

How Big is Your God?

The Proceeding word of God for the Dream Centre for 2010. 1 Kings 17: 1 - 24

1st Point: Obedience precedes God's power, provision and protection.

This is the first mention of Elijah in the word and he explodes onto the scene in the court of King Ahab. Elijah has been sent to Ahab to say to him, "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.**" So we can see here that Elijah has faith that what God says will happen, will happen. His obedience to God in the past, (and we have no past history), means that Elijah has been given **power** to close up the heavens by the word of his mouth. He has stature with God.

Look at the scriptures – v3&4: Leave here and go and hide there. So he goes and the ravens feed him in the morning and the evening. v5 He did what the Lord told him and stayed there. Now the brook has dried up and he has no more water but he still stays there until he receives another word from the Lord. v9: Go at once to Zarephath and stay there; v10 So he went.

God didn't send Elijah's provision to him – God sent the provision to where He told Elijah to go.

God had 'commanded' – past tense – the ravens to feed him there. So they were already on their way. If he didn't go to where the provision was, he would starve. It wasn't that God didn't or couldn't provide for him, but He wanted Elijah to be in position. Why? Because God was training him in obedience for the next leg of the journey. How did he know he was in the right place? Because the food was already there when he arrived. When he arrived at the gates of Zarephath, the widow was already there – she also had to be in position to receive her provision.

The widow is not there by chance – she is there by divine appointment. God will orchestrate events in order to bring His plans together. Elijah has been told to go to the town and as he enters the gates, she is gathering a few pieces of firewood so she can cook her last meal for herself and her son and then all the food is gone. In the middle of a drought she could have refused Elijah. But she didn't – she explained the reality of the situation and Elijah's response is ^{1Ki 17:14} **For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'** " Elijah gives her the word of the Lord and what happens next is vitally important, because her response to that word will literally be the difference between life and death.

^{1Ki 17:15} **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.**

^{1Ki 17:16} **For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.**

The provision was met in the word; it manifested when she did something with that word.

Do you know why we don't see God's provision?

- The first reason is because we don't have faith to see God move. We always think it happens to someone else, but not us. We have to stop looking at biblical miracles as stories and realise that this is our God. Noah believed God when He told him to build an ark before he had even seen rain. Joshua marched the Israelites around Jericho expecting the walls to fall down, just as God had said. But it took obedience and faith in God's word on the part of both men before they could see the fulfillment of that word. They had to hear it and then act upon it.
- **Secondly**, we don't see God's provision because 'there' can often be a place we don't want to go. It's often a place God has directed us to go but we don't want to. Do you know when something is wrong in your life but you don't want to deal with it? Well until you go 'there' and deal with it, God will not provide for the next step of the journey. For some, 'there' may be lack of commitment; for others it may be lack

of obedience; or lack of character but until we act upon what we know God is saying to us, He will never take us to the next step on the journey.

- Its not just what we can hear, it's what we **act** upon that will release the miracle in our lives, our families and in Tameside.
- God's provisions are often just for today – like the manna in the desert. We often want the whole download in one go but daily provision keeps us reliant on God and teaches us to be thankful for our daily blessings. Our obedience should be immediate – not think about it for two weeks or phone a friend. Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase – Martin Luther King.

2nd Point - the widow lives not only in physical but also spiritual poverty. I often listen to what people think is important in life. Many people think the latest car or the biggest house is a sign that they've arrived in life – they have finally achieved success. For others, it's 3 holidays a year, how much they earn or the latest designer clothes. They may have physical wealth but they live in spiritual poverty. The widow at Zarephath lived in the middle of Baal country so she was probably connected to **a** god but not **the** God. She was not only living in a physical drought but when trouble hit, she had no spiritual resources to draw on.

Illustration: As I was thinking about her, I couldn't help but draw parallels to a colleague of mine called Judith who lives alone with her son. Somehow, somewhere down the line, she has connected to **a** god. She evangelises to anyone and everyone who will listen about the benefits of being a Buddhist. How being a Buddhist enables her to live a calm and peace existence. The problem is – she's always in a mess. One day I heard her talking about a situation that was causing her great concern and I took the opportunity to speak to her while the door was open. She got to the 'the situation was hopeless' bit and I said, 'So what did you do then?' She replied, 'I chant. I go into my room and I chant – it makes me forget everything and I come out when I feel good.' That was her one and only resource – chanting empty words into an empty room affects nothing in her life or her son's. **Now the reality check; when the 'feel good' factor wears off, nothing has changed and nothing has been affected. Reality is this – we all have bad times, but when I go and speak to my God, the heavens open and begin to respond. The word in our mouth, just as in Elijah's mouth, will do the same thing. It will create hope and destiny in people's hearts, but it means we have to take hold of the proceeding word, act upon it and see God move.**

The widow had no resources, no strategies, no connections; then she met Elijah who connects her to the prophetic word. Judith is the same – no resources, no strategies but she's just met a connection. You and I are that connection - wherever we are; at home, in work, at the gym, in the supermarket. The mandate of the house is 'gather the vessels' – God has spoken the prophetic word to this house. We have to hear it, and act upon it if we are to affect the lost.

Isa 49:8 This is what the LORD says:

"In the time of my favor I will answer you,
and in the day of salvation I will help you;
I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people,
to restore the land

and to **reassign its desolate inheritances,**

Isa 49:9 to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'

What do I mean by a 'desolate inheritance'? It means that they will inherit something – the problem is their inheritance is not a glorious inheritance that 1 Peter 1 talks about. It will be an inheritance of death and destruction, just as it was with the widow and her son before Elijah connects her to the prophetic word.

