

1 Kings 17:8-16

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[0 : 00] Celebrating Life in the Gospel series. And I have a goal, one goal, on this afternoon. That is to help us to evaluate and, if necessary, reorder our regular commitment to support gospel ministry through our giving.

That's what I want to help us do. I want us to see that, among other things, that joyful, generous giving is right at the heart of the gospel life.

Inconsistent with what our Lord Jesus Christ himself has done. We are in that train. We are his people.

And give ourselves in that kind of way. One goal. Two texts. Turn with me to 1 Kings, chapter 17.

And your worship folder directs you as to where that is in the page number. If you have a blue Bible, you'll find that on page 299. And then we're going to look at another text in the Gospel of Mark.

[1 : 30] The first one we want to read is 1 Kings, chapter 17. And I'm going to read verses 8 through 16.

And then we'll look at, we'll read the Mark text also. Listen with me. Read along with me, if you would, please. Then the word of the Lord came to him, that is Elijah.

Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.

So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks.

And he called to her and said, Bring me a little water in a vessel that I may drink. And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.

[2 : 44] And she said, As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug.

And now I'm 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.

And Elijah said to her, Do not fear. Go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me.

And afterward make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, The jar of flour shall not be spent and the jug of oil shall not be empty until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.

And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. The jar of flour was not spent.

[3 : 55] Neither did the jug of oil become empty according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah. And then Mark chapter 12, 849, Blue Bibles, verses 41 through 44.

And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box.

Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.

And he called his disciples to him and said to them, Truly I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.

For they all contributed out of their abundance. But she, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.

[5 : 12] A tale of two widows. Let's pray. Lord, we love you and we thank you for this opportunity to be in your presence and in the presence of your people.

Praise you for having been led in worship. The wedding of music and verse that calls attention to your greatness and your sufficiency.

And may, Lord, now through your word, you speak to us and mold us and even renew our minds in ways that only your work can do.

We give ourselves to speaking as well as listening and hearing your word today. We pray all of these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Several years ago, during my Judson Baptist years, I was invited, or perhaps a better word, is challenged or dared to put on a Chicago Bears jersey on a Sunday morning and preach from it.

[6 : 25] Well, one of our men loaned me their Bears jersey. It had a 54 on the front and a 54 on the back and, of course, the letters across there, not Rothschild's, but Erlacher.

The word on the streets these days is that the jersey to wear is a number six for our new Bears quarterback.

We love our heroes, don't we? Whether it's a hero in a sports jersey or a hero in a three-piece suit or maybe a hero in scrubs or a ball cap worn backwards or a spectacles-wearing academic, we find ourselves admiring and even emulating those kind of people.

In today's text, we see two unlikely heroes or should I say heroines. For some, they may be unlikely because of their gender.

Some people feel that a woman can't be a hero or heroine. But these women stand out in today's text.

[7 : 49] And how backwards and sexist is the thinking that diminishes the excellence of womanhood.

A poetic rendering of Genesis chapter 2 helps us to see both the blessedness and the beauty of the fairer gender.

As the sun set on Eden, Adam's work was complete. Yet still there was an emptiness, a need still to meet.

But the Lord had a plan of which man would be a part. He would fill the deep void in the lonely man's heart. According to the wisdom of his infinite mind, he would add another gender to the race of mankind.

Tenderly and gently he put man to sleep, laid him to rest from his head to his feet. He then went to work and with exquisite skill, he outdid himself, his plan to fulfill.

[9 : 02] The product, a woman, a wife, a mother, a guardian of life, a friend like none other. Her name would be Eve, the mother of living.

She would major in wisdom and nurture and giving. Her mind would be sharp, in her eye a gleam. A guardian, lost my place, in her eye a gleam.

Yes, there we go. Curves in the right place, no wonder I stumbled. Curves in the right place, her skin soft and clean. Let me say that again, okay?

Her mind would be sharp, her eye would be a gleam. Curves in the right place, her skin soft and clean, and the brother said amen.

As a co-heir of life, she would share the dominion, not a second-class person with devalued opinion. She was a full participant, a key player in God's plan, made in his image, and a partner with man.

[10 : 07] So with the people of the ages, we witness the fact that man without woman would suffer great lack. And with Adam, our father, we say to our father above, thanks, Lord, for women, the gift of your love.

Women. women. Some would devalue these in the text because of their gender.

Others would devalue the women in our text because they are without companionship. The thinking of some is that those who are unmarried are less than stinks.

If you're unmarried, may your heart be guarded against the thinking that your ultimate worth and usefulness and value are tied to your companionship status.

Not so. We also note that the women in this text were needy women as it concerned this world's goods. Their worldly goods were scarce.

