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Death in the Pot- Christ the Answer

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in May, 1959. The spoken form has been retained verbatim.

In the second book of the Kings, second book of the Kings chapter 4, at verse 38:

"And Elisha came again to Gilgal: and there was a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him: and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof. But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm or evil thing in the pot."

As you recognise, this is one of these many recorded incidents in the life of the prophet Elisha subsequent to his receiving the mantle of Elijah and the double portion of his spirit. Every one of these is a part of a whole and the whole is the testimony of Life overcoming death. This brief story has several features which we will note, and I think we shall find in them something true to all the Word of God; that is, abiding meaning and value.

We begin by noting again, that it is related to the "sons of the prophets", men of those schools of the prophets founded for the training and educating of men who were to succeed them and carry on the testimony of the Lord, and become responsible people in that testimony. It is necessary to keep that connection in mind, because *it* has something to say to us. There is a sense in which we are all in the Lord's school for training in the matter of spiritual responsibility in His testimony. Indeed, we could say that that *is* the explanation of all His dealings with us, and of the strange happenings which He allows in our lives. It is education, spiritual training, unto responsibility in His testimony.

The Lord has no place for irresponsible people, or people who carry no responsibility. That's the connection.

Then there was:

A Dearth in the Land.

It was a time of straitness, a time of pressure, a time when things were anything but easy. And all such times are perilous times. A time of pressure, time of adversity, time of difficulty, time of straitness, when things are hard... that is a perilous time in this sense: that we are very often found governed by the necessity of the time, and we *yield* to the pressure of circumstances and do something or try to do something.

We've been occupied with Abraham on our Thursday evenings; the situation was a very difficult one for Abraham. Indeed, humanly impossible, and he yielded to the pressure of circumstances, or of what *seemed* to be a necessity. He took action... and we know the terrible result of that in Ishmael. We have quite a number of such instances in the Bible, and perhaps the most outstanding of all, it is a comfort to know that our Lord Jesus did not escape this temptation for there is no doubt that the temptation of the devil in the wilderness to Him was to *act under the pressure of necessity*. "And He hungered..." after forty days and forty nights fasting, and the devil came and said: "Command these stones that they become bread; if you don't you'll die; it's *necessary* for you to do something! Your circumstances *demand* that you do something." It's always a perilous time to be under pressure, duress, and a time of adversity. This was a time of dearth, and so they must do something and they go out to do it. And you see what happened; it's a part of the whole story - it's only a part - it leads on to the very blessed sequel.

But the next feature: this inadvertent wrong, mistake. As they gathered, one gathered this wild vine, and it says that, "They knew it not". Under pressure doing something and inadvertently making a mistake, which involves in real peril of a threat to the whole life itself.

Out there in that world, the curse was lurking secretly... for all wild things and poisonous things came from that initial curse, when God said "Cursed shall be the ground because of you". The curse was lurking, as it always is; that curse which has in it the very element of death - it's about, it's there - we are not always able to detect, to identify. It is *in* the world, it is everywhere; the *deadly* thing... just waiting for them, shall we put it like this: to *act* like this, indiscriminately, or by sheer force of *seeming* necessity, for their very life. A trap waiting!

Do you notice that this inadvertent error, mistake, not only involved the one who gathered the vine; it involved all those who were in relation with the testimony. The enemy is very subtle. If he can only drive just one child of God, one servant of God, along this line and entangle him or her, he knows that this is a communal pot, that it's not an isolated thing - he has got others in view - and they were all involved in this mistake. The result: the touch of death. Evidently they drew out and tasted, and detected that there was something poisonous: the touch of death, Of course, that *is* the point of this whole story, and of all these stories, you see death in some form or another abounding - the work of the curse.

But then the end. And this is where this message turns from being one that is sombre, and perhaps not very helpful, although enlightening; where it turns to become, I think, tremendously helpful. When, discerning their mistake, recognising that they had become involved in something evil quite unintentionally - they did it under pressure, under seeming necessity - they made a mistake. And I

suggest, dear friends, that there are not many of us here today, who, looking back over our lives, are unable to see more than one occasion when it was like that with us: we were driven, we were harassed, perhaps distraught, pressed out of measure; we felt that we must *do something*, and we did something on that ground. And we regret it to this day. What it involved us in, and others too... well, it's a very real-to-life story, this is. But that is not the message. It may be a warning; it may be enlightening, but the message comes at the end.

