

## WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE GIVING UP!

**I Kings 17:16** And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

We have been here before ... In fact, we have been here a *few* times before! It is the story about the widow of Zarephath, who kept returning to her barrel of meal during the time of famine in her country.

From an ordinary human perspective, regarding this story, I'm not sure who was in the worst predicament ... Elijah, or the widow. Elijah had become a fugitive from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, and he had fled into the desert. There the Lord fed him with bread and meat, provided by the ravens. It might sound rather idyllic, but it would have been lonely. He would have had plenty of time to think *and depress himself* as to what a poor state he was in! For a while, he stayed there beside a brook called Cherith ... but it dried up ☹️.

He was on the run, with no company, except for the wild birds, in hostile terrain, and his water supply had dried up ... He couldn't go back home to Gilead in case King Ahab's soldiers were lying in wait for him. He had nobody to sit down and talk with and ask advice. He was in quite dire straits ... and he was prone to looking at 'the dark side', as I Kings 19:10 indicates, *the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away ... God, could it get any worse?*

Do you ever feel like that? On another occasion Elijah would be huddled away in the back of a dark cave ... Do you ever feel like that? It is as if everything is closing in on you. There is nothing going right, and as a Christian, you reckon it shouldn't be like this. Yes, you accept there are the good days and the bad days ... but the bad days seem to have taken over the good days ... and you feel rotten!

And what about the woman of Zarephath? She was in a predicament too for she was a widow, with a son to look after. She was 'down to' her last meal, - the cupboards were empty, she couldn't grow anything because the ground was so dry, she only had a few sticks to make a fire ... and her son didn't keep well. She didn't have a husband, or anyone to look after her. There is no mention of brothers or sisters, or a mother or a father. She was alone in the world, at the very top end of the land of Canaan.

And the Lord told Elijah to travel from ‘away down’ in the south of the country up to the north ... and the Lord even had to tell him where Zarephath was, **1 Kings 17:9** Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. **10** So he arose and went to Zarephath. ... Why do you think he went? Looking at it from his perspective, where else *could* he go? Ahab was looking for him, he couldn’t go back to Gilead, he had to stay away from the central region and, Jezreel, he daren’t stay too long in one place. ... He hadn’t a lot of choice.

How did he get into such a predicament? Well, it started when he began to serve the Lord, - the Lord sent him with a message to King Ahab that famine was on its way. He was just ‘ordinary’ until then, but since then, - since he entered the Lord’s service, - he has been on the run.

It’s not fair when you are trying your best to be a Christian, and you face difficulties. You thought life would get better, but you seem to have had nothing but problems ... Would you admit to sometimes feeling like that? ... Times were really hard for Elijah and they were becoming harder! It was as if he was the only one left in the whole country who remained faithful to God ... We know there were at least one hundred and one others (the hundred prophets hidden in the two caves, and Obadiah, the official in King Ahab’s palace) ... but it *seemed* as if Elijah was the last remaining true servant who had not abandoned Jehovah. ...

Does the magnitude of the work ever get to you? Do you sometimes find yourself thinking, “I can’t keep doing this!” ... And yet, you *do* keep doing it. There is a compulsion inside you that won’t let you give up, and that is the same inner compulsion which kept Elijah going. An opposite to compulsion is complacency ... and if Elijah was only complacent he would have ‘lifted’ his faith in God when it suited, and ‘set it down’ when it didn’t ... but when the Lord told him to travel from one end of the country to the other, he didn’t argue ... he simply obeyed, and went. ... That is the character of a true servant of God. To use the language of Jesus, Elijah had put his hand to the plough and wasn’t for looking back. ... “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back” ... and that was a decision he made in obedience to the Lord’s command.

“My Lord knows the way through the wilderness, All I have to do is follow. Strength for today is mine all the way, And all that I need for tomorrow”, - Elijah could have sung that chorus. ... Isn’t it true that sometimes, that’s all that seems to be around us, - the wilderness ... and it’s enough to get through today, and hopefully tomorrow ... And do you notice how Elijah made that

long journey, - on foot, - ... he had no easy transport ... “Must I be carried to the skies On flowery beds of ease” ... No, Elijah, you have to walk it!

