

# Bird Food

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 04 August 2019

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[ 0 : 00 ] The thing that made him truly great and super, it was that he listened to God's voice and he spoke God's words.

Sounds really simple, doesn't it? But it was really, really hard because what he did was he walked up to the strongest king in that whole area and he said, Your God is wrong.

The true God you have rejected. There won't be any more rain. No more rain. And that's because that king got his whole people, the people of God, to follow the God that brings rain supposedly. And Elijah was saying, My God's the only living God. He'll decide if there's going to be rain. And you know what? The problem with not being rain is that Elijah had to be taken care of too.

Now, I don't know if you listened closely to what Verity was saying, but can you tell me in this story there are two things. Give me a little bit of a hint there. That fed Elijah.

[ 1 : 02 ] What fed Elijah? Yes. The oil and the flour. The oil and the flour. Well, who made the oil and the flour, the cakes and things? Who made that?

Do you remember? The oil and flour fed him. But who made it? Yeah. The widow. It was the widow. So a widow fed Elijah. And who else fed Elijah?

Now, this is sort of a trick question. Do you remember? Yes. Verity. You should probably know because you read today. Yes. The ravens. The ravens fed him. Does anybody know what ravens get to eat?

Do you know what they do? What do ravens eat? Yes. Scratch. Trash. You are exactly right. They are scavengers and they eat trash.

Roadkill. Whatever is dead. Whatever is out there. So those are the two things that fed Elijah. Ravens and a widow did as well. Now, I want you, during our time today, to draw one of three pictures.

[ 2 : 05 ] You can actually draw all three pictures if you want. Okay? One is a picture of superhero Elijah standing in front of King Ahab and saying, No more.

There is no more rain. And that's in a nice palace. He's sitting on a throne. And Elijah... By the way, Elijah wore a hair shirt made of hair, like camel hair, and a leather belt.

He was kind of a wild-looking guy. A lot like John the Baptist. So you can draw a picture of that. You can draw a picture of him being fed meat and bread and all kinds of stuff by ravens, too.

Draw a picture with ravens feeding Elijah. And the last thing you can draw a picture of is the widow with oil, a jug of oil, and a pan of bread, feeding him what they think is the last supper.

Because her son is there, too. And they're very poor. So you can do one of those two pictures. A meal, ravens, or the king with superhero Elijah.

[ 3 : 07 ] So come on up to the front here. You can draw pictures. Or you can make the scene with clay, too. So come on up and grab these things. And as you're doing that, we're going to talk from the front of the church to the adults.

For about 12 minutes. You guys have 12 minutes to draw. Well, let's pray as the children are quiet. Let's join in prayer.

Father in heaven, we thank you and we praise you for Elijah. We thank you for the gift of your living word. And we thank you that you speak to us. Because you are the living God.

Lord, speak to us through your word today. So that Jesus is glorified. And we know your love and your purpose is for us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, a little bit of a setup.

We are talking about Elijah the next five weeks. And Elijah comes to Israel in a time of great darkness. This is evil times.

[ 4 : 11 ] The greatest of the Old Testament prophets come in one of the worst times in Israel's life. They'd had a succession of terrible kings. We should be thankful for the politicians that we have

when we consider what Israel had.

20 kings and almost to a person. They were leading the people of God away from the true God to worship idols. And to go into immorality.

And to see the destruction of society. The darkest of times. Many in Israel had forsaken God and followed Baal. This God that supposedly provided rain.

And for the flourishing of the crops. And for the economy to grow. So out of the blue. Elijah comes into Ahab's life.

And brings God's living word. And it's not a pleasant word. He says in verse 1. If you turn to 1 Kings 17. There is going to be no rain. Until God says otherwise.

[ 5 : 14 ] And as I told the children. The deep meaning of that. Is that Baal is the God of rain. And here Elijah is saying your God is powerless. Your God is lifeless.

Your God is a dead end. And you are leading people into that dead end. There is judgment here. And that is what Elijah's life work is about. It is very positively to say there is one God.

