

God Can Make A Lot From Only A Little

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[0 : 00] 1 Kings chapter 17, looking again at verse 14, 1 Kings 17 verse 14.

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.

As we were looking at Bible characters last year, one of the characters that we looked at was this amazing prophet Elijah. And while we look a little at Elijah tonight, focus will turn to this widow woman.

Elijah, as we know, was quite a remarkable man. His dedication and zeal to and for the Lord were probably as great as anybody that you'll come across. His life was dramatic, and there was an incredible fiery passion about him.

In fact, sometimes as you read the life of Elijah, you think that he might have had superpowers, that he was somehow a little different to the likes of us.

[1 : 16] And I think maybe part of what makes us think that is the way he was taken from this world. But he never died. He was one of only two men that never actually died. So sometimes we can think, oh, Elijah, he was different.

At one level he was, but he was exactly the same. And that's why James, in his epistle, says that Elijah was a man exactly like ourselves.

The same nature, same passions, just the same as ourselves. So we mustn't think of him as some kind of superman or some endowed with supernatural gifts in this world.

It was God that was empowering him. Yes, we said he was only one of two men in this world, never to die, Enoch and Elijah.

And as we remember, Elijah was carried by a chariot of fire into heaven. And although we won't be transported unless the Lord comes first bodily, Elijah and Enoch were transported bodily, we will also be transported from this world into glory.

[2 : 29] Our souls will. And I don't know exactly how that will be. What I do know if we go from what Jesus, for instance, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus tells us that the rich man died and was buried, and in hell he lived up his eyes.

But he also tells us that the poor man died and his soul was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom or to Abraham's side, so that the angels transported the soul of Lazarus into glory.

And that, of course, makes complete sense to us, because the angels are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. Surrounding you, every day, there are angels ministering.

Because if you're a Christian, the Lord is sending his angel. And little do we know the number of times that we have been delivered and kept from, and things have stopped happening to us that we don't know anything about.

But there is a ministry of angels taking place around us all the time. And we believe that when a person dies, that the angels are there, angel or angels are there present, to take the believer's soul to glory.

- [4 : 03] And even although a person may die suddenly, the angels are already there. Because a sudden death, although a sudden death is a sudden, very sudden to us, it's not to the Lord, because he's already made the preparation.
- The angels are already there, surrounding, waiting, ready to carry the soul home to glory. And so it's a wonderful prospect that we will be secure and safe.
- And that's why it's all, can you imagine what it's going to be like if you don't have Jesus Christ as Savior? Because you're going to be all alone in death. And that's where that awful concept of being lost comes into play.
- Because there's no such thing as being lost for the believer. They are so secure and they are transported into the presence of the Lord. Like, remember how Stephen, before he died, he saw that vision of Jesus standing, as it were, ready to receive him into glory.
- What a welcome there will be for every believer into glory. But what a haunting experience for those out of Christ. That's when loneliness and alone will really hit in.
- [5 : 31] Well, Elijah, as we said, was transported, body and all, to glory. Now, Elijah was ministering at a very, very tough time in Israel, because Israel was in the grip of the most wicked king that they had.
- In chapter 16, just prior to, just at the very end of it, it tells us about this king, Ahab. It tells us in verse 30 of chapter 16, And Ahab, the son of Omri, did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him.
- And there were some awful ones before him. And then, of course, he took his wife, this wife, Jezebel, who was a byword for wickedness. And together on the throne, they had that horrendous reign in Israel.
- And they built up the altars to Baal and idols of Baal. And they turned the nation more than they had ever been before towards Baal worship.
- And the Lord had said, right, enough is enough. And he said to Elijah, I'm going to send a drought upon the land. And you are going to go and convey that message to Ahab and tell him what's to be.
- [6 : 50] And that's what Elijah does. He tells Ahab, we read that at the beginning of the chapter, As the Lord God lives of Israel, before whom I stand, there shall be neither June or rain these years, except by my word.
- And then after he was to deliver that message, God said, go and hide yourself. Go to the brook cherished and hide yourself there. And I'll sustain you. Because he knew that Jezebel and Ahab would be out for Elijah's blood, that he was a dead man walking in the land of Israel, unless he went to hide.
- And we have God's wonderful provision and protection there, because God uses scavenging birds to bring every single morning and every single evening bread and meat.
- Isn't that extraordinary? Ravens that would fight one another for bread and meat. They would gobble it up like there's no tomorrow. They're there, carrying that bread and that meat all the way to Elijah at the brook.
- Every morning and every evening, Elijah ate well. And it just shows how every single thing is under the control of God.
- [8 : 09] Everything. Even the birds and the fish. He caused the fish to swallow Jonah. And here he's using the birds to bring the food to Elijah.
- And we've always got to remember this, that God is in control of everything. But something I think maybe we mentioned before, but it's worth mentioning in passing here, is what I love about Elijah is how obedient he is to God.

