

Confidence in God's life giving word - 1 Kings 17

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[0:00] 1 Kings 17 starting at verse 1. I haven't got a page number. Thank you. 358.

So if you've missed any of the talks from chapters 1 to 16, they're all on the website and we head back into it.

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

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah. Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kareth ravine east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook and I have instructed the ravens to supply you with food there.

So he did what the Lord had told him. He went to the Kareth ravine east of the Jordan and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening.

[1:20] And he drank from the brook. Sometime later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him. Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there.

I have instructed a widow there to supply you with food. So he went to Zarephath and he came to the town gate and a widow was there who was gathering sticks.

He called to her and asked, Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink? As she was going to get it he called, And bring me please a piece of bread.

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.

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.

[2:32] And then make something for yourself and your son. 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.

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. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry in keeping with the word the Lord spoken by Elijah.

Sometime later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse and finally stopped breathing. 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? 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.

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?

[3 : 49] 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.

The Lord heard Elijah's cry and the boy's life returned to him and he lived. Elijah picked 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. 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.

Let's pray. Lord God, you have spoken your word and you have caused it to be written down.

And we have heard your word afresh this morning. And we pray that this word would speak into our lives.

[5 : 12] That we may have confidence and know that you are the truth. Amen. Well, let me ask you, this book that I am holding in my hands and I hope you have one beside you or with you.

Do you have confidence in this book? Do you? Do you trust that the words written in this book are the truth?

Do you believe that God's word that we are looking at and listening at this morning can give you life today and life for all eternity?

Do you have confidence in this book? You see, we live in a culture where God's word is being silenced.

We're told the Bible, this book is irrelevant, it's outdated, it's backward, it's regressive. We've grown up as a nation, we've now moved on, we can think for ourselves, we can live as we please.

[6 : 37] the last thing we need to hear today is God's word. You see, it's hard to have confidence in God's word when it is continually being trashed and undermined.

And this continuous voice that tells us we don't need God anymore filters into our lives and, well, we can maybe begin to doubt that this book is little more than just words and of no value to us.

And maybe we've gotten to the point in our lives where we don't actually bother reading it anymore because, well, nobody else does. And why should we believe it?

But this is really nothing new. Look at our text that we read this morning. God's people have suffered one bad king after another.

And when we think it can get no worse, we are introduced to Ahab. Just go back to the end of chapter 16, verse 30.

[8 : 00] Chapter 16, verse 30. Ahab, son of Omri, did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of the kings before him.

He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, he was one who had set up a golden calf, he also married Jezebel, daughter of Ephbaal, king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him.

Not only did Ahab turn away from God, but he replaced God with his own gods. In other words, he tried to keep God's voice from being heard.

But God is not going to be silenced. He will not be gagged. He still speaks with authority and power. In fact, God wants us to know that we can have absolute confidence in God's word.

Just like the widow we met in this account. Look at verse 24. Then the woman said, of chapter 17, verse 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.

