



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

2 Kings 4: 1-37

Spring 2024

"Mercy, Mercy, Mercy"

TRANSCRIPT

Good morning. We are continuing our studies in the ministry and life of the prophet Elisha, and we're looking at 2 Kings, chapter 4. I'm going to cover verses 1-37, but it's a lot to read, so I'm going to just read verses 8-17—but let me give you a quick summary of the passage.

The full passage deals with three acts of mercy and the *first* has to do with a widow, (in verses 1-7), who is in debt and the creditor is at the door. She needs help immediately and appeals to Elisha for that—and he shows mercy.

The *second* has to do with another woman. She is not a widow, but she doesn't have children, (as the first woman does), and shows mercy to the prophet and the prophet shows mercy to her.

Then another woman is given a child; and the *third* act of mercy is mercy for that child and her, (and we'll cover that at length in the lesson).

Let me begin reading our text with the second woman in verse 8. We don't know her name; she's simply called, "the Shunammite." (vs25).

4 Now a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD; and the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves." 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 except a jar of oil." ³ Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels at large for yourself from all your neighbors, *even empty vessels*; do not get a few. ⁴ And you shall go in and shut the door behind you and your sons, and pour out into all these vessels, and you shall set aside what is full." ⁵ So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons; they were bringing *the vessels* to her and she poured. ⁶ When the vessels were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not one vessel more." And the oil stopped. ⁷ Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt, and you *and* your sons can live on the rest.

(Now, this is the text that was read by Dan)

⁸ Now there came a day when Elisha passed over to Shunem, where there was a prominent woman, and she persuaded him to eat food. And so it was, as often as he passed by, he turned in there to eat food. ⁹ She said to her husband, "Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God passing by us continually. ¹⁰ Please, let us make a little walled upper chamber and let us set a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lampstand; and it shall be, when he comes to us, that he can turn in there."

¹¹ One day he came there and turned in to the upper chamber and rested. ¹² Then he said to Gehazi his servant, "Call this Shunammite." And when he had called her, she stood before him. ¹³ He said to him, "Say now to her, 'Behold, you have been careful for us with all this care; what can I do for you? Would you be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the army?'" And she answered, "I live among my own people." ¹⁴ So he said, "What then is to be done for her?" And Gehazi answered, "Truly she has no son and her husband is old." ¹⁵ He said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood in the doorway. ¹⁶ Then he said, "At this season next year you will embrace a son." And she said, "No, my lord, O man of God, do not lie to your maidservant."

¹⁷ The woman conceived and bore a son at that season the next year, as Elisha had said to her.

(That was the second act of mercy. The third, we will see, is even greater.)

¹⁸ When the child was grown, the day came that he went out to his father to the reapers. ¹⁹ He said to his father, "My head, my head." And he said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother." ²⁰ When he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her lap until noon, and *then* died. ²¹ She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut *the door* behind him and went out. ²² Then she called to her husband and said, "Please send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God and return." ²³ He said, "Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath." And she said, "*It will be well.*" ²⁴ Then she saddled a donkey and said to her servant, "Drive and go forward; do not slow down the pace for me unless I tell you." ²⁵ So she went and came to the man of God to Mount Carmel.

When the man of God saw her at a distance, he said to Gehazi his servant, "Behold, there is the Shunammite. ²⁶ 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." ²⁷ When she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught hold of his feet. And Gehazi came near to push her away; but the man of God said, "Let her alone, for her soul is troubled within her; and the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me." ²⁸ Then she said, "Did I ask for a son from my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?"

²⁹ Then he said to Gehazi, "Gird up your loins and take my staff in your hand, and go your way; if you meet any man, do not salute him, and if anyone salutes you, do not answer him; and lay my staff on the lad's face." ³⁰ The mother of the lad said, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." And he arose and followed her. ³¹ Then Gehazi passed on before them and laid the staff on the lad's face, but there was no sound or response. So he returned to meet him and told him, "The lad has not awakened."

