

## **The Providing Hand of God.**

Text: 1 Kings 17:1-16

1) How God clears up our problems

Suggested Hymns:

2) How we are to trust God implicitly

383, 373, 393, 395, 352

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Kings 17:1-16, <sup>1</sup> *And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”*

<sup>2</sup> *Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,* <sup>3</sup> *“Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.* <sup>4</sup> *“And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.”*

<sup>5</sup> *So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.* <sup>6</sup> *The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook.* <sup>7</sup> *And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.*

<sup>8</sup> *Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,* <sup>9</sup> *“Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.”*

<sup>10</sup> *So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.”* <sup>11</sup> *And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, “Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.”*

<sup>12</sup> So she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am 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.”

<sup>13</sup> And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. <sup>14</sup> “For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.’”

<sup>15</sup> So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. <sup>16</sup> The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Few people in history have such a glorious record as the Prophet Elijah. He appears suddenly and disappears miraculously. Nothing is known of his days and years prior to his prophetic activities. He appears on the scene as a prophet engaged in the work of the Lord, and after a few years of zealous work, a chariot of fire takes him into heaven.

As far as we know, his prophetic career was brief, but it was eventful. In it we can trace the loving providence of God. In happiness and in sorrow, in prosperity and in adversity, God’s tender guidance is so outstanding that every Bible reader feels encouraged to trust in God alone. In the midst of need, hunger and want God always finds a way to satisfy His children’s needs. Yes, God is the Provider for His people. He always has ways and means, even when a person has no solution.

For 40 years God provided for His people in the wilderness and kept an entire nation from starvation by miraculously supplying bread from heaven and suppling meat to eat. A similar example we have in the miraculous feeding of the four thousand in the New Testament. At that time even His disciples asked in consternation, “*Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such*

*a great multitude?*"<sup>1</sup> Yes, man's mathematics does not solve problems such as these.

All the more striking, then, are the Lord's unlimited resources, and we can only marvel at the loving providence of God. Let us, then, today see in the events related in our text the providing hand of God. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. How God Clears Up Our Problems**

We read in our text that God sent Elijah on a very dangerous mission. Elijah was to appear before King Ahab, who had been hostile to the religion of Jehovah and who had done much to destroy the true worship in Israel. He was to go with the solemn announcement, "*As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.*"

Surely, this was not an easy task for the prophet. Might not Ahab, who harboured no friendly feelings toward God's messengers, immediately apprehend him, cast him into prison, and cruelly put him to death? Would the king not find sweet revenge in executing one of God's prophets who dared to predict such a calamity?

But, see how the Lord solved the problem for His prophet. He removed all shyness from his heart and filled him with boldness to make this announcement to the king. He gave Elijah the assurance that no one would dare to lay a hand on the Lord's anointed.

Again, might not Elijah fear that in bringing this message to the king he was announcing his own doom? For the natural result of such a drought could only be that soon starvation would be throughout the whole country; and who would suffer famine sooner than the prophet himself?

Would he not have to ask: What shall become of me? I have no financial backing to pay out large sums of money when food will become scarce. Nor have I a home in which I can store a supply large enough to tide me over these years of crop failures. And surely the king will be the last one to feel the pinch of hunger. He can buy food even at exorbitant prices. And if he cannot buy it in his own country, he can import it. But what about me?

But, look how the Lord clears up this difficult problem for His prophet. He tells him, <sup>3</sup> *“Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. <sup>4</sup> “And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.”*

In what a remarkable manner God provided for His prophet! But would this miraculous feeding continue throughout the predicted drought? Soon the prophet was faced with another difficulty. The waters of the brook dried up, and the question became crucial, Does God still have some other means to preserve the life of His prophet? Where could he go to quench his burning thirst?

For Elijah that question remained unsolved. But not for the Lord. He sees His prophet through. He tells him, <sup>9</sup> *“Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.”*

Again, what problems confronted the prophet! To Sidon he was to go? Was not the Lord leading him right into a trap? Was not this the home country of the wicked Queen Jezebel? Would she not soon find him and bring him to justice? Would she not pour out on him the full force of her wrath?

