

The Provider and Restorer—Response Required

‘Two nuns returned from Ireland. The Customs Agent, going through their belongings, came upon a half-filled bottle. The nuns said it was holy water. The ... Agent took a sniff. “Smells like Irish whiskey to me”. “Praise the Lord, another miracle of Cana!”

Yes, our Lord did once turn water into wine. But was not for the purpose of people getting drunk! It was the very first miracle He performed, inaugurating His earthly ministry as a Jewish rabbi who’d reached thirty years of age when service normally begins, and as the Son of Man, Son of God, the Lamb of God, the Savior of the World, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, and the Lord of Lords and King of Kings of all Creation. This miracle revealed many things, not least that Lord Jesus is the Creator God because He instantly, with only a thought, chemically changed the composition of water molecules into wine molecules, and of the highest quality. With Christ Jesus, He never does anything half way. It is perfect, or nothing. If ever anything ends up not achieving the best results possible, it’s because we humans have gotten in the way. For because God originally purposed and prefers to partner with us, His creatures, His human beings, made in His very Own likeness, to reveal His glory, power and supernatural acts through the intermediaries of human beings in this earth.

The miracle of turning water into wine is perhaps the most famous miracle of provision, when God provides something necessary supernaturally. But, as we know, it was hardly the first time, nor would it be the last. Far from it. Remember the manna in the wilderness? What about the meat in the wilderness? What about the water in the desert? And those were just during the first year of the Exodus from Egypt! Remember the provision of God in the form of animal skins to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness just after they'd sinned by eating the forbidden fruit? God has been providing for us His beloved creations from day one!

In the Exodus, God provided His supernatural provisions of bodily sustenance, through the intermediary of Moses. He spoke to Moses, telling him what He was about to do, and how to distribute it to the people, or other instructions of how to use what He was going to provide for His people. In between these extraordinary circumstances, God provided for His people, and all people, through His miraculous working in the very earth, the very ground, bringing forth bounty from the earth. Note that mankind has to partner with God in order for the earth to produce its harvest. Unlike before our first parents' Fall, when Adam and Eve literally didn't have to lift a finger for their every need to be met, so much so that they were never even aware of having to ever need anything—they had no idea or concept of need. Imagine what a world that would be! Oh, that would be Heaven! But since the Fall, humanity has to work in order for the fruits to come forth.

So God works through all people to bring forth His blessings on all humankind. Most especially through farmers and ranchers, cattlemen and shepherds, who, by working the land and nurturing livestock, bring forth the fruit of the earth to feed and clothe all the world. Depending on how well they live in conscious or unconscious accordance to the *natural* laws of the universe that God established when He first created the cosmos, determines how well the earth produces fruit. In general, the greater the sin humans live in, the poorer the harvests. Living in accordance with God's rules, whether known or not, God's blessings automatically flow. Living contrary to His rules, necessarily results in blocking some or many of God's blessings. This is the natural law.

But in extraordinary, particular circumstances, it becomes necessary for God to directly intervene in His creation. But He still prefers to do this in partnership with His servants. Adam was the first, flawed as he was, and, for that matter, all of us have been flawed with that original sin nature ever since—until Lord Jesus came to earth in the most spectacular, surprising, and stupendous intervention of all time and space. The “natural” law of entropy, of devolution, that is the law of sin resulting in everlasting death, met its match and was overcome and reversed by Christ Jesus our Lord. Ever since His death on the Cross and then resurrection from the dead, like a long arrow shot into the bed of a raging river, He's created a point in the waters that stop the flow downward to death. And that point is widening and enlarging as

the centuries pass, until He returns the second time when the original arrow diverting the seemingly unstoppable flow of death is suddenly becomes an impenetrable wall of His grace, mercy and restoration, entirely damming up that flow. Death will be stopped for God's people forevermore, and the earth and the heavens will be restored to a new perfection, even better than at the beginning, never to be hijacked by sin, lies and the devil ever again!

Adam was God's first servant. Many followed. Hebrews 11 lists some of the most noteworthy. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Deborah, Ruth, Boaz, Samuel, David. Here in II Kings, we read a few weeks ago of Elijah's rapture. Great servant prophet he was! And now, in our series of readings from II Kings, we're reading about Elijah's successor, Elisha, who asked for double the Spirit of God anointing that Elijah had. Well, he got what he asked for. Here in chapter 4 are recounted more of the miracles God wrought in Elisha's early years of ministry and servanthood. Notable is the fact that despite how greatly Elijah was used of God in the face of a mostly degraded, depraved and paganized Israel, Elisha performed far more supernatural miracles in the midst of the people than Elijah ever did, and if one counts, exactly double! Thirty-two verses sixteen! We read in chapter 2 of the parting of the Jordan River, Elisha's very first miracle. Then his calling of the bears to vindicate the name and holiness of God on the vicious boys mocking God to God's face in the person of Elisha, the ultimate disrespect of God. Talk about throwing God's

gracious blessings back into His face!

Chapter 4 begins with a widow coming to Elisha, the leader of God's prophets, with a serious problem. Her husband, one of the prophets, had recently died. Unfortunately, somehow the family was heavily indebted. With the husband dead, the banks and bill collectors had come calling with ultimatums that without full repayment, her two sons would be sold as slaves. That would not do! So God told Elisha what she needed to do. Use the one remaining possession she had, a pitiful flask of olive oil, and from it fill all the containers she could find and borrow, and sell it to not only pay off all the debts, but provide for her and her son's livelihood until they grew up and established themselves and could support her in her old age. The widow, and sons, obeyed, without question. With faith she poured her oil into the first jar. Imagine her amazement as the oil just kept flowing! A whole big jar, full! And another and another, until dozens and dozens of containers were brimming full of oil. When there were no more containers to fill, the oil stopped. And she was taken care of. Perfectly.

Then there was the woman of Shunem. With an elderly husband, they were childless. So sad and pitiful! Since they had money, she supported Elisha in his ministry, providing meals and a place to stay, even building a made-to-order upper room just for him whenever he came by. She asked for nothing in return. Giving to God's ministry with *no* expectation of anything in return—God just loves that! And how eager He is to reward such faith! At

his servant Gehazi's suggestion, Elisha prays that God give her a son, which was God's intention all along. She can't believe it, but a year later, she has a son. For all children come from God. A few years later, the son suffers a seeming aneurysm and dies in her arms. Distraught, she seeks Elisha out personally. And God uses Elisha to bring the dead son back to life and health.

Later, during a famine in the north, a meal served to the prophets was inadvertently poisoned. But God used Elisha through his anointed touch of a handful of flour to detoxify the entire stew! And hearty did it become. Another time, a man brought an offering to Elisha of a sack of fresh grain and 20 loaves of barley bread. Elisha, under God's unction, refused it, instead telling the man to give it to all the 100 or so hungry people around. Incredulously, the man complied, and the bread kept multiplying and all ate their fill, with lots left over. Just like Lord Jesus did twice centuries later, on a far greater scale.

All these miracles, including the one in today's Gospel of Christ the Lord healing a Canaanite woman's daughter, display God's provision and restoration of tragic situations. But they all were accomplished through human partners. And all required a response from the would-be recipients—faith! Even faith as small as a mustard seed was enough for God to act. All we need do is believe in Him; that He knows what's best, and put our lives and circumstances into His hands, and act in this faith! No faith in yourself? No matter at all. Put your faith in His faith in you!