Because God said to him, you go and you hide there, stay at the brook Cherith. And that's exactly what he did. So day after day, the bread and the meat came and he drank of the brook.

That's what we're told. But you'll notice in verse 7, after a while, the brook dried up because there was no rain in the land. So I would imagine, there's Elijah.

And day after day, he's looking at that brook and he says, you know, I can go a few days without food. The ravens are coming and so, but I can't go long without water.

[9 : 12] And that flowing stream, it was getting less and less and turning eventually into just a little trickle. And then one day, it was dry. It was nothing. No water at all.

Common sense, and our own wisdom would have said to us, before it reached that point, hey, I better get out of here. Common sense tells me, if I stay here, I'm not going to have any water.

I might have food, but I'm not going to have any water. Common sense tells me, I better go. Well, where would he go? You see, Elijah didn't go anywhere.

He stayed. Because that's the order. That's what it says. Verse 7 tells us, and after a while, the brook dried up because there was no rain in the land. Verse 8, then the word of the Lord came to go to Zarephath.

It wasn't go before the brook dried up. And the Lord is testing Elijah's obedience. Elijah, will you stay put even as you see that river dry up?

[10 : 20] And you know, we've got to apply that to ourselves. Because when God puts you anywhere, where God directs you anywhere, you stay put until he shows you otherwise.

Because so often we can, when things are going against you, and when you're, you might be here tonight, and you're saying, you know, I'm really struggling in life. I'm absolutely persuaded of where I am, that it's the right place to be.

But now I've got to question it because things are going against me. I'd better move. No, you don't. Not unless the Lord makes it clear to you to go.

And that's what Elijah did. He stayed put even when the river went dry until the Lord said, right, Elijah? Next stage. And that's what he did.

He said that he was sent to go, arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. And so, away Elijah goes.

[11 : 21] And it's quite interesting, because, I think, maybe we mentioned this before when looking at Elijah, is that when the Lord sends him to Sidon, he sends him to the very place that Jezebel has come from.

There's something almost very ironic in it all. Because we read, if we go through Kings, we find that Jezebel and Ahab were scouring the land searching for Elijah.

And Elijah isn't Jezebel's home country. That's where the Lord sent him. That's probably the very last place in the whole world that Jezebel would have expected him to be, but that's where he is.

And, you know, when God sent Elijah to Sidon, in a sense, he was displaying his judgment against his own place.

You see, when God favors a people, when God favors a person or a people or a nation, and he blesses them richly, and then they turn away from him, then it is inevitable that his judgment will come upon them.

[12 : 37] And that's exactly what is happening here. That God is removing the blessing and for a while he's going to put it elsewhere. And, you know, that's what happened to the Jews at the time of Jesus.

And Jesus actually talks about this very incident with a widow woman in Luke's Gospel. And Jesus makes a point and he says, were there not many widows in Israel?

Of course there were. There were loads of widows in Israel that God could have sent Elijah to and it would have been a blessing on their home had Elijah, the man of God, been there.

But God didn't send Elijah to one home in Israel. Instead, he sent him to Sidon. And in a sense, God was giving a little insight, this little glimpse, as we mentioned this morning, of the light, the divine light of God going outside Israel.

And that's what God was showing, here I am, I am reaching out to another nation as well. Now, if God is sending Elijah to be looked after and to be fed, you would expect him to send him to somebody who is wealthy.

[13 : 56] You might expect him to send him to somebody, some rich person inside him so that there would, here's somebody who has resources for a number of years that they might be able to feed the prophet and nourish the prophet.

But no, God sends him to probably the poorest person in the whole of Zarephath. If you were to go around Zarephath and say, who in Zarephath has the least of all?

Who is living beyond the poverty line? Who has absolutely nothing? You would say, I'll see the widow woman there.

She's there with her little boy. They have nothing. They have nothing. Back in those days, a widow woman was in a very poor place because there was no provision made.

And thankfully, although it wasn't always adhered to in Israel, it was one of the things that God emphasized through his law that the poor and the needy and the widow and the stranger were to be looked after.

[15 : 05] God made that as a part of his statutes. And although it was in the law, it wasn't always adhered to, but God was making provision for that. But that wasn't the case in other nations.

So this poor woman would have been in a terrible state. She had absolutely nothing. And yet, this is the very passion that God is sending Elijah to.

And as God sends Elijah to this woman, he's sending her there in order to strengthen Elijah's faith. Because this is, I'm telling you, this is a journey of faith.

And he's sending Elijah there to bring this woman to come to faith in himself. Which is a journey which, we're not going through all of them, just focusing on one part of it.

