

AN ANONYMOUS BENEFACTOR

- A. This lesson is about incident in the life of the prophet Elisha.
1. There are many great lessons from Elijah's successor Elisha --- who had a double portion of Elijah's spirit.
 - a. The Widow's oil not running out during the famine.
 - b. The barren Shunammite woman was given a son that died and was raised.
 - c. The poisonous stew purified.
 - d. The healing of Naaman the Syrian commander.
 - e. The punishment of greedy Gehazi his servant - leprosy.
 - f. The sunken and then floating axe-head.
 - g. The striking of the Syrian army with blindness.
 - h. The revealing of the angelic host in defense of Israel.
 2. In this lesson were going to look at an over-looked event in his life.
 - a. But first let's get the backdrop for our discussion.

2 Kings 4:38-41

38 When Elisha returned to Gilgal, there was a famine in the land. As the sons of the prophets were sitting before him, he said to his servant, "Put on the large pot and boil stew for the sons of the prophets." 39 Then one 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 sliced them into the pot of stew, for they did not know what they were. 40 So they poured it out for the men to eat. And as they were eating of the stew, they cried out and said, "O man of God, there is death in the pot." And they were unable to eat. 41 But he said, "Now bring meal." He threw it into the pot and said, "Pour it out for the people that they may eat." Then there was no harm in the pot.

- B. Try to put yourself Elisha's sandals and these trainee prophets at Gilgal.
1. For seven long years, famine had plagued the land (8:1).
 2. The faith of the sons of the prophets was being tested.
 3. This little community (Gilgal) had been delivered from the deadly stew but their troubles were not over.

[In a climate of economic deprivation and shortages -- like we're reading about here -- the natural reaction is predictable: selfishness and covetousness!

But instead we see here examples of generosity toward God and others.]

I. A DONATION FOR ELISHA (42)

2 Kings 4:42

42 **Now a man came from Baal-shalishah, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits**, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack.

A. Here is a kind-hearted man of whom we know nothing -- other than what we read here.

1. But apparently he had a love and concern for Elisha in his time of need.
2. He was willing to go to some trouble to help him in his time of distress.
3. Have you ever noticed that God's provision for His people often come from an unexpected source? *God never fails to provide for His people.*

Philippians 4:18-19

18 But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.
19 And **my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.**

Look at the gift this man brought.

B. He brought his firstfruits to Elisha; the first and the best that he had.

1. Now we don't know much about this man, but what we do know is commendable.
 - a. We don't know if he kept the Law and went to Jerusalem for the 3 National Feasts: Unleavened Bread, Harvest, Ingathering (Exo 23:19; Num 18).
 - The Feast of Harvest required an offering of the firstfruits to be made to the priests at the Temple.
 - b. We don't know if the man did that or not; but what he did here is worthy of our imitation, because at this time in Israel's history the people were worshipping the golden calf, and supporting an unauthorized priesthood, ...and not only that, they had just come out of years of Baal worship, and there were probably many still worshipping that idol (1 Kings 12:28, 16:31; 2 Kings 3:3).

2 Kings 3:2-3

2 **He** [Jehoram, son of Ahab] **did evil in the sight of the Lord**, though not like his father and his mother; for he put away the sacred pillar of Baal which his father had made. 3 **Nevertheless, he clung to the sins of Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin; he did not depart from them.

2. But this servant boycotted the corruption of his nation to bring his firstfruits to the actual true servant of the Lord.
 3. The lesson: We are called on to go against the tide of our idolatrous society if we are to bring the firstfruits of our lives to the Lord.
- C. Secondly, he saw his responsibility to God despite the needs his family caused by the 7 years of drought.
1. Surely, they had needs, which could have caused him to hoard his wealth.
 2. But no, here he is -- in lean times -- giving his best to Jehovah.

[This donation for Elisha, from an unknown worshipper of the true God, is a prime example of how we ought to be using our own resources in the service of the Lord Jesus.

