

Choices
Week 8: The widow of Zarephath

In this story we run into our **old friend, Elijah** the prophet. If you remember from earlier, or you just remember the story, **Elijah was pitted against the evil king Ahab** and his manipulative power-hungry wife, Jezebel. The story we are about to read takes place **right before the epic battle** between Elijah and the prophets of the god Baal. This is the **prequel**. You may remember that **God brings down fire from heaven** to consume the sacrifice on the altar and then ends the drought.

That brings us back to the **god, Baal**. This scene takes place in the heart of Baal country and he is the one who is supposed to be the rider on the clouds who brings rain, fertility, and wealth.

The other significant character, we don't even have a name given for her, only a description. She is a widow, mother, and is from Zarephath.

Both of these people are confronted with **God, who wants to do something in the world around them**. The prophet has been obediently joining God in what he wants to do in his people Israel.

Remember the drought ended. Here is when it began. And it's all because Ahab and Jezebel have led the people away from worshipping the true God to dabbling in the religion of Baal. Not only dabbling, but also it has become the **officially endorsed religion of Israel**. Try to get your head around that.

This story takes place in the book of 1 Kings, 17. **Can any of the children tell me what part of the Bible this comes from?** **17** Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab, "As surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives—the God I serve—there will be no dew or rain during the next few years until I give the word!" ² Then the LORD said to Elijah, ³ "Go to the east and hide by Kerith Brook, near where it enters the Jordan River. ⁴ Drink from the brook and eat what the ravens bring you, for I have commanded them to bring you food." ⁵ So Elijah did as the LORD told him and camped beside Kerith Brook, east of the Jordan. ⁶ The ravens brought him

bread and meat each morning and evening, and he drank from the brook. ⁷ But after a while the brook dried up, for there was no rainfall anywhere in the land.

That brings us to the first choice Elijah has to make to follow God.

1. Elijah chose to trust God when he sends him into the unfamiliar.

God sends him into a foreign country, off the grid.
God provides for him there.

Here is your officially endorsed verse for when God is sending you into an unfamiliar and possibly uncomfortable situation.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6

Let's see if we can memorize this by using some hand signals. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, (hand on your heart)...do not depend on your own understanding, seek his will in all you do, (looking through binoculars)...and he will show you which path to take, (look both ways and then choose a direction).

Can any kid or teen give this by memory?

Some of you will be going into a **new school**. Will this be a **"normal" school year?** We are returning to what we hope will be a **"normal" fall with ministry** here at Eagle Ridge Church of God. **But it really is a complete unknown.** Life is different in America and the world. **We are called to be salt and light in these difficult times.**

Let's pick back up at verse 8. ⁸ Then the LORD said to Elijah, ⁹ "Go and live in the village of Zarephath, near the city of Sidon. I have instructed a widow there to feed you." ¹⁰ So he went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks, and he asked her, "Would you please bring me a little water in a cup?" ¹¹ As she was going to get it, he called to her, "Bring me a bite of bread, too." ¹² But she said, "I swear by **the LORD your God** that I don't have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die."

The creek dried up so **Elijah has no water**. The Lord tells him to go to this little village. **He continues to trust God** in another unfamiliar place. **But what is the choice the widow makes?** 2. **She chose to allow God's person to come close.**

The widow responds to Elijah by using the name of the God of Israel. She must have recognized him as being a Jew. Maybe she has figured out that Baal is not what he is cracked up to be since there is a drought.

¹³ But Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you've said, but **make a little bread for me first. Then use what's left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the LORD sends rain and the crops grow again!" ¹⁵ So she did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her family continued to eat for many days. ¹⁶ There was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the LORD had promised through Elijah.**

It's a drought and she and her child are starving. She doesn't have to do this. **I don't care if he was the president** of the United States or the **Pope**, I'm making my kid and me some first and if there is any left he can have it.

You have that same choice this fall. You can let God's people come close and that will cost you in time and energy. Or you can **make excuses** and keep a distance between your life, your hurt, your brokenness, your sin, and God's people. **And yet it is through his people that he wants to bring life, nourishment, and hope.**

- **Bridge Groups**...if you can't find one that fits your schedule we will figure out a way to make a new one.

You were made to be in relationship with God and with God's people. It's not just God. We need to experience that **shared mission together.**

Can you imagine each time she tips the jar over, some falls out. Each time she uses it up and yet, the next day, when she tips, more comes out.

If she hadn't let this stranger close to her, she wouldn't have experienced that miracle every morning when she would tip that jar of flour and jar of oil that was empty the night before and have something come out of it.

I can just take care of me and mine, or I can let people get close.

God brings him into contact with a foreign widow who was probably a Baal worshiper, but definitely not God. She did recognize Elijah as a Hebrew. Baal is supposed to bring rain and crops and ultimately prosperity.

¹⁷ Some time later the woman's son became sick. He grew worse and worse, and finally he died. ¹⁸ Then she said to Elijah, "O man of God, what have you done to me? **Have you come here to point out my sins and kill my son?**" ¹⁹ But Elijah replied, "Give me your son." And he took the child's body from her arms, carried him up the stairs to the room where he was staying, and laid the body on his bed. ²⁰ Then Elijah cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, why have you brought tragedy to this widow who has opened her home to me, causing her son to die?" ²¹ And he stretched himself out over the child three times and cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, please let this child's life return to him." ²² The LORD heard Elijah's prayer, and the life of the child returned, and he revived! ²³ Then Elijah brought him down from the upper room and gave him to his mother. "Look!" he said. "Your son is alive!"

We don't have a record of Elijah railing against Baal and this woman's country because they didn't worship the Lord. **We don't know exactly what they talked about around those meals** of bread and bread.

Elijah's next big choice was that he came close to someone who believed differently than he did. In this case, his contact with her would have made him unclean. He's not supposed to eat with a non-Jew. But going even deeper...**3. Elijah chose to help her not simply point out her sin.**

The other thing that was absolutely not allowed was to come in **contact with a dead body**. And yet, he laid on the lifeless body of this boy three times. He was **all in** on this. **He put his whole self into it.** He didn't just stand at the door and say a prayer. **He was "hands on".**

Listen to that phrase again. ¹⁸ Then she said to Elijah, "O man of God, what have you done to me? Have you come here to point out my sins and kill my son?" She knew how the Jewish people felt about people like her.

Is Elijah there simply to meddle, tell her she is wrong, or is he there to help?

"If she hadn't been such a sinner, then maybe her son wouldn't have died."

Laying his body across the child was an **act of sacrifice** because a Hebrew would not touch a dead body. "I didn't come here to make things worse for this family. I didn't come to bring food in a drought only to have her son die."

It's very easy to simply look and point out what is wrong. It's easy to do that in the church or we can serve one another. We can go into this new season as consumers looking for what will feed me. **Elijah went to serve.**

It's really popular to point out the sin of the people who don't follow God. But what if we look to serve those people who we don't agree with the way we live or vote. Instead, making sure they know how we feel about their relationships, morals, and voting, what if we looked to serve instead of trying to immediately change their mind.

What is the conclusion of all of these choices?

²⁴ Then the woman told Elijah, "Now I know for sure that you are a man of God, and that the Lord truly speaks through you." 1 Kings 17:1-24

Baal did not bring sustenance when they needed it. Baal didn't bring life to her dead son. The God who Elijah represented did.

As God's people we must head into this new time in the church and the world with these choices in mind.

- Will we trust God as he sends us into something unfamiliar?
- Will we let God's transformational people near?
- Will we look to serve instead simply pointing out their sin.

That's the formula for hearing someone say what the widow said at the end of the story.