understood her barrenness and the possibility she would never have a child as a great source of shame for the woman, as it would have been for any woman during that time. If he would obtain favor from God for her in this, the removal of her only, but surely most painful grievance, would occur. Elisha did not use his influence in a man-made court, but he did in the court of heaven, which is far better.

“About this time next year you shall embrace a son.” he told her. God met the deepest and most private desire of her heart as the next year she did embrace her son. God knows the desires of our heart. Psalm 34:7 tells us to, “Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” She had delighted herself in the Lord, and the way she served and cared for the Lord’s prophet was evidence of that.

Verses 18-37 take us through the death of the promised son, the response of the noble woman, the compassion of the man of God, and the miracle of resurrection . . . the outcome of unwavering faith. There’s no doubt she was heartbroken at her son’s death, but she didn’t consume herself with the loss and didn’t allow herself to stay in a prison of pain. Instead, she rose up in faith to make preparation for the dream of resurrection and all that it meant to her, when in verse 21, “She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out.”

In confidence and expectation she “set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.” Gehazi greeted her inquiring “Is it well...?” She replied, “It is well.” It was only when she got to Elisha himself, who she believed could help her, that her grief and distress, and perhaps her feelings of having been deceived, were visibly released and verbally expressed.

I like what Matthew Henry says in his commentary: “However the providence of God may disappoint us, we may be sure the promise of

God never did, nor ever will, deceive us: hope in that, will not make us ashamed.”

Sending Gehazi on ahead to lay his staff on the dead boy brought no change; however, when Elisha arrived, “He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the Lord.” Elisha knew he needed to shut out the distractions, and incredulousness around him and he knew from “whence cometh” his help. Elisha aimed at nothing less than the restoration of the child to life. In verses 34-35, we see he used every natural means in his power to restore life while praying to and trusting in the Author of life to exert His supernatural means and miraculous response, as if to show us that in our lives, we ought to do our part while asking and believing God to do His part. With God on our side, we don’t have to be content with aiming at secondary results or benefits in any area of life, but instead can strive for the greatest of benefits, our salvation and new life in Christ.

James 1:5 tells us, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously and without finding fault and it will be given to him.” In our next miracle Elisha exercised that wisdom from God.

*** The Poisoned Pottage (2 Kings 4:38-41)**

In the story of the poisoned pottage, we learn Elisha had returned to Gilgal to one of the schools of the prophets, to provide his support to them during the difficult time of famine that affected the Promised Land because of the persistent disobedience of the people. Physical hunger

can often affect not only our bodily health, but overtake our desire for spiritual food. Elisha would use this visit to feed them the truth of God's Word and remind them of God's faithfulness.

What better way is there to enjoy fellowship and encouragement than sharing a meal together? This stew, however, had poison in the pot. Something tangible was needed to reactivate their faith in God's love and provision. Wisely, Elisha used flour to heal the pottage.

Elisha's heart and commitment to the prophets and to their needs reflects the heart of our Shepherd and Lord who does not abandon us, His fold, but stays present with us to bless us, encourage us and instruct us through all life events. I like the way one commentary put it, "As a work of God's power, the miracle was a pledge to the prophets, of God's ability and readiness to help them in every time of need. The simplest means can be made effectual if God blesses it."

Most Christians are aware that Jesus fed multitudes with very little food. But how many of you were aware of this miraculous feeding in the Old Testament?

***The Feeding of 100 (2 Kings 4:42-44)**

A godly man from Baal Shalisha came to Elisha with an offering of 20 loaves of barley bread. It was his way of honoring the Lord with his substance and the first fruits of all his increase as ~Proverbs 3:9 calls us to do; "Honor the LORD with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase." In honoring God with his first fruits, he provided

the substance for the miracle of the feeding of 100 prophets. Here was a man standing for righteousness in a society that had moved away from God. He reminds us that honoring God with our first fruits during hard times expresses our security and faith in God to sustain us through any trial that comes our way. ~ Psalm 55:22 “Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.”

What a reminder of the part we play in bringing miracles to others through the outreach of our tithes. He also reminds us, that we can and we must stand for righteousness in the world and society we live in; even as we live in the midst of a culture that is rapidly moving away from God. We are redeemed to be salt (Matthew 5:13) and light (Matthew 5:14) to the world. To honor the Lord of Hosts, we must walk a different path, just like the man from Baal Shalisha did.

So, a miracle of faith (the oil) . . . a miracle new life (the boy raised from the dead) . . . a miracle of protection (poisoned stew) . . . a miracle of provision (100 fed) . . . and now we come to the miracle of healing in the story of Naaman.

***The Healing of Naaman’s leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-27)**

Naaman was a highly esteemed, valiant warrior, and commander of the Syrian army, and he had contracted leprosy. Although as a Syrian, leprosy did not cause Naaman to be excommunicated, as he would have

been if he were a Jew, nonetheless, the skin disease was causing him difficulty that would only continue to worsen with time.

Leprosy is a skin disease that is mentioned more than 40 times in the Bible. Many commentaries agree that leprosy in the Bible serves as “a graphic illustration of sin’s destructive power and as a powerful object lesson of the debilitating influence of sin in a person’s life.”(Leviticus 13:46) “He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.”

