

Giving in a Time of Crisis

Missions Sunday 2022

Text: 1 Kings 17:8-16

Introduction:

1. Context of this passage:
 - The time of the divided kingdom and Ahab the wicked son of Omri was on the throne in Samaria. The previous chapter has this to say about the diabolical character of Ahab – “And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.” (1 Kings 16:33).
 - Elijah appears abruptly on the scene as a rugged, fiery prophet of God to denounce the sins of the nation. Maclaren writes, “The startling suddenness of Elijah’s leap into the arena, where he appears without preface or explanation, helps the impression of extraordinary force which his whole career makes. He crashes into the midst of Ahab’s court like a thunderbolt.”
 - Elijah pronounces a drought as a part of God’s judgment on Israel’s idolatry. This would last three years (18:1).
 - God then directs Elijah into hiding at the brook Cherith, a tributary of the Jordan river. There he is sustained for some time by water from the brook and food (bread and flesh) brought to him by ravens morning and evening.
2. Elijah is then directed by the Lord to a town called Zarephath in Zidon where He would use a widow woman to sustain him. In both the example of the ravens and the widow we see God using unique methods of providing for His profit.
3. We can learn some very helpful principles from this account on the theme of giving in a time of want and difficulty.

I. THE PROVIDENCE IN HER GIVING (VS. 9-10A)

The uniqueness of God’s ways are seen in how He directed this whole affair.

A. The Uniqueness of the Place (Vs. 9)

1. Elijah was directed outside of Israel to Zarephath in Zidon. Zarephath was a city in Lebanon, to the north and near the coastal city of Zidon. Jezebel, Ahab’s infamous wife was daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians. It was Jezebel who brought Baal worship to Israel and popularized it.

2. Right in the hub of Baal worship, the prophet God would use to strike a mighty blow to Baal worship in Israel was being hidden and cared for.

B. The Uniqueness of the Person (Vs. 9b-10a)

1. God directed Elijah, not to a wealthy individual of means but to a poverty-stricken widow woman for sustenance. She would be God's chosen vessel through whom He would work and thereby He would show Himself strong. God was putting together two needy people who had basically nothing between them!
2. It is a reminder that you do not have to be a man or woman of great means or talents for God to use. You just need to be available for Him to take and use!
3. The Providence of God is also seen in how Elijah's path intersects with the widow woman at exactly the right time. Those who walk the walk of faith learn to see the Providential Workings of God and the marvel of how God times things just right.
4. God's purpose was not only the welfare of Elijah but also the wellbeing of this Gentile woman. He showed her mercy by sending Elijah to her. She and her fellow countrymen were suffering the draught also on account of Israel's idolatry.

II. THE PROBLEM FOR HER GIVING (VS. 10B-12)

She was asked for:

A. What She Could Give Easily (Vs. 10b)

1. Elijah's first request was for a little water in a vessel. This was met with no objection from the woman. Being a coastal area, the wells there would be supported by the nearness of the sea which would help maintain the water table. (Butler)
2. It still says something of her character that she was willing to go to the effort of getting the water for a total stranger but the greater test was about to come. It is generally easier for us to give that which does not cost us too much personally, something we have readily available and in abundance. The real test is when God puts his hand on that which we have little of.

B. What She Could Give with Difficulty (Vs. 11-12)

1. Elijah's next request constituted a real test for this dear lady, a test that she would pass by the grace of God and reap the blessings of God as a result.
2. To give in a time of abundance is one thing but to give in a time of poverty and want is a real test of faith. The churches of Macedonia gave in a time of trial and poverty and provide an inspiring example. 2 Cor. 8:1-4 "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; (2) How that in a

great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. (3) For to *their* power, I bear record, yea, and beyond *their* power *they were* willing of themselves; (4) Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and *take upon us* the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. (5) And *this they did*, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.” Note some of the key truths that come out of the Macedonian example:

- a. The Grace behind their Giving (Vs. 1). God gave the Macedonian churches grace to give.
 - b. The Generosity of their Giving (Vs. 2). Though they were a persecuted and poverty-stricken people, they had the joy of the Lord and they gave generously of what they had. They “rejoiced exceedingly that an opportunity was afforded them of doing good to their more impoverished and more persecuted brethren” (Clarke).
 - c. The Willingness of their Giving (Vs. 3). They were willing to give according to their power (ability) and beyond their ability. Albert Barnes says this means they gave “to the utmost of their ability” and “beyond what could have been expected; or beyond what it would have been thought possible in their condition.” Adam Clarke adds, “In their liberality they had no rule but their ability; they believed they were bound to contribute all they could; and even this rule they transgressed, for they went beyond their power – they deprived themselves for a time of the necessities of life, in order to give to others who were destitute even of necessities.”
 - d. The Passion of their Giving (Vs. 4). It appears Paul and his associates were somewhat reluctant to take an offering from the Macedonian believers on account of their difficult circumstances but they pleaded earnestly with the Apostle and his team to be able to contribute. It again highlights the work God’s grace had done in their hearts that they could be so selfless.
3. Giving requires self-denial. It involves putting God and others before ourselves.
- a. Illustration: William Booth and Self-Denial week. In August, 1886, William Booth delivered a challenge at London’s Exeter Hall, encouraging support so that the Salvation Army could expand its ministries around the world. Commissioner John Carlton, profoundly stirred by the appeal, wrote on a slip of paper which was passed on to the Founder William Booth “By going without pudding every day for a year, I calculate I shall save 50 shillings. This I will do and will remit the amount named.”

