

When the Brook Dries Up

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

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July 14, 2024

Text: Psalm 30, I Kings 17:8-16

Purpose: Elijah was called by God to deliver a message of rebuke to King Ahab. In the process of being obedient to God, Elijah learned several lessons about “being dried up” in order to be used by God. The brook dried up, the flour barrel was dried up, and the life of the widow’s son dried up. At every turn God provided.



A man was walking down the beach at sunset. As he walked along, he saw another man in the distance. He noticed this man kept leaning down, picking up something and throwing it out into the water, again and again. As he approached even closer, he noticed that the man was picking up starfish that had been washed up on the beach. He was throwing them back into the water, one by one.

Puzzled, he approached the man and said, "Good Evening. I was wondering what you are doing."



"I'm throwing these starfish back into the ocean. You see, it's low tide and all these starfish have been washed up onto the shore. If I don't throw them back into the ocean, they'll die up here from lack of oxygen."

"But, there must be thousands of starfish on this beach. You can't possibly get to all of them. And don't you realize this is probably happening on hundreds of beaches all up and down this coast. Can't you see that you can't possibly make a difference?"



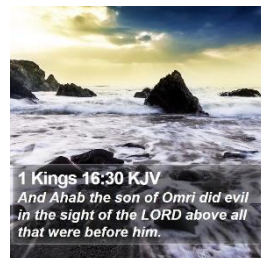
The man bent down and picked up yet another starfish, and threw it back into the ocean. With a smile he replied, "Well, it made a difference to that one!!!"¹

Elijah is one of the Old Testament prophets you don't hear much about in churches these days. One of the more modern worship songs that is sung in many contemporary churches is titled, "These are the Days of Elijah." Looking back over my sermons, it has been over 10 years since I specifically preached on Elijah.



We first find Elijah coming upon the scene in this chapter of the Bible – I Kings 17. Verse one describes him as "*Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead.*" I went to several commentaries and studied several maps of ancient Israel trying to find out exactly where this area was and found two possible areas in which he grew up. The one he was most likely from was just east of the Jordan River, just south of the Sea of Galilee.

His opening task, as given to him by the Lord, places him before the wicked King Ahab. Ahab in the previous chapter (16:33) was described as one that



"did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him." For someone to be described as more wicked than all previous kings of Israel – he must have been a very-very bad, evil, king.



Elijah said to King Ahab, "*As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years except by my word.*" That has got to be one of the shortest sermons ever delivered. After his message was delivered, Elijah headed into the wilderness as instructed by the Lord.

The Person Elijah

Before I move forward with Elijah's story, I want to pause for a moment and expand on something significant that he said about his relationship with the Lord. Elijah used the phrase, "*As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand.*" This was not the only time this phrase is used in the Bible.



- Elijah used it three years later when speaking to Obadiah when he promised he would meet with Ahab.
- Elisha (the one that came after Elijah) once said it when He stood before three kings.
- Elisha also used the phrase with Nathan when Nathan offered him a reward for healing him. (2 Kings 5:17)

Elijah stood before the Lord. That means his complete focus of life was fully directed on the Lord. When you stand very close to something, you block out all other things that could distract you.



Elijah was in close fellowship with the Lord. So close was his vision of God and the things of God, that a small tyrant king like

Ahab was nothing for him to be afraid of when Ahab spoke. Because of that close relationship between the Lord and Elijah, the things of this world did not really concern or worry him. He was committed to the One that gives and sustains life.

This “*standing before the Lord*” was the source of Elijah’s confidence and steadfastness. God was preparing Elijah in the desert for a high calling and confrontation at Mount Carmel.

God often prepares people in the desert, a dry place of life.

- God took Abraham out of the Ur of Chaldees and placed him in the rugged places there in Canaan.
- God trained Moses in the wilderness, on the back side of the desert, before calling him to lead the people out of Egypt and on a path towards the Promised Land.
- God did the same with John the Baptist as he called people to repentance from that desert landscape near Qumran.



- The Apostle Paul spent several years in a deserted place learning and listening to God.
- Even Jesus Christ withdrew to the deserted place near Jericho to pray and prepare for his ministry.



We are so accustomed to abundance and plenty, that when a dry place comes into our life, we scream with agony, kick against the pain, and whimper unto God to remove this discomfort in our life. God is not interested in our comfort as much as He is interested in our full face turned towards Him, our full window of attention focused in His direction, and our will aligned with His will.



