

**Articles and Sermons :: The Shunammite Woman II - Spiritual Fullness - Oliver Peng****The Shunammite Woman II - Spiritual Fullness - Oliver Peng, on: 2010/10/26 8:09**

The Shunammite Woman II – Spiritual Fullness

II Kings 8:1-6

The intriguing story of the Shunammite woman seemingly ended with her son brought back to life in II Kings 4:37. All's well that ends well. Then she unexpectedly resurfaced again in chapter 8 with a backdrop of severe famine in the land.

The chapter opens with Elisha asking the woman to flee with her household from an impending seven-year famine. She followed the man of God's advice and "went with her household" and dwelt in the land of the Philistines for seven years (8:2).

Then the very next verse addresses her return from sojourn. The story omits all the details of the entire seven years as though nothing happened during the time when the family of three lived in the territory of the Philistines.

But, as we discussed previously, much of the significance, or "greatness," lies not with the Shunammite woman's words or deeds; it is hidden in the unspoken.

First of all, it was the Shunammite woman with whom the prophet communicated both in chapter 4 and chapter 8. Her husband, no doubt a good man, never took part in the conversation. True fellowship that hits the mark is from deep unto deep, or from spirit to spirit. No doubt, the Shunammite woman has spiritual depth and discernment to facilitate fellowship with the prophet.

There is nothing quite as uplifting as fellowshiping with brethren who are full of Christ and full of spiritual insight. But I also remember times when elderly and spiritually matured brothers' fellowship flew right over my head. There were other times when I received email from seeking brothers and sisters who lamented that no one in their respective congregations understood a word they were saying – it was as if they spoke in a foreign language.

The problem is not a lack of knowledge, but a lack of spiritual depth. Knowledge comes by relatively easily; spiritual depth is gained only by yielding to the work of the cross. One of the deficiencies of seminaries, trainings, or any mass-production schemes is the emphasis on turning out pupils, followers, and workers without turning on their spiritual depth. The kingdom of God is not going to be won by brethren unified in knowledge and walking in lockstep, but by common folk who have had their spiritual depth turned on.

This is not to say, however, that saints with spiritual depth should only fellowship with kindred spirits, but never attempt to communicate with spiritual novices. If it were so, then none of us would have the light we have today. If Jesus were such, He would not have spoken to His largely clueless disciples, and we'd all be doomed to darkness.

Spiritual depth does not necessarily refer to stoic or somber demeanor, or men and women walking around with a Bible tucked under their arm while a halo floats above their head. In fact, it is a joy to talk to simple believers who just love the Lord. A simple greeting from a child always warms my heart. A hand drawn card with squiggly notes handed to my wife during her time of physical affliction often moved us both greatly. It seems that the Lord comes through simple folk much more easily than sophisticated folk. May the Lord help us return to simplicity.

Take our precious Shunammite woman for example. She received and understood Elisha's fellowship, and she must have shared it with her husband also, as we saw in

chapter 4. Here in chapter 8, her fellowship with her husband is hidden in the unspoken. Notice that Elisha told her, not her husband, about the impending famine, but she went "with her household" to the land of the Philistines (v. 2). Undoubtedly, her husband took the lead on account of her fellowship, and she merely followed – it's a beautiful picture of fellowship, isn't it?

We have to give the Shunammite's husband tribute for being a simple person with an open heart for fellowship. Though not shown to possess spiritual depth, he gladly received his wife's fellowship time and time again without reservation. As a result of this openness, the entire household received blessings.

As we consider the attributes of the Shunammite woman, her husband's simplicity and openness to receive fellowship should not be minimized. In a day and age when spiritual knowledge is easily accessible through books and the Internet, everyone seems to be fortified and puffed up with many spiritual concepts which prevent open and uncluttered fellowship. To have the Shunammite's husband's simplicity and openness would be a great blessing indeed!

Then, an interesting thing happened. Instead of the woman returning with her household, it simply says, "the woman returned from the land of the Philistines." And not only so, but we read that "she went to the king to make an appeal for her house and for her land" (v. 3). Given the Shunammite woman's spiritual depth and maturity, something extraordinary must have happened during those seven years for her to take the lead in coming home, and to make an appeal before the king for her house and for her land!

Hidden in the unspoken is that her husband must have died during the seven-year sojourn in the land of the Philistines, leaving the Shunammite woman alone to lead the family back and appeal to the king with only her son in tow (vv. 3 & 5).

How can we prove that her husband died during those seven years? The first clue is that her husband is "old" (4:14). Then we know from history of the Old Testament that the Philistines are perennially arch-enemies of God's people. So it's not hard to imagine the physical and emotional stress this old man must have endured in having to move his entire family to resettle in the harsh conditions of a repressive ruler in a strange land.

Perhaps a small window is open so that we can see something of the tremendous sufferings this Shunammite woman must have endured during those seven years of exile, i.e. the famine, the move, the resettlement in enemy's land, and ultimately, the loss of her husband.

