

ST. LUKE EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH-WELS

SERMON BY PASTOR ANTHONY E. SCHULTZ
JUNE 10, 2012
2ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 2 KINGS 4:38-41



Death in the Pot

³⁸ Elisha returned to Gilgal and there was a famine in that region.

While the company of the prophets was meeting with him, he said to his servant, “Put on the large pot and cook some stew for these prophets.”

³⁹ One of them went out into the fields to gather herbs and found a wild vine and picked as many of its gourds as his garment could hold. When he returned, he cut them up into the pot of stew, though no one knew what they were. ⁴⁰ The stew was poured out for the men, but as they began to eat it, they cried out, “Man of God, there is death in the pot!” And they could not eat it.

⁴¹ Elisha said, “Get some flour.” He put it into the pot and said, “Serve it to the people to eat.” And there was nothing harmful in the pot.

People of God—rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Back in 1939 a man named Joseph Kesselring wrote a stage play about two little spinster aunts who run a boarding house. Lonely old men come to stay at the boarding house. These lonely old men are so painfully lonely the sisters decide the right thing to do would be to put them out of their misery. This they accomplish by means of a glass of home-made elderberry wine laced with arsenic, strychnine and “just a pinch” of cyanide. The bodies of these unfortunate men are then buried by a delusional brother who thinks he’s Teddy Roosevelt—digging locks for the Panama Canal in the basement! Poison! What a nasty invention that is. But certainly nothing new! Down through the ages Kings and Queens have had food tasters and cup bearers—people responsible for nothing less than making sure their ruler was not poisoned. At any moment—upon the slightest whim or suspicion the King could say—“Now you drink my wine—drink it to the dregs!” The slightest hesitation on your part—and you would be put to death! Poison! Today—with Jesus’ permission we will begin a series of sermons about lesser known chapters in the history/ministry of Elisha. Our text teaches us:

The LORD Rescues Us From Death In The Pot!

- 1. Understand the Danger**
- 2. Then Appreciate the Rescue!**

Sometimes—not often—but *sometimes* you will hear people complain—that Church is boring. They will say—I come to Church and it’s always the same old *same old!* I’m bad—a wretched sinner. Jesus died on the cross. Now I’m forgiven. Someday I will go to Heaven—which is probably boring *too*—they fear. A lot of dry ice smoke—and people in white gowns floating around—playing little golden harps. They fear it will be sitting in pews listening to forever Church—for the Old Testament lesson somebody reads all 66 chapters of Isaiah—then the Epistle Lesson: the whole 16 chapters of Romans with people like Phoebe and Aquila and Priscilla and Epenetus and Mary and Andronicus and Ampliatus and Urbanus and Apelles and the household of Aristobulus and Herodion and the household of Narcissus get introduced. And then maybe they read all 28 chapters of Matthew’s Gospel and then sing *I don’t know*—65

verses of some hymn with a difficult melody. Heaven is not boring. And Church will not be boring – when you really appreciate your personal debt of sin – and really appreciate the greatness of Jesus’ grace and mercy! Church cannot be boring – when we are motivated to pray, praise and give thanks for all Jesus did to rescue us!

God’s Word talks a lot about Elijah and then Elisha. I think almost all of us know some Elijah Bible history. We know about Elijah and wicked King Ahab and even more horrible Queen Jezebel – her name a synonym for nasty! We know about the drought – and Elijah fed by Ravens – who brought him bread and meat beside the Brook Kerith. We know about the Widow at Zarephath – up by Sidon – so far north she was all the way up by Lebanon. Remember how the LORD made her *Tupperware* of flour and her jug of oil to never run out – as long as there was a drought and famine. Remember the widow of Zarephath had a son – and he died! Elijah carried her son to the upper room where he was staying, put his lifeless body on the bed. Elijah stretched out on the boy three times and cried out to the LORD, **“O LORD my God, let this boy’s life return to him!”** And by grace alone – the LORD made this little boy alive! We know the Bible history of Elijah dueling with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and how the LORD sent fire down to burn up Elijah’s sacrifice. Then Elijah and the people on the LORD’s side took their swords and put to death some 450 prophets of Baal. We know about Elijah out in the wilderness – in the cave – the strong wind that shattered rocks – the earthquake and the fire. But the LORD wasn’t in them. Then the still small voice that asked, **“Elijah, what are you doing here?”** We know God’s Word concerning Elijah going up to Heaven in a fiery chariot – Elisha watching – Elisha inheriting Elijah’s mantle – his cloak. In the same circumstance Elisha receives a double measure of Elijah’s spirit – a zeal and passion for the glory of the LORD! There is much Bible history about Elisha, too, but perhaps not as well known. The next couple of weeks with Jesus’ permission we will look at some of the lesser known Bible history concerning the ministry of Elisha.

