

II Kings 4:38-44; Luke 9:10-17; Elisha the Cook? I. Deadly Stew Made Whole II. A Few Loaves Multiplied

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, when is the last time that you have been surprised by God's abundant grace- that you have been struck by God's provision for you? We live in a time and place of great plenty- but imagine for a moment that you were living in Europe during WW 2- or that your home was in the central plains of Africa. The need for daily bread would be pressing. Although we assume that we will always have enough- we are just as dependant upon God for our daily bread as those in our text this morning. As we return to II Kings 4 this morning, our passage opens in v. 38 where once again we find ourselves in a famine. Because of Israel sinful rebellion and idolatry, the famine as a sign of God's judgement has fallen once again. Another drought- lack of rain and the following lack of food form the context of our reading this morning. And once again, we find the LORD graciously providing for His people in the context of their great need. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ heals and multiplies as He provides for His people through the twin food miracles of Elisha. It seems that the righteous are suffering along side of the wicked in our text- the obedient sons of the prophet experience want even though they have not joined in the idolatry of the nations. Will the righteous perish along with the wicked? Now we have to remember why these miracles are recorded here. It is not only to faithfully record how God has provided for His people in the past. Not only is this just another example of how God cares for His people. We do see that God redeems and restores- He takes what is bad and makes it good- He takes what is lacking and brings about plenty and abundance. But specifically, here, miracles performed by Elisha are to prove the veracity of Elisha's word and identity! Is Elisha a prophet of the LORD- does the LORD speak and act through Him? Again, our theme is that Jesus Christ heals and multiplies the supplies in our text- through Elisha. Thus, this passage proves the identify of both Elisha and Jesus Christ as we will see.

I. Deadly Stew Made Whole

In the first of our twin miracles, we find a deadly pot of stew is made whole and good. In the midst of a famine, food is scarce, so nothing can be wasted, right! Well, our passage opens with Elisha coming back to Gilgal where he is sitting with the sons of the prophets. Remember that the sons of the prophets were faithful men who were being taught to know the will of the LORD- similar to our seminaries of today. Now as v. 43 says, this was a rather large group. 100 men plus their wives and children. So this is really a seminary training complex including student housing. But there is a problem, they are hungry and there is no food. As our young men might testify, it is hard to study on an empty stomach. So Elisha tells Gahazi to prepare some food for these families. And what follows is sort of like an OT version of Stone Soup- everyone lends and whatever can be found is thrown in this rather large pot of soup. One of the sons of the prophets goes looking for something to add in v. 39- and he finds a gourd and cuts it up and throws it into the pot. Now this wild gourd was likely a small yellow and white gourd called the colocynthis- which grows in dry areas in the Middle East and is known to cause vomiting, diarrhea and even death. It looks like a small watermelon. Well, this gourd is cut up and thrown into the pot and the end result is that the whole pot is ruined. It would be like walking in the woods and gathering every mushroom you found for your pizza- without knowing which ones are good and which ones are poisonous! Well, the stew is served and as they start to eat, they cry out- there is death in the pot! It was either so bad tasting that they could not eat it, or it had a direct effect on them they knew something was wrong. Have you ever eaten something that turned your stomach sour- immediately tying your belly in knots? Like eating a whole clove or raw garlic? Well then, is it better to die of hunger or to die from being poisoned by this soup? So this poses a problem- how can all these people eat and be satisfied? Poor Gahazi has just wasted his time- this soup is bad. There is death in the pot! Have you ever worked hard to prepare a meal only to have the meal go bad- where you have to throw out the food you have prepared? It is inedible- so it has to be tossed. Looks like we are having cereal tonight kids- right? Well, there is no other option- it was this soup or nothing. So Elisha speaks in v. 41- bring

me the flour. He throws some flour in and tells the men to eat. Again, this takes faith! Elisha has spoken and acted- he has promised that the soup would be made whole by the flour- that the death in the pot would turn into a nutritious meal leading to life. But those who had just tasted the soup need to believe- and eat. They do- and there is no harm. As we have seen in the past, Elisha uses a simple substance. A common object to bring about this miracle. As salt was used to make the poisoned water whole in 2:21- so now flour makes this poisonous soup whole. By this miracle not only does God provide for His servants, but the identity of Elisha is confirmed and his word is proved true. But as I said before, this is a twin miracle. Two miracles of food given to the same people.

