

### The Widow's Oil Multiplied

#### 2 Kings 4:1-7

2 Kings 4:1-7 – “A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves.” So Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?” And she said, “Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil.” Then he said, “Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels; do not gather just a few. And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones.”

So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured it out. Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” And he said to her, “There is not another vessel.” So the oil ceased. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, “Go sell your oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.”

#### Background Notes

The “sons of the prophets” were the seminary or Bible college students of Elisha’s day. Several of these schools were located in the northern kingdom of Israel, where Elisha’s ministry was centered. The sons of the prophets were not a celibate, monastic order. Obviously marriage was permitted, because the widow of one of the sons of the prophets was in need. Her husband had died and she and her sons were in dire need.

She came to Elisha and told him, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves.” A creditor was coming to collect on a debt her husband had owed, and because his widow couldn’t pay, the creditor was planning to take her two sons to be his slaves.

Why didn’t Elisha rebuke this creditor and report him to the authorities for threatening to take the widow’s sons into slavery? Under the Old Testament Law, this kind of arrangement was permitted to pay off a debt. It was regulated, and was similar to indentured servanthood. Leviticus 25:39-40: “And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave...but as a hired servant.” The “slave” was treated as a hired servant, and then this servant was freed after a certain number of years.

So God met this widow’s need with a miracle done by the hand of Elisha, rather than by zapping the creditor. The miracle enabled the woman to pay the debt that her husband had owed. The widow only had a little oil in her home, but it was miraculously multiplied! The oil, as you know, was olive oil. Olive oil was used in that day for cooking, for lamp fuel, and for anointing, so there was a market for this widow’s oil. The oil was sold and the debt was paid.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. God knows the needs of widows.

This widow lived in the northern kingdom of Israel. There was no government agency to care for her needs. There were no churches to help her.. The sons of the prophets did not have IRAs or a pension plan. In fact, because her husband had been associated with one of the schools of the prophets, this widow was probably an outcast, as far as many of the idolatrous citizens of the northern kingdom were concerned. But this widow was trusting God to meet her needs, and the needs of widows are known to God.

Deuteronomy 10:18 says that God administers justice for the widow. Psalm 146:9 says God supports the widow. So if you're as a widow, you can be sure that God knows exactly what you need.

Last week my mother moved into a retirement home in New Jersey. My father died several months ago, and since that time many decisions have had to be made to help my mother. Should she sell the house, and when should she sell the house? Should she stay in her home area? Should she live with one of her children? All three children invited her to come live with them. So many decisions to be made. It's been wonderful to see how the Lord has met my mother's needs. He's answered prayers and guided her step by step in her decisions. You can be sure that God knows the needs of widows.

### 2. The extent of God's blessing is dependent on faith and obedience.

God blessed this needy widow - but notice that she had to **have faith** in Elisha's word from the Lord, and she had to **obey** the message. The word of the Lord to her through the prophet Elisha was "collect as many empty oil containers as possible, even from all of the neighbors!" And the widow obeyed in faith. Can you imagine this widow and her sons knocking on doors, asking "Do you have any old jars or old pots?" I'm sure she was met with various responses, but she obeyed in faith, and she was blessed with a miracle.

Notice verse 6: *"When the vessels were full, she said to her son, 'Bring me another vessel.' And he said to her, 'There is not another vessel.' So the oil ceased."* There's a great spiritual lesson here. **God's supply is as big as our faith.** If there had been more containers, the oil would not have ceased. The oil would have kept on flowing.

The extent of God's blessing is dependent on faith and obedience! Do you want God to bless your life? Are you willing to obey God and walk by faith? Don't limit God's blessing by lack of faith and disobedience.

Let's take one illustration – about paying back a debt that you may have. This widow not only obeyed by getting the empty vessels, but she also obeyed God by paying back her debt. It was not right to stay in debt. Do you owe any

money right now? Have you borrowed something that you haven't returned, or do you get a loan you haven't paid back? In Romans 13:8, God's Word says "Owe *no one anything*," Maybe God's Word is speaking to you. Don't expect God's blessing on your life if you're not willing to obey **all** that the Lord says in **all** His Word. The extent of God's blessing is dependent on faith and obedience.

## Practical Applications

### 1. What do you have in your house?

In verse 2, "Elisha said to her, 'What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?'" And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil." Well, God took what she had in her house, and He multiplied it. That's how the debt was paid. That's how God met her needs.

The question to us is: What do you have in your "house"? Maybe you don't have much, but God expects us to start with what we have, not with what we don't have! Then God will do the rest.

Do you see the spiritual lesson? What do you have in *your* house? You may think you don't have much - not much spiritual gift, not much natural talent. The way you see it, you can't do much. As far as you're concerned, you don't have much, spiritually speaking.

Well, if you're a Christian, you know you have the **Holy Spirit!** In fact, as often in Scripture, the oil in the jar may be a spiritual picture of the Holy Spirit. Well, start here! Begin to share the oil with other "clay pots." Share Jesus Christ with others. You'll be amazed at what God can do through you, even though your testimony is not very exciting, from your perspective. Start with what God has given you - and you definitely have the Holy Spirit if you're a believer. God can miraculously touch many lives through you.

What do you have in *your* house? You may think you do not have much spiritual gift, and hardly any natural talent – but you definitely have the Holy Spirit. Start with what you have, and be willing to let God miraculously touch other clay pots through you.

### 2. We must be empty before we can be filled.

Let's continue this spiritual lesson about the oil a little further. In order for the many jars to be filled, the jars had to be empty. Verse 3: "Then he said, 'Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels...'" I wonder if all kinds of things had to be dumped out of some of these vessels before they could be filled with oil. Maybe some of them even contained garbage that had to be thrown out.

In the same way, if we are to be filled with the Spirit, we must be emptied of self. If you're not a Christian, you need to acknowledge that you can't save yourself. You must empty yourself of all your own efforts and turn to Jesus Christ alone for salvation. He will fill you with His Spirit.

If you're a Christian, and you know you've been given the Holy Spirit, but you know you are not **filled** with the Holy Spirit. You're wondering what the problem is. The key is that we are too filled with **self**, and what **I** want to do with **my** life. We need to empty ourselves of ourselves. We need more of God, and less of self.

Think of all the different containers that the woman and her sons collected. They must have been all sizes and shapes, but they all had one common characteristic. Before they were used, they had to be empty!

We, too, come in all sizes and shapes. We're all different. But there's one thing that's a characteristic common to all of us. If we're going to be filled with the Holy Spirit, we need to be emptied of self. We must be empty before we can be filled.