

## God Provides For Elijah.

Text: 1 Kings 17:1-16

Suggested Hymns:

501, 610, 389, 408, 392

1) By a brook

2) Through a widow

3) Lessons for us to learn

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Kings 17:1-16, <sup>1</sup> *And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”*

<sup>2</sup> *Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,* <sup>3</sup> *“Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.* <sup>4</sup> *“And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.”*

<sup>5</sup> *So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.* <sup>6</sup> *The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook.* <sup>7</sup> *And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.*

<sup>8</sup> *Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,* <sup>9</sup> *“Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.”*

<sup>10</sup> *So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.”* <sup>11</sup> *And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, “Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.”*

<sup>12</sup> *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.”* <sup>13</sup> *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. <sup>14</sup> “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.’”*

*<sup>15</sup> So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. <sup>16</sup> 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. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Few names have such a glorious association surrounding them as that of Elijah. He appears suddenly and disappears miraculously.

In the whole range of world history there is scarcely another person quite so stern, rugged, mysteriously grand, and impetuous in character. In certain elements he resembled Moses in the Old Testament times and John the Baptist in the New Testament times.

The highest compliment ever paid to John the Baptist was, when, preaching in the wilderness, with his hairy garment around him and his eloquent voice causing, through the Holy Spirit’s power, thousands to repent and even the king to tremble on his throne, the words of Jesus, *he is Elijah who is to come.*<sup>1</sup>

In our text the mission of Elijah was to reprove and punish King Ahab because under him and his idolatrous and wicked wife, Jezebel, Israel had reached a depth of depravity which it had never seen before. The whole land was given over to idolatry, the altars of the true God were overthrown, and those of Baal, the sun-god, were set up in their stead.

Faith and loyalty to the true God had so completely died out that Elijah thought that he was the only one left who loved and worshiped the Lord God.

A characteristic phase of the apostasy of Israel, under the leadership of Ahab and Jezebel, was the adoption of the Phoenician worship of the material elements which produce rain and dew, while the God that made them was forgotten.

While Ahab was congratulating himself on the success of his policy and leadership, suddenly there appeared before the king and queen, this messenger of

the God who thundered out this curse, ***“As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”***

Let the house of Ahab and all Israel know that the living God, the Creator, is superior and will stop both the dew and the rain, and then all the world shall know that He is God.

Elijah’s approach is sudden, and his disappearance is just as sudden. Where is Elijah to go? Ahab will try to kill him. Where shall he find sustenance? When the heavens are closed by the word of the Lord, what will become of the prophet who declared that word?

Will he not suffer from the drought in common with the sinners on whose account the dew and rain ceased? Will not a demoralised people resent their sufferings on the man of God and help Ahab in seeking his life?

Today we will learn that God knows everything and provides for us at all times, even during emergencies. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. God Provides For Elijah By A Brook**

Our text says, <sup>2</sup> ***Then the word of the LORD came to [Elijah], saying, <sup>3</sup> “Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. <sup>4</sup> “And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.”***

The Psalmist writes, <sup>4</sup> ***For the word of the LORD is right, And all His work is done in truth.***<sup>2</sup> The rainy season came, but the sky above continued cloudless, blazing like polished brass with the red glare of the fiery sun. Month after month no dew drop sparkled on the withered grass. The springs refused to flow, the rivers dried up in their beds, and the famine began its desolating march across the land.

The grass had become blackened and was destroyed. Then the cry awoke in the palace and was echoed in every quarter of the land, ***“Where is Elijah the Tishbite?”*** They sought him east and west and north and south. They sought him in the towns and in the desert, on the mountainsides and in the valleys; in Gilead and Judea, in Israel and Sidon. Wherever they heard that any one answering to the description of his person had appeared, there Ahab sent messengers in the

hope of capturing the prophet. But all searching was in vain. Elijah was safe, hidden away by God.

Our text says, <sup>5</sup> *So [Elijah] went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.* Elijah did not go there because he was afraid of anything that might be done to his person because of the bold message which he had carried to Ahab in God's name, but he went there because God sent him there.

And in taking up his abode in that rocky cavern, he served his Master as faithfully as he did when he entered the palace of Jezebel to confront the king or when he stood on the summit of Mount Carmel and put to shame the worshipers of Baal.

Our text continues, <sup>6</sup> *The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook.* The Lord God never sends a man to a warfare on his own charges. If He sets a person on a pilgrimage, He will put a staff into his hand and will support him on the way. If He calls someone to suffer for His sake, He will sustain him by His grace and cheer him by His favour. If He requires one of His children to do a certain thing, He will provide for him the resources which are needed for doing it.

