

## **A Study of the Life of Elijah;**

### ***A Man Like Us.***

#### **Sermon # 3**

#### ***“The Widow and Her Cruse of Oil!”***

#### **1 Kings 17:8-16**

When we last looked at the life of Elijah, Elijah was faced with a great crisis of faith. The brook Cherith, his sole supply of water had dried up. We all no doubt know what that is like. When our brook dries up we are tempted to think that God’s power has ceased. But as we noted last time, drying brooks are not an indication of God forsaking us it is only an indication that God is changing the source of his supply.

But God knew Elijah’s need and when it was time, He revealed to Elijah what to do. Elijah receives a new command from the Lord in verse eight, “Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, (9) “Arise, go to Zarephath, which *belongs* to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.”

There several things of note about this new command. First, is the location is very surprising. He is told to “go to Zarephath which belongs to Sidon.” Zarephath was a small village in Sidon, in what is now modern day Lebanon. The location is important because Sidon is also birthplace of Jezebel, Ahab’s pagan wife. Sidon was quite literally the center of Baal worship. God’s purpose was to demonstrate on Phoenician soil, where Baal is worshiped, that He (Jehovah) has power over the things in which Baal has failed. Interestingly “in Phoenicia they said it was Baal who supplied one’s meal and oil. He was the son of dagon – dagon is the Canaanite word for corn. He was also the god who supplied oil.” [David Roper. *Elijah: A Man Like Us.* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1997) p. 125]

In addition the name *Zarephath* comes from a Hebrew word for “*smelting place,*” meaning a place where a furnace was used to produce iron by heating ore until the iron separated from the dross. The noun form of Zarephath means “crucible.” This was to be a place designed by God to refine Elijah and make a major difference in the remainder of his life. Most of us are aware that God may put us in place where we will be tested but he told Elijah (v. 9) “...go to Zarephath ....and dwell there.” He tells Elijah go to the place of testing and stay there. It can be a very humbling and it can be very frustrating when God says, “*Stay where you are!*” It can be very frustrating when you’re in a job, in a relationship, in a situation, when you are ready to go and God says, “*Stay There!*”

Secondly, the command to Elijah is remarkable because he will have to travel over 100 miles while the King has his men actively searching for Elijah over the entire country.

As to the safety of Elijah, the safest place in the world was right in the center of Baal homeland, because the safest place in the world is always where God had told you to be.

Third, the command to Elijah is remarkable in who Elijah is directed to. A widow would have been among the first to feel the hardship in a time of drought because her resources were generally much less than most people to begin with. A widow could hardly be considered a good source of providing for He in a time when even the well-to-do have very little.

This passage has some important lessons to teach on the “Will of God.”

First, Facts Concerning the Will of God

(vv. 8-9)

From this passage we can glean three principles concerning the Will of God.

- God always reveals His will at the appropriate time.

God is always on time, He knew Elijah’s need and when it was time, He revealed to Elijah what he was to do. God spoke to Elijah when the brook dried up and He spoke to widow when she was preparing her last meal. She did not starve and Elijah did not die of thirst. God came through. Why does he not provide for us sooner, because he wants to learn to rely on Him?

- God reveals His will through His Word.

If you want to know what God expects of us as a believer, if you want to discover the will of God for your life, then you must go to the Word of God! The Will of God for our lives will *always* conform to the Word of God.

- God reveals His will progressively- a little at a time.

The way God not to reveal tomorrow’s will until we been faithful to perform what He has already told us to do today.

Someone has said, “The Will of God is like the headlights on a car, they give enough light to so we can see for enough down the road to drive safely but they do not show us the whole road ahead of us!”

God generally shows us only what we need to know at the time. We do not need to know about God’s Will for tomorrow until tomorrow comes. And while we think we would like to know what lies ahead, God seldom sees fit to reveal His will ahead of time.

Secondly, Following the Will of God

(vv. 10-15)

In verse ten we are told, *“So he (Elijah) arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks.”*

The prophet arrived in Zarephath hungry, thirsty and tired after his 100 mile journey. As he passed through the city gates he spied a woman picking up sticks in order to prepare a meal. Believing he had found the right woman he began a conversation with her.

