



Welcome to our Sunday Service (2/05/21)

Elijah and the Widow at Zarephath

Prepared by Mervyn

God forgave my sin in Jesus' name.
I've been born again in Jesus' name
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share his love as he told me to.

Chorus

*He said 'Freely, freely you have received,
Freely, freely give.
Go in my name, and because you believe
Others will know that I live.*

All power is given in Jesus' name
In earth and heaven in Jesus name
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share his power as he told me to.

God gives us life in Jesus' name
He lives in us in Jesus' name
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share his peace as he told me to.

By Carol Owens



Today I'd like to look at a short story from the Bible that has been really blessing me recently, and it's found in 1 Kings Chapter 17 verses 1-16

Elijah Announces a Great Drought

1Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe 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."

**Happy Birthday to Anne and Pauline
who both have birthdays on 8th May**



God bless you both!

Father God, we worship you today because you are so great, we praise and thank you for all you have made, and done for us through Jesus.

We come to you humbly, and in a spirit of repentance for all the things we do that are not in line with your best for us and other people.

Forgive us we pray.

We open ourselves to you today and ask that you would fill us with your goodness, and as we freely receive, help us to freely give.

We pray for those in our church who are unwell and struggling with pain at the moment, we ask that you would be especially close to them and touch them with your healing power.

In Jesus name we pray. **Amen.**



Elijah Fed by Ravens

²Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: ³“Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. ⁴You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there.”

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



Elijah and the Widow at Zarephath

⁷Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. ⁸Then the word of the LORD came to him: ⁹“Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.” ¹⁰So 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?” ¹¹As 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 olive 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.”

¹³Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴For 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 sends rain on the land.’ ”



¹⁵She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. ¹⁶For 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.

There is much that we can unpack from this story and I have 5 points I’d like us to engage with today. Five anchors if you like, to hold us steady as we journey through life.

1, Hard times don’t take God by surprise 2, God can meet your needs through surprising ways

3, God knows the details of your situation 4, We receive as we give

5, God has resources that never run out!

So let's look briefly at each point.

1, Hard times don't take God by surprise. In the story God appoints Elijah to announce that there is going to be a draught. This is terrible news for the people and means that a time of suffering and a struggle to survive is on the way. The prophecy doesn't even have a definite timeline, only that the draught will last a few years. Like us now, the people were facing a period of uncertainty.

Why does God permit hard times? This is a huge question that many great minds have grappled with and many books have been written. There is no simple one line answer, however we can see that hard times develop our characters, refine us, often bring us closer to God, reset our priorities, push us to develop and discover new things, reveal hidden attitudes, and take us to new levels... the list goes on. In comparison a life of comfort rarely produces such a list!

I was struck recently when reading in [Acts 27:23](#) that God sent an angel to Paul with a message of hope while he was in a boat in the middle of a storm at sea. I found myself thinking, why did God bother to send an angel, why not just stop the storm? But, God obviously had some purpose in permitting the storm to continue and for the boat to run aground. With hindsight we can see his plan unfolding and lessons being learnt.



In the story we're looking at today the draught was instrumental in disciplining an ungodly king who was leading the nation of Israel away from the commandments of God and into the worship of Baal, a false god known as the god of fertility, but also designated, 'The Lord of rain and dew'. God specifically warned that as a result of their turning away to this so-called god, there would actually be no rain or dew in the land. You can read about the big spiritual showdown between the prophets of Baal and Elijah in [1 Kings 18](#).

With God, hard times are never meaningless and like the angel sent to Paul in the middle of the storm he promises to never leave us or abandon us during the hard times. In his grace and wisdom he is able to use these times to produce good fruit in our lives. Sometimes, in his wisdom, God doesn't remove the storm, but takes us through the storm.

2, God can meet your needs in surprising ways! I love the concept of the ravens bringing Elijah bread and meat morning and night. I deliver meals on wheels once a fortnight which is an enjoyable job to do, but this is meal delivery on a whole new level... meals on wings!



I wouldn't particularly like to eat meat delivered by a bird, but desperate times call for desperate measures and this supply of food was a lifeline for Elijah. Jesus tells us to '[consider the raven](#)' in [Luke 12:24](#); '[they do not sow or reap, or store in barns, yet God feeds them](#)'. Elijah is powerfully reminded as he receives food from the raven that as God feeds the raven, so God feeds him. If Elijah had been too proud to receive this provision he would have died. It's good to be reminded sometimes that we are ultimately dependent on God for all things.

We see here that God is not restricted to conventional methods to provide for us, but has all creation at his disposal to achieve his purposes and that he is willing to be creative to solve a problem. This is wonderfully freeing and gives us a green light to be inventive and creative as we face jobs that need to be done and problems that need to be solved.

There have been many times that God has provided just what I need from an unexpected place at just the right time that leaves me with the knowledge that God knows and cares about the tiny details of our lives.

3, God knows the details of your situation. This story is a reminder that God knows the whereabouts of every person, understands the details of their situation, their back-story, and brings along new characters to move their stories on. In our story today we have a widow with a young son, in desperate need and down to their very last bit of food. Jesus mentions this specific widow in [Luke chapter 4](#) when pointing out that God's care was not confined just to Israel, but he had seen the desperate plight of this particular widow living in Zarephath and reached out to her.



