

The Power of God's Love to Save
1 Kings 17:8-16; Matthew 15:21-28
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The love of God for His elect is not a mere wish or desire. The love of God for those He has chosen to save does not simply ache for the one loved when assailed by those who would besiege his/her soul. The power of God's almighty love actually accomplishes salvation from the guilt and condemnation of sin, and from the enemy of one's soul, Satan. The power of God's sovereign love crushes the proud heart of man. God's love opens what no man's love can open (the very gates of heaven to an undeserving sinner) and closes what no man's love can close (the very gates of hell to the same undeserving sinner).

What moved God to elect from all eternity certain sinners to save (sinners that deserved His just wrath and condemnation)? His sovereign love. What moved God to give up His only Begotten Son to bear His righteous wrath against the sins of His people? His sovereign love. What moved Christ to willingly go to the cross to bear the everlasting shame and condemnation of His Church? His sovereign love.

Why is God's sovereignty in His electing love and in His redeeming love so despised by the world and even by so many who profess to be Christians? It is for no other reason than that man wants to be lord and master of his own salvation in choosing God on his own terms. The sovereign love of God crushes the pride of man and exalts the glory of God alone.

From our text today, we shall witness in the life of Elijah the undeserved love of God that was set upon one chosen widow out of thousands within an idolatrous land. The main points from our text are in the form of two questions: (1) Why Did God Choose This Poor Widow (1 Kings 17:8-13)? (2) What Did God Promise This Poor Widow (1 Kings 17:14-16)?

I. Why Did God Choose This Poor Widow (1 Kings 17:8-13)?

A. As the water in the brook, Cherith, dried up from the drought which the Lord had brought upon Israel, it meant not only hardship upon the wicked idolaters in Israel, but likewise hardship for Elijah (and those who were faithful to the Lord). For those who had broken covenant with the Lord, God meant the drought for their judgment; but for those who (like Elijah) were standing faithful to God's covenant in worshipping and serving Jehovah alone, God meant the drought for their sanctification. God delivers us from the evil of afflictions and trials, but not from the sanctification of afflictions and trials.

B. The word of the Lord (whether personally or simply verbally) once again came to Elijah as we see in 1 Kings 17:8-9. There were various excuses Elijah might have made about the word of the Lord to him.

1. "Lord, that is a great distance away (100 miles), and I must travel through the hot, dry desert to get there." God was not most concerned for his comfort, but for his love and submission to His will.

2. "Lord, Zarephath in Zidon is the very belly of the beast of Baal worship. It is the father of the wicked Jezebel that rules there." It is the Lord that prepares a table for Elijah in the presence of his enemies. It's not that you should love to be in the presence of them that despise your God and hate His truth. However, the Lord places you in those situations at work to be His witness to His glory in word and deed. Whether your co-workers come to Christ or not, that is not up to you. You are to let Jesus Christ be heard and seen in your life.

3. "Lord, this is embarrassing to now be dependent for my daily needs from a woman—even a widow." God's plan in taking you through the various temptations, falls, trials, and hardships is to crush your pride in boasting about what you have accomplished, so that He gets all of the glory. He uses many

different ways to humble us.

4. "Lord, what about my own choices and decisions in making plans about what would be pleasing to me?" God's commands are not options or suggestions, but are His sovereign and authoritative will for your life. In seeking God's will for your life, begin with loving His commandments. If you don't love God's will as revealed in His commandments, you are deceiving yourself that you would love to know His will about whom to marry, what career you should pursue, or where you should live. You may be curious about the future, but that is all.

C. Let us now consider the widow that God chose and commanded should care for Elijah during the remainder of the drought.

1. The widow was not an Israelite (1 Kings 17:10). She was not from among God's people with whom God had covenanted to be their God and to give unto them the promises of salvation found in the Covenant of Grace as administered through the Mosaic ceremonies. She had not those means of grace nor had she heard a prophet of God prior to the coming of Elijah. She was outside the Visible Church. She lived within an idolatrous, heathen nation. Why did the Lord choose her?

2. This widow was poverty-stricken (1 Kings 17:12). She did not have an inheritance from her husband that supplied her needs. She had an only son for whom she provided, and she had reached the very end of her ability to provide either for herself or for him. She was completely destitute. She was down to her last small meal. No one cared for her. No one pitied her. She was all alone with her son in her misery. Her and her son faced death apart from a miracle. Why did the Lord choose her?

3. The Lord Jesus mentions this same poor widow in a sermon that he preached in His hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:25-26). For what purpose did Jesus bring up this poor widow? Jesus was illustrating to the hometown crowd that God's love in election is not dependent upon nationality, gender, or finances. The Jews had come to look upon their national/familial relationship to Abraham, Moses, and David as being their salvation. They were privileged, but those privileges apart from faith in the promises of salvation would only bring a greater condemnation upon them. Jesus teaches that God went outside the Visible Church of the Old Testament and brought salvation through Elijah to a Gentile widow in a Baal worshipping country who had absolutely nothing to offer God by way of privileges, covenant blessings, or means of grace. God simply chose an unworthy sinner who deserved His condemnation. She was not seeking the Lord. But God in His sovereign love sought her and chose her out of thousands of widows or hundreds of thousands of people to be saved (physically and especially spiritually). She was among those chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began (Ephesians 1:4-6). She was one of the sheep for whom Jesus would suffer to pay for her sins (John 10:11,26). She was one for whom the Lord came to seek and to save (Luke 19:10). She was one to whom God would give life and faith by His sovereign love and grace so that she would lay hold of the promise of God and be saved (Ephesians 2:8-9).

