

# The Forgotten Pot of Oil

by Major Ian Thomas

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*Major Ian Thomas's sermon emphasizes the necessity of a personal relationship with God through the Holy Spirit, contrasting it with the dangers of second-hand faith.*

**Duration:** 38:52

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 4:1

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the common experience of many Christians who have a superficial knowledge of Jesus Christ. They may have made a genuine decision to receive Christ as their savior, but their understanding of Him is limited to historical facts and borrowed beliefs. The speaker emphasizes the need for a personal and vital relationship with Christ, where His life is expressed from within. Using the story of the widow in 2 Kings 4:1-7, the speaker illustrates how the woman's desperation and admission of her bankruptcy led her to discover a hidden resource, symbolized by a little jar of oil. This story serves as a reminder that true relevance and power in the Christian life come from a deep dependence on Christ and His indwelling presence.

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## Transcript

The Lord will take up Elijah in the desert by whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Bethlehem. And Elisha said unto him, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.

So they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and they said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he said, Yea, I know it, hold ye your feet. And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho.

And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and they said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he answered, Yea, I know it, hold ye your feet.

And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here, for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they too went up.

And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off. And they too stood by Jordan. God always adds his blessing to the reading of his own precious word.

We'll bow our heads for one moment and pray. Our God, now as we turn to thy word, we thank thee again for the Lord Jesus. And we thank thee for the Holy Spirit, our teacher.

And we trust him now to take this, thy wonderful book, and to illumine its page and write its message upon our hearts. And send us away from this place, refreshed in soul, as we've come to understand thy mind from the beginning. Ready obedience to the truth revealed.

And for thy dear name's sake, amen. The story that we're going to examine this morning is found in the second book of Kings, and chapter four. Two Kings, chapter four.

Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elijah, saying, Thy servant, my husband, is dead. And thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord. And the creditor is come, to take unto him my two sons to be bonds.

This, I'm sure, will be a very familiar story to you. We're introduced at once to a woman who is described as having been one of the wives of the sons of the prophets. In other words, she was a woman who had already made one big decision in her life.

Quite a big decision. She had decided to get married. And our first interest is aroused, naturally, in the kind of person to whom she gave herself in marriage.

And it says that she was one of the wives of the sons of the prophets. That's why I read those few verses from the second chapter of this same second book of Kings. Because in the second chapter of the second book of Kings, it tells us something about the sons of the prophets.

And we see them vividly contrasted against Elijah. For if there was one characteristic about the sons of the prophets more evident than another, it was simply this, that they were those who were accustomed to and had acclimatized themselves to having a second-hand knowledge of God. It wasn't that they were without the fear of God, and it wasn't that they went sincere in their desire to know about God, but their vision, their grasp of God, their knowledge of God never got beyond the realm of instruction.

That's the contrast that is given to us in the second chapter. For you remember there was a man called Elijah, and of this one thing he was supremely confident that what one man could experience of God, any man could experience of God. That what God could be to Elijah, God could be to Elisha.

This was his deep and burning conviction, that it isn't the man that matters, it's the God who controls the man that matters. And in the heart of Elisha there was a holy ambition to know God as Elijah knew God. If Elijah could know God this way, said Elisha to his own heart, I could know God this way.

But this was a concept that was totally foreign to the sons of the prophets. And because it was foreign to them, they resented it in Elisha. Now that's always the case.

Christians who are without vision are always, in a sense, incensed by somebody who's got more vision than they have. They're quite prepared to accept, in a sense, the fait accompli. If somebody has reached spiritual heights of celebrity, if there is quite obviously, manifestly, the mantle of God upon some individual, then they'll tip their cap to him.

But if one of their number, if some young man or woman from their own midst were for one moment to presume that what God could be to that individual they could be to them, then there's a rouse of actual resentment. Because it convicts them of their own lack of spiritual appetite and spiritual ambition. And that's exactly what happened.

Do you remember the story? We're only glancing at it so we may get the background of the story of the fourth chapter. Because when Elisha persisted in traveling with Elijah, and Elijah was a man of great spiritual discernment, the one thing he did not want was to have Elisha imitating Elijah. He didn't encourage him for one moment in that, but I'm perfectly convinced that Elijah was more than delighted at the silence of his heart, at the persistence of Elisha, and the sheer hunger within his heart to know God the way he knew God.

