

**Articles and Sermons :: The Shunammite Woman I - Oliver Peng****The Shunammite Woman I - Oliver Peng, on: 2010/10/24 8:41**

This is a refreshing article in our day of "religious activity". If Jesus Christ cannot be seen in our lives, what good are our words?

The Shunammite Woman

II Kings 4:8-37

The Shunammite woman intrigues me.

The Scriptures call her a "great" (Lit.) woman (II Kings 4:8). To my recollection, there are not many people worthy of being called "great" in the word of God. Upon closer examination, she didn't seem to have accomplished much of anything that can justify her with this accolade. The few things we are told that she did were 1) inviting Elisha for a meal every time he passed by, 2) asking her husband to build a small upper chamber for Elisha to rest, and 3) informing Elisha of her son's death.

She is a woman of few words. The few times that she did speak, her words were all very simple. There were no high-sounding, eloquently presented, spiritually embellished or theologically profound phrases.

I think the Lord left much of the unspeakable to the capable hand of the Holy Spirit to reveal it to the simple and hungry hearts yearning for Himself. Herein lies the first lesson for us. Too many of today's preachers rely on their eloquence and presentation to weave an airtight sermon complete with PowerPoint, dramatization, research, and high-sounding catchy phrases designed to impress their audience. Nothing is left to the Holy Spirit who alone can invigorate and captivate the hearts of men.

To a certain extent, Christians in general have also embarked upon this psyche in employing high-sounding and spiritually garnished phrases in talking to each other. Folks often want to be viewed as being spiritual. Worse yet, those in leadership positions encourage this type of behavior to the detriment of the proper growth of younger believers.

Our Shunammite woman did not become "great" by listening to or following Elisha's preaching. In fact, she was not Elisha's target audience at all. Elisha merely "passed by" her house on his way to somewhere else.

It seems clear that there is an urgent need among Christians to reconsider the whole idea of sitting passively listening to sermons preached to them week in and week out. Don't misunderstand. Genuine prophetic ministry is a rarity these days and sorely needed. It's the unscriptural spoon-feeding of the congregation Sunday after Sunday that has crippled the body of Christ. Take a hint from our humble Shunammite woman.

She must have had many dealings with the Lord and grown to understand spiritual things as a result. For one thing, we learned that she has no son (v. 14). We know from the example of Hannah, as well as through our knowledge of the Hebrew culture, that a son is highly desired in every Hebrew family. Just her barrenness must have been a tremendous

dealing from the Lord.

Dealings from the Lord are precious and constructive. As long as we have the right frame of mind, it's impossible to have such dealings without being impacted and changed by the Lord in terms of our spiritual growth and transformation— just look at Jacob, David, Peter, John, Mary Magdalene, Paul, to name just a few.

I think we can establish that the Shunammite woman is "great" not by what she did, but by what she has become as a dealt-with and yielded vessel in the hand of the Lord. May we all learn to embrace the Lord's hand and treasure His dealings.

The first thing she did was to persuade Elisha to stop by her house to eat some food. An evidence of a person's wealth is his abundance of food. Since our Shunammite woman is one who has learned yieldedness, she is rich in spiritual abundance. Throughout church history, the person with the deepest brokenness yields the rarest fragrance. And we know that a person's usefulness is always a function of their overflowing fragrance of Christ, not their zeal or ability.

Many Christians are zealous for service; few have found the secret. Miss Margaret E. Barber taught the young and zealous Watchman Nee that the first thing he needed to learn about serving God is to not serve God. Service is not a function of what we can do for God; it is an extension of what we have become in the hand of God. The process of becoming a useful vessel is the hard part. Serving is the easy part, once we've learned to yield and surrender.

This is why the Shunammite woman is "great"— she as a yielded vessel is rich with surplus food— the abundance of the experience and reality of Christ.

The picture of her sharing food with Elisha should also translate to our fellowship and relationship with each other. Fellowship and relationship is about sharing Christ. To share Christ, we must first experience Christ. Then, we must learn to yield to His dealings, the more the better.

Notice that the Shunammite did not stop at providing food. She also asked her husband to build a little walled upper chamber and furnish it as a resting place for Elisha.