[11 : 20] And that comes through very clearly in each of these texts on this afternoon. And you and I must be guarded against thinking that one's worth and value are tied to their social class, where they are on the socioeconomic scale, where they are on the ladder.

What makes these women in the text noteworthy is not their gender. It's not their companionship status, or their net worth, or the lack thereof.

These women are women of obedient faith. And Hebrews chapter 11, which mentions heroes of faith, includes a veiled reference to this woman in 1 Kings chapter 17.

I'm going to read a portion of it. Listen, verses 32 through 35 of Hebrews 11. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah of David and Samuel and the prophets who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, remained strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight, and listen to this in verse 35, women received back their dead by resurrection.

It's a reference to the 1 Kings chapter 17 woman. That's her. The woman we encounter in 1 Kings 17 is one of those women that received their dead back by resurrection.

[13 : 21] And so in 1 Kings chapter 17 verses 8 through 16 we have what I would call a widow commanded. And in the Mark passage we have what I would call a widow commanded and a widow commended in the Mark passage.

Two snapshots of widows, women without husbands, women without the protector that God has provided within the context of a marriage. But they exercised obedient faith and through such they encourage your faith and my faith and inspire us to trust deeply in the very sufficiency of God almighty.

Look at the first Kings text if you would please. I'm going to be as timely as I can but I believe that this is a message that we need to hear.

it opens chapter 17 it opens with Elijah stepping on the scene it's like he comes out of nowhere look at chapter 17 verse 1 Elijah the Tishbite his name means my God is Yahweh or Jehovah or Jehovah is my God Yahweh is my God he steps on the scene and he speaks a word to Ahab the king of Israel that's the northern kingdom and if we would look in chapter 16 we will know that Ahab really out distanced himself and those who were before him in rebellion and evil against God look at chapter 16 and let's look at begin at verse 30 and Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him and as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ephbel king of the Zidonians and went and served

Baal and worshipped him notice what he did in verse 32 he erected an altar for Baal and the house of Baal which he built in Samaria and Ahab made Asherah these were these poles or implements of idol worship he made these Asherah Ahab did more to provoke the Lord the God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him how would you like to have that kind of reputation to wear that label in history one of the signs of God's displeasure with his people of old was withholding the rains of heaven and although Baal which his name means lord or master was allegedly the lord of the land and responsible for rain and fertility it was Jehovah the God of Israel who really and ultimately was in charge we see that in first

[16 : 45] Kings chapter 17 and following that's what this narrative is about the superiority of the living God over the gods that Israel had embraced and the gods of the Israel's neighbors who were around her drought is announced chapter 17 verse 1 the word from heaven no dew and no rain God's hand was on the faucet and it was turned off it would be shut nothing would come from it not even a drop three years and six months of drought the dew also was going to be withheld notice the directions that were given in verses 2 through 7 having pronounced the judgment of the Lord Elijah was then directed as what he was to do as far as being sustained in the midst of this drought how he would be provided for he was to go east verse 3 he was to hide by the brook

Kirith verse 4 verse 4 details how the prophet would be sustained water for his thirst would come from the brook and his food would be catered by the ravens Elijah was somewhat like a college student in that he was on a two meal plan bread and meat in the morning bread and meat in the evening what a picture though of God sustaining his own during a season of severe drought but notice in verse 7 the brook dried up also why no rain judgment from God had arrived just as it had been prophesied by God's servant Elijah but look at the heart of the story in verses 8-16 once again look at verse 8 the word of the Lord came to him that's

Elijah go to Zarephath the word of the Lord comes to him it's time for relocation this source of provision of God is dried up so he sends his prophet another place but where he is being sent is even more interesting he is sent to the heart of Baal country Zarephath and Phoenicia the very region that Jezebel had come from and from whence the worship of Baal in Israel it had been imported from there in the life of Israel it would be like the bears going up to Wisconsin to Lambeau Field of the Packers there the Packers they have home advantage there but so God was sending his servant Elijah to this foreign territory where Baal alleged to reign though Elijah was on foreign soil the Lord the God of the whole earth wasn't and he would sustain his prophet and prove himself even in enemy territory look at the language of verse nine and following it's very interesting it says

I have commanded a widow there that's in Zarephath to feed you had not the ravens who were likewise commanded they had delivered look at back at verse four you shall drink from the brook and I commanded the ravens to feed you there the ravens had delivered in essence at the command of God and also had not the heavens been shut up in essence at the voice of God or at the command of God they had withheld their rain the picture here is one of God as the grand conductor one who is ordering all things he is the one that is in control of nature and sky and sea and we see Jesus when he steps on the scene in first century!