II. A Few Loaves Multiplied

So our text continues in v. 42 with a man bringing some bread. This bread was the bread of first fruits- the first bread of the new harvest. As a sign of faith and joy, this man brings 20 loaves of barley bread and some ears of grain from his own harvest. And Elisha again says, feed the people. Take these 20 loaves and give them to the 100 men and likely their wives and children as well. Well, there would not be enough for everyone onto have a slice- not even a large mouthful of bread. What is 20 loaves compared to all these people Gahazi asks in v. 43. To this question the prophet says, give it too them and there will be some left over- for this is the Word of the LORD. The LORD has spoken to His servant, and the message is that this bread will be more than enough. Now have you ever been in a situation where you did not have enough food to give some visitors that you were hosting? I remember back in Canada that I once invited a visiting family to our home without asking Allison first. We had just gotten back from vacation the day before ourselves and had not gone to the store yet. It was a serious concern that day- what would we serve these visitors? Well, Gahazi has a serious concern as well- this will not be enough! But he obeys and sets this food before this large group of people. Is it possible that the God who sent manna from heaven every day in the wilderness would also make this small amount of bread to be enough? We will find as we did back in chapter 4 with the widow's oil, God can cause the increase

when and where He desires. The bread will not stop multiplying until their needs are met according to His Word. In this, the Word of the LORD is proved faithful and true- His promises are sure- and Elisha is clearly His prophet. So one of the applications is this- when God speaks, He will do as He says! If the LORD said that there would be enough food, there will be! His Word will not return to Him void- He will do what He has says! So we can rest assured that the salvation that He has promised us will be done! He will do even more than think or imagine! If He takes care of the birds and the flowers, won't He take care of us? But we also catch a glimpse of the greater prophet in our text. Earlier we read from Luke 9- where Jesus outdoes Elisha in every way. Starting with only 5 loaves instead of 20 loaves, and feeding 5,000 and not just 100 men. And after all the 5,000 plus woman and children ate and were satisfied, they took up 12 baskets of leftover fragments- just as in Elisha's day. But as I said before, these miracles were neve meant to be an end to themselves. In other words, the point of the miracle is not just that a miracle has taken place. Rather, the miracle proves the identity of the miracle worker. The context in Luke 9 bears this out- where in the next passage we find that Peter is asked- who do men say that I am. Some say you are a prophet like John or Elijah- Peter responds. But what about you, Peter, who do you say that I am? You are the Christ of God! You are not just a prophet like Elijah or Elisha, John the Baptist or even Moses. You are thee prophet- the Christ sent from God!

But we can also learn something from the limited nature of this miracle. We note that although a large group of men were fed in both miracles- they would be hungry once again the next day! The famine still raged on, and even now we still do not have a permanent fix to the situation. There is a temporary nature to these miracles- even as Jesus would point out in John 5. After Jesus feeds the 5,000 on one day- the next day the people are looking for Jesus again. Why? Because they were hungry! They were not yet filled with the bread that comes down from heaven that gives eternal life! When you think about it, you can see that the miracles performed where always limited and temporary. Both Elisha and Jesus did not heal every disease- they did not feed every single hungry person- nor did they raise all the

dead! Not yet at least. Rather, the miracles were given to prove the identity of the prophet- as a sign to the people that the words of the prophet were true. For Jesus, feeding the 5,000 in John 6 would transition into the teaching that He is the bread of life- that He is the bread that the Father sent- the bread we need to eat in order to have eternal life. And it is of these who eat that Jesus says- I will lose none of them and I will raise them up on that last day. You see, a time is coming when Jesus will heal all our diseases, bind up all our wounds, and raise all His followers from the dead. On that great day there will be no physical hunger nor thirst- for we will have no need or want unsupplied! In fact there will be no crying and pain- and no more death! That is what we look forward to- but until then we need to live by faith! Trusting- even though we do not see! Believing the Word of God delivered to us by His prophet! Looking forward to the wedding supper of the Lamb where we will feast as the bride of the Christ forever!

To conclude, as we read these two miracles together, we find something remarkable. There is lots of eating and even plenty in a time of famine and want. What can account for this except the grace and mercy of our God- kindness shown to His people? There is still a remnant in Israel, and the LORD will still provide! But more importantly we find that whatever the LORD promises He will do! He always keeps His Word! Jesus Christ heals and multiplies as He supplies for His people through the twin food miracles of Elisha. So as we catch these glimpses of the future breaking into the present, may we learn to look to the prophet to provide us with all we need for body and soul! To look to His hand for all that He has promised us in His word! To supply not only our daily bread, but to be our heavenly bread that brings eternal life!