

**2nd Kings 4: 8-17; “The Notable Woman of Shunem”, Message # 5 in the series –
“Elisha and the Prophets”, A Bible Study conducted by Pastor Paul
Rendall on May 30th, 2018, for those gathered at his home.**

The Lord our God is so very good to take notice of all the details of His people’s lives. He is so very good to place His prophets, His preachers, and His pastors in situations where He alone knows how to adequately provide for their needs. Indeed He delights to do these good things because He Himself is full of compassion, and kindness, and goodness to all who trust in Him. The Lord uses means to provide for His people; sometimes unusual means, and sometimes by directing the attention of another believer to consider the needs of the His servant. God fed Elijah by means of ravens at the brook Cherith. Here He provides for Elisha through a notable woman of Shunem. It was not that Elisha felt that he really needed anything beyond what he already had. He had made do with what he had. But it seemed that he was a couple of times a month traveling from Carmel, going through Shunem, on his way to teach in the schools of the prophets in Samaria, Bethel, and Jericho, and because he was often going through Shunem, he was taken notice of, by this notable woman.

The ways of God are the ways of grace being lavished upon His people, but even in material things He would usually have his people adequately provided for. This grand lady, because she was well-off financially, and she loved the Lord, and appreciated the word of Lord delivered by Elisha, she took notice of Elisha’s particular needs, and she was rewarded for it. This evening I want to set before you the fine character qualities of this woman which may teach each of us a great deal of how we ought to think of God’s servants who preach and teach the word of God to us.

1st of all – This was a woman who was discerning enough to know when and how to show hospitality. (verses 8)

“Now it happened one day that Elisha went to Shunem, where there was a notable woman, and she constrained him to eat some food.” “So it was, as often as he passed by, that he turned in there to eat some food.” It is not always the case that notable women are spiritually discerning, but when it is the case, it is a great blessing indeed. The Hebrew word for “notable” is *gadole*. It is also translated “great” in the KJV and “prominent” in the NASB. In the ESV it is translated – “wealthy”. All of these adjectives seem to apply to the woman that we are studying. Apparently, when Elisha entered the city of Shunem, her attention was drawn to him. Perhaps it was the attire of the prophet. Perhaps it was his whole appearance of being grave and serious in his demeanor, and yet having the twinkle of joy and delight in his eyes in speaking of spiritual things to the people in the city. But she was mightily pleased that he had come to her little city of Shunem, and that they might have the privilege of conversing with such a man. She would probe him with holy questions and listen to his holy concerns, and she would find out whether he was willing to speak the word of God to them there in her city.

One of the most important character qualities a woman can have is that she be spiritually discerning; that she know what she can do to help the cause of God and Christ forward. When a woman is spiritually discerning, she will help the pastors who preach, to do the work which God has called them to do. In this case, she, it says here, she “constrained” Elisha to eat some food. He evidently was not of a mind to accept her offer of food, initially, but she “persuaded” him to take the time to eat the food she set before him. And no doubt she conversed with him about his many preaching and teaching labors in a kindly, thoughtful, and concerned manner. Normally, Elisha would not have taken notice of such a woman, or such a request to stop and eat with she and her husband, but when he perceived how very spiritually minded she was, and how much she cared for the kingdom of God’s advance in true spiritual knowledge, he had no hesitation to

accept her offers. So, as oft as he passed by, it says, he turned in there, because he knew that he would receive such good hospitality.

Turn with me over to Hebrews chapter 13, verse 1 and we will see the importance of showing hospitality to godly Christian people and preachers. “Let brotherly love continue.” “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.” This is the way that holy women can help in the labors of the preaching of the word; by showing hospitality to strangers. That is, those strangers who they observe who are involved in the work of the Lord, they will take steps to show them hospitality. It takes a holy discernment to be able to tell holy strangers from any old stranger. This verse is referencing the hospitality that Abraham and Sarah showed to the “strangers” that came down from heaven to visit them; the Lord, and 2 angels with him, who came in the appearance of men.

In Genesis 18: 1-8 it says, “Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day.” “So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, ‘My Lord, if I have now found favor in your sight, do not pass on by Your servant.’” “Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.” “And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts.” “After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant.” “And they said, ‘Do as you have said.’” “So Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, ‘Quickly, make ready three measure of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.’” “And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it.” “So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.”

The reason that the Lord and these men had come was to tell Sarah that even though she was almost 90 years old, that she was going to have a child, a son who would be the first in the line of descendants through which the Christ would eventually come. Do you see the importance of hospitality, dear ladies? Sometimes, I think, that women do not understand the importance of their role as wife and mother. They may be very interested in spiritual things in general, but they do not see how important it is to learn to show hospitality at a moment’s notice. But these verses show us different. Hospitality is a very important Christian practice because it is based on the character quality of discernment and Christian love. This woman had what we now know as brotherly kindness, and even more, she had Christian love.

Turn with me over to 2nd Peter 1: 5-8. “But also for this very reason giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love.” You can see from this list that Peter gives here that there is a progression in learning to exercise the grace that you are given as a Christian so that character is being pursued and built in your life. Thomas Coke, the Methodist commentator says – “By this exhortation the apostle plainly implies, that they did already love their Christian brethren; accordingly, he commended them before, (Hebrews 6: 10.) for their ministering to the saints: consistently with this, he exhorted them (Hebrews 12: 14) to follow peace with all men, which implies, that they were defective as to this duty of charity towards the Gentile Christians. There is a difference between φιλαδελφια, brotherly love, and αγαπη, charity, or love in the general; according to what St. Peter says, 2nd Peter 1: 7.—add to brotherly love, charity. Brotherly love signifies men’s loving those whom they esteem to be their brethren, answerably to that relation; but the word αγαπη expresses the love which men bear to such also as they do not own to be their brethren, even those who are not of the Christian religion,—and even to enemies.

