

## The Mantle of the Prophet – Operating in the Miraculous

There are many Christians who feel trapped because they don't know how to find a way out of their predicament. Do you ever feel trapped? Have you ever felt like you're at the end of your tether? What do you do when you reach that point? The realist would say, "Just tie a knot and hang on." The pessimist would say, "You might as well let go; it's only going to get worse." The optimist might say, "Just tie another knot and keep on climbing." Each of those has its merits but, in reality, what can you do? Some of you may be in that very place today! You are at the end of your tether and there is a long drop beneath you. And you just don't know what to do....

- What do you do when you are facing problems with your loved ones that you cannot solve?
- What do you do when there are problems at work and it seems that there is no way out?
- What do you do when your heart is broken, your dreams are shattered and your hopes have been dashed to bits on the cruel rocks of the reality of life?
- What do you do when you are walking through a spiritual wasteland and there seems to be no way out?

I don't think anyone but the Lord has the answers to all those questions. Yet, there may be some help in the verses of **1 Kings 4:1-7**. This passage tells us about a poor, widow woman who was at the end of her tether. She did not know what to do or where to turn. In her pain and her poverty she did the only thing that she knew she could do; she turned to the Lord. And when she did that, God came through for her in a very big way! This passage teaches us the glorious truth that God has a plan for our problem. These verses show us that just as God took care of this widow, He will take care of us. This passage lets us know that when we reach the end of our rope, there is help and there is hope. I want to take these verses and share a few insights that should be of comfort to many of you.

### 1. GOD KNOWS OUR PROBLEMS

(a) There Was Real Despair In Her Family - verse 1. The word "cried" means "to moan; to weep uncontrollably; to shriek out of grief." This word identifies the sound of a broken heart. This woman comes to the man of God at the lowest moment of her life. She's in a desperate situation! (Have you ever been there?)

(b) There Was Death In Her Family. She was married to one of the "sons of the prophets". These were the men who were in training under Elisha to be the prophets and preachers in Israel. Her husband, her lover, her friend, her provider, her protector, had been taken away from her in death. She is broken because a loved one has been taken away. (Have you ever been there?)

(c) There Was Debt In Her Family. Since her husband is dead she cannot pay her bills. As a result, her creditors are coming to take her sons away as slaves so they can work off the debt. This was allowed under the Jewish Law, Leviticus 25:39. She has been deprived of her husband, now she is about to lose her sons as well. She is over her head in debt and she doesn't see how she can make it. (Have you ever been there?)

(d) There Was Devotion In Her Family. In spite of all her problems, she still held firm in the grip of faith! She needs help, but she does not turn to her family or her friends. She does not try to find someone to loan her

more money. In her desperation she turns to the man of God for help. Elisha was God's representative on earth and he was her best hope. She reminds Elisha that her husband "did fear the Lord." Her life has been a life of devotion to the Lord and in her trouble, she still trusts Him and turns to Him for the things she needs! In spite of her pain, her problems and her lack of possibilities, she still looked up to God for the help she needed! Even though she couldn't see a way out, she knew that she couldn't see everything. Even though she didn't understand everything she was facing, she still believed that God cared and that He could do something about her situation, so she cried out to Him - in faith!

There are some lessons in this verse that we do not want to miss today. At some point, every one of us is going to arrive at that low point of life. There will come a day when you will reach the end of your tether. Some have already been through it and can testify about it. Others are there right now and are looking for some help. When you reach that point, the world, the flesh and the devil are all going to tell you that God doesn't see your circumstances, and that He doesn't care. The fact is, He does see, Proverbs 15:3; 2 Chronicles 16:9. He sees everything you are facing. Not a single thing is hidden from His view. And, He does care. He cares more than you know about your situation.

These verses are designed to teach us that our problems, while they may appear to be insurmountable in our eyes, are really just God's opportunities in disguise. Therefore, no matter what you are called on to face in this life, learn to turn to the Lord first for the help you need. He cares! He is able! And He will do a mighty work in your need!

## 2. GOD RELEASES OUR POTENTIAL

(Verses 2-4) It would have been easy for Elisha to have said, "*Okay sister, you have suffered enough. The Lord is going to meet your need. Just go home and wait for Him to work.*" Instead of taking that course, the Lord chose to involve this widow in her own miracle. First God nullified her faith by forcing her to admit what she didn't have. Then, God expanded her faith by teaching her trust, humility and obedience. He does the very same things in your life and mine!

(a) **How God Nullifies Our Faith.** The Lord erased the widow's faith through two questions asked by Elisha. "What do you need?" And, "What do you have?" By those two questions, this woman was made to see the size of her need and the inadequacy of her own resources. She needed everything and she had very little. She needed much, yet she could not possibly meet her own basic needs. Often God will use the trials, heartaches and burdens of life to bring us to the place where we can honestly see our need and our own inability to meet it.