³² When Elisha came into the house, behold the lad was dead and laid on his bed. ³³ So he entered and shut the door behind them both and prayed to the LORD. ³⁴ And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth and

his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands, and he stretched himself on him; and the flesh of the child became warm. ³⁵ Then he returned and walked in the house once back and forth, and went up and stretched himself on him; and the lad sneezed seven times and the lad opened his eyes. ³⁶ He called Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite." So he called her. And when she came in to him, he said, "Take up your son." ³⁷ Then she went in and fell at his feet and bowed herself to the ground, and she took up her son and went out.

2 Kings 4: 1-37

Let's bow together in a word of prayer, and ask the LORD to bless this time of study and worship together.

LORD, it is that; it is a time for us to study and to gain refreshment and be built up in the faith through the study of Your Word, the reading and the teaching of Scripture, and so we pray for that, we pray that will be the result of our time together. And so we pray the Spirit of God will be active in our hearts and open our minds to the things we've read and the things we will consider. And we pray that in all of this, You would be magnified in our hearts. This all applies to us; this is how You work among Your people. You work in different ways at different times in history, but the result is the same; You build up Your people through the blessings that You give. —You're the source of it all.

And so we look to You to bless us in this hour, build us up in the faith, help us to understand the things that we have read, and the things that we'll consider—and that in it all You would be glorified, You'd be magnified in our hearts. That's so fundamental, LORD, if we're to live the life that You've called us to live—which is simply a life of faith. And what is the life of faith but trusting Your Word; it's believing. In spite of the circumstances, it's believing Your Word, and living an obedient life to Your glory. I pray that we'll do that.

As Mike reminded us in the Sunday School class, life is short. We may not even have today. May we live each day that You give us to Your glory—and that means, live a

life of faith trusting You. So I pray, LORD, that You would instill that within our hearts as we consider these three acts of mercy, and that we would glorify You in our hearts and in our deeds, and in all that we do.

LORD, we pray for our spiritual condition. We also pray for our physical condition; we pray You'd provide for us and bless us, and that we would see Your hand of provision. We confess we see it every day and don't even notice it because every moment is a gift of life from You, and everything we possess we have ultimately by Your grace and Your "good hand." And yet we have it so often in this land in which we live, (we have such prosperity), that we don't even consider it as something as a gift from You. —But it all is. And yet sometimes there's privation that's taken away from us and we learn how dependent we are on You.

LORD bless us now as we continue to worship You in song, in the hymns that we will sing, and we pray that You'd prepare our hearts for this time together, this time of study and worship. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) In Genesis 35, following one of the lowest points in Jacob's difficult life, the LORD told him to go up to Bethel and make an altar to Him. So Jacob told his sons, 'Let us arise and go up to Bethel so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress.' (Gen 35:3).

That's the God of Jacob. He is the God of Abraham and Isaac. He is the God of Isaiah and Jeremiah, the God of Peter and Paul, the God of Augustin, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, and Warfield. He is your God, the only God, God Almighty, the Triune God, the infinite, eternal and holy God, the personal God who loves His people and answers all of us 'in the day of our distress.'

What a blessing! What a glorious and gracious thing, that He who is enthroned above the universe would stoop, condescend to come down to us to care for us and answer us in our time of need.

In 2 Kings chapter 4, verses 1-37, there are three examples of the LORD doing that, three examples of His mercy to His saints in the day of their distress—an example of what He does for each of us as we look to Him.

Elisha was the great prophet of the day; and as his story continues it clearly follows the pattern of his predecessor, Elijah, with miracles that were similar to those that Elisha did. In 1 Kings 17, at the beginning of Elijah's ministry, he daily provided oil and flour for a widow and her son during a severe famine; and then, when the widow's son died, Elijah raised him from the dead.

We see similar events here in 2 Kings 4—which served two purposes. *First*, to show that the LORD's hand was on Elisha just as it was on Elijah, and showing Elisha was a worthy successor to the great prophet. And *second*, that God supports those who fear Him; that He answers us 'in the day of our distress.' And He doesn't do it grudgingly, but gladly; He does it joyfully. He is, as Paul told the Corinthians, "the God of all comfort." (2Cor 1:3).

