

Sunday 18th September

God provides for his prophet Elijah

1 Kings 17:2-16

Elijah Fed by Ravens

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

⁵ So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. ⁶ The 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

⁷ Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. ⁸ Then 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." ¹⁰ So 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?" ¹¹ As 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."

¹³ Elijah 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. ¹⁴ For 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.'"

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

Matthew 15:21-28

The Faith of a Canaanite Woman

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So, his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

²⁶ He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

²⁷ "Yes, it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Sermon: God provides for His prophet Elijah

[Turn your Bibles to 1 Kings 17 starting at verse 1– let me pray before we begin]

Intro

*I came across this story that has been told about many famous preachers, but it actually happened to Rev Dr Joseph Parker (1830-1902), minister of the City Temple in London. An old lady talked to Dr Parker in his vestry after a service to thank him for the help she received from his sermons. "You do throw such wonderful light on **God's Word**, doctor," she said. "Do you know that until this morning, I had always thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were man and wife?"*

(pause)

That's what happens when we are **ignorant** about **God's Word**.

[Slide 1-Intro]

Application: But before we laugh too much here – **how well do we know God's Word?**

Perhaps we're ignorant about God's Word too?

In our look at the Kings of Israel over the past few weeks – it seems the kings were either **ignorant of God's Word** or are just plain **ignoring it**.

It's **God's Word** which is the main theme of this morning's chapter from **1 Kings 17**.

That shouldn't surprise us if we know how the **Bible describes God's Word**

Psalm 119:105 says – *God's word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path*

Hebrews 4:12 says – *The word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges thoughts and attitudes of the heart*

Jesus Himself says in **Matthew 4:4** – *man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*

And God the Father promises in **Isaiah 55:11** – *my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

And the Apostle Paul tells us in **2 Tim 3:16** – *Scripture [God’s Word] is breathed out by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*

So, in this chapter from 1 Kings, we see

- God’s Word **ignored**
- God’s Word **absent**
- God’s Word **obeyed**
- God’s Word **produces faith and**
- God’s Word **fulfilled**

Context - God’s Word Ignored (1 Kings 17:1)

So, let’s look at the **context** from last week

[Slide 2-Ahab and Jezebel]

The **King** of the **Northern Kingdom** of **Israel** is **Ahab** –He is **influenced by** his wife, **Jezebel**, who’s from the region of **Sidon** – a non-Jewish land on the Mediterranean coast - that **worships** the false god **Baal** and **worships** Baal’s partner/consort goddess **Asherah**

King Ahab even builds a **temple** for this false god **Baal** and Ahab worships at an **altar** for **Baal** inside this temple. **Asherah poles** are also erected in Israel **to worship the false goddess Asherah** too.

And also, from last week – we learn that **Ahab** has given his approval to **rebuild** and **refortify** the city of **Jericho** – which God through the prophet Joshua – had previously said **should NEVER be rebuilt**.

Basically – **Ahab** has God's Word available to him but **he IGNORES it** – and follows his own way and follows false gods

And so, **we read in v1 of chapter 17** – that **God sends** a prophet called **Elijah** to speak to Ahab – here's what Elijah says:

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

[Slide 3-God's Word ignored]

God is **saying** to Ahab – through Elijah – you've ignored my word – and you've worshipped the false gods – asking them for favourable weather for your crops – **but I** – the **Lord God of Israel** – I am the one **in control of the weather** – and it won't rain until I say so!

Application: For us it means – it's worth asking ourselves – what blessings will God withhold from us– if **we ignore His word for our life?**

God's Word Absent (1 Kings 17:2-4)

Which bring us to this week – look at chapter 17– from vv2-4

[Slide 4 -Map]



The **word of God comes to Elijah** – and he is told to **leave Israel** – and **go East** and hide in the **Kerith Ravine, east of the river Jordan** – and Elijah is told that **God will provide drink** from a brook there – and God will **supply food** for Elijah – **brought to him by ravens**

Why would God **send Elijah away**?

Several reasons

- a. The **drought** that Elijah has just announced would be a **great threat** to Israel – and so **Elijah’s life is in danger** – so God sends him away from Israel – to a Gentile (non-Jewish region) **for his own safety**
- b. Also – later on in 1 King 18:4 – we find out **Jezebel is going around butchering God’s prophets** – so **God sends Elijah away to protect him** until it’s time for Elijah’s ministry to start
- c. Also – the place Elijah is sent to – **Kerith** – means “**cutting off**” – and so it’s **symbolic of Elijah being “cut-off” from Israel** – whilst God prepares him for service

[Slide 5-God’s word absent]

But there’s another reason for sending Elijah away

Just as there is to be an **absence of rain from Israel** – by God sending His mouthpiece – Elijah - away from Israel – there is an **absence of God’s Word**. Just as there is to be a **drought in the land** –this is symbolic -that there is to be a drought of God’s Word. **God’s silence** is often seen as a judgment on disobedience (see 1 Samuel 28:6, 15; Psalm 74:9; Amos 8:11-12)

Application: We might think that it’s impossible for God’s Word to be absent in our lives, when we live an **age of technology** – **computers, smart phones and tablets with Bibles on**; we may even have various translations of the Bible at home - but it’s one

thing having access to God's Word; and another thing altogether when we actually read it; believe it; follow it and apply it to our lives.