The key in Elijah’s life is that his full attention was directed towards God – he stood before the Lord.

You find Elijah mentioned several other times in the Bible.

- Elijah was so close to the Lord, that he never tasted death, he was taken up in a whirlwind (II Kings 2:11)
- Elijah passed his mantle on to Elisha just as he went up into heaven (II Kings 2:8)
- Surprisingly, in the New Testament, Elijah appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, along with Moses and Jesus. (Matt. 17:4)



- In Luke, Jesus used Elijah's story of the Lord's provision for the Widow at Zarephath as an example of how God sometimes provides for one and not for others in times of need. (Luke 4:25)
- Later in the Gospel of Luke, some people even thought Jesus was Elijah who had returned. (Luke 9:19)
- James 5:17 describes Elijah as being a man just like you and me!

The Message Delivered

Elijah delivered a message like no other weatherman you have heard. Today's weathermen can only guess what it will be like tomorrow or next week. Elijah said there would be NO MORE RAIN or even DEW on the ground, until he said it would happen.

The bad news about Elijah's pronounced judgment on the land also meant that Elijah would suffer as well.

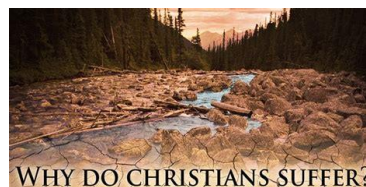
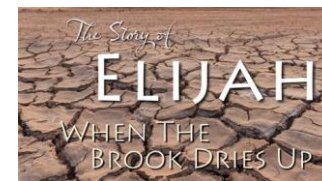
The Lord knew the heart of Ahab and knew His prophet would need to hide from the wrath of Ahab so the Lord sent him to a dry and deserted place just east of the Jordan River to the Brook Cherith to live among the caves there. The Lord promised Elijah that there would be water to drink from the brook and the Ravens would come and feed him meat and bread in the morning and meat and bread in the evening.



When I had read that in the past, I wasn't sure there were birds like that in the area. When I was in Israel about 10 years ago, there along the Dead Sea, at Masada, there were ravens standing watch over the people coming and going. I thought about how the Lord used the birds to feed Elijah. For me that just confirmed this story in the Bible.

The Brook of Cherith²

I can see Elijah sitting by the water's edge, day by day, measuring his shrinking water supply. Aren't we also prone to measure the rate of change in something happens over time? Aren't we inclined to focus on the statistics of our situation? As time went by, the stick Elijah used to mark where the water was yesterday was inching further and further away with each passing day. After some time, I am sure Elijah began to wonder, "How long can I stay here until I too die of thirst?" His brook was drying up.



How many of us look at our situation from the statistical view point. Our checking account is getting smaller each month. Our blood pressure is changing every month. Our cholesterol is increasing each month. Our ability to survive is threatened each time we measure how much worse our situation is. Words like cancer, chronic unending pain, weakness, exhaustion, and we have no medical answers for our situation. We panic and wonder, "How long can I go on like this?" We are guilty of not looking to the one that provides the supply and begin to

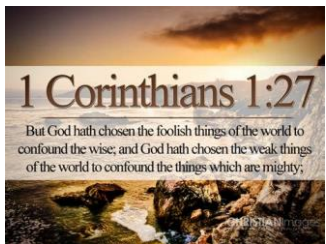
look more and more at OUR resources to accomplish OUR will. We are so full of ourselves that we cannot or do not make room for God to move in and work on our behalf.

Elijah was probably there a year when the last trickle of water stopped flowing. It was at that point Elijah learned a very important point. He saw that his life was drying up just like that brook he was depending upon. Just as that brook was dried up, he too was dried up. Elijah was nothing. Elijah was nothing more than a brook, a channel, through which water could flow.



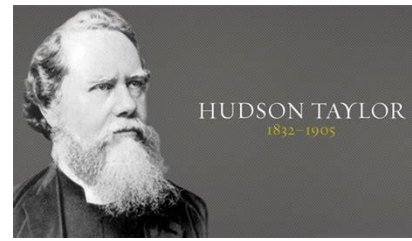
Jesus told the woman at the well, *“Whosoever drinks this water shall thirst again, but whoever drinks the water I give them shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”* (John 4:13-14)

Sometimes we sing, *“Make me a Channel of Blessing”* and we don’t really understand the meaning. We are nothing but empty brooks in which the Lord works. We are nothing. You need to see – God is the supply. We are not the source of the water (blessing) we are only a conduit – an empty brook. It is only the water of life that gives life.