But he was wise enough to know that if ever Elisha was to know God as Elijah knew God, it must be dealings between Elisha and God, and not just an imitation of Elijah. He didn't just want another little satellite. And so he gave him no undue encouragement, but was delighted that without encouragement Elisha insisted on going on with him.

But the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha and said unto him, knowest thou that the Lord is here today, and then you'll look pretty. And you're nothing more than a little upstart. You ought to come and stay with us.

And take your place with the rest. Don't imagine that God's ever going to make you an Elijah. That was the attitude in the heart of the sons of the prophets.

In other words, we don't intend ever to reach the heights that Elijah has reached, and we don't intend ever to let you reach those heights either. We'll keep you precisely where we are, spiritual non-entities. Now it's a strange characteristic of the Church of Jesus Christ that it's one of the most pathetic of its characteristics, that folk who are not prepared themselves to go beyond a certain level spiritually always resent anybody of those who intend so to do.

Now that was the characteristic of the sons of the prophets, both in Bethel and Elisha. And there they went. Verse 7 of the second chapter, fifty men of the sons of the prophets, they went and they While they too, Elijah and Elisha, stood by Jordan.

And Elijah took his mantle, and he wrapped it together, and he smoked the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they too went over on dry ground, and not one of the fifty sons of the prophets, but they went there really just to witness what Elijah could do. They were there to watch Elisha make a fool of himself. Because, you see, when Elijah smoked the waters, they had come to expect what would happen when he did that.

But then they nudged each other and said, now we'll see, when God has taken Elijah away, we'll see what Elijah does. And he'll play the Elijah, and won't he look a fool when nothing happens? And it came to pass when they were gone over that Elijah said unto Elisha, And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. But Elijah said, thou must ask the heart.

I cherish the ambition that exists, because I see that you don't have any expectation in what I am on God's behalf. Your expectation is in what God can be on a man's behalf. But I can't promise you this.

It won't be your relationship to me that brings this about. It'll be your relationship to God. Now I have a pretty sound idea of what your relationship to me is, but I can't.

So you'll never become Elisha. You'll never become an Elijah simply because you imitate me. You'll become an Elijah if your heart is right with God.

And God is pleased to honor you as he's honored me. I can't promise you. But when I'm taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee.

If not, it shall not be so. If thou see me, it shall be unto thee. If not, it shall not be so.

It's not within my jurisdiction. And it came to pass that they still went out and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by whirlwind in the heavens, and on that night he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more.

He took hold of his own clothes, and he rent them in two pieces, and he took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and he went back, and he stood by the bank of Jordan, and he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and he lifted it up, and he was just about to smite the waters, and all the fifty sons of the prophets, all of them, look at Elijah playing the lute, and he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and he smote the waters and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? And when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither, and Elijah went over. Where now is the Lord God of Elijah? And God's answer was this, waiting for an Elijah. That's all.

The Lord God of Elijah is simply waiting for a man who will come. And when the sons of the prophets, which were to view at Jericho, afar off, who never got near enough to know God the way these men knew God, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest in Elijah. Would you believe that? And they came to meet him, and they bowed themselves to the ground before him.

Men who for the rest of their days would be perfectly, perfectly satisfied to be spiritual non-entities because they could never believe that what God could be to Elijah, he could be to anybody else. Now I've just painted that picture to you, because this woman about whom we read in the fourth chapter of Matthew, so that in her choice of a husband, it is true that she chose one who feared God. But unfortunately, the quality of religion, if you like, that she experienced by virtue of this marriage to this man, was a very second-hand experience of God.

It was hearsay. It was perfectly sound doctrinally. But it was something that didn't glow with personal experience.

Something that had never been made vital and real in terms of daily walking with God, with the power of God. That's the background. And then he died.

And she was left with nothing but memories. What had she been doing in the meantime? Well, like every good woman, I suppose, who gets married, she had done her very best to furnish the home, make it comfortable and as nice as she could. And where did she get her ideas from? Well, she got her ideas from the neighbors.

She practiced in the furnishing of her home what her husband had practiced in the practice of religion. Everything was borrowed. Every idea was second-hand.

