

“SEVEN SNEEZES OF SALVATION”

II Kings 4:8-37

“And when the child was born, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him today? It is neither new moon, nor Sabbath. And she said, It shall be well. Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee. So she went, and came unto the man of God to Mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite: run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well. And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me? Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come into unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed himself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.”

“And the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.” Let me get this one behind me at the beginning: some wit said that a sneeze is God’s way of letting a married man open his mouth. Sorry, ladies, but if you want equal time, write your own article! Just kidding, of course (I’d be afraid of what you’d say).

It had been a tragically eventful day for the Shunammite woman and her husband. That morning, the husband and father of the child whom God had miraculously

given to the couple had lost the child to death, apparently a victim of sunstroke while visiting (possibly working with) his father in the harvest field. The young boy was carried back home by a servant, but after a time of being attended by his mother, he died at noon of that day. The mother carried him up to “the prophet’s chamber” in their home, the room occupied by the prophet Elisha when he was in the community. There she “laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out.” Then she rode to Mount Carmel on a donkey behind a household servant to find the prophet Elisha. After a series of maneuvers to respond to the situation, Elisha came to the Shunammite woman’s home and “went in, and shut the door upon the two of them, and prayed unto the Lord.” Elisha then stretched himself full-length over the lifeless body of the child, “and the flesh of the child waxed warm.” After a brief interlude, Elisha repeated this action. Then the text says, “And the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.” Then Elisha called the boy’s mother and delivered her son into her hands. “Then she went in, and fell at Elisha’s feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son.”

Elisha has been called “the prophet of resurrection” because of his personal endowment by God with the spiritual power to counteract death. At this point, as well as at several others, he is a type of Christ. As far as the Gospel record tells us, Jesus broke up every funeral he ever encountered. Three times, accounts are given of Jesus specifically raising individuals back to life after they had died. In each case, Jesus did a significant thing *after* the deliverance. He commanded that *food* be provided for the risen daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:41-42, 49-56); He commanded that the restored son of the widow of Nain be returned to the *fellowship* of his mother (Luke 7:11-15); and He commanded that Lazarus be *freed* from the graveclothes that had bound his dead body (John 11:1-44). The prerogative and power of resurrection belong only to Jesus Christ, but the “follow-up” of those He raises from the dead is the responsibility of His followers and friends. His friends and followers must provide proper spiritual *food*, personal spiritual *fellowship*, and practical and progressive spiritual *freedom* from the bondage of the flesh which had characterized his previous life.

In this study, we will focus on the symptoms of life revealed in the body of the child after the restoration to life had occurred. “And the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.” The title of the study is “The Seven Sneezes of Salvation.” When a sinner is saved, Jesus said that he “passes from death into life” (John 5:24). And just as surely as there are symptoms of natural life in every living person, there are symptoms of spiritual life in every saved person. The three primary pictures of salvation which Jesus took from the physical world are *creation*, *birth* and *resurrection*. All three of these point to prerogatives and powers that belong only to God. God miraculously created the entire universe, God miraculously presides over every birth with His sponsoring plan and power, and God only can raise the dead.

The salvation of a sinner is pictured in the Bible as a resurrection from the dead (read Ephesians 1:19-2:1). The three resurrections performed by Jesus in the Gospels provide perfect pictures of this salvation. In our text, the first sign of life seen in the Shunammite woman’s son provides an excellent picture of the symptoms of salvation

which appear in saved people once they become *new creatures in Christ* (II Cor 5:17), are *born again* (I Pet 1:23), and are *raised from spiritual death to spiritual life* (Ephesians 2:1). Just as the boy sneezed seven times when life was restored, similar spiritual symptoms will occur when a person is truly saved. Let's examine some of these symptoms both generally and specifically.