There is reason to believe that the Holy Spirit broke the continuity of the Shunammite's story into two parts (II Kings 4:8-37 & II Kings 8:1-6) with more than three chapters of unrelated stories in between to show us just how dark the situation was and how dire the sufferings were.

II Kings 4:38 begins to detail different aspects of the suffering. There was the "wild gourds" that became "death in the pot." There was the feeding of one hundred hungry men. There was Naaman's leprosy and Gehazi's greed. There was the meager living condition of the "sons of the prophets." There were wars. There were famines. Folks were driven to do the unspeakable, even to cannibalism!

Then, out of all these horrendously dark and gruesome tragedies emerges a pure, simple and humble woman who has herself undergone afflictions and tragedies yet seems to have been untouched and undaunted by any of them. There is simply no mention of the woman's sufferings, hint of her groaning, or even a murmur of any kind throughout the story. Although her beloved and only son suddenly died in her lap, she conducted herself in perfect calmness. It reminds me of Daniel's three friends who were thrown into a fiery furnace that was intensified seven times. When they came out, there was not so much as the smell of smoke on them.

Many Christians cringe at the slightest hint of God's dealing. They miss many golden opportunities to allow the Lord to deepen them from within and constitute them with the Lamb's humble nature and character. The greatest blessings are often, if not always, hidden under rough disguises.

On the other hand, many teachers ministering on the subject of the cross must take heed lest their sharing does not match their inner constitution which has to have been molded and conformed to Christ's image before the message can become a blessing.

I appreciate what the Holy Spirit intends to show us in presenting the other stories found in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 before returning to consummate the story of this precious Shunammite woman. As we have seen in these chapters, when suffering, starvation and the terrors of war come, God's people struggle in despair for deliverance. We hear their collective cry, "There is death in the pot!" But in stark contrast, our Shunammite woman, having yielded herself to the Lord, calmly stands as a fragrant aroma in the midst of horrendous situations that no amount of teaching or human endeavor can alter. She needs not shout, lecture or even speak much; her being emanates the reality of the cross, not just her words—this, dear friends, is what makes the Shunammite woman "great."

Un-molested, unaffected, and unafraid through all the turbulent tribulations, our brave Shunammite woman stands quietly and humbly before the king to appeal for what was once her husband's, now hers, home and land. There was no thought of regret for not taking Elisha's offer seven years prior in asking for a favor before the king (II Kings 4:13) which would have made it easy now to get her house and land back. But then she would have owed a huge debt of favor to the king that might encumber her and her family for the rest of her life, not to mention the effect such a course would have had on her spiritual stature.

We can learn a lesson from the Shunammite woman with regard to our relationship with our earthly "king" (leaders). Let it be a sobering warning that we should always be careful in seeking to develop a special relationship with our spiritual leaders. Our relationship horizontally, with one another, should be the result of our relationship with the Lord vertically. Excessive reliance upon a leader, especially a well respected one, will develop into an undue loyalty to him, and many leaders exploit this loyalty to manipulate innocent flock.

But there is no such danger with our Shunammite woman who put the Lord before the king and declined Elisha's offer of seeking favor from him in chapter 4.

It is interesting to note that in chapter 8, the Shunammite's son stands by her side as her silent testimony of life. Many are those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord. Many are those who stake a claim in the land of God's kingdom. Many are those who believe they have a position in the household of God's people. But the crucial question remains, Do they have a silent testimony of life by their side?

When the King of kings returns in His glory, we must all stand before Him. Many may lay claim before Him concerning the "great works" and "mighty miracles" which they claim to have done "in His name". But if the silent testimony of divine Life is missing, a Life known only through experiencing His death and resurrection, the Lord may say to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." (Matthew 7:23).

How, then, is this silent testimony of life acquired? Remember the Shunammite woman.

Only God's sovereign grace could have arranged the conversation between Gehazi and the king, and the timely appearance of the Shunammite before the king. God moves, through the king, to restore not only her former house and land, but also all that the land has produced since the time that she left! This, dear friends, is none other than spiritual fullness.

In everything the Shunammite woman did, we see Christ. We see Christ speaking in and through her. We see Christ manifested in and through her words and actions. It was the cross of Christ operating in her that sent forth a sweet aroma of His death. It was her experience of Christ's cross that gave depth and meaning to her sufferings. It was also the cross of Christ that brought forth a resurrected son—the silent testimony of resurrection life. Finally, it was that same cross of Christ that ushered her into spiritual fullness.

O, that we would echo Paul's longing and prayer that the body of Christ might be built up "until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith, at the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Amen!

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Re: The Shunammite Woman II - Spiritual Fullness - posted by bakary (), on: 2010/10/27 14:59

God bless you pilgrim777 for this insightful messages.

Re: , on: 2010/10/28 15:52

Well thank you, but I did not write it. I am blessed as you are from Oliver's article.