Now a point about her spiritual perception should be considered too. She said to her husband, "Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God passing by..." (v. 9). Spiritual perception, or discernment, is an extension of spiritual maturity. Spiritually matured believers have discernment that younger believers do not have. Less matured ones often fall for what is visually enticing and soulishly exciting, but lack discernment to grasp the real situation.

In the Shunammite's case, her spiritual discernment played a significant part in providing for the next level of fellowship: building an upper chamber for rest.

Sometimes we encounter brethren who appear to be calm on the surface, but under the facade they may be in great distress and turmoil. Discernment is required before we can usher our brothers and sisters out of their turmoil into rest. Again, the only way spiritual discernment can be

acquired is through yielding to the Lord's dealings. Jacob is a case in point. Everyone knows that he encountered numerous dealings. But it wasn't until he learned to yield to the hand of the Lord that he finally acquired real spiritual discernment.

Notice that when Jacob was old, weak and nearly blind, he knew what he was doing when he crossed his hands and blessed Joseph's younger son above the eldest. What did he say when Joseph protested? "I know, my son, I know . . ." (Gen 48:17-19). Spiritual sight gave blind, but matured, Jacob better discernment than the natural sharp sight of Joseph. Such spiritual insight is never deceived.

In the Shunammite woman's case, her abundance enabled her to provide food for Elisha, and then her discernment ultimately resulted in a resting place for him as well.

It is important to see a spiritual progression here. In our walk with the Lord we sometimes enjoy mountain-top experiences; at other times we languish in the valleys. Through it all, we gradually learn to yield and surrender to the Lord who graciously enlarges our spiritual capacity with more and more of Himself which becomes the "food" we share with others. Then, ultimately, our fellowship (sharing) should usher us into a rest in Christ. And this is where spiritual discernment comes in, enabling us to know each other's needs and draw from our riches of Christ to meet those needs. Once the riches of Christ have been enjoyed and assimilated, we enter into rest.

Now we can begin to understand the importance of discernment. It is the means that enables us to share with each other the Christ who has been wrought in us, ushering us into rest. How we need spiritual discernment in order to help our brothers and sisters find rest!

Not only are there deeply troubling personal issues that beset our precious brothers and sisters, there are a horde of Christian movements, cults and churches each claiming to be the fulfillment of God's ultimate desire. Most of these groups lift up either certain leaders or teachings and practices that distinguish them from all others. They all have one thing in common – they focus on the church, or their group, as the ultimate rest instead of Christ Himself.

Now, let's consider the building project in the Shunammite woman's household. Notice it is an "upper chamber" (v. 10). It cannot be just an add-on to the existing house, but an elevated upper chamber. Interesting.

The best efforts and noblest intentions of men can only produce an add-on to the ground level of the house. An "upper chamber," on the other hand, is in another realm altogether. It is something of a heavenly and spiritual nature. It is something that is Spirit-wrought through yielded vessels.

There is no shortage of gifted and powerful Christian leaders who discovered God's ways for the organic gathering of His church. The problem is that their building project usually leads to just an add-on to the ground floor. The "upper chamber" is what will set the real rest in Christ apart from all the imitations.

Anytime the unique centrality of Christ is replaced, rest is gone. It is not difficult to find many enlightened believers trumpeting a return to the Early Church-inspired organic church patterned after the book of Acts in the

New Testament. It's also easy to talk about the "centrality and supremacy of Christ," and many do give a fine talk. But the real issue is whether Christ Himself is the Rest – or is there a subtle emphasis on church, certain teachings and practices, or leaders? Discernment – may the Lord grant us discernment.

So far, we have seen, through the Shunammite woman, what normal Christian fellowship and relationship ought to be. It is caring for and sharing the riches of Christ with each other. It is having discernment which will help usher others into an "upper chamber" of rest in Christ.

Now let's consider Elisha's fellowship with the Shunammite.

Elisha asks, "What can I do for you? Would you be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the army?" (v. 13).

We have to love the Shunammite woman's answer, "I live among my own people" (v. 13). What simplicity! What contentment! Leave the great movements to the movers and the shakers. Let their anointed "kings" and "captains" have their moment in the sun. Movements come and movements go, but at the end of the day, we all have to find our "own people" to dwell with, don't we?

Those caught in a movement will be disappointed sooner or later. And better sooner than later – I am speaking from my own experience.