He is like the saints in Macedonia, who “first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God (2 Cor 8:5).]

II. A DEMAND FROM ELISHA (42b, 43)

2 Kings 4:42b-43

42 ...And he said, "Give them to the people that they may eat." 43 His attendant said, "**What, will I set this before a hundred men?**" But he said, "Give them to the people that they may eat, for thus says the Lord, 'They shall eat and have some left over.'"

- A. Elisha might have reasoned that he had no responsibility to share the gift he was given.
1. He might have said, “I have my own financial concerns to take care of first.”
 2. But he didn’t, Elisha gave generously during a time of great personal need.

**Notice the interaction between
Elisha and his servant**

Elisha: “Give this offering to the people!”

Servant: “There’s 100 men, plus their families.”

Elisha: “The Lord said, ‘Do it! There’s plenty...’”

- B. What had been given sacrificially to Elisha was now sacrificially given to others.
1. Why has God been so good to us, in this country, throughout the days of our lives?

2 Corinthians 9:8

8 And **God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that** [grace: always having all sufficiency in everything], **you may have an abundance for every good deed** 9 as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER." 10 Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; 11 **you will be enriched in everything for all liberality**, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

2. The Lord blesses US so that WE may become a blessing to OTHERS, and yes, sometimes, even in our need.

Titus 3:14

14 **Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs**, so that they will not be unfruitful.

3. Have you heard the phrase, "paying it forward"?
 - a. It is an expression for describing the beneficiary of a good deed repaying it to others instead of to the original benefactor; *the expression really leaves God out of the picture.*
 - b. When it comes to what this man did and what Christians are to do with their resources -- that phrase does not apply.

- c. Because, by receiving a gift and repaying it to others (like Elisha did) we are also giving to the original benefactor (God).

4. One of the best OT examples of taking the sacrifices of others and using those gifts to the benefit of man as well as to the glory of God is found in David's prayer.

1 Chronicles 29:10-17

David's Prayer

10 So David blessed the Lord in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, "Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. 11 "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. 12 **Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone.** 13 Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. 14 **But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this?** [Check out verses 1-9, concerning the willing offerings made for the Temple.] **For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You.** 15 For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. 16 **O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours.** 17 Since I know, O my God, that You try the heart and delight in uprightness, **I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these things;** so now with joy **I have seen Your people**, who are present here, **make their offerings willingly to You.**

[Elisha's demand, to give the offering to the people, was made without any thought of himself, and with every thought as to what would glorify Jehovah.]

III. THE WORD OF GOD WAS CONFIRMED FOR HIS SERVANT (44)

2 Kings 4:44

44 So he [Elisha's servant] set it before them, and **they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the Lord.**

- A. Elisha's servant surely thought there would be nothing left for Elisha or for himself.

Proverbs 11:24-25

24 **There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more**, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want. 25 **The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered.**

Proverbs 3:9-10

9 **Honor the Lord from your wealth** and from the first of all your produce; 10 **So your barns will be filled with plenty** and your vats will overflow with new wine.

- 1. Small faith produces tight fists; people who clinch their money do not cling to faith.
- 2. Elisha trusted God to multiply the little sacrifice made.

- 3. And, he anticipated not only sufficiency, but also surplus, and indeed there was.
- 4. God is always liberal in His giving (Jas 1:5).

[What's our faith like in times of crisis? Are we fully persuaded that God will provide if we put the needs of other first?]

CLOSING

- A. What we have in 2 Kings 4 is the OT counter-part to the feeding of the 5,000 (Matt 14:16).
 - 1. Not a single person went away hungry; God satisfied everyone.
 - 2. Not only that, but His provision surpassed the needs of the people.
 - 3. He met the sacrificial giving with super-natural blessing (2 Cor 9:8; Phil 4:18).
- B. This farmer in Israel came to feed a prophet and he fed many, many others!
 - 1. We can never fully know how God will use what we give (to the men we support).

He will take it, bless it, multiply it, and use it to the blessing of His people, for His kingdom's sake.