The part of God’s Word we are concentrating on today is from 2 Kings Chapter 4. Chapter 4 begins with a wife – a widow of a man from the company of the prophets who cried out to Elisha, **“Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.”** Elisha asked her if she had anything? She had nothing at all – except a little olive oil. Elisha sent her around to all her neighbors for all their empty jars. Back home with the doors shut – she poured and poured and poured olive oil – until there was not a jar left to fill. Again by the grace of God – she could pay her debt and what was left would sustain her and her sons. Again the LORD provided. He always provides – taking care of his people. Remember what King David wrote? **The blameless spend their days under the LORD’s care, and their inheritance will endure forever. ¹⁹ In times of disaster they will not wither; in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.²⁰ But the wicked will perish: Though the LORD’s enemies are like the flowers of the field, they will be consumed, they will go up in smoke. ²¹ The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously; ²² those the LORD blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be destroyed. ²³ The LORD makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; ²⁴ though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand.²⁵ I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.²⁶ They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be a blessing. ²⁷ Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever.** Psalm 37

³⁸ Elisha returned to Gilgal and there was a famine in that region. While the company of the prophets was meeting with him, he said to his servant, “Put on the large pot and cook some stew for these prophets.” ³⁹ One of them went out into the fields to gather herbs and found a wild vine and picked as many of its gourds as his garment could hold. When he returned, he cut them up into the pot of stew, though no one knew what they were. *Famine!* I don’t think most of us know what a famine is... Oh, sometimes we may be low on groceries—maybe we run out of milk or soda or bread or eggs. But famine—where we have to ration food—where we go to bed hungry and wake up hungry and have no idea where we are going to find something—*anything* to eat? Even during the Great Depression—if our grandparents lived on farms—they had food—gardens full of vegetables and trees full of fruit—apples and pears and plums and apricots! In Bible times there were famines—droughts and famines—in the days of Elijah and now 7 years later during the ministry of Elisha—there was a famine. Still the LORD provided for his people. The Seminary students that Elisha was teaching were told—put on the large pot and cook some stew! One of them went out into the fields to gather herbs and vegetables. He found a wild vine and picked as many of its gourds as he could carry. No one knew exactly what kind of vegetable it was—but chopped them up and dumped them into the stew!

⁴⁰ The stew was poured out for the men, but as they began to eat it, they cried out, “Man of God, there is death in the pot!” And they could not eat it. Sometimes we act as if the worst that could happen to us is physical harm and danger. We don’t want anything that’s going to make us say, “Ouch!” We are quick to say—is this going to hurt? We dread hearing the nurse or the doctor or the dentist saying, “This is going to bite or sting”—*even a little!* Sometimes we grow so self-indulgent—we complain if we are even a little *uncomfortable!* Do we whine—it’s too hot, too cold, too stuffy, too drafty, too humid, too dry—most recently—it’s too bright? The pews are too hard—too soft—the sermon too long—too short—the hymn melody too difficult—too familiar! The communion wine is too sweet—too many steps into church—the elevator too far down the hall! Perhaps we need to spend some time in Nigeria or Benin or Togo—where people are fortunate to eat a free range chicken that is itself malnourished—with wings that are skin and bones. Where the natives literally eat the bones—because they contain calcium. Only in the United States do we eat snacks—food we eat between meals—because it tastes good and we crave *comfort* food! Only in the United States do we throw away literally garbage cans full of leftovers—food that has spoiled before we got around to reheating it—or food we lost in the back of the refrigerator—when we went to the grocery store to buy lots and lots more food! The worst danger is not from physical hurt and harm. The worst danger is spiritual harm to faith and immortal soul! The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians Chapter 6 ¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. If our struggle was against physical harm it would be a thousand times easier. But our struggle is against spiritual danger. Only Jesus can keep us safe!

Death in the pot? ⁴¹ Elisha said, “Get some flour.” He put it into the pot and said, “Serve it to the people to eat.” And there was nothing harmful in the pot. There was terrible danger—physical hurt and harm from physical poison. A hand full of finely ground grain—some

flour sprinkled—stirred into the stew and the danger was gone! Ever since Adam and Eve listened to the devil and tasted forbidden fruit—there has been death in this world. Again and again we are poisoned—physically and spiritually! Murdering by means of poison is nothing new. Perhaps one of the greatest mass poisoners was “sister” Amy Duggan Gilligan. Sister Amy operated a boarding house for the elderly. One of her boarders was a little grandpa named James. James died of apparently natural causes—technically Bright’s Disease—a type of kidney failure. It was only some time later it was discovered Sister Amy had helped James take out an insurance policy just weeks before he died—making her the beneficiary! Sister Amy’s second husband was named Michael. He died of an “acute *bilious* attack”—that is *severe indigestion*. Just shortly before his marriage—he drew up a will—leaving everything to his new wife! Boarder Andrew was in good health until moving in with Sister Amy. Within a day he collapsed. By evening he was dead from a *gastric ulcer*...something he ate? CSI ultimately discovered at least 5 boarders had died of poisoning—either arsenic or strychnine. It was discovered Sister Amy had bought large quantities of arsenic—supposedly to get rid of rats! Sister Amy may have as many as 50 victims of her poison. The devil has done far *far* more damage—poisoning hearts, minds and souls with the arsenic and strychnine of sin and unbelief. The only antidote that can save us—is the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen. The prophet Elisha like Elijah before him and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos and Obadiah and countless others—pointed to the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world! We are rescued from the death that is all around us—by the Lamb of God who died once on the altar of the cross—to wash away all our sins. Jesus died and rose again—that we might have everlasting life. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony L. Schuster