

Christ – The Answer to Death in the Pot

by H. Foster

“And Elisha came again to Gilgal. And there was a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him; and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and boil pottage for the sons of the prophets. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage; for they knew them not. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof. But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot ” (2 Kings 4:38-41).

“And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days, where we tarried seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber where we were gathered together. And there sat in the window a certain young man named Eutychus, borne down with deep sleep; and as Paul discoursed yet longer, being borne down by his sleep he fell down from the third story, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Make ye no ado; for his life is in him. And when he was gone up, and had broken the bread, and eaten, and had talked with them a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the lad alive, and were not a little comforted” (Acts 20:6-12).

This message is a very simple one, but is emphasised by this double illustration, found in the Old and the New Testaments. In the case of Elisha, Gilgal had been his starting-point, not literally of his own walk, but of his real ministry, when he began that journey with Elijah. Now he came back again to Gilgal. There is no mention in the earlier case, in chapter 2, of there being sons of the prophets there. Perhaps that was a happy development since he had left; but now there was a large number of true people of God, servants of the Lord, gathered at Gilgal. And their very number provided a problem for them, for it was a time of dearth, of famine; and they were gathered together, all sitting before him. It seems to me quite obvious that the question would be, Could they keep together? The famine was not such that they were in their last extremities, and would die, but the famine was evidently of such a nature that it seemed impossible for them to maintain their communal life, and to remain together in this place. Elisha came on the scene, perhaps just in time — the Lord has a wonderful way of sending his servants at the right moment — and they all sat before him with this problem: How can we continue? Is it not essential that we break up, and each man go and look for what he can find, where best he can find it? That, of course, to the Lord’s servant, was unthinkable. God had brought them together; they must stay together. And he said to his servant: *“Set on the great pot”*. Presumably his servant had brought some food to provide a basis for this pottage, and presumably also, this one who went out to gather gourds, decided that there was not enough in the pot to provide for everybody’s need. And so he did as he felt, what he thought was a sensible thing and he went out to add to what was in the pot. He was wrong, of course, as the next story shows us. If the Lord provides something, it is enough for everybody, you do not have to panic. He was wrong in that his good intentions lacked discernment, and he brought not food, but poison. We will not blame him too much for that, since, I suppose, most of us have some time or other, with the best of intentions, trying to help, have made things worse — he certainly did. And so, all gathered together, ready to eat, they discovered that this was not life but death, and had to appeal to the man of God, *“There is death in the pot”!*

There is no indication that anybody had eaten enough to kill himself, or that the emergency was of such a nature that they were all going to die. Indeed, otherwise, it says in the end of verse 40, "*they could not eat thereof*"; they were back where they started! The pot, the gathering around the pot, the feast, the table, is always the symbol of fellowship. The servant of the Lord had come at a time when fellowship was likely to be broken up. And by his orders to his servant, and the provision of this food, had made a centre around which fellowship could be maintained. And now it was all spoilt, and they cried out: "*O man of God, there is death in the pot*" — we will have to scatter after all. The food that was here is no food but poison; we must break up, and every man care for himself. It is then that we see the answer brought by the man of God, not in terms of argument, not in terms of trying to correct the troublesome gourd — it was too late to do that; the whole thing was so mixed up. And that is not God's way of doing things anyhow. "*But he said ...*". It is all so simple and typical of Elisha, nothing complicated, ponderous or official. He was a simple man, but a simple man who walked with God, a simple man anointed with the Spirit from on high. "*But he said, then bring meal; and he cast it into the pot ...*". You know the sequel; the situation was saved; they were able to find their strength and nourishment and life, and you will discover from the very next verse that, evidently, the turning-point soon came, and the first fruits of a new harvest were available to them.

But for the moment everything was in jeopardy; for the moment there was no answer, no solution, except this one, which was God's solution, I believe, to all such circumstances, and such need. "*Bring meal*".

Meal, of course, is a type of Christ. One of the offerings was a 'meal' offering; and it was this "meal offering" which saved the situation, not a 'burnt offering', but a 'meal offering'. If we were at any time, or, if we are at any time in a position of dire calamity, there is not one of us that would not, in fellowship with the Lord, sacrifice his very life for his brethren. I am quite sure of that; it is one of the wonders of our fellowship together. We look round and we know we would lay down our lives for one another. But he was not called upon to do that, and it is very seldom that such a circumstance arises in our case. Not the great 'burnt offering' of utter sacrifice, but the simple expression of Christ in daily life. The "meal offering" speaks of the pure, true life of Christ, ground as it had to be in the sacrificial provisions, to a fine flour. It was that which swallowed up all death; it was that which safeguarded all the threats to fellowship. Put that in, Christ in the daily life, and we all share the table of fellowship, and we can go on.