There may have been no miracle in the continuance of the mountain stream. This appears from the fact that by and by it failed. But it continued to flow long after the other brooks had dried up. And this stream, which ran so long, was in a hidden retreat, where no one would think of looking for the prophet.

But even more wonderful is the latter part of the promise, *I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.* Ravens are unclean creatures. They are insect-feeding, carcass-eating birds, themselves fed by the special providence of God. Yet God commands these otherwise unclean creatures to bring Elijah food; for the instincts of all creatures are in God's hands.

Remember that God restrained hungry lions from harming Daniel, and instructed a fish on how to behave toward Jonah, and another to lift a piece of silver from the bottom of a lake and then fasten on a hook. <sup>14</sup> *"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"*<sup>3</sup> The Psalmist says, *I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.*<sup>4</sup> In the barren wilderness God

gave manna from heaven. Scriptures says, ***“In the days of famine they shall be satisfied.”***<sup>5</sup>

Elijah had called a famine upon the land and broken the whole staff of bread; but he himself had enough. God spread for him ***“a table in the wilderness,”***<sup>6</sup> and almost in the presence of his enemies.

Elijah only received a small supply of food each time the ravens appeared; so although he had no lack, he had no abundance. He had ***“daily bread”*** — for ***“the evening and the morning”***<sup>7</sup> are one day. Even he must walk by faith and learn ***“not to worry about tomorrow.”***<sup>8</sup>

***<sup>7</sup> And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.*** The ravens bringing Elijah food and the brook furnishing him with water whispered to him of the care of God and of the provision made by a Father’s love. When he drank, he drank in faith. He drank in the firm faith that God was interested in him, was watching over him, and was ready to supply all his needs.

But one morning as he visited the brook-side, he was struck by the fact that the little stream was more hushed and subdued than it had been. And there came to him the startling realisation that the water of the brook was failing. It was a bewildering experience.

Then there came a day when he made his way to its banks and found it altogether dry. There was no water, only parched, glittering sand. Why did the brook dry up? It did not dry up because God had forgotten His prophet. It did not dry up because God was so busy governing the universe that He allowed all thought of Elijah to be crowded out of His mind.

You and I forget sometimes, but God never does. He is great enough to light suns and fashion stars, but He is also great enough to stoop to the humble task of clothing the lily. God is not too busy to sit by the sick-bed of the sparrow and to think upon the day of its death. And be sure of this, that whatever seeming harm may come to you, or to this prophet, did not come because of the forgetfulness of God.

God allowed the brook to dry up because He had other plans for His faithful prophet. Far away at Zarephath was a poor widow at whose skirts a hungry child

was plucking. She was a widow who was not only greatly in need of material bread, but more greatly in need of the Bread of Life. God sent His prophet to find sustenance there.

She was a blessing to Elijah, but he became a far greater blessing to her. Scripture says that *“all things work together for good to those who love God.”*<sup>9</sup> They are not defeated by any disaster. They are not conquered by any calamity. There is absolutely nothing that can come to them that God cannot use to work for their good.

## 2. God Provides For Elijah Through A Widow

Our text continues, *“Then the word of the LORD came to [Elijah], saying, ‘Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.’”*

This is a new trial for his faith. To obey this command required that he cross the entire expanse of Israel lying between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. This meant that Elijah would have to go to the territory of Ethbaal, the idolatrous father of wicked and vindictive Jezebel, and that even there he would be cast on the support of a woman whose natural breadwinner and protector had been taken from her side.

It did not seem a very inviting prospect, but it was God who gave him the command, and so *“he arose and went to Zarephath.”*

*I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.* That does not mean that the word of the Lord came to her as it did to Elijah himself, but simply, as in the case of the ravens, that God would sustain the prophet through her as His instrument.

In the course of divine providence Elijah would be supported by a widow in Zarephath. But how was he to know to which of the widows of the city he was sent?

As he approached the entrance into the city, he saw a woman gathering sticks, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit he approached her and asked her kindly, *“Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.”* He had walked a long way; it was a time of drought, and he was exhausted after such a long journey.

But water was a scarce commodity just then, and the woman might have been excused if she had declined to comply with the request of a stranger. She went, however, to do as he had asked; but while she was going, he called after her and said, ***“Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.”***

This, however, seemed more than she could bear; so she revealed a terrible depth of distress by saying, ***“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.”***

Here indeed was extreme misery. ***“Surely,”*** the prophet might have thought, ***“this is not the widow to whom I am sent.”*** But he did not say that; he saw in her the very person for whose deliverance he had so opportunely come.

