

Oodles of Oil

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[0:00] So, we've already said a prayer, and in our true story from the Bible this morning, we met a woman who was very desperate, very desperate. The first thing we heard about the woman that makes us realize how desperate she is, was that she was a widow.

Her husband had died. Now, there's something else about that as well, about for this lady. Her husband was from the company of the prophets, which means he was a God follower. And that happened at a time when lots and lots of people had turned their back on God.

They'd forgotten God. And this lady and her husband had kept following God in Israel. So, here's a question. Have you ever felt that for following God, you're a bit the odd one out?

Have you ever been somewhere where you think for going to church and knowing Jesus, maybe lots of people are not like that, and you're the odd one out? Do you ever feel a bit like that? But, if we ever feel a bit like that, that's exactly how it would have felt in Israel at that time.

Israel had forgotten God, and this lady and her husband had kept going with God. And if we think Glasgow's a bit like that, let me tell you, it was even worse back then, because the queen had been a lady called Jezebel.

[1:11] Now, how many of you have a friend called Jezebel? Any of you know anyone called Jezebel? Nobody. Good. I'm on safe ground. And I think the reason why is because Jezebel was a scoundrel, right?

Do you know what she did? She was rounding up people who were God followers, and she was putting them to death. She was horrible. So, it may even be that this man, this lady's husband, got killed for being a God follower.

We don't know. But we know that he's gone, and that's really hard for this lady. The next thing, the next big problem the lady has is her husband owed a lot of money to somebody.

Maybe they couldn't afford to live, and he borrowed money to buy food. And now, the man that was owed the money wants it back off this poor widow, and she hasn't got the money to pay back.

So, I need a couple of volunteers, and I need two boys. Are there any boys who'd be willing just to be volunteers for a minute? Sam, do you think you'd be willing to come up? Is that all right?

[2:09] Do you think? Thanks, Sam. Matty, if you come up as well. So, these two boys here, you just have to come for a minute. It's fine. Oh, we've got three. How exciting. Brilliant.

Brilliant. Thanks, Zachary. You come here as well. Now, these are just being two boys here. Okay. Now, these boys, believe it or not, even these boys have a mum out there somewhere who loves them.

Okay. Having a look at them, it might be hard to believe, but it's true. Okay. And now, just imagine, okay, if their mum found out that the boy was going to be taken away, and they'd never see them again.

That's what it's like for this lady. How awful. How awful. So, boys, thanks for being our volunteers. You can go back now, because you don't have to get taken away. But these boys, imagine this lady has got two boys like that.

They're her only children. And because of the money that's owed to this man, he's going to take the boys as slaves, and she'll never see them again. So, she says this to Elisha, the man of God.

[3:12] She says, My husband is dead. You know how much respect he had for the Lord, but he owed money to someone, and now that person is coming to take my two boys away. They will become his slaves.

So, what does the woman have to pay back? How is she going to pay off the debt? Well, she opens the cupboard in her kitchen. It's totally empty. In fact, her whole house is empty.

And she says to Elisha, all she's got left is a small jar with some olive oil in it. That's all she's got left. She's starving.

She hasn't got any money. She's going to lose her boys. And what's going to happen when the boys get taken away? She won't have anyone to work in the house to get money so that she can live. She might be homeless.

She might starve. And what's the woman's name? Can anyone remember the woman's name? It's a trick question. Well done for noticing. It's interesting because we don't know the woman's name.

[4 : 09] Now, why do you think we don't know the woman's name? It's because nobody cares about the woman. That's why she's been forgotten.

Except for her boys. The neighbors aren't looking after her. Nobody's looking after this lady. So, what does God think about people like that? We're going to find out. Our second point in the story, after God's desperate people, is God's listening ears.

The first thing we heard about the woman was she took her problem to God. She went to find Elisha. Now, that's long before Jesus came. So, Elisha was the man of God.

He's the hero. He's the main man who follows God in Israel. So, when this lady goes to Elisha, it's just like, for us today, praying, talking to God through Jesus.

She's going to the main man for God in Israel. So, what do we rely on when we're in trouble? She went to find God through Elisha. I wonder what you think.

[5 : 08] When the chips are down, who do you really rely on? Or what do you rely on? We maybe come to church on a Sunday, but we trust other things in life if we're in trouble. Maybe we don't trust God because we want things that we know He wouldn't really want for us, and we don't want to trust Him because we wouldn't get them.

Or maybe we don't think God's powerful enough to help us. Or maybe we don't think God's good enough to help us. So, we rely on other people or other stuff instead of God.

Well, this widow was different. She prayed to God through Elisha. She went to Elisha, and that's a really good thing, because God listens to the people who trust Him. So, what happens next?

Well, the third thing that happens in our story is we get God's puzzling word. She tells Elisha that all she's got left is this bit of olive oil in a jar, and Elisha says something amazing.

Shall I read it out to us again from verse 3? Elisha said, Go around to all your neighbors. Ask them for empty jars. Get as many as you can. Then go inside your house.

[6 : 13] Shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars. As each jar is filled, put it over to one side. What do you think the woman would have thought when Elisha said that?

I think she'd have thought, That sounds really weird. I've just told you I've only got a bit of olive oil left. And her neighbors, they don't really care for her. They've not been looking after her. And she's to go and ask all of them for their empty jars.

They're going to think she's nuts. And then she's going to get them all back in her house and shut the door. To help us imagine it, we're going to do it now. Okay? So, we've got some empty jars around the church.

People have got them. And if our guys at the front, if you could get up and go around and find the empty jars, and we'll put them on this table. Just like the woman had to. She had to go to her neighbors to show that she trusted God and bring them.

So, have a wander around. See if you can find some empty jars. Get one each. There's one. Brilliant. Thank you. Thank you. Great.

[7 : 16] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Okay. There's some more over there.

People waving their jars, offering them out. Other people didn't get the memo about bringing jars to church. There was no memo. Don't worry. Okay.

We're about there, I think, with our jars. Brilliant. And now you're thinking, how on earth is Martin going to do this?

But I'm not going to do it, so it's fine. Okay. Because if I did it, you'd all be thinking, how did he do the trick? Instead of, what did God do for the lady? So brilliant.

[8 : 25] Well done, guys. It would have seemed a bit strange, wouldn't it? Going around to the neighbors, have you got any empty jars? Oh yeah, we've got some jars. Why does this poor widow need the empty jars? It's very strange.

But we get the jars, and then she closes the door behind her. And the important thing is, she's done exactly what the man of God said she should do. She's obeying God's word, because she trusts God.

She looks a bit crazy. She's just got a little bit of oil left, but she knows that God is worth trusting. When he says something, we do it. It was just the same when we looked at Noah last year.

Do you remember Noah? God said to Noah, build an ark while he was in the desert. He looked a bit crazy obeying God, but he trusted God, and then the flood came, and it showed that he was right to trust God.

And this lady's the same. Because she trusts God, she obeys God, and goes to get the jars. Now that's important for us to remember, because sometimes we think, what is God asking me to do today in my life?

[9 : 23] And sometimes the Bible clearly says that God wants us to do certain things for him, or not do other things for him. And living for God like that looks a bit crazy in the world around us.

He asks us to do things that only make sense if his promises are true, if we're going to trust him. But Jesus has promised that he one day is going to take us to live with him in a perfect world forever. And the people around us, they live as though this world is all there is. So sometimes being a God follower looks a bit crazy to the people around us. It's going to be like that. But we show that we trust God by obeying him.

Obeying him with our money, our time, with the people that we choose to see and spend time with. And there's a world to come when God will keep his promises and show that he was trustworthy. So this woman, she gets all the jars, and then she's got to start pouring out her olive oil into the jars. And that's our fourth point from the story. God's overflowing kindness.