The first answer, or miracle, involved a widow whose husband had recently died. [Some of the old rabbis identified him as Obadiah, from 1 Kings 18, (verses 3&4), who had hidden 100 prophets from the wicked queen Jezebel and saved their lives. According to Josephus, he had borrowed money to do that, to feed the prophets that he had put in hiding. That's a legend, it's speculation, but the man was a prophet living in the community of prophets, so he was a godly man.]

But upon his death, his wife and children had been left destitute and were facing a crisis. She came to Elisha for help. She reminded him that he knew her husband, knew that he, as she said, "feared the LORD." (vs1b). But she was in debt, and the creditor was coming for her children as payment on it; "...the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves." (v1c). This was her day of distress, the actual day of it. She was desperate—but would God work through Elisha to help her as he had helped others through Elijah? The widow didn't doubt that He would.

But still, this was a challenge for Elisha. He was in no doubt either; he asked what she had in her house. "Nothing..." she said, "...but a jar of oil." (vs3). And actually, it's smaller than that—what this was, was a flask used for anointing. Not much to work with, but it was enough. Elisha told her to, 'borrow all the vessels she could from the neighbors, all the jars, all the containers.' "...do not get a few." he said. (vs3b). In other words, 'Don't think God can't answer big—He does.' In fact, Paul reminds us of that in Ephesians chapter 3, verse 20; He, "is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think." I think all of us probably think God does small things, not the big things. But no, 'He's able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think!'

And we see it here. She didn't question him; she obeyed in every detail. Elisha told her to, 'collect the neighbors' jars', (vs3), and, 'behind closed doors', (vs4), begin pouring the oil from her small flask into the many jars and bowls that she'd collected. (vs5). The reason for doing this in private isn't stated, ('with the doors shut', vs4a),—but it seems it was evidently to demonstrate that Elisha's presence wasn't necessary.

You remember the man who came to Jesus and asked for help because of his sick and dying daughter and, 'he needed Jesus to be there.' (Ma7 9:18). And that is the issue that some might have...'we need the prophet there with us; he's got to be there, in this room.' And what Elisha was demonstrating is that, 'No, it's not necessary for me to be there because this is God's work.' And so that is demonstrated here in that she's in there, behind closed doors, by herself, with the prophet outside.

The prophet does miracles but they are the miracles that God does *through* him. The prophet was only His representative to the people. He had no knowledge to reveal, or understanding, or power, to do miracles in and of himself. It's all of God. And her obedience to him in this regard showed her faith in that.

Now the word used for '*pouring*' here is an intensive form of the word stressing an ongoing action. She 'kept on pouring' because she kept believing. (And she didn't stop until the flask ran out.) "Bring me another vessel.", (vs6a), she said—until her son said, "There is not one vessel more." (vs6b). —And then the oil stopped. So just as the

LORD provided oil for the widow of Zarephath in Elijah's day, He provided for this widow and her children. God can do a lot with a little.

He can do a lot with nothing—He made the universe out of nothing, and Hebrews 11:3 states, 'We know that by faith.' And when we know 'how great God is', and that nothing is too difficult for Him, we will live by faith like this poor widow did.

And she experienced abundance beyond what she had even hoped for. The profits from the sale of the oil gave her enough to pay off all the family debts, to deliver her children from slavery—and far more, they had enough to live on. That was 'far more abundantly beyond all that she had asked for or even thought of'. Not only were her children rescued from slavery, but the family was rescued from poverty. The LORD doesn't forget those who fear Him, and those who serve Him.

The next great miracle occurred for a woman who had no children, and who showed mercy to Elisha. She lived in Shunem. She's not named; she's known simply as "the Shunammite." Shunem was in the Jezreel Valley; in the central part of Israel just south of Mount Carmel where Elijah did his great miracle of calling down fire from heaven in his contest with the prophets of Baal. And that's where Elisha had his home.

This valley, the Jezreel Valley, is referred to in Israel today as *Ha-Emek*, 'the valley', because this is the breadbasket of Israel. It is a fertile valley with prosperous farms; and she was a prosperous person. She is described here as "a prominent woman", (vs8), a wealthy woman who clearly had keen insight in spiritual things. Such women are not common because such people are not common—often, wealth blinds them to the things of God.