I believe with all my heart that we at the Dream Centre are here in Droylsden, in this place, for a purpose; to affect the community around us. We have been told to gather the vessels this year and God will fill them. When Pastor Tony gave us the proceeding word from 2 Kings 4 and 1 Kings 17, my spirit responded to it immediately. I didn't know what to do with it initially but I just said, 'Lord, show me what you want me to do with it.' And at first my prayer every morning was '**Show me the vessels.**'

Illustration: I was in the staff room at work and 2 new R.E. teachers were talking about prayer and its effects and they asked the question 'Why doesn't God always answer prayer?' to which I replied, 'I know the answer to that!' Every eye in the place turned and looked at me! I'm a born again Christian – and I started telling them about my faith and before I know what's happening I've been asked to speak to the whole of Yr 11 about my Christian faith. That's 250 16 year olds. Then the whole staff room fills up because it's break time and the discussion about prayer is still going on. I told them about Claire's mum and how she was healed of cancer. Let the Holy Spirit work with what you have spoken - 2 people texted me to pray for them.' **The vessels are starting to line up.**

In 2 Cor 5:21, Paul quotes Isa 49:

^{2Co 5:21} God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{2Co 6:1} As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.

^{2Co 6:2} For he says,

"In the time of my favor I heard you,
and in the day of salvation I helped you."

I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

If people don't hear about Him, how can they connect to Him? People need to see God working in OUR lives in order to believe He can work in their lives. It's the word coming out of your mouth and my mouth that will cause a change in the environment. It will cause hope to arise and God can then start working as faith moves in. The widow hears God's prophetic word, she acts on it and when Elijah moves on 3 years later, she has developed her own connection which enables her to draw on God and now pour into her own family. The word of God coming from your mouth and my mouth will connect Judith and others like her to our God which will enable them to eventually have their own connection and be a resource to their family and others. When Elijah speaks the word to the widow and she activated it by her faith, then suddenly, both she and her family now have had their inheritance reassigned.

3rd Point: Go back to the source

Things are going well. Elijah has been with the widow for nearly 3 years and each day God has provided food for the widow and her family. Then disaster strikes, the son takes ill and dies. The death of the son was a double blow to the widow. Not only has she lost her son, but in her culture, she has also lost her only hope for the future. The expectation was that her son would grow and provide for her in her old age. Now that expectation was shattered. 'Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?'

The first place she goes to is the prophet. It was God's word in his mouth that had released provision and now she goes to him again, this time in distress because her future has just died. Think about what her perception of God is, at this point. Elijah was living in this widow's house; surely he spoke to her about his God. She has seen God as a provider of food. She has seen the daily faithfulness of God and she has now started to form her own opinion of the God of Elijah. Is God only a "**little**" God, who can provide flour and oil, but not keep her son from dying? Even though she sees Elijah's faith, hers hasn't yet developed. **Let me challenge you**

this morning. What is your perception of God? Is He a little God who can provide for your small, daily needs? Or is He the God for whom nothing is impossible? Is He able to perform miracles in your life and your family's? Or does He only answer other people's prayers?

Our perception of God doesn't limit His power – but it limits the degree to which He can work in your life if He is seen as a small God. I have faith that one day, we will see the dead rise in this place. I have seen a history now of God always backing up His word. **BIS** – let's look at the time Pastor Tony asked us to pray to the north, the south, the east and the west. He didn't know why. He knew he had heard God and he trusted Him and in obedience, he brought that word to the people. We trusted Pastor Tony so we did as we were asked. After months of sowing into the spirit, the United Nations turn up. God always honours His word if we are obedient.

1Kings 17:24 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."

NOW I KNOW – This phrase amazes me; how can the widow live in the same house as Elijah for nearly 3 years, see daily provision for herself and her family, watch Elijah's life up close and personal and yet she confesses that only NOW does she realise he is a man of God and that the word of the Lord from his mouth is the truth. But look what has happened here – we've gone from 'As surely as the Lord **your** God lives' in v12 to 'the word of the Lord'; notice not **YOUR** Lord anymore but **The Lord**. Now she has embraced the same God. Elijah, through his prophetic word, connected her to the living God and now, she has a connection of her own. **This woman realised that what happened was because of what was in the mouth of Elijah. She realised it all started with the word, it brought something in by the word and it revived that which was lost by the word.**

Conclusion: Elijah was the issue – not the widow.

Whilst many commentaries talk about this whole episode in 1 Kings 17 as being about the faith of the widow, the real issue is Elijah. Elijah has been given a mission – to speak to the heavens and shut down the works of the enemy. Speak to Ahab, declare there will be no more rain, removes Elijah from the land (and so removes His word), and then begins to build up Elijah's faith for the next mission, to destroy the prophets of Baal and to turn the hearts of Israel back to Yahweh. It was all about Elijah.

The faith to trust God that he would be fed by the brook, the faith to trust a desperate widow to provide food and shelter, the faith to see the son raised back to life – all these things developed faith and trust in God to enable him to move to and carry out with absolute conviction and confidence that God would provide everything he needed to carry out the next task. What the widow received was a benefit of Elijah being there. **Elijah needed a bigger perception of God at the end of his 3 year trial in order to fulfill his assignment.**

God is wanting to enlarge our faith. God is wanting to give us a Mount Carmel experience. Why? Because He wants to use us to extend His Kingdom. When the proceeding word for 2010 was given to this house and God asked us to gather the vessels, the baby leapt in the womb. When Claire told me about her mum, I knew the oil had started to pour and my faith went through the ceiling. I believe that God can use all of us just as He did Elijah. The principle is: the Lord is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Circumstances change, times change but the Lord never changes. Some of us have to stop looking at these miracles as something that happened then but can't happen now and realise this God is OUR God. Remember – **we get the God we declare. So I'll challenge you again this morning - How big is your God?**