

Elijah — Living in Baal's Backyard

1 Kings 17:8-16 (KJV)

8 And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, **9** Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. **10** So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. **11** And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. **12** And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. **13** And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. **14** For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. **15** And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. **16** And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.

Directions for Changing Course

We pick up with Elijah leaving the brook Cherith because it dried up. The ravens quit bringing him food and the famine has caught up with the creek that God had parked Elijah beside. If you use your imagination, it probably would lead us to think that Elijah was alarmed, worried, and distressed at this new turn of events.

James 5:17 (KJV) Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

Despite that, we don't find Elijah saying anything against God or his circumstances.

He was silent before God. He waited in faith. He prayed in faith. He crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts in faith.

Live in faith and rest in faith knowing the hand of God is at work!

But with every brook that dries up, the righteous will hear the voice of God... the word of the Lord came unto him, saying... When God closes doors He generally opens another door that is clear to us where we should go. Hindrances and obstacles are ways that God moves us forward.

Just for a short detour, the book of Acts adds some principles about when course-changing decisions in life. This is just before Paul is about to experience his last recorded shipwreck. Paul had advised them not to sail, but they refused to take his advice and it ended up detrimental for the ship although no life was lost.

Acts 27:13 (KJV) And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.

I think that there were three principles that was guiding Paul to tell them not to go forward. (For another day: Sometimes you can get caught up in the storms of others despite your own advice for them not to get involved in it.) The principles we should consider when moving on from dried up brooks:

The inner voice of conviction—Sometimes described as a “gut” feeling although I believe that those who are Spirit-filled and Word-driven, it is the wisdom of God.

The outer voice of circumstances—What are the conditions on the outside? What are the wise counselors saying to me?

The deciding voice of the Word of God—There is great direction that comes from the pages of Scripture if we are willing to seek it out.

Elijah was experienced with the inner voice of conviction and the deciding voice of the Word of God. Now his outward circumstances are moving him forward. Follow this pattern in your life and make careful and spiritual choices about where you go.

As we shall see, sometimes moving forward does not necessarily seem to be the best place to go. When God leads in a surprising direction, don't overanalyze it.

God was moving Elijah into Baal's neighborhood which was literally in the backyard of Baal country.

Living in Baal's Backyard

Go to Zarephath

1 Kings 17:9 (KJV) Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.

Elijah was tested at Cherith, which means a "cutting place," and now he is moving to Zarephath, which means a "melting or smelting place." It is a place that is associated with a refiner's fire in a furnace. In our walk with God, we may find that the tests often come back to back and just because we may be children of God, it does not grant us a pass from difficulty.

Gold is very prominent throughout the Bible. It is found in the Tabernacle, the Temple, and will be found in Heaven. As the gold was formed throughout Scripture for inanimate things, the process that God puts His saints through is

Mining—Pulled from the earth in chunks of rock and the ore would be pulled out.

Smelting—Separating the gold from the ore by using fire. This is where the bits of gold would be pulled from the rocks.

Refining—The gold was then put into a cup-shaped container (a crucible) and the fire was raised to 1000 degrees and the impurities would rise to the surface and the refiner would remove it. The process was complete when the refiner could see his face in the reflection.

Forming—The goldsmith would shape the gold into what he wanted it to become. It could be a fine wire or a piece of furniture overlaid with gold.

The process is critical and God uses these steps to turn His children into saints of God. Far too many fight against the fire that God is desiring to use to form them into what He longs them to be. Elijah was sent through the fire at Zarephath.

Job 23:10 (KJV) But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

Proverbs 17:3 (KJV) The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts.

Zechariah 13:9 (KJV) And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God.

God works backwards in our lives while we live forwards. We cannot see around the bend, but we know the Lord has chosen this path for us. Don't fight with the fire of the smelting process!

Isaiah 41:10 (KJV) Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

Zarephath was quite a distance from Cherith.

It was eight miles south of Zidon.

It was thirteen miles north of Tyre.

It was eighty miles north of Samaria.

All summed up it was about one hundred miles for Elijah to travel.

He had to walk it out. Twenty miles a day and it would have been nearly a week for him to walk this distance. Constantly looking over his shoulder for the troopers of Ahab to find him. He had to camp out by the roadside at night and hunt or beg for any food he might have gotten. Furthermore, we cannot forget the famine and drought that was ravaging the land.

Zarephath was the domain of Ethbaal, Jezebel's daddy! I imagine that Elijah knew that and he had to wonder why that God was leading him into Baal's backyard. The very fact that Elijah had brought judgment to Israel because of their allegiance to Baal is ironic because now God is placing him in the middle of it all.

He had spent a year at Cherith and he had no indication at all how long he would be in Zarephath.

Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there...

Elijah is also directed by God to dwell there... stay there... Here is another matter of the test... Sometimes staying in a place has its own set of difficulties too!

What do you do in moments when God you are told to stay? You stay... But there is a crucial key to existing in those places:

John 15:4-8 (KJV)

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. **5** I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. **6** If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. **7** If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. **8** Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

More fruit than we can imagine will grow when men and women are willing to put roots deep down in a place where God has called them to live in. Fruitfulness and dwelling... staying... settling... will always be connected.

Strong families

Strong marriages

Strong churches

Strong people... the vast majority of the time are the results of just digging in and staying no matter what!