Do you see what happens between leaving the brook in the wilderness and arriving at Zarephath? ... **I Kings 17:9** *Arise, get thee to Zarephath ....* **10** *So he arose and went to Zarephath.* ... What about where he rested? What about what he ate, and how was he fed? What about the enemy searching for him? What about bandits along the way? What about the distance being too far? Could you not get me somewhere closer, that wouldn't 'take as much out' of me? What about his sandals wearing out?! ... There is not a single mention of any such thoughts for he simply obeyed the Lord. Another hymn says, “My Jesus knows when I am lonely, He knows each pain, He sees each tear, He understands each lonely heartache, He understands because He cares” ... and then the chorus begins, “My Jesus knows just what I need”. ... And if you are obediently in the Lord's service, He will supply your need ... and that is how Elijah travelled to Zarephath, - the Lord met His every need along the way.

Zarephath, of all places! ... There's a famine there too. Lord, You're calling me out of one desperate situation into another! ... He arrived at the gate of Zarephath, and he didn't know anybody. He saw a widow woman, - she would have been dressed all in black. She would have had no smile, or no hearty greeting, - “Welcome to Zarephath!” ... She was miserable ... and she was the first person, - maybe the *only* person, - he saw. He had travelled the length and breadth of the country *to this!* ... And yet, the widow would be the answer to *his* need, and the Lord would use him to be the answer to *her* need.

It was a strange set of circumstances the Lord was leading him into ... but the Lord knew exactly what He was doing. ... This woman had heard of God. She mentioned Him in v.12, *As the LORD thy God liveth*, and Elijah also mentioned Him in v.14, *For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.* ... The Lord had brought them together ... It wasn't a 'chance' meeting because, centuries later, Jesus explained Elijah was sent specifically to this woman (Lk. 4:26). ... Out of all the women in Zarephath, God led His servant to the widow. ... And since they met, they both talked about the Lord ... and I'm sure Elijah went on to teach the woman more about the Lord.

In whatever circumstances God has you, He has you there for a reason. He never has you stumble out of His will, - He doesn't try to 'catch you out'. You might sometimes feel like a ship battered on the waves, coming closer to the rocks ... but don't forget Who is in charge of the waves and Who is steering

the ship ... “With Christ in the vessel” you mightn’t be smiling at all the storms, but you have “an anchor that keeps the soul, Steadfast and sure while the billows roll”.

And Elijah went into the widow’s house, sat down at her table, ate the last scraps of food she had ... she hadn’t much, and she wasn’t sure if she could spare it, but she took Elijah at his word when he promised, **14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.** ... She was trusting in Elijah’s God, *Jehovah Jireh*, “God will provide”.

This is just a simple study, but doesn’t it have massive and beautiful implications! Elijah came and found the woman and God changed her life. It came to the time, though, when he had to move on. ... Do you remember when the Lord came to *your* house? You weren’t expecting Him. You had nothing prepared to receive Him? You felt so inadequate, and yet He entered in and changed your life, - it has never been the same for He gave you a new perspective. ... You see life is different now for it is the life God has given you to live for Him, and when it is over *here*, you will be with Him *there*.

Elijah had to eventually leave the woman, but the Lord has promised He will never leave you. ... Elijah made a long journey to find the widow of Zarephath, over rough and difficult terrain, with all kinds of dangers on the way ... But his journey doesn’t compare with the journey the Saviour made to find you. His journey took Him from His Father in Heaven into this world where He knew He would face the wrath and cruelty of evil men. But He made *that* journey for you and for me, and He will continue to provide every need until the day He will take us to be with Himself.

Do you see what the widow was doing when she met Elijah? Yes, she was ‘gathering sticks’ (v.10) ... which means she was looking *down*. But when Elijah spoke to her, she looked *up*. ... There is the secret ... When you feel like giving up ... *Don’t*, instead *look up!* ... **Phil. 4:19 my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.** Amen.