With his usual keen perception William Booth saw in this proposed act of sacrifice on the part of one officer a means by which the Army might inculcate the spirit of self-sacrifice, raise money, and so be enabled to take hold of opportunities hitherto beyond its power. William Booth read this message to the congregation, "There is an idea here," he remarked. "While we ought not to ask our people to do without pudding for a whole year, I see no reason why we should not ask them to unite in going without something every day for a week and to give the proceeds to help on the work." Shortly afterward the first Self-Denial week was announced for the United Kingdom alone and resulted in the raising of about 5000 pounds.

- b. We say we can't give to missions but somehow, we manage to spend money on our favourite hobbies. We can't give to missions but we still eat at our favourite restaurants. We can't give to missions but we somehow manage to go through the drive through at Maccas. We don't have anything to spare for the work of missions but we can spend hundreds on Gumtree.
- c. "Today Christians spend more money on dog food than missions."—Leonard Ravenhill.

III. THE PROVING OF HER GIVING (VS. 13)

What a test was now before her as she was presented with this moment of decision. Would she trust the promise of the God of Israel?

A. The Faith in God Required (Vs. 13a)

- 1. Elijah exhorts her to "fear not". Fear over finances is the natural response rather than faith to trust God with our finances!
- 2. To surrender what we have for God's service to support men of God (the Elijah's) is never easy. It requires a walk of faith and trust in the God who can and will provide when we are faithful in the ministry of giving.

B. The First place for God Required (Vs. 13b)

- 1. Notice the order outlined by the prophet – "...make me thereof a little cake **first** and **after** make for thee and for thy son". This was not an exercise of selfishness on Elijah's part. He was acting under God's Divine leadership and this was a test from the Lord for the woman which if passed would bring untold blessings to her and her son.
- 2. The word 'first' is a reminder of the order in which we should approach the ministry of giving. It is the Lord first, ourselves second. Note the word 'first' in the following Scriptures:

- a. Prov. 3:9-10 “Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the **firstfruits** of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.” Tithing to the Lord is really that “first place” principle. The Lord gets the first 10th of our income as an act of obedience and worship. Mal. 3:8-10 “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye *are* cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, *even* this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it.*”
- b. Matthew 6:31-34 “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (32) (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. (33) But seek ye **first** the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (34) Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof.”
- c. Col. 1:18 “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the **preeminence**.” The word ‘preeminence’ simply means “to be first; to have first place”. Does the Lord have first place in our finances?

IV. THE PROMISE FOR HER GIVING (VS. 14-16)

The promises of God are available for those who will be a part of the ministry of giving and God’s promises are totally reliable and trustworthy!

A. The Features of the Promise of God (Vs. 14)

1. The lasting of the provisions (Vs. 14a)
 - a. God would work a miracle of multiplication. As they took flour and oil each day for their meals, it would not run out. It would be a day by day walk of dependence, witnessing God’s faithfulness to them each day. It was still only a little flour and oil but God made the little they had last.
 - b. Sometimes God does large displays of His power. Biblical history is punctuated with such miracles at key times within the purposes of God. But let us not forget to thank God for the small miracles day by day that are often unknown and unseen to a

wider audience but are known to those who walk the walk of faith.

- c. Those who are faithful in the ministry of giving get the joy of seeing God fulfill His promises in a personal and real way.
 - i. Luke 6:38 “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”
 - ii. Philippians 4:19 “But my God shall supply **all your need** according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” This would be one of the most claimed promises in the Word of God but so many forget the context. Paul has just commended the Philippian church (one of the Macedonian churches) for their ministry of giving to support his Gospel ministry. Read verses 15-18!
2. The length of the promise (Vs. 14b). This special provision from the Lord would last until the drought ended.

B. The Faith in the Promise of God (Vs. 15)

1. This woman was yet to witness the fulfillment of the promise but she believed it and took the step of faith, trusting that God would come through.
2. Faith is taking God at His Word and acting upon it. It is one thing to say we believe God’s promises, it is another thing to actually prove those promises with an actual step of faith.
3. Giving presents a choice. She could have refused but evidently God had done a work in her heart, making her willing to take a huge step of faith and trust God by giving him all she had left. A willing heart is so important in the ministry of giving:
 - a. 2 Cor. 9:6-8 “But this *I* say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth **in his heart**, so *let him give*; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may abound to every good work:
 - b. The offering for the tabernacle also highlights this principle as recorded in Exodus 35. Note particularly verse 5, 21-22, 29. The people gave so joyously and generously that they had to stop them giving! (See Ex. 36:5-6)

C. The Faithfulness of the Promise of God (Vs. 15b-16)

1. God was faithful to His promise! Elijah, the widow and her household ate for “many days”. How long this was we are not sure but it would have been a significant amount of time within the 3-year

drought period. Every day throughout that period, they saw God's faithfulness to keep His promises.

2. "according to the word of the LORD which he spake" = God is always true to His Word if we will but trust Him!

Conclusion: Will you commit to be a channel God can use in the ministry of giving, taking a step of faith and trusting God to fulfill His promises to provide all your need?