- [9:31] So through this text of chapter 17, we're going to see four reasons why we can have absolute confidence and absolute assurance in God's word.
- First, God rules all things by the power of his word. Chapter 16, verse 33.
- Ahab also made an Asherah pole, another god, and did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.
- It sounds a fairly bleak situation. Ahab might be doing his best to shut God up, but God is not going to be silenced.
- So chapter 17, verse 1. Now Elijah, the Tishbite from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, Well, who's Elijah? And where's Tishbe?
- [10:37] Who is this guy? Well, who he is and where he comes from is not important. Rather, what he has to say is important because Elijah is speaking on behalf of God.
- Again, look at verse 1. 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.
- And just like that, the rains stopped. drought and famine across the land. God is sending a very clear message.
- Ahab, it's not you who rules with your gods. I rule by my powerful word. You see, Ahab's new god called Baal was in fact, or so called, the god of the weather.
- the one who was supposedly in charge of the rain and the sunshine. So why would you listen to God when you've got your own god, Baal, who controls the weather?
- [11:46] Well, in just a word, Ahab and his gods are silenced. You see, we can't shut God up.
- His words are powerful and effective. Not only did God create the universe by his word, but he sustains all things by his word.
- Just as we turn a tap off, so God by his word can turn the rain off. And just as we flick the switch and turn the lights on, so God by his word causes the sun to shine.
- His word is powerful and effective. But not hearing God's voice or not hearing his word is very, very dangerous.
- Look at verse 2. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah. Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kareth ravine east of the Jordan.
- [12:52] You see what's happening? God speaks through Elijah and then God removes Elijah. The very one who's speaking God's words to the king and to the people is suddenly taken out of the situation.
- Now God has gone silent. He's removed his word from Ahab. You see when God's word is absent, it isn't freedom, it isn't good, it's a sign of judgment.
- judgment. The prophet Amos made this clear. You can see the quote on the screen. He says, the days are coming, declares the sovereign Lord, when I will send a famine through the land, not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.
- People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.
- You see, our country today, our nation, is desperate to silence God, doing everything possible to push God out.
- [14:14] We're doing what Ahab did. We're doing our best to keep God away. We set up our own gods, the God of autonomy, self-autonomy, do whatever I want.
- And now, at last, we're free. God no longer has a place in our society. We don't have to listen to him anymore. But you see, I don't think it's just that we remove God.

The danger is, is that God removes his word. and when he removes his word from society, instead of order, there is disorder.

Left to ourselves, we don't make our lives better. We fall into ruin and despair. When God is silent, it is not freedom, it is an act of judgment.

You see, what this country really needs, is for God to speak, for his word to permeate every area of society and at all levels of government, starting with where we live and where we work.

[15 : 32] Because it is only by hearing the voice of God will lives begin to change. So first, God rules all things by the power of his word.

second, God preserves his servants by the command of his word. You see, telling Ahab there is going to be no rain, also meant that Elijah would have no rain.

God's people are not immune from the troubles of this world, but yet God is not finished with Elijah. have a look at verse two. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah, leave and turn eastward and hide in the Kareth ravine east of the Jordan.

You will drink from the brook and I have instructed the ravens to supply you with food there. And just as God said, verse six, the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening and he drank from the brook.

But that was not the only taste of God's provision. Look at verse seven. Sometime later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him, go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there, I have instructed a widow there to supply you with food.

[17 : 05] And just as God said, verse 15, she went away, the widow went away and did as Elijah told her, so there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.

Elijah is twice at the mercy of God. But God sees the need of his servant and by his words just instructs ravens and commands widows to feed him.

Now isn't that strange to you? Ravens don't usually bring you your dinner. If anything they might steal your dinner.

And widows don't usually provide food, they need provided for. But God simply commands his words and Elijah's needs are met.

Now can we expect God to supply all our needs in a similar way? If I'm short of cash will a robin bring me a 20 euro note?

[18 : 16] Or will a homeless man provide me the keys of a brand new car? Well I don't doubt that God provides. God just needs to command and it will happen.

But I don't think that's the message here. That's why we need to be careful not to read too much in but read God's word carefully. Remember what Elijah's role is.

He's a prophet isn't he? He is speaking God's word on behalf of God to the people. And God has more things for Elijah to say.

God hasn't finished speaking to Ahab. We'll meet Ahab again and all the people on Mount Carmel will see what happens there. But God is going to preserve Elijah for as long as God needs him.

This was God's plan for Elijah's life. Not everyone had ravens and widows to bring them food. In fact, if you are to read on into chapter 18, it tells us there that while Elijah's life was being preserved, other prophets were being killed.

[19 : 36] The point is, God has more for Elijah to do, so his life is spared. Ralph Davis, one author that I've been reading this week has helped me think clearly about this.

He says this, Elijah's life had to be preserved for his task had not yet been completed. Until his work was done, God would see to it that he was preserved.

That's the comfort of the word of the Lord. You see, nothing and no one can take your life without God say so.