similarly he was in control of nature and demons and disease and even death had bowed down to him this is the nature of the God that we serve and I don't believe sometimes the wonder and his power all the time are not clearly in focus and in view in our hearts and minds But again it's good to have biblical snapshots like this to help to renew our minds and to sharpen our thinking as it concerns his ability this plan called for sustenance through a widow that she was a widow is discerned probably because of her clothing her dress and her activity she she is gathering sticks verse 10 not only had the hard times descended in Israel but Zidon and Zarephath were feeling the crunch also and the language there it reveals the environment it was an environment of scarcity and perhaps to tester

[21 : 55] Elijah asked for notice the language he asked for a little water in verse 10 in a vessel and bring it to me she passed the willingness test and perhaps this was a clue that this was the one that God had appointed for his sustenance he then requests a marshal of bread in verse 11 and what he really requested amounted to simply nothing but a few crumbs and notice her reply is all I have is a handful the language of scarcity a flower and she has a little oil in a jug just enough on the bottom you know like you have one of those those those oil vegetable oil and it's just a little bit there that's all that she has a little oil on the bottom her plans for last supper of sorts this mother was going to share this last meal with her son and die but the

Lord had a different plan the Lord converted here a death plan into a life plan a starvation plan into a salvation plan and notice Elijah's words in verse 13 Elijah said to her do not fear there it is right there do not fear those are good words of caution and appropriately here don't fear obedience these words preceded his asking her to do something that was going to be scary it was going to be uncomfortable and even to the human mind it was going to be unreasonable and brothers and sisters that kind of fear can keep us from God's best the request that would follow under the circumstances this request really didn't make sense but the results vindicated the audacity of the request look at verse 14 through 16 for thus says the

Lord the God of Israel the jar of flour shall not be spent in the jug of oil shall not be empty until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth and she went and did as Elijah said and she and he and her household ate for many days the jar of flour was not spent neither did the jug of oil become empty according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah how would you like to have that jar and that jug the word of the Lord comes through in a time of need and need both for the prophet and need for this widow huh the Lord brought a needy woman and a needy prophet together to forge this faith partnership this woman needed the ministry of Elijah as much as Elijah needed her ministry the ministry of this widow and humanly speaking huh this was a recipe for disaster and failure this was like

I mean when you really look at this this was both a wedding of comedy and tragedy together and while there looked like there would be no net gain from this transaction the gain actually was great for everybody concerned God's profit was sustained the work of the Lord through him continued a widow a mother and her son were sustained and lasting partnership was established that would mean greater benefit even in the future there was sustenance then but there was going to be resurrection in the future and if you look at 1 Kings chapter 17 and the verses that follow you see that eventually this woman's son fell dead through this partnership that we see here deliverance from hunger preceded deliverance from death oh this is a marvelous story it's a story with lessons and here's one of them the Lord is king over all the earth and over all circumstances at all times you believe that do you really really really believe that he is the king over all the earth in this as it were the battle of the gods that you might even say ended on

Mount Carmel chapter 18 but here God is proving himself that he is Lord of all the earth he is Lord over all circumstances at all times we need to hear that today we need to hear that in our times of economic downturn our time of employment that doesn't seem to be decreasing soon enough we need to hear that kind of thing as a matter of fact listen to this passage of scripture that reinforces that first chronicles chapter 16 verses 25 and 26 and the

[27 : 43] Lord has a way of showing up and showing out in places where he is not even recognized and honored as God Lord has a way of causing people to act in ways that facilitate his purposes and the desires of his people and they don't even know why people in high places and in high positions humanly speaking just think about this humanly speaking as we think!

church there's no way that we should have a church plant north if that was up to ourselves we would not be there but God had a way of commanding the people of Lakeshore Baptist Church to give us their property and money in the bank the Lord has a way of directing people and also you see here there's this lesson of abundant flow that comes from obedient faith those with meager means must not fear obedience even those with meager means can join the Lord in his work of what he's doing I mean that's the nature of the Christian life it's one of constantly giving and investing and investing and giving this Old Testament widow was commanded and a part of

God's sustenance program for his work in that day but then there's this New Testament widow who was commended for her actions the text in Mark finds Jesus in a very interesting place he's seated adjacent to those who are depositing their offerings he's observing the people he's observing them as they put their offerings in these 13 horn shaped receptacles that were there in the temple for offerings and he noticing that the rich people are dropping in what could be deemed jaw dropping kind of offerings amounts in their offerings and one would think that because of the size of their offerings that heaven has a big smile because of abundance because of the size of their gifts not so the applause of heaven according to this text was reserved for another and here it is an unlikely person heaven's hero as it were the example that

