

⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to [Elijah], saying, ⁹ “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.” ¹⁰ So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.” ¹¹ And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, “Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” ¹² So she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” ¹³ And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.’” ¹⁵ So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶ The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.

Text: 1 Kings 17:8-16 A 7/30/17 Hebrews 9:24-28 Mark 12:38-44 Psalm 145 Resp. Ps.: 34
Hymns: 27, 29, 436, 785

GOD IS OUR HELP AND OUR SALVATION!

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Elijah was one of God’s faithful Old Testament prophets. Elijah served during the time of King Ahab. King Ahab was so evil that the Bible tells us, “*Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him*” (1 Ki. 16:33). As Elijah kept faithfully speaking God’s Word, he ran into opposition and persecution from Ahab. Because of the wickedness of Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, and the Jewish people the Lord decided to send a drought as a judgment on them, to try to humble them and turn them to Him. God sent Elijah to Ahab to tell him about the drought, which Elijah did. Then God told Elijah to get away from Ahab so Ahab would not be able to take revenge on him. Elijah went and hid by a brook. God had told Elijah, “*You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there. ... There by the brook, “The ravens brought [Elijah] bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook. And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land*” (1 Ki. 17:4, 6-7).

Here is where our text takes up the story: “*Then the word of the LORD came to [Elijah], saying, ‘Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.’ So he arose and went to Zarephath.*” Zarephath was a heathen city within the domains of the father of Jezebel. Elijah’s situation looked desperate. But in the midst of everything that was happening to Elijah, in the face of seemingly impossible circumstances, God was there watching over him and taking care of him.

“*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. ... You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies*” (vv. 1-2, 5). Just as sheep are completely dependent on their shepherd, so you and I are completely dependent on Jesus, our Good Shepherd. Sometimes we forget this. From time to time the Lord puts us in difficult circumstances, as He did with Elijah, to remind us how much we need Him. The Lord kept protecting and taking care of Elijah and strengthening his faith, even in the face of his enemies and his troubles. In the same way the Lord keeps

protecting us and taking care of us and strengthening our faith in the face of those who would hurt us, and any and every other difficulty as well.

How discouraging it must have been for Elijah to be a prophet to the Jewish people when most of them had rejected God and refused to listen to the Word of God. Elijah tried to bring them. How discouraging and frightening it must have been for Elijah to have to deal with evil King Ahab, and his evil wife, Jezebel. Elijah was the prophet who became so discouraged that he asked God to let him die because he thought he was the only believer left among the Jewish people. But now the Lord brought Elijah into contact with this widow, a gentile woman who believed in God. She later said to Elijah, *“the LORD your God lives,”* confessing her faith in the God of the Bible as the living God. Elijah was one of the greatest prophets of God in the Old Testament (to this day he is highly revered by the Jewish people), but Elijah was only human. What an encouragement it was from God for Elijah to be able to see and talk to and stay with this believing widow and her son. We’re not told if her son believed in God or not, but he probably did. Certainly his mother taught him about God and salvation in Him. He and his mother also had that extended time with Elijah to learn much more about God, and grow in their understanding of Him and faith in Him. In the face of the severe drought, the spiritual deadness of most of the Jewish people, the serious danger Ahab and Jezebel posed to Elijah, and the unbelief of most of the world at that time, the Lord blessed Elijah, the widow, and her son with Christian fellowship and mutual encouragement in Him and His Word!

We live in a society that is turning away from God in increasingly greater numbers. A growing number of churches which call themselves Christian are turning away from one after another of the truths of God’s Word. The world and the outward, so-called “Christian” church are becoming more and more hostile to God and His Word, and to us Christians who want to remain faithful to God and His Word. In the face of these things, what a gift from God it is for you and for me to have this blessed fellowship we share with each other in Christ and His Word! As King David said, *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”* (Ps. 133:1). As the Bible says, we are here for each other to help *“bear one another’s burdens”* (Gal. 6:2). We *“[speak] to one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in [our] hearts to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Eph. 5:19-20).

Elijah found the widow and asked her to give him some water and some bread. She replied, *“As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”* What a sad situation! Elijah had all of his problems, and God sent him to a poor widow whose problems were as bad, if not worse, than Elijah’s.

So how are things going in your life? I hope you are doing well. But maybe you are struggling with one or more problems. As if that’s not enough, we have to live in this sinful world – a never-ending source of trouble, worry, and concern. Jesus has told us, *“In the world you will have tribulation”* (Jn. 16:33). Sometimes we go from one problem to another, and maybe one or more people are making our life difficult and even causing us pain. Sometimes our situation can seem hopeless.

Neither Elijah nor the widow had to worry, because God was still there to take care of them. Elijah told the widow, *“Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until*

the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.” Why did Elijah ask the widow to give him something to eat and drink before she and her son ate and drank? God was testing her faith. Would she trust in God to provide for her and her son? Would she be willing to use the last of her flour and oil to feed this prophet of God, and trust in God to miraculously provide for all of them in the days to come?

Scripture says, *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths”* (Prov. 3:5-6). What beautiful, comforting words. It’s not easy to do what they say, especially when we’re going through tough times. Are we going to follow our own reason and feelings and experience and do only what we think is best, or are we going to trust in God and follow His Word?

“So [the widow] went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.” The widow took God at His Word and gave Elijah what would have been the last of her food. And God kept His Word and miraculously provided for her, her son, and Elijah during what turned out to be 3 1/2 years of drought and scarcity (Jms. 5:17).

Remember the stories in the Bible of Peter’s miraculous catch of fish? God protecting Daniel in the lions’ den, and the three men in the fiery furnace? God giving young David the victory over the giant, Goliath? God parting the Red Sea and saving His people from Pharaoh’s army? and God sending His people manna to feed them for forty years in the desert? That same God is still with His people, watching over us and protecting us and providing for us.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. ... Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:1-2, 10). *“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them”* (your enemies and your troubles); *“for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you. ... And the LORD, He is the one who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed”* (Dt. 31:6, 8).

After our text we’re told that later on the widow’s son got sick and died. Elijah prayed to the Lord that He would heal him. We’re told, *“Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived”* (1 Ki. 17:22). The Lord protected Elijah from Ahab and Jezebel, blessed Elijah and the widow and her son with fellowship in Him and His Word, miraculously fed them during the long and severe drought, and brought the widow’s son back to life again when he had died. But these weren’t the greatest things God did for them. The greatest and most miraculous gift God had given them was salvation in His Son, the coming Messiah. Elijah, the widow, and her son didn’t live on this earth forever. But because God had given them faith in Jesus, they have eternal life with Him now in heaven!

The Bible says, *“Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘Therefore I hope in Him!’ The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD”* (Lam. 3:22-26). God is so kind and loving and generous to us, and so faithful and strong to deliver us through every time of trouble. God has given us the greatest and most miraculous gift of all: His Son, Jesus, on the cross, and faith to believe in Jesus and be saved! **GOD IS OUR HELP AND OUR SALVATION! Amen.**