(pause)

God's Word Obeyed (1 Kings 17:5-15)

Now we come to – **God's word obeyed** – that's in vv5-15

[Slide 6-God's Word Obeyed]

See v5 – **Elijah** did what the Lord told him and **went** east to **Kerith Ravine** and stayed there

And because of his obedience – v6 – **God supplied ravens** to bring Elijah **bread and meat** – morning and evening –

This should **remind us** of God providing **manna and quail in the wilderness** for the ancient Israelites – when He brought them out of slavery in Egypt and led them to the Promised Land (Exodus 16:1-8)

Application: For us it means as we said last week – there is a **general concept of blessings for obedience** – and God providing our needs.

And God's ways are often mysterious – the **choice of using ravens** to supply food for Elijah is interesting. **Ravens** were classed as **unclean** (Leviticus 11:15 and Deuteronomy 14:14) – and **renowned for not feeding their own young** (Job 38:41; Psalm 147:9) – but here they bring food to Elijah. I wonder what meat they brought him – probably **best not to ask?**

But **God's ways are not like our ways** (Isaiah 55:8-9) – **nothing is impossible for God**

Application – For us – it shows God may use a spiritually unclean person (like the raven) to bring His word to others. As Charles Spurgeon puts it *“How possible it is for us to carry bread and meat to God's servants, and do, some good things for his church, and yet still be ravens!”*

After a while though the **brook at Kerith dried up** – v7 – as it seems the drought reached there too

So, God’s Word came to Elijah again in v8 – and **Elijah is told to go to a place called Zarephath** in the region of **Sidon** – v9 – where God has commanded a **widow to supply food for him**

[Slide 7-Map]



Elijah immediately obeys God’s Word – v10

And again – **God’s ways are mysterious** here

Elijah is to go to the **region where Jezebel’s father lives** – the very **region where the whole Baal worship started!**

And just as surprising – **Elijah is to be provided for by a widow.**

Now there were **plenty of widows in Israel** who could have helped the prophet Elijah, but God directed Elijah to none of them, instead He sent Elijah to a widow into Gentile land. In doing so, God was bypassing Israel; in **conferring His favour on** this gentile **widow** and **removing His favour from Israel** [See Luke 4:24-30].

Elijah’s journey to Zarephath was a **judgment upon Israel**, because they had **descended to such blatant rejection of God.**

Application: This is a sobering thought for us to ponder. If we continue to disobey God’s Word – like the nation of Israel did in Ahab’s time – **God may bypass us** – and withdraw His light and allow us to walk in the darkness that we seem to prefer!

Back to the widow – and the **idea** of a widow providing food for Elijah – seems **bizarre**. A **widow** would have **no means of an income** and **could barely provide for herself** – let alone any family – and yet **God wants her to provide for Elijah**

To make the situation more dire – we find out in v10 – that the **women is gathering sticks to make a fire** – she hasn't even got any decent firewood – and we find out in v12 – she's **only got a handful of flour and a little olive oil** to make her **final meal** for herself and her son – as she has **resigned herself** to the fact **she and her son will die after that** – with **no possibility of any more food**.

Which makes **Elijah's request** – in v11 – **for a drink and a piece of bread** – a bit of **tall order!**

Elijah's **request for water** should remind us of **Jesus** asking the non-Jewish Samaritan woman for a drink at the **well** in John 4:1-7ff – and how Jesus offers her **living water that wells up into eternal life**.

Elijah's **request for bread** should also remind us that **Jesus is the "bread that came down from Heaven"** (John 6:32) – the **"bread of life"** (John 6:48) – which gives **eternal life!**

Elijah's request **might seem a tall order** - but Elijah is God's servant – and Elijah is following God's orders – **God told him the widow would provide** – and **he takes God at his word** – even if it doesn't make sense.

It seems the **widow has no idea that God's told Elijah** she will provide food for him.

