

1st Kings 17:8-24

Last week we were introduced to the prophet Elijah who came in on Israel like a flood, and now the place is drying up. He stormed into King Ahab's presence, said, "The Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word." and He turned around and walked out, God has an awesome plan in store for Elijah's life.

But before God can use him to the full of what He desires, there has to be a lesson or 3 that Elijah needs to learn and understand. Here he was pumped, poised, and primed for action, adrenaline was flowing, he was moving in *authority*, in a place of high *visibility*, was the acting voice of God to the nation *personally*, yet after his faithful approach to King Ahab God immediately positioned him in a place of *obscurity*, *anonymity*, virtual *invisibility*. What's going on? What was going on was that God was still preparing this lump of clay to be the vessel that He needed him to be if He was to pour Himself fully into him and out through him. Because when God starts moving in a person's life in a high profile way, there's a real temptation to puff up, be a bit prideful, start thinking you're all that. So generally speaking God's protocol towards those whom He's going to use in a way that lends itself to high visibility is to take them 1st through the school of hard knocks. In order to jar "self" out of them, so that they're real sure that what's happening in their lives has nothing to do with them, it's all Him, to God be the glory great things *He* has done. And they're then able to reflect the heart of God more accurately, in a spirit of humility, understanding their total dependency upon Him, they're no more special than anyone else, God is no respecter of persons. Now is the school of hard knocks limited to people that serve in positions of high visibility? No, God will do whatever He needs to do in each of our lives to maintain in us a spirit of humility, which equals usability. God wants to use your life, but it's not you, it's not me, it's Him. Remember, we're nothing more than earthen channels through which the water of life *could* flow, has the *potential* to flow, but apart from the Living waters of another source (namely the Holy Spirit) flowing into us and gushing forth from us, the potential for us to quench the thirst in the hearts and lives of others is concretely non-existent.

And these are the lessons that Elijah is learning as God gave to him His Word, and through that revealed to him His will, by which He's gleaned God's ways. all the while he's waiting at Cherith. You no doubt remember that "Cherith" literally means cutting. And that's what God has been doing in Elijah's life all these days, weeks, perhaps months as he's been there just waiting for God's direction for his life. Cutting on him, carving on Him, pruning and trimming him back, teaching him his need to depend upon the Lord for his every need, his daily bread, the water of life, it's all about Him, it's all from Him, He and He alone is the One who is able to meet our needs. So regardless of how God may use our lives, it's Him and Him alone who's meeting the needs of people's lives as He flows through ours. Before Mt Carmel comes the Brook Cherith.

Well, time has past, the creek's ran dry and Elijah is there just waiting, he's past the test, he didn't get impatient in the "wait" but he remained steadfast there at "cutting creek" until the Lord moved him on.

Vs8-9

God still has a plan to provide for his life, but now He's going to do it in a different way. And this is something else that's difficult for us to grasp. God leads us to a place, provides for our needs, but eventually that source may run dry, we get laid off, the company goes belly up, or whatever. But that doesn't mean God's done providing for you, it means that He's moving you on that He might meet your needs in a different way.

You see God will meet the needs that we have *practically*, but He may not always do so *predictably*.

God lead's Elijah by His Word away from the place of *cutting*, and we say, "Hallelujah" it's not necessary to stay there forever, there comes a time when we can move on. God says, "You're to go now to Zarephath." So what? What's that supposed to mean? Zarephath means "refinery." As in out of the frying pan and into the fire, the smelting process of liquefying metals, the refiners fire that melts down the metal, causing the impurities to float to the top that they might be scooped up and thrown away. "Elijah, I'm done cutting on you, carving on you, pruning you back, (for a season) but there's some refining that needs to take place. There's a deeper element of humility still that I want to work into you." So God leads him to Zarephath.

Now notice that Zarephath belongs to Sidon, which means it's not even Israelite country, it's Phoenician. And on top of that it's at the very heart of Baal worship, it's Jezebel's home town, notice vs 31 of Ch 16 (read). But God says, "Go, *there* for it's *there* that I'm going to provide for you." Notice that God had a very specific direction for Elijah's life and it was *there* that He was going to provide for him and meet his needs. It was His will for him to be there and so it was there that He would take care of him. And we take note of how it was that God had ordained to provide for Elijah. Through the hands of a widow, now we have to piece this together, a Jew (more than likely) being provided for by a Gentile would take a radical swallowing of the pride. But on top of that it's a Gentile *woman*, now obviously much of that stigma has been lifted in our culture, but you need to place yourself in the times. Even today for a man to be provided for by a woman is a bit challenging to the male ego, but then on top of that it's a widow woman. "A heathen, gentile, widow woman is going to take care of you Elijah." This is some major refining, believe me Elijah would've much more preferred to have his head bombed with bread via ravens. But before Elijah brings *rain*, he spends time in the *refinery*. The bible says, "*The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests the hearts.*" Prov 17:3

As the refining pot purifies the silver and gold as by heat, so does the Lord the in heart of His own. Allows things to heat up at times, that we might be broken down and refined.