That is one of the secrets to having great strength in the Christian life... Abide in the Lord and let His words abide in you!

Elijah, go and dwell in Zarephath. Even though it literally may be next door to Baal, God knows where you will be and that is all that matters.

The Widow

1 Kings 17:10-11 (KJV)

10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. **11** And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

God used the unclean ravens to feed Elijah at Cherith and He used an unlikely widow at Zarephath to sustain him there.

-God had a widow that was going to feed and shelter him. Many commentators are at odds as to whether this woman was a true believer of Jehovah in the heart of Baal country or if she was just another person who God used to accomplish His purpose.

If she was a worshiper of Jehovah, then her witness is just as substantial as that of the three Hebrew boys who did not bow to Baal. She would end up putting her life on the line to help Elijah. She was serving God right in Baal's backyard.

If she was not a worshiper of Jehovah, you must believe that God ordained her to be just the person that Elijah needed to meet.

Widows in biblical times:

Often very poor

Lived lives that were very hard

Was at the mercy of any who might help

Was at the mercy of any who might try to harm

The dilemma of widows was something that had to be dealt with by the early church in Acts 6. Even in the Pastoral Epistles, Paul instructs Timothy and Titus concerning widows.

But just as God was testing Elijah, there was a test involved for this widow. She literally was in a place of scrapping the bottom of the barrel and God was putting

her in the crosshairs of a test. However, we all need to be reminded that in places of testing we also discover the power of God's blessing. No matter who you are... there will be a test.

Fetch me water... Bring me a morsel of bread... That is how the test looked to this widow. Generally, when you find yourself in a place of testing, a place that demands sacrifice, a place that requires going the extra mile, we can experience a host of choices:

Be selfish
Doubt and be discouraged
Rationalize and offer excuses

Or you can determine to pay the price no matter how high the cost seems to be. Far too often we cry out to the Lord to deliver us out of the test that He intends to walk us through it.

Misconceptions about this matter in the Christian life can be a great source of pain and misunderstanding that the devil would love to use to take advantage of us. You will have agonizing dilemmas, dark doubts, and closed doors to endure and none of it means that you are any less loved by God... it just means it is life!

The sooner we see that then the safer we become in our walk with God.

The Widow's Response to The Request

1 Kings 17:12-14 (KJV)

12 And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. **14** For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.

This poor widow's response to Elijah helps us to see far deeper into the situation. She tells him that she doesn't have a whole lot to give, in fact what she does have will only keep her and her son alive for just a few more days.

This widow had come to a place that most people will get to at least once in their lives. Her future was dark and she was not expecting to last very much longer than just a few more days. You have met more than a few people like that.

I only have just enough money to make it until Tuesday and payday is not until Friday.

I have just enough to take care of myself and my family there isn't any way to help anyone else.

I have lain awake at night wondering, wondering, wondering how this thing could work out.

I have lost my joy and my feeling for life because of the empty barrel and empty bottle.

I can give you a drink, but I cannot afford to give you a piece of bread.

In the face of all her explanation, Elijah could have just given up and said, "You're right! Maybe you are not the one God has in mind to help me." But that was not his response at all. He told her to "fear not."

"Fear not" is a phrase that is found sixty-two times in the Bible. Many of those times are when God was speaking directly to His people.

It came from God in when His servants were confused.

It came to others in times when they were fearful of the outcome of a situation.

It came when people were in physical pain.

It came when some needed a sense of direction.

It came when men were facing great adversity.

It came when a covenant between men was honored.

Now it is coming from a man that God has His hand on to a widow who can hardly see past her tomorrow. God's "fear nots" always reach beyond our tomorrows. Elijah promised her that the meal would not waste and the oil would not fail... until the Lord made a future provision for her.

Confidence in The Word of The Lord

1 Kings 17:15-16 (KJV)

15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. **16** And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.

She went and did... That is the key to the whole passage. This prophet whom God was smelting and refining had to depend on something that appeared to have very little resources. But just as Elijah had left the brook Cherith and obeyed. The widow obeyed and the prevailing plan of God was worked out.

Our obedience, just as Elijah's, hinges on God's hand of action in our lives. We come to believe, then to repent, then to baptism in Jesus name, and then receive the Holy Ghost. We also come to know that holy living, holy praying, and holy involvement in the Kingdom is a part of us bringing water and the morsel of bread.

In responding to the Word of the Lord, we are brought to a place of confidence:

A confidence to have access to God—Eph. 3:12

A confidence to do the things that we have been commanded to do—2 Thess. 3:4

A confidence that will remain to the end—Heb. 10:35

A confidence that can ask anything and He will hear us—1 John 5:14

Confidence and obedience will always be very closely related to each other.

Trust in The Lord

It would almost appear as to a running theme throughout these first three messages on Elijah... You must trust in the Lord... no matter what.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (KJV)

5 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. **6** In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Psalms 37:3-7 (KJV)

3 Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. **4** Delight thyself also in the Lord: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. **5** Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. **6** And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. **7** Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

Perhaps there is a lengthy trial that you cannot seem to shake free from in your life. We must remind ourselves that God's "prophet of fire" went through a 3 ½ year famine and drought and mixed all through it was the hand of God in action. If it could sustain Elijah, the same holds true for us!