

'PROVISION'
2 KINGS 4: 38 - 44 & 6: 1 - 7

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Throughout the Bible we keep coming back to the absolute all sufficiency of God to provide for, keep and save his people in different ways and from different angles. In 1 and 2 Kings we see a crescendo of the miraculous in the ministries of Elijah and Elisha that we don't see again until the coming of Jesus Christ, the Lord who saves. God provides in

the face of debts, deaths and danger. In a little house in Mold there lived a couple: Mr and Mrs Teaspoon. He was constantly fretting that there will never be enough to fill him. Mrs Teaspoon took him to Bala Lake but that would not be enough to fill him. So they drove to the end of the Llyn Peninsula where the ocean stretched out before them. He was convinced that that would be enough. The Bible doesn't just tell us that God provides but it introduces us to Jesus Christ, the ocean of God's infinite provision, before whom we bow. He provides for us in certain days, he keeps us from certain dangers, he provides in deficiency and he keeps us in certain duties.

God provides in the day of famine. "Elisha returned to Gilgal and there was a famine in that region". (v38) In the days of Ahab Northern Israel had turned from God to idols (Baal)The famine came as the judgement listed in the covenant curses in Deuteronomy. They turned to death so death came upon them. In verse 42 a man came from Shalishah bringing an offering of the first fruits. It should go to the temple but there they had abandoned the Lord by their great apostasy, so he brings it to Elisha and the remnant who faithfully follow the Lord. They were like the incredible resistance movement of ordinary men and women in Germany during WW II. How exciting to realise that people of faith are the resistance movement against the evil desires of the nation. They are gathered by the Jordon where Joshua entered Canan. Don't judge Christianity by a huge Christian culture and its big buildings. Christianity is a resistance movement. People all round the world gather around the word of God in secret places in the midst of a culture of death and idolatry. They are people of the resurrection holding to Christ. Here in Mold we don't worship Baal, even though Bryn-y-Baal is just up the road, but we live in a culture that has turned away from the living God. When we turn away from life we get death. We see it in how we treat the unborn, the vulnerable and the elderly. God's people were not immune from famine, a scarcity of supplies, the danger of debt or war. Christians face those things. We remember that the Lord keeps us in those things and we pray for our Christian brothers and sisters. In the first two stories the Lord cares that they will eat. In the third story he cares that they will have somewhere to meet. It is an incredible provision when we have food to eat, somewhere to lay our heads and somewhere to meet. God provides for us in the day of judgement.

The Lord provides in the day of danger. One of the students finds some small yellow gourds (very likely *Citrullus colocynthis*, a very strong laxative also known as the "vine of Sodom") and added them to the pot. When they discovered there was death in the pot they came to the man of God. Elisha adds ordinary flour to the stew and by God's grace they are rescued. God turns the curse into a blessing. That is the gospel; Christ became cursed for us. There are many dangers, toils and snares in the Christian life. A well-meaning servant of God can put God's people in danger by not knowing what he is doing. Christians can be well meaning and overzealous and say the wrong thing when evangelising. Christians can unwittingly say the wrong thing when trying to help another Christian. Leaders can try to deal with things in an over-bearing and wrong way. We can put death in the pot. We need to repent of these things but remember God is at work and the dangers we bring will not derail his work. He may not rescue us from every dodgy church lunch but nothing will derail the

gospel. Often in church life the weight of responsibility can be really difficult. 'What if I put the wrong thing in the pot?' God is in charge. He rescues us from danger, to bring us out of the curse and into blessing.

I needed some shaving cream. The only pack I could find was almost as large as a fire extinguisher. We like to buy in bulk. But we cannot buy grace in bulk. We do not have a reservoir of competency for the situations we may face. The Israelites learned in the wilderness that the mana was for that day. We have to trust the Lord for the day. The Lord Jesus is totally sufficient for each day. The man brought twelve loaves to feed one hundred, the Lord provided for five thousand and for four thousand. God's provision and grace is abundant.

I have been in Christian work for quite a while but I will never get to the point where I feel competent enough for this work. I will never have enough books on my shelf or attend enough seminars to be able to ace every situation. We have the backlog of God's blessings but there is a waterfall of God's grace coming in the future that provides for our deficiency. The practical support of Christians is so necessary. We have been helped by our contact with Mold, the practical support of Dr. David and the Slovic Gospel Association. The heart to help other churches brings practical support to other Christians so that they may be provided for.

My grandfather was a blacksmith and labourer in London. A family story tells of my uncle and grandfather coming back from a job in the high street. My uncle was swinging a hammer by his side as he walked. The head came off and smashed the window of a jeweller's shop. Both men ran away as fast as they could. Here the prophets are building a new place to meet. It was sensible for them to ask Elisha to go with them as it is sensible to ask the Lord Jesus to be with us wherever we go. One of the students is staring at the debt in the face when he loses the head off his axe. Iron was not easily replaced in those days and the axe was borrowed. In all three of these stories they cry out to the man of God. "Ah there is death on the pot." "How are these loaves going to feed these men?" "It was borrowed." The great thing about praying to Jesus is that we just bring our needs to him. This student has a duty to care for his neighbour's possession as expressed in Old Testament law. The miracle of the floating axe head enabled this man to care for his neighbour's axe. He was able to fulfil the law.

This morning we talked about the Syrian General who passed through the Jordan to be cleansed of his leprosy. Here a completely ordinary axe head passes through the Jordan. Conversion of a sinner should lead to obedience in the ordinary things of life: caring for the things we borrow, loving our neighbour, caring for property. Bill Bygroves says that with most people, the last thing to be converted is the wallet. Ordinary life lived for God is glorifying.

The Lord provides for us in ordinary ways. What is the most radical thing we can do as part of the resistance against a culture of death? It is to love your neighbour. Give back the things you have borrowed. Live the whole of life to the glory of God. Spurgeon did a big preaching event in Crystal Palace. Some people lost their lives when there was a stampede leaving the building. Spurgeon was brought down by this into a very deep depression. He was really helped by meditating on 2 Corinthians 12:9 "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" Spurgeon said, "If the ocean should say to the teaspoon, 'Am I sufficient enough to fill you?' the teaspoon would have to humbly say, 'Yes'". This is the God who provides for you. He is the God we cry out to. He rescues us from "death, destruction and despair." "My every need he richly will supply"