



F I F T H

S U N D A Y

2 KINGS 2:19-22

NIV: The people of the city said to Elisha, "Look, our lord, this town is well-situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive."

"Bring me a new bowl," he said, "and put salt in it." So they brought it to him.

Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it, saying, "This is what the Lord says: 'I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.'" And the water has remained pure to this day, according to the word Elisha has spoken.

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

In this Second Book of King, we revisit the same verse where Elisha asks for a new bowl and salt. Salt is a valuable commodity of the ancient world. Salt was used as a disinfectant and to preserve and flavor food. It was also a powerful symbol. The Torah commanded God's people to offer God salt with their sacrifices. Covenants

were considered legally binding when both parties ingested salt in front of witnesses. Salt was offered to guests as a sign of hospitality and friendship. No wonder Jesus said to his followers in his Sermon on the Mount, "You are the salt of the earth."

When Elisha asks them to bring salt, he is asking for a substance with practical and symbolic powers. It makes sense that he would ask them to bring him salt. The real mystery here is, why does he specify that they bring a new bowl?

There have been many guesses. Jesus taught that new wine could not be stored in old wineskins; he meant that God was doing a new thing, and that people shouldn't be surprised if God worked outside of the old and established channels and institutions. Maybe Elisha was sending a similar message - perhaps he wanted the people to see that God was about to do a new thing in a nation that had grown wayward and corrupt. Or maybe he wanted to make it clear that he himself was a new vessel, that people shouldn't expect him to be a second Elijah, that he would be who God had created him to be.

Then again, maybe Elisha wasn't sending any sort of symbolic message with the new bowl. Maybe his intention was more practical.



Jericho, located in Palestine, has a long history of creating beautiful works of art, especially mosaics and pottery. The beauty created by the artisans of Jericho, even in the midst of crisis and desperation experienced in this land for thousands of years, is a testament to how creativity can restore dignity in a hurting people. Perhaps Elisha's request for a new bowl was an opportunity to affirm the importance of their creative culture.

P R A C T I C A L
A P P L I C A T I O N S T O
M I N I S T R Y

Jesus also understood the importance of empowering people. This moment in the ministry of Elisha reminds us of an important moment of Jesus' ministry. Faced with a hungry crowd of many thousands, Jesus asks the disciples to take an inventory of what food was on hand. They present him with loaves and fishes. "It's enough," Jesus says. He blesses the food and it is distributed to the crowd. At every point in this story, Jesus empowers and challenges the disciples to be part of the miracle. They provide and distribute food and collect the leftovers. They discover that their hands also have the power to work wonders.

In this story of Second Kings we have learned why this was an important moment in Elisha's ministry. Elisha showed wisdom by listening to the people of Jericho and

allowing them to take part in a miracle.

Elisha cleaned the water and it "has been wholesome to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke." It continues to be clean water, even now! The Palestinian City of Jericho has continued to flourish and the water continues to bubble up.

This is all the more remarkable when you consider how much has happened in Jericho since the time of the prophet Elisha. It was destroyed when Judah was invaded by the mighty Babylonian Empire, then rebuilt when the empire fell. All the while, the water continued to flow.

Hundreds of years later, Alexander the Great fell in love with this oasis in the wilderness and made it his own private estate. The water continued to flow.

Herod the Great (the same King Herod who was terrified by the news that a Messiah had been born) built a palace in Jericho. The water continued to flow.

A wandering rabbi passed through Jericho. On his way he healed a blind man and a tax collector named Zacchaeus and climbed a tree to get a better view of the man called Jesus of Nazareth. The water continued to flow.

The Romans came and made Jericho a military outpost and the water continued to flow. Christianity went from a

small and persecuted religion to the faith of an empire, and the water continued to flow. A monastery was built nearby, and the water continued to flow. It was destroyed by Persian invaders, and the water continued to flow. Muslims conquered the Holy Land and the water continued to flow.

Jericho became famous for its lush produce, especially bananas and dates, and the water continued to flow. Crusaders conquered the Holy Land and built churches and another monastery in Jericho, and the water continued to flow. The world was engulfed in war and the Ottoman Empire fell, and the water continued to flow. Jericho came under British control and the water continued to flow.

The First Arab-Israeli War ended with Jericho under Jordanian control, a haven for thousands of Palestinian refugees, and the water continued to flow. The Six-Day War ended with Israel occupying the West Bank, including Jericho, and the water continued to flow.

Since the time of Elisha, Jericho has been governed by Judeans, Babylonians, Greeks, Persians, Romans, Ottomans, Crusaders, Jordanians, and Palestinians, and during all that time, throughout all of those changes, the water has continued to flow. There's something inspiring about that.

This story of a well made well we noted one of the least-

dramatic, least-remembered, least-preached-upon of all Elisha's miracles. Yet of all his miracles, this may be the one with the most lasting impact. It turns out that if you want to change the world, one powerful thing you can do is also one of the simplest things: help a community find a sustainable source of clean water.

Q U E S T I O N S T O P O N D E R

Small actions, when backed by large faith, can have a huge impact. Just as Elisha, in faith, made an entire water system pure by simply throwing salt in it, we too can make a big impact and change the lives of others. Water is not just an important part of our daily life, it's important to know how having access to clean water improves the quality of life of everyone.

- What small action can you take that will have a big impact on the lives of others, either in your community or world-wide?
- How has access to water shaped our history?
- Consider why most major cities are located on a river or waters edge. What parts of history has ensured that water and, later hygiene and sanitation, have become important parts of our public health approaches?