

**1<sup>st</sup> Kings 17:8-16**

8 Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 9 "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." 10 So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." 11 As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." 12 But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." 13 Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. 14 For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth." 15 She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. 16 The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

Today's lesson is on food insecurity, actually the worst case scenario of food insecurity, starvation. It is also about divine intervention and shows that God blesses the faithful. Elijah is Israel's greatest miracle worker since Moses. He is empowered by God to battle against the forces of Baal, the Canaanite god of storm, rain, fertility. The story lies within a realm of conflict between God, the God of Israel and the god of the Canaanites. The time is one of great suffering which is due to an extended drought which causes extensive famine. It is during this time of great distress that Elijah emerges as a great prophet.

The Scripture is an interesting story of despondency, divine intervention, and blessing. I would like to emphasize just how desperate the situation is. The widow has run out of food. All she has is her very last bit of food; a handful of meal and a little oil. What can you do with that? Not much; maybe a snack; maybe just a bun.

To put this in a modern perspective she has less than a sandwich, there is no meat, no slice of tomato, no condiments. Let's make sure we understand what she is doing. She is gathering sticks so she can cook her very last bite (not even a meal) so she can lay down and die of starvation. Now here comes Elijah in a diametrically opposed position. He says "bring me some food, a small piece of that bread in your hand." To which she responds "man, I ain't got nothing, only what I can carry in my hand and a little bit of oil. Heck, I'm headed home to eat and die. Elijah is like "don't worry, be happy." Sort of like a used car salesman telling you to buy a car with 200,000 miles on it and promising you that you can easily double that with no problems. Elijah reassures her. He says "OK, you go and do that. Go on home and cook your last meal but first make me a little cake out of it and bring it to me.

Now let's make sure we understand just how insane this sounds. It is as if he is detached from reality. The widow is starving. All she has is a very small last meal. The prophet wants her to bake it for him first. Did we read this correctly? He asks the starving widow to feed him first and then reassures her that she can have the leftovers. To sell her on the idea he proclaims it is God's doing. The God of Israel says "the jar will not empty and the oil will not fail." As crazy as it may seem to her, and in spite of the odds of it coming true, she puts her trust in God and in the prophet. The result is that the meal and the oil do not run out.

Now here we are today. The Scripture shows the faithfulness of the prophet Elijah. He trusted God and obeyed. He went to a foreign town and trusted the word of God that revealed he would be fed by a widow. Keep in mind a widow is the least likely to be able to help. The Scripture also shows us the faithfulness of the widow. She trusted the prophet. This is significant because she was starving and yet she trusted him with her last meal. She did not have enough for a meal and she shared it anyway, she even put him first. She acted on a promise that seems impossible. The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail. The Scripture also shows us that God rewards faithfulness. The Widow is Blessed as God provides a provision that never ends. In fact God's blessing multiplies.

The lesson for us is to maintain our faithfulness. You know faithfulness is not just coming to church sitting in the pews, listen to a sermon, and saying amen let's do it again. Faithfulness is revealed in action. The faithfulness of Elijah is seen in his response. He moved; he physically took action. The faithfulness of the widow is seen in her response. She shared even though she had very little to share and even put him first. I repeat for emphasis faithfulness is not just coming to church sitting in the pews, listen to a sermon, and saying amen let's do it again.

Your faithfulness is revealed in your action. You have a number of ministries that deal with feeding the needy. You support Meal on Wheels where the shut in, elderly, widows are given a nutritious lunch on a daily basis. You support the Neighbors Helping Neighbors program where you actually participate in physically feeding the hungry of your community. You have a Panera Bread distribution program where their leftovers are distributed through us to the community. You support Gateway a half way house that serves men that are recovering from addiction and substance abuse. You support the Christmas Cheer project where food boxes are delivered to the needy at Christmas. You have a very strong history of faithfulness which is revealed through your ministry. Some of your missions are new and some are ongoing throughout your history. Your ministry shows you are still strong. OK, we look around and see the size has shrunk. But the Glory of the Lord is seen here today through you, your faithfulness, your action.

We have talked about the glory of the Lord where God provides the manna to the whole community with everyone receiving equally. We questioned a matter of justice asking why people go hungry in the wealthiest nation on earth and realize it is a problem of distribution. It has been revealed that we are called to supply the manna. A Christian is an agent of change in a world where God provides enough for all but not everyone receives. The question what did Jesus do? The answer is he fed the multitude, everybody got something to eat, and no one was left out. The Christian is to do what we can in the name of Christ. We are to follow the teaching of Christ and the actions of Christ. No one is to be left out. The glory of the Lord is revealed through you an agent for the hungry of the world.

We had a meeting recently and it was revealed that you do a very good job. Considering the resources that you have and the size of your congregation you do an excellent job. You existing ministries: Neighbors Helping Neighbors, Meals on Wheels, Gateway, Christmas Cheer, and Panera Bread. On top of that we also have individuals that contribute to Back Pack for kids and a Master Gardener.

You are an older group. You certainly don't need me to tell you that. As we age our energy naturally declines. But it's not over yet, the Lord is with us. But for the hungry to be blessed everyone must be willing to do their part. I complement you on your successful ministries and encourage you to continue your success. But I also strongly encourage you to do

more because God needs your help. When we give in faith, God multiplies the blessing. The hungry are only blessed if Gods servant responds.