So he 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.*** <sup>14</sup> ***“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.’”***

***“Make me a small cake from it first.”*** As she heard these words, she might have felt disposed to say, ***“How dare you ask that of me? Here I have left only a meal for myself and my son, and you, an entire stranger ask that I should make a cake for you!”*** But the promise with which the prophet closed his petition took care of her misgivings.

Elijah virtually said, ***“If you make this cake for me, God will provide for you through this terrible drought.”*** And believing in God’s willingness and ability to keep His promise, she at once went and did as the prophet had requested. And God kept His word; for <sup>16</sup> ***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.***

### 3. Lessons For Us To Learn

Now, in conclusion, what are the lessons we learn from this amazing story?

The first thing that strikes us is the minuteness of God’s daily providence. Jesus Himself has said that ***“not one [sparrow] falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will.”***<sup>10</sup> This narrative exemplifies that divine assertion in such a

manner as almost to stagger our intellect. And this minute providence is the same today. It is as true now as it was then that God is *“above all, and through all, and in you all.”*<sup>11</sup> He is *“not far from each one of us.”*<sup>12</sup> He is on every side of us.

God’s providence encircles us with His protection and guides us with His wisdom. What a comfort there is in the assurance that God is with us and for us, so that each of us can sing with David, *“I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinks upon me,”*<sup>13</sup> especially since God’s provident love is based upon His mercy in Christ Jesus.

We read in Romans 8:32 <sup>32</sup> *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? .*

In the second place, we learn here that, no matter how small our resources may be, we can still do something for God if we simply have the will. This poor woman could scarcely have been in more destitute circumstances. She was at the point of starvation, and yet by her unselfish generosity with what she had, she was honoured to sustain God’s prophet for perhaps two years, besides having all the necessities furnished for herself and her son.

Never let any one say, *“I am of no use in the world; I can do no good; I am too poor to render any service.”* The little we have becomes much in the hands of God. Today in our Gospel lesson, think of the lad’s loaves and fishes in the hands of the Saviour.

Think also of the ox goad in the hands of Shamgar;<sup>14</sup> a bone in the hands of Samson; lamps, pitchers, and trumpets in the hands of Gideon’s three hundred; a sling and a stone in the hand of David. Under God’s grace and power our weakness will be our strength, so that like Paul we may say, *“For when I am weak, then am I strong.”*<sup>15</sup>

Thirdly, what we do for God should go before what we do for ourselves. The world’s maxim is, *“Take care of yourself first.”* But the Christian principle is to merge self in Christ. God requires the first-fruits. It will not do merely to serve ourselves and give the surplus to Him. We must serve God and advance His cause even if we should be required like this poor woman to eat a smaller cake ourselves, and to give a smaller portion to our families.



There is no faith exercised in giving to God only what we can spare after we have served ourselves. Faith will, like this poor widow of Zarephath and the poor widow at the Temple treasury, give all, if need be, to God and look to Him for continued supply.

Fourthly, in giving to God, we are so far from losing anything but we are rather actually gaining. What God gets from us, His children, He repays with an abundant increase.

This woman gave one meal to the prophet, and God sustained her for two years. This is always the divine law — we get by giving. We must sow if we want to reap. We must open our hearts in love to others if we would have God's love shed abroad in our souls.

It will not do, however, for us to look for the reward. Scripture says that we are to *“do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return;”*<sup>16</sup> and then it is that our reward will be great, and *“we shall be the children of the Most High.”*<sup>17</sup>

Lastly we learn that God's help is often delayed until the very last, to make us realise all the more that, when relief comes, it comes from God. Not till the brook was dried up, did the Lord make provision for Elijah; and the widow was preparing her last meal when Elijah came.

*“Man's extremity is God's opportunity.”* It was in the fourth watch of the night, when the disciples were worn out by their long toil in rowing, that Jesus came walking over the sea to their assistance. It was after Lazarus had been buried four days that Jesus came to help His friends at Bethany.

It is very sad indeed, when a person has nothing but earthly things to sustain him. The day will come when the brook will fail him and the barrel become empty; and what shall he do then without God?

So let us never despair, no matter how dark the outlook may be. It would indeed be a sad thing to be in perplexity with no God to fall back on. However while we have God saying to us, *“I am your God,”* all is well.

Let us close with the words of the hymnist

Belovèd, it is well:

God's ways are always right,

And perfect love is o'er them all,

Though far above our sight. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11:14

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 33:4

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 18:14

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 37:25

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 37:19

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 78:19

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 1:5

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 6:34

<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:28

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 10:29

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 4:6

<sup>12</sup> Acts 17:27

<sup>13</sup> Psalm 40:17

<sup>14</sup> Judges 3:31

<sup>15</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:10

<sup>16</sup> Luke 6:35

<sup>17</sup> Psalm 82:6