Because, initially, she talks about Elijah, about his God, but she comes round to believing. You can see that there's a journey of faith within this woman herself.

[16 : 09] So, here's this widow woman living in Zarephath. And Elijah arrives at the gates of Zarephath. That's what we read here, that so he arose and went to Zarephath.

And when he came to the gate of the city, there was this woman gathering sticks. And I love the way that Elijah has such a trust in God that he doesn't for one moment think that God is going to make it difficult for him.

And that he's going to have to go searching around, how will I work out who this widow woman is? He sees a woman gathering sticks, and he says to himself straight away, this will probably be her.

So he puts a test out in the very same way as the servant, Abraham's servant, when he was looking for a wife for Isaac, when Rebecca came, remember how he asked for a drink of water?

And then he asked for the drink for the camels also. Here's Elijah asking for this woman for a drink of water. And you can see the immediate response.

[17 : 14] He said, bring me a little water in a vessel that I may drink. And straight away, she begins to go for it. And it's at this point that we find Elijah saying, in verse 12, he says, and as you're going, he says, bring me a marshal of bread in your hand.

Now, Elijah's really testing the waters here and saying, is this her? And she says, well, you know, I would love to do that for you, but I can't.

Because she said, see these sticks I'm gathering? And you'll notice also that it's not a lot of sticks. It's only a couple of sticks. Because that's what she says.

And she said, bring me a marshal of bread in your hand. And she said, as the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour and a little oil in that jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks.

It's going to be just a little fire. Because she's only got this little bit of oil and this little bit of flour. And it's going to be literally the last supper. The shells were bare.

[18 : 30] She had no money. She had no resources. She had nothing. Nothing. No provision, whatever. And she says, I can't. I would love to do that for you. I can't.

I'm on my way to prepare this last supper. What a test of Elijah's faith. Because Elijah, at one level, if that was you or me, would say, whoa, I've got it wrong here.

You're a woman who has nothing. It must be somebody else. But Elijah knows his God. And you know, the beauty of it is, Elijah's not listening to her words. He's not listening to the emptiness of the words.

He's not hearing about her empty cupboard and her last drop of oil and her last bit of flour. He's listening to the word of God. His eyes are focused on the Lord. And then Elijah, he says this quite beautifully.

He says straight away to her, as the Lord, your God lives. He says, 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.

[19 : 40] Great faith. And you know, here's this woman at the very end of her resources. And God is coming to intervene on her behalf. And you might be here tonight or you may have gone through situations in life where you felt you were at the end of your resources.

Some of you have been there. Maybe some of you are there right now. And maybe for you there's a hopelessness and a helplessness. There's a settled despair in life.

You're looking out into the future and it's bleak. And you're not sure where you're going to turn, what you're going to do. Well, here is the Lord who has never, ever changed.

And if you're a believer tonight, he has promised that his grace is sufficient for you. He has promised that he will never leave you nor forsake you.

He has promised that he will work all things together for your good. You know, when you go through the Bible, there are loads of characters there who were at places and points where to them it looked like it was the very end.

[20 : 49] When Jacob got word that Joseph, his son, was dead. Oh, he said, I'm going to go to the grave in grief. You find the same idea with Jonah when he sort of came to in the belly of the great fish.

He was there and there was this, can you imagine the terror, the horror, the emptiness, the helplessness of being there. There's loads of situations that you go through Scripture and you find people and it seems to be at the end of the resources.

But as we say, Elijah said to the woman, do not fear. And I love his faith. And he said to her, you believe what I'm saying to you because I want you to believe in the God whom I believe in.

And I love what this woman does as well because you know this, the woman believes. This woman is on a journey of faith and she accepts the words of Elijah.

And she goes and she bakes him. And Elijah, this was a test. He said, make me first. Elijah wasn't being selfish. There was a test in this.

[22 : 02] Go and bake something for me first, then for yourselves. people's. Well, the amazing thing was that that jar and that jug never went empty.

You know, there might have been people who passed that widow's house and they were, maybe she had friends who went in and they were looking and they were seeing the jug going down and down and they were seeing the jar of flour going down and down.

It's poor. She's finished. And there might have been many people around her who had plenty. Do you know, as the years went on, that widow woman was still there and she was baking every single day and maybe some of those people years later who had plenty, one day they had nothing.

and they were in the state of emptiness because remember there was a drought and when there's a drought there'll be a famine and it was covering the whole land and so, so it is in life.

You know, when God is with you and God, you, when you are where God wants you to be and you are living right with God, God will keep you and there might be others around you that are getting on an awful lot better but quite persuaded, the Lord will never leave you.

[23 : 23] And you will see, you might see others who are way up there, one day they won't be but you'll still be there. And part of the, part of what I love about this is it was never a full jar and it was never a full jug.

