



Daring Faith

Main Truth

Faith requires obedience to God's directions and trust in God that he will provide what we need.

Passages to Study

1 Kings 17:8–24; Luke 4:22–28

Background

God sent Elijah to Zarephath in Phoenicia, present-day Lebanon. This was Jezebel's home country and the center of Baal worship. The people were pagans, believing in multiple gods and practicing temple prostitution. Elijah was to search out the poorest of the poor, a widow, and to ask her for hospitality. We assume that not only was she down to her last meal, but that she was rationing out her food so carefully that she and her son were starving. They expected to die since food was not available because there was no rain.

The Lord spoke to the widow before Elijah ever arrived. Would she do as God asked and feed him? She most likely rehearsed the excuses she would give Elijah. Yet when Elijah assured her that God would provide for her needs until the famine was over, she believed him enough to give up her last bit of food for him to eat. God continued to provide the oil and flour they needed until the famine was over. After Elijah resurrected her son, the widow finally recognized the true God. God revealed himself to her through Elijah and his faith.

Questions

There are many questions we could ask about this story. If we could, we would ask the widow:

What were your religious beliefs and practices? What did you know about the Lord God of Israel? What did you think when you heard his voice?

How did God speak to you and tell you to feed Elijah? Did you know anything about Elijah before he came to you? How did you know that Elijah was a man of God?

Why did you assume that Elijah was sent to punish you for your sins through the death of your son?

We would ask Elijah:

How did you feel about having to depend upon a poor widow who was not an Israelite for your sustenance?

Where did you get the faith to believe that God would supply what the widow needed to feed the three of you?

What did you think about during the time you were waiting for the famine to end? What was it like for you to live in enemy land?

We would ask God:

First you chose Ravens and then a poor widow to feed Elijah. Women had no stature in Phoenicia. Why would you want to reveal yourself to this woman, someone with no influence in society and was not an Israelite?

Why did you send Elijah to Phoenicia, a heathen land where Baal and other gods were worshipped? Why did he have to spend so much time there?

Reflection

Not only did God ask Elijah to go into enemy territory where Baal is worshipped along with other gods, but also he had to put himself in the hands of a desperate widow and depend upon her for food. In addition to her poverty, she was a pagan. God provides for us in ways that go beyond our expectations. He defies our narrow definitions and logic. He teaches us to trust him in all circumstances.

Making It Personal

Can you think of a time when you did not understand why God set you in a situation or circumstance that didn't make sense to you?

Were you tempted to doubt God and to think he would not provide for you?

Did you find this a humbling experience? Was your faith increased?

"Our faith is strengthened when we go where he leads and we do his will, even when we don't understand why." Would you agree with this statement? Why?

Application

Pride is the greatest human weakness. It keeps us from genuine faith in God because we depend upon our own abilities instead of trusting him fully. Humility is often required along with obedience and faith. Elijah learned to live humbly as well as to have great faith in God.

Tell a friend a story about yourself and how you learned humility through an experience. Ask your friend to share a similar experience. Did either of you learn to have more faith in God? What role did obedience have in your experiences?

Going Deeper

Jesus used the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath in his message to the worshippers in the temple at Nazareth (Luke 4:22–28.) Just after Jesus read from the Scriptures and interpreted them, the people of his hometown spoke well of him and were amazed at his teaching. Then after he talked about how God sent Elijah to the widow at Zarephath, the people were furious and wanted to push him off a cliff. What caused this drastic change in the people?

Jesus emphasized that God also chose to reach out to the Gentiles. The Jews held on to the belief that they were God's favorite people, instead of his favored people. When these listeners heard that God chose to bless pagan people, they could not stand to hear of God's gracious compassion on Gentiles instead of themselves.

This is a key passage to illustrate the heart of God throughout the Scriptures is toward all people groups, not just a select few. Jesus was revealing the heart of a missionary God who chose a poor, insignificant Phoenician woman to bless his choice servant, Elijah. God in his mercy revealed himself to her through Elijah.

Ask God to lead you to someone he wants to bless and reveal his glory to through you. Will this be someone who is seen as insignificant or outside of your culture?