

IT HAPPENED ON HORSEBACK

2 Kings 4:17-26

Have you ever had a change of heart within a matter of minutes?

They say that when the World Trade Center was attacked, people's hearts were changed from the time the towers were struck until the time they fell to Ground Zero.

People who had been estranged from their families were now calling them and begging forgiveness and confessing their love for them.

People that had lived their lives only out for themselves, never lifting a finger to help another were now endangering their lives to rescue those trapped and wounded.

A complete heart change, humanly-speaking, within a matter of moments.

In 2 Kings we see the story of the Shunemite woman. It is a the story of how God spiritually changed her heart in the time it took to race her horse from Shunem, 15 miles to Mt.Carmel.

To understand the story, let's go back to 2 Kings 4:8...

"Elisha" (the Prophet who replaced Elijah) "passed to Shunem"

"Shunem" is a small town in the territory of Issachar, located on the slopes of Mt. Moreh, near the Jezreel Valley and Mt.Carmel.

Elisha passes through and he meets what the Bible calls in verse 8: "a great woman"

The term "great woman" means that she is prominent in the community, influential, wealthy, and of a high social standing.

Obviously, this woman had a spiritual side...verse 8 tells us "and she constrained him to eat bread" - she invited the Preacher over for dinner!

JOKE- You heard about the bi-vocational Preacher (he was a preacher at the small town church and a farmer) who was invited to eat with one of his members at the diner. When he bowed and thanked the Lord for his food, some rowdy, disrespectful teenagers said, "Hey, Preacher, does everybody do that before they eat where you come from?" The Preacher answered, "No, the pigs don't."

This woman was "great" not just because of her position in town but because of her love for God, the things of God and the people of God.

NOTICE that she makes this hospitality to Elisha, a regular event...verse 8 "And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread." She had a desire to reach out and do good to this .

*** WE NEED TO MAKE REACHING OUT TO GOD'S PEOPLE A HABIT IN OUR LIFE!**

We have so many poor habits and wasteful habits, let's find some good habits that yield spiritual results...

Galatians 6:10 says, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

Jesus said in Mark 9:41, "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward."

YOU'LL NEVER DO PEOPLE WRONG, BY DOING GOOD FOR PEOPLE!

Now in verse 9, the woman of Shunem shows her spiritual perception...

“And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.”

THERE WAS SOMETHING DIFFERENT ABOUT ELISHA. Even though he was not like his predecessor, Elijah, who was given to living in the desert, covered with hair, wearing a leather girdle...Elisha was a plain man and more apt to visit in people's homes and YET there was something different about him!

BELIEVERS should be different than the average person of the world. We don't have to be sanctimonious...just separated, different, godly.

***Noah was different!** In the wicked days before the flood when the Bible tells us in Genesis 6 that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually...it says of Noah “and Noah walked with God.”

*** Daniel was different!** When the Babylonians took the Hebrews captive and carried them off to a foreign land where apparently all but 4 men were brainwashed and changed into the idolatrous ways of Babylon, Daniel 1:8 says, “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself...” And he didn't! Both he and his 3 friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced the lion's den and the fiery furnace for standing up and being different.

*** Jesus was different!** In Luke 2:40 we have the only verse in the Bible that details Christ's childhood, where it says, “And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.” This chapter tells us that at only twelve years of age, Jesus astounded the learned doctors of the Law in the Temple with his knowledge and understanding of the scriptures. Verse 52 gives us the only details of Jesus' teenage years where it says, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”

***Jesus calls the believer to be different!**

Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Can others see a DIFFERENCE in your life than the average person they meet?

Verse 10 tells us the woman of Shunem now wants to take her hospitality to this Man of God to a new level: “Let us make a little chamber, (now we all know that she's the contractor and her husband is going to be the sub) I pray thee, on the wall; (this is a home addition...she's been watching that “Home-Make-Over-In 1 Day” show again) and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, (that's so he can sit at the table, she's a smart one) and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.”

SHE WANTS THE LORD, THE THINGS OF LORD, AND THE PEOPLE OF THE LORD TO BE A CONTINUAL PART OF HER HOME...That is good!