Now we'll see in the next couple of vs that when he gets there she seems to be clueless as to what her place in his life is, yet we read here that she was *commanded* of the Lord. If you look up that word *commanded* in a Strong's concordance you'll see that the word *commanded* could also be rendered *appointed*, or *set in order*. God is saying, "I've gone before you and set in order, or *appointed* a widow woman there who will provide for you." God had made an appointment for her unbeknownst to her. And He does the same thing for you and for me all the time, there is no such thing as interruptions, simply opportunities that God has ordained for us. Now we can choose to be obedient or disobedient in the opportunity which of course determines whether or not God will bless your life in it or not. But by His own sovereign authority He ordains appointments for our lives, and the bible is full of such appointments. The woman at the well, Phillip (in the book of Acts) meeting up with the Ethiopian Eunuch, Peter in Acts 10 meeting with Cornelius, and on and on we could go, Apollos meeting up with Aquilla and Priscilla that Apollos might learn more accurately the way of God in his preaching and teaching the people. And our lives are full of appointments ordained by God as well, we just need to learn to seem them as such. So God's not only humbling Elijah, but He's reaching out to this woman, he's made an appointment for her to meet up with the man of God.

Vs10-12

Now understand that this is no small trek, it's 100 miles or so that God is telling him to walk, I mean he's really being stretched here. So the 1st widow woman he sees, he reaches out to, he's sending out the feelers so to speak, God is this the one?

And he asks for a drink of water, she responds in the affirmative, so he pursues her being positive that this is indeed the one whom God had appointed and so he asks for bread as well. The essentials of life, Living Water, and the Bread of Life, the Word of God and the Spirit of God, now she's all good with the water, but when it comes to the bread she has a bit of a problem. You see there's a drought in the land (guess who brought that on humanly speaking), and she's just out there getting a few sticks that she might prepare her and her son's last meal and just die. But in this we see 2 things (ultimately we'll see another) that God has appointed for us as by His own sovereign authority. #1 Our appointments with *servicing* are arranged by God, and #2 Our appointments with *sacrifice* are arranged by God.

As a side note something else we're seeing here is God sending His prophet with His message to the Gentiles, there's nothing exclusive about the gospel of Jesus Christ God wants His message sent out to all people, throughout all time, in every place. Jesus said, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,*" Matt 28:19 In Rev Ch 5 as Jesus stepped forward to take the scroll we read, "*And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.'*" Rev 5:9-10

Charles Spurgeon sites God’s sending Elijah to her as another example of how God chooses the base things of the world, the things that are despised, and the things that are not to bring to nothing the things that are that no flesh should glory in His sight. He says, “Electing love passes by the thousands of widows that dwelt in God's own land, and it journeys beyond the borders of Canaan, to cherish and preserve a heathen woman of Sarepta. (Or Zarephath) She was no Hannah. I read not that she had smitten the Lord's enemies, like Jael, or had forsaken the gods of her country, like Ruth. She was no more notable than any other heathen. The saved ones are not saved on account of anything they did; but simply because he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion.”

And notice where the sovereignty of God catches this poor woman, in the time of her greatest misery, at the end of all her personal resources, then God shows up. And that’s just like the Lord, He waits until we’re at the end of us, finally ready to give up on our own ability to preserve ourselves and then He’s able to enter the equation.

But to get back to our points, God appointed an opportunity for this woman to serve. Elijah saw her out there gathering sticks and said, “Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.” It’s interesting to think that the 1st opportunity that was given to her was one that took *from* her rather than gave *to* her. But it’s an opportunity to serve, and it wasn’t a big deal, he didn’t ask for much, just a glass of water. And this is the way God does things, He starts us out small, we have all these visions of grandeur, saving the world in Jesus name and all, but God starts us out in the small things. Because He’s looking for something and seeking to develop something in us; faithfulness. Paul said, “...*it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.*” 1 Cor 4:2

Jesus said, “*He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.*” Luke 16:10 Zechariah teaches us not to despise the days of small things, you see there are some who aspire to do great things, and others who aspire to do things great. And it’s not that it’s wrong to want to do great things for the Lord, but lets not get the cart before the horse, lets focus on doing the things that we’ve been given to do great, simply being faithful with whatever it is that’s been entrusted to us, and in that God will continue to reward your life. What’s the reward for faithful service? More service, did you catch that? As she was faithful to fetch him some water, she was also entrusted to get him some bread. You see as we grow and mature, we don’t get less and less to do, God gives us more.