I. SUDDEN

First, note that the symptoms were *sudden*. The first of the seven sneezes occurred at one moment as the first symptom of restored life. The symptoms of life began to appear at one particular moment of time. Just as spiritual life *begins at one specific moment of time, at one point on the time-line* (the moment of the sinner's new birth, the moment of his spiritual but real resurrection from the dead), so also the *symptoms* of that life should begin to develop and reveal themselves at that point. The passage from spiritual death to spiritual life may be preceded by much preparation, but the event itself occurs in a moment – just like the fiat creation of God, or the birth of a child (the hospital reports the time to the minute), or the resurrection of a dead body back to life. And the symptoms which reveal the passing from death to life should begin to be in evidence immediately.

It might also be noted that the first symptoms of salvation might be *sensational* as well as sudden, though they might not necessarily be pleasant to observers who are nearby. To a child, it may be a mild displeasure to sneeze. Because I have three animals in my house, I sometimes break into morning fits of sneezing (sometimes up to twenty sneezes in succession), and the “fits” of sneezing are not very pleasant. Most of us would not prefer to sneeze seven times in succession. Furthermore, a succession of sneezes is not a favorite sound to those who are nearby. So veteran Christians must be very cautious as they appraise the symptoms of salvation in a newborn believer. Everything may not be as pleasant when a person is saved. There may be explosions and abrupt upheavals, but they point to life in the one who exhibits them.

II. SIMPLE

Second, the symptoms were *simple*. And the symptoms of Divine salvation are very simple. The sneezes of the Shunnamite woman's son were very simple evidences of life, and the symptoms which first appear in evidence of Divine salvation are clear but very simple.

Nothing is less planned and less full of thought than a sneeze. A sneeze may be faked, but a faked sneeze is easily detectable. Nothing is more involuntary than a sneeze. It is generally true that human beings don't sneeze because they want to but because they can't prevent it. No classes of instruction, no tutoring, no education is necessary to induce a sneeze; indeed, they can't! Infant babies and senile human beings both sneeze. The illiterate and the educated both sneeze. The untaught as well as philosophers and theologians sneeze.

In our story, Elisha required no further evidence of life than a sneeze. The boy was not expected to repeat a verse of Scripture or a Psalm. He wasn't asked to demonstrate life by a one-mile hike, or by climbing a tree, or by singing a song. Elisha only saw an elementary sign, but it was quite enough to demonstrate the presence of life. A sneeze is not an articulate expression, and the vitality it reveals is totally untrained, but it is a spontaneous sign of life.

III. SURE

Third, the symptoms of Divine salvation are *sure*. A sneeze is not self-caused or self-induced. In fact, it could never be said to be sure if you wait on a sneeze that you arrange! A sneeze is enticed by other factors. And the symptoms of Divine salvation are sure for the very reason that they are not self-produced. Many of the artificial "signs of life" are self-produced, but not the real symptoms of real salvation. No human being can fabricate his own birth – or the symptoms of his birth. These symptoms automatically attend the birth. Corpses simply don't show signs of life. Cadavers don't sneeze, or walk or talk. Dead bodies don't laugh or celebrate -- or sneeze. A sneezing body has life, and the sneeze is a sure sign of that life.

The Shunnamite woman's dead son might have been cosmetically cleansed and dressed in his best suit of clothes. He might have been surrounded by arrangements of bright and beautiful flowers. Makeup might have been put on his cheeks until they showed the imitation of a healthy blush. However, neither Elisha, the boy's mother or father, or the community would have been satisfied. A dressed-up corpse is still a corpse! A beflowered corpse is still a corpse! A made-up corpse is still a corpse! The boy must show a sign of life for them to be favorably impressed and satisfied. *And nothing could have been more convincing and conclusive as a sign of life than a sneeze!* And even if wishful thinking made the observer think he heard a slight sneeze, there was no mistaking a succession of seven sneezes. The symptoms were sure.

IV. STEADY, SUCCESSIVE – and SEVERAL

Finally, the symptoms of life in our story were *steady* and *successive* – and there were *several* of them. There were seven sneezes, and they apparently occurred in rather quick succession. The sneezes were successive and steady, and there were several of them.

