

A Faith Journey – 2
(2 Kings 4:17-37)

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This sermon, the ninth in our sermon series, “God, Israel, and Elisha,”
was preached to GGCF, Escario St., Cebu City, last April 3, 2011.

Last Sunday, we studied the faith journey of the Shunnamite woman, which reflects the faith journey of Israel and our faith journey as well. We learned that the purpose of the miracles of Elijah and Elisha is to show Israel that Yahweh remains gracious to her, despite the godlessness of her kings.

We also learned that the first three marks of the faith of the Shunnamite woman. It is a giving faith. The faith that receives is the faith that gives.

It is a contented faith. The faith that rests content in Christ resists the craving for more.

It is a rewarded faith. God rewards a giving faith, stretching it to believe the impossible.

Today, we shall learn five more marks of the faith of the Shunnamite woman.

A Tested Faith (vv. 18-20)

(READ v. 20) The miracle baby grew up to be a young boy. One day, during harvest season, the boy complained of a headache. He probably suffered a heatstroke. A servant brought him to his mother, who held him on her lap till noon, till he died.

If you were this mother, how would you feel watching your only child, the treasure of your heart, the gift of God die on your lap? Brethren, in the school of faith, there will always be exams. The exams take the form of trials, troubles, and tribulations. Sometimes, we will fail the exams of faith. But the important thing is to learn the lessons AFTER we fail the exams.

The Shunnamite woman faced a crisis of faith. In your faith journey, you will also face a crisis of faith. Your faith in God will be tested by fire. The divine purpose of the tests of faith is to show the glory of the grace of God in times of troubles. It is also to sharpen your faith, to stretch it, and to shape it.

That’s what happened to Abraham, the dean of faith. God told Abram to go to the land that God shall give him. Then when he got to the promised land of Canaan, there was a famine in the land (cf. Gen. 12:1-10). Imagine going to the land of blessing, only to find a famine in the land. That’s why the prosperity gospel is a false gospel. It tells you that if you obey the Lord, the Lord is obligated to bless you with health and wealth. But Abram obeyed the Lord perfectly. But when he got to the land of promise, there was a famine in the land.

The famine was a test of faith for Abram. Isn’t that a picture of the faith journey of the nation of Israel? In Deuteronomic stipulation, Yahweh shall bless Israel for her obedience, and curse her for her disobedience. But along with the blessings are the trials of her faith in God.

I think that the writer of 2 Kings included this story of the miracle birth and miracle resurrection of the Shunnamite woman’s son to show a greater miracle—the

miracle of God's grace to Israel. Are you trusting God today, walking in a faith journey with Him? Expect the tests of faith. The tests shall show the glory of God's grace. It shall also sharpen your faith.

But you must learn to trust God in the trials of faith. The time of troubles is the best time to trust God. It is the best place to exercise your faith in God.

A Working Faith (vv. 21-27)

In v. 21, we read that she put the boy on the bed of Elisha. Maybe she didn't want anyone, including her husband, to bother the body before Elisha comes back. Then she asks her husband to send her a servant and a donkey to go with her to Elisha. But her husband, not knowing about the boy, asks why she wants to go to Elisha when it's not the new moon or Sabbath. The prophets conducted worship or preaching services during the new moon and Sabbath and people would come.¹ It's like saying in modern terms, "*Why go to him when it's not the time for church services?*"

But she answered, "*All is well*" (v. 23, ESV), from the Heb. *shalom*. Then she told the servant to go full speed ahead to Mt. Carmel, which is about 15-25 miles from Shunem (v. 24).

I can't help but notice that true faith is a working faith. Do you believe that you are saved by grace through faith? Then work out your own salvation, for it is God who works in you (Phil. 2:13).

Faith without works is dead. A living faith is a working faith. James wrote, "*If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*" (James 2:15-17, ESV). Prove your faith by your works!

Do you believe that God will provide your needs? Then work hard for it! God does not bless lazy people. Paul said, "*For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living*" (1 Thess. 3:10-12, ESV).

Do you expect God to give you a bright future, for His glory? Then study hard today. God does not always bless the best people. But God always blesses people who give their best!

An Anguished Faith (vv. 26-28)

Elisha must have suspected that something was wrong. That's why he sent Gehazi to ask her about her son (v. 26).

(READ v. 27) In the ancient Near East, people would hug the feet or the knees, to add "force" to the request.² Gehazi tried to push her away. But Elisha stopped him, because she was in "bitter distress." "Bitter distress" translates one word in the Hebrew (*marar*), which means, "to be bitter" (BDB); "to be despairing" (Holladay).

The Hebrew expresses painful, tragic experiences in terms of the sense of taste—"bitter." (TWOT) We also do the same in Cebuano with our word, "paita uy!" The

¹ H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *II Kings* (TPC; London: Funk & Wagnalls, n. d.), 67.

² Spence and Exell, *II Kings*, 67.

Hebrew literally reads, “*because her soul is bitter to her.*” The woman experienced extreme bitterness of soul.

Then the Shunnamite woman said in v. 28 (READ). She did not ask God for a son. But God gave the desire of her heart anyway. Now, her son is gone. It seems that she is saying, “*How can the God who gave me a son I did not ask, take him away?*” I see here a faith that holds on to God’s promises, despite the odds against it. I see a determined faith, despite contrary circumstances.

Is her faith like your faith today? Some trial is causing you anguish. But you want to keep on believing God.

When her husband asked her, she said, “All is well.” When Gehazi asked her about her son, she said, “All is well.” But the truth is, “All is not well.”