2nd – This was a woman who made provision for the on-going needs of the prophet.
(verses 9 and 10)

Verse 9 says – “And she said to her husband, ‘Look now, I know that this is a holy man of God, who passes by us regularly.’ “Please, let us make a small upper room on the wall; and let us put a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lampstand; so it will be, whenever he come to us, he can turn in there.” Now, this goes one step beyond hospitality, for hospitality is showing kindness and making provision only for a short time usually. But what this woman and her husband were doing was to make provision for the prophet’s needs on a more regular and permanent basis. They added on to their house to supply the prophet’s regular and on-going need. She did not make elaborate provisions for him, but she took into consideration what the prophet would truly would want, without fitting the apartment up in some sort of a rich way. Simplicity and functionality of purpose were how she and her husband went about to help Elisha.

I like what A.W. Pink says about this woman’s comment to her husband that “a holy man of God was passing by”. “While admiring the virtues and graces of this woman, we must not overlook the tribute she paid to Elisha. Observe how she refers to him. Not as a “charming” or “nice man”; how incongruous such an appellation for a servant of God! No, it was not any such carnal or sentimental term she employed. Nor did she allude to him as a “learned man,” for scholarship and spirituality by no means always go together. Rather as “an holy man of God” did she designate the prophet. What a description! What a searching word for every minister of the gospel to take to heart. It is “holy men of God” who are used by the Spirit (2nd Peter 1:21). And how did she perceive the prophet’s holiness? Perhaps by finding him at prayer, or reading the Scriptures. Certainly from the heavenliness of his conversation and general demeanor. Ah, my reader, the servant of God should need no distinctive manner of dress in order for people to identify him. His walk, his speech, his deportment ought to be sufficient.

I would say further: What more does a prophet need, than privacy, a bed, a table, a chair to sit upon, and a lampstand to give light? Thereby, he has a place for devotion to God and a place to prepare the messages that he would deliver to the people. All this came about because she perceived that “a holy man of God was passing by.” What can women do, if they will help Christ’s cause and forward His kingdom? They can pray and they can labor to support, their husband agreeing with them, those who preach the word.

Listen as I read for you the great help which Lady Selina, Countess of Huntingdon was to the preachers of her day. In the year 1750, Philip Doddridge says – “Lady Huntington, for whom I desired your prayers, is wonderfully recovered.” “She walked with me in the garden and park, and almost wearied me, such is recruit of strength; but the strength of her soul is amazing.” “I think I never saw so much or the image of God in any woman upon earth.” “Were I to write what I know of her, it would fill our heart with wonder, joy, and praise.” “She desired me to educate a lad for the dissenting ministry at her expense, till he be befit to come to my academy; and this is but one of a multitude of good works which she is continually performing.” “I must tell you, however, one observation which struck me much: ‘None,’ said she, ‘know how to prize Christ, but those who are zealous in good works.’”

“Men know not till they try, what imperfect things these best works are, and how deficient we are in them; and their experience of that sweetness that attends their performance, makes me more sensible of those obligations to Him whose grace is the principle of them in our hearts.” Doddridge goes on to say – “She has God dwelling in her, and she is ever bearing her testimony to the present salvation he has given us, and to the fountain of living waters which she feels springing up in her soul; so that she knows the divine original of the promises before the performance of them to her, as she knows God to be her Creator by the life that he has given her.” (Taken from P. 84, 85 of *Lady Huntington and Her Friends*, by Helen C. Knight) It is a good thing, my friends, when women of means, godly women, see what they can do to help the cause of Christ in an on-going sense.

3rd – This was a woman whom God would reward her philanthropy to his servant with a blessing of fruitfulness.

“Verse 12 says – “Then Elisha said to Gehazi his servant, ‘Call this Shunammite woman.’ “when he had called her, she stood before him.” “And he said to him, ‘Say now to her, ‘Look, you have been concerned for us with all this care.’ “What can I do for you?’ “Do you want me to speak on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?’ “And she answered, ‘I dwell among my own people.’ “So he said, ‘What then is to be done for her?’ “And Gehazi answered, ‘Actually she has no son, and her husband is old.’ “And he said, ‘Call her.’ “When he had called her, she stood in the doorway.” “Then he said, ‘About this time next year you shall embrace a son.’ “And she said, ‘No, my lord.’ “Man of God, do not lie to your maidservant!’ “And the woman conceived, and bore a son when the appointed time had come, of which Elisha had told her.”

Now, truly, this is grace upon grace. This woman was not looking for this reward, but the prophet sought to do anything that he could to repay her kindness. He thought first that he could speak to the king or the commander of the army on her behalf to secure some earthly protection or blessing, but she was so content with all that she had, that she declined that. Godliness with contentment is great gain. But Gehazi pointed out a fact that had escaped his notice; that being, that she had no son, and her husband was old. Immediately, by prophetic grasp and intuition, Elisha embraces the idea that God could give her a child. He knows that the Lord will do this great thing for her, and reward her faith and good works. Turn with me over to Hebrews chapter 6, and verses 10-15.

“For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” “For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.’ “And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.” I want you to see from this passage that God will reward faithfulness in ministering to pastors and others of the saints. God does not forget your good works, but since you are in Christ He will reward them. In this case we see that God blessed this woman and gave her a son because of her faithfulness to help and encourage Elisha His servant. What it will be in your case, when you are faithful, you will have to wait and see. But we can always be assured that it will be something that will be very fitting for you to receive. This lady helped Elisha greatly in his ministry. God would help her in her everyday life by giving her a son who would be able to help her and be an encouragement to her and to her husband.