4. Neither this poor widow nor you nor I have any reason at all to boast in what we have accomplished in being saved by the living God. Just as this poor widow was totally helpless to save and rescue herself and her son, so is every one of us. The Bible says we are all dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:4-5). It was not you that chose the Lord, but He that chose you to live and to believe in Him (Ezekiel 16:6; John 1:10—"who were born not of the will of man, but of God"). She was penniless, destitute, having nothing to preserve her life apart from a miracle of God's free love, mercy, and grace. So you and I have nothing to offer God to rescue us from death—no righteousness and obedience acceptable in His sight due to our sin (Isaiah 64:6). This poor, penniless, destitute heathen widow was chosen by God's sovereign love and free grace alone. Her condition is the condition of us all before the Lord Jesus makes us alive, gives us faith in Jesus Christ, and justifies us in His sovereign love.

D. What was the evidence of God's work of grace in granting to this poor, destitute widow faith in

the Lord God? She obeyed the command of the Lord through Elijah, even though there was nothing more difficult for her to do by way of her motherly love and instincts (1 Kings 17:15). Was there ever a more difficult command of God for a mother to obey? This was similar to the command of God to Abraham to offer his son, Isaac, on the altar. What faith in the Lord God! This was a confirmation of her faith in the Lord. This command to prepare first a meal for Elijah before even her own dying son was not selfish on Elijah's part, but was the test God put before her to confirm for her and us all that she was trusting in the Lord God and not in that handful of meal and small portion of oil to preserve her one more day. She was putting all her confidence in the living God.

1. Dear ones, the evidence of your faith in Jesus Christ is not your mere profession that you believe in God—so does the devil and his demons (James 2:13). It is your obedience to God's commandments out of a heart of faith, love, and submission to the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (James 2:26; John 14:15).

2. When you fall into sin, loving Christ and keeping His commandments is rising again by His grace, repenting, and renewing your covenant and obedience to the Lord (Proverbs 24:16). The evidence of your election is your faith in Jesus Christ alone, and the evidence of your faith in Christ is your loving obedience to the commandments of the Lord.

II. What Did God Promise This Poor Widow (1 Kings 17:14-16)?

A. God did not promise her that she would have all of the food and provision she needed all at once or that God would immediately fill up her house with all of the provisions to last the remaining years of the drought.

1. He certainly could have done so had He chosen to do so, but the Lord did and usually does provide His grace to us for the daily needs we have so that we might be daily communing with Him in prayer, daily depending upon Him by faith, daily looking with certain expectation to His promises in hope ("Give us this day our daily bread" Matthew 6:11). At the end of every day, the meal in the barrel and the oil in the pot were all gone. The temptation for the widow to question and doubt was present (especially initially). But no doubt as time passed and the widow day after day, week after week, month after month saw the daily provision of the Lord, her faith was enlarged to know the faithfulness of God to His promise. Does God's faithfulness in saving you, providing for you, preserving you, healing you, and causing you to persevere in hope even when you do not immediately see the answers to your prayers, cause your faith in Him to grow or does it not matter to you at all?

2. It is easy to become self-sufficient and proud when you believe that you have your treasures stored up for years to come and need not depend upon anyone—not even upon the Lord (Luke 12:19-21). That is not to say that you should not save for the future (Proverbs 6:6-8). But when you get out of debt and gain a surplus, do not forget who is the source of all of the spiritual and material blessings that are yours. And put not your trust in the surplus that you have, but in the Lord. Be like the one leper that returned to give thanksgiving for his healing and not like the nine that forgot to do so. They cried out loudly to the Lord for healing, but once they were healed they were off and running.

B. God did not promise the widow that she would eat like a king.

1. The Lord promised her that she would have meal and oil every day until He brought an end to the drought. This was her manna that came to her every day, and miraculously filled her barrel with meal and miraculously filled her jar with oil every day. The same food daily until the drought was completed. This is where the temptation to covet and be discontent enters. Forgetting that every crumb of food and every sip of water is God's gracious gift, we cast our heart and eyes elsewhere.

2. Dear ones, what does it take to make you happy and thankful for what you have? Must God give you all for which you pray before you will be filled with joy and contentment? If you truly understand

that you deserve nothing good from God's hand, but only His judgment, you will be thankful for all that you have rather than coveting what others have or holding so tightly to what you have for fear you will lose it. If you are not thankful even for the little God so mercifully gives to you, you will not be thankful for more. If you are thankful for the little, the Lord is more likely to bless you with more.

Dear ones, the widow's faith was not in what she could see with her eyes (because there was not much there to see). Her faith was not in her health or in what she deemed would best preserve the life of her son for even another day. Her faith was in the omnipotent God who promised that He would provide for her and her son—not only in that which could be eaten, but her faith was in the Bread of Life who gives everlasting life. This Syro-Phoenician widow's faith in the omnipotent God reminds us of another Syro-Phoenician mother who came to Jesus with the need of her daughter being set free from a demon (Matthew 15:21-28). Biblical faith is not turned away from the Lord Jesus Christ, but pursues His omnipotence, faithfulness, and mercy against all obstacles. The trials God sends are not for your destruction, but for the refining of your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. You cannot on the one hand plead with the Lord to grow you in faith and on the other hand despise the means He uses to do so. The means God used in the case of the widow of Zarephath was not easy or pleasant. The means God used in the case of the Syro-Phoenician mother was not comfortable nor what she would have chosen. The same will be true in your life and mine. God has not deserted you who trust Him. He is growing you because He loves you and is more concerned with your sanctification and character than with your comfort. Just as His sovereign love chose and redeemed you, so it will sanctify you.

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