And there is the way of life. It's only in this God that you will find true hope. And his life work is to turn people's hearts to the living God.

And back away from those lifeless gods. That they were so tempted to follow. For their own financial benefit. And we are going to see in the next few weeks.

The powerful things God does through his ministry. He becomes the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. As I said the superhero. He becomes the guy that is going to be with Jesus.

[ 6 : 14 ] At the transfiguration. He is the one who prefigures Jesus. And yet Elijah is going to experience incredible physical.

And spiritual. And emotional. Brokenness. And weakness. You are going to see him persecuted. You will see him hungry. And alone. And often at the end of his rope.

He is very human here. And you are going to see. As we heard in this reading. That God immediately sends Elijah away. From Ahab.

To be fed by ravens. As I told the children. And he is not running away to the wilderness to hide. There is something very symbolic about what he is doing.

It shows that God's word is leaving Israel. And this question. That you know. His own people. God is leaving. With his word.

[ 7 : 14 ] Now you might wonder. Could this happen in Canada? We have all these Bibles. We have access to things that have to do with God's word all of the time. And the answer is yes.

It happens. In fact today. Later on. There is going to be a very large parade in Vancouver. And it is a parade that will be celebrating. Worshipping creation.

Rather than the creator. It will be something that will celebrate. And revel. In confusion. Of what God intended for his creation.

It will glorify sexual immorality. And will actually scorn. God's good and loving purposes. For sexuality. It will scorn the idea of purity.

And that there is a God that we would listen to. Who knows us. And what is better for us. Better than we know ourselves. And whole denominations.

[ 8 : 09 ] And many other congregations. Proudly support that movement. And preach its aims. So there is a famine of God's word. In those churches.

And denominations. There will be no true life. No growth. No reality in their relationship with God. If they reject. And do not have God speaking to them.

Through their word. And that is what is happening today. So we have in our own country. A little foretaste. Of what things were like. In Israel.

But wonderfully. The rest of the Bible reading. In verses 2 through 16. Is this deep contrast. It's actually about two people. Elijah. And this widow.

Who feed on God's word. There is nothing else. There is only God's word. By faith. To feed on. And it's really hard.

[ 9 : 06 ] To do it. They know the reality of God. And his power. In his. In their lives. By feeding on that word. We don't have a lot of time.

But I want to encourage you. With the faith of those two people. And apply it to us right now. Look at verses 2 through 7. You see Elijah. He is fed by ravens.

Who are scavengers. As I said. Twice a day. Bringing bread and meat. So there's roadkill. And who knows what else. He's drinking from the brook. That's getting smaller. And smaller every day.

And he must have wondered. Where is God taking me? If he had a motto. It would be. There is no prophet. In being a prophet. And he could put it on a bumper sticker.

There doesn't seem to be any future here. But every day. What he did. Was to hold on to God's word. God told me to come here. I just won't think about.

[10:02] What the ravens are bringing me. I'm going to cook it really well. There's nothing else. I'm here. I can only lean on God's word.

And what he does. Is he perseveres. He stays in the wilderness. And just as the brook dries up. Just as that sustenance is gone. God's word comes to him.

In verses 8 and 9. And God says. Go to Zarephath. Which is near Sidon. On the coast of Lebanon. It's just to the north of Israel. It's a pagan country.

And I don't know if you know this. But it's where Jezebel. Ahab's wife. Who is leading the charge. To move towards Baal. That's where she's from. And in that pagan country.

God says. Behold. I have commanded a widow there. To feed you. And he must have thought. A widow? Provide? That makes no sense. And it's not just any widow.

[11:01] But we find out. That she is the poorest of widows. And women whose husband have died. There was no social net. There was nothing to provide for them. It was a dead end.

When her husband died. Leaving her nothing. She was gathering sticks. She had a son. She was going to have one last meal. She's literally the most unlikely person.

To take care of Elijah. But again. It is God's word. That he obeys. And it is God's word. That says. God will provide. By his own power.