[10 : 22] Let me read it for you. It's on the screen. The woman left him. Then she shut the door behind her and her son, so she's obeying God. They brought the jars to her, and she kept pouring.

She fills jar after jar after jar. She fills them all up, all the jars. They all get filled up. And so she says, quick, bring me another jar, because there's still more oil.

And the son says there's no jars left. And then the oil stops. But all the jars are full, and it's a lot of oil. We've got some here to show you how it might have looked. All those jars and jars and jars of oil.

Wow. Amazing. Wow. Let's see how many are left by the end of the service. Okay. Brilliant.

Okay. So, guys, do you want to have a sit down again? Slightly unplanned. So, it's so much oil that she even asks. She goes to find Elisha, and she says, what do I do now?

[11 : 26] Because it's more than she needed. And Elisha says three things. Three things from God to this woman. Sell, pay, and live. Verse 7, he says, go and sell the oil.

Pay what you owe. You and your sons can live on what's left. So, she can pay off the man who wants his money. She can keep her sons because of this miracle. It's brilliant.

But more than that, she's got enough oil now so that her and her sons can live. They can have life with God in God's land. And friends, the reason that happened to this woman is because this, this is what the Lord our God is really like.

Do you believe that this morning? That God cares for his people like this? Because we need to hear that. God isn't a taker. You don't come to church on a Sunday because God's like a nasty, strict school teacher who really can't wait for you to get out of the classroom but needs you to say sorry for what you've done wrong.

No, God is a giver and he's the most loving father that we could imagine. And if you trust him, he will care for you. And God isn't just concerned with the big people, with people like Donald Trump or Nicola Sturgeon or TV presenters or football stars.

[12 : 41] No, God is concerned, perhaps even concerned even more, with the people the world forgets. He really cares about people who other people don't care about very much.

Now that doesn't mean that sad things will never happen to us and in that chapter of the Bible, sad things happen to God's people. Sometimes in this life, things will happen that make us wonder, does God really care about me like that?

Sometimes you can look at your life and think, you know, my jars are overflowing. God has been so kind to me. And other times we feel as though God's taken all my jars away.

And if you're someone here who's struggling to trust that God really cares for you, on the sheets inside the notice sheet this morning, I've just put an insert, I've put a prayer there that you can pray

that speaks some of God's promises to your own heart and back to God.

There's a guy called Scotty Smith, I've adapted his prayer. He writes these great prayers online that take God's promises and pray them to God. And it's a prayer for the times when maybe we're struggling to think, does God really care for me?

[13 : 45] Maybe you feel like that this morning. But as well as praying like that, we also need to remember what happened to this woman. Because the reason God did that for that woman was to show this is what he's like.

He's a God whose jars overflow for people, who fills people up so that they're full of what they need. He's a brilliant God. Just think, God helped that woman because he didn't want her to have to lose her sons.

But God helped us by knowing that he'd have to give up his only son. And this woman's debt was just money that she had to pay off, but our debt was our sin. And God has paid for that because he really cares for us.

So we look at the blessing that God gave that woman and we think, what a kind God we have. Even if nobody else remembers your name, this God will remember you.

So don't you want to spend your life being friends with a God like that? One who cares, who takes what little we've got, and who turns it into abundant, overflowing goodness. And he gives us true life with him.

[14 : 50] He is such a good and caring God. So we're going to pray now. Let's do a prayer to that great caring God. Thank you, Father God, that you care for your people in our needs.

Help us to trust your kindness and care. Thank you for how amazing it was for that lady. She kept her sons and she had enough oil that she could live. Help us to see you as the caring God that you are, that we would pray to tell you about our problems, that we would obey your word because we trust you and your goodness, and that we would have thankful hearts about your many kindnesses to us.

In Jesus' name, amen. So we're going to sing again. We're going to sing about God's character, his compassion that he feels for us, just like he felt for that woman and cared for her.

And we're going to sing about how we can pray to rely on God as well. Let's stand and sing together.