

"When Creature Comforts Fail and Creatures Bring You BBQ Sandwiches"

1 Kings 17:1-24

6 October 2019

Sooner or later, God will bring you into a crisis. And in that moment you will have to wrestle with where and in whom you will place your trust. You will have to struggle with questions like: *Can God really be trusted right now, in this moment? Can I really give this situation to Jesus? Will He really be true to His promises?*

That's the Christian life. That's discipleship. Learning anew to trust Jesus. And when has that ever gone bad? When has trusting Jesus ever turned out bad for you? Never, because He's faithful. And it's really a great combination when you think about it: *our weakness and foolishness meets His power and wisdom*. What could go wrong? What could go wrong when our weakness and foolishness meets His power and wisdom? Nothing. There is no downside to trusting Jesus. There is no hangover with trusting Jesus. There is no fine print that you regret not reading later. There is no downside to trusting Jesus and taking Him at His word... even when things get really dark- especially when things get really dark.

And so our big idea today is chockfull of Gospel hope-

YOU CAN TRUST GOD FURTHER THAN YOU CAN SEE HIM.

That's what we'll see in God's word today. So turn in your Bibles to 1 Kings 17. I stole that phrase from Matthew Henry's commentary, where he said this-

The better God is known the more he is trusted. Those who know him to be a God of infinite wisdom will trust him further than they can see him (Job. 35:14); those who know him to be a God of almighty power will trust him when creature-confidences fail and they have nothing else to trust to (2 Chr. 20:12); and those who know him to be a God of infinite grace and goodness will trust him though he slay them, Job. 13:15. Those who know him to be a God of inviolable truth and faithfulness will rejoice in his word of promise, and rest upon that, though the performance be deferred and intermediate providences seem to contradict it. Those who know him to be the Father of spirits, and an everlasting Father, will trust him with their souls as their main care and trust in him at all times, even to the end.

YOU CAN TRUST GOD FURTHER THAN YOU CAN SEE HIM.

When creature comforts fail. When you have nothing else to trust to. Even when God slays you, you can trust Him. And you can trust Him even when He tells you to live in a van down by the river and ravens will bring you BBQ sandwiches.

LOOK AT VERSE 1...

Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

Recall what we see saw several weeks ago back in chapter 16. King Ahab was worse than any king before him. He led the nation of Israel into gross idolatry: *worship through prostitution*. They worshipped Baal and Ashtoreth alongside Yahweh. So we pick up here in chapter 17 with Elijah coming out of nowhere. And he goes to see king Ahab and he delivers a message to him: *There will be no rain unless I say so*.

But why does Elijah tell Ahab that there will be no rain? I think there are 2 reasons:

1) No rain would prove that Baal was a fraud. This would cripple Ahab's theology! Baal was believed to be the god of thunder and rain. So a drought brought on by the Lord would expose the false theology of Baal.

But the withholding of rain was not just to discredit Baal. There is another reason for bringing on the drought-

2) No rain was evidence of God's judgment on His people. The answer can be found in Deuteronomy 11:16-17-

Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the Lord is giving you.

(See also the "covenant curses" in Deuteronomy 28:23-24 and Leviticus 26:19)

Ahab and the nation have disregarded the very clear word of God! In the covenant curse sections of Deuteronomy and Leviticus, the Lord makes it very clear that obedience brings blessing and disobedience brings curses. So the Lord is withholding the rain in order to get His people's attention.

But are we surprised then that Yahweh is bringing the covenant curses upon the nation? We shouldn't be. Our God is faithful! Amen? Our God is faithful! Yes, our God is faithful to discipline His people when they turn from His word in willful disobedience.

And that truth should startle us. It should sober us. Are we comfortable with a God who is faithful to discipline His people? Does this truth make you want to sing the Doxology or sing *Your Love Never Fails*? It ought to. Just as much as He is faithful to forgive our sins, He is faithful to discipline His children, too. Because He loves us. *Because His love never fails.*

God loves us, therefore, He will discipline us. And we can trust that about Him. We can trust Him...even when it hurts.

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Even when He disciplines you and you can't see the end in sight. And sometimes our egos take a blow when God confronts us and disciplines us, right? We think we're "all that" and above some sins, and then we find ourselves caught red-handed, and we have to do the "walk of shame" back to Jesus. So, sometimes our egos take a blow when God confronts us and disciplines us. Sometimes our egos get the living daylights beat out of them. And it hurts. And it's embarrassing when we realize just how bad we are. But do we want to keep living that way? God loves us enough to crush our ego so that we find our identity and value and worth in Him, and not in us.

Understand this: Sometimes God comes to discipline you just so that He can knock that swagger out of your step. Let me say that again: *Sometimes God comes to discipline you just so that He can knock that swagger out of your step.* And we need that sometimes because we, like king Ahab, like to think that we can do life without God. That swagger needs to get knocked out of us.