I Corinthians 1:27 reminds us, *“God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty.”*

Elijah may have been a strong man physically. But he learned there by the Brook of Cherith, that he could have no strength until the water of life flowed through him. God even chose a foolish unexpected solution to Elijah’s hunger problem. God chose an unclean bird, a raven, to bring him bread and meat every day.

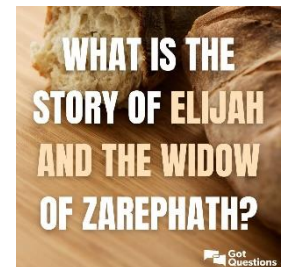


It is reported that Hudson Taylor used to tell young missionaries as they were preparing to go on the mission field: “Remember that when you come out here you are

nothing. It is only what God can do and will do through you that will be worth anything.” One person replied it is difficult to believe “I am nothing.” Hudson replied “Take it by faith because it is true – you are nothing.”

We need to hear that same word: **we are dried up brooks unless the Word of God is flowing through us.**

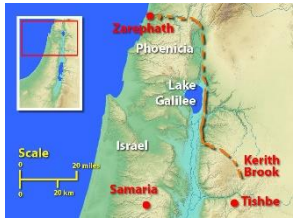
It was at the end of the water supply that the word of the Lord came to Elijah.



The Widow of Zarephath

The Lord sent Elijah from the dried-up brook to a poor widow in the town of Zarephath. This city is located between Tyre and Sidon along the Mediterranean Sea to a country we know today as Lebanon. Now why the Lord chose this woman out of all the widows suffering due to the yearlong drought will never be fully known. Why did the

Lord send Elijah to a foreigner instead of a widow in Israel?
God's ways are not our ways.



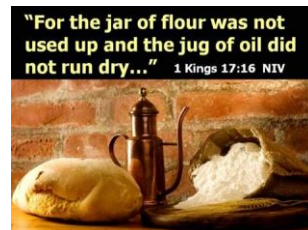
When Elijah arrived in the city, he didn't have a name or address as to who he was supposed to meet. He went to the watering hole and met her there. He asked her for a cup of water

and she quickly went to meet his need. (This story sounds very similar to the story of Abraham's servant who went to find a wife for his son Isaac.) As she was going to get him that cup of water, he also asked her for a small morsel of bread.

It was at this point we find out how desperate the widow's situation really is. You see, this woman had come to gather a few sticks to start a fire to bake the last morsel of flour left in the house. She and her son were down to the very end. They had a handful of flour and a small amount of oil left. It was their intention to eat that and then they were expecting to die soon.

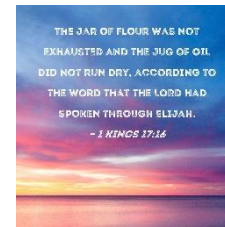
Elijah asked for a small cake of bread from this widow. What amazes me is that she had a heart of hospitality and a willingness to give, even if it was the last morsel she had.

Elijah promised her that if she would do this, her bin of flour would not run empty nor would her jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain once again.



The scripture simply states she went and did as instructed and the provision of the flour and oil never stopped for her, her son, and Elijah. In meeting the needs of the Prophet of Israel, her needs were also met.

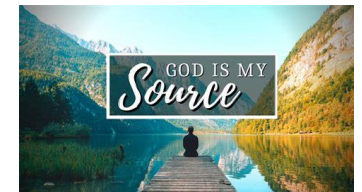
The scripture does not say how long Elijah stayed there, but based on what I have read, he could have stayed there for as long as two years.



Imagine the surprise they found every day when they looked down in the flour bin. God supplied their need just like he provided Manna for the people of Israel in the wilderness. I am sure they could have sung the doxology each day – Praise God from whom all blessing flow!