They cried out: "O man of God, there is death in the pot" and he said, "Then, bring meal". And he cast it in the pot. They drew out, and there was no evil. What's the message? I hope I'm not reading something into this, but if the rest of the story is true to principle, I think its issue is true. I have to go back to the book of Leviticus for the real clue to this issue and I will find it in the second chapter - those chapters dealing with the various offerings to be brought to the Lord by His people, all of which, as you know, are related to the one thing: Life - Life with God. The second chapter of that book, at the beginning, we have the "meal offering".

The Meal Offering

We know a type of Christ as the Meal Offering, composed of fine flour, oil, frankincense and salt. I'm going to stay with all that, simply to sum it up in its inclusive meaning.

The fine flour... ground very fine... "bread corn is bruised". Well, this Meal Offering quite clearly is a figure of the incorruptible humanity of the Lord Jesus: a human life without corruption in it, without the poison in it, without the harmful element in it, without any elements of the curse, therefore of death - His perfect humanity. Under the anointing of the Holy Spirit with the frankincense mingled, making it a "sweet savour offering", as differing from other offerings. The whole Burnt Offering, the offering for sin, they were not "sweet savour offerings"; they were offerings of judgment. But the meal offering was a sweet savour offering; the frankincense made it that. And the mingled salt eliminated any possibility of corruption. And then "baked in the fire": tested, perfected, through the fires of suffering. He presented Himself to God as a Man to satisfy the heart of God: incorruptible, a humanity perfect.

Do you see the connection? You and I, in our human frailty, our human folly, and in the corruption that is in our natures and in our hearts, do many, many foolish things and involve ourselves and others in a great deal of trouble, and bring something very much like death very near. *But* this is not done by calculation, deliberately, in rebellion; so many of these things in our lives are inadvertent, unintentional, unpremeditated; we just get caught in them under pressure. The consequences, of course, are very serious.

What are we to do? Is it hopeless? Is there no way out? Cannot our human failures, follies, and weaknesses be retrieved? Must that be the end? Is it death, because we have made a mistake? However grave it is, God has made His Answer for all human inadvertency, all unintentional sin or mistakes: He has got His Answer in a perfect humanity in His Son - an Offering to Himself that satisfies *Him* for all your and my mistakes.

You know, in the great provision under the Law, there occurs this very phrase "If a man sin unwittingly...", then a provision is made. This man went out into the field, to gather what was there, and *unwittingly* - he had no thought of bringing back poison, to poison all his fellow-students - *unwittingly*, not knowing what this thing was. Perhaps it was a part of his education that he *had* to learn the difference between things that are good and bad, and undoubtedly he did that day. We do learn in this hard school of mistakes; if we can't learn by our mistakes well, then we are pretty

hopeless. No doubt he learned a very big lesson that day by his error of judgment and by acting without sufficient thought and consideration, or prayer; impulsively, like Saul did, and lost his kingdom. But he learned his lesson, this man, no doubt about it. The great thing, I am quite sure, that remained in his heart, was this: "I've made a terrible mistake; I have been responsible for an awful blunder. I nearly involved not only myself, but others, in disaster, but the Lord has made a provision to meet all my foolishness, all my ignorance, all my *unintentional* wrong." Christ meets our need in that way. I think there's a lot of comfort in that, don't you?

You see, the whole question is the question of death through corruption. And it's still true of us: in us, that is, in our flesh, "dwelleth no good thing"; we are still very corrupt; our heart *is* desperately wicked, desperately wicked. But the Lord has provided... He is greater than our heart. It is one more aspect of our appreciation of the Lord Jesus.

I trust that this comes to you, as it does to me, with some real helpfulness. Are you often looking back over your life, and saying, "Oh, if only... if only I had not done that." Of course, perhaps some of you people have no regrets about your life at all; there's not a thing that you can look back upon and have any regret... well, behold the perfect man! But most of us are like that: we are aware that there are many things that we wish had never been, we had never done; if only we had had the light then that we have now, we should never have done them, *but* they're done! What do we do about it? Is it hopeless? The Lord has taken the *full measure of human frailty* and met it with an Answer in His Son of human foolishness.... We may have to meet the Lord in another way if it is rebellion, if it is deliberate, but most of us can truly say to the Lord, "We would not have done that had we known, had we understood - it was *not* intentional, it was *not* deliberate, it was *not* rebellion - it was just inadvertent... under pressure".

And I realise, dear friends, that this is a limited message; it can only apply to some, and certain situations. You want to take all these incidents in the life of Elisha to get the whole range of the Lord's provision, whether it be for a Naaman, or a woman and her son, or whatever it may be. Here is one point in the whole story of a wonderful provision in the Lord Jesus to meet us where we've got into trouble by our own foolishness, our own weakness: a Meal Offering of a Perfect Humanity that satisfies God.