

10-22-17

THE EXAMPLE OF THE WIDOW OF ZEREPHATH AND MISSIONS GIVING

I Kings 17:8 And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,

I Kings 17:9 Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.

I Kings 17:10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.

I Kings 17:11 And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

I Kings 17:12 And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

I Kings 17:13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

I Kings 17:14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

I Kings 17:15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

I Kings 17:16 And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

Here we have an account of difficult times. There was a drought which brought great poverty and even death to many. It was not so easy in those days to feed your family. All it took was for one year of drought and many many people died because of the drought.

Elijah was on the run. He was being persecuted of Ahab and Jezebel. God however told him to go and sojourn with a widow lady in a city of Zidon called Zerephath. God told Elijah that He is going to sustain him there.

He goes into the city and he sees the little widow lady gathering some sticks. He asks for the woman to fetch him some water, and she does. Then he asks the widow to make him something to eat.

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I Kings 17:12 And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

Now here is a tough thing. As far as this little lady knew she was gathering together her last meal. There was no hope for any more. As far as she was concerned it was the last thing she was going to eat.

We have yet to experience anything like this in our lifetime.

It is hard to imagine what it was like when the first settlers came to this country and many starved to death because of lack of food.

It is hard to imagine what it is like in many nations today that do not have what we have in our nation.

I was told that many people were starving during the great depression, and they would travel through the country begging for work. Farmers would let these people build the stone walls we see dotting the countryside just for food. You talk about working for food, that is what people did back then. My Grandfather used to walk the railroad tracks picking up coal that fell from the coal trucks to help heat his parents house. During World War I he was sent out by his parents to collect dung and sold it for to make gun powder for dynamite.

In my lifetime we have not experienced the poverty and heart aches that previous generations have experienced. Still around the world many still suffer hunger and famine.

Imagine now, this little widow lady, all hope was lost for anything to get better. She was planning to die and figured her son also would die. Then along comes this preacher, this prophet and says, make me a little cake to eat.

Most people would say drop dead!

Most people would tell him to get lost.

She does protest but obviously recognizes Elijah to be a prophet, because she says. AS THE LORD THY GOD LIVETH.

I Kings 17:12 And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

I Kings 17:13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

I Kings 17:14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

But Elijah says, THUS SAITH THE LORD, DON'T FEAR.

MAKE ME A CAKE FIRST.

Now there was only enough meal for her to make one cake and Elijah says make one for me first.

The miracle was that is exactly what she did. She believed the prophet when he said:

I Kings 17:14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

I Kings 17:15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

I Kings 17:16 And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

Now this story is a great lesson of faith.

The truth is that a lot of people are afraid to step out and obey and trust the Lord. Why is that?

Why do we fear losing what we are going to lose anyway? Is there anything in this world we can keep forever?

Maybe this little widow lady realized she was going to die anyway. What did she have to lose?

Yet so many people don't think that way. That is exactly the way I thought when I gave my life to the Lord. I realized everything that I was living for I was probably going to get in this life but as surely as I would receive it so too I would lose it.

I am getting older now and I am seeing many of my colleagues dying off who stayed in the world and lived for the world. I am assured more than ever that I made the right decision.

As Jim Elliot that young missionary who was martyred for his faith said: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

This morning I want to use what this little widow lady did as an illustration for and motivation for us to consider our obligation to put God first in our giving.

NOTE A FEW PRINCIPLES OF GIVING AS WE MEDITATE ON THIS STORY ABOUT THE WIDOW OF ZEREPTHATH.

***I. OUR GIVING IS ONE OF THE GREATEST EVIDENCES OF OUR FAITH
THIS IS THE ULTIMATE TEST (Giving To His Servants Is Giving To God).***

1 Kings 17:10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.

1 Kings 17:11 And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

1 Kings 17:12 And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

1. Note, the difficulty that the servant of God may have had in asking this widow to give:

***A. Go fetch me some water to drink....
... then he added bring me also a morsel of bread...***

These were hard times and in hard times people were dying of starvation.

Truth is I don't find it easy to preach on giving. The reason why is because I am not out to get from you. I especially would find it hard to tell someone who is going through tough times financially to give sacrificially like this widow lady. Yet, this is exactly what Elijah did, and it turned out to be the salvation of this woman's family!

