

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ,

How much time has passed since the writers of the Kings had us we consider the cry of Elijah that the LORD take him from this earth. We recall his despondency. Jezebel was after him, his life was on the line and meanwhile it seemed like the wicked were prospering. What more could he do than was doing? Those were dark days for Israel of the Northern Kingdom under Ahab and they were spiritually and emotionally dark days for Elijah. Therefore, Elijah went to seek the Lord.

There on Horeb where Moses had seen the Lord, the Lord appeared to Elijah in the still small voice and there the LORD proclaimed a day of punishment on the house of Israel and the anointing as prophet, Elisha the servant of Lord. Yes, it was true as Elijah saws that Israel as a nation had broken the covenant of grace but it was also true that 7,000 had not bent the knee to Baal. In time the mantle of authority was passed onto Elisha and Elijah was called out of the darkness to be home with God of light. In the time after we have seen the punishment of God upon the house of Ahab and the youth of Israel. It was then, as it is now, a terrible thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. But we have also been able to see through the miracles that God performed through Elisha, that God was gracious to His own and His own still lived as a remnant there in that land of wasting under the curse of the LORD.

Our story today takes place within that historical context gives us again that context of covenant-breaking Israel living under the curse of the LORD. We also see that what Elijah did not understand, the Sons of the Prophets and Elisha and the godly in that day understood. As long as we live in this world we are subject to God's judgement and we also see that in that context of this broken world there God is nurturing and feeding the souls of His children lest they fall away.

It is as the Psalmist says, "I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken."

I think we too can wonder about this country of ours. We lament the immorality of our leaders and the citizenry alike. We wonder what difference we make and I think we sometimes wonder how long the Lord will put up with such a wicked and sordid lot. But we also know that many are calling on the name of the Lord in this country yet and so the LORD continues to work. We can take heart and comfort from these two stories of the LORD working through Elisha to comfort and care for His people in a time of hunger and darkness. The Lord gives us counsel from His Word under the theme:

### **THE LORD TENDS TO HIS FLOCK IN THE WILDERNESS**

#### **1. The Curse of Famine 2. The Purging of the Pot 3. Abundance from the Inadequate**

**Curse** It seems that Elisha continued his itinerant work moving about prophesying and his work as master and teacher of the school of the prophets. Upon return to Gilgal, we read that there was famine in the land. When modern secular humanity hears that they understand it was a time of drought or and as such there was not enough food in the land and find some sort of scientific answer for this. In our day and age, we might attribute this to greenhouse gases, soil erosion or global warming. In that day the Israelite or Canaanite would consider this a matter for the gods. Since crops were not growing either Baal or the Lord was not blessing the planting with growth and harvest. Since we come to the Scripture and history by faith, we know that God was doing something in terms of his covenant people.

It is easy to forget sometimes that world history is continuing alongside the history of redemption revealed by Scripture. These are the days of Plato, Aristotle and Buddha and the growth of the culture in China and Japan. This is one of the great ages of the development of

humanity in terms of art, philosophy and religion. This development is happening by God's providential care as He is preparing everything for world domination of Christ and the universal mission of the church into these lands. However in Israel there is God and His people and there is a relationship that is being forged and developed. If there is famine in the land, God is angry at Israel.

In his last words to Israel, Moses said,

***“If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God.”***

***“However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go.”***(Deuteronomy 28:1; 15-19)

In the days of the Judges, we read of the patterns of famine and feast connected to the obedience of Israel to the commands of God. Canaan is a very arid place and yet the soil is remarkably fertile. God sent the dew from Mount Hermon and Mount Mizar as Psalm 133 so poetically points out. God sent the early and the late rains. The Israelite understood that it was God who grew the crops and unless He blessed the work of the farmer, nothing the Garden of Canaan would become a wasteland. Therefore, Israel was to love God and respond to Him in devoted worship, Sabbath trust and moral living providing for the widow and the orphan. The Lord called the Israelite to love the LORD and his neighbor as himself. When the leadership caused Israel to be a place of rebellion and reckless disobedience and when the leadership caused Israel to sin through false worship of God via the golden calves: idolatry, then the Lord God

would keep His word uttered through Moses. In Leviticus 26 we read if Israel will not repent of her sin God promises,

***I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit. If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve.***

Israel is not eating because they have not mended their ways and have continued to walk in the sins of Jeroboam and Ahab and Jezebel. God is not mocked! We understand.