We can render a great help to our precious brothers and sisters who are caught in such "movements" by helping them find their "own people." How can you tell when you have found your "own people"? It is simple. There will be no "king," no "captain of the army"! In other words, there will be no authoritarian figures, imposing their rules and regulations upon you, to keep you "in line." No man demanding honor; all honor goes to God. Make no mistake, ultimately the only authority is God Himself. How sad that many ambitious and gifted men seek to set themselves up as "kings" and demand that all in their "kingdom" submit to them. It seems such men have no rest until they have corralled a following of "sheep" who are willing to be dominated by them and to listen to no other voice.

Isn't this extremely revealing of our precious Shunammite woman's real character? She has no desire for success, fame, riches, favor, power or glory – all the things that carnal (and religious) men relentlessly pursue after. Now this has to be another proof that, through many dealings, she has learned to yield and surrender to the Lord.

Many enlightened brothers and sisters pursue a dream church and thus they skip from church to church. They have no rest until they find it – but they won't. I recall the words of one wise brother: "The church was perfect until you showed up." What a poignant reminder to all those who have their eyes fixed upon the church instead of Christ! Pursuing church – dream church or otherwise – will only lead to heartaches and disappointments. Pursuing Christ will lead us to "living among our own people" – where, I might add, Christ is the King.

The Shunammite's words are so simple yet profound, "I live among my own people." May the Lord grant us to find simple brothers and sisters who desire to live under the headship of Christ in simplicity.

Then comes the single most precious element of fellowship – sonship.

Since the Shunammite "has no son and her husband is old" (v. 14), Elisha's burden and fellowship for her is to usher her into sonship.

There is no other element more precious than the formation of sonship. Paul said to the Galatians, "My little children for whom I travail again until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). It is every parent's desire that their child grows into adulthood. It is no different in the spiritual realm.

The writer of Hebrews differentiates the "babe in Christ" who can only partake of milk from the "mature" who can partake of "solid food" (Heb 5: 13-14). Without a doubt, it is only the mature "sons" who are qualified to bear the ark of the true testimony of God.

Notice what Elisha said, "At this season next year, you shall embrace a son" (v. 16). Sonship is not an instantaneous thing. It takes both time and travail. Someone said very well, "The conversion of sinners takes a moment; the construction of saints takes a lifetime." Sonship requires a lifetime. A son is not formed miraculously; it takes both time and tribulation.

Paul said that the Lord, as the Captain of our salvation, was made perfect through sufferings, and that He will lead "many sons" into glory (Heb. 2: 10). It is sons that the Lord is after, not babes in Christ.

Since the sons represent spiritual maturity, it is the one thing God's enemy hates the most, and it is just here that the spiritual warfare rages the fiercest. No wonder we read in II Kings 4 that the woman's son suddenly died, apparently without cause. No doubt, this is an attack from God's enemy to destroy sonship.

Now we get a glimpse of the Shunammite's true "greatness." Notice how calm and collected she is even when her son has died right in her lap. She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God (in the upper chamber), and shut the door behind her. She recognized that she was in a spiritual battle, and she knew it must be fought in the heavenly realm—in the "upper chamber."

The problem with many Christians who encounter warfare is that they put the problem on the ground floor instead of taking it "upstairs." Paul said we fight not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers in the heavenly places. Once we position the battle in the proper place, that is, recognizing its spiritual nature, the battle is half won.

Then we must make a beeline to our "Elisha," a figure of Christ. And just how does our "Elisha" fight this battle? By zapping the enemy with legions of angels? By a snap of His fingers?

By His Cross.

Elisha's laying himself on and identifying with the dead corpse is a prefigure of Christ identifying Himself with sinful mankind and entering fully (mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands) into death.

The cross is a sign of weakness. Man conquers his enemy by strength; God conquers His enemy by weakness. Our only way to resurrection life and victory is through the Cross.

It might be funny—if it were not so sad—that the message of the Cross has

been preached for centuries, but those who claim to be the church, who claim to be enlightened as to how to practice the church life, still are not willing to take the cross.

I think I'll return to living among my own people....

Oliver Peng  
Jan. 18, 2010

**Re: The Shunammite Woman I, on: 2010/10/25 9:16**

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**Re THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN - posted by bakary (), on: 2010/10/26 3:19**

Good word, pilgrim777.

**Re: Re THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN, on: 2010/10/28 15:53**

It is very refreshing and takes a false burden off of you.