The sneezes were so consistent that they may have sounded monotonous. One sneeze followed another and there was no other sign or sound from the boy. Sneezes and nothing else! But I am sure that Elisha did not complain; he was only too glad to give full attention to all of the boy's sneezes. He was happy to hear and see the signs of life. The child lived! Even so, much of the talk of newborn believers is consistent and "monotonous," but if the observer has been longing to see dead sinners come to life in Christ, he will never complain about the abrupt, spasmodic and explosive signs of new life.

If a veteran Christian is seeking enlightenment on the doctrine of propitiation, or strong expository teaching of the Bible, or great interest and variety of revelation, he would not want to see and hear the steady symptomatic signs of salvation in a newborn Christian. This is one of the great problems in every fellowship of believers. Many veteran Christians want their own needs met, and cannot defer to the tastes and needs of newborn Christians. Newborns don't communicate articulately and they are usually difficult to understand. Great patience is required to assist them. Every veteran Christian should tune himself to cheerfully look for the symptoms of salvation in new Christians and to honor them with full assistance as they grow. What a joy it is to trace the work of the Spirit in the abrupt symptoms of the new birth in new believers! When veterans cannot adapt themselves to the needs of newborns, God is not likely to give many newborns to that church.

In a "Family Circle" cartoon, little Jeffy sneezed with the typical "Ahchoo!" sound. His mother gave the typical blessing, "God bless you." Jeffy sneezed again, this time with a bit more emphasis. She repeated, "God bless you." Jeffy repeated the sneeze several more times, with each "AH -- CHOO" more exaggerated than the one before. Each time, his mother said, "GOD BLESS YOU!" with emphasis equal to his. Finally, his mother said, "Jeffy, aren't you overdoing it?" Jeffy replied, "Mommy, I just wanted to be REALLY blessed!" Jeffy's succession of "sneezes" was designed to invoke real blessings, but the boy's sneezes in our story *revealed a real blessing – a resurrection from the dead!*

Remember that there were *several – seven, to be exact*, sneezes. So let me be specific. Let me mention some seven symptoms that will sooner or later follow the salvation of a newborn believer. You might choose to revise the list and both of us might be correct, because there are many symptoms of salvation. I have just selected seven from my own experience and understanding. If you want a technical study based on the one "salvation symptom" book, the book of First John, your study would be rewarded. But I have devised a list based on observation, revelation and experience. Here, finally, is a possible list of "seven salvation sneezes."

1. The first sneeze might be called CHRISTIAN CONFESSION at CONVERSION. See Matthew 10:32 and Romans 10:9. This confession of Christ at salvation is the beginning of a lifestyle, not a one-time or occasional confession. The confession is both silent (by baptism and lifestyle) and spoken (the regular testimony of the saved person to others). The silent confession of Christian baptism is soon behind the new Christian, but what it represents should be relived in his mind, his heart, his experience and his expression as long as he lives. He is now dead to his past, his "old man" is buried with Christ and this is pictured in his baptism, he is spiritually (but actually, really, and vitally) risen from the dead, and he has a new life in Christ which is to increasingly dominate the rest of his life. While the silent confession of baptism occurs only once at the beginning of his new life, the spoken confession of Christ should fill his heart, his mind, *and his lips* every day of his life.

2. The second symptomatic sneeze is the CHRISTIAN CHARACTER of the CONVERT. See II Corinthians 5:17. Every statement about salvation in the New Testament suggests or says that salvation involves a total change of life and character. Without a transformation of inner character, Divine salvation has not occurred.

3. The third sneeze is a continuing symptom. It could be called CHRISTIAN CONTINUATION in the established COURSE. See I John 2:19, which clearly says that a true Christian will “stay the course,” even if he has temporarily lapses.

