

“Grace for a Gentile Widow”
1 Kings 17:8-16
(Preached at Trinity, June 20, 2021)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The first thing we find in this passage is Elijah's faith and obedience. God had told him to flee from the presence of Ahab and that He would provide him food and water during the drought. Elijah obeyed.
 - A. Each morning and each night ravens brought Elijah his bread and meat. He drank from the brook. All was well for a season until the brook dried up. This was a deadly turn of events. God told him to relocate to Zerephath.

Of course, we know this was all by God's design and sovereign purpose.
 - B. Zerephath was located about eight miles from Tyre. This was the land of Jezebel's father, the king of Tyre, the land where Jezebel had been raised. It hardly seems reasonable to flee from Ahab only to fall into the hands of Jezebel's father, and the center of Baal worship.
 - C. This entire section is compressed. There is so much information that is withheld. We aren't given any details regarding Elijah's thinking; how he responded to the dried up brook. It would have dried up little by little. It was a great test of faith. How many days did it take to go from a brook with a strong flow of clear water to a muddy trickle. Was he wondering what he would do if it dried up? These are the thoughts that go through our minds. It's one thing to trust when we can see bright days ahead. It's another when there are dark clouds ahead. How do we respond when our bank account is running low, our health is declining, dark clouds are on the horizon. Will God still provide? We can imagine Elijah's thoughts.

The brook did indeed dry up and he received word from God to go to Zerephath. We are told of his immediate obedience. Without delay he went.
1 Kings 17:10 NAU - "So he arose and went to Zarephath"
 - D. Elijah didn't know what God had in mind. He just obeyed.

Too often we wrestle with God's commands. We consider options to bypass God's Law, justifying ourselves all the way. Elijah simply obeyed.
 - E. God promised Elijah a widow would care for him.
1 Kings 17:9 - "behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you."

Perhaps a wealthy widow with a large home. Perhaps she had servants to cook savory meals. This was not God's plan.
2. The story continues to unfold quickly and we are immediately introduced to the Gentile widow. We aren't told how long it took Elijah to travel to Zerephath or how he was sustained on the journey. He just suddenly arrives at Zerephath and meets the widow. She was destitute and at the point of death. She was in the domain of Baal, and yet Baal had been unable to sustain her. She had come to the end of her resources and was prepared to die. She was gathering a couple pieces of wood in order to cook a final meal for her and her son. Such is the nature of the gods of this world. They make promises but leave us empty.

3. Elijah arrives at Zerephath sees this woman and asks her for a drink of water. That was a great request during this time of severe drought. Incredibly, Elijah also asked for a portion of the final meal she was preparing for herself and her son. In fact, Elijah asked for the first portion of the meal.
4. Elijah's demands from this poor widow may seem selfish and unreasonable, but it wasn't to Elijah. In the entire passage he is gracious and compassionate to the woman. But he wasn't ashamed to ask of her. He was trusting God, taking Him at His Word. But it was essential that the widow also trust the Word of God. This was a great test of the widow's faith – of her trust in Yahweh, Elijah's God. Elijah's God was to become her God. Elijah tells her, "Do not fear; go, do as you have said"

I. First of all, this passage is a picture of genuine faith

- A. It was not just a request from Elijah. It was a request from God.

1 Kings 17:14 NAU - "For thus says the LORD God of Israel"

1. The Word of God is the foundation of our faith.
Faith comes from the hearing of the Word of God.
2. Faith is confidence that God will do what he has said.
3. It was prefaced with the same words that God often gives to His people:
Verse 13 - "Do not fear"
The phrase "do not fear" or "do not be afraid" appears over 50 times in Scripture. It is most often given when there is good reason to fear. And they are usually followed by words of great comfort.
Luke 2:10 - "But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people"
Mark 6:50 NAU - "for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid."
4. But notice, Elijah doesn't immediately give her the reason not to be afraid. She was to step forward in obedience even when she couldn't see the outcome. And don't forget how Elijah looked—he was rough and hairy.
2 Kings 1:8 NAU - "*He was a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins.*"

- B. This is the nature of faith. Believing in the unseen.

