

GOD COMMANDS THE POOR TO GIVE

1Kings 17:8 *And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,*

1Kings 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.*

God owns the heavens and the earth. “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts” (Haggai 2:8). Yet God commanded a widow to sustain his prophet. Could the Lord not have selected a few immensely rich Israelites to sustain Elijah? Yes, he could! God, in his infinite wisdom, desires to show us that his Gospel will never be dependent upon the pockets and generosity of the rich. The first great lesson of this story is the fact that the poor will always have a role to play in giving to the Kingdom of God. Amen! Notice, God commanded the poor widow; it was not a suggestion – the poor are commanded to give to the Gospel. The Lord Jesus stood by the treasury of the Temple and took a keen interest and commented on the giving of the poor. “And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had” (Luke 21:3,4). God will not permit the rich to boast. He will not tolerate the rich taking the Minister or the Gospel hostage. Abraham was always vigilant in regard to God’s sovereign provision.

Gen 14:22 *And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,*

Gen 14:23 *That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich*

Especially in these difficult times, when citizens of rich countries are experiencing lower standards of living due to a combination of global factors – the aftermath of Covid, the war in the Ukraine, a spike in fuel and gas prices etc., this message is pertinent. Just yesterday, the media reported that Hannover in Germany will no longer provide hot water in public buildings, swimming pools etc. This unstable world will always experience ups and downs, but our God does not change. God still commands us to give to the Gospel. “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Malachi 3:6). In fact, the Gospel often comes to the poor first because this is God’s solution for their poverty. Remember God was able to feed Elijah through ravens, but ravens do not need a blessing of riches – they will always be ravens who gather food in ways ravens always have. So the brook dried up and Elijah had to move on to a human. Humans need blessings, and God wanted to give an opportunity for the widow, not just to survive during the famine, but thrive.

Let us consider the second lesson of this study. Elijah was commanded to go to Zarephath, a city in the neighboring country of Lebanon. Foreigners were considered unclean. “But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs” (Mark 7:27). Not least, the Lord himself declared in the Synagogue in Nazareth that there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah. So why then does God send Elijah away to another country, a heathen one at that? There can only be one answer: God does not choose Israelites alone to bless. Throughout the ages, and every country, he has chosen many unnamed poor to bless. Hallelujah!

Act 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

Act 10:35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Job, Rahab, Ruth, Ebedmelech, Timothy and Titus had one thing in common: they were not Jews and yet God used them mightily. Here we see the twofold mercy of God: the widow of Zarephath was not only destitute, but she also carried the stigma of being a foreigner from Sidon, the city of Jezebel. It is a paradox that God selected a widow from the very city of Jezebel a woman who sought to destroy Elijah. “And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him” (I Kings 16:31). Elijah now finds refuge in Jezebel’s own city and is sustained by a poor widow of Sidon. God always has the last laugh! Let us come back to what the Lord Jesus said about many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah.

Luke 4:25 But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land.

The widow of Zarephath is a symbol of us gentiles who were marginalized and disparaged. Now, however, thankfully, the mercy of God through Jesus Christ has visited us in Sidon. “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:12,13). God will find you in an obscure, foreign place called Zarephath! Some of you joining us through Zoom maybe scattered in lands hostile to the Gospel. You may feel isolated and forgotten. God wants to encourage you though this message. Declare boldly by faith, “I am in Zarephath. God will send Elijah to my city soon!”

Let us finally consider what happened when Elijah met the widow. She was surprised that Elijah, a prophet of Israel, would make such a demand. We realize that she had not heard about this “command” from God. “And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (I Kings 17:12). Clearly, her response reveals that God had not talked to her. Is there some mistake here? Absolutely not! This is how God has always operated. He commands us to go into the whole world because there are people who will repent, be baptized in Jesus’ name and receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). These people, whose names we do not know right now, just as Elijah did not know he would go to Zarephath, are being prepared by God to receive us and the message of Jesus’ salvation. God is “commanding” people to prepare to receive our witness even as I speak here now. Hallelujah! The widow protested and was hesitant, but she did indeed obey Elijah. People will argue and contradict us, but many will receive the Gospel because God has commanded them.

***Act 17:30** And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.*

The widow of Zarephath must have reasoned in the end that she had nothing to lose. She has just a handful left for her son and herself. She had already resigned herself to death. There are some people as we witness the Gospel who will take a hard honest look at reality. What hope is there outside of Jesus Christ? What plans do we have after retirement? This life is just about a handful of a meal before death comes. But there is hope when death comes knocking, just as there was hope in the land of Goshen when the shadow of death came ever closer. It is the name and work of Jesus Christ!

***Hosea 13:14** I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.*

***John 5:24** Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.*