

Death in the Pot – Christ the Answer

Reading: 2 Kings 4:38-41.

As you recognise, this is one of these many recorded incidents in the life of the prophet Elisha, subsequent to his receiving the mantle of Elijah and the double portion of his spirit. Every one of these is a part of a whole, and the whole is the testimony of life overcoming death.

This brief story has several features which we will note, and I think we shall find in them something true to all the Word of God in its abiding meaning and value. We begin by noting again that it is related to the 'sons of the prophets', men of those 'schools of the prophets' founded for the educating and training of men who were to succeed them and carry on the testimony of the Lord, and become responsible people in that testimony. It is necessary to keep that connection in mind, because it has something to say to us. There is a sense in which we are all in the Lord's school in the matter of spiritual responsibility in His testimony. Indeed, we could say that that is the explanation of all His dealings with us, and of all the strange happenings that He allows in our lives. It is education, spiritual training, unto responsibility in His testimony. The Lord has no place for irresponsible people, nor people who carry no responsibility. That is the connection.

Then there was a dearth in the land. It was a time of straitness, a time of pressure, a time when things were anything but easy. And all such times are perilous times. A time of pressure, adversity, difficulty or straitness, when things are hard is a perilous time in this sense, that we are very often governed by the necessity of the time, and we yield to the pressure of circumstances, and do something or try to do something. Take for instance Abraham: the situation was a very difficult one for Abraham; indeed, humanly impossible; and he yielded to the pressure of circumstances, or what seemed to be a necessity. He took action, and we know the terrible result of that in Ishmael. We have quite a number of such stories in the Bible, and perhaps the most outstanding of all is that of the Lord Jesus. It is a comfort to know that the Lord Jesus did not escape this temptation, for there is doubt that the temptation of the devil in the wilderness to Him was to act under the pressure of necessity. "And He hungered", after forty days and forty nights fasting, and the devil came and said: 'Command these stones that they become bread; if you don't you will die; it is necessary for you to do something; circumstances demand that you do something.' It is always a perilous time to be under pressure, duress, at a time of adversity. This was a time of dearth, and they must do something and so they go out to do it. And so you see what happened. It is a part of the whole story and it is only a part. It leads on to the very blessed sequel.

And the next feature is this inadvertent wrong, mistake; as they gathered, one gathered this wild vine; and it says, They knew it not. Under pressure, doing something, and inadvertently making a mistake, which involves in real peril, a threat to life itself. Out there in that world, the curse was lurking secretly, for all wild things, and poisonous things came from that initial curse, when God said, "Cursed shall be the ground because of you." The curse was lurking, as it always is that curse which has in it the very element of death; it is there; we are not always able to detect or identify. It is in the world, it is everywhere — the deadly thing; just waiting for them to act indiscriminately, or by sheer force of seeming necessity, for their very life. A trap waiting! You notice that this inadvertent error, mistake, not only involved the one who gathered the vine; it involved all those who were in relation with the testimony. The enemy is very clever; if he can only drive one child of God or one servant of God, along this line, and entangle him or her, he knows that this is a communal pot, that it is not an isolated thing. He has got others in view; they were all involved in this mistake. The result is the touch of death. Evidently they drew out and tasted, and detected that there was something poisonous in the pot. Of course, that is the point of this whole story and of all these stories: death

abounding in some form or another which is the work of the curse.

And then the end. And this is where this message turns from being one that is sombre, and perhaps not very helpful to become tremendously helpful. They discerned their mistake and recognised that they had been involved in something evil, quite unintentionally. They made a mistake under pressure, under seeming necessity. And I suggest that there are many of us who, looking back over our lives are able to see more than one occasion when it was like that with us. We were driven, harassed; perhaps distraught, pressed out of measure. We felt that we must do something, and we did something on that ground, and we regret it to this day. What it involved us in, and others too! Well, it is a very real to life story, this is. But that is not the message. It may be a warning; it may be enlightening, but the message comes at the end.

They cried out: "*O man of God, there is death in pot!*"! And he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it in the pot. They drew out and there was no evil thing. What is the message? I hope I am not reading something into this, but if the rest of the story is true to principle, I think its issue is true. I have to go back to the Book of Leviticus for the real clue to this issue and I will find it in the second chapter. Those chapters deal with the various offerings to be brought to the Lord by His people, all of which, as you know, are related to the one thing, life — life with God. At the beginning of chapter two, we have the Meal Offering, a type of Christ — composed of 'fine flour', 'oil', 'frankincense' and 'salt'. I am not going to stay with all that, but simply sum it up in its inclusive meaning.

The flour was ground very fine — "bread corn is bruised". This Meal Offering quite clearly is a figure of the incorruptible humanity of the Lord Jesus: a human life without corruption in it; without the poison in it; without the harmful element in it; without any elements of curse, therefore of death; His perfect humanity. Under the anointing of the Holy Spirit; with the frankincense mingled, making it a 'sweet savour' offering, as differing from other offerings. The whole Burnt Offering, the offering for sin were not 'sweet savour' offerings; they were offerings of judgment. But the 'Meal Offering' was a sweet savour offering; frankincense made it that. And the mingled salt eliminate any possibility of corruption. And then "... baked in the fire" — tempted, perfected. Through the fires of suffering He presented Himself to God as a Man to satisfy the heart of God.

Do you see the connection? You and I, in our human frailty, and in our human folly, and in the corruption that is in our natures and in our hearts, do many foolish things, and involve ourselves and others in a great deal of trouble, and bring something very much like death very near. But this is not done by calculation, deliberately, in rebellion; so many of these things in our lives are inadvertent, unintentional, unpremeditated; we just get caught in them under pressure. The consequences, of course, are very serious. What are we to do? Is it hopeless? Is there no way out? Cannot our human failures, follies and weaknesses be retrieved? Must that be the end? Is it death, because we have made a mistake, however grave it is? God has made His answer to all human inadvertency; all unintentional sin of mistakes. He has got His answer in a perfect humanity in His Son, an Offering to Himself that satisfies Him for all our mistakes. You know in the great provision under the Law, there occurs this very phrase "*If a man sin unwittingly ...*", then a provision was made. This man went out into the field, to gather what was there, and he had no thought of bringing back poison, to poison all his fellow-students. It was unwittingly, not knowing what this thing was. Perhaps it was a part of his education that he had to learn the difference between things that are good and bad, and undoubtedly he did that day. We do learn in this hard school by our mistakes; if we cannot learn by our mistakes well, we are pretty hopeless. No doubt he learned a very big lesson that day by his error of judgment, and by action without sufficient thought and consideration, or prayer, impulsively, like Saul did, and lost his kingdom. But he learned his lesson, this man, there is no doubt about it. The great thing, I am sure, that remained in his heart, was this: I have made a terrible mistake; I have been responsible for an awful blunder; I nearly involved not only myself but others, in disaster. But the Lord has made a provision

to meet all my foolishness, ignorance and unintentional wrong. Christ meets all my need in that way. I think there is a lot of comfort in that.

The whole question is that of death through corruption, and it is true of us, in us, that is, "in our flesh dwells no good thing"; "the heart is desperately wicked". But the Lord has provided; He is greater than our hearts. It is one more aspect of our appreciation of the Lord Jesus. I trust that this comes to you as it comes to me, with some real helpfulness. Are you often looking back over your life, and saying, If only ... if only ... I had not done that. Most of us are like that; we are aware that there are many things that we wish we had never done, had never been; if only we had had the light then that we have now, we should never have done them, but they are done. What do we do about it? Is it hopeless? The Lord has taken the full measure of human frailty and foolishness and met it with an answer in His Son. We may have to meet the Lord in another way if it is rebellion, if it is deliberate, but most of us can truly say to the Lord, We would not have done that had we known, had we understood; it was not intentional; it was not deliberate; it was not rebellion; it was just inadvertent, under pressure.

I realise that this is a limited message; it can only apply to some, and certain situations. You want to take all these incidents in the life of Elisha to get the whole range of the Lord's provision, whether it be for a Naaman, or a woman and her son, or whatever it may be. Here is one point in a whole story of a wonderful provision in the Lord Jesus, to meet us where we have got into trouble by our own foolishness or weakness — a Meal Offering, of a Perfect Humanity, that satisfies God.