Even when we are disciplined, we need to be reminded-

YOU CAN TRUST GOD FURTHER THAN YOU CAN SEE HIM.

Just this week, as I faced some unknowns, I was comforted by Question 11 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which says-

Question 11: What are God's works of providence?

Answer: God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

This week I needed to be reminded of God's providence- that He is preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions by His most holy, wise, and powerful providence. Jesus is preserving and governing every creature in this world. And Elijah was about to find out that Yahweh was governing the creatures that would be serving him BBQ for breakfast and dinner.

LOOK AT VERSE 2...

And the word of the LORD came to him: "Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." So he went and did according to the word of the LORD. He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

So Elijah delivers the message and then leaves. But why does the Lord send Elijah away? Is it because eventually, as we will see in chapter 18, that Ahab and Jezebel are after Elijah and there's a bounty on his head? That's usually the explanation that's given for Elijah's departure. That's not it. Elijah does not leave Ahab because he's afraid. People say that, but that's not what's happening here at all.

I think there's another reason. A more sobering reason for believers anywhere. The answer lies in Elijah's identity. Who is Elijah? He is a prophet. He is the mouthpiece for the Lord. He is the Lord's voice to His people. He represents the word of God. And the Lord sends His prophet, His word...away from His people! The willful disobedience of God's people to God's word has brought about the removal of God's word.

Throughout the Old Testament, the removal of God's word or the silence of God's word is seen as a sign of judgment. And perhaps the most frightening of all is found in the prophet Amos-

Amos 8:11-12

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord God, "when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it."

Could this be? Would the Lord really remove His word from His people? Yes, He would...and does. But some might say that we have God's word (any kind of study Bible that you can dream of!). We have great teachers on the radio, T.V., podcasts, commentaries, apps, etc. And yet, in spite of all of these resources, there could still be a famine of the word. How might that happen today? How might the word of God leave us?

Like we saw a few weeks ago, a seminary has a chapel service where they confess their sins to plants. I spoke with a retired pastor from another denomination last week, and he said that he was once part of a denomination that did not believe the Bible was the authoritative word of God for all people. All the pastors had to affirm to be ordained was to believe that God's word was true *for them*, but not for the church where they would serve. And this was a denomination that affirms the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms!

That's how there is a famine of the word of God, even when you have the word of God in your possession. You can have the word of God and yet it can be absent. What a scary place to be! Experiencing a famine of the word of God and not even being aware of it! And it could happen to us if we neglect and willfully disdain and disobey God's word. You can hear sermons preached here every week, sit in Sunday school classes, go to Bible studies...and yet the word of God has withdrawn.

Ahab and Co. have refused the word of the Lord. So the word leaves. Elijah leaves. But how does Elijah respond to God's word? The text says in verse 5...*"So he went and did according to the word of the Lord."* Elijah is obedient. Now let's get our bearings here. What the Lord asks Elijah to do is crazy!

"Go hide by the brook. Drink from it. And by the way, I'll send ravens and they'll bring you BBQ sandwiches everyday."

Crazy! The Lord does indeed work in mysterious ways. Ravens? Ravens were considered unclean according to Leviticus 11:15 and Deuteronomy 14:14. Israelites weren't allowed to eat ravens. But the Lord isn't asking Elijah to eat ravens. The ravens will simply bring him the food everyday. And what is one to do when ravens bring you "road kill from the dollar menu" everyday? You make sure you cook it real good!

And if you thought the Lord couldn't get crazier in his instructions to Elijah, wait till you see what He says to Elijah next!

LOOK AT VERSE 8...

Then the word of the LORD came to him, "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you." So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." And she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now 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." And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. 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.'" And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. And she said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!" And he said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. And he cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again."

And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives." And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

So, if you thought raven-carrying fast food was wild, get a load of this. Now the Lord directs Elijah to go to a Gentile widow in Zarephath. It's crazy for 3 reasons:

- 1) *She's a widow.* Widows were considered goners in the ancient Near East. Their husbands would be gone and they'd have little. No education. No skills. And yet a dirt poor widow is to provide for Elijah?
- 2) *She's a pagan.* She's a Gentile. And she doesn't believe in Yahweh...yet.
- 3) *She lives in Zarephath.* Zarephath was located between Tyre and Sidon, very close to Jezebel's dad's house, Ethbaal, the Baal worshipper.

Isn't God amazing? Isn't He wild and crazy? This is vintage Yahweh: feed a man with ravens and when the brook dries up, send him to a poor pagan widow who lives in Baal-ville.

