

OUR PURIFYING MULTIPLYING GOD

II Kings 4: 38-44 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Today we come to two amazing surprise miracles. Most of us become so logical, practical, and wooden in our ways, we fail to trust God for miracles. Have you read Josh McDowell's awesome book, "Evidence That Demands A Verdict?" His mother died and he never knew for sure led Josh into a deep depression. Was his mother a Christian or was she not? He began to give it to the Lord in prayer. His prayer was, "Lord, somehow give me the answer so I can get back to normal. I've just got to know." It seemed like an impossible request, but he kept it over and over before the Lord. Two days later, Josh drove out to the ocean and walked to the end of the pier just to be alone. There sat an elderly woman in a lawn chair fishing. "Where's your home originally?" she asked. "Michigan, Union City. Nobody's heard of it. I tell people it's a suburb of..." "Battle Creek," interrupted the woman. "I had a cousin from there. Did you know the McDowell family?" Stunned, Josh responded, "Yes, I'm Josh McDowell." "I can't believe it," said the woman. "I'm a cousin to your mother." "Do you remember anything at all about my mother's spiritual life?" asked Josh. "Why sure! Your mom and I were just girls, teenagers—when a tent revival came to town in Union City. We both went forward to receive Jesus as our Savior." "Praise God!" shouted Josh, startling all the surrounding fishermen." Don't you love God's surprise miracles?

We are looking closely today at two surprise miracles of the prophet Elisha. He was a prophet that got definite and specific with God, and God, over and over, got definite and specific in answering Elisha's prayers. The setting for these two miracles was Gilgal, the very place that Elisha started out with his master Elijah on their final journey together before Elijah was raptured, caught up to heaven in a whirlwind and a chariot of fire and horses—II Kings 2: 1. You remember from Gilgal, they had went 12 miles northwest to Bethel and from there back to Jericho, and finally together, they went to the Jordan River. Elisha performed a miracle at each of these places in the inverse or reverse order of his original journey with Elijah. At the Jordan River, Elisha divided the waters so that he passed over dry land in the presence of these same prophets that saw him go across with Elijah. At Jericho, Elisha healed the waters of the spring that caused miscarriages. At Bethel, Elisha cursed the 42 mocking young men" in the name of the Lord and brought about their being torn apart and ripped open by two she bears. Now here at Gilgal, Elisha again exercised the miraculous powers God had endowed him with. Gilgal was to the east of Jericho, close to the Jordan River, where there was more moisture and vegetation than further inland. It was a place made memorable from the early history of Israel. It was in Gilgal that the Israeli nation set up twelve stones as a monument to God's gracious intervention, because God caused them to

pass through the Jordan River to the western shore, dry-shod. It was in Gilgal that those Hebrew men who had been born in the wilderness wanderings, were all circumcised, rolling away the reproach and bondage of Egypt from off them.

This sign of the covenant God called for in Gilgal, evidenced their separation from the heathen, as being God's peculiar people. The Lord made this physical circumcision a picture of the circumcision of the heart God calls for in each of us. God said in Jeremiah 4: 4, "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord; remove the foreskin of your hearts." Paul added his words about the significance of the physical circumcision God called for in the Israeli men after they crossed the Jordan River. Paul wrote in Romans 2:29), "But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter." It was in Gilgal, across in the Promised Land that God's people first ate "the old corn of the land" (Josh. 5:11) so that miraculous supplies of manna ceased. Yet even such a favored spot as Gilgal was in trouble now, affected by the dearth, the famine, and the lack of food, because of the great wickedness of the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom. Ezekiel the prophet in Ezekiel 14:21 said that God's judgment on His people was fourfold, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence. Our text begins today telling us in II Kings 4: 38, that Elisha came again to Gilgal, when there was a famine in the land. Jeremiah wrote in II Kings 8: 1 that the Lord called for this famine which lasted for seven years. In these seven verses of our text, II Kings 4: 38-44, I see five certain signposts that stand out as God markers or warnings as we examine God's remnant in Gilgal when the land was so idolatrous.

