

**1<sup>st</sup> Kings 17: 7-16; “A Handful of Flour”, Message # 3 in the series –  
“Lessons from the Life of Elijah”, A Bible Study conducted by Pastor  
Paul Rendall on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017, for those gathered at his home.**

It was probably about a year after Elijah went into hiding by the brook Cherith that the brook dried up. For in the Hebrew, this phrase, “after a while”, literally is translated, “at the end of days”, and that phrase is often used to refer to a year’s period of time. (Bishop Patrick) The subject that we are looking at this evening is God’s provision for His people. In our last study we saw that God had provided for Elijah through His hiding him at the Brook Cherith; the brook which had supplied his need for water. And God also amazingly appointing ravens to feed him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening. He was also protecting him from being harmed from king Ahab. Now this evening we are going to see that God is not limited in the use of means; He can provide for Elijah just as well in Zarephath as He has at Cherith, and in the process He will show forth the glory of His provision for a poor widow as well. We want to consider together 1<sup>st</sup>, the glory of His provision in His electing love and grace. 2<sup>nd</sup> – The glory of His providing for our greatest needs in relation to the exercise of our faith. And 3<sup>rd</sup> - The glory of His provision never running out.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – The glory of God’s provision in His electing love and grace.** (verses 7-9)

We find here that after a while the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. God ordains all things after the counsel of His own will. If God says that there will be no rain, through the word of His prophet, then most certainly there will be no rain. If he says that it will be for some years, then God will uphold His prophet and all His people during that time. No rain means no water to feed the brooks and streams. And when God withholds, then they dry up. Turn with me over to Psalm 65, verses 1-10. “Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion; and to You the vow shall be performed.” “O You who hear prayer, to You all flesh will come.” “Iniquities prevail again me; as for our transgressions, You will provide atonement for them.” “Blessed is the man whom You choose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts.” “We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple.” “By awesome deeds in righteousness You will answer us, O God of our salvation, You who are the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of the far-off seas; who established the mountains by His strength, being clothed with power; You who still the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the peoples.” “They also who dwell in the farthest parts are afraid of Your signs; You make the outgoing of the morning and evening rejoice.” “You visit the earth and water it, You greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; You provide their grain, for so You have prepared it.” “You water its ridges abundantly, You settle its furrows; You make it soft with showers, You bless its growth.”

I want you to notice the theme of the Lord’s provision here; that God provides not only for the needs of His people, but for the needs of all flesh. “To You all flesh will come.” Why do they come? Because God is a God who hears prayer, it says in verse 2. Since God alone can provide for the needs of all mankind, then all mankind ought to seek Him. Here we are told that all flesh will come; even the Gentiles may come, and will come if they are chosen and called. Listen to John Gill on this: “This may be considered as a prophecy of the calling of the Gentiles, and of their calling upon God through Christ, and of their coming to God in his house, which was to be, and is, an house of prayer to all people, Isaiah 56: 7.” (end of quote) Here in the text that we are studying tonight, we find that God had commanded a widow, a Sidonian woman, to provide for him there. She was a person chosen of God.

And in verse 4 of Psalm 65, we find that God has made provision in His eternal decrees for people to come to Him, and approach Him. For in verse 5, it says that He is the confidence of all

the ends of the earth, and of the far-off seas.” In verse 4 it says: “Blessed is the man whom You choose, and cause to approach you, that he may dwell in Your courts.” Well, this woman was outside of the Old Covenant people of God, but she was nevertheless elect of God, and under the gracious care of the Almighty. Verse 4 of Psalm 65 says, “Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions, You will provide atonement for them.” For this particular woman of Sidon, God had provided atonement. In Jesus Christ atonement is provided for all kinds of people; Jews and Gentiles, people of His choosing, and it says that He “causes them to approach to Him”. God will always provide everything needed for the redemption of those whom He has chosen. This is pictured so very well by Psalm 65, verse 9 which says – “You visit the earth and water, You greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; You provide their grain, for so You have prepared it.” Yes, this is speaking of God’s providing physical water, but in this case it is picturing the greatness of the provision of the spiritual water of life which He provides through our Lord Jesus Christ for all of His chosen ones. He calls it “rivers of living water” in John 7: 38. Psalm 46: 4 and 5 – “There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God.” “The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved.”

For the sins of Ahab and the people of Israel, the physical rain was withheld for three and a half years. There were still 2 and a half years left of this judgment of God. Nevertheless God would provide for the physical and the spiritual needs of His elect daughter in Sidon, and through her, Elijah the prophet would be provided for as well. Turn with me over to Luke 4, verses 24-30. “Then Jesus said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country.’” “But 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.” “And many lepers were in the Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” “Then all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff.” “Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.”