This story begins with an act of mercy, love, and forgiveness that ultimately results in salvation. A little Hebrew slave girl had been taken against her will to the foreign land of Syria during a raid on Israel that perhaps Naaman himself led. The little girl served the military leader’s wife without bitterness or anger, and when Naaman became sick, she was not glad nor did she celebrate his illness. Instead, she shared with his wife the good news, the way to a miracle, the way to Naaman’s salvation. Naaman listened to her because her life had been such a testimony that it gave credibility to her words.

We find Naaman more than just desiring or willing, but actually believing so strongly he could be healed, that he went to Israel to find Elisha and receive his miracle. However, because of pride, because of a preconceived expectation, he almost let go of the opportunity to be healed. It was only after letting go of pride and indignation and fully

obeying the simple instructions sent to him from the man of God that Naaman received physical and spiritual healing. Although reward was offered and refused, Elisha sent Naaman on his way committed to never worship false gods again and taking soil from Israel so that he could use it for offerings to God.

But the story doesn't end there, does it? God may have been glorified in the life of Naaman, but Satan is still at work in the hearts of man. Enter . . . Gehazi. Although he'd been the messenger and assistant of Elisha for many years, we see how this man's pride, indignation, greed, lies, and hypocrisy finally destroyed him. He'd been privileged to hear the anointed teachings of his master, see miracles of grace, been in the company of prophets, yet his actions demonstrated that God did not reign over every part of his life and that his heart was not set on the things above. He had acquired the possession of religious privileges which by themselves do not save the soul.

Setting out after Naaman to claim at least part of the gift refused by Elisha, he lied to Naaman, implicating his master in this deception, and tarnishing the free miracle of healing and salvation. He compounded his lie, this time to his master, and the consequence of his quenching the Holy Spirit was condemnation to live with leprosy. Through Gehazi, we see how patient and merciful God is in bringing judgment to the sinner.

The deception of Naaman was not the first indicator that Gehazi's heart was not right with God. Recall how he tried to push the Shunammite woman away from Elisha in her greatest time of need; he lacked compassion. When given Elisha's staff to lie on the body of the dead boy to restore him, nothing happened because Gehazi was not in union with God to allow the power of God to come through him. When commanded by his master to serve the 100 prophets with the 20 loaves of barley bread, he questioned and challenged Elisha because he had no faith that God could multiply the loaves. His actions were a symptom of the spirit of unbelief that was lodged in Gehazi's heart. Judgment was finally rendered.

One last miracle for our lesson this week . . . a miracle of compassion.

*** The Floating Axe head (2 Kings 6:1-7)**

The company of prophets had outgrown their meeting place in Gilgal and had selected to build a new place near the Jordan River. Elisha being a man of great compassion accompanied them, showing them they were loved and cared for. During the building, one of the workers lost an axe head off a borrowed tool as it fell into the water. His anxiety over the loss was a great opportunity for Elisha to display God's love, provision and power and a reminder that God is not tied up to the laws of nature. God meets even the smallest of needs. Inquiring where it fell, Elisha "cut a new stick, threw it there, and made the iron float."

This miracle of compassion and provision calmed the man's fear of being indebted to someone he would not be able to pay. What a gracious God we serve!

What have we learned from this reading?

1. That God is a God who loves us and He is in “the business” of stretching us; developing and strengthening our faith and our lives and broadening our vision of His grace, love and plans for our lives.

Something to note from the lesson is that God didn't prevent problems and trials in the lives of His people. Instead, God used the trials and problems to grow their faith and trust in Him. God will allow problems and trials for our learning, for our experience and for our spiritual growth.

2. That God is a God with the ability to meet our needs no matter how big or small they might be, regardless of the times in which we live and the challenges or problems we face. There is no problem or need God cannot meet.

3. That in the face of problems, how we respond to the Lord, how we react, is the real issue. If we will trust that God cares, and obey Him, He will provide for us.

4. That God will use our personal failures, sicknesses, and problems as a means to bring us to the end of ourselves and to acknowledge our dependence on Him and His salvation.

5. Most often people experience God's love, mercy, grace, healing and provision through His instruments, a vessel ready to be used by Him, to be the miracle worker to manifest divine intervention in human affairs. God fills empty vessels with His Holy Spirit to be a reflection of Him at all times and in all places. Elisha was such a vessel who brought joy to the people through miracles from God and with his gentle spirit having a positive influence on the lives of many in Israel.

Are you that type of miracle worker? Indeed you are! If you:

- a.) Keep yourself in a right-minded state, in connection with Almighty God, guarding your thoughts from wrong-minded thoughts.
- b.) Understand miracles are an expression of love, and God is Love and all glory goes to God.
- c.) Notice the need, feel the impulse and respond whether it be in action, word or deed. By taking every opportunity to do good in God's name, you will be the miracle God brings into the lives of those in their times of need.
- d.) Pray and Pray some more. That's where the power is, in our communication with God. Jesus commanded us to pray and to pray

without ceasing, and to do it often. Prayer is the most powerful ministry and the fuel of miracles.

Like Anne Sullivan, enter into the world of those around you. Be the vessel God uses for His next miracle.
Let's pray.

