

28 “Did I ask you for a son, my lord?” she said. “Didn’t I tell you, ‘Don’t raise my hopes?’”

29 Elisha said to Gehazi, “Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy’s face.”

30 But the child’s mother said, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So he got up and followed her.

31 Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy’s face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, “The boy has not awakened.”

32 When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. 33 He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. 34 Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy’s body grew warm. 35 Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

36 Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite.” And he did. When she came, he said, “Take your son.” 37 She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.

God Gives us Unwanted Gifts. Don’t Be Afraid to Have them and Love them in Christ

“Did I ask you for a son, my lord?” Can you sense the anguish and the sorrow in that question? The Shunammite woman said this because she had become resigned to the fact that she wasn’t going to have children. I probably shouldn’t even say “resigned” to the fact.” She learned to live without children and thrive without children: she was doing just fine. God had blessed her with plenty of money. She was thankful to God for what He had given her, and she was thankful for what she had and generous with what she had. When Elisha came through town she made provisions for him to stay on the roof, and that was actually a nice place to live in Palestine. She put a bed up there with a lamp. There was a cool breeze at night for Elisha to enjoy. She was happy even though she didn’t have children, and that isn’t an easy place to get to in life for most women who envision themselves having children. It may have taken some time - but she was there - she was in a good place.

Ah, contentment. **Godliness with contentment is great gain.** How many times in your life do you reach such a point where you say, “I’m good right where I’m at.” We say to ourselves, “Life will be so much easier / better when . . .” When I get a raise? When I get a spouse? When I get children? But with every blessing comes more responsibility and more stress. Very seldom in life do we have what we want and find ourselves in a place where all is good. It is a good goal to have. In Proverbs 30:8 the prayer goes, “**give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.** The Shunammite - she was good where she was at, genuinely good. Perhaps she had to keep telling herself that over and over. “I don’t need a child. God is good. God is gracious. I have a husband. I have a house. I am living among God’s people. I have a forgiving God. What more do I need?” Maybe it took a while, but finally she was there. It’s sad that we have such a hard time finding that place.

But Elisha, he had to go and “ruin” everything for her by praying for her to have the one thing she had wanted for years - a baby boy - even though she didn’t ask for it. Why did he do that? Well, the Shunammite had been nice to Elisha, and he wanted to do something nice back for her. His servant mentioned that she didn’t have any children, so Elisha prayed to the Lord that she would have a child. But she said to him, “**Don’t raise my hopes.**” Think about that. Why did she say that? She didn’t want to have to go through the emotions of even hoping for a child. Perhaps she had gone through several miscarriages, we don’t know. But she didn’t want to go down that road again. It was too painful. She was happy where she was at.

There’s a fine line, isn’t there, between living in contentment with what you have, and living in fear of blessings? Someone once said, “It is better to have loved and lost than to have never loved at all.” Most of us would agree with that, I would assume. But when you go through such a loss of a spouse or a child, it makes you fearful ever to put yourself in such a position as to feel that loss or suffer that kind of loss ever again. We live in a world of sin and death, and things are constantly being torn from us. So in order to protect the heart from pain, some people purposely seclude themselves from others and withhold themselves from enjoyable things and pleasures out of fear of losing them again. They learn to live with what they’ve got, and they don’t want any more.

But just because we live in a sinful world that is full of suffering and death, it doesn’t mean that we have to be afraid of blessings. Elisha WANTED to give the Shunammite something she could personally enjoy and something that she had wanted. Think about how happy it makes you as a parent to see your children enjoy themselves. Don’t forget that our God is a God who gives us things for our enjoyment. So it was with giving this Shunammite a son that she had wanted for so long. God opened her heart up to a love and a gift she never thought she would have. She had the joy and the pleasure of raising a son of her own, and her heart was full of joy.

She had just begun to hold this baby boy and enjoy him and play with him. This boy was able to speak. He was showing some personality. He was able to walk and talk. But then within mere hours, his head began to hurt. Perhaps he had heat stroke. Imagine her holding her baby boy in her arms, praying desperately for the LORD to spare him, stroking his hair and rocking him back and forth. Then quickly and suddenly he died. Immediately she went back to the one who gave her the hope in the first place. When she reached Elisha she said, “**Didn’t I tell you, don’t raise my hopes.**”

Why did she go to him? She went to him because, in a sense, he was the only hope she had. She hoped and believed that this same God who gave her life, could restore the life of her boy. Right when she died, she went upstairs and put him on Elisha’s bed. Perhaps she hoped that by being on the same bed that Elisha slept on that it would somehow have some miraculous power attached to it. Then she had her servant grab a donkey where she could travel maybe 20 miles to go straight to Elisha. He was the only hope she had and she didn’t waste any time in going to him.

The Shunammite placed her boy on the bed of Elisha in hopes of saving him from death. This is why we rush our children to the baptismal font, where we have our children placed in the bed of Christ’s tomb. Every time we have our children baptized, Paul says in Romans 6 “**don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?** Why would we want to put our children in such a terrible place?

Because when they are buried with Christ, God looks at it as if they too were crucified and put to death. God sees them as having had their sins paid for. It is as if we were laying our children in the tomb of Christ to be crucified and buried with Christ, for the forgiveness of their sins. We don't put our children in the tomb of Christ to remain dead! But we do it with the hope of life after death! We go to a greater prophet, Jesus Christ, who prophesied that He would not only die, but that He would also raise to life.