If Jesus came to my house today, would I be happy to show Him the way?

Would I welcome Him in with no fear, or would I call ahead and say, “Honey hide the beer!”

Would I throw open the door without a second's thought that day?

Or would I send the kids in ahead to hide the ash tray?

Would I be unconcerned about what's in the VCR, the DVD or the on the coffee table?

Would we all rush around to find that monstrous, dusty “Family Bible?”

Now let's consolidate the story a little bit...verses 12-17 tells us that Elisha established a genuine friendship with this family and was so thankful for their goodness to him, one day he asked them if he could speak to the King for them and ask for a favor. The King was pleased with Elisha because he had recently helped him in a victory against Moab.

The humble woman of Shunem replied that she was content and all in her life was satisfying. Elisha still wanted to do something good for her and her husband, so his servant, Gehazi suggested that Elisha pray to God for a child for the couple.

The woman was barren (it says in verse 14, "she hath no child") and her husband was old. Now this was a great shame and disappointment for a couple in Bible times. A woman's joy was giving birth and a man's joy was having a heir to carry on his name. This woman didn't say so, but this was on her heart, I guarantee it.

Elisha perceived God would give them a son and he told them the good news. In verse 16 the Shunemite woman is afraid to get excited about it and at first she says to the Prophet, "Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid." (In other words, you wouldn't pull my leg about something like this would you?)

Verse 17 declares, "And the woman conceived, and bear a son..." **PRAISE GOD...A MIRACLE!**

God gave them their heart's desire...a son of their own!

I BELIEVE GOD IS STILL DOING MIRACLES TODAY!

But the story takes an unexpected twist...

When the boy is older...old enough to go work with his father in the fields but still young enough to lay on his mother's knees...he is stricken by a stroke and not realizing the severity of it, the father sends him to get nursed by his mother.

The worst happens...the boy lays on his mother's knees until noon and dies. How could this happen? How could God give them their heart's desire and then take it away just a few years later? She'd rather have never given birth to him than watch the life fade from his eyes as he gazed up into hers on her knees.

She tells no one. She carries the lifeless body of her son up to the Prophet's Chamber, the room she'd had built to honor the Lord and His Man. Every step towards the Man of God's room was more painful than the last. She had tried to do everything good and right but now it seemed God had forgotten her. Her son's mouth hung open, no breath hitting her face. Her son's eyes stared into nothingness, failing to return her look of lost love. Her son's arms dangled at his side lifelessly as she carried him to what seemed his would now be his coffin. She places him on Elisha's bed and shuts the door. She now knows what she will do...she will run to the Man of God and seek God's face in her hour of darkness.

As she's preparing to leave with her servant on horseback, her husband, who is still unaware of their son's condition, questions her as to why she's going to see the Prophet when it's not a holy day. In verse 23, she says a simple but honest answer... "IT SHALL BE WELL."

This statement is anticipating that God is going to do something about her need. She is not yet saying that God has acted because she doesn't know what He will do...she just knows He will do something for her... She is **CHOOSING FAITH** in the God Who can act on her behalf.

Now, the woman is coming from Shunem to Mt. Carmel, where Elisha is...that's about 15 miles away. Her servant is driving her by horseback and they are speeding.

(No policemen back then...they could put the huff to the hard road and never look back)

We would do well to make haste to the Throne of God in times of trial!

When they get to Mt. Carmel, she is met by Gehazi who seeing her haste asks her how she, her husband and their son are.

Her answer is different now. In verse 26, she replies a firm and faithful, "IT IS WELL."

No longer "IT SHALL BE WELL" (I don't know what God will do but I know He'll do something for me) Now "IT IS WELL." (God already has it planned what He's going to do for me and I know that it is exactly what I need)

What happened on that horseback ride? How did God change her heart as she bounded up and down in the carriage behind her speeding servant, as she watched Mt. Carmel grow closer and closer until they stopped at to foot of it?

SHE RECOGNIZED GOD IS THE GRANTER OF LIFE

God had given her "new life" in a "dead womb" - something ONLY He can do!

She was a "great woman" but she could not give herself life.

Out of her lifeless body, God sprang the miracle of a living son!

GOD DID THAT FOR US TOO!

