

**1st Kings 17: 7-16; “The Glory of God’s Provision”, Message # 3 in the series –
“Lessons from the Life of Elijah”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on May 9th, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

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”, is literally translated, “at the end of days”. And that phrase is often used to refer to a year’s period of time. (Bishop Patrick) What we want to think about at this time is the way that God provides for His people. We have seen 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. God was also protecting Elijah from being harmed from king Ahab.

Now, as we think together about these verses, I want to show you the glory of God’s plans to provide for the needs of His people. We are going to see that God is not limited in the use of means. He can provide for Elijah in Zarephath, just as well as He did 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 1st, the glory of His provision in His electing love and grace. 2nd – The glory of His providing for our greatest needs in relation to the exercise of our faith. And 3rd – The glory of His provision never running out.

1st 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 which had been supplying Elijah’s needs. It dried up because there had been no rain in the land. It will be good for us to remember that 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 meant 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; that is, even the Gentiles may come, and they 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 our text, we find that God had commanded a widow, a Sidonian woman, to provide for him there. She was a person chosen of God.

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, we should understand from this, that even though this woman was outside of the Old Covenant people of God in Israel, God still chose her and

set His eternal love upon her. As such, she was 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 also pictures for us 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. Our Lord 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." It was for the sins of Ahab and the people of Israel, the physical rain was withheld for three and a half years. And 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."

We need to understand the greatness of the sin of idolatry that Israel was guilty of. She was worthy of this great judgment of having no rain, because of it. 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 great miracles which they desired Him to do, to prove Himself to them, that He was the Christ.

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 are always provided for. The basis of election, however, is not of man's works, or man's expectations of what is fair or right in their own eyes. And so we need to glory in this fact; that God's ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts, and we need to humble ourselves in the sight of God, and to realize that it is only because of God's saving mercy that any of us should be chosen to everlasting life. Since He chose His elect before time began, He will also then go on, during the time of their whole life, to provide for the all of their needs. He will take cognizance of how He will supply them with the necessities of life.

Romans 8: 31 and 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 most certainly be saved. But we see here that God only gives all things related to salvation to those whom He has chosen. Romans 8: 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 to whom the Father has freely given all things.

So let us glory in God’s Electing love and His having chosen us unto salvation. If He did not choose, if He did not call, if He did not justify, if He did not glorify, then no one would be saved. But He has chosen to show mercy to some, even to many, that the glory of His provision of grace might be seen, and shown to unworthy sinners such as ourselves.

2nd – 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 it was that 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 sometimes the way that it is for the Christian when it comes to giving. They may be afraid that if they give generously; if they 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 so she fears that in preparing this meal it will be her last, and that she and her son will, soon after they eat, die from want. These were legitimate fears. But we need to see that in this, God was testing her faith. Would she be able to see Him as able to make a table in this wilderness for her and her son? For her to exercise faith and give Elijah some of her food in this difficult situation where she did not know where her next meal would come from after this one, this was what God was asking her to do. Would she believe that God could provide for her, and that He would provide for her? Would she believe that God would bless her with enough to live on, even if she would give Elijah some of the little she had left? Yes, by faith she would do this very thing.

So you see, there was an obedience of faith to God’s word which she exercised. This widow mother believed the word of God, through the prophet to her, and in this way she would truly glorify God. She would honor Him by obeying His word to her. And in doing that, she would thereby enjoy His much needed provision. We can apply this to ourselves as well. There is an obedience of faith which each of us needs to render to God in order to glorify Him. If we do obey His commands by faith, we will enjoy His much needed presence and His much needed 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 to 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.

2nd 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 –

3rd – 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 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.”