You know, she'd go around to the neighbors, and she'd see something rather dinky on the wall, so she'd come back and she'd put something there. And she collected things until she had furnished the house. Thoroughly furnished to the best of her ability by copying what other people did till her husband died.

And then she discovered that her income had ceased. And she had to begin to realize her estate. And she had to sell the things that she had been gathering and with which she had been furnishing her home until the time comes when nothing is left.

Nothing. Not only is nothing left, but she is in debt. And the creditors have come to take her to silence so that the failure of the past could even mortgage the future.

Any hope that she might have had in them is gone, swallowed up by the plagues of the past. Well, of course, God's painting a picture. As again and again he does in these wonderful, wonderful Old Testament stories.

He's painting a picture again and again of what is the experience of all too many of God's people. They've registered a decision, and quite a genuine and a sincere decision to receive Jesus Christ as Savior. But their knowledge of Christ is almost historical.

He's the one who died for them 1,900 years ago. We're accomplished in something that will make them fit for heaven. And they claim redemption.

They claim forgiveness. They claim it. It is forgiveness.

It means that I'm reconciled to God. It means that I'm saved. It means that my name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

But the Lord Jesus Christ is simply the one who died historically 1,900 years ago. I don't really know Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection. I'm not living in the good of what he is within me.

And there comes a time when if you've lived your life as a Christian long enough that way, believing all the things you ought to believe about Jesus Christ, and believing all the things you ought to believe about the Bible, but not reckoning with the fact of Christ, not practicing the presence of Christ, not enjoying what he is on the basis of what he did, that your life will become pretty thin spiritually, pretty poverty-stricken. Until at last there'll come a moment when in sheer despair you'll get down on your knees with tears in your eyes before God and say, God, I'm a backer. For all I know about Jesus Christ and all I believe about Jesus Christ, there's nothing really that registers as vital.

It seems that everything I know is second-hand. Everything I know has been borrowed from other people. I can see men and women upon whom the mantle of the Lord has fallen, who speak with authority, who can strike the water, and they'll divide before their feet, and they'll go through on dry land, but this is an experience of God I've never had.

I know people who can walk into the presence of others and leave them unquestionably blessed and refreshed, and others convicted and converted. Nothing ever happens like that in my life. I've taught a Sunday school class, and for all I know, I've never yet bled one single soul to Christ.

I witness to my nakedness, but for all I know, I might just as well whistle up the drain. And yet I believe it all. I know it all.

I know it's true. I'm doing the things that other Christians do. Ever since I was born again, I've watched carefully what Christians ought to do, what Christians ought to say, and the places that Christians ought to go to, and the places that Christians ought not to go to.

And I've done it all. I've copied them exactly. And anybody passing my way would recognize me to be what I am, a good, solid, respectable member of a sound, fundamental, evangelical church.

I say all the things I ought to say, I do all the things I ought to do, and I go to all the places I ought to go, and I don't touch anything I ought not to touch, and I don't go to any of the places I ought not to go to. And yet I know, I know that deep inside, there's nothing. I'm dried up.

I'm spiritually sterile. There's nothing about the quality of life that I'm living as a Christian that has ever reproduced itself in anybody else. I've no expectations of the future.

It's been swallowed up by the failures of the past, and the future, and at last the burden becomes intolerable, and the poor woman comes to the cross and tells her miserable story. And Elijah said unto her, What shall I do with thee? Tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not anything in the house. Nothing.

Absolutely nothing. And then suddenly, she remembered. That is to say, save her a little part of all.

She didn't even know I had it. And it was hardly worth mentioning anyway. I only came across it when I'd sold the very last thing that I'd produced.

You see, for all the years that she'd been furnishing her home, she had been burying the little pot of oil by the things that she was accumulating. And away, tucked in a tiny dark corner, all covered with dust, in a cupboard, there was a little pot of oil. Well, I don't need to tell you what that meant.

Every one of you knows exactly what oil speaks of in the Word of God. Oil is always a picture, in the relentless consistency of the Holy Spirit, in the revelation that He gives, oil is always a picture of the Holy Spirit. The imparted life of the risen Lord, for the Holy Spirit is the one by whom the Lord Jesus, in the power of His resurrection, re-inhabits your humanity, your humanity, so that you become a habitation of God.

