

Praying like Elijah – learning to depend on God

1 Kings 17 (Also 2 Corinthians 12:9)

Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.'

Elijah fed by ravens – learning to depend on God for life itself

2 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: 3 'Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. 4 You will drink from the brook, and I have instructed the ravens to supply you with food there.'

5 So he did what the Lord had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

Elijah and the widow at Zarephath

7 Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. 8 Then the word of the Lord came to him: 9 'Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have instructed a widow there to supply you with food.' 10 So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, 'Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?' 11 As she was going to get it, he called, 'And bring me, please, a piece of bread.'

12 'As surely as the Lord your God lives,' she replied, 'I don't have any bread – only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. **I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it – and die.**'

13 Elijah said to her, 'Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. 14 For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: "The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land."

15 She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. 16 For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

17 Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. 18 She said to Elijah, 'What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?'

19 'Give me your son,' Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. 20 Then he cried out to the Lord, 'Lord my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?'

21 Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, 'Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!'

22 The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. 23 Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, 'Look, your son is alive!'

24 Then the woman said to Elijah, 'Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.'

Introduction

Following his confrontation with King Ahab Elijah is commanded by God to go into hiding. His life is on the line but God provides for him in two unexpected ways. Firstly, he is fed by ravens at the brook Cherith. This is surprising because ravens were considered “unclean” birds by Jews. When this provision ends he is sent to a Gentile (non-Jewish) widow in Sidon. (Compare Luke 4:25-30)

They share a common helplessness and dependence on God to keep them alive on a daily basis. This provision continues for the duration of the drought and teaches Elijah to trust God for his life day by day.

In a similar way we are called to:

- Prove the sufficiency of God (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- Understand that our life is “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3)
- Depend on God daily. (“Give us this day our daily bread”)
- Discern when God is calling us to stay where we are or move on
- Trust in God’s provision but understand that his methods may change
- Understand the power of helplessness – asking help from the helpless widow (compare Luke 18:1-8)
- “Let desperation do its work”
- Realise that God doesn’t always rescue us out of our situation but he will always meet us in it. Sometimes he comes to us (indeed often) through unexpected people.
- Hear God’s constant and overarching question, “Will you trust in, rely on and cling to me?”

Conclusion

To follow God does not mean that we will be exempt from life’s challenges. In fact, for Elijah obeying God created more problems and challenges for him. Not only was his life under threat he was also experiencing the consequences of the very drought which he had declared in the name of the Lord. But God met him in the midst of his difficulties and provided for him in surprising and unexpected ways.

Questions

- When have you been aware that you needed to trust God to just “get through the day”?
- Have you ever experienced a time of “hiddenness” where you withdrew by choice or circumstance from your normal connections with others?
- What did Elijah and the widow have in common? How did they learn and benefit from their shared situation?
- How do you cope with needing help from others?
- When have you felt like you had nothing to offer others?
- How does this narrative encourage or challenge you?
- What does this reading teach you about the character of God?
- How might you pray differently as a result of considering these readings?