Why did she say, “All is not well,” when all is not well? Perhaps she did not want any delay on her way to Elisha.³ Most likely, she refused to reveal her pain to anyone except Elisha. The issue is the promise of God through Elisha. Now that the promise of God has come to nothing, she will face only the man who gave her the promise of God.

In confronting Elisha, she was confronting the God of Elisha. She brought her anguish before God through the man of God who spoke to her the word of God about a son.

Brethren, God never promised a faith journey that is free of pain. But He promises His steadfast love, His faithfulness, and His grace for you in the midst of pain.

Sometimes, we need to go to people we trust—people who will listen and understand, like your pastor, close friend, or parents. But sometimes, these people cannot really comfort us.

And so the best thing to do is to throw ourselves on the feet of Jesus and pour our hearts to Him. I can assure you that he will listen to you, because He understands.

As the old hymn tells us,

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

O, what peace we often forfeit. O, what needless pain we bear.

All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Then there’s the old song that speaks to our hearts today.

I’ve had many tears and sorrows. I’ve had questions for tomorrow,

There’ve been times I didn’t know right from wrong:

But in every situation God gave blessed consolation

That my trials come to only make me strong.

Through it all, through it all, I’ve learned to trust in Jesus,

I’ve learned to trust in God;

Through it all, through it all, I’ve learned to depend upon His Word.

An Expectant Faith (vv. 28-31)

In v. 29, Elisha tells Gehazi to tie up his garment, so that he can run as fast as he could. He is to take Elisha’s staff, go to the child, and lay it on him. Along the way, he is to greet no one. The point is to waste no time and to get there faster.⁴

³ Russell Dilday, *1,2 Kings* (PCS 9; ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 279.

⁴ Spence and Exell, *II Kings*, 67.

We are not told why Elisha wanted his staff to be put on the child's face. Maybe he wanted to assure the mother of his attention. I think he wanted no one in the household to do anything to the child before he arrives.

Then the Shunnamite woman said in v. 30. (READ) She wants Elisha to go and see her dead child, and so she will not leave Elisha, until he does so. Only Elisha gave her the promise of a miracle child. So only Elisha shall give her hope concerning her son.

She expects that Elisha can still do something to her child. She believes that God will still do the impossible. She refuses to give up, until the prophet himself gives it up.⁵ Hers is an expectant faith.

Are you in an impossible situation today? Do you expect God to do the impossible? Do you expect God to change the unchangeable? You need to ask God to add to your faith more faith, to bring you to the next level of faith—the faith to believe God for the impossible!

An Answered Faith (vv. 32-37)

Notice that the staff did not bring the child back to life. (READ v. 31) You cannot rely on a tool to bring a miracle. A bleeding woman got healed by touching Jesus' clothes. People got healed by the touch of Paul's handkerchiefs. But the Lord Jesus and Paul are no longer with us.

Here, the miracle did not come through Elisha's staff. The miracle came with Elisha himself.

When the woman came to Elisha about her dead son, Elisha admitted that he did not see it coming. He said in v. 27, "*the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me.*" True prophets of God proceed only by the revelation of God. But at this point, God did not tell him.

Sometimes, pastors don't know everything. But pastors should know one thing—to go down on their knees and pray for the power and will of God. That's what Elisha did, as we read in v. 33. (READ) Elisha asked God for His will to revive the dead child. Pastor, you may not know everything in ministry. But if you know how to pray earnestly, you have already accomplished one-half of your ministry.

Then Elisha did something weird. He put his mouth on the child's mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands. He stretched (Heb. *gahar*, "bend, crouch"—BDB) his whole body upon the body of the child. Elisha actually bent over or crouched on the boy's body.

Why did Elisha go through this elaborate ritual? It follows the style of Elijah, in the resurrection of the widow's son (cf. 1 Ki. 17:21-22). Elisha's acts warmed the boy's body (v. 34).

But why did the author of 2 Kings include this detail? I think because he wanted to show that the prophetic power and authority of Elijah is now also with Elisha. Elisha therefore is the divine replacement of Elijah.⁶

⁵ Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings* (NAC 8; ed. E. Ray Clendenen; Nashville: Broadman, 1995), 267.

⁶ Bob Deffinbaugh, "The Life and Times of Elisha the Prophet— Two Women and Two Meals (2 Kings 4:1-44)." Cited March 26, 2011. Online: <http://bible.org/seriespage/life-and-times-elisha-prophet%E2%80%94two-women-and-two-meals-2-kings-41821144>.

We read that Elisha got up and went around the house. He got back and stretched himself on the boy's body again. The boy sneezed 7 times and opened his eyes (vv. 34-35). When the woman came in, she saw her breathing child. Filled with emotional gratitude, she fell at the prophet's feet.

Listen! God performed a miracle of compassion through Elisha. God can also answer your prayers with a miracle of mercy. Out of the mercy of God, God can do the impossible for you.

Conclusion

The faith journey of the Shunnamite woman is our faith journey. Our faith should be a giving faith. It should also be a contented faith. It will be a rewarded faith.

But your faith should be a working faith. Living faith is faith in action.

But sometimes, your faith will go through difficult times. It is then an anguished faith, tested by trials and troubles according to the purposes of God. But it is still faith, only an anguished faith in trial. Be careful however that you keep trusting God when anguished. Instead of doubting God, expect the grace of God in trials.

Your faith should be an expectant faith. Troubles are the best times of expecting the mercy of God. Expect God to do the impossible.

An expectant faith will be an answered faith. Out of the mercy of God, God shall do something wonderful for you.