

The LORD's Provision 1 Kings 17: 8-24

Elijah is a man of faith. He obeyed God's word, even when it was difficult and challenging. Elijah had been sent to Zarephath – a land outside of Israel, in the territory of Ahab's father-in-law. Not only was Elijah in enemy territory, he was to trust in a widow – certainly not someone who would have resources to support him. Elijah finds the widow, and all would appear to be going well. However, when the widow is asked for a loaf of bread, her response cements the theory that she cannot support Elijah. In fact, her response is that she can't even support herself and her son.

Elijah responds in faith. He knows that God has promised to provide through the widow. He has no evidence, but he has faith in God to provide. Elijah believes that if the widow does as God has instructed, then God will provide – and so Elijah instructs the widow to do so. This is the behaviour of a man, just like us. Elijah had the same vulnerabilities that we have, and so we can learn from him.

Q. How can we be tempted to give up on God's plans, when circumstances appear too tough?

Elijah is a great example for us, yet this story shows an example that may be a little closer to how we feel. The Zarephath widow shows us a journey which many of us can relate to.

The Journey to Faith

When Elijah encounters the widow, she seems to know of him. She is in a pagan nation, worshipping Baal, and yet God has told her to feed Elijah. She is not shocked by meeting Elijah – she is aware who he is. Yet her response makes clear that - although she respects Elijah and God – this is not her faith, and not her god. Elijah's word of faith is strong enough to convince her to take part - to ride along on Elijah's faith. By Elijah's encouragement, we see the widow take great steps of faith, and starts to trust in the provision.

Q. How does your faith and obedience impact and affect your friends/family/colleagues?

Q. How can we be inspired by the faith of those around us? How can we learn from other's experiences?

Later she experiences a crisis. She has been living on the blessing God has provided, enjoying the food that God has given – and then, all of a sudden, her son dies. Her blossoming faith is rocked by this crisis, and she shows anger at Elijah and 'his God' – feeling like the whole thing has been a joke, a plan to highlight and punish her for her sin.

Elijah continues in faith. His response is not a brazen or proud response – he cries out pleading with God, and the son is revived – a miracle as the boy is brought back to life. The widow sees something completely different. No longer is she talking of Elijah's God, leaning on his faith. Now she knows God herself, and believes His words to be truth. What started as respect and appreciation of the God of Israel, has developed into full faith in Him and His words.

Q. How do your friends/family/colleagues respond in times of crisis? How can a crisis affect our faith in God?

The Grace of God

Elijah's encounter with the Zarephath widow is a sign post – an early indicator – of God's heart for the hurting, the poor and the needy across the world. Jesus referred to this woman in Luke 4 to show an example of what He was coming to do. Jesus was talking to the teachers of the law - the religious people – who expected Jesus to benefit them. Jesus uses this widow as an example, highlighting His purpose for the world, those who need His good news and healing.

Grace is God's favour, unearned. The widow is a clear example of someone who deserved nothing. She did not follow the laws of Israel, nor did she have the blood heritage that the teachers of the law expected. Jesus explained that she is the type of person that He came to save. It is not by works or human endeavour, but solely by the grace of God. This idea offended those around him (to the point they tried to throw him off a cliff) – but is seen clearly throughout examples in the Old Testament, and the teachings of Jesus.

Q. 'Grace is something for nothing – for those that don't deserve anything' – how can this seem offensive?

Q. How does the widow's example remind us of grace, and take our eyes of ourselves and our works?

The LORD's Provision

This widow experiences something in this encounter. She may not be the big character that Elijah is, but she is key to this story, and we can see that she catches something from Elijah. At the start of this story we read that this widow had enough food for herself and her son only. By giving to Elijah, the widow needs to sacrifice either her son's meal - or her own. She is prepared to trust in the word of Elijah, and giving to him first – before she can see the miraculous provision. The widow gets out of poverty and need by giving out of the little bit that she has. God is looking for the widow to honour Him as the provider. Elijah challenges the widow, and inspires her – but she needed to trust in God to provide, when the circumstances and evidence around her suggested otherwise.

Read Proverbs 3:9-10

This is an example of biblical economics – trusting in God to meet our needs. Putting God first - not fear of the assumed outcome, but in faith of God's promise. God uses the little we give - the widow with only a little bread; a little boy with only five loaves and two fish – and pours out blessing to meet our need. The widow started with enough for one final meal - but by faithfully remaining obedient, the widow had enough for each day, every day.

Q. How can we be tempted to limit our sacrifice by our circumstances and personal situations?

Q. How do your friends/family/colleagues react to your stories of sacrificial obedience, and God's provision?