REMEMBER THAT FAMINES ARE OFTEN A SIGN OF GOD'S

JUDGMENT ON IDOLATRY. (I.) Look at verse 38. "And Elisha came again to Gilgal when there was a famine in the land. And as the sons of the prophets were sitting before him—(that means he was teaching or lecturing them) he said to his servant, "Set on the large pot and boil stew for the sons of the prophets." So Gehazi, it would appear got out the huge seminary stew or soup pot and got a little soup bone boiling so the 100 students, v. 43 could have a meal together. Speaking of the northern kingdom of Israel as Ephraim, Hosea the prophet some years later continued the word of the Lord's judgment of famine on Israel or Ephraim saying in Hosea 9: 15-17, saying, "Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them, because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of My house. I will love them no more; all their princes are rebels. Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up; they shall bear no fruit. Even though they give birth, I will put their beloved children to death. My God will reject them because they have not listened to Him; they shall be wanderers among the nations." This seven-year famine in Elisha's day left the land with a sense of lack, a sense of gloom and a loss of hope. Long dry spells and dried up food supplies made God's people more willing to

accept less and less, and they became less discerning about what they would accept. Now all the Gilgal sons of the prophets surrounding Elisha were focused to hear the Word of the Lord. When the land is suffering famine, in Gilgal at the seminary, there was no famine for the Word of God. Listening to God's Word, these sons of the prophets found refuge. But being fed the Word of the Lord, now hunger was setting in, and in this famine, Elisha wanted the prophets to put the kettle on, to get out the big stew pot and provide a meal for the learners. Secondly,

REMEMBER THAT GOD KNOWS ABOUT OUR MISTAKES IN SERVING HIM. HE WANTS US TO CONFESS OUR MISTAKES. (II.)

Look at II Kings 4: 39 states, "One of them (one of the seminary students) went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine and gathered from it his lap full of wild gourds, and came and cut them up into the pot of stew, not knowing what they were." Untrained in these matters, he mistook the wild vine for an edible squash or gourd. What he found apparently was the citrullus colocynthus, which is a melon-like gourd, that has a leaf like a squash but is bitter and poisonous due to its very severe purgative qualities. If eaten in a large meal, it tears up the digestive tract and even causes death. In small amounts you might not die, but you might think you were going to die, and you might even want to die. This melon looking gourd, a colocynthus, is also called locally in Israel, the gourd of Sodom. It grows by the Dead Sea. It looks and smells very good, very pleasant, but this gourd of Sodom is a poisonous wild fruit. This prophet wasn't familiar with this beautiful looking gourd back where he lived. Here in Gilgal, close to the Jordan River, he made this huge mistake. It might have cost many prophets their own lives. It was a grave mistake, but a well-intentioned mistake. God in his grace showed Elisha what to do. God can take what is bad and poison, and He is able to overcome our mistakes.

One day a lady prepared a meal for some guests. She used meat that was marked down on discount. As she cooked it, though it smelled very good, she kept wondering if the meat was safe or not. The woman decided to first feed the meat to her dog, and then she would see if there were any ill effects. Seeing none, she completed the meal and served her guests. They loved the food, especially the meat. As she was about to serve dessert, her son came running into the house crying, "Our dog just died." Panic struck the embarrassed woman. She explained the problem to her guests. All of them went to the emergency room and the emergency doctor determined they should have their stomachs pumped, which is not a fun procedure. Feeling no better, the woman, who also had her stomach pumped, insisted her guests return to her home. Reluctantly, they did. Inquiring how her son was doing after the death of their dog, he told her he saw the dog die, when the dog ran in front of a car, was hit and killed. All of us are capable, of making some very foolish, almost fatal mistakes. Innocence and ignorance are no

guarantees of immunity from problems. The ignorance of man does not undo the grace of God. Good intentions can still have disastrous results. The uninformed son of the prophets meant well, but his cutting up the Sodom gourd and putting it into the pot, did ill. If we mistake poison for food, the natural law of chemical reaction in our bodies will result in sickness and possibly death. Many people in ignorance of God's Word, believe working hard for their salvation will save them. You may ignorantly trust in your church attendance Sunday after Sunday for salvation, or join church thinking that joining church will save you. These actions may be seemingly innocent or ignorant actions, but they are opposed to the law of God and the Gospel of God's grace. Proverbs 14: 12 is clear, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Thirdly,

REMEMBER THAT IT IS RIGHT TO CRY OUT TO GOD WHEN THERE IS DEATH IN THE POT, FOR HE HAS THE PURIFYING ANSWER. (III.)

Look at verses 40-41. "And they poured out some for the men to eat. But while they were eating of the stew, they cried out, "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" And they could not eat it." Now, everyone knows that there is no healing property in flour. In the natural, if you throw some flour into a pot of poisoned stew, you have a thicker poisoned stew. But for some reason God asks us to take natural things from time to time that using, will unleash supernatural miracles. Something natural is something God knows that we can do. We may not want to do it, but when we do our simple act, and obey, God turns His seemingly absurd idea into a supernatural miracle of grace. Imagine the scene as the sons of the prophets had this poison stew in seminary and began to taste the poisonous stew and began to choke on it as they tasted its bitterness. The men spoke to their chief professor, Elisha and cried out, verse 40, "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" He said, "Then bring flour/meal." And he threw it into the pot and said, "Pour out some for the men, that they may eat." And there was no harm in the pot."

Elisha was on the problem like a crow on a June bug. He said, "Then bring flour." And Elisha threw the flour into the pot and said, "Try it now. Pour some out for the men, that they may eat. Miraculously, the poison stew was purified and there was no harm in the pot of stew. Charles Spurgeon said of this miracle, "There is death in the pot; how is the Church to meet it? I believe it is to imitate Elisha. We need not attempt to get the wild gourds out of the pot; they are cut too small, and they are too cunningly mixed up; they have entered too closely into the whole mass of teaching to be removed. Who shall extract the leaven from the leavened loaf? What then? We must look to God for help, and use the means indicated here. 'Bring flour/meal.' Good wholesome food was cast into the poisonous stuff, and by God's gracious working, He killed the poison. The church must cast the blessed Gospel of the grace of God into the poisoned pottage, and false doctrine will not be able to

destroy men's souls as it now does." I call us today to cry out when there is death in the pot. That cry, "It's poison!" opens the door to God doing something. So today, I with these sons of the prophets, as a learning leader, I too am seeing over and over that there is death in the pot. When we fail to trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean on our own understanding, there is what, "There's death in the pot." When we resist the leadings or the promptings of the Holy Spirit, "There's death in the pot." When we are secretly drinking at home, secretly taking drugs, secretly watching pornography, and secretly slandering and gossiping, "There's what?" "There's death in the pot." Cry out! When we know to do good, and refuse to do it, not only is it sin, but in our marriage, our church, our job, our school, and in our relationships, "There's death in the pot." Cry out! Fourthly,

REMEMBER THAT HOARDING OUR BLESSINGS WHEN OTHERS ARE NEEDY ROBS US OF ONE OF OUR GREATEST PURPOSES IN LIFE.