Now we turn to the New Testament, and we are in Troas; that also was a starting-point, not the beginning, but the start again of a very big movement of God with his servant Paul. And now, after those years, he comes back by way of Philippi, to Troas. We do not know if there were believers there in the day when he saw the vision of the man of Macedonia; there may have been a few; there may not. But we do know that when he came back, again he found a group of people gathered together to break bread, to express in this supreme way the miracle of Christ's redemption, was gathered of many separate and warring factors, one people, to feast with Him at His table. Calamity came to them — the young man fell from the third story, and was taken up dead. What a masterstroke of Satan! Here, they are just going to gather around the Lord's table, a united company, and the devil breaks up their unity. Well, you say, it was not the devil, it was the foolish young man! Yes, there are all kinds of personal reasons, explanations, if you like, weaknesses, but behind it all, what a triumph for the devil! If, after all this talking by the apostle, and no doubt a good deal of that would have been about their fellowship in Christ, and the expression of His Presence in their midst, he had to go away sorrowful, and they had to say goodbye to him sorrowful, either abandoning the Lord's table — for who would keep the Lord's table after such a calamity — or else keeping it half-heartedly, with a sense of gloom and loss, what a triumph for the devil! But, praise the Lord, the devil did not triumph! Paul *went down*.

Now, you notice, and this seems to me to tally very much with Elisha's contribution. He did not speak; he did not raise questions as to the whys and wherefores; we are not even told that he prayed, though I would never like to say anything that seemed to diminish the value of prayer. We are not told that he did anything of these, though, He 'fell on him'; he embraced him; it was as though he came and gave to the young man something of his own vitality in the name of the Lord, and by the Spirit — "*he fell on him, and embraced him*". And then he said, It is all right; the broken circle is no longer broken; the calamity of fellowship is averted; the company is complete! And what an amazing Lord's table that must have been! Oh, what praises from the young man, from his friends, from them all! What praise that the Lord had turned what might have been defeat and calamity into gracious fellowship together. "*They were not a little comforted*" (Acts 20:12)! When Paul went away, I am quite sure they remembered his preaching, and treasured his word, but I am equally sure that far above that, they thanked God for a man who had a vital contribution to make in a time of need.

Now, of course, Paul was unique; we are not given to do these miracles today. And I think the main reason why they were done, and certainly why they were reported, was not to draw attention to the physical, external and literal, but to stress a spiritual lesson. And that is not just for apostles, or prominent men such as Elisha and great servants of God. It is the lesson that comes to me, and surely to you, to each one of us, as to whether we have the saving contribution for the preservation and increase of the fellowship of the people of God. We have, we can have, but it is a tremendous challenge to us.

May I say again, in neither of these cases was it a matter of words, of opinions, arguments, recriminations or suggestions. There is a time for all these things, maybe, but in the last analysis, the real saving factor is the 'meal' of a Christ-like life. The real contribution to our need, to the church's need, and to the inroads, or threats of death and dissolution among the fellowship of the people of God, is a man who can come down, and fall, and embrace, and give something of himself. And the whole atmosphere changes.

Of course, in these cases, it. was just one crisis. Elisha did it, and the crisis was over. Paul did it, and went on his journey and left them rejoicing at Troas. There may be some element of crisis which calls us in a new way to make sure that we are giving Christ-likeness of life, a spiritual contribution of the very life of the Lord. But I think it is not only in crises, but we have to face this demand upon us constantly. If the sons of the prophets are to survive in the famine, and flourish and serve the Lord and if the little group at Troas is to continue, and the Word of the Lord, and the testimony of the Lord through them, is to flourish, then there must be Elishas and Pauls — not just to preach and to talk; not only to pray, though there is room for a lot more prayer; but to give of a Christ-like life, ground in the mills of daily experience. And that will turn the death that may be in the pot, to life. It will solve the problem as to whether we should be scattered, and bind us together in new strength of fellowship.

It is a tremendous challenge as to whether we have got the fine meal, a daily challenge; an hourly challenge, as to whether we are in that vital relationship with God; that our embrace, as it were, is an embrace of life. Thank the Lord that Christ is our sufficiency! May we prove Him, and may we have that contribution to give, for His praise and glory.