Doesn't this text make you wanna shout? Yahweh uses creative and wild and imaginative ways to meet the needs of His people. I love that about Jesus! His answers to our prayers, His meeting our needs, His powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions, is not boring! He meets our needs and often does it in surprising ways! Just like with this widow. And just like Elijah said, she never ran out of food. And verse 16 gives us the reason: *The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.*

God's word proved true. He kept His promise. The old widow was learning a truth that the original audience of 1 Kings, who in exile were learning. And it's a lesson we need to re-learn too-

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The widow couldn't see into the future. All she had was Elijah's word that her food would last. She was learning a core truth of discipleship that goes all the way back to when Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden: *God's people can trust Him even when they can't see Him.* And the widow will have to learn this truth when her little boy dies. But before she learns this truth, she'll accuse Elijah of causing his death and bringing tragedy on her house. But then Elijah raises her son up from the dead and she trusts in Yahweh, as verse 24 says-

And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

Understand that all of these little miracles here- the ravens that carry BBQ sandwiches to Elijah, the never-ending oil and flour, the dead boy raised to life- all of these are just mini-demonstrations of where the future is headed. They are demonstrations of the incoming kingdom of God.

So everything that we go through in this life, every time that we experience deliverance, every time we see victory from some trouble, every time God answers our prayers, every time we experience a miracle- these are just pictures, they are just snapshots of where things are headed, that Jesus is going to make all things new. That He is going to make all the sad things come untrue.

So that means that we can trust Jesus *right now*, in this moment, all the way to the end of our lives- even though we can't see that far into the future, even though we don't have a picture of what our future holds, even though we don't know what's going to happen to us next week!

So what is our part? What do we do? You can strip it down to two very simple words: *Trust Jesus.* That's it! That's our part: Trust Jesus.

That's simple, yes, but if you've been a Christian for very long, then you know that trusting Jesus is not easy. It doesn't come natural to us. It isn't easy for us because of the unknown, because we don't know what the future holds.

So God is saying to us, in the middle of all of our uncertainties, *"You won't always understand me, you won't always 'get' what I'm doing, or know what I'm up to, but you can always trust Me. I'm trustworthy-always. And if I just so happen to surprise you with some impossible situation that seems hopeless, like this pagan widow in 1 Kings 17, then I will also surprise you with the joy that I'll bring out of that*

impossible situation. Oh, and by the way, in case you forgot, I specialize in impossible situations. So, why don't you just cast your cares on Me. I got this, okay?"

That's the Christian life right there. That's discipleship. Learning anew to trust Jesus. And when has that ever gone bad? When has trusting Jesus ever turned out bad for you? Never, because He's faithful. And it's really a great combination when you think about it: *our weakness and foolishness meets His power and wisdom*. What could go wrong? What could go wrong when our weakness and foolishness meets His power and wisdom? Nothing. There is no downside to trusting Jesus.

Ray Ortlund said, *"If no one ever thinks we're crazy for the way we stick our necks out in trusting the promises of God, are we really living by faith?"*

If no one ever thinks we're crazy for the way we stick our necks out in trusting the promises of God, are we really living by faith? If no one scratches their head when they hear about how much peace we have when troubles come our way, if no one scratches their head when they hear about how calm we are in the face of hardship, if no one scratches their head when they hear about how we are simply trusting Jesus when all of our creature comforts fail, are we really living by faith?

And what better place to trust God and stick our necks out in trusting His promises than when we celebrate the Lord's Supper? It is here that we feed on Christ by what? By faith! By trust! All that God is for us in His Son we find when we come to this table. He is our wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30).

We come to this table and we're sticking our necks out in faith and trusting in what Jesus has done for us. We're sticking our necks out and trusting that He lived a perfect life for us. We're sticking our necks out and trusting that He died a brutal, bloody death on the cross for our sins. We're sticking our necks out and trusting that God raised Him from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. We're sticking our necks out and trusting that His love never fails...even if we do, even *when* we do.

So as we come to the table today, stick your neck out and trust the promises of God. Trust that the sins that you can't seem to forget, Jesus can't remember. Trust that He is your wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Trust that He is preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions. And trust that when your weakness and foolishness meets His power and wisdom, then nothing can go wrong.

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1 Kings 17:1-24

Sermon Study Questions

1. Read Hebrews 12:3-11. Discuss how and why the Lord disciplines us.
2. Discuss how you might apply the Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 11 to your life:

Question 11: What are God's works of providence?

Answer: God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

3. Read Amos 8:11-12 and discuss the "famine of the Word."

4. Discuss what Matthew Henry said-

The better God is known the more he is trusted. Those who know him to be a God of infinite wisdom will trust him further than they can see him (Job. 35:14); those who know him to be a God of almighty power will trust him when creature-confidences fail and they have nothing else to trust to (2 Chr. 20:12); and those who know him to be a God of infinite grace and goodness will trust him though he slay them, Job. 13:15. Those who know him to be a God of inviolable truth and faithfulness will rejoice in his word of promise, and rest upon that, though the performance be deferred and intermediate providences seem to contradict it. Those who know him to be the Father of spirits, and an everlasting Father, will trust him with their souls as their main care and trust in him at all times, even to the end.

5. Discuss the big idea of the sermon and where you need to trust the Lord: *You can trust God further than you can see Him.*