(IV.) Look at verse 42. "A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing the man of God, that's Elisha, bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of grain/corn in his sack. And Elisha said, "Give to the men, that they may eat." Let's understand this setting. We are still in Gilgal. In the northern kingdom, there was no official temple dedicated to the Lord. Many of the faithful priests and Levites in Israel would not worship the two golden calves, so they moved to Judah. Listen to what happened in II Chronicles 11: 13-16. "And the priests and the Levites who were in all Israel presented themselves to him (Solomon's son, King Rehoboam) from all places where they lived. For the Levites left their common lands and their holdings and came to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons cast them out from serving as priests of the LORD, and he appointed his own priests for the high places and for the goat idols and for the calves that he had made. And those who had set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came after them from all the tribes of Israel to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD, the God of their fathers." Since there was no sanctuary for God in the northern 10 tribes of Israel, many of the people would bring their tithes and offerings to the nearest school of the prophets, where they would be shared by people who were staying true to the Mosaic law. So here came this unnamed Jewish believer, a farmer, to visit the man of God from Baalshalisha, which sits at the base of Mt. Ephraim. All he had with him was 20 loaves of barley bread—they were small about the size of a hot dog bun or a twisted baguette of lean twisted dough. The firstfruit offerings of grain could be roasted heads of grain, fine flour baked into cakes, or even small loaves of bread as these were. Elisha welcomed these people who came to support him and the schools of the prophets, and he blessed them for refusing to bow down to golden calves at Dan and Bethel. This farmer brought a small gift, only 20 of the coarse barley loaves that the common people ate, and a sack full of fresh ears of corn. Yet, this gift was providentially timed by God in this

7-year famine to meet a pressing need in the seminary, the school of the prophets. This gift was just as much an unbelievable miraculous gift as when the ravens brought bread and meat to Elijah. In a dearth or famine, for this farmer to tithe on the first-fruits, not knowing after giving God his due, that their would be more to harvest, this was a huge gift to Elisha. Elisha could have legitimately eaten every loaf or baguette. He could have eaten every ear of corn, but he loved the Lord and he loved his seminary students. It would be many meals for him, but a shared meal for the 100 students in seminary would have to be a stretched meal. Fifthly, lastly,

REMEMBER THAT GOD IS WAITING TO SUPPLEMENT OUR SHORT-COMINGS AND TO MULTIPLY OUR INADEQUATE SUPPLY. (V.)

Look at the final two verses in this text—v. 43-44. “But his servant said, “How can I set this before a hundred men?” So, he repeated, “Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, ‘They shall eat and have some left.’” So, he set it before them. And they ate and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.” Elisha’s servant, like many of us, knew all too well the inadequacy of this farmer’s gift to feed 100 men. He protested to Elisha, “How can I set this before a hundred men?” One loaf was a normal man’s portion, so logically, Gehazi though his master’s idea was foolish thinking. He didn’t want to be the one to present that farmer’s gift to seminary students for supper. Elisha had to say it twice. V. 42- and v. 43—“Give to the men, that they may eat.” Having to repeat himself, Elisha added that this wasn’t his bad math idea, but God’s good math idea, for little is much when God is in it. This miracle was a foretaste of Jesus feeding the 4,000 and the 5,000 men, besides all the women and children in the NT. Is there something in your life that’s missing? Has it been missing for years? Is your life a kind of spiritual dry time—when any thinking person would say, “Forget your need, your shortcoming and your inadequate supply. Go on. Buck up.” Yet, God told Joel to tell His people, “I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten.” Have the doctors given you just weeks or months to live? God always has the last word. Elisha said, “I said to you—”Give the 20 loaves and the sack of corn to the 100 men, and they won’t be able to eat it all.” The secret to God’s multiplying is our obedience to His commands. Faith is trusting God will supplement shortcomings and provide our needs, whether naturally or supernaturally. He will give us what He wants us to have, to do what He wants us to do. God’s supply when we obey, is not only enough to make up for what we are short, but it leaves us with leftovers. Don’t argue with God that what you have-to-give or don’t want to give is inadequate. Put what you have in His hands today. Give your tithes/first-fruits to God like this farmer. Share your meal in a famine with those who have nothing, like Elisha did, and see what God will do. Do what you once were willing to do, and now have refused to do. See what God can do. Your little puny O is much when God is in it.