Now there are some exceptions to that for we see that throughout history—the Countess of Huntington comes to my mind. She was an 18th century English aristocrat who became a believer in Christ—and as a result of that she supported the ministries of George Whitefield, and the Wesleys, and of others.

She was a remarkable woman. Living in the upper class, she would invite many of the prominent people of that day, the aristocrats, into her home where they would hear

the Gospel preached by various men who were among great preachers in that day: Whitefield, and the Wesleys, and others. God puts His people in all kinds of places, from the heights to the depths, to be His witness; there at work, at home, wherever. He's put each of us somewhere, to be a light, to be a servant.

The Shunammite woman was like that and she took an interest in Elisha. We read in verse 8 that, "...there came a day when Elisha passed over to Shunem....and she persuaded him to eat food." By now, Elisha was known—a great public figure, and the successor of Elijah, and she wanted to contribute to his ministry; she referred to him as "a holy man of God". (vs9).

She realized that he would be passing through the region often, and so she proposed to her husband for them to show hospitality to Elisha. Verse 10, "Please, let us make a little walled upper chamber and let us set a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lamp stand; and it shall be, when he comes to us, *that* he can turn in there." It was a generous offer, and Elisha received it with gratitude.

It's always interesting to see the response of the prophets—and these prophets, Elijah and Elisha. Elisha didn't presume that it was his right to have such a gift because he was poor and because he was God's servant. He was grateful for her kindness, and he wanted to bless her and her husband with a gift. She was wealthy and he didn't know if she had any special or specific want or need—so he asked his servant Gehazi what would be appropriate. (She didn't have any political need; she didn't need an audience with the king, which Elisha could have given her, or with anyone else of authority, or any kind of financial need.) But, Gehazi said, "Truly she has no son and her husband is old." (vs14). A son was important in Israelite society in order to maintain the family name and preserve the title to the family inheritance—to the property that the family was allotted. So it was important to have a son. But more than that, I think, it was just natural for the Shunammite woman to want a child—to be a mother.

But this was an older couple and she had likely given up all hope of that long ago. And so when Gehazi went to her and "called her", and she came to Elisha and, "she stood in the doorway" (vs15), of his home, she then had a hard time believing the good

news that he gave her; verse 16, "Then he said, 'At this season next year you will embrace a son.' And she said, 'No, my lord, O man of God, do not lie to your maidservant.' "

Of course God cannot lie, and a prophet who speaks for God cannot lie—that's impossible. That's Titus chapter 1, verse 2. "God cannot lie." It's repeated in Hebrews, chapter 6, verse 18; "...it is impossible for God to lie...". His Word is pure; and His promises are true and unbreakable. We can rest confidently in them.

The Shunammite woman knew that. She wasn't questioning Elisha's character or God's Word—this was an expression of astonishment at the good news; and it seemed beyond belief.

But it happened, just as the prophet said it would. Verse 17, "The woman conceived and bore a son at that season the next year, as Elisha had said to her." That was the *second* act of mercy that we see in this passage.

In the Beatitudes, in Matthew chapter 5, verse 7, Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Now that's not, 'a quid pro quo' —getting something for something; performing a service in order to receive a service; doing something good in order to receive something good; getting mercy in exchange for mercy. —Just the opposite.

The Beatitudes describe the true nature of Christ's disciples—the *nature* of those who inherit the kingdom of God. And one of those characteristics is *mercy*. Mercy is defined differently in different places by different people, but I like this definition: 'Mercy is giving help to the helpless.'

A person must first receive mercy from God in order to be changed. And then as a result of this change, the new nature that the one, (who has received mercy from Him), has, (he or she), being born again, shows mercy to others. 'Mercy produces the character in a person that shows mercy to people.' —That's the Gospel.

Paul wrote, in Romans chapter 5, verse 6, "While we were still helpless...", (when we could do nothing to save ourselves, when we were still helpless,) "...Christ died for

the ungodly." Not those who, 'clean up their act'—He died for the *ungodly*. He doesn't forgive and justify the one who *works*, the one who *achieves*, the one who *merits*—but the one who *believes*, the one who simply *receives*.

