

1 Kings 17:1-16 (New International Version)

Elijah Fed by Ravens

¹ Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe ^[a] in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."

² Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: ³ "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. ⁴ You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there."

⁵ So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. ⁶ The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

The Widow at Zarephath

⁷ Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. 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. ¹⁴ For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.' "

¹⁵ She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. ¹⁶ For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

Most of us have had the experience of calling a company with an issue that needed attention. Often you first have to navigate the options of the voice mail system. Finally you reach a live person, but has it happened that you were transferred from one department to another, and it seemed nobody had the authority to address your concerns? That's not a problem when it comes to the ultimate management of our lives. This text demonstrates

GOD IS IN CHARGE

- I. Directing what happens v1
- II. Caring for His people v2-6
- III. Fulfilling His Word v7-16

Our Lord God shows He is in charge as He is directing what happens even when He is opposed. He has the rank of supreme over all by virtue of His role as creator of the universe. However, the sinful human mind thinks that we're number one. We like to be in control. So often if we do yield that first spot, it is to other gods and not to the Lord. That was the problem in the nation of Israel at the time of the text. We are in the years of the Divided Kingdom. God's chosen people had split into two nations, with the northern tribes placing rivals to the family of David on their throne. Their history brought one bad king after another.

Ahab currently occupied the throne. God's summary of his rule was, "Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him." Along with his foreign wife Queen Jezebel, he promoted worship of Baal, the Canaanite fertility god. He had built a temple to Baal in his capital city of Samaria.

The Lord had something to say about that. His Word commands us to worship the true God of Scripture and to serve Him only. He does not want His glory given to another. So He took action to demonstrate who was in charge. He sent the prophet Elijah to the king with the message, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word." We know what happens when we have a lack of rain for a few weeks. Our lawns turn brown; our gardens and fields suffer reduced yields. If a whole summer is dry we see stunted corn and experience a shortage of hay. Did you notice that Elijah said there would not even be dew in the morning? That was valuable in an area that had a dry season. He said these conditions would prevail for a few years—it turned out to be 3½.

It wasn't just the idolaters who suffered those conditions. Faithful believers were also affected. The rain did not fall on their crops either. Yet God does not overlook His own. The text reports the special provisions He made for His prophet, but Elijah was not the only believer in the land. Later we learn there were still 7,000 Israelites who had not bowed to Baal. But it did not rain on their property and then skip the fields of their pagan neighbors.

Those kinds of times are when we must especially cling to His promises that He will never leave us or forsake us and that He has a loving purpose in everything that He permits. What good could there possibly be in such difficulties? For one, the times would remind the people of their dependence on God and their need for His blessing. None of us is self-sufficient. The believers faced the temptation in an idolatrous society to stray from God. The conditions would point to the worthlessness of the idol Baal. He provided no help. Troubles drive us to our knees in prayer. They can also clarify our relationship with God. We are to love God totally, in good times and in bad. Are you a fair weather Christian? Do you thank God when life is great but turn away when troubles strike? Wrestling with these issues are some of the positive developments that come to us in times of difficulty, of which we all have our share. Know that whatever happens, it is not without God's permission and that He is in charge.

When we talk about His will, we need to remember that the true God does not will evil. Sin happens daily in the lives of us all and evil people deliberately take action in their selfish disregard for others or out of active malice toward Christians. God does not prevent all difficulties. But what He allows He will direct for our good. He is in charge.

II.

Even then He is caring for His people. There is the matter of protection. He sent His prophet to a remote area, on the other side of the Jordan River, where he was alone beside a brook. Undoubtedly his announcement had not made him popular with Ahab. This location would be away from the king. The decree had called for a lack of rain "except at my word." If Elijah remained around the populated areas, I can imagine people would be constantly at his door saying, "Mr. Prophet, isn't it about time to turn on the spigot?" The second area God sent him was even outside of the land of Israel, although it was not far from the origins of Jezebel.