By his own strength. And God is calling Elijah. And I think he's calling us too. To look at the world. Through the eyes of faith. Through the eyes of God.

Which is often very unlikely. And upside down. From what we conventionally. Would think. And it turns out. That her faith.

[11:58] That you're going to see. In verses 10 through 16. Teaches us today. Very clearly. What faith is. What it means. To hear God's living word.

And to respond. And I don't think it's an accident. That 800 years later. Jesus will talk to a Canaanite woman. From the exact same location.

Who comes to Jesus. And says. Heal my daughter. And he says. You know. That I came. For the people of God. That the bread. Is not for the dogs. And she says. Even the dogs.

Eat the little crumbs. From the table. And she says. There. He says to her. There is faith. That is the living faith. Your daughter. Is healed.

And he raises her up. And says. This is what it means. To believe. In God. And indeed. That is what this widow. Of Zarephath. Is teaching us as well.

[12:52] She is the example. Of living faith. She shows us five things. Very briefly. First of all. She teaches us. That God speaks. To every kind. Of person.

In every situation. Whether it's the great prophet. Or a completely unknown. Pagan woman. God speaks. To them. I have commanded.

A widow. Jesus said. I have spoken. To this widow. And spoken to her. Before Elijah arrived. What a surprise. It must have been. To her. And each of you.

Gathered here today. Have very different stories. From one another. But for all of you. God is speaking. To each of us. Through his word. Whatever.

Your situation. He is speaking. Personally. He reveals. His personal love. For you. In that. He speaks. To you. And that's what sets.

[13:45] The living God. Apart from. Any other God. In any other religion. It is not arrogant. To know. That God. Is the living God. Who speaks to us.

It is true. And it is very. Very good. He wants you. To know him. Personally. And his transforming life. And the question. That the widow. Really.

Her example. Gives us is. Are you listening. To God. Do you read. His word. Expecting him. To speak. To you. The second thing.

She teaches us. Is that God. Challenges us. In faith. He challenges us. To trust and believe. In sometimes. Very difficult ways. You know.

When Elijah comes. He asks. Not only for water. But then he asks. For food. When she's getting that water. And she says. Look. As your Lord God lives. And she knows it.

[14:38] Because he spoke to her. I don't have anything. I have nothing baked. Only a handful of flour. In a jar. And a little oil. In a jug. And now I am gathering. A couple of sticks. That I may go.

And prepare it. For myself. And my son. That we may eat it. And die. How can I give this thing. That you're asking me to give. It's an incredible sacrifice. Let us die in peace.

Elijah. And it may seem. A great hardship. And a sacrifice. For us to trust God. And to obey him. We don't see why. Sometimes. That is the part.

Of the walk of faith. For each of us. There is challenge. There is testing. And real risk. We take in following Jesus. It is the part. And parcel.

Of having. A living faith. And this woman. Reveals it. In the most. Extreme ways. And that leads. Though. To the third thing. And it teaches us.

[15:34] That God. Also. Assures us. In his word. Not only challenges us. But assures us. He gives promises. Look at verses 13 and 14.

Elijah said to her. Do. Not. Fear. The most. Frequently commanded. Thing in the bible. Do. Not. Fear. Do. Not. Fear. Instead. Do. As you have. As I have said. First. Make me. A little cake of it.

Bring it to me. Elijah says. And afterwards. Make something for yourself. And your son. For here's what the Lord says. The jar of flour. Shall not be spent. The jug of oil. Shall not be empty.

Until the day. That the Lord. Brings rain upon the earth. With. You see. God's word. Is full of promises. And what this woman. Is doing. Is she's being called.

[16:28] To risk everything. To trust. In those promises. Because. God. In his word. Says that true hope. Is found.

In listening to that word. He's calling this woman. To go from desperation. To promise. He is calling her. To replace her fear. And anxiety. With a risky trust.

In God. Our salvation. Our only true hope. And that's true for you. As well. God is calling you. To replace the fear. And anxiety. You have.