So Christ wasn't saying a person should be merciful in order to receive mercy—the true disciple *is* merciful. And because he or she is, they receive mercy in life—and at the final judgment. And the *blessing* produced by God in a disciple, a believer, is the great motivation for being helpful and showing mercy to others. Because we have been shown mercy, *great* mercy, we *want* to show mercy to those around us. That is a great characteristic of a believer in Christ. It's great evidence of the new birth and new nature—*Mercy*.

There are all kinds of things and characteristics that can impress us about people: Intellect, wealth, a winsome, winning personality—but all of that can be used for selfish ends. It seems to me, mercy is different from that.

Fundamentally it is kindness. And it was characteristic of Christ: "He went about doing good" Peter said. (Acts 10:38). I love that statement. It's a simple statement that says so much: "He went about doing good"...and far more than that, having compassion on a helpless widow, or a grieving mother and giving blessing to them. There's nothing more impressive than that. It is selfless. And it is to characterize us; 'giving help to the helpless.'

It was the characteristic of this woman, the Shunammite woman. She was merciful because she loved the prophet, and she loved Elisha because she loved God—she loved the LORD so it was natural that she wanted to bless him, (*Elisha*), support him and be merciful —expecting nothing in return.

But she got something in return, something great—a son! And we can be sure that if we are living a transformed life, an obedient, godly life, a selfless life, the LORD will take care of us and bless us in every way—and every day.

Not to make us healthy, not to make us wealthy and to give us everything we want. In fact, He may deprive us of what we want because it is not *best*. —But He will

always give *the faithful* what is best for them, even if it is hard. He blessed her with what she wanted most, a son. It was a miracle. It wasn't a quid pro quo; for God blesses obedience, He blesses kindness, He blesses selflessness...and He gave her a child.

The child grew to be a young boy, and no doubt was the joy of the Shunammite and her husband. But the unexpected blessing can lead to unforeseen sorrow....and that happened. The boy went out one day to help his father and the servants in the field during the harvest when suddenly he cried out to his father, "My head, my head." (vs18). His father told one of the servants to, "Carry him to his mother." (vs19). He was, 'placed on her lap where a few hours later he died.' (vs20). It's hard to imagine the sorrow that she must have had at such a moment.

My grandmother once told me many, many years ago about the death of her second son. His name was Sammy; he was four. He and my father were outside playing and Sammy fell. He skinned his knee, it got infected, he got tetanus, and he died. So he was my uncle who I never knew. She said, 'There is nothing harder for a mother than losing a child; you never get over it.' I'm sure that was so.

But for this woman who lost a child she had never expected to have, the grief must have been overwhelming. Puzzling as well; the blessing she was given, and the hope that she had for her son was suddenly snatched away.

Still, she didn't lose her faith. She placed his body in the prophet's room, then asked her husband for a servant and a donkey that she might go to Elisha. And he asked, "Why?" (vs23). To him that seemed like an odd question to ask. Evidently she had said nothing to him about the child—or it may be that she had, and he's thinking, 'Why? It's over; it's done; it's lost. Death is the end of everything.' But she answered, "*It will be well.*" (vs23b).

She was confident. She was confident, but not casual; there is a sense of urgency in her mission. We read in verse 24, "Then she saddled the donkey and said to her servant, 'Drive and go forward; do not slow down the pace for me unless I tell you.' " She crossed the Jezreel Valley north to Mount Carmel where Elisha was—who saw her

coming and sent his servant Gehazi to meet her. When he asked, " 'Is it well with the child?' She answered, 'It is well.' " (vs26).

One of the secular commentaries of this wrote, "She said these words to Gehazi because she does not want to be detained." And I can see his point, that that makes some sense. But I say to that, 'No, these are the words of a woman of great faith. So firmly she believed that her boy would be raised, she was confident in that that she could say, "It is well with the child." '

Just as Abraham believed that Isaac would have been raised from the dead if, in Genesis 22, he had carried out that sacrifice of Isaac, (which he fully intended to do). And I don't doubt that when the angel stayed his hand, it was just at that moment when he's about to plunge the knife into his beloved son, ('his only son', as he's called). He could do that because, as the author of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 11:19, 'He believed God would raise him from the dead.' God had to because this was 'the child of promise', and the whole history of God's people hung on that one boy.

