

“God’s Opportunity in Our Emptiness” From Deacon Robert Holt, 7/8/18

Pastor shared with me yesterday that he may not be able to preach today, and if I could be prepared just in case – so I prayed. First for God to strengthen Pastor, and manifest healing of the specific challenge Pastor was facing. And second, to prepare me to share whatever God intended NLC to hear today. As I was praying, I asked God to empty me of self, to make room for whatever He wanted me to say. Pastor did say he was feeling a bit better, but didn’t want to push things...so here I am.

I thought about what did Pastor want me to address, or if there was something I had been reading or studying lately that I could share. I texted Pastor to see what he might want me to address, and he said, ‘No special topic, whatever the Lord gives you.’ So, I had to empty myself of what I thought I was going to say, and make room for God to give me what to say.

I trust God, so I communicated my concerns to Him through prayer. When we communicate with someone we trust, even before getting an answer we can sometimes feel better “getting that off our chest...we’ve emptied ourselves of some care and concerns. Because of that trust, any vulnerability or preoccupation with self SHOULD be dismissed, especially with God. Even with others we trust, we feel that individual will hear our heart’s concerns, without feeling they will abuse our vulnerability. We may not even need that trusted person to audibly respond. In the process of emptying ourselves of that care or concern, we may be enlightened as to what’s needed to be done to get through our situation. We position ourselves for God’s opportunity to fill our emptiness.

With that said, I want to share some biblical examples of God’s Opportunity in Our Emptiness”. Please turn to our main text for today, 2 Kings 4: 1-7.

2 Kings 4: 1-7

1 A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves." 2 So Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of

oil." 3 Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors--empty vessels; do not gather just a few.

4 And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels and set aside the full ones." 5 So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured it out.

6 Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another vessel." So, the oil ceased. 7 Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you and your sons live on the rest."

I want to emphasize a few "o-words" here.

- Obedience. Obedience; from both the woman to Elisha and sons to their mother. Even though the woman thought she had "nothing but...", she was obedient and did what Elisha advised. And her sons were obedient to their mother, resulting in them being delivered from their impending bondage, and becoming free instead.
- Ownership. Elisha could have poured the oil in the vessels, or told the woman to pray that God would provide the oil. But he told the woman to pour the oil. We need to empty ourselves, not wait for somebody else to do it. We have a part in this, take ownership. Look at our emptiness as an opportunity for God, not a time for wallowing in discontent.
- Overflow. In verse 3 it reads: "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors--empty vessels; do not gather just a few." If we trust God through faith and obedience, we should prepare for an overflow, beyond what you can mentally conceive. Don't underestimate what you already have in the house, or in your giftings, or in your heart. The woman said "I have nothing but a jar of oil...". God makes much with what we may consider to be little; it gives him room to work his perfect work. Then we need to remember when that we had "nothing but...", and only through God did deliverance and freedom come. If we're not experiencing the fullness of God, maybe we're not empty enough.

For another example of God's opportunity in emptiness, please turn to Matthew 14: 15-21, the familiar story of Jesus feeding of the 5,000. To set context, earlier Herod had beheaded John the Baptist. The disciples told Jesus what happened, and He went away to a deserted place by Himself. The multitudes heard what happened and followed Him there.

Matthew 14: 15-21

15 When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food."

16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them some thing to eat."

17 And they said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish."

18 He said, "Bring them here to Me." 19 Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. 20 So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. 21 Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Just like with the woman who went to Elisha having "nothing but some oil..", the disciples presented Jesus with "nothing but 5 loaves and 2 fish". But Jesus made "nothing but" more than sufficient to meet the need, as once again there was overflow, twelve baskets full of the fragments remained. The Word shows no indication the multitude followed Jesus because they were hungry; they followed him based on compassion for the loss of John the Baptist, whom they knew Jesus loved. The multitudes also made a sacrifice. Notice earlier in verse 13, that Jesus went to the deserted place by boat; but the multitude went there by foot. Jesus chose to feed the multitude when they were hungry, or empty, and being in a deserted place, there was no other substitute other than what He could provide. The multitude emptied themselves of whatever their cares or concerns were and

shifted their care and concern to Jesus. Maybe some of us haven't shifted our cares and concerns to Jesus from whatever day to day challenges we have. If so, we're too full of these cares for God to use the opportunity in our emptiness to meet our needs.

1 Peter 5: 6-7 tells why we need to empty our cares upon God:

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Maybe out of pride, relying on our own experience, skills or perceived intellect we hold on to these cares. We need to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, or we remain unnecessarily full of these cares.

The final example of God's opportunity in our emptiness I'd like to share today is found in John 2: 6-10, Jesus turning water into wine. Jesus and his disciples were invited to a wedding in Cana, and they ran out of wine:

John 2: 6-10

6 Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And He said to them, "Draw *some* out now, and take *it* to the master of the feast." And they took *it*. 9 When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. 10 And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the *guests* have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!"

Jesus waited until the jars were empty to produce the wine. If there was already enough wine, the guests would have had to settle for what was shown to be inferior. They only received the best wine when they ran out of their own wine.

Jesus took the opportunity of emptiness to not only meet the need but exceeded it with "the best wine".

Also, Ephesians 3: 20 reads: "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in

us,”. We need to empty ourselves to give room for the Holy Spirit to be that power that works in us. I can look back over things I tried to do within my own power instead of His, and ultimately, they fail.

In conclusion: How can we expect to hear from God if we're so full of ourselves, or the cares of this world? But we may say, I go to church every Sunday, I serve in the “fill in the blank” ministry...I go to Bible study, I gave an offering; how could I be full of myself?

We are all supposed to be servants of God. Do we allow the seeds planted by our service to God on Sunday and Thursday, to grow and bear fruit on the other days of the week? Seeds need to be watered and exposed to the light. Prayer and faith, combined with works, and allowing God to fill us, waters and exposes our seeds to the light and I believe the quality of our service to God will grow. When we empty ourselves to be filled with the Word on Sundays and Thursdays for example, let's not allow ourselves to be preoccupied with other cares and concerns that will then fill the spaces God seeks to fill. We need to continue refilling our space with our own private study and prayer time, not just on Sundays and Thursdays.

God sees the opportunity in our emptiness – let him fill us, there is no substitute.