We will not die a minute too early or a second too late. Our life is in God's hands and he will keep us and preserve us until the work he has for us to do is completed.

Now that doesn't mean to say we can live as we please and do as we like. Our job is to obey what God has said. Look at chapter 17 verse 2.

[20 : 49] Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah. Verse 5. So he did what the Lord had told him. Verse 8.

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah. Verse 10. So he went to Zarephath. You see if we're a Christian if you're a Christian here today God's plan for your life is really simple.

It's not complex. It is simply obey what God's word says. That's his plan for our life. And he will provide for you until the work he has for you to do is completed.

Our job is not to work out how long that's going to be or why some of God's servants die young and why other people live longer. Our job is simply to obey what God has said go and make disciples of all nations and I will be with you.

Just as God sent Elijah so God is sending us into the world. Go and make disciples. That's my plan for you for your life.

[22 : 13] wherever you are wherever you live whatever you do and God will preserve you and keep you until the work he has for you to do is completed.

So God preserves his servants by the command of his word. And third God reaches the lost God's command to Elijah to go to this widow was not just about his empty belly.

God's desire was to bring grace to the nations of the world. Look at verse eight. The word of the Lord came to Elijah.

Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. Well we know where Sidon is. Do you remember from chapter 16 that we read at the beginning?

That's the hometown of Ahab's wife Jezebel. That's also where Ahab had come across Baal and brought him back to his own country.

[23 : 31] If you are a God follower like Elijah you don't go into Sidon. There's no Bibles there. There's no churches in Sidon. Just godless pagans who deserve God's judgment.

But God doesn't have favourites does he? God's desire is that all people and all nations hear the grace of his word.

So verse 10 Elijah went to Zarephath into Sidon a pagan nation. Jesus himself picked up on this in Luke chapter 4.

The so-called religious leaders were getting uncomfortable with this Jesus guy who had appeared and was hanging around with all these untouchable people the outsiders the Gentiles the sinners the unclean people and they didn't like it.

So Jesus reminds them. Here it is on the screen. Jesus said to them no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land.

[24 : 57] Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. You see God's plan God's desire is that his grace always overflows to the outsiders.

His desire is always to reach the godless pagan nations of the world to widows just like this to people just like us so we too can know and experience his grace.

Look at the interaction between Elijah and the widow verse 10 we'll pick it up at the end of verse 10 Elijah called to the widow and asked would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink as she was going to get it he called and bring me a piece of bread as surely as the Lord your God lives not my God she says not my God but your God I don't have any bread only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug I'm gathering a few sticks to make a fire to take home and make a meal for myself and for my son that we may eat it and die why are you asking me I don't have any food I have nothing to give you nothing to offer verse 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 for your son 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 Lord sends rain on the land what's she going to do will she eat her last meal for herself and her son and hope that in the next few days it's going to rain or will she give what she has the very last bit of food that she has and give it to this complete stranger who says God's going to provide for you I mean what would you do well will she accept

God's word of grace or will she reject it well look at how she responds verse 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 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 what a wonderful account of God's generous grace reaching out to the most godless to the needy and broken don't be afraid this is what the Lord says and she went and did what Elijah told her and so this outsider this idol worshipping pagan widow took God at his word and believed she had nothing to offer nothing to give and she experienced the word of

[28:49] God's grace in her life you see it's this word of grace that people desperately need to hear God is not on the side of the religious folk the good folk his grace continually overflows to the needy to the broken to the nations who have not yet heard and God is calling us just like Elijah as his plan for us is saying go and make disciples of all nations and as you go I will be with you and I will provide for you until the time I have for you is up and through you I will bring grace to those who do not know so God reaches the lost by the grace of his word fourth God gives resurrection life by the authority of his word

