

A Faith Journey - 1 **(2 Kings 4:8-37)**

This sermon, the eighth in our sermon series on “God, Israel, and Elisha,” was preached to GGCF, Escario St., Cebu City, last March 27, 2011.

The writer of 2 Kings presents a series of miracles of Elisha for the sake of Israel. The cluster of miracles of Elijah and Elisha serve several purposes. One is to show Israel that Yahweh remains faithful to Israel even after the division of the kingdom of Solomon. The other purpose is to bless Israel for her obedience and curse her for her disobedience. The miracles also show Israel that despite the godlessness of her kings, Yahweh remains gracious and merciful in difficult times. The bottom line therefore is the glory of Yahweh in Israel.

At this point, the writer of 2 Kings introduces us to the Shunnamite woman. She is called a Shunnamite because she lives in Shunem, a village about 15 to 25 miles southeast of Mt. Carmel where Elisha lived. If you study the story, it tells about the faith of the Shunnamite woman. It is a faith that describes the faith journey of Israel and of ours as well.

Warren W. Wiersbe has rightly said that when you trusted Christ as your personal Savior, you were automatically enrolled in a school. That school is the school of faith. In the school of faith, the Bible is your textbook. The troubles in life are the exams. In school, we study the subject and still fail the exam! But in the school of faith, after we fail the exam, we know the subject!

That’s what happened to the Shunnamite woman. Her faith was rewarded by the gift of a son, but her son died. She went through a difficult time of anguish. But in her anguish, she expected the mercy of God.

That is how Israel should trust Yahweh, her covenant God. And that is how you and I should also trust the same God today.

I’d like to share with you eight marks of the faith of Shunnamite woman.

A Giving Faith (vv. 8-10)

In v. 8, the word “wealthy” (ESV) or “prominent” (NASB) (Heb. *gadol*), means, “great” (BDB), signifying greatness in “importance” (Harris) or “significance” (Holladay). This woman was a great woman, then, in that she was prominent, important, and influential in her village.

She was wealthy. She can afford to build an extra room for Elisha. She had many servants and donkeys (vv. 18, 22). But the writer of 2 Kings is not so much concerned about her wealth as in how she used her wealth. She used her riches to support the ministry of the prophet. Verse 8 tells us that she prepared food for Elisha, not just one time, but every time they passed by Shunem. In addition, she built a small room on the roof for Elisha.

(READ v. 10) She served not only a feeding ministry. She also served in the lodging ministry for the man of God.

I remember when I was invited to lecture in Davao during the general assembly. (By the way, they did not invite me again to be their speaker. So I guess they did not really like my speaking!) A Christian family received me into their home. I’d sleep there every night and take a bath every morning. On the second night, they put lots of durian and coke on the table. We ate it all. Then the third night, they put durian and coke again on the table. I felt like we were in a durian eating session. “Let’s eat again,” the husband said. So we ate. At last, I couldn’t eat one more durian. I had a great time there because of the hospitality of that family.

Why did this woman go through all this trouble for the prophet? The reason is that she served the living God. (READ v. 9) She is saying, “I know that he is a man sent from God. He is a man who brings the word of God.” Therefore, she is very supportive of Elisha, the man of God, because she believes in God, in the word of God, and in the preaching ministry of this man of God.

Brethren, if you believe in the Lord and in the word of the Lord, you should be supporting the work of the Lord. You should open your homes to God’s workers. You should invite them to eat your ice cream and cake. You should invite visiting Pastors and missionaries. I call my house a “Pastors Pension Haus,” because many pastors have stayed in my home.

Blessed are you when you open your home for Bible study, for Christian fellowship, and for the workers of God. By doing so, you are promoting the work of God!

It is not the will of God to starve your Pastors. But it is not also the will of God to spoil your Pastors. Paul wrote, “*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching*” (1 Tim. 5:17, ESV). The phrase, “double honor,” can translate into double salary or support for your pastor; or, if the church cannot afford it, double love and care of your pastor.

If you have faith in God, your faith will be a giving faith.

A Contented Faith (vv. 11-13)

(READ v. 13) The prophet Elisha was no politician, that’s for sure. But he was not afraid to talk to the king or the army. Elisha may be offering protection for her and her husband. Her husband was old already and she was childless. Maybe she needed some protection from the king. But she declined, saying, “I live among my people. I live with their care and protection. I don’t need the protection of the king.”¹

Perhaps she had a quarrel with another family. Would she need the help of the authorities? But she replies, “No, I have no quarrel with anyone. I live peaceably with my people.” She is contented with her status and situation in life.² Hers is a contented faith.

