

FREEDOM SUNDAY

Introduction by Judi

First video – IJM around the world.

Bible reading: 2 Kings 4:1-7

The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his

Elisha replied to her, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?”

“Your servant has nothing there at all,” she said, “except a small jar of olive oil.”

Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbours for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.”

She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.”

But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing.

She went and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.”

Interview with Di Ewin on Justice and Mission.

Sermon:

There is little doubt that the people who influence us most in life are our parents. I am sure, like myself, you will have found yourself unconsciously copying something your parents did. And these behaviours can be positive, negative or anywhere in between. And you may think – did I consciously copy that or where did it come from. Of course any parent would be keen to see their children imitating their good habits. That would have to be one of the best ways to influence future generations – that our children might embody our better character.

That's where I want us to begin today – that's what God wants too. God wants nothing more than for His people to embody His character in His world. But when you read through the Bible, that is not always what God's people have been known for.

Think about what our Scripture reading was about this morning.

We have a widow, crying out to Elisha. Her husband, a man from the company of prophets had died owing money to another man. And to make up for that debt, that man was coming to take the widow's sons as his slaves. Can you imagine a more horrific situation for a parent? You have just buried your husband you are grieving this loss and now your sons are about to be taken away as slaves. What thoughts and emotions you would be going through. How can this situation change – you are inconsolable. Something has to be done quickly.

In the ancient Near East there is no Centrelink, no pension. Your sons are your future, your lifeline, your economic security. Your sons are your only hope. It's a double tragedy – you will end up destitute, on the streets and your sons will end up in slavery.

What may be harder for us to imagine is that slavery is not just a feature of this story. Slavery is worse today than it has ever been, with over 40 million people in its horrifying grip.

To illustrate Kevin is going to play another short video. This tells the story of Sadhna. A young girl, full of energy and adventure but this all changed when she was 11 years old.

You may find the short video confronting but I would encourage you to watch to the end as there is hope.

Now I want to return to the widow. We don't know what kind of slavery awaited her two sons and there were varying forms, but God had expressly forbidden Israel to enslave their own people.

So Elisha is gravely concerned about it and grasps for a solution. He suggests the widow sell some stuff to clear the debt, but all she has is a small jar of olive oil.

In those days Olive Oil was a very versatile commodity, just as it is today. It was used for cooking, burning in lamps, poured on wounds to stop infection and was a ceremonial symbol of God's blessing, prosperity and thriving in the kingdom.

So the fact that the jar was tiny and the widow had only a small amount of oil relates to the symbolic state of Israel's soul. In that once great nation there was hardly any blessing; little prosperity; no-one thriving. Israel was in the midst of a spiritual drought.

That being the case, it did seem odd that Elisha tells her to go house to house to gather as many empty jars as she can. It seemed so futile. But she obeys and gathers a multitude of jars. She takes her little jar and fills up a much bigger jar with it. And she takes another jar and fills that one up too. It's amazing. She keeps pouring oil out of that tiny bottle into lots and lots of bigger jars – huge jars and pots. No matter how big her little jar never runs out. See what is happening – in this miracle God is changing her life. She can sell all the oil and cancel the debt. That's incredible.

This is also symbolic. Through Elisha, the Lord has broken the curse of slavery and the captives are set free. The grace of God, through Elisha. The presence of God among His people is their only hope.

The Lord called Israel to be a shining light to the nations around them but they kept doing what they should not have been doing. What happened to Israel to result in the oppression of a widow and having her sons sold as slaves. This was not embodying the Lord's character in a watching world.

For us, how we live and act reflect the character of Jesus who came to bring freedom for the prisoners and set the oppressed free. He enables and empowers us to do this work through His Cross, Resurrection and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Pursuing justice is still the calling of God's people today. And, as a church we must work to restore justice and mercy – this is God's calling. Sadhna's cycle of slavery was broken through the work of IJM and God is now working through her to bring freedom and life to others.

As God's people we can take the lead to end slavery. We can be carriers of this miraculous transformation; we can be witnesses to the Kingdom of God as it breaks the chains and shatters the darkness.

Together we embody the grace, love and mercy of the Living God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Together we show the character of His kingdom.

Together we express His heavenly reign here on earth.

Together, let's pray boldly, act courageously and give generously to end slavery and glorify the God of all freedom.

Closing Prayer:

Gracious Father, You have called each one of us to carry out Your work here on earth. Sometimes it seems too hard to accomplish; sometimes it seems worthless and unachievable. But Lord, as the widow carried out the task that Elisha requested – You granted a wondrous miracle in her life and a new beginning through her grief, loss and fear.

In Sadhna's seemingly hopeless situation, You once again granted a miracle, rescued her and gave her a new task – to help others like her to be rescued and to recover.

Father, we may never be in their situation but we may be struggling with our own challenging circumstances. Please help us see that all things are made possible through You.

And through Your healing we are called to step out in faith and hope and reach out to those being controlled by cruel and inhumane greed. Through the power that only comes through the Holy Spirit, we pray for guidance, wisdom and leading to act boldly in all issues relating to justice and freedom for all.

In Jesus' name Amen.