Besides, did the prophet hear correctly? He is to go to a widow woman. She can hardly make her own living, let alone feed a prophet. If God had sent him to some king's court, that would have been more reasonable. But a widow in poverty?

Again, were there not many widows in Sidon? How would he ever know to which widow he was to go? What should be the sign by which he might determine this? Oh, don't you see that one difficulty after another arose in the life of this man of God? His problems seemed insurmountable and unsolvable. But how simple it was for the Lord to solve the most complex problems.

Does this not remind you of experiences in your own life? Problems arose that were too great for you to solve. Difficulties confronted you that left you at your wit's end. Clouds of affliction hung over you that seemed to shut out all rays of light and hope. And you perhaps even began to question God's ability to clear away your troubles and to look after you. But it was then that the sunshine of God's help shone through the clouds. It was then that God's foresight became apparent, and His solution so simple.

## 2. How We Are To Trust God Implicitly

Because of this loving providing we are to trust the Lord for help.

Difficulties would be no difficulties if we could easily remove them. Problems would be no problems if we could readily solve them. But if our resources come to an end and we find no way out of our troubles, it is then that we are called upon to trust God implicitly, and that is what we mean by trust — to rely on God for help when help seems impossible. Such implicit trust we find in this man of God, the Prophet Elijah, and in the widow woman of Zarephath.

First, we look at Elijah's trust. After Elijah began to suffer want in Israel, God told him, *hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.* <sup>4</sup> *“And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.”*

We would naturally think that Elijah would have questioned God and asked, Am I to believe this? Is it not the height of folly to believe that these ravenous birds will feed me? Will they not rather devour whatever food they find? How silly to go to Cherith and expect birds to provide for me! Who has ever heard of such a thing? You see, then, that such a demand required a great deal of trust.

But we find that Elijah raised no such objections. There was no doubt lingering in his mind as to the possibility of what was promised. He did not show the least distrust in the Word of the Lord. He knew that he could place his full trust in what the Lord had promised.

Secondly, we look at the Widow's Trust. A similar trust we find in the widow woman of Zarephath. When the stranger came to the gate and demanded that she bake of her last handful of flour a cake for him first, what did she do? Did she flare up and exclaim in heated indignation, What a preposterous demand! How can I deny my starving son the last bite of bread? And what are you but a stranger at my door, not even of my nationality! With your empty promise you merely seek to deceive, to trick, and to cheat me!

Was that her reaction? No, not at all. Because after the prophet had promised, *“For thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain*

*on the earth*” she went and served the prophet. She gathered her sticks, kindled her fire, baked the cake, and fed the stranger.

Oh, great was her faith and trust! Her name has gone down in sacred history because of it, and she received an honourable mention by the Lord. For Jesus said to the people of His home community in Luke 4:25-26, <sup>25</sup> ***“But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; <sup>26</sup> “but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.”***

Finally, this means that you are to make the Lord your trust. We trust after the difficulty has been removed. We trust after we see the outcome of a promise. But God wants us to trust when the clouds of affliction and trouble are black and heavy. He wants us to trust when the darkness of sorrow shuts out every ray of light. He wants us to trust Him for everything.

***“Blessed is that man,”*** says the Psalmist, ***“who makes the Lord his Trust.”***<sup>22</sup> And again in Psalm 146:3 we read, ***Do not put your trust in princes, Nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.*** Trust is strength because it rests on the *Rock of Ages*.

In our feebleness let us ask God to strengthen our faith, that we may implicitly trust in His Fatherly care and remain immovable in all hardships and trials and dangers. Scriptures says, ***He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?***<sup>3</sup>

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,<sup>4</sup>

O for a faith that will not shrink,  
Though pressed by many a foe;  
That will not tremble on the brink  
Of poverty or woe. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 15:33

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 40:4

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:32

<sup>4</sup> Hymn 395