Since the widow faced circumstances which seemed to far out way her duty of hospitality in importance, how was Elijah to overcome her natural reluctance to give up her only food. (vv. 10b-12) *“... And he called to her and said, “Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.” (11) And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, “Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” (12) So she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”*

Elijah’s request become increasingly more demanding, there can be little doubt that Elijah did come up with this on his own but was saying to her what God had told him already.

Notice the three-fold progression!

- Elijah asked her for a drink of water. (v. 10b) *“Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.”* This request would have been the easiest. All that was really asked of her was that she interrupt her schedule long enough to see to this stranger’s needs.
- But as she set off to perform this first request Elijah asked for a second thing, (v. 11) *“And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, “Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.”* This of course was much greater request and her poverty seemed to make her incompatible with what God was asking her to do. Her circumstances would say she was the one who needed help, not the one expected to give help.
- Finally she was asked to give God first place in her life. (vv. 13-14) *“And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. (14) For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.’”*

Elijah requested that she give him the last bit of meal instead of her and her son eating it. What a severe test of self. Even the best of unselfish people would struggle here. But what he was asking her to do was see him as a representative of God and he was asking her to give God first place in her life. Human reasoning would argue on the side of the widow that she save what she had to sustain herself and her son. What Elijah was asking just did not make sense. But we are not asked to understand God commands we are merely asked to obey them!

The widow is not the only one who is asked to give to God first. We all have this duty! In Matthew 6:33 Jesus said *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”* But few actually do. An example would be people who get behind on their tithe so they just quit tithing or those who do not practice tithing at all because they have failed to see this as a priority in their lives.

We are forced to admit that in our own day the slightest inconvenience or the least bit of danger seems sufficient reason for not doing what God has told us to do. We don't want to put forth any effort, be inconvenienced in any way, take any risks financially or otherwise or subject our-selves to any suffering to do the will of God.

Upon examination we have to admit that it is a lot easier to talk about faith than it is to live by it, especially when your life is on the line. Elijah was asking her not for part of what she had but all of it with the promise that afterwards a miracle would be provided in her behalf.

Verse fifteen is a synopsis of the widow's obedience, *“So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah...”* Quite simply the scripture says, *“she went and did.”* That is obedience in its simplest form. But let's take a few moments and examine her obedience.

### Third, Finding the Will of God

Note with me two things that Elijah found as a result of following the will of God.

- He found the Guidance of God.

Notice what happened when Elijah obeyed (v. 10) *“So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks.”* One version renders it *“Behold the widow was there.”* The world would say that was just lucky coincidence

But we have a word for that, it called providence. There is a principle here, *“Be where you are suppose to be, doing what you are suppose to do, and you will discover God's hand at work.”*

- He Found The Provision Of God.

(vv. 15-16) *“So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. (16) The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.”* Every day during the remainder of the famine (*two years or more*) she and Elijah saw the power of God at work in providing for their needs. God can display his power in such a way that the faithful saints will see and receive it fully, and yet the unbelieving world all around them will know nothing of it.

Yet it should be remembered that God's supernatural provision continued *only* until it began to rain again (1 Kings 17:4). When there is natural means available to meet our needs

God expects the believer to provide for themselves from the natural resources He has already provided. God expects his children to use the natural resources that are available fully before waiting on him to intervene supernaturally.

## Conclusion

Elijah and the widow give us quite a lesson on determining the Will of God. Determining God's will may indeed not be as difficult nor as mysterious as we sometimes think. When we find ourselves in middle of a problem that we do not know the answers to, and we are groping around trying to find our way, we can follow the example of Elijah and the widow – do what you know to do. Elijah was told, *“arise go... and stay there”* (v.9) and the widow was told, *“first go and make me a little cake”* (v. 13), in each case obedience preceded provision.

As you do what you already know to do – God will be at work in your life and one day you will realize that problem that you thought was impossible has been answered. How did it happen? You simply did what you knew to do, and God did the rest.