

DEALING WITH THE DRY SPELLS **I Kings 17:1-16**

INTRODUCTION:

Consider the state of the nation of Israel during the period reflected in I Kings 17. It was the time of King Ahab and the wicked Jezebel: a terrible time; a time of blatant idol worship to the pagan Baal. People sacrificed children to the idol. They committed sexual sin in public worship of their false god. And among the people who were involved in these detestable acts were the Israelites: God's chosen people.

The entire nation was turned against God. The entire nation did things detestable to God. The Israelite King Ahab made the God of Israel angrier than all the previous kings of Israel put together! It was a crucial time in the history of Israel. It looked as if the worship of the true God might be completely eliminated in the northern kingdom. The land swarmed with the priests of Baal glorying in their sudden rise to power: insolent, greedy, immoral, and debased. The fires of persecution were lit, and began to burn with fury.

Of the entire population of Israel, only seven thousand remained who had not bowed the knee or kissed the hand to Baal. The few and the faithful were so paralyzed with fear and kept so still that Elijah, the prophet of God, did not even know that any faithful Jews existed. That made Elijah feel isolated, lonely, alone. Elijah felt like a foreigner in his home land. His spirit was parched for fellowship and encouragement but he knew of no one with whom he could find support. Elijah, whose very name was "Yahweh is my God", felt alone.

Can you relate? Have you ever felt like that? This message is for you.

Elijah lived during a time of great conflict between good and evil...and evil was apparently winning and gaining the upper hand. Desperate to see a change in his land, Elijah confronted King Ahab and told him that because of his wickedness, it would not rain in Israel. And it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. Later we learn it only rained when Elijah prayed to God to open the heavens and end the drought. Everyone else acted like the Lord was dead but Elijah knew that God lives. The Lord was the supreme reality of Elijah's life.

So Elijah told Ahab there would be no rain and then he went into hiding so the evil king would not murder him. Elijah's spirit was parched and now the land was parched, too.

God led Elijah to a hidden ravine where there was a small stream flowing and ravens came and fed him. Ravens brought him bread and meat in the

morning, and bread and meat in the evening and, unlike the rest of the land, Elijah had water to drink.

But then the stream ran dry! God led Elijah to the stream where he would be sustained and then the stream ran dry.

I have had times in my life when the stream ran dry. Have you? There are times when God allows us to be drained, our money to flow through our fingers like water, our health to wane, jobs to be lost, comfort zones to be violated, friendships to fail and our resources to dry up. Don't you wonder why this would be? Why would God allow this? In my experience and in my walk it is at the times of drought that I learn that I have no choice but to trust God and depend on Him. Typically, we do not learn dependence in the lush times...we learn it in the lean times.

So the stream was dry and the ravens may even have ceased their delivery service. What was Elijah to do then?

⁸ *Then the word of the LORD came to him: ⁹ "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." ¹⁰ So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" ¹¹ As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."*

¹² *"As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die."*

¹³ *Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son."*

(1 Kings 17:8-13)

Elijah had felt like a foreigner in his homeland and now, through the gracious generosity of a widow of Zerephath, he felt at home in a foreign land.

During the prolonged drought, Elijah had camped by a brook until the stream went dry. Then he was led to a widow who was feeding herself and her son on flour cakes fried in oil...until the flour bin was empty and the oil jug went dry.

There may be a message for you in this message today. How do you cope when you are going through a dry spell? Elijah and the widow of Zarephath can teach us what to do.

I. FOCUS ON WHAT YOU HAVE AND NOT ON WHAT YOU HAVE NOT
(Show two glass jars at this point – one ½ filled with flour, another ¼ full of cooking oil)

This is about as much flour and oil that the woman had. The prophet of God told her to go home and prepare food for him and then God would never allow her jars to be empty.

She had the promise... but she still had to make a decision. The decision was this: she could focus on how little she had in her jars... or she could focus on how much God had promised.

That's the same choice we face. We can look at how little we have or we can look at how much God has promised.

Someone has observed that we can always find a reason not to give God that which is rightfully His.

We cannot give generously in January because of the Christmas bills that are due.

We cannot give much in February because of fuel bills and car upkeep.

We can't give much in March because of income tax being due the next month.

In April we have to buy our spring wardrobe.

In May because too much rain threatens the planting season and we don't know what kind of harvest we may receive.

In June because too little rain threatens the crops.

In July because of vacation expenses coming up.

In August because of vacation expenses to be paid.

In September because of the children's school needs.

In October because of winter clothes and doctor bills.

In November because of the Thanksgiving trip.

In December because of the Christmas shopping.

There are always reasons for not being generous to the Lord and His work. As long as those worries keep us from giving to God – as long as we keep our focus on how little we have in our jars – we are never going to be able to receive much from God. We need to change our focus from what we have not, to what we have.