I often wonder what would happen in our country if we fell into hard times like this.

I see the way people are today and just shake my head.

I've seen neighbors get irate about a little bit of water going on their property or a little inconvenience. What do you think that same neighbor would do if he was starving to death?

Everyman is out for himself.

Elijah was a stranger to this lady and the Lord told him he commanded her to sustain him. Don't think it wasn't hard for the preacher to ask her, but Elijah knew if she did what he said she would herself be sustained. In making reference to this incident when our lord said.

Luke 4:25 But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land;
Luke 4:26 But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.

Luke 4:27 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.

There were many widows who perished in the famine in those days.

Now this one thing I know and believe.

I believe if you obey the Bible in the area of giving God will bless you also.

Malachi 3:10 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.

There are few times in the Bible that God says, prove me, or He gives any kind of promise in regards to obeying Him..

God doesn't say, if you do or don't do this or that I will pour you out a blessing. For most of His commandments He doesn't make any such statement, except when it comes to obeying and honoring your parents and tithing.

Ephesians 6:2 Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise;

Malachi 3:10 is a commandment with a promise.

In the area of tithing, sometimes it is hard to preach on giving when I know people are having a tough time financially.

YET WE MUST TELL PEOPLE TO DO WHAT GOD HAS SAID.

B. This Widow Lady Was Making What She Had Thought Was Her Last Meal:

No greater giving than to give your all.

What would we do if there was a depression in our country??

Could we still give?

C. Giving To God's Servant's Is Giving To God:

Is God in need, Is God hungry, thirsty, etc.?

Matthew 25:34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

Matthew 25:35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

Matthew 25:36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Matthew 25:37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

Matthew 25:38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

Matthew 25:39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

Matthew 25:40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Missions month is a time when we think about the need of worldwide missions, when we refresh our hearts and minds about the need to support preachers who have given their lives to spread the gospel around the world. These are God's Elijah's.

II. GOD EXPECTS US TO GIVE TO HIM FIRST.

FEAR NOT: How could he ask such a thing of her when people were dying all around her and she had nothing more than a handful of grain?

Why didn't Elijah say go ahead, eat your little meal and then God will supply more for you to give to me?

It never works that way. God expects us to give to Him by faith and then watch and see how He blesses.

I Kings 17:13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

Faith believes God when there is no outward sign that it is going to work out. She believed God even when the outward evidence did not show that she would benefit by doing so.

God says to give the tithe to Him. Giving that tithe may seem a waste, after all, just think what you can do with that money.

That's just it. This little widow lady was without hope until Elijah said trust God and watch Him work.

Best way to survive into the year is to be like this little widow lady and give to God first and trust Him for a miracle.

Giving to God is just like this:

Tithe.

Missions giving same thing.

How do we give to God first?

We do so by scheduling the first activity of the week to honor God in his house with His people.

We do so by writing the first check out to him, in the form of our tithes and offerings, on this the first day of the week.

Elijah said make me a cake with that little measure of meal that you have left. Dedicate that to the Lord first and God will sustain you.

III. GOD WILL TAKE SPECIAL CARE OF THOSE WHO SUSTAIN HIS SERVANTS.

I Kings 17:14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

I Kings 17:15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

She and her House Did Eat MANY DAYS!!!!!!

The most important thing to God is that His work and His workers are cared for.

Matthew 10:40 He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

Matthew 10:41 He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

Matthew 10:42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

How can you do something nice for God?

Will you visit Him? Will you send Him a birthday card?

How will you do some nice thing for God?

You do it by doing an act of Kindness to his servants, prophets.

This is why we have a missions giving program.

I do not believe that tithing is giving to God. According to the Lord, the tithe belongs to Him. He decides to keep the first 10% and then gives you the rest. In fact when someone does not tithe God calls it robbing Him. How is it Robbing God if it is yours? You can only rob someone by taking what is not yours but is in fact theirs. If I take money out of my bank account and decide to take my wife to dinner with that money, could it be said I am robbing you? NO. NO.

