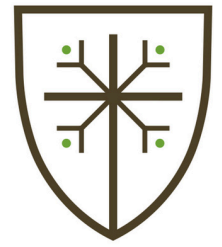


SERMON NOTES



ELISHA

Renewal in the Spirit

June 2, 2024

SERMON INFO

TITLE

"From Poverty to Provision"

PREACHER

Rev. Adam Radcliff

TEXTS

2 Kings 4:1-7

James 1:27, 2:8-17

Matthew 22:34-40

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Not every Christian is called to serve those suffering extreme poverty by moving to a foreign country as a missionary. But every Christian is called to follow God's example and serve the weak, the poor, and the hungry. Where do you see opportunities for this in your life now?

SERMON IN SUMMARY

This week, Adam focused on a text in 2 Kings that centers on the idea of poverty – a topic that, in America and in the particular context in which many of us live our day-to-day lives, is all too easy to ignore. He began with the question, "What, if anything, will you and I do about the poverty in the world?" And he addressed this question by bringing the good news of the gospel into focus and letting it lead us to the answer.

The Widow's Plight

The woman in our story has lost her husband and is left to provide for herself and her two boys. She finds herself with debts she can't pay and she cries out for compassion. The fact that this woman finds herself in this position, in which creditors are seeking to seize her sons to work off her debt, reveals a failure on Israel's part to fulfill the law – love your neighbor as yourself. It shows a lack of concern for the most vulnerable among them. And so, in her desperation, this woman turns to the only source of provision she can think of, to the Lord's prophet, Elisha.

The Prophet's Help

Elisha's response to the widow's plea is to ask God, "What shall I do for her?" As Adam said, the word for "do" is the same root as the word used when God created the world. It is an active word. He is there to love his neighbor, not just offer empty words. And the woman, in her humility, is willing to do whatever the man of God tells her to do. Even her meager amount of oil is more than enough for God. When Elisha instructs the woman what to do, he doesn't tell her what the outcome will be. It is an act of faith on her part – faith in Elisha's words but even more so, faith in the Lord to work.

The Evidence and Experience of Faith

In the widow's greatest moment of need, God meets her with a miracle in the words of Elisha. A little gets turned into a lot. And we see a window into what it looks like when God's word spoken by God's messenger is believed and obeyed by God's people. This is how we know faith is active in a person's life. First, there is a cry for help to the one who is able to help. This cry is necessitated by a recognition of how impoverished we are. Secondly, there is a receiving of the help that is offered. Elisha's word is met with a response. If we say we believe, it will inevitably lead to obedience in God's Word. As 16th century reformer John Calvin put it, "It is faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is never alone." It expresses itself in love for God and for other people. The experience of faith in a context such as the widow is in changes everything – poverty turned to provision, desperation to delight, all owing to a person and work outside of you.

Faith at Work in the World

So, what does this have to do with us? If we have faith in Christ, this widow's story is our story. It points to our far greater spiritual need, held captive to our creditor. In Christ, our debt has been paid and we responded in faith. But it also tells us something significant about God. God is concerned for the widow, the fatherless, and the poor. As his disciples, he calls us to follow in his footsteps. This story is not only a nice analogy for our spiritual condition, but also about the call to the Church and to the individual Christian to care for the hungry, the poor, and the destitute, to put our faith to work. Like Elisha, we are Christ's spirit-filled representatives sent to a world that desperately needs the word of God worked out in tangible, life-giving ways. They need to see, as we have seen, their poverty turned to eternal provision because they have encountered Christ through you.