God's word it seems can be trusted that was the widow's experience God says he will do what he will do in keeping with his word he will always do it but then tragedy strikes doesn't it verse 17 sometime later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill he grew worse and worse and finally stopped breathing a lifeless corpse death is never easy it robs us of those we love and it steals away our joy and for this widow she's been struck a double blow first her husband has died and now her son and we can feel her pain and her agony verse 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 is God punishing me for something I did where's God now he says he's powerful over all things he says he's going to provide how can I trust God how can I believe his word you can keep your God don't come in here reading the Bible to me even Elijah is struggling he too has doubts verse 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 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 it wasn't enough for me to pronounce there be no rain now

I'm here and this woman's hair why are you doing this you see death is the ultimate test of trusting God's word does the God who rules over the weather and the God who can control ravens and provide flour and oil does he even have authority over death can I trust him in death well the answer is a confident yes God gives resurrection life by the authority of his word verse 21 then Elijah stretched himself out on the boy three times and he cried out to the Lord Lord my God let this boy's life return to him it's a strange act isn't it but one that identifies himself with the boy let this boy have life just as

I have life may he breathe as I breathe and then Elijah prays he cries out to the creator God the one who spoke the universe into existence the one who sustains and provides us with all that we have he is dependent on the source of all life verse 22 the Lord heard Elijah's cry and the boy's life returned to him and he lived God heard Elijah and the dead boy heard God he lived here is the God who gives life not just new life but resurrection life verse 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 isn't this the joy and hope we all long for can we experience what this widow experienced can

[34:32] God take a dead life and say life let life return well again we can say yes confidently you see what God did through Elijah for one widow God has done for all who will believe through his son have a look with me please at Luke's gospel chapter seven Luke's gospel chapter seven Luke records for us a dramatic event not I suggest unintentionally like what we've just seen with Elijah because Elijah the prophet was only pointing forward to the true and ultimate prophet so

Luke chapter seven verse eleven let's read this section soon soon afterwards Jesus went to a town called Nain and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him as he approached the town gate a dead person was being carried out the only son of his mother and she was a widow and a large crowd from the town was with her when the Lord saw her his heart went out to her and he said don't cry then he went up and he touched the bar they were carrying him on and the bearers stood still he said young man I say to you get up the dead man sat up and began to talk and Jesus gave him back to his mother they were all filled with awe and praised God a great prophet has appeared among us they said

God has come to help his people and the news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country you see what Jesus did for that widow was just a sign of what he would do through his own death and resurrection for all who would believe because as Jesus died on that cross he too stretched out his hands he stretched out his hands to identify with us and through that act Jesus was saying I take the death that you deserve so that you can have the life that I deserve I will die for you so that you can have eternal life with me and after three days Jesus rose again defeating death and destroying the grave you see all who believe in the words of

Jesus have the assurance of resurrection life even though we will all die one day we will hear the words of the risen Jesus I say to you get up and we will live the power and the authority of God's word to give the dead life for all eternity you see Elijah and all that he did is simply there to point us forward to the true prophet Christ himself who would take death upon himself and who would give life to all who would receive and as we look back to the cross and resurrection like the widow we too now can say now I know that the word of the

Lord is the truth do you have confidence in this book do you believe that the words written down is God's truth do you believe that by believing and trusting in this word it will give you life today and life for all eternity we live in a society and a culture where God's word is constantly being silenced and undermined and the temptation is just to put it away don't believe it nobody else does but we can have confidence and know that God's word is the truth he has power and authority he will provide for his servants until he calls us home and his word will bring grace and life to all who will believe and his word will raise us from the grave when he comes again have confidence confidence in the truth of God's word let's pray father we thank you we thank you for the clarity of your word for its simplicity but yet for its amazing power and authority father help us when we are tempted to doubt your word when we are tempted to close it up and push it away that we would read it with confidence and know that your word is living changing and transforming lives and offering grace to a broken world offering new and resurrection life to all who will believe thank you for your word help us to speak it and help us to believe it in Jesus name amen we're going to sing together in response you are the word of

[41 : 23] God the father from before the world began by the power of his word he spoke life into existence and it's that same word that we can trust to raise us from the grave to be with him forever let's stand together as we sing to be and happy to be one word of him to be one