But if I take money out of your wallet and then decide to take my wife out to dinner with the money I took out of your wallet it could be rightly said, I have robbed you.

Malachi 3:8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

Now when you give to our missions budget this is something you are doing from the heart. This is giving. It is not commanded it is something you are deciding to give over and above your tithe.

God loves a person who gives like this.

The Bible says God loves a cheerful giver. II Cor. 9:7

IV. GOD WILL DO SPECIAL THINGS FOR THOSE WHO HAVE SHOWED KINDNESS TO HIS PROPHETS.

I Kings 17:15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

I Kings 17:16 And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

I Kings 17:17 And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him.

I Kings 17:18 And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?

I Kings 17:19 And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed.

I Kings 17:20 And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?

I Kings 17:21 And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.

I Kings 17:22 And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

I Kings 17:23 And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.

I Kings 17:24 And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth.

One of the Blessings of supporting the work of God is that you enlist the prayer support of God's servants.

When you are in need and you cry out to God that is one thing but when God's preachers cry out to God for you that is another.

We need the prayer support of God's prophets.

Those who know how to get power from the throne of God.

Why do you think that Elijah had such a burden for this widow's son?

Was it not that she was supporting him all that time and now he wanted God to bless her.

V. APPLICATION:

You risk nothing to trust the Lord by faith.

The Bible says,

II Corinthians 9:7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

Look what you should want more than anything is to gain God's favor in your life. The way we do that is by trusting Him, obeying Him and putting Him first.

Will you be like the widow at Zerephath?
Will you trust God to sustain his servants?
In this way you can enlist their prayer support.

God blesses our faith. This little widow lady really had to have faith to believe Elijah and it paid off.

**1. Two ways you do this.
First in giving the tithe.**

Malachi 3:8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

Malachi 3:9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

Malachi 3:10 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.

Malachi 3:11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 3:12 And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.

2. In Giving Above the tithe to missions and special needs of other men of God.

Missions month.

Command: Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me **BOTH** in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

The only way we can be a witness BOTH in our local area and around the world at the same time is by partnering up with others who are willing to go places where we cannot go. THIS IS WHAT FAITH PROMISE MISSIONS GIVING ISA ALL ABOUT.

Application: The greatest favor Elijah did for that widow lady was when he asked her to bake him a little cake first and then trust God that there would be some for herself!

Will you be like the widow of Zerephath.

Every year I look to increase my missions giving by \$5.00 a week. That is not a lot but it is at least something more each year. Truth is my income is not going up, but I am trusting God to bring the increase as only He can.

Each day as the Widow fed God's prophet, God continued to feed her.

II Corinthians 9:6 But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

II Corinthians 9:7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

II Corinthians 9:8 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:

II Corinthians 9:9 (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever.

II Corinthians 9:10 Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;)

II Corinthians 9:11 Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.

II Corinthians 9:12 For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God;

II Corinthians 9:13 Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men;

II Corinthians 9:14 And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you.

II Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

Notice, when the widow's son got sick the prophet was right there to pray for her needs. Paul was excited about this ministry of giving.

I Kings 17:20 And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?

I Kings 17:21 And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.

I Kings 17:22 And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

He did not write this because he wanted anything of the church for himself. He was excited about seeing this church that he planted at Corinth manifest the fruit of caring and giving to the necessity of others who needed their help financially. He wanted to see the grace of God working in there hearts.

He said himself.

Philippians 4:17 Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

This is the purpose of the church.

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

Hebrews 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

It is the Job of the Pastor to provoke God's people in the church to love and good works. THIS IS WHAT WE NEED TO DO!

There are two ways to try and fulfill the great commission, which is missions.

#1 We can be witnessing ourselves.

#2 We can support others who are going places where we cannot go.

This is what Paul wrote about in II Cor. 9.

We should do both.

There are people that you can influence for Christ that no one else can ever influence.

A kind word, an act of kindness, a little light shining in a dark world that is what our good works should be to those who are around us!

There are other people who are out there dedicating their lives to win people to Christ in remote places in this world. We need to support them with out financial help.

THIS IS HOW WE DO OUR PART TO FULFILL THE GREAT COMMISSION TOGETHER.