



Elijah's Seemingly Selfish Command

1 Kings 17:11-13 -- He [Elijah] called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand." But she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have no bread, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold, I am gathering a few sticks that I may go in and prepare for me and my son, that we may eat it and die. "Then Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and make me a little bread cake from it first..."

Introduction

1. Because of the sins of king Ahab and of Israel, Elijah the prophet pronounced a drought (1 Kings 17:1). God provided for the prophet during this time, first, by sending him to the Brook Cherith (17:2-7), then to the village of Zarephath near Sidon. God told Elijah, "I have commanded a widow there to provide for you" (17:9).
2. At Zarephath Elijah saw the widow and he asked her for water and bread. She explained she had only a little flour and oil for herself and her son and that they would eat and die (17:10-12). Then Elijah commanded her to do a very strange thing. He told her to make him a cake first and then feed herself and her son.
3. Elijah's command seems selfish. Why did he ask the woman to feed him first? Elijah's seemingly selfish command was a test of this widow and her faith. Her response to Elijah's command reveals the depth of her character and provides us with great lessons.

A. Faith is Found in Unlikely Places

1. Of all the places the Lord could have sent His prophet Elijah, He sent him to the little village of Zarephath. This was not in Israel, but in the Gentile nation of Syria. Of all the widows in Israel, God sent Elijah to a Gentile widow. Jesus mentions this mission and commended the widow's faith.

Luke 4:25-26 -- But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.

2. Jesus found faith in the heart of a Roman centurion.

Matthew 8:5-10 -- ...Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled, and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel."

3. Jesus found faith in a woman from the same area as this widow.

Matthew 15:21-28 -- ...Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once.

4. Faith was even to be found in Caesar's own house.

Philippians 4:22 -- All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

B. The Genuineness of Faith

1. The Lord had commanded the widow to provide for Elijah.

1 Kings 17:9 -- Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.

2. When she obeyed Elijah, she was obeying the Lord.

1 Kings 17:15 -- So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for many days.

3. Genuine faith helps those in need.

James 2:14-17 -- What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

C. One is to Recognize God's Priority

1. This widow put the Lord before even her own needs.
 - She lived in terrible times and dire circumstances. The little flour and oil she had left would provide one final meal. Then she expected to die.
 - Yet, when the Lord's prophet demanded her final meal, she obeyed.
2. The Jews were to put God first by giving Him their "first fruits."
Exodus 23:19 -- You shall bring the choice first fruits of our soil into the house of the Lord your God...
3. Jesus instructed His disciples to place God first in their lives.
Matthew 6:33 -- But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.
 - God is to come before everything else in our lives, including our own family, even our own lives (Matthew 10:37-39).
 - The Macedonians gave themselves first to God (2 Corinthians 8:5).

D. Prosperity Comes by Sharing

1. The only way the widow and her son survived the drought was by sharing what little she had. If she had been selfish, she would have died.
2. Jesus explained that to receive, we must first give.
Luke 6:38 -- Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.
3. If we share (sow bountifully), we shall reap bountifully.
2 Corinthians 8:5 -- And this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

E. Obedient Faith is Rewarded

1. The faith of the widow was amply rewarded. Her flour and oil were miraculously replenished during the famine.
1 Kings 17:16 -- The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke through Elijah.
2. Later, her son died and was restored to life.
1 Kings 17:17-24 -- ... (v.22) And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived...
3. Jesus promised a reward for those who receive the righteous.
Matthew 10:41-42 -- 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 in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward.