

Lessons From a Widow 1 Kings 17

Tonight I want to present a lesson from a chapter of the Bible I was reading this past week. As with all of God's word, when you are reading you come across verses and stories that just seem to be relevant. As I read this account, I was thinking about the troubling times we continue to face today with this pandemic and how we need to continue to trust in God. I believe this text reminds us of that. It is about a Widow from Zarephath in Sidon and her interaction with Elijah. The account is found in 1 Kings 17.

I. Background and story

a. **Ahab is king of Israel** – Ahab was an exceedingly wicked king in the divided kingdom period of history. He not only continued following the sinful religion of Jeroboam with golden calves at Dan and Bethel, but he also brought Baal worship into Israel through his wicked wife, Jezebel (daughter of the King of Sidon). He built a temple in Samaria and made a wooden image. 1 Kings 16:33 says of him, *Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.*

b. BUT also during his wicked reign, **we are introduced to Elijah**, one of God's prophets who is a thorn in Ahab's side because he keeps bringing messages from God that expose and rebuke Ahab and his sin (and the sins of the people – it was a DARK time in Israel's history). Like so many of the prophets of God, he was rejected by the king and despised for telling the truth (Ahab calls him a trouble maker in 1 Kings 18:17).

We could learn many lessons from Elijah, as a prophet of God. He did not see physical death, as he was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2). The account of his dealings with Israel and Judah is found in 1 Kings 17-2 Kings 2. In 1 Kings 18 we read about his confronting the prophets of Baal. He is mentioned about 30 times in the New Testament, mostly by Jesus. He appeared to Jesus along with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration.

c. We want to notice when he enters onto the scene. **1 Kings 17:1 Elijah says to Ahab that there would be a drought in the land until he (Elijah) said it would end.**

Next we find Elijah fleeing into the wilderness where God sustains him with water and ravens bring him food (1 Kings 17:3-7)

When the well dried up the LORD (YHWH) tells him to go to Zarephath (which belongs to Sidon – where Jezebel was from) and he is told a widow would provide for him there. (1 Kings 17:8-9)

d. 1 Kings 17:8-16 (READ). As he enters Zarephath, he finds a widow gathering sticks. He calls to her for a cup of water and a morsel of bread. The woman has nothing left and tells him that the little she had left of flour and oil was going to be prepared for her and her son so that they could eat one final meal and die (starve to death).

Elijah assures her to trust in God. He instructs her to go make that bread and give him a small portion. He also promises that the LORD had said her flour bin would not be used up, nor her oil run dry until the LORD sent rain on the earth.

The widow does as instructed and as a result the promise of the LORD through Elijah was fulfilled – she had oil and flour all the days of the drought (James 5:17 tells us the drought lasted 3 ½ years).

e. 1 Kings 17:17-24 – The story continues with the son of this woman becoming sick so that he dies. She is distraught and blames Elijah and perhaps God – “Have you come to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?”. Elijah takes her son to an upper room and cries out to God to restore his life and the Lord listens and the child comes back to life. This prompts the woman to say, “Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth.”