There are people who are not contented with the gifts of God. They want more money, more power, and more things.

I remember the late President Marcos. He had a brilliant mind. He was an effective politician. He won his second term in 1971. Then in 1972, he declared martial law. It was good at first. Many surrendered their arms. People became disciplined. We would all stop on the road when we saw the raising of the flag, on pain of punishment. We were all trained to show up on time and work together in CAT and ROTC. The police became disciplined, because they were afraid of the military.

But with much power, the military became abusive. Marcos imprisoned many political prisoners. Many suspected leftists and communists disappeared. The concept of human rights then was new and nebulous. The new oligarchs close to Marcos replaced the old economic monopolies. Imelda Marcos became powerful. After the people power revolution of 1986, we came to know of the millions of dollars of Marcos’ hidden wealth abroad. We discovered about Imelda’s diamonds and shoes. Until today, the Philippine government is trying to recover the wealth of the Marcoses through litigations and court cases.

That’s what happens when you crave for more power. It is dangerous to crave for more money and more things. Why crave for an expensive cell phone when you already have one? So what if your neighbor has a more expensive car? Why buy more clothes when you already have many?

Jesus said, “*Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions*” (Lk. 12:15, NRSV). “*You cannot serve God and wealth*” (Lk. 16:13, NRSV).

Paul wrote, “*Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs*” (1 Tim. 6:6-10, ESV).

God’s Word warns us against an unhealthy craving to become rich in this world. It is more blessed to be content than to crave for more.

A Rewarded Faith (vv. 14-17)

(READ vv. 16-17) Contented people are rewarded people. God rewards a giving faith and a contented faith. God spoke to Elisha and Elisha prophesied that the woman shall embrace a son about this same time next year. But she reacted saying, “No, do not lie to your servant.”

She’s is not being disrespectful of the prophet here. The verb, “lie” (Heb. *kazab*), means, “to speak that which is untrue and therefore false to reality.” (TWOT) She seems to be saying, “No, sir, do not say things that are untrue and far from reality, for I am old and my husband is old.”

¹ Russell Dilday, *1,2 Kings* (PCS 9; ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 278.

² H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *II Kings* (TPC; London: Funk & Wagnalls, n. d.), 65.

It's like telling a 60 yr. old woman today, "You will have a baby." And the 60 yr. old woman will say, "No, don't tell me things that are untrue and far from reality, for I am old already."

She sounds like Sarah, who couldn't believe the promise of a son. The angel said, "Abraham, your wife Sarah, shall bear a son." When Sarah heard it, she laughed. She couldn't believe it, because it was far from reality. It tells us that although she was believing, she was unbelieving.

Is that possible? Can true faith believe, but at the same time, disbelieve?

The Shunnamite woman is like the father who brought his son to Jesus. His son is demon-possessed from childhood. The demon makes him mute, throws him down, and makes him foam and grind his teeth. It throws him into fire and into water, to kill him.

The desperate father said, "*But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.*" But Jesus replied, "*If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.*" The father cried out, "*I believe; help my unbelief!*" (Mk. 9:22-24, ESV).

We trust God, we believe in His promises, but sometimes, we find ourselves unbelieving, because it is far from reality. We are used to reality, and reality tells us that it is unreal. It is so unreal, so untrue, and therefore, hard to believe. We believe, but we are unbelieving.

But God converts your unfaith to faith. He adds to your little faith with more faith. He stretches your faith to bring you to the next level.

If you are used to living on the level of reality that you find it hard to believe things that are unreal, then you need God's enabling power to bring you to next level of faith—the faith to believe the impossible!

In the case of the Shunnamite woman, she needed to rise to the next level of faith—the faith to believe that she shall hold a son. Verse 17 tells us that the woman conceived and gave birth to a son about the same time the following year, as Elisha prophesied.

You need to grow to the next level of your faith in God—the level of the impossible!

Conclusion

The faith journey of the Shunnamite woman is also our faith journey. Is your faith a giving faith? The faith that receives is the faith that gives.

Is your faith a contented faith? The faith that rests content in Christ is the faith that resists the craving for more. God blesses the faith that is contented in Christ.

God rewards a giving and contented faith. "*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*" (Heb. 11:6, NKJV).

Are you believing, but unbelieving sometimes? Expect God to stretch your faith and bring you to the next level—the faith to believe the impossible.