II. **WORRY MORE ABOUT WHAT GOD HAS TOLD YOU TO DO THAN ABOUT TELLING HIM WHAT TO DO**

The Bible tells us that God sent Elijah into hiding and supplied for his needs. First, ravens feed him in the Ravine of Kerith. And then God had a widow from Zarephath supply his needs.

Now, Ravens are described in Scripture as being an “unclean” bird. They are scavenger birds. They’re the type of bird that eat road kill. Ravens are scavengers. Now, I’m not real keen on eating food dropped in my lap by any bird so you can be sure I wouldn’t be excited about this particular kind of meal. This would be like possum dropped off by turkey buzzards!

But now, that’s not really what bothers me about this text. I mean, as long as it’s Elijah that has to eat the food and not me, why should I be upset?

I don’t have a problem with Elijah’s accommodations at the Ravine of Kerith... but when we get to Zarephath I have a problem. In Zarephath we find Elijah begging for food from a woman who has barely enough to feed herself and her son.

Just imagine that you have to ask one of the poorest families in the county to give you food for the next several months. Imagine knocking on the door of the home of a poor widow woman and her son (they are barely getting by, and living on food stamps) and telling them God wants them to feed you for a couple of years.

Now... I’m sorry... but that bothers me. Why would God do it that way? Why would God ORDER Elijah to go beg food from a poverty stricken widow? God could have sent Elijah to the home of a rich merchant or the castle of a King. Why impose upon a woman who has so little that she expects to starve to death in couple of days? That doesn’t make any sense. Unless... unless God wanted to teach us something here.

The Apostle Paul had a very difficult time in his ministry and he wrote that God told Him:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (II Corinthians 12:9-10)

You see, rich men and Kings have food to spare. If Elijah had gone to one of their homes for food, God wouldn’t have seemed necessary. Elijah would have been fed by the power and strength of rich people. There

would have been no need for God to show His power. But the way God did it, Elijah knew that God would have to provide or he would die.

When we pray, we are prone to tell God how to solve our problems. We tell Him how much the Illinois Lottery is worth this week. We tell him about that promotion and that raise that we think might help. We tell Him about the scenarios and the solutions that we've worked out that would surely fix the fix we are in.

But very often, while we are telling God how to do His job, we are not being obedient to what He has already told us to do. We disobey Him and then are shocked that things aren't working out for us. We should worry a lot more about what God has told us to do than about telling Him what He ought to do.

III. UNDERSTAND THAT YOU CANNOT GIVE MORE TO GOD THAN GOD CAN GIVE TO YOU

In addition to focusing on what we have instead of what we have not, and in addition to worrying more about what God has told us to do than telling Him what to do, we must also understand that we cannot give more to God than God can give to us. In II Corinthians 9, Paul wrote:

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” (II Corinthians 9:6-8)

Now I will tell you that this is a difficult concept for me to preach. I've heard way too many sermons about this passage that leave me with the feeling that some preachers believe we can buy God's blessings. If we give money to Him, He is obligated to give us more in return. I've heard preachers teach that if you tithe, God will give you a financial blessing.

But look at this text. Paul writes that if we give generously and cheerfully, God will bless us with abounding grace and will provide us with all we need to “abound in every good work”. There is no Biblical promise that we can give money and expect a monetary windfall. Giving to the Lord is not a financial investment strategy. But it is a way to enjoy an outpouring of God's grace and a flood of opportunities to minister to others. That is what Paul means by having our needs met and abounding in every good work.

And that was the experience of the widow in Zarephath. The more she gave to the work of the Lord, the more she was able to give to the work of the Lord. She wasn't blessed so she could be wealthy: she was blessed

so she could be a blessing. When you are using what you have for God, He will give you more opportunities to use what you have for Him...whether you are sharing from your treasure, your time, your talent, your testimony or anything else of which the Lord has made you a steward.

CONCLUSION:

Civilla Martin needed to learn the lesson of resting in God's care. Her husband, W. Stillman Martin, was a well-known Baptist evangelist. One Sunday in 1904, Mrs. Martin suddenly became ill and was unable to accompany her husband to his preaching assignment some distance away. As Mr. Martin considered canceling his trip, their young son said, "Dad, don't you think that if God wants you to preach today, He will take care of Mom while you're away?" Because of what his son said, Mr. Martin left home, preached at the church and several people accepted Jesus as their Savior. When he returned home, he found his wife greatly improved and busy writing a poem, which had been suggested by their son's words. That same night, Mr. Martin set his wife's words to music and created the hymn we use this morning as our invitation.

INVITATION: #692 – *"God Will Take Care of You"*