The Heart of a Servant

Day Eleven: Lessons from the Shunammite Woman
2 Kings 4:8-37

There are many warnings about rich people not making it to heaven because they love their riches (1 Tim. 6:10; Mt. 19:24). But scripture also gives us examples of wealthy people who were not given to a love of “mammon” – Abraham, Joseph of Arimathea, and the Shunammite Woman.

In 2 Kings 4:8 we learn that Elisha became friends with a “prominent” woman in Shunem. Whenever Elisha would come to town she would persuade him to come eat at her home. This became a regular event.

This woman talked to her husband and made a request. She told him that she knew Elisha was a man of God. She would like to be able to provide him his own room in their house, so that when in town he could stay with them.

Her husband agrees to this, she creates this room, and Elisha and his servant, Gehazi, stay in this woman’s house when they are in Shunem.

After some time of this going on, Elisha decided he wanted to do something to show his gratitude to this woman who had the heart of a servant. He asked her what he could do for her. He offered to make her known to people in positions of power, but she modestly declined.

Not being able to get any ideas from her, Elisha and Gehazi discuss the matter. Gehazi observes that she has no child and that her husband is old. I like to think that Gehazi was realizing that she would be alone in the not too distant future, as much as saying that she had no hope of children at this point in her life.

Elisha latches onto this idea and calls the woman to see him. He tells her that next year she will have a son. The woman cannot believe what she has
been told! In due time, Elisha’s promise comes true and the woman has her son.

When the boy had grown enough to be working in the fields with his father, he began having terrible pains in his head. His father had servants carry him back to the house and to his mother. She held him until noon and then he died in her arms.

Through the course of events, Elisha is able to restore her son back to life.

I do not want to diminish the miracle in her story, but that is not the focus of today’s lesson. There are many interesting things to note – how quickly she acted, her faith, God not letting Elisha know what had happened, Elisha needing several attempts to revive the boy. All interesting study material.

But today, I want to focus on what this woman did for Elisha.

It says she was a prominent woman. She is well known and thought highly of, I would expect from that description. She has no fear about bringing a man of God into her home.

She begins by only offering him a meal every time she sees him in her town. This progresses to a regular occurrence whenever Elisha and Gehazi are in town.

The woman then wants to do more. Reading between the lines, she wants to make things easier for Elisha. She wants to provide comfort to him. And from what she says to her husband, it seems that this is because she knows he is a man of God. I get the impression that she wants to make his work a little easier, at least while he is in her city.

She asks for and receives a room to be made just for Elisha’s use when he visits. This too becomes a routine. Elisha knows the room is his and he readily uses it.

She is very free with what she has to offer. Nothing in her providing these things took away from anyone else doing for Elisha as well. She was doing what she could.

She had the means and the opportunity and she made with it what she could.

Not everyone’s opportunities are going to be the same. Someone with more room to spare in their home are free to offer space to someone else.
Someone with every room already filled is not in that position. The person without the space should not feel slighted or embarrassed because they do not have the room.

In yesterday’s lesson we talked about the widow who gave two mites, or one cent, into the treasury. Jesus said she gave more than all the rich people, because she gave all that she had. She made a sacrifice. The rich people had given to the Lord, but they had not given to the degree that she had. His point was to teach the apostles to value the depth of the gift over the worldly value of it. What did it take from her to give it? He didn’t say the rich people needed to give all that they had – it was just a point of distinction.

Scripture teaches us to be ready to do what we can. This is why we give on the first day of the week – so that there is already something prepared for those in the brotherhood who have need (1 Cor. 16:1-2). What is given is to be as we each “purpose” in our own heart. What I give is not to be compared to what anyone else gives.

This woman in Shunem gave with all her heart, just as the widow gave her two mites.

Don’t look at this woman and say, “I cannot wait until I have a house big enough to designate a room for when a preacher visits.” Be glad of what you can do with what you have for the preacher when he comes to visit.

IF you have the space to create a room – GREAT! Do that. But do not see the setting aside of the room as the goal. The goal is to give freely of whatever you have, whoever you are, however financially set you are.

In the USA we are accustomed to “needing” larger homes. People the world over make due with smaller homes, and they manage to be generous as well. But in the USA, we are also accustomed to strangulation by covetousness. “If I had what she had, I would do more of ...” “They have so much money they should be doing ...” “Look how much we do for others, and we earn so little. Why don’t those with more money contribute more. It would help even more.”

We spend a lot of time worrying about what others are, or are not, doing with the means they have been given. We need to stop it.

Each one of us would do well to be like the woman in 2 Kings 4:8-37.

Each of us has something more that someone else does not have. You may have the art of serving while someone else has the means to financially
provide for what’s need to accomplish that service. You may be the one who has more mercy to share than others do (Rom. 12:3-8).

Whatever is YOURS – share it with gladness. See what you have that can make someone’s day easier, and do so. It can be your husband, your mother-in-law, your friend, or the homeless man on the corner.

Today it may be saying a prayer with or for them. Tomorrow it may be preparing a meal or taking them to an appointment.

These are not small things. Because whatever you are doing for them, it’s because they have a need – which makes it a big thing for them.

So, stop trying to keep up with Suzy Jones over there who can do this or that. Be content where you are (2 Kin. 4:13; Phil. 4:11). In your contentment, grow in ways to serve others.

Take on the heart of a servant (1 Kin. 3:9; Mt. 20:27-28).

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

Gal. 5:13

Enjoy!