Maybe this was the second lesson that Elijah needed to learn from an empty flour bin. Just like he was nothing but an empty dried up brook – he was once again learning he was nothing but an empty flour bin. God was the source of the supply – not Elijah – not the widow – but **God was the supply.**

When Jesus went to the wedding at Cana what was the most important thing there? Was it the bride's dress, the food provided? No. It was those empty water jars standing in the corner. Jesus had them filled with water and out came the best wine ever.



We need to realize we are nothing but empty flour bins and empty water jars. We are nothing until the **water of life** and the **bread of life** are put into us.

The Resurrection of the Widow's Son

There is one more story that I need to share with you from I Kings 17 – it is concerning the resurrection of the widow's son.

The Bible's First Resurrection
(1 Kings 17:17-24)



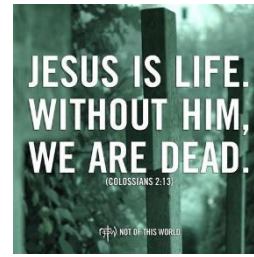
Elijah resurrects son of the Zarephath widow

The Bible records that the widow had a son that became very sick one day and he eventually died. The widow was so distraught at this that she turned and accused Elijah of bringing this calamity upon her family. She even thought that maybe Elijah had seen some type of sin she had committed and she was being punished by God for what she had done.

How many of us have heard someone say this when someone close to them has died –

- “What did I ever do to deserve this?”
- “Was it something that I had done to cause this person to become sick/get injured/die?”
- “The Lord must be punishing me for something I have done wrong!”

Elijah immediately took the son to the top of the house and prayed to the Lord to revive this child. Elijah wanted this woman to know that she was not being punished for providing lodging and food to him. Then Elijah stretched himself out on the boy three times and his breath came back into him. It was the Lord that brought this young boy back to life.

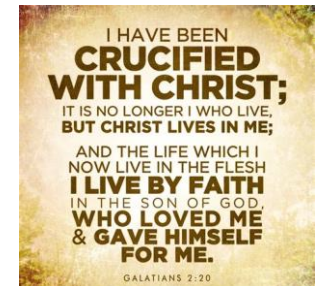


I am not exactly sure what the symbolism of Elijah stretching himself out on the boy three times is. In J. Vernon McGee's commentary he states it is a great principal of resurrection. It involves contact with life. If we as Christians are to ever exhibit any signs of life, we must remain in close contact with the Living Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from Christ we are dead. With Christ, we are alive.

We need to see ourselves as that young boy was – dead and lifeless. There is no good in us – there is no life in us – apart from Jesus Christ living in us. We are lost sinners – dead in our trespasses.

If we have trusted Jesus Christ, and received Him as our Lord and Savior, we can say our sins are crucified with Christ. Just as Jesus was buried and resurrected, we too will experience death and resurrection because of our connection with Jesus Christ. We are joint heirs with Jesus Christ today – if we are not joined with Him – we are nothing.

Galatians 2:20 says, “*I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*”

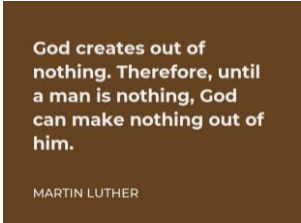


Elijah learned several lessons I believe we need to learn today as well.

- He learned he was nothing but a dried up brook.
- He learned he was nothing but a dried up empty flour bin.
- He learned he was nothing but a dried up dead body.

God was preparing Elijah for his next confrontation with Ahab. The first lesson took 3 ½ years to fully comprehend his “Nothingness” when compared to God. He saw it was God who was the provider of water to the brook. It was God who was the provider of flour to the bin and oil to the jar. It was God who brought life back into a dead body. Before God can use us, we need to come to the point of emptying ourselves and allowing God to use us a conduit of His blessings.

J. Vernon McGee in his commentary on I Kings quotes Martin Luther.



God creates out of nothing. Therefore, until a man is nothing, God can make nothing out of him.

MARTIN LUTHER

Martin Luther once said that God creates out of nothing, and until a man recognizes that he is nothing, God can do nothing with him.

Could it be that is the same problem with so many of us today? We are too strong, we have too much ability, and all the resources we depend upon do not depend upon God. If that is the case, then maybe God cannot use us? As we empty ourselves of our will, our desires, and our goals, the Lord can use us channels of blessing for others.

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Mickey's Funnies A Starfish Funny, June 7, 2024

² Outline is from J. Vernon McGee's commentary on I Kings 17.