About what you are. Facing. With a risky trust. In God. Being your only. True. Hope. And again. That leads. There to something.

Fourthly. And that is. The walk. Of faith. And obedience. And I want you to notice. What she does. This woman does. About that. Promise.

[17:25] She actually. Leans completely on it. She has no choice. She's like Elijah. In the wilderness. She believes. A sheer promise. And she takes. The risk of faith. And it's a risk.

That she takes. Every single day. That is the nature. Of faith. God does not show us. The whole picture. He calls us. Every day. To trust him.

In what we know. And so. It was not like. For. It would have been great. If for that woman. God had caused. A big van. To pull up. With a whole. Hundred pounds.

Of flour sack. And a huge. Hundred gallon jug. Of olive oil. But no. Morning by morning. There was just enough. Oil at the bottom. Of the jug.

And the same amount. Of flour. At the bottom. Of the jar. Yet verse 15. Says. Her household. Ate for many days. Now put yourself. In the widow's shoes.

[18:18] Every day. This happens. By about. Day 22. She was probably. Beginning to think. God is. Faithful. God is. Faithful. And this is what.

We are called to this. This is the nature. Of the living faith. She could have sung. At that point. Probably. Great is your faithfulness. Morning by morning. New mercies.

I see. Because that's. What was going on. For her. That's the nature. Of living faith. And we are called. To this. God doesn't show. The whole picture. But he calls us. To an ongoing.

Living faith. And believe in him. Each day. And in that. Our lives. If you're like me. We often forget. To pray. Even about small things.

Like writing a sermon. And suddenly saying. I can't figure out. What I'm going to say. Oh yeah. I should pray. I should pray. And this is the nature. Of an ongoing.

[19:12] Living faith. God does not show us. Beyond what he is. Calling us to. Each day. Very very often. And the reason for that. Is so that we cultivate. This living faith.

In which we experience. The reality. And the love of God. It's one of the reasons. Why we say grace at meals. Day by day. We're saying. I'm depending on God. For his mercies.

That his mercy and grace. Are new. Every morning. Now I want to close. With in about 30 seconds. So you guys. Are almost done writing. You guys are amazing.

You're very. You're very good. And quiet. So. I'm going to finish. In about a minute. And then we're going to look. At your reading. Your things that you've done. You can put your stuff away. But I want you to say. That the last. I want to say. The last thing. The widow shows us. Is that God. Fulfills. His promises. God fulfills them. Verse 16.

[ 20 : 08 ] If you look at that. Exactly. Mirrors. Elijah's promise. It says. Whether the flower was not spent. The jug of oil. Did not become empty. According.

To the word. Of the Lord. And you see. What the widow. And her son. And Elijah. All came to learn. Is that God. Does. What he promises. In his word.

And we as Christians. Have this incredible gift. In that Jesus. Is our guarantee. Of this. In Jesus. All of the promises.

Of God. Are fulfilled. The whole arc. Of the Bible. All that is. That Elijah. Is about. All that the prophets. All of all. Are all about. The whole Old Testament. Everything is fulfilled.

In him. And what that means. Is that. All our hopes. Are fulfilled. And will be fulfilled. In him. That in the midst. Of even the most. Difficult times.

[ 21 : 03 ] That you face. He brings us. To the living God. By the forgiveness. Of sins. And he actually. Pours into us. His love.

Into our hearts. He fills us. With his very presence. His Holy Spirit. And he gives us. Life with him. Forever. These promises. Are actually being.

Fulfilled. Day by day. In all of the things. That are happening. In our life. The hard things. And the joys. This is the hope. That is at the center. Of real life. The life of God.

It is the hope. That actually. Shapes our life. And actually makes us. Who God. Intended us to be. May God. Give you the faith. Of this widow.

As you hear his word. Today. And each day. In the days to come. To him be all honor. And glory. Praise and thanksgiving. Now and forever.

[ 21 : 59 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.