Think about it, as long as we think we can handle things, why should we look to the Lord? If we have all the answers, why should we turn to Him with our questions? But, when we stop and honestly answer those two questions, we will realise that we need more than we will ever be able to supply by ourselves. God does this to nullify our faith. He isn't trying to erase our faith in Him; He is trying to erase our faith in ourselves. As long as we think we can, He won't!

(b) **How God Expands Our Faith.** After God nullified her faith in herself and her own abilities, He began the process of expanding her faith in the power of the Lord to meet her need. Again, He does the same thing in

your life and mine. Notice:

- He Expands Our Faith Personally – Elisha's second question: "What do you have in the house?" was designed to teach this widow that it may not have looked like she had much, but in reality, she already had everything she needed to obtain what she wanted. She couldn't see it, but God had already given her the very thing He would use to meet her need. Her answer to Elisha is to tell him that all she has is "a pot of oil". The word "pot" refers to "a flask". This oil was probably a small amount of anointing oil, used by the prophets to anoint the men of God. This little flask of oil had sat in the house unused since her husband died. That little, insignificant flask of oil would be the answer to her prayers.

Often, what we fail to realise is that God has already given us everything we need to get our need met. That widow said that the only thing of value she had was a pot of oil. Yet, you and I have so much more than a mere pot of oil! We look at our problems and they look so large. We look at our possessions and they seem so small. Yet, we always fail to factor God into the equation! So, He places us in situations where our faith in Him must be expanded!

- He Expands Our Faith Publicly – The widow is told to go to all her neighbours and borrow all the empty vessels that she can get her hands on. That is a strange command! How do you suppose she explained this to her neighbours? Did she say, *"That crazy preacher told me to do this?"* Or did she say, *"I am flat broke, but God is about to meet my need! I don't know how He is going to do it, but the man of God said go borrow some pots. I don't understand it, but I know God is going to make a way."* He does the same thing in your life and mine! We talk about how we love the Lord and its just words until the Lord sends us into the valleys of life. When we are there, and He comes through for us in a big way, it speaks volumes to the onlooker.
- He Expands Our Faith Privately – Faith moved in that widow's heart. She obeyed the Lord; she borrowed the vessels and she and her sons shut themselves up in the house and trusted God to do what He had promised to do. Can you imagine the scene in that little home that day? There is that mother with her sons and all those empty vessels sitting all over that house. She picks up the flask of oil and one of those boys says, *"Mom, what are you doing with that oil? Why did you have us borrow all those vessels from the neighbours?"* And she says, *"Boys, I don't have all the answers, but I believe the Lord is about to do something great in our home. Your daddy didn't leave us much, but he did leave us this little flask of oil. The man of God said that we should get us all the vessels we could. Boys, God is going to fill every one of these vessels out of this little flask."* With that, they hand her the first vessel and she fills it up. She fills up one after the other and oil just keeps pouring out of that little bottle until every vessel was filled. When that day ended, there was a mother and some boys who had learned a valuable lesson. There in the privacy of that home, they learned that God was all-powerful and able to meet every need.

This is the experience of every child of God who is placed in a position of total trust and dependence. When the Lord comes through for His people, the work He does might be widely known, but the greatest work is in the heart of His child. When the Lord moves in power, the child of God receives a lesson in faith that can never be taken away from them. Their faith is expanded and they will never be the same again. The woman and her sons filled one vessel after another until every vessel they had borrowed was full. She began that day with nothing, she ended it with everything! That is what our God can do.

### 3. **GOD MIRACULOUSLY MEETS OUR NEED**

One of the lessons we can learn from this episode is that God will do exactly what He has promised to do. Elisha promised that the Lord would fill the vessels, and He did! He will keep all of His promises to you too! Not a single word in a single promise will fall to the ground unfulfilled! God will do everything He had promised to do. He meant everything He said! He will do everything He has promised. And remember, there is no limit to God's provision. The oil flowed until the vessels ran out. It never ran out! When the day was done, every vessel was filled to the full. There was no limit on the amount of oil. The only limit was on the amount of vessels. God's provision knew no limits (in the widow's case) and it knows no limits in your case! God is able to meet every need, move every mountain, and solve every problem. His provision is limited by nothing but our faith. God stands ready to give all that you make room for in your life, no more and no less!

If we can trust Him to take care of us and if we can get our vessels under the flow of His oil, there is nothing He can't do! When the day was done, there was enough oil in those borrowed vessels to settle the widow's debts, meet her desires and supply her dependents! God's supply was far more than sufficient! That is the kind of ability our Father possesses. He is able to do much more than you can think or imagine - if you give Him the opportunity!

Why not bring your vessels to Him and watch Him fill them all! A vessel is just an object that can hold God's provision. In your case it can be one of many things. But usually it's something you already possess that God can use to cause a miracle to happen. It may even be something small and insignificant, but it's yours! So bring it to Him!