Hebrews 11:1 NAU - "Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

1. God was asking everything from her
 - a. She had only enough flour and oil to prepare a small portion for herself and her son before they died. It was their last supper. Elijah comes to her and tells her to provide for him.
 - b. God is saying to her, "Give me all you have, and I will give you all you need."
2. She believed and obeyed. She "went and did."
1 Kings 17:15 NAU - "So she went and did according to the word of Elijah"
3. She gave her best for God's work, feeding God's prophet before herself and her son. She would only do this if she trusted the provision of God.

C. God was true to His Word

1 Kings 17:16 NAU - "The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke through Elijah."

1. Notice, God did not provide everything all at once. He didn't suddenly provide several barrels of flour and numerous jugs of oil. Rather, each morning when she went to take out the flour and oil to bake bread for the day it was there. Enough and no more. God was more than sufficient for her daily need.
2. This is our prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." When Israel was in the wilderness God provided sufficient manna for a day and no more, except a double portion for the Sabbath. It was a test of faith—gather sufficient for the day, and no more. Trust in God's provision.
3. God has proven Himself faithful over and over in my own life. For five years we lived day by day. God said trust Me and I will provide. He was more than sufficient.

II. The widow of Zerephath was a foreshadow of the New Covenant where God has granted unto the Gentiles repentance unto life

A. Like all gentiles she would have been an outcast from God's covenant promises

Ephesians 2:11-12 NAU - "Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision " by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands-- ¹² *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."

1. Few really consider how desperate we are in our alienation from God. We were all hopeless and undone.
2. The widow of Zerephath was a gentile pagan. She would have been a worshipper of Baal.
Ephesians 2:1-2 NAU - "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."
3. And yet, God changed her heart. She took Elijah at his word as he spoke the Word of God.

1 Kings 17:14-15 NAU - "For thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain on the face of the earth.'" ¹⁵ So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for *many* days."

- B. This Gentile widow was also one more indication of God's judgment upon Israel.
1. Jesus drew attention to this widow and it infuriated the Jews. It was because He was condemning their hardness of heart and commending the gentiles.
Luke 4:25-26 NAU - "But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; ²⁶ and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, *in the land* of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow."
 - a. Jesus says that there were many widows in Israel, many who might have provided help to Elijah. Yet, God sent Elijah to this Gentile widow.
 - b. It is yet another reminder of God's work of grace in sending Jesus to the Gentiles. Israel had corrupted itself in idolatry and Elijah was forced to flee. Elijah turned away from Israel and turned to the Gentiles. It was a beautiful picture of the work of Christ.
 2. The Jews would not have Christ as their Lord and King and so God has turned to the Gentiles.
John 1:11-12 NAU - "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name,"
Acts 13:46 NAU - "Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles."
Acts 18:5-6 NAU - "when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul *began* devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. ⁶ But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood *be* on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."
Acts 13:47 NAS - "For thus the Lord has commanded us, 'I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, That You should bring salvation to the end of the earth.'"
 3. This doesn't mean God has utterly forsaken Israel. They remain invited to enter God's promise through faith in Christ.
Romans 11:11-12 NAU - " I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. ¹² Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!"
Romans 11:23 NAU - "And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again."

III. The grace of Divine election

- A. It is always amazing the great extent God goes through to gather His own
1. Consider Paul's missionary journeys – he would arrive at a pagan town where he faced hatred of the Gospel and threats upon his life but some would believe. Why? Why were the Bereans more willing to believe than those in Thessalonica? Why was Paul directed specifically to Philippi?
 2. What about Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well. He directed His steps intentionally to meet her.
 3. Jesus said there were many widows in Israel, but they were left in unbelief. How many widows were there in Sidon or Zerephath? Why this particular widow?
This is the marvel of sovereign grace.
- B. God is still saving His own today
1. Not a single one of the elect will be lost
 2. God moved upon this widow as He did with Lydia at Philippi.
Acts 16:14 NAU - "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul."
 3. God opened the heart of this widow. She heard God's Word and believed

Conclusion:

1. This passage should fill our hearts with great praise. That God has displayed His wondrous grace upon people from every tribe and nation. His redeeming grace extends even to the Gentiles – even to you and me.
2. And this passage should give us great comfort. If God tells this impoverished widow who was formerly a worshipper of Baal, "fear not" does He not also comfort us? If God is mindful of even the flowers in the field, how much more is He mindful of you?
Matthew 6:30 NAU - "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith!"