4. The fourth sneeze is the CHRISTIAN CHOICE of COMPANIONS. We all know the adage that “birds of a feather flock together,” and that adage is true. Moral character gravitates to its own kind. If the person is Godless, he gravitates to those who are ungodly. If he is Godly, he gravitates to believers like himself. Negatively, the Bible says that “evil companions corrupt good manners.” And the reverse is true – Godly companions enhance Godly character and Godly conduct. A newborn Christian tends to gravitate to other born-again.

5. The fifth sneeze is the CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTION of CURRENCY. A newborn believer is immediately infected with the generosity and love of Jesus Christ. I began to tithe the week I was saved – and as far as I remember, nobody mentioned or explained tithing to me at that time. A generosity filled my spirit which certainly had not been there previously. You see, I believe in “*purse-onal*” *salvation*! Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Let the nerve from your heart to your wallet be sanctified, and your whole life tends to fall under the blessing! Salvation begins the process of delivering the believer from being a *greedy getter* to becoming a *gracious giver*.

6. A sixth sneeze that might accompany salvation (Hebrews 6:9) is CHRISTIAN CONQUEST in the time of CRISIS. A Christian might rock and reel under the impact of adversity, but he will recover with a stronger faith than he had when the storm of adversity came. One wise veteran believer said, “God made this old world precarious so that we wouldn’t find our security here.” A person who has really been born again will reveal the authenticity of his birth by “drawing closer Home” when adversity strikes. He will “use the darkness to see the stars,” even if he trembles violently when the darkness engulfs him.

7. The final sneeze I mention is the practice of CHRISTIAN COMPASSION in our CONCERN for others. Conversion always floods the heart with compassion for others. It always inclines the spirit to sympathize with those who are needy or lost. See I John 3:14, where love for others is revealed as a symptom of salvation.

These, then, are seven specific sneezes that attend Christian salvation. Let me conclude with a few final words to the “mother” and the “family” when a child comes from death to life.

The community of believers is the “mother” of newborn believers. Augustine was right when he said, “No man can have God as his Father without having the church as his mother.” A good mother passionately cares for her child, and the church must passionately care for her children. She must live spiritually, aggressively and relationally, like the Shunnamite woman did. She must enlist the Godly intercessor to assist her when her need is great, just like the Shunnamite woman did. And the church must go to its knees in a posture of prayer, praying the prayer of faith just like Elisha did. Even the power of the grave cannot prevail against the might of faith when the church uses the weapon of all-prayer.

Furthermore, every believer must be like Elisha in the story. He must practice close-up contact with sinners who are dead in sin. He must deal with them person-to-person. Mouth-to-mouth and eye-to-eye is the picture given in the story. We must enter into close identification with those we would bless for God’s sake. Elisha “laid down” his life for the boy’s sake, and so must we. If we had *more passion in the mother*, and *more person-to-person contact in those appointed to be God’s witnesses*, we would have more resurrections of people who thus would become members of The Family.

Finally, let me show you the picture of salvation that is suggested by this story. A thoughtful Christian will see here an excellent picture of the new birth. Like the boy, all sinners are “graveyard dead” before they are born again, dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). Through the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, the sinner becomes “warm” toward God and spiritual truth, and finally by trusting Jesus Christ alone and receiving Him as the Lord of his life (this is inevitable when a person *truly trusts Jesus Christ*), the sinner is brought to spiritual life. Note the steps carefully: Salvation is received through the closest *contact* with Jesus Christ. Indeed, it is received through a *communicating* contact with Him, a contact by which Jesus Christ actually communicates eternal life into the sinner’s dead spirit. Thereafter, salvation is a *continuing* contact with Jesus Christ. He does not merely convey His Life and then depart. He remains in the enlivened spirit of the newborn person, continuously communicating His very life by His indwelling Presence.

“ah-choo.” “Ah-choo.” AH-choo.” AH-CHOO.” “AH-CHOO!” “AHH—CHOOO!” “AHH-CHOOO!!!” *What a lovely sound! Evidence of another re-creation, another new birth, another resurrection—another saved person—in the Forever Family of God! Now, Mother, what will you do with this baby God has entrusted to you?*