



**KING'S
CHURCH** (<http://kingschurchedinburgh.org/>)
EDINBURGH

God Saves (2 Kings 4: 38-44)

The past

These events happened at **Gilgal**, somewhere whose history was supposed to still to people. It is first mentioned in the book of Joshua (chapters 4 and 5), centuries before Elisha. It was the twelve stones taken from miraculously-crossed Jordan river were placed as a memorial. It was also where the people of Israel first celebrated the Passover, where they first ate from the produce of the Promised Land, and where God's provision of manna to them ceased. These amazing events were part of the great old covenant act of salvation: rescue from slavery in Egypt and being brought into a land of their own (salvation in Hebrew, in its most basic sense, means to bring into a spacious place). So Gilgal is a place that reminds God's people that He is a God who saves.

Most people have forgotten, or ignored this, by the time of Elisha. They are afraid of the nations around them that believe different things, they put their trust in their wealth and in the idols and ideas of the culture around them. How does this happen? When we fail to remember. Memories aren't pure nostalgia, they are meant to be faith-stirring for today and what God is calling us to do and believe now.

The present

These stories are from a subsistence economy, where food production is the primary activity, and there was a seven-year famine happening at the time. This all makes food a matter of life and death. These are two miracles that are more than just pleasant ("More food, how lovely!"), they bring desperately-needed life.

Both of them are resolved by the speaking of life-giving words: Elisha commands that

flour be added to the stew, and God tells him that there will be more than enough from the loaves for everyone to eat. This is in perfect continuity with Israel's past, as God taught them the same lesson with the manna that stopped at Gilgal: we live not by bread alone but by *"every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."* (Deuteronomy 8:3) It is God alone who gives us life, it is God alone who saves.

It's impossible to avoid the challenge of the miraculous here: could these things really happen? Christianity asserts that there is a God who is all-powerful and involved in His creation, so there's no reason He couldn't purify a poisoned stew or make bread feed many more than it should (although clearly this is unusual). The question then isn't, "Could God purify a poisoned stew with some flour?" or "Could God feed 100 people with 20 small loaves?" but "Why does God use props?" Why bother with the flour, or the loaves, or the manna back in the day? I think the answer to this is that the salvation God offers us is real and right now: it is a restoration of the real and good creation that He made for us to enjoy, and which sin has ruined. Food isn't supposed to be poisonous, or scarce, and God proves this when He provides for us. Food is a sign of His care for us today, when Jesus taught us to pray for "our daily bread" He was getting us to admit to God that we need Him to look after us every day. Whether your food comes from heaven directly or via Tesco – it is God's gift to you. In all these things, God is speaking to you.

The Future

Elisha's life story is amazing, but ultimately he is a signpost for someone else. The parallels between Elisha and Jesus of Nazareth are remarkable:

- They are both preceded by Elijah (Jesus identifies John the Baptist as "His" Elijah, *Matthew 17:11-13*).
- They both lead communities of the faithful in a land that is faithless.
- They are both commissioned by God to overthrow corrupt rulers (the Omri dynasty for Elisha, the powers of the world for Jesus, personified by the Jewish establishment and Roman power).
- They even have the same name: Elisha means God is salvation, Jesus means Yahweh is salvation.
- And among the many miracles they perform, including healings and raising the dead, they both make bread go a lot further than it should.

John 6 tells us that Jesus once fed a crowd of around 5,000 men, plus women and

children, with five barley loaves (the very same type of bread as Elisha had) and two fish. This sensational miracle caused people to get very excited but soon they were also very cross when Jesus tries to move their focus from the bread they'd eaten to the One who supplied it (*John 6:31-35, 47-51*). Many of His followers end up leaving Him because they find this hard to swallow: believing in Jesus, not trusting in ourselves, is the only way to be saved.

The communion meal is how we remember and celebrate this. This was the Passover meal, as first celebrated in the Promised Land at Gilgal, which Jesus made all about Himself: this body that would be given and His blood that would be shed so that we could be saved.

Questions

- What places have special meaning for you because of what God did for you there?
- Where are you tempted to look to instead of God for your salvation? Most of know and trust that only Jesus can save us, but is that how we actually live our daily lives?
- What do you think trust in God looks like? Was Luke suggesting that we should value and require nothing else in life?
- How would you explain these stories to a non-Christian?
- These stories show how tightly and beautifully woven the story God tells us is, how can this encourage you about His work in your life?
- Take communion together, confessing your sins to each other and thank God for His salvation.



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