No, these are words of a woman of great faith. She firmly believed that her boy would be raised, just as Abraham did. And she came directly to Elisha, then 'she fell down and took hold of his feet'. (vs27a). Now I think here, (if we haven't seen it in her at this point), we see the deep emotion that was in her heart. She falls down at his feet and holds on to him. Evidently that was a breach of proper decorum, because Gehazi tried "to push her away", (vs27b), (and you think of those disciples trying to get rid of the children that the parents were giving to Jesus to be blessed, and He says, 'No', "Suffer the children to come to me." (Mar 10:4). So Elisha stopped Gehazi. He saw, "Her soul is troubled." (vs27c). Something happened, and God had not revealed it to him.

Now that reveals two things about a prophet; it reveals two things in general, and it reveals two things about Elisha in particular. He was not so enamored of himself and his importance that he was unapproachable or unaffected. He didn't care so much about decorum and respect as he did for the soul of that woman. That made him perceptive; that made him sensitive; that made him insightful. He cared about her as the LORD did.

He was God's representative. We see God reflected in the prophet; he's God's representative, and that's the second thing. Again, it reveals that a prophet was only an agent of the LORD. He had no knowledge, understanding, or power in and of himself—it's all of God. So whenever a prophet spoke on his own, it was wrong; he's totally dependent on the LORD for the revelation given.

I think that reminds us of the importance of God's revelation; it's who we're to listen to; that's what we're to read; that's what we're to obey—the revelation of God. And the prophet has nothing in and of himself—he's an empty vessel until he's filled with whatever God gives him—power or revelation.

And God had not given him revelation about this. He's not revealed this crisis to Elisha, so the Shunammite did. And she did it carefully, she did it wisely. Verse 28, "Did I ask for a son from my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?" In other words, 'Was it a deception after all?' Now she was a woman of faith, as I've said. She knew that could not be; God deceives no one. And she knew that her blessing would not end in the boy's death— she is basically saying, 'Change things. This cannot be.'

Her response was brief, a bit cryptic, but Elisha understood and took action to restore the blessing. He sent his servant on ahead of him; told him to run; 'Let no one delay him; and lay Elisha's staff, his rod, on the boy's face.' (vs29). He did it, but without effect. And so Gehazi reported to him, "The lad has not awakened." (vs31b).

So, Elisha entered the house, entered the room; and verse 32 states, "...behold the lad was dead and laid on his bed.", which reinforced the fact for us that the child was, in fact, dead. What he was about to receive from the prophet was not CPR. He wouldn't be resuscitated—he would be brought back from the dead.

But it required a process. When Elijah raised the widow of Zarephath's son, the result was more immediate. He stretched himself on the boy three times, prayed, and the boy lived. Here a more involved method was required of Elisha. Verse 33, "So he entered and shut the door behind them both and prayed to the LORD. And he went up

and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands, and stretched himself on him; and the flesh of the child became warm. Then he returned and walked in the house once back and forth, and went up and stretched himself on him; and the lad sneezed seven times and the lad opened his eyes. He called Gehazi and said, 'Call this Shunammite.' So he called her: And when she came in to him, he said, 'Take up your son.' (verses 33-36).

There was no set formula for these miracles that these prophets did. God deals with different people in different ways. And I don't know that we can say much more than that about this. But in both cases, (with both Elijah and Elisha), we see the confident faith that both prophets had.

Genuine faith and trust in the LORD is seen in perseverance—continuing in prayer when the answer or results are not immediate. So, we must continue; we must persevere. That is the life of faith. That is often the test of faith. Will we persevere? Do we truly believe? The life of faith is one of perseverance, as we see here.

When the boy was raised up, his life restored, the Shunammite woman was called in. Elisha said, "Take up your son." (vs36). And then we read in verse 37, "Then she went in and fell at his feet and bowed herself to the ground, and she took up her son and went out."