In the same way that God knew all about this woman, he also knows all about you, your back-story, the attitudes of your heart and the struggles you face. In the same way, he cares for you too. Interestingly, God didn't come along and just fill her larder with food, but daily gave her what she needed as she lived along side Elijah. Often God works in the same way with us on a day to day basis, particularly when difficult circumstances mean that we can no longer anticipate or plan for the future. This can be frustrating for us at times as we tend to like to see our needs met further out into the future, however it's by being daily dependant on God that our relationship truly grows and we learn to trust him and become confident in his provision.

If you're feeling frustrated that you can't see a clear path into the future, take time to explore everything that God is giving you at this very moment. There's a strong chance this exercise will lead you into a place of peace. This may sound really trite if you are grappling with physical pain, but throughout the Bible we often see that people who went through the most awful and testing of experiences arrived at places of even greater blessing, such as Job, Joseph and Jesus. Also, at the end of [Hebrews chapter 11](#), those who kept their faith in the face of awful suffering are held in the highest honour. It's in the furnace of suffering and desperation that our faith is proved to be genuine, or alternatively a fair-weather faith which gives up when things look bleak.

4, We receive as we give. This is an incredible spiritual principal which goes against human nature and our natural instincts. Elijah tells the woman to use up her last ingredients to make some bread for him first, then make some bread for her son and herself! Is he being utterly heartless, taking a vulnerable widows last ingredients? We read that God had singled out this woman to provide food for Elijah and instructed him to specifically seek her out to fulfil the purpose of God in her life. The woman has a choice, she can keep all that she has for herself and have one last meal for herself and her son, or she can trust what Elijah says. We know from the story that she chose to trust, and give all she had left to this man of God. Miraculously, each day there was just what she needed to feed the three of them. We may not have much to offer, but when God requires us in our vulnerability and place of limited resources to give what we have to him, he will prove faithful, in spite of how it looks.



Fear tells us that we need to keep hold of everything we've got and grab all that we can otherwise we may not have enough, but faith is open handed and trusts that if we are willing to share what God has given us, he will give us more. There's a beautiful story from Corrie Ten Boom's book 'The Hiding Place'. She and her sister are experiencing the horrors of Ravensbruck concentration camp during WW2. They had somehow obtained a tiny bottle of vitamin drops which Corrie was keen to keep for her frail sister Betsie to use, but Betsie was keen to share the vitamin drops with other prisoners, which they did. Miraculously this little bottle kept producing drops, day after day to the point where an awed little group of prisoners would daily gather around to watch the drops fall onto the daily rations of bread. The bottle continued to provide drops until the very day a new supply of vitamins were smuggled in! Corrie and Betsie told the story about Elijah and the widow to the other prisoners, and they took great comfort from this sign that God was with them in the most awful of experiences in a German concentration camp.



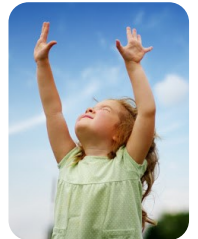
Jesus took this principle to a whole new level when a young lad was willing to give his small, packed lunch for one to Jesus who then multiplied it to feed five thousand! On another occasion Jesus said, "Freely you have received, freely give." [Matt 10:8](#). This principle does not only apply to physical things but also to things such as forgiveness, grace and mercy. May we be a community of people who are quick to forgive, knowing that God has forgiven each of us for so much.

5, God has resources that never run out! This story is a wonderful reminder that God has resources that we know nothing about, and that his resources never run out. God is not confined to any of our physical limits, quotas or even the time frames within the laws of nature. If we focus just on physical resources, we can become fearful that these resources will run out. The physical earth is finite, for example some fish stocks are critically low. There are many things to concern us, and it is really important to be good stewards of the planet that God created as a place where we could live and get to know him. However, as we see in this story, God is not limited by the resources that can be seen and measured.

Within this story there are two different levels of reality at play. The physical reality clearly says... ‘There is only enough food for one more meal’, and yet God’s bigger reality 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 earth.”** 1 Kings 17:14. One reality based in fear, the other based on faith in a promise from God. I think that each of us at different times in our lives have fear based realities that say one thing, and faith based reality that says something else!



A couple of weeks ago in our online service we were thinking about “our perceived truth” based on our feelings and perspectives of the world and “God’s truth” that is based on who he created us to be and how he see’s us. The woman in this story chose to surrender her perceived truth - she was one meal away from death - to God’s truth which was that her needs were all in hand and led to great blessing for her and her son. May we too have the courage to surrender our circumstances to God’s provision and enjoy living in his truth. What is his truth? That he knows our circumstances, however frightening or uncertain the future may seem, he reaches out to us and calls us to give everything we have and all that we are to him, assuring us that he *is* enough, and *he* will provide all that we need to fulfil his plans for our life.



Let’s recap our five points...

1, Hard times don’t take God by surprise - May the hard times we face bring us closer to Jesus

2, God can meet our needs through surprising ways - Let’s open our hearts and eyes to the many different ways that God blesses us

3, God knows the details of our situation - Remember that God knows all the details of our lives better than we do!

4, We receive as we give - May we live in an open handed way, freely sharing what God has given us and passing on God’s forgiveness and grace as freely as God gives it to us!

5, God has resources that never run out! - Let’s live confidently knowing that God always has something else up his sleeve! God bless you!

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of The Holy Spirit, be with us all now, and evermore. Amen.