You know, that's what we would love, we'd say, oh Lord, can you fill the jug full and can you fill the jar full? But you know, if you did that, faith wouldn't be there because full jugs and full jars we become complacent and we stop looking to the Lord and we say, oh I'm okay and our prayer life goes and so on.

That's why God keeps the Christian down. We live in a day where we want everything easy, we want to have the full, we want to have the plenty. God says, I'll supply all your needs, I'll never let you go down but you might never have the great abundance, you might never have the plenty but you'll always have enough.

Mark my words. And that was so true for this woman. Every day, every day, every day, there it was, there was always enough, always enough.

Remember when Israel were in the wilderness and God told them to pick up manna. They weren't to pick it for the week, they were every day. And that's the way the Lord operates because it's a journey of faith, it's step by step.

[24 : 52] As I said, we want to see the whole picture, we want it all set out before us so that I know where I'm going, I want all the dots and all the lines, everything matched up so that there's the picture, I know I've got all the resources, everything's going to be fine.

And the Lord says, that's not the way faith works. We're on a journey. I want to develop your faith, I want to strengthen your faith, I want to lead you in the right way.

And so, this is the way it went. And you know, one of the wonderful things I love about this is, here's this woman, and we mentioned the amount of sticks she had, a couple of sticks.

And you'd say to yourself, what can I do with a couple of sticks? Humanly speaking, not much. Well, you know, the couple of sticks that she had, and the fire that she lit, and a little cake that she made for the prophet, that couple of sticks, in a sense, that fire never went out, and that jar never ran empty, and that jug never went empty.

Because when we put our couple of sticks to the Lord, when we give our little, he is able to make a lot. David went out to fight Goliath.

[26 : 11] Saul said, all right, you've got that. Here's all my armor. Here's my breastplate. Here's my sword. Here's my helmet. David said, I don't want these things. All David had was a few wee stones and a sling.

Now he's going to face this human juggernaut. But that sling was also in God's hand as much as in David's. Because David's trust was completely in the Lord.

The Israelite army were charging, the Egyptian army charging after the Israelites. There they are in the banks of the Red Sea. What's going to happen?

Well, all Moses had was his shepherd's crook. And he used that in God's hand. All he used was that crook.

But it was by faith doing what God wanted. And the waters divided and Israel crossed over. Two little sticks. By faith, you give.

[27 : 17] You might say to yourself, that's only little me. What can I do? What can the Lord make of me? Well, the Bible shows us over and over.

Remember the boy? He had only five loaves and two fish. That wasn't much. There was a multitude there. Given to the Lord Jesus, it fed thousands.

You give to the Lord yourself. And watch what he will do with you. And you know, at the end of the day, the Lord will make you a blessing to others.

Because that's part of what the whole journey of faith is about. It's not just about you. It's who you are in God's hand for him, for the good of others.

And at the end of the day, and I mean the end of the day, when we get to glory, we will be amazed at how God has used the little that we have to make a lot.

[28 : 19] and we'll be saying, Oh, I didn't know that. I never knew that. Really? Well, that's the way that God works. And this is one of the most encouraging passages in Scripture.

It shows how just with so little given to the Lord, trusting in him, that he can make so much. Let us pray.

Lord, we pray to bless us. We give thanks that you encourage us. Help us to realize more and more that your ways are not our ways. We apply our human logic, our human wisdom to situations, and so often we get it wrong.

But Lord, help us to simply trust in you and to believe that with you we can overcome all the obstacles and difficulties. The obstacles and difficulties will be there.

Life is often a challenge. The life of faith is a challenge. We want an easy life, but the life of faith is a challenge. Help us then, Lord, to be prepared for the struggles, to be prepared to follow you and to know that this is a way that you will have us go.

[29 : 29] Watch over us, bless us, take us to our home safely, do us good, cleanse us from our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to conclude singing to God's praise from Psalm 146.

And this is from the Scottish Psalter and the Tunis of Guile. Psalm 146, verses 7 to 10. Page 446.

Verse 7. 15 And let's read, Entrance by Luke 2, wh Angie of the Christ ready for thehunist, do you ever pray for the 18 ESTH? M Psalm 146, 7-10 Who righteous judgment execute, For those oppressed that be,

Who to the hungry giveth food, God set the prisoners free.

The Lord doth give the blind their sight, The bow with death doth raise.

[31 : 33] The Lord doth dearly love all those, That walk in upright ways.

The stranger's shield, the widow's stay, The orphan's hell is he.

But yet by him the wicked's way Turned upside down.

The Lord shall reign forevermore, Thy God, O Zion, He reigns to all generations.

Praise to the Lord give me. Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God, The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore.

[33 : 00] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.