It’s our privilege and to our eternal benefit to be all the more consumed in the things of the Lord. Now God’s not going to give us more than we can handle, sure we need to pray for the ability to prioritize, be wise time managers and all, but God will reward your faithful service with more opportunity to serve. And remember that God gave her this opportunity right in the midst of her everyday life. She wasn’t on staff at some church, she was just preparing dinner, mowing the lawn, or any other mundane task that ordinarily takes place in your life.

She'd done this countless times before with nothing significant taking place, but today God had made an appointment for her. And He does the same thing for us, we just usually see them as interruptions instead, remember the woman at the well, she wasn't interrupting Jesus' rest, God had ordained an appointment. She'd been to that well a thousand times, but that day God had arranged an appointment to quench her thirst permanently. God wants to work in the routine of your life, but we need to be sensitive to those divine appointments that He gives to us.

Vs 12-16

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary said, "By her obedience in feeding the prophet, the woman exchanged the uncertain for the certain, famine for plenty, death for life." and Again C.H. Spurgeon said in his application of the bin of flour and the jar of oil always having just enough to meet their daily needs, "You shall have just enough to carry you through your trials, but you shall have no faith to spare. You shall have just enough grace in your heart to keep you living day after day in the fear of God, but you shall have none to sacrifice to your boasting and yield to your own pride." and He said, "There will be nothing over, but there shall be none lacking. So take this for your comfort, as your days so shall your strength be; as your needs so shall your grace be; as the demands of your necessity, such shall be the supply of God's mercy." We read in Prov 30:8 "*Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches --Feed me with the food allotted to me;*" God is taking care of them day by day, meeting their needs, flour and oil, again the Word of God and the Spirit of God. "...*man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.*" Deut 8:3

But what's happening here, she was ok with the serving, apparently her well hadn't run dry, there was still a bit of water to go around. But when it came to giving him bread we've touched a sore spot, that went beyond service, that was sacrifice. It was all she had, but when we're faithful with the small things God rewards us with further opportunity, and often times it goes beyond serving out of our abundance, and it involves what, sacrifice. And that's the opportunity she's confronted with now, and she says in vs 12 (read).

So there seems to be a bit of a barrier at 1st with this idea of sacrifice, but I want you to notice that she says, "As the Lord your God lives." and What I want you to see in this is that she had never met Elijah before but somehow she recognized him as a servant of the God of Israel. Maybe it was simply the fact that he was a Jew (if in fact he was) perhaps it was the authority with which he spoke, maybe the mantle that he was wearing, or the countenance that he carried, I don't know. But the question is, are we recognizable to the non-believing world as servants of the Lord? Perhaps your countenance, the way you carry yourself or present yourself, the way that you speak sets you apart, there are a number things that people might be able to glean from, but are we distinguishable as believers? She knew immediately that Elijah wasn't a follower of the god of her world, but that He served a God that was altogether different than hers.

And as Elijah presented her with the opportunity to serve, there came next the sacrifice. All she had left was enough for one last meal for her and her boy, and she's called upon to sacrifice it. And God promised her that if she would make Him her priority, giving to him, not out of her abundance, but sacrificially, that He would take care of her life. Don't think that Elijah was being selfish here, there's a deeper underlying spiritual current and truism that's being drawn out here.

Because life functions on 2 primary plains, the horizontal and the vertical, the horizontal plain is my relationship with man, the vertical plain is my relationship with God. And we're constantly trying to balance out the horizontal plain, everything is in disarray and so I'm running over here only to throw things out of balance over there. But the key in getting my life in order horizontally is to get my life right *1st* vertically. Focusing on my relationship with God, and when I get that in order *He* is the One who takes care of every other detail of my life bringing balance to each of the respective details of my life. Jesus said it like this, "...*do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*" Matt 6:31-33 He didn't promise that the flour bin would be running over, but that there would be enough everyday to supply their needs. We want God to supply in abundance, but the bible doesn't say that godliness while seeking abundance is great gain. But rather, "...*godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.*" 1 Tim 6:6-8

And it would be real easy to turn this into a pummeling point of giving God your "bread" if you know what I mean. And don't get me wrong, we need to not be budgeting God in with our bills, but budgeting our bills around God, seeking Him *1st*, giving of our *1st* fruits. If she would've refused the sacrifice, her bin would've gone dry and that would've been it. But because she trusted the Word of God, somehow every time they needed to eat, they were able, because you can't out give God, He'll be a debtor to no man. We need to be giving to God of the *1st* fruits of our increase financially. But the sacrifice isn't limited to money, it can involve your time, your energies, your abilities, we're to give unto the Lord of *all* that we are, not a portion of what we are. Her faith in doing this is a radical thing, and Jesus commended her for it. He said, "*I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.*" Luke 4:25-26 Because she believed the Word of God and her life reflected it accordingly, God took care of her personally. Just like the other widow the Lord saw that day as she dropped a couple of mites in the offering plate. And He said, "She gave more than all the rest, because they gave out of their abundance (what they could afford) but she gave out of her poverty, sacrificially."