God's care includes provision. The brook supplied water for Elijah. It would have been fresh, with no chemicals added. Water is important for our bodily welfare. The other part of God's care was

unusual. "The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening." That is not an everyday occurrence. Ravens are scavenger birds. They look out for themselves. What they find, they devour. Because God is in charge He overruled their natural behavior and sent them to share with Elijah twice daily. The food sustained Elijah.

Note that God met Elijah's needs. He did not provide luxurious surroundings such as a palace with servants to attend to him. Nor did he have a gourmet diet. Was there a variety in the delivery of the ravens? We don't know if they alternated between wheat bread, white bread, rye and that fun-sounding kind, pumpernickel, or offered all the choices that await the customer at Subway or in the grocery store. We can't be sure there was a rotation of meats either—beef one day, pork another (nope, none of that under the Old Testament laws), then lamb or fowl, or how about the preparation—deep-fried, grilled, baked or broasted, or was it up to him to do the cooking? I'm sure the prophet did not complain. He was glad to survive. The questions lead me to think about how we view what we have. We are tempted to grumble despite receiving much more than the necessities of life. We have substantial homes filled with appliances, electronics and trinkets we think we can't do without. God has cared for us in great measure beyond the dreams of many other areas of the world and eras of history. We have reason for gratitude rather than grumbling about God's care.

III.

All the Lord does is part of fulfilling His Word. Sometimes in doing so He puts us to the test. The drought continued and conditions became severe. Even the brook where Elijah stayed dried up. But God already had a plan in place. He gave the instruction, "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." Zarephath was outside Elijah's homeland. I can imagine some questions would have crossed his mind. "Who would possibly care for me, a foreigner? How will I know which widow to go to? But the prophet also knew the Lord's care up to this point. He went as directed. When he arrived, he saw a widow outside the town gate. He initiated contact, asking her for a drink of water. As she went to fetch it, he posed a further test, asking, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."

The depth of that test was evident in the woman's response. " '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.'" She was at the end of her supply. It would provide only a last meal, and a meager one at that. Times were tough and as a widow she had no other means of support. There were few resources around. Now this stranger, an Israelite, asks to be served and to have it first. He ought to be helping her, not asking for priority treatment!

God's call to follow Him in faith does not ask for a leap in the dark. He provides a basis for our trust with His promises. So it was here as Elijah reassured her, "For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'" That promise would not mean much unless she knew the true God and the reliability of His Word. Even though we are outside His nation in a pagan land, she must have been a believer. Note that she used the special covenant name LORD, the name expressing His grace and faithfulness. She knew the true God. Here she showed faith as she did what Elijah requested. And she was blessed by the Lord. It happened exactly as God had promised through His prophet. Her provisions lasted. Some scholars estimate that it could have been as long as two years that she hosted Elijah. God had performed another miracle. Imagine the effect it exerted on her faith each day as she took out the ingredients from the containers yet never ran out of oil and flour!

The situation would also have an effect on Elijah. Here in a foreign land God had produced faith in this woman. If He could do that, then it was possible also in Israel. Elijah could continue his ministry with confidence. There was no need for him to worry about his survival. He could devote his attention to his work and carry out that work sure that God would bless him. Jesus made a similar point in today's Gospel as He sent out the seventy-two on a preaching mission but told them not to take supplies as their needs would be met.

You and I can be sure of the same truths that Elijah and the widow gained assurance of by their experiences. Through times of testing we come to know that we can rely on the Word and its promises of care for our needs. Set free from worry we can dedicate ourselves to serve the Lord. We can be content like Paul expressed in the Second Lesson. We won't demand miracles from God, but since we know His power and the fact that He is in charge, we are not surprised when they happen. We have a greater blessing than food or success as we work in His kingdom. Jesus reminded the 72

that He sent out, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Most of all God was in charge of the plan of salvation. He rescued us from our false worship, from the times we have failed the test to trust His Word, and from every other sin. He paid for them all with the blood of His Son, who also lived and trusted perfectly in His Father, fulfilling God's commands. Jesus won heaven for us. He will bless and strengthen you so that you receive His gift of eternal life.

We are glad God is in charge. Then our life and eternity are secure. No one else can provide that certainty. Trust Him always!