The Shunammite went to the only place she knew that could bring life out of death, to the same one whom God had used to bring life into her dead womb. He could bring life back from the dead on his bed. She went there quickly in the midst of death, and God worked! He had his servant Gehazi take his staff and lay it on the boy. God had worked through the staff of Moses to part the Red Sea. He had used it to turn water to blood. So God could use this staff to bring the boy back to life. But not this time. Elisha had to go there personally.

What an intimate picture! Imagine the panicked mother waiting in the basement for the door to open. She would have been exhausted from the journey. Elisha went into the room and did something most of us would consider disgusting. He stretched out upon the dead and cold boy's body. Face to face, eye to eye, mouth to mouth, and palm to palm. He was not afraid to touch a dead body and have his mouth touch death itself, out of the hope that God could bring life. Jesus did much more. He didn't just come to touch a dead body. He came to be that dead body, and let death come upon Himself.

Then there was the slightest hope of life. Warmth had come upon the boy, but no life. Elisha prayed and knelt back over the boy. Finally, after seven sneezes, the boy came back to life. A miracle had occurred. God brought life back from death.

This same God brought Lazarus back from the dead after four days. Martha didn't want Jesus to roll back the stone. She was afraid the body would stink, and it would have. But that stench didn't stop Jesus from speaking and bringing life. **The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."** What a greater miracle when Jesus then came forth from the grave by Himself after having been whipped and crucified - three days later - all by Himself. What a wonderful promise that Jesus gave when He said, **"Because I live, you also will live."**

Paul wrote that in our baptism, **"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."** We don't believe in Jesus and have our children baptized *only because* we are afraid of death, but also because we believe that in Jesus we have life! Those who believe and are baptized will live forever with JESUS in heaven! What a wonderful reminder in the midst of Lent season, as we study upon the suffering and death of Jesus, that our God is a God of life!

The Shunammite was afraid of hope; afraid of being brought outside of her comfort zone. She asked Elisha NOT to raise her hopes. Elisha ignored her request. He specifically gave her what she didn't want. He gave her more hope than she could ever imagine. Not only did he give her hope for a boy. He gave her a boy. More than that, he gave her hope that his God could raise her boy from the dead, and God did not disappoint. Instead

of sheltering her from hope and keeping her content with a seemingly aloof and godless husband, God gave her much more than she ever wanted.

This is the kind of God we have. He doesn't want us to live in cynicism and fear. He doesn't want us to live with cold resignation to death. He gave us a Son we never asked for. He gave us a salvation we could have never hoped for, a free and gracious forgiveness earned by the death of God's Son and a resurrection from the dead to eternal life. He did this so He could have the joy of welcoming us to heaven and we could have the joy of being there. There are so many people that have convinced themselves that God just wants them to be miserable - that we are nothing but evolved creatures just waiting to return to the ground. They have resigned themselves to the thought that there is no hope. Oh, that they would see how our God has the power to bring life from death! Oh, that God would place in their hands His Son, to fill their hearts with hope and love.

Think about how much joy your children or your spouse give you. What a wonderful thing it is to experience the love and forgiveness of a fellow believer. It's scary to find so much joy in the middle of a sinful and dying world. We know that any day they could be torn from us. When we both believe in the same Lord and Savior, we have promise that we will get to be with each other forever in heaven. We don't need to fear losing a loved one in the Lord, because we know they are never lost. They are simply brought home first, and we are coming next. Why not enjoy such love and such joy when it comes from God, even if the joy is lost for a temporary amount of time?

Can you imagine the joy and the hope the Shunammite had when Gehazi called her upstairs. **When she came, he said, "Take your son." She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.** It all seems so simple, so quick. Maybe the writer just didn't elaborate. Did she smother him with kisses? Were there tears in her eyes? I can't help but think so. But all it says was that she showed respect to Elisha, grabbed her son and left. Maybe she didn't know what to say. Maybe there was nothing more to say. Imagine too the joy and relief in the eyes of Elisha as well - at seeing this woman being given her gift back again.

- Lord Byron lived a life of pleasure if anyone did. He wrote: "The worm, the canker, and grief are mine alone."
- Jay Gould, the American millionaire, when dying, he said: "I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth."
- Lord Beaconsfield enjoyed more than his share of pleasure and money. He wrote: "Youth is a mistake; manhood a struggle; old age a regret."

What is the one thing they were missing? Jesus. Think about the look that will be on Jesus face when He sees us at the resurrection of the dead? Can you imagine the joy that will be on the eyes of mothers and spouses and children at the resurrection of the dead? How happy they will be to hold their loved ones in their actual arms, and see them happy as well! How glorious will it be to see Jesus face to face, enjoying our joy as well! This is our greatest hope! This is why Jesus died and rose from the dead - to see us there at the great reunion. It is a most wonderful gift of God, one that we could have never asked for or imagined, that we not only get moments of joy with ones we love here and now, but that we also have to hope that we will be with them forever in heaven. Instead of making us cynical and guarded and afraid of having things to love in this world, it can make us open, joyful, and thankful. Amen.