As Charles Spurgeon puts it:

This shows how God's unseen hand often works. "The widow does not appear to have been at all aware that she was to feed a prophet. She went out that morning to gather sticks, not to meet a guest. She was thinking about feeding her son and herself upon the last cake; certainly, she had no idea of sustaining a man of God out of that all but empty barrel of meal. Yet the Lord, who never lies, spoke a solemn truth when he said, 'I have

commanded a widow woman there.’ God had so operated upon her heart and mind that he had prepared her to obey the command when it did come by the lip of his servant the prophet Elijah”

Elijah reassures the widow – in v13 – not to be afraid but to simply go home and do as she had planned but she is to **make Elijah a small loaf first** – v13 – and then make **something for herself and her son**

Elijah then tells her in v14 – what the Word from God 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.*

It’s like the advert on TV – advertising a **never-ending packet of Tim Tams!**

The widow did exactly what Elijah said and obeyed – v15

[Slide 8-God’s Word Obeyed]

Application: For us it means – **we must not be afraid** in whatever circumstances we’re in. Here we have an **example of God’s daily provision**. He could have provided the widow with **bags and bags of flour – and jars and jars of oil**. But no – it was a provision of what was needed only – and no more. Imagine **if she did have bags and bags of flour and jars and jars of oil** – wouldn’t she be in **danger of being robbed and killed** as the drought and famine continues? **We** are to **trust in God’s daily provision** and **depend on him daily**– and trust in whatever means God provides – even if its unclean ravens – and poor widows!

And it’s a **call for us to obey God’s Word** – no matter how strange or unlikely it might seem!

Which brings us to the next point

God’s Word produces faith...

[Slide 9-Word produces faith]

God's Word Produces Faith (1 Kings 17:15 & Matthew 15:24-28)

See v15 – not only did the widow obey God's word from Elijah – but she **had faith that the flour and oil would not run out – as Elijah said it would**

The **widow showed remarkable faith** – given her dire circumstances.

But that's the way God's Word works – it **produces faith**.

In our NT reading from Matthew 15 – we hear of another **gentile woman** – a **Canaanite woman** - also from the **same region of Tyre and Sidon as the widow** in Elijah's story.

This woman is also in a **dire situation** – her **daughter is demon possessed** and suffering terribly. This woman also responds in faith to the word of God – Jesus tells her – He has been ***“sent only to the lost sheep of Israel”*** –

But **Jesus' word** [which is the word of God] **produces faith in the woman** – and even when Jesus says ***“it's not right to take the children's (Israel's) bread and toss it to the dogs”*** (Gentiles)

The **woman shows remarkable faith** – and still believes Jesus can heal her daughter!

Application: **Surely this teaches us** – to read God's word – believe it in our hearts – so **we too can have remarkable faith** – like the widow of Zarephath and the Canaanite woman.

Even though, there were **obstacles in the way for the widow** (down to her last bit of flour and oil); and **obstacles in the way for the Canaanite woman** in the story (her being a Gentile woman) - both the woman and the widow showed great faith; and **they are in the Bible as an example of great faith for us!**

Also, **God led Elijah by faith, one step at a time, first to brook at Kerith and then to the widow at Zarephath** – **God will lead us by faith – step by step – too!**

Faith in God's Word - brings us to our final point

God's Word fulfilled

[Slide 10-fulfilled]

God's Word Fulfilled (1 Kings 17:16 & Matthew 15:28)

See v16 in the 1 Kings 17

For 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".

And the same thing happened in our NT reading see Matthew 15:28

Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Application: From this we can learn – that whatever God says will happen - will happen
– **God's word is always fulfilled!**

Conclusion

To **finish up** then

Whether we are struggling with a severe illness – perhaps even life threatening – whether we have a terminal illness – whether we're not sure where our next meal is coming from – or we have a sick son or daughter – whether we have the most severe trial in our lives that's testing us - whatever the circumstances – surely the stories from the widow of Zarephath and the Canaanite woman – and the faith they showed in their circumstances - **teaches us** what the Apostle Paul says in God's Word from **Romans**

8:38-39 – Paul says:

[Slide 9-Romans 8]

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul's point is - NOTHING can separate us from the love of God – because – no matter what else is going on - we know God sent Jesus to give us forgiveness [cross] and eternal life [resurrection].

If God sent Jesus to do that for us – we can always have faith in God's Word.

Let's pray...

Father God, thank you for your word.

Help us to obey your word and to have faith in your word like the women in our two stories today.

Thank you that your word is always fulfilled.

And that ultimately your word is fulfilled in sending Jesus to give us forgiveness and eternal life.

Thank you that nothing can separate us from your love – when we have a relationship with your Son, Jesus.

In His name, we pray Amen.

Benediction (Ephesians 3:20-21)

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.