How? Through the Spirit, a little pot of oil. And yet if there's one thing of which more Christians are ignorant than another, and if there is one thing which more Christians neglect than another, it is the presence of God Himself within the heart of the believer. We'll neglect it.

This, though with furious zeal, we busy ourselves with other things. We'll become, some of us, walking encyclopedias of biblical content, and yet neglect the presence of God within the heart. Until we can criticize everybody else's sermons and tell them exactly where they went wrong and the little bit they left out in some historical record.

And yet live as poverty-stricken and as barren as a dried bit of stick, because they neglect the presence of Christ. There are some who get a missionary vision and give themselves with frantic, furious zeal to evangelization and neglect the one thing that will ever make evangelization effective. The presence of Christ within the heart.

Most extraordinary thing. I suppose it isn't really extraordinary, because the one thing the devil is afraid of is the presence of Christ within the heart. And he doesn't mind how much a man knows about the Bible so long as he neglects the presence of Christ within his heart.

He doesn't mind how much a man is prepared to give himself organizationally and in the area of Christian administration in promoting this and promoting that. The devil doesn't mind how much so long as he neglects the presence of Christ. Because he knows that apart from the presence of Christ the only origin of any activity is the flesh.

And the flesh provideth nothing. And the Lord Jesus says, without me you can do nothing. So everything I do without Christ is nothing.

And the devil doesn't mind a bit how busy I am doing nothing. Because he knows perfectly well it'll leave me as bankrupt as it finds me. A little pot of oil.

And while she had been busy collecting things, the very process of collecting things, imitating the neighbors, doing what they did, going to the places they went, saying the things they said, that process simply buried the little pot of oil. And you and I can bury within our hearts the very explosive, dynamic life of Jesus Christ simply by being to the pattern that all we do is imitate. Without any spontaneous expression of the life of Christ within.

She said, I do nothing. But a little pot of oil. You see, it isn't until you're bankrupt and admitted that you begin to see the relevance of Jesus Christ living within the heart.

When I realize I've done things that are wrong, committed sins, I can see some relevance in what he did for me historically 1,900 years ago. He had to do what he did because I've done what I've done. But as we mentioned already, that's only baby repentance.

It's only when I really recognize and yield in obedience to the fact that what I am apart from what he is, is nothing. That I have nothing, I am nothing, and I can do nothing apart from Jesus. It isn't until I've consented to God's verdict upon what I am, that I'm rotten through and through, that in my flesh dwells no good things.

It isn't until then, at last, at last, at last, I see the relevance of the presence of Christ by his Holy Spirit within my heart. For my sins, I can see the relevance of what he did. He died for me.

Eternally for what I am, in all his wickedness, in prayer, pig-headed, cobbled pride, that I see the relevance of what he did. For he died for what I've done, that he rose again to take a place of life. That's why we need not only Calvary, we need Pentecost.

Not only the place where he died for us, but the place where being risen from the dead he comes and indwells a little. The soul of Tarsus had to come to this place of sheer bankruptcy, for whom, says Paul the Apostle, now I have life. I have suffered the loss of all things.

What do you call a man who's suffered the loss of all things? It's Mr. Jones' next door, suddenly lost all things, you'd say he was a bankrupt. It isn't until you and I are self-confessed bankrupts that we begin to discover the little pot of oil. The man of God said, Go borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy days, leaving empty vessels.

Borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon them, upon thy sons, and thou shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went forth from here, and she went and collected the empty vessels, and she sent her sons, her two sons around collecting the empty vessels.

You can imagine the astonishment on the faces of the neighbours when they asked for the boiling pans and the big saucepans and the kennels. And a small boy would come knocking on the door and say, Excuse me, mum says, can she borrow your boiling pot? What does she want it for? Well, she says, something about oil. Oil? Oh my.

I've seen the credit around her door. I don't know what she wants it for, for oil. If she had oil that much, she wouldn't have a credit around her door.

Yes, she can have the pot. Don't forget to bring it back. Oh yes, you won't get much enthusiasm, and you won't get much, and you've learned to step out of my face.

You won't get a tremendous amount of encouragement or enthusiasm from the neighbours. It'll be a lonely pot, sir. Mind you, even the boys were a bit bewildered.