It was a third miracle of mercy—and the greatest of the three, showing again that the LORD rules over life and even death itself. Nothing is too difficult for Him. The chapter ends with two more miracles in Gilgal, but these first three are examples of mercy—and reveal the nature of true religion and the life of faith.

God is sovereign, absolutely. We cannot stress that enough. God is sovereign. He determines the length of our days. That's Psalm 139, verse 16, "In Your book were all written, the days that were ordained *for me*, when, as yet, there was not one of them." Our days are all numbered; the LORD decreed that from all eternity.

That's what the Word says; and that's not fatalism. And because He is sovereign, we pray, not to change His will, but to change the circumstances so that His will will be accomplished. And so we do that, according to His revelation. That's faith. It is active; and it acts with wisdom, it acts with caution, it acts with urgency to appropriate the means that God has given to do His will. As more than one great theologian has said, "The God who ordains the ends, also ordains the means to the ends."

It may be evangelism. That's the means that God has decreed and that He uses to call His elect out of darkness, and into light and life.

It may be Scripture, which God uses to sanctify us. We will not be sanctified apart from the Word of God; it produces in us growth, the means to the end.

Or it's prayer. That's how we communicate with God; and He always responds with mercy to a prayer of faith.

That's His great work, *mercy*. He is 'the God of all comfort'. We can't separate Him from the One, (who we looked at last week), who sent bears against boys who mocked the prophet. He's also just; He is "a consuming fire," the Word of God tells us. (Heb 12:29). But He did that, that judgment in the previous chapter, with restraint, with mercy involved.

The work that God delights in, that He truly delights in, is seen here; it is His love for His people. It is *mercy, mercy, mercy!*, from the one whom Jacob called the, "God who answered me in the day of my distress." (Gen 35:3). That is our God, the only God.

Today we don't go to a prophet, we don't go to an apostle to get an answer from Him. We live in a different age, and really in a more privileged position from the widow and the Shunammite woman. Our mediator is Christ, the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity; and He is the mediator between God and men—the only mediator, we are told in 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 5. Through Him, we go directly to the Father, and to the throne of grace where we, "...receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. " (Heb 4:16).

And so the great lesson of our passage is, 'Go to the God who is our Father, the only God who is merciful, go to Him in prayer.' Heaven has been opened up to us; and we are invited to draw near with confidence, with boldness, day and night at any time—all times! The assurance we have is that the LORD hears and answers in the day of our distress...or the day of our peace and prosperity. But He answers according to His wisdom and goodness, to give to us what is best for us.

It's not always what we want, but it's always what we need. The life of faith is trusting Him in the worst of times—being faithful, as the Shunammite woman was in her great test of faith. And God blessed her.

God answers big. He does, 'more than we ask or think'. He even makes tragedies into blessings. The widow and the Shunammite saw that. But even if we don't see that in our life and in our experience presently, faith perseveres in trusting in the LORD. Faith is what lays hold of the great promises of God, and knows that regardless of my circumstances God is faithful to me, and blesses me, and will continue to do that.

So, may God help us to persevere, persevere presently because the day is coming when the trials will all be over, 'all tears wiped from our eyes'. (Isa 25:8). Heaven has not only been opened up for prayer, but for entrance and life, eternal life in God's house and glory. That's our destiny. And it's certain.

Well that is for believers in Jesus Christ, just as the privilege of prayer is for His people. Only those who have put their faith in Christ as God and Savior are His people. So if you've not believed in Him, recognize your need of salvation, realize that you are a sinner, separated from the LORD, guilty and in need of forgiveness. Trust in Christ; trust in Him whose death has paid for our sins fully and completely—and made peace with God. All who are forgiven, cleansed, declared righteous, and made sons and daughters of God are children of God forever, with a glorious future. May God help you to come to Him.

And you have, may God help you to rejoice in what you have in this life, and what He's doing, and to trust in Him.

(Closing prayer) Father, what a great truth to know and believe that we have a Redeemer who has purchased our forgiveness, because He has washed our sins away in the blood of the Lamb. We thank You for Him, and thank You for the forgiveness that we have, and the life You've given us in this brief time in this world. May we live it faithfully; may we persevere confidently and victoriously to Your glory.

The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

(End of Audio)