II. Lessons –

a. Concerning God

- i. In all these extraordinary events, we learn that **God is in control**. This is something we must never forget. He is greater than Satan and his forces – 1 John 4:4, Romans 8:28 – all things work together; Matthew 19:26 – With God all things are possible; Proverbs 19:21, *There are many plans in a man’s heart, Nevertheless the Lord’s counsel—that will stand.*
- ii. **God can still work even in the ungodliest of times**. Sometimes His greatest work is done in times of great ungodliness. This is where the truly godly will stand out and often people are searching for answers.
God CAN do whatever needs to be done, and the way it is resolved may come from some place you never thought of. Isn’t that the plan of the Bible – Jesus came to this earth, the church began, and the New Testament was written during the Roman Empire that was anything but godly
- iii. **God can take care of you – and sometimes in unusual ways**. In her case it was miracles (first the never-ending bread, then the raising of her son – the first recorded resurrection in scripture). For us, He still works though it is through natural means (providence).
1 Peter 5:7 calls for us cast our cares for Him – He cares for you.
As Paul recounts his blessings even while in prison, Philippians 4:19 says, *And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*
That is the point Jesus makes when He challenges us to not worry – Matthew 6:25-34.
- iv. **God keeps His word** – in this chapter He took care of Elijah, the widow and her son.
We can have confidence that God can and will do what He says by the numerous accounts in scripture that reveal His character.
Numbers 23:19, *“God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”*
1 Thessalonians 5:24, *He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.*
Hebrews 10:23 tells us that *He who promised is faithful*
- v. **God can use unlikely people to accomplish His will** – Elijah had to flee from Israel because of Jezebel and Ahab. So he is sent by God to her home region where a woman sustains him.
We must never forget this. God can and will use whoever and however He wills.
We sometimes turn to God asking for His help. How He answers is another subject but know this – we sometimes expect things to happen a certain way and don’t even think about alternatives. But what happens is the farthest thing from what we intended. But it happens none-the-less. Let’s keep our eyes open.

b. Concerning the widow –

- i. **A godly woman is useful** – just be reminded that God needs all and is no respecter of persons. We all have something we can do, even if we are restricted and can’t do everything (which no one can). Remember Galatians 3:26-28.
- ii. **A need for faith** – perhaps this is the most direct lesson from this account.
What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 – the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. It means we don’t merely believe IN God, but we BELIEVE GOD and trust Him.
Sometimes our faith needs a little help but it involves trusting Him, especially in uncertain times.
We find in this widow extraordinary faith – remember she is in “hostile territory” that cherished Baal. Exactly how the Lord spoke to her we don’t know but somehow she knew she needed to provide for Elijah.
When he arrives, she is preparing to die but listens to him and follows his instruction. There

is a “leap of faith” in this. She had to believe him (consider how she might have been around many false prophets and idols).

She trusted and ACTED – we find in her yet another example that faith obeys. True faith will respond and do whatever is asked. That is the type of faith we need (cf. James 2:17).

- iii. **A Gentile who trusted in God** – God cares about everyone. We are all part of His creation and have hope. We better not forget this.

Consider Luke 4:24-27 where Jesus makes mention of this woman as a Gentile, when He is rejected in Nazareth by His own. He notes that even when a prophet is rejected in his own country, he may be heard in foreign countries. Jesus gives this as an example.

- c. **Concerning us** - certainly the above lessons are there for us, **but consider these lessons as well as they relate to our interacting with others.**

- i. **Sometimes your act of kindness for another helps them** – Just as this woman provided just a small piece of bread and some water – that was enough.

God knows the little things we do - A cup of cold water – Matthew 10:42;

Remember Hebrews 13:2 - do not forget to entertain strangers....

As Christians we are to be loving and kind to all – even if think no one else is watching. We NEVER know where this will go.

The best way to win others begins with a proper example – cf. Philippians 2:15.

- ii. And with this, **don't assume that a little help from someone is trivial** – it might be a big deal to them. Consider the widow with 2 mites – Luke 21:2-4 – Jesus noticed what a sacrifice it was.

Be grateful when someone does something little for you. Say thank you and acknowledge what they do. Maybe even compliment them.

In these times, do you act kindly and say thank you to the store clerk, who is likely hearing a lot of grief from miserable people? Be different – it may make their day or help them through some struggle they are dealing with.

- iii. **Finally, Our faith is one of our best evangelistic tools** – we need to be people of faith and live it. If you live with doubts people will notice. IF you, in everything, trust God and show that (not necessarily as a neon billboard) in you attitude, actions and words – someone will notice.

After Elijah went to God in prayer on behalf of that boy and he was raised we note the final verse of this chapter (1 Kings 17:24), *“Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth.”*

What a way to end an account and this lesson. There are some wonderful lesson we can glean from Biblical examples. As you read God's word always ask, “What can I learn from this?” When you are struggling, open your Bible and read some of the accounts of His people – you won't go far before you likely find someone you can relate to. And as you consider, may your faith be strengthened as well. Think about it!