We must understand that the faithful must also endure this curse. It is not because of the faithful that this curse of famine has come on the land. Yet they must suffer through it. Yes even these sons of the prophets as they were known were hungry sharing with the disobedient church (Israel) in the famine. They were hungry because there was not enough food.

It is rather dramatic then for Elisha to ask his servant to make the pot ready to make stew for 100 men. Yet there is in Elisha faith that God will take care of the faithful even in these difficult times. The LORD had fed Elijah by the brook through His servants the ravens. Later He took care of the widow and her son together with Elijah, in such a way that they had food to eat during that three-year drought. Now in the wilderness the Lord had been tending his flock. Elisha was taken care by the rich widow and she and her son was taken care of by the Lord. The widow of the son of the prophet when confronted by hostile creditors, the Lord provided enough oil that her debt was paid and she could live on the rest as we heard this morning. Now the Lord will tend to the flock there in a land under curse that all may taste and see that the Lord is good.

There is for us a parallel if we look at Jesus high priestly prayer as it is recorded in John 17. Jesus prays to the Father for his disciples, "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that

you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” And he goes on to pray for those who believe their word as well. They are to be left in the world that by their unity the world will know that God sent the Son and the Son will be glorified.

The church militant lives in the world that is still under the curse of sin. Death, violence, immorality, debauchery and brokenness are still very much a part of this world under the curse of sin. Some Christians live in war torn countries, others in places of serious famine and others in the places of decadent luxury. In each case, as God sees fit, He will protect His flock and will work all things for the good of His flock. He gathers and defends them by the Son who died for that flock and now reigns in order to guide and tend the flock to bring others into the fold. So what was true then, the faithful suffering through a famine, but remaining faith and obedient, brought honor and glory to God. It does not matter so much whether it is a group of faithful men making stew or a faithful man sacrificing his first fruits! Let us not forget that 7,000 had not bent the knee to Baal!

Thus these two miracles of purging the pot and from the inadequate providing more than adequately the providence of God and his love for His people is revealed that we might be encouraged and comforted in this dark world! Yet we also get the sense that the days of God’s grace will not abide be much longer if these acts of kindness are missed by the general Israelite populace. (Is that true for our own nation as well) We move to our second point then and see how God tended to the sheep there in Gilgal.

### **Purging the Pot**

During the famine, after a meeting of the prophets, Elisha as host and master commanded his servant to get the large pot ready and cook the men some stew, or soup. Now in a famine to serve some 100 men as mentioned was no simple task. Water needed to be found and vegetables

and herbs for the stock also had to be found. But as providence would have it there was a large vine with enough gourds (or as the LXX<sup>1</sup> has it: "bitter apples"). Others believe vegetables were some kind of cucumber. There were not a lot of domestic vegetables around and thus the servant saw the gourds, took a chance, and filled the fold of his cloak with them. He cut them up and threw them in the pot.

We know the story. The men began to eat and the taste was so bitter they believed the stew to be poisonous. They declared that there was death in the pot. (I recall a story about someone who had a sore throat and when her daughter gave her some Buckley's cough syrup, horrible tasting stuff she thought her daughter was poisoning her.) Shocking taste can do that! The men sat there hungry staring at the stew that was not fit to eat. The joy of anticipation had turned to the despair of the cursed reality once more.

Elisha then called his servant to get some flour, which he put into the pot. Now the stew was tasty and edible! The Lord through His servant again, had, in a miraculous way taken care of His sheep, in order that and we might see His goodness and kindness. We must also see the power of God over the curse. The curse on the creation brought these wild gourds into being, and the taste was dreadful and perhaps even poisonous and the Lord God overrides that. He burst into the natural with His supernatural power and grace and changes things. There is that place of famine He gave a foretaste of the glorious creation that He will renew when Jesus comes. Paul writes to the Romans that the creation waits in travail for the sons of God to be revealed. Then like Eden all the fruit will be wholesome and good and we will have nothing to fear. But for now we trust that God will preserve the church in His way and time.