The Bible tells us ALL MEN are born dead in unbelief and sin...

Romans 3:23 says, "For ALL have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Galatians 3:22 says, "But the scripture hath concluded ALL under sin..."

Ephesians 2:1 says of ALL men..."who were dead in trespasses and sins;"

The Bible tells us that our sins earn us eternal DEATH in Hell...

Romans 5:12 says, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world, (that was Adam)

and DEATH by sin; and so DEATH was passed upon ALL men, for that ALL have sinned."

Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is DEATH..."

WE'RE DEAD, FOLKS...DEAD IN UNBELIEF AND SIN!

But the Bible gives us the GOOD NEWS of the GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE LIFE IT CAN BRING TO A SINNER DEAD IN SIN...

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER believeth in him should not perish, (that's the eternal death sentence of sin) but have EVERLASTING LIFE."

Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death; BUT the gift of God is ETERNAL LIFE through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Romans 10:13 says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Ephesians 2:1 says, "And you hath he QUICKENED, (made ALIVE) who were DEAD in trespasses and sins." And then in verse 8 it says, "For by GRACE are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God..."

HAVE YOU BEEN SAVED TODAY?

DO YOU BELIEVE JESUS CHRIST PAID FOR YOUR SINS WHEN HE DIED ON THE CROSS AS YOUR SUBSTITUTE AND THAT HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD THE THIRD DAY TO DEFEAT SIN'S PENALTY OF "DEATH"?

HAVE YOU PERSONALLY RECEIVED JESUS AS YOUR SAVIOR?

HAVE YOU RECEIVED "ETERNAL LIFE" THAT HE OFFERS WHEN YOU TRUST HIM?

He will save you NOW, no matter what you've done or where you've been...He's not your "possible Savior" but will be your "personal Savior" It's not "IT SHALL BE WELL" or "It MAY BE WELL" but "IT IS WELL"

If you have, no matter what is happening in your life, whether it be the darkest, deepest valley you've faced...REMEMBER...God is the Giver of Life!

SHE REMEMBERED GOD AS THE GIVER OF LOVE

We saw this Shunemite woman's love for God and the people of God BUT did you know that she could NOT love anyone apart from God, the Giver of Love?

There are only a few verses in the Bible that define God and one of them is 1 John 4:8, which says, "...God is love." You may believe that you have the ability to love God and others without God in your life through Jesus as Savior but 1 John 4:7 says, "...for love is OF God; and everyone that loveth is BORN of God, and KNOWETH God." Then in verse 19 it says, "We love him, because he FIRST loved us."

God has loved man since creation. Even when man turned his back on God and fell into sin, God loved man...He provided blood sacrifices throughout time to picture His ultimate display of love when He gave His Beloved Son to take man's place on Calvary.

God had given the woman of Shunem a "son" out of His great love for her. The boy's death did not cancel God's love.

We make a BIG MISTAKE when we fail to recall all the love God has shown us (starting with salvation and continuing throughout life) and we hit life's greatest crisis and conclude that same loving God has now somehow stopped loving us and forgotten about us.

God's love is even MORE evident when our heart is broken...when we've fallen away from Him...when we face the unknown.

Jesus said in John 15:9, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love." Romans 8:35, 38-39 says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am persuaded that neither DEATH, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God's love is centered on YOU - In the all the billions of people on Planet Earth, He loves YOU personally in YOUR personal position in life...whatever it is

Meyer said, The love of God is like the mighty Amazon River flowing down to water a single daisy.

ILLUSTRATION: One day a father wanted to teach his son about God's love and how BIG it is. He took him to the top of a high hill and pointed in every direction of the compass and said, "My boy, God's love is as big as all that and bigger!" To which his son replied, "Then, Daddy, we must be right in the middle of it!"

NEVER forget God's abiding love on YOU in the valley...it is as SURE as it was when you started down the mountain!

The Shunemite woman Recognized God is the Granter of Life
She Remembered God as the Giver of Love, and

SHE REALIZED THAT GOD WAS THE GROUND UPON WHOM WE CAN LEAN

She got off that bumpy horse ride on to solid ground...she had fixed her faith upon the firm foundation that God would now make ALL THINGS WELL!

THIS GOD Who granted her Life - THIS GOD Who had given her Love...HE WOULD NOW BE THE VERY GROUND SHE WOULD PLANT HER FAITH'S FEET ON AND LEAN WITH ALL HER HEART!

Proverbs 3:5, 6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and LEAN not unto thine own understanding." (Her boy was dead back at the house, she'd never seen Elisha raise someone from the dead, she'd heard Elijah did it...but he was long gone!) Then the Proverbs continues..."In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (This was God she was trusting...and He was HOLY, RIGHTEOUS, PERFECT, AND TRUE...she could trust Him that ALL IS WELL)

When the woman got to Mt. Carmel, Elisha sent his servant, Gehazi to meet her to which she said, "It is well"

She then bypassed Gehazi and went straight for Elisha, thrusting herself at his feet, bringing the servant's attempt to pull her away. The Prophet then said, "Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her..."

3 THINGS TO REMEMBER HERE:

(1) GOD SEES YOUR HEARTACHE AND HE WILL NOT TURN YOU AWAY!

(2) IT'S ALRIGHT TO CRY OUT IN FEAR AS YOU TRUST GOD IN FAITH!

(Fear doesn't vanish in the valley, but it can be overtaken by faith)

(3) YOU CAN LEAN ON GOD TO MAKE ALL THINGS WELL!

Elisha accompanies the Shunemite woman back to her home and God grants her the miracle she longed for...verse 32: "And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed." (This was Elisha's bed, the Man of God, a representative of God to this woman) **THERE IS NOTHING GREATER YOU CAN DO THAN LAY YOUR PROBLEMS AND BURDENS IN GOD'S BED**

Verse 33: "He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord." Can you see that woman at the door listening as the Prophet prayed? **SHE'S LEANING UPON GOD...SHE'S TRUSTING HIM WITH ALL HER HEART!**

Verse 34: "And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, (the same mouth that breathed no air into his mother's face) and his eyes upon his eyes, (the same eyes that failed to look back into his mother's gaze) and his hands upon his hands, (the same hands that dangled lifelessly in his mother's arms) and he stretched himself upon the child; (God covers our heartaches, He surrounds our valley, He envelops our sorrows - **HE IS ALL ENCOMPASSING!** Psalm 91:1 and 4 says, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust...")

SONG: Under His wings, under His wings, Who from His love can sever?
Under His wings my soul shall abide, Safely abide forever.

Verse 34 concludes, "...and the flesh of the child waxed warm."

GOD'S PRESENCE in our times of trial brings a **WARMTH** like no other. To know He loves us... that He's working out a perfect plan for us...that before it's done, we can proclaim...**IT IS WELL!**

In verse 35, Elisha takes a walk up and down through the house and after a while He goes back upstairs...**GOD WORKS IN HIS OWN TIME-TABLE, HE KNOWS WHAT TIME IS BEST AND SOMETIMES WE MUST WAIT ON HIM...BUT THE WAIT IS ALWAYS WORTH IT AND THE OUTCOME IS ALWAYS WELL!**

When Elisha returns to the chamber, the child sneezes seven times and then opens his eyes to be presented to his mother **ALIVE AND WELL** - He sneezed "seven" times" - that's God's number, the number of completion and perfection.

WHEN GOD WORKS OUT HIS PLAN - IT IS COMPLETE...IT IS PERFECT!

Where are you today, my friend? Are you lost and unsaved? Have you not yet received this God of "Life?" Won't you realize He is the ONLY giver of life. Trust Him today and receive eternal life in the place of the eternal death sin has sentenced you to? It's as simple as coming to Jesus...and coming NOW!

Where are you, dear believer? Are you heartbroken in the valley of despair, defeat, depression and fear? Won't you remember His love is ever yours. Won't you realize He is the only ground you can lean on when your earthly foundations are shaken. It's a matter of running to Him and thrusting yourself in His loving arms and leaning on His mighty arms.

It happened in the time it took to travel by horse back from Shunem to Mt. Carmel...it can happen to you from the beginning of this sermon until this invitation...You can let God change your heart from "IT SHALL BE WELL" to "IT IS WELL."