

## How To Keep The Oil Flowing

2 Kings 4:1-7

**I**magine yourself at the end of your rope. Your resources are all but exhausted. Your family is threatened. Panic grips your heart, and the fear gnaws at your being constantly. Have you ever been there?

The woman in our Scripture passage today was experiencing such a crisis. Her husband, a godly man and a servant of Elisha, had died, leaving a large mountain of debt behind him. His widow had apparently sold all their meager possessions in her attempts to stay ahead of the creditors. But the day eventually came when she had nothing left to sell. The creditor was demanding that her two sons be sold into slavery to satisfy the debts which remained. Now she must have laid awake nights, her mind trying to solve this problem. But no solution could be found. The solution came when she took her problem to Elisha, the prophet of God.

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In following Elisha's instructions, the woman went around to all her neighbors and borrowed empty jars. Elisha had told her not to borrow only a few, but to get as many as she could. Then the widow went home, shut herself up in her house with her two sons, and began to pour the little oil she did have into the jars.

As she poured and the seconds passed, she must have wondered to herself, "When will the oil be gone? Will there be enough?" Surely she wouldn't need *all* these jars! Can you imagine what she felt? Can you sense the excitement fluttering in her stomach and the quickened heartbeat in her chest? As she kept pouring the oil into first one jar, then the second, then the third, then another and another, she may have fought a nagging question in the back of her mind: "How do I keep the oil flowing?"

That question would be quite appropriate for us to ask ourselves this morning. "How do I keep the oil flowing?" Some of us in recent months and weeks may have been at the end of our ropes in a spiritual sense. We had run out of resources. We were tired of playing the game of church, and we knew there had to be something more to this life Christ offers. But we didn't really know where to turn or what to do.

But then the "oil" began to flow! There has been a tremendous turning of our hearts to the Lord in recent weeks, and especially in the past few days. Many of us

have been renewed in our relationships with the Lord Jesus Christ and our devotion to Him. We've begun a new walk with Him, and we've made new commitments to prayer, Bible study, worship, witnessing, and perhaps stewardship. The oil is flowing now—but how do we keep it flowing?

In the Scriptures, we see much mention made of the oil of the olive. It was burned in lamps for illumination, and used in cooking. It was mixed with meal and made into little cakes to be used as part of a meal offering to God. Sometimes wine was added to the oil for medicinal purposes, as we see in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:34. Olive oil was used as a cosmetic for anointing the body, especially after a bath, and for smoothing the hair.

Olive oil had a symbolic use as well. It was used as early as the book of Genesis, where Jacob poured oil on his stone pillow at Bethel, symbolically consecrating it to God. In Exodus (30:23-28), God commanded Moses to mix oil with certain spices and fragrances, and use it to anoint the Tent of Meeting, and all the furniture and utensils used in worship. Samuel took a flask of oil and anointed the head of Saul in declaring him king over Israel (1 Samuel 10:1), and David after Saul (1 Samuel 16:1). Zadok the priest anointed Solomon with olive oil as the people shouted "Long live the king!" (1 Kings 1:39).

In these and many other instances olive oil was used symbolically to dedicate something or someone to God for a special purpose. It was used to signify that God's Spirit had descended upon that person, empowering him for special service. So it would only be the natural thing that Jesus should be called the Christ, or Messiah, which both mean "The Anointed One."

But the significance of olive oil doesn't stop there! In what is perhaps the favorite psalm of many Christians, Psalm 23, we find oil used as a symbol for the care and comfort of God: "*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil*" (v. 5). In Psalm 45:7, oil is used to symbolize the joy that accompanies righteousness: "*You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.*"

And when we get to the New Testament, this anointing by God takes on greater significance for those of us who follow Christ. Through God's plan, the anointing with olive oil is replaced by the anointing of the Holy Spirit!

Let us look at a couple of examples, the first being in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22: “*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. **He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.***” You see, we have been anointed by the Holy Spirit! Another example is found in the book of First John, chapter two: “*But you have **an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth***” (1 John 2:20). Then a few verses later, in verse 27, “*As for you, **the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him***” (1 John 2:27).

So we see that this anointing by God’s Holy Spirit is symbolized in the Old Testament by the pouring of olive oil, while in the New Testament it is seen more directly in the lives of believers as they walk with Christ. So again, the appropriate question for us today is “How can I keep the oil of God’s Holy Spirit flowing through my life?”

We go back to 2 Kings 4 for six clues as to how each of us can continue in this renewal of our relationship with God. It is done through God’s Holy Spirit, which He has poured out upon us, in much the same way as this widow poured her oil into the jars which were available.

## **1 I must totally and absolutely confess my inadequacy without Christ.**

The widow came to Elisha to admit that she had nowhere else to turn. Her money was gone, the creditors were hounding her, and she had nothing in her house except a little oil she may have intended to use for cooking. She was totally inadequate to face and conquer the crisis. Without Christ, we are totally inadequate to conquer the sin in our lives. Let us admit these things: we could do nothing to save ourselves, and we could do nothing to revive ourselves. It follows naturally that there is nothing outside of our continued faith in Christ we can do to keep the oil of the Spirit flowing through our lives. We read in Romans 5:6, “*you see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*”

We see familiar words in John 15:5, “*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*” That is what Paul discovered in his own ministry, so he wrote to the

church at Corinth: *“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God”* (2 Corinthians 3:5).

