

A Boy Returns to Life Through Elisha's Ministry

2 Kings 4:18-37

2 Kings 4:18-37 – *“And the child grew. Now it happened one day that he went out to his father, to the reapers. And he said to his father, ‘My head, my head!’ So he said to a servant, ‘Carry him to his mother.’ When he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut the door upon him, and went out. Then she called to her husband, and said, ‘Please send me one of the young men and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God and come back.’ So he said, ‘Why are you going to him today? It is neither the New Moon nor the Sabbath.’ And she said, ‘It is well.’ Then she saddled a donkey, and said to her servant, ‘Drive, and go forward; do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you.’ And so she departed, and went to the man of God at Mount Carmel.*

So it was, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to his servant Gehazi, ‘Look, the Shunammite woman! Please run now to meet her, and say to her, ‘Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?’” And she answered, “It is well.” Now when she came to the man of God at the hill, she caught him by the feet, but Gehazi came near to push her away. But the man of God said, “Let her alone; for her soul is in deep distress, and the LORD has hidden it from me, and has not told me.” So she said, “Did I ask a son of my lord? Did I not say, ‘Do not deceive me?’ Then he said to Gehazi, “Get yourself ready, and take my staff in your hand, and be on your way. If you meet anyone, do not greet him; and if anyone greets you, do not answer him; but lay my staff on the face of the child.” And the mother of the child said, “As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you.” So he arose and followed her. Now Gehazi went on ahead of them, and laid the staff on the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Therefore he went back to meet him, and told him, saying, “The child has not awakened.”

When Elisha came into the house, there was the child, lying dead on his bed. He went in therefore, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD. And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands; and he stretched himself out on the child, and the flesh of the child became warm. He returned and walked back and forth in the house, and again went up and stretched himself out on him; then the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi and said, “Call this Shunammite woman.” So he called her. And when she came in to him, he said, “Pick up your son.” So she went in, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; then she picked up her son and went out.”

Background Notes

One day the Shunammite woman's son was out with his father and the reapers, and he developed a severe headache. His father had a servant carry him back to the house, but within a few hours the boy died in his mother's arms. His mother laid the boy on Elisha's bed in his vacant apartment, and she went straight to find Elisha. Elisha was at Mount Carmel, about 25 miles away. When Elisha got the news, he immediately sent his servant Gehazi ahead of him to lay

Elisha's staff on the dead boy, but the boy did not respond. When Elisha arrived he went directly to his room where the dead boy was lying on his bed. The first thing he did was pray. Prayer is always a good place to start.

Then Elisha went up and stretched himself out over the child, put his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, his hands on his hands, and the boy's flesh became warm. This was not artificial respiration or cardiopulmonary resuscitation – it was a miracle. Why did Elisha use this technique? Maybe the Lord told him. Maybe he remembered Elijah telling him that he had used a similar technique when God raised the widow of Zarephath's son back to life in 1 Kings 17.

In any case, the boy was brought back to life. This was one of the great miracles in the life and ministry of Elisha.

Doctrinal Points

1. Bad things do happen to good people.

Back in the early 1980s Harold Kushner, a Jewish rabbi, wrote a book entitled, "When Bad things Happen to Good People." Unfortunately the book took an unbiblical position. The bottom line was that bad things happen to good people because God is not in ultimate control of everything. But that's not what the Bible teaches! Ephesians 1:11 teaches that God is in complete control, even when "bad" things happen to "good" people.

That truth is taught here in 2 Kings 4. The Shunammite woman was involved in good deeds in the community. She was sensitive to the needs of God's servant Elisha. She was a woman of great faith. But something very bad happened to her. Her young son died suddenly, unexpectedly, and tragically. Do you think God had lost control here? Certainly not. God was in total control!

In this story, one of the reasons why God permitted this tragedy to happen was that He planning to work a miracle. The woman would receive her son back alive! Sometimes we don't see the reasons why God allows bad things to happen to good people. But on the basis of Romans 8:28, if you're a believer you can be sure that "God works all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose."