#1 Our appointments with *servicing* are arranged by God, and #2 Our appointments with *sacrifice* are arranged by God. And #3 Our appointments with *suffering* are arranged by God. The death of anyone is always an unlooked for suffering, all the more the death of a child. Earlier she'd seemed to concede that they were both going to die, but now that her son *did* the experience is much different for her than maybe she had anticipated. And I suppose the Job would be a great example of suffering according to the will of God, and an even greater example would be Jesus Himself. Most people respond just like her, they think that they're suffering because of some sin, perhaps this child was born out of wed-lock or something and so she thinks this is God's judgment. And I'm not going to say that bad decisions don't at times bring bad ramifications, but suffering is not always an indication of sin. Sometimes we suffer because of righteousness, because we've done the right thing. Or because we refuse to compromise, we maintain integrity in the situation causing people to turn on us. The bible tells us that if you want to live godly, you will suffer persecution. But as we mentioned Sunday morning, "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*" Rom 8:18

God is always working something far more glorious in us eternally, than anything we'll suffer temporally in this world. But often times on the other side of the suffering there are even benefits for us *in* this world. Notice

Vs19-24

Couple of things quickly, #1 When Elijah was preparing to do a miracle here we see that he didn't call for a tent, didn't rent a huge hall or stadium, didn't take a love offering. But in humility he took the boy aside in total privacy, not drawing attention to himself in anyway, he takes the boy out of the sight of others and begins to minister. Now there's much speculation as to why he stretched himself out on the boy 3 times, the bible doesn't say. We see the #3 and a resurrected son which rings a bell. But we do notice here that in the seeing this boys death turn to life, there was contact with him, and prayer *for* him. How are we going to see those who are dead in sin and trespass have life breathed into them? Contact with them and prayer for them, if you're never around a non believer how will you lead them to Christ? Contact, and prayer, but this woman's desperation was turned to her delight, her suffering was turned to joy. And though she'd seen God's faithfulness in the past with the flour and oil what was it that made a believer out of her? The reality of the resurrection of the only begotten son, when she saw *that* she said, "*Now I know* that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth *is the truth.*" It's the reality of the resurrected Son of God alive in you, moving in power through you that's going to make a believer out of them. Contact, prayer, and the reality of the resurrection, that's why Paul determined to know nothing among people other than Jesus Christ And Him crucified, because it's in the gospel, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ that the power of God to salvation lies.

Did you notice though that that which made for her sacrifice and her suffering, though initially they seemed like barriers, ultimately they served as bridges to draw her nearer to God. And those things that serve as burdens and barriers in your life are designed to do the same thing.

And we don't have time to really develop that, but I want you to see it, maybe another time we'll be able to develop it a bit. But those things that seem to be barriers God desires that they become bridges by which we're drawn nearer to Him.

The people that publish the Daily Bread devotional have a pamphlet called "Ten Reasons To Believe In A God Who Allows Suffering." I'll share them with you and with that we'll close.

#1 Suffering Comes With The Freedom To Choose

"A world without choice would be worse than a world without pain..."

#2 Pain Can Warn Us Of Danger

"Even the wisest among us tend to drift from good and from God until arrested by the... pain of [wrong] choices."

#3 Suffering Reveals What Is In Our Hearts

"Capacities for love, mercy, anger, envy, and pride can lie dormant until awakened by [suffering]. As gold and silver are refined by fire... the human heart is revealed and developed [in suffering]."

#4 Suffering Takes Us To The Edge Of Eternity

"Those who find... God through suffering have not wasted their pain."

#5 Pain Loosens Our Grip On This Life

"Each new pain makes this world a little less inviting... Pain paves the way for a graceful departure."

#6 Suffering Gives Opportunity To Trust God

"Job [the most famous sufferer of all time] was left to conclude that if God had the power and wisdom to create this physical universe, there was reason to trust Him when we [or our loved ones] are suffering."

#7 God Suffers With Us In Our Suffering

"No one has suffered more than the [Savior] who, when He stretched out His arms and died, showed us how much He loved us."

#8 God's Comfort Is Greater Than Our Suffering

"[The apostle] Paul learned that he would rather be with Christ in suffering than without Christ in good health and pleasant circumstances."

#9 In Times Of [Suffering], We Find One Another

"Each time we discover God's comfort in our own suffering, our capacity to help others is increased."

#10 God Can Turn Suffering Around For Good

"When everything in us screams at the heavens for allowing suffering, we have reason to look at the eternal outcome..."

It's the Roman's 8:28 principle, like Joseph said, man may mean it for evil, but God can use it for good.