## **2 I must continue to live a life of honesty and integrity.**

The widow of 2 Kings 4 was instructed to go around to all her neighbors and borrow as many empty jars as she could. Surely her poverty was known to all, so it must have evoked some curiosity among her neighbors when she knocked on their doors and asked to borrow whatever empty jars they may have had on hand. What could this woman possibly have to put in them? Some of her neighbors may have gone beyond curiosity to criticism, as her requests around the neighborhood were discussed and analyzed. Then perhaps a few even went beyond the curiosity and criticism to commitment, as they realized what God had done for her.

Like it or not, the way I live my life before others will evoke some curiosity, as others attempt to figure out why I do the things I do, what motivates me. Criticism will come from some, who will say that I am merely a fanatic who has no sense of the real world. But there will be a few who are drawn to a deeper commitment because of my faithfulness to live for Christ. Because our lives are so carefully watched by others, we must be very conscientious about the integrity of our Christian witness. It is a truth we see in the Scriptures—just listen to these verses:

*“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature”* (Galatians 5:16). *“Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God”* (Ephesians 5:2). *“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light”* (Ephesians 5:8). *“Only let us live up to what we have already attained”* (Philippians 3:16). *“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him”* (Colossians 2:6). *“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity”* (Colossians 4:5). *“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody”* (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

Nothing will stop up the flow of the oil of the Holy Spirit any faster than hypocrisy in our lives. Let us make sure that as believers we live lives of integrity and honesty.

### **3 I must continue to do whatever He directs, even if I do not understand.**

It surely must have made no sense to this widow to borrow jars when there was nothing to put in them! But she obeyed, doing just as Elisha instructed her, right down to the last detail.

To keep the oil of God's Holy Spirit flowing in my life, I must demonstrate to Him that I am willing to obey Him in everything, every facet of my life, even if what He instructs makes no sense to me, or even if I do not see how I could possibly do what He asks. Jesus said, *"If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love"* (John 15:10). And He warned us in Matthew 7:21, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."*

Obedience is the lifeblood of the Christian's walk with the Lord. If we want to keep the oil of the Holy Spirit flowing, we must continue to do whatever the Lord says, even if we don't understand it.

### **4 There must be those times when I am "shut up" with God.**

An important part of Elisha's instructions to this woman was that she should go inside her house and shut the door behind her. In our hurry-up world, we are prone to overlook the basic fact that many times in the Bible, seclusion from the crowds and noise was sought by those about to perform miracles: Elijah, Elisha, Jesus and Peter, to name a few. If we are to keep the oil of God's Holy Spirit flowing in our lives, then we must recognize the fact that there must be those times when we will be "shut up" with God away from the noise and distraction of the world around us, that we might more clearly hear His instruction and receive His power and fellowship for our lives.

Notice, though, that this woman was to shut the door behind her *and* her two sons. In that, we see that

### **5 There must be those times when I live my faith before my family.**

If the people who know us best and then see us at our worst cannot see our faith in Christ being lived out, then it is very likely that the "oil" of God's Spirit will cease to flow. We cannot live one way when we are at church or around other Christians, and quite another way when we are at home with our families,

and still expect to keep the oil flowing. If our children do not see that Jesus is real to us, then He will not be real to them. We cannot expect God to keep pouring Himself upon us when we quench the fires of our testimonies before our families.

## **6 I must continuously draw from the Fountain of Life.**

Notice in verse six that the oil stopped flowing only when there was not another empty jar left. In that fact is a basic truth we have ignored too often, which was best expressed by the great Bible preacher of another generation, Alexander Maclaren: “God keeps giving Himself as long as we bring that into which He can pour Himself. And when we stop bringing, He stops giving.” That was something Maclaren lived out. Another preacher (W. Robertson Nicoll), writing about Maclaren’s life, said, “Those who observed him recognized that he drank from fountains older than the world, and for him they were always running fresh. In his later years it seemed to be his supreme desire to obtain a fuller communion with God in Christ.”

Jeremiah pointed out that two sins of the people of his day were that they had stopped drawing from the true fountain of life, and that they had attempted to forge their own way without God (Jeremiah 2:13). Jesus said, *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me...streams of living water will flow from within him”* (John 7:37-38).

This fountain of living water must be drawn from continuously if you and I are to keep the oil flowing. Paul told the Colossians *“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him”* (Colossians 2:6). He told Timothy, *“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convicted of...”* (2 Timothy 3:14a).

So how do I keep the oil flowing? How do we remain in this anointing power of God’s Holy Spirit which has so filled us these past few days and weeks?

I must ...

1. Continue to totally and absolutely confess my inadequacy without Christ
2. Continue to live a life of honesty and integrity
3. Do whatever He directs, even if I do not understand
4. Take the time to be “shut up” with God
5. Live my faith before my family
6. Continuously draw from the fountain of life

Perhaps even today you would like to commit your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, that the oil may begin to flow in your life.