Romans 8:28 **does not** say that all things are good! Some things are bad! When death intrudes, that's not good. Death is an enemy. But Romans 8:28 **does** say that God will work **all things** together for our ultimate good. Even tragedies. Even discipline. When God needs to discipline us, that's not pleasant - but God is working that into His overall program for good. For the believer, God can take all things and work them together for His good purpose – and his ultimate purpose is to make us more and more like Jesus.

Perhaps something bad or tragic has happened to you or to your family recently. Why? We don't know. Bad things do happen to good people. You may be wondering, "What did I do wrong?" Well, God may use tragic events for discipline, but many times He allows bad things to happen when you're not doing anything wrong.

Bad things happen to good people for any of a number of reasons, and we may never know those reasons until we get to Heaven. And when bad things happen to good people, that's not because God has lost control. God is in complete control! He is working out His plans and purposes in our lives. Bad things do happen to good people.

2. Faith presses on.

What a great lesson we see in this woman's faith. Her faith persevered, especially in difficult and tragic circumstances. She went quickly to Elisha and urged the man of God to come! It seems that, just like Abraham in Hebrews 11:19, this woman had such great faith that she believed that if God took her son, God could also raise him back to life. In fact, we believe that she, too, is mentioned in Hebrews 11, that great chapter of faith. Hebrews 11:35 says, "*Women receive their dead raised to life again.*" Certainly the Shunammite woman's great faith is recognized there.

When she said "*All is well*" to Gehazi (v26) I don't think she was being deceitful, and I think it was more than just a courteous greeting. She was saying that whatever the outcome might be, "all is well" - because God's will was being carried out. She thought: "I believe that God can raise my son back to life, but even if that is not God's will, still - all is well."

The woman of Shunem was willing to accept God's will, whatever the outcome - but at the same time she pressed on in faith for her son to be returned to life. Faith presses on.

Practical Application

Don't be like the "Shunammite man."

This lesson is particularly for fathers.

The "Shunammite man"? Who's that? He's the Shunammite woman's husband. He wasn't a major character in this story, but there's enough about him in this chapter that we can draw some pretty good conclusions and lessons. And one of the lessons would be this: Don't be like the Shunammite man!

When you look at what's in this chapter about the Shunammite man, there's good news and bad news. The good news is that he was a good provider. It looks like this couple was pretty well off. He had done well in his job and career, and

provided well. It also seems that he let his wife have the time and money to carry out her good deeds in the community. And at his wife's suggestion, he agreed to build the prophet's chamber. That's the good news.

The bad news, or the sad news, is that it appears this man was not a spiritual man. He was not the spiritual head of his household. He seemed more interested in his work than in his family. When his son cried out, *"My head! My head!"* because of his severe headache, the father told a servant, "Carry him to his mother." He didn't carry the boy himself - and he didn't even follow the boy to the house. He went on with his work.

Then when the mother came out and said, *"Please send me one of the young men and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God and come back."* So he said, *"Why are you going to him today? It is neither the New Moon nor the Sabbath."* You would think he would have asked, "What's going on? Is our son OK?" Instead, by implication, he said to his wife, "Why are you suddenly getting so religious? It's not the Sabbath!" How insensitive to make a comment like that when his son was very sick. He didn't even ask about the welfare of the boy. It seems he wasn't really concerned about the needs of his family, and he wasn't the spiritual head of his household.

Men, let me ask you – are you like the Shunammite man? You may be a good provider. You're not against your family being involved in ministry. In fact, in some ways you support the Lord's work – but basically you're a Sunday-morning-only Christian. The rest of the time, it's business. You're not the spiritual head of the household. You let our wife carry the burden of the raising your children. You're more interested in your job than in the spiritual well being of your family. Are you like the Shunammite man?

Not long ago I talked to a Christian man who, in tears, told me that he wished he could start his family life all over again. Why? Because he realized that he hadn't set his priorities properly. He realized that he had spent more time on business than his family. He realized that one of the main reasons why his sons were walking away from the Lord was because he had blown it. He hadn't set a good example. He had been like the Shunammite man. He hadn't been sensitive to the spiritual needs of his family. Men, let's not be like the Shunammite man.

Ladies, be more like the Shunammite woman. Men, don't be like the Shunammite man!