He had done this earlier for Israel too. The nation, tired and thirsty, came to the waters of Marah, but they could not drink that water because it was too bitter. The Lord showed Moses a

---

<sup>1</sup> The Septuagint- the Greek Version of the Old Testament.

piece of wood. He threw it into the water and it became sweet. This is the gracious power of God, which whets our appetites for the glorious appearing of His Son!

We look forward to the New Jerusalem with its freshwater river, which feeds the tree of life. In Christ, through His death and resurrection that curse on the land and the curse unto death will be removed. The day is approaching; the 100 or so sons of the prophets get a little foretaste of the wonders yet to come. Elisha the man of God points ahead to the Great Prophet who will be the one to remove the curse. The great prophet also would perform some mighty acts of providing more than adequate from the inadequate.

**Abundance** Around the same time, a good man had from his small harvest set aside the first fruits and brought them to Elisha and the Sons of the Prophets. In Leviticus 2:14 we read, “If you bring a grain offering of first fruits to the LORD, offer crushed heads of new grain roasted in the fire.” We read that this is exactly what the man did.

However in Leviticus 23:20 we read, “The priest is to wave the two lambs before the LORD as a wave offering, together with the bread of the first fruits. They are a sacred offering to the LORD for the priest.” This the man did not do. Why? Because the Levites at Bethel and Dan were corrupt and this faithful man knew it. He saw in the sons of the prophets and their master Elisha, faithful men who the Lord would provide for by means of this food, as little as it was.

That theme comes once more to the fore, namely, that of God shepherding (that is caring for) His people through faithful people whether that be Obadiah, or the widow in Zarephath or the rich widow in Shunem. As we read in Psalm 16:

*I said to the LORD, “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.” As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.*

God's people, by serving God, take care and delight in each other! So this man comes with what he has to give to the Lord and the Lord through the act of this man provides. But when the servant is asked to make the meal ready he is skeptical.

Now we make a note. The word here, "servant," is not the normally used Hebrew word for servant. It is likely then that this is Gehazi. The writers of Kings have not thus far revealed Gehazi as a man of faith and so they provide a bit of foreshadowing for the next story about Naaman. We also note that the Jewish scholars see that this sub plot, namely of a servant without faith is being played out here. We cannot be sure but there is much to be said for this proposition.)

Now back to the story. Elisha says feed the men. The servant says, "But how, there is not enough?" Elisha responds with the Word of the Lord! There will be enough and there will even be some left over. **In the midst of famine there will be abundance.** Hear the Word of the LORD! And it was so, the men all ate and there was some left over as declared by the Word of the Lord.

Once more we are drawn to that parallel with Moses who was used by God to call down bread from heaven and quail to eat in a miraculous way. Then when the new Moses came, the one greater than Moses, He had compassion on the people who had come to hear him preach for a whole day. They were hungry and tired. The disciples found five loaves and two fish. He had the people sit down and he fed them all. He fed 5,000 of them. There was enough left over for 12 extra baskets were filled, enough for one for each of the twelve disciples! In those days that was often how a servant was paid for serving at a meal!

The supernatural bursts into the natural, the perfect blessedness into the world touched by the curse of sin and the miraculous happens! What is impossible for us is not for God. We get



that foretaste of eternity and the glory that waits for us when Jesus comes again! Yes, we must live in this world with its troubles, thorns and thistles, but we serve a great a glorious God who tends His sheep with such loving care. We see His Son and his compassion! We see Elisha the man of God and his compassion and there God commands the blessings! The light shines in the darkness and blessing is revealed in the land cursed by God.

We look forward beyond this taste of glory to an eternal and permanent glory that waits for us when the master appears! How wonderful that will be. The Shepherd who watches over us, who has died for us and lives again and tends us even when we go through the valley of the shadow of death will watch over our coming and going! We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. The Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want. He is our water unto life and He is the bread of life. He is true God and true man!

A long time ago the sons of the prophets were left as a light to shine in the fading glory of Israel, a reflection of the wonderful relationship between God and His faithful pointing to the day of the crucified and resurrected Jesus who will bring all things under his feet including death.

World without end! Amen and Amen.