Let us understand that Israel was worthy of this great judgment of having no rain, because of her idolatry. The people in Jesus’ day thought that He needed to prove Himself to them; that whatever was done in Capernaum, He should do for them. But Jesus proceeds to instruct them on God’s choice of this woman from Zarephath. She was the only widow that Elijah was sent to, and God would have it that way. Israel of that day was not walking in His ways and they deserved the judgment of their land, the withholding of rain. And the Israel of Jesus’ day was deserving of His judgment of withholding from them the miracles which they desired Him to do to prove Himself. God’s judgment comes upon men and nations on the basis of their works. Salvation is on the basis of God’s grace and His merciful choice. Electing love and grace are always shown, and the spiritual needs of His people always provided for. The basis of election is not man’s works, or man’s expectations of what is fair or right in their own eyes. Let us glory in this fact; that God’s ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts, and let us humble ourselves in the sight of God to realize that it is only God’s mercy that any of us should be chosen to everlasting life. When He chose, before time began, He also then goes on, in the time of their life, to provide for the all the needs of His people and takes cognizance of how He shall supply them.

Romans 8: 32 – “What then shall we say to these things?” If God is for us, who can be against us?” “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” He who did not spare His own Son, that is the Father, but delivered Him up for us all, (not all mankind, but His elect people), how shall He not

with Him also freely give us all things. If God freely gives all things to all men, then all men would be saved. But we see here that God only gives all things related to salvation to those whom He has chosen. Look up verse 29 – “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” Those are the persons whom the Father freely give all things.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Let us glory in God’s providing for our greatest needs in relation to the exercise of our faith.** (verses 10-15)

“So he arose and went to Zarephath.” “And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks.” “And he called to her and said, ‘Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.’” “And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, ‘Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.’” “Then she said, ‘As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.’” Now, we need to pause here and see what Elijah was asking this woman to do. He was asking her to obey his word to her as a prophet. He politely requests that she would share with him some of the little that she had. She only had a handful of flour in the bin, and a little oil. She communicates her fear to Elijah that this will be her last meal. But he tells her not to be afraid, but to go ahead and bake him a little cake first, and then make some for herself and her son.

This is always the way it is for the Christian when it comes to giving. They may be afraid that if they give generously or give a regular tithe to the church that they will not have enough for themselves. But let us see what this woman did with the little that she had. We know that she did have saving faith, because of what she says in verse 12 – “As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar.” She only has this small amount of food, and she fears that in preparing this meal it will be her last, and she will die from want. These were legitimate fears. But we need to see that God was testing her faith. Would she be able to see Him as able to make a table in this wilderness? To exercise faith and give some food to Elijah in this difficult situation, where she was scared that she would not have enough for herself and her son, for even another meal, this was what God was asking her to do. Would she believe that He could provide for her, and would provide for her? Would she believe that God would bless her with enough to live on, if she would give Elijah some of the little she had left? Yes, she would!

You see, there was an obedience of faith to God’s word through the prophet to her which this dear lady needed to render, if she would truly glorify God, and enjoy His much needed provision. And we should apply this to ourselves as well. There is an obedience of faith which we need to render to God to glorify Him and enjoy His much needed presence and provision in our own lives. Let’s think about a couple of verses which pertain to us who are New Testament Christians. Matthew 6: 31-33 – “Therefore 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.” And Luke 6: 38 – “Give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom.” “For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

God would have each of us learn how to show hospitality and to give, to help in the work of the Lord and to help support the man who is speaking God’s word to us, and even help missionaries as well. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 9: 6 – “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” “So let each one give as he

purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.” Surely God is looking at our hearts and minds to see if we will sow bountifully or sparingly. This woman, although she had little, sowed bountifully. And she was to come to understand that wonderful reality of reaping bountifully in the situation that she was in. Because –

**3<sup>rd</sup> - She came to know the glory of His provision never running out even in the whole time of this drought.**

Elijah tells her in verse 13 – “Do not fear, go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son.” And then He gives her the promise of blessing and provision, which he had heard from the Lord. Verse 14 – “For thus says the Lord God of Israel: “The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.” Verses 15 and 16 say: “So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days.” “The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah.” If she would receive the great blessings that the Lord would give to her, she must receive and obey the word of this prophet of God. This she did, by faith, and she was rewarded for her obedience. She was willing to share because she knew God would have her to share with His prophet. She also took it to heart that there was a promise of God attached to the request; that what she had in the bin and the jar would not run out. But it appears that she was more focused on honoring the Lord with what little she had, and giving help to God’s prophet, than anything else.

This is a very wonderful principle which we find reiterated by the Lord Jesus in the New Testament. Turn with me over to Matthew chapter 10, verses 40-42. We have here Jesus’ sending out of His twelve disciples to preach the gospel of the kingdom. And Jesus says to them – “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” “He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward.” “And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward.” “And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.” Now, I hope that you can see here that what this woman was doing was that she was “receiving” the prophet Elijah. In her receiving of Elijah and his word to her, she was actually receiving Christ. In a personal and formal sense, she was receiving God’s appointed messenger, and in doing so, she would be blessed in every way.

She did not exactly know how it would be that God who would daily replenish this little supply of hers, but He did miraculously do it. God would see to it that the supply would not come to an end as long as there was not rain on the land. Let us also see that God will do the same for us in the midst of our trials. The apostle Paul says in Philippians 4: 10 – “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.” “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound.” “Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.” And in verse 19 he says – “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” “Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever.” “Amen.”