For when it says, Mother had come and they'd got all the vessels and the pots and the pans, and she had shut the door there with the two boys, and they said, Mum, what are you doing? Oh, she said, I'm going to fill these with oil. Oil? Where are you going to get the oil? And she held up her little tiny pot. Can you imagine the reaction of the boys? When they looked at each other.

Poor Mum. Poor Mum. We somehow knew it had happened for so long.

She's broken under the strain. I think if I'd been that woman, I'd have gone and had a little practice round the corner, wouldn't you? Don't you see that this is the critical hour in your Christian life? When in the face of all that is reasonable, you do the unreasonable. The only reasonable thing for this woman would have been to throw in the sponge and say, I'm finished, I'm finished.

But God said, now do the unreasonable. Because I have placed within your house something which will make the impossible possible. We've already seen that the Christian life is a sheer impossibility, that it's only explicable in terms of God, and it's only the little pot of oil that's in you and me, God the Holy Ghost imparting to us the dynamic of the risen life of Jesus Christ.

It's only this that makes the Christian life possible. And while all the world around you, and all your neighbors around you, and all your fellow Christians around you, and your fellow church officers around you, and your own family know that in the past you've been nothing but a spiritual bankrupt for all the language that you've used, and for all the business which you have employed, God says you can still do the impossible. If only you were in your bankruptcy to discover the little pot of oil, and act as though God can't.

That's all. Just reckon with Christ. While that little pot was in her hand, though it held the secret of her fortune, nothing happened.

And you can know this very morning that Christ lives within you in all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and that God has made you as wealthy as his own dear son. But if you only know that and do nothing about it, you'll remain as poverty-stricken and as bankrupt. It takes the moral courage of obedience.

Nothing would replenish the lefty vessels, but that she, by failing sheer cold-blooded faith, acted as if it was all there in the table. And she poured out. So she went from him, verse 5, and she shut the door upon her son, who brought the vessels to her, and she poured out with tight lips and with a thumping heart.

She did the impossible. And although the failure of the past had bought against the future, her faith in the future redeemed the past. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her sons, Bring me yet a vessel.

They said, There's not a vessel more full. They're all full. And the oil is stained.

And she came and she told the man of God. And he wasn't a bit surprised. He said, That's how wealthy you've been ever since the pot of oil was in the house.

You've lived in self-imposed poverty. Go, sell the oil, pay thy debts, live thou and thy children with the rest. Never be a beggar again.

Did you ever discover the little pot of oil? Maybe you've never yet discovered how bankrupt you are. Maybe you're still satisfied the things which you have been accumulating, the very things with which you have been burying your true wealth. Maybe you're satisfied to stand with the sons of the pockets afar off.

You simply tip the cap and bow your head to everybody who knows God in a way you've never known. Well, that would be a pity. You're never richer than when you discover your own poverty.

You're never stronger than when at last you admit your own weakness. What a wonderful thing it is to take the pot of oil in your hand and say, God, take the consequences. I'm going to pour up and pour and pour and pour until every vessel is full of oil.

All that means is this, reckoning with Christ. For if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, if there's no pot of oil there, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, there's none of this. You don't need to discover the fullness of the Spirit.

You need to get converted. But if you're converted, you have at this service an old, soft, inebriated spirit. Let's stop for a minute.

Now we'll bow our heads and pray. Dear Lord Jesus, forgive us for our unusual skill at reckoning with everybody and reckoning with everything except Thyself. Forgive us, we pray Thee, for our unbelief, for our pride, for our self-reliance, our self-sufficiency.

Forgive us for our willingness to have something less than a first-hand knowledge of God. Look in mercy upon the bankrupt whose heads are bowed in Thy presence this morning and teach us the kind of faith that takes what grace provides and lives in all the lavish good. We no more deserve, Lord Jesus, Thy death for us than we deserve Thy life in us.

But some of us are determined to enjoy both. For we know that nothing less could ever satisfy Thy heart or make Calvary really worthwhile. Some of us are going to step out of this service with a new faith in the future because the future is now Christ's and this is going to relieve failures of the past.

We give Thee thanks and for Thy blessed name's sakes. Amen.

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