Jesus highlighted was in fact our second widow she's poor her gifts betray her poverty we have no currency in our system that matches or compares to what she gave it would amount to one sixty fourth check it out of a of the wage of a common laborer of that day which was seventeen to twenty cents so calculate one sixty fourth of seventeen just round it out to eighteen cents go figure it wasn't much huh that which was so small that if you dropped it on the ground it would hardly make a sound on earth but guess what when this lady dropped these two small coins in the receptacles there was a loud cha-ching in heaven on the basis of what she gave huh in

Jesus words all the upside down values of heaven she gave more than they all on earth her gift was the smallest in heaven it was the largest it was the largest because of what it cost her to give it cost her everything they had leftovers this woman had absolutely nothing left huh and Jesus commendation was reserved for this one he was so moved by this display of extreme generosity that he got his disciples he wanted to seize this teaching moment for them and he said look at that look at that huh he wanted them to see what she was giving he he sees this incident it demanded sharing and what an example of obedient faith it cost her everything and listen friends giving is a sincere act of worship that cost us something not a casual or an empty ritual for the applause of men if that's the reason that we give we should keep it

[32 : 47] Dan Ryland who's known as the pastor's coach in a recent article notes that each church has a predominant financial personality what might the financial personality of Holy Trinity be he lists seven financial personality traits among them attitudes of faith and generosity and gratitude do any of those things describe you as a giver to God's work just think of how the Lord could be honored with those kind of attitudes amongst us and those kind of characteristics characterize this New Testament widow in our text and this is what I want us to ponder today from these dear ladies if the command to give and the commendation for giving includes the most vulnerable what about the rest of us if the command to give and the commendation for giving includes the most vulnerable these widows of little to no means if obedient faith including faith to give generously regularly and joyfully is to be found anywhere it should be among the people of God in the

Old Testament the Lord didn't find faith on familiar territory he went to foreign soil to find obedient faith Jesus so much has said that in Luke chapter 4 listen but in truth I tell you there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the heavens were shut up three years and six months and a great famine came over all the land and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath in the land of Sidon to a woman who was a widow does the Lord have to find obedience outside of the people of God the Lord is looking for obedient faith from all of us and this is the thing brothers and sisters obedient faith is at the very core of the gospel life commitment to the gospel not only says take my life and let it be consecrated

Lord to you it also says take my silver and my gold and not a might would I withhold obedient faith is faith that gives and our advances in God's work in the world and in the city need that kind of gospel commitment from the very people of God what we do with what we have been given says so much about our devotion and as I look over the years at the giving of patterns of churches that I have pastored it's pretty consistent with what we see in the broader public the exception rather than the rule is that most of God's people give considerably less than 10% of their income which as

Randy Alcorn says and I like the statement 10% is like the training wheels for giving it's good to get you started but even there we shouldn't end there but the average giving is somewhere around about 3% of one's income at the core of gospel living is commitment to God and his work and supporting it God is marvelously blessed and smiled on this church over its 11 years of existence God has sustained us sometimes those gifts have been from outside we need one of the words and we I'm trying not to

Steve say self sustainability but we'll need to craft another word for that but in order for that's what we're looking for in principle perhaps there is a better word because ultimately it's God who sustains us but we're looking to take the kind of here's a good word ownership for what God has called us to do from within our body and our dreams and visions and plans demand nothing less than that we are to give obediently and generously and purposefully and intentionally and worshipfully it's at the core of the gospel life the Lord the great God above all gods is worthy of the first he's worthy of the best he's worthy of the last if he asks for it the gospel life it's a matter of the heart that's where it all begins because our lives follow brothers and sisters our devotion and speaking of unlikely heroes our faith is built on the living and the giving of an unlikely hero even

[39 : 09] Jesus the one who became poor in order that we might be rich we're reminded that Jesus Christ paid it all and as the old song says all to him absolutely all to him I owe he leads the way for us in our giving and helping others to become rich in him because that is where true riches lie in him and him alone he gave himself sacrificially for the world and we give ourselves and of our substance for his work in the world may we be renewed in our mind and renewed in our commitment to be people who calls heaven to smile the applause of heaven may await those who give honorably and from the heart we're going to sing a song in a bit here speaks about the heart of worship and as

I mentioned worship is ultimately a matter of the heart giving is ultimately a matter of the heart and God calls us back to the things that really count to things that really matter God is the God of heaven who is worthy of our lives our soul all were the whole realm of nature mind that were a present far too small love so amazing so divine demands my life my soul my dollars my investments in heaven for the glory and honor of

God and for the advance of his kingdom on earth let's pray Lord we love you we thank you bring us back to where we belong bring us back to devotion Lord that mimics your devotion of selfless sacrificial giving of ourselves and that which you have entrusted to us may it be for your glory for your honor is our prayer in Christ's name let's stand together and sing our last song before we dismiss■