

Sermon, October 29, 2023
1 Kings 17:8-16; Philippians 4:19
“Radical Reliance”
Jane Wise, Guest Speaker



I have a couple of questions for you today. Would God ever give a mission and not give provision? Would God ever give a challenge and not give the strength to complete it? Dare we believe God’s promise like this one?

Phil 4:19 ESV “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

And these questions: I need self-control; will He provide it? I need wisdom; will He provide it? I need



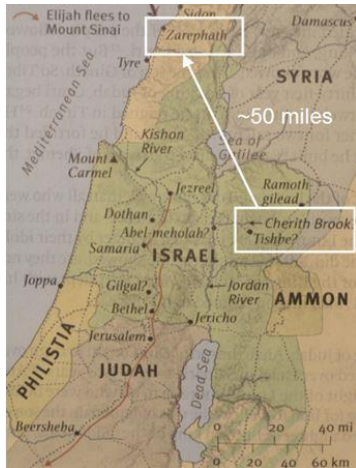
support. That was my need in February 2022. I was visiting Jerusalem church that day, and the Spirit whispered to me “Those children need you”. I had just been inside the church where 5 school classes were taking place at the same time. The sound was deafening; I couldn’t even hear my manager, Bwalya, who was standing right next to me. Each class was reciting their

lessons orally because there are no textbooks in our rural district. I knew immediately what God was asking- these children needed a school building with classrooms.

Do you have a call, but not the means to fulfill it? Perhaps you're being called to be a doctor, but you don't know if you can pay for medical school. Or perhaps you're being called to be a foster parent but think about all the miles of red tape! You're in a dilemma, a quandary. You might even say you're in Zarephath.

That's where Elijah and the widow were. To learn about Elijah, we have to go to the Old Testament to the books of 1 and 2 Kings and mentally transport ourselves back nine centuries before Christ. Elijah and a widow were grappling with the question "Would God give an assignment and not the provision?" Their stories intersected when God told Elijah to go see her and God told the widow to go and see Elijah.

Then the word of the Lord came to him: "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." 1 Kings 17:8-9 NIV



Did we read that correctly? Elijah is on his way to being a superstar!

When Jesus arrives and is on the Mount of Transfiguration, He'll receive 2 visitors- Moses and Elijah. And yet God sends this mighty man to a solitary widow in Zarephath.

Zarephath sits on the Mediterranean coast about 100 miles west of Kerith, a collection of ravines where Elijah was hiding from Ahab. Now God tells Elijah to walk from Kerith to Zarephath. They're about one year into what will be a three-year drought. How many of you have seen what a drought can do to a countryside or to animals? So Elijah was on his journey and the drought was exacting its toll. The grass was crunchy, his naked arms burned from the sun, and the barren trees were reaching up to the sky. No cloud or drop of rain had been seen for months. He could die from thirst, or

from attack. Remember, he was a wanted man! Ahab's men were just waiting for him to leave the ravines so that he was unprotected.

And Zarephath? Here's what you may not know about Zarephath. It had been overtaken by the religion of Baal. Baal was a false god and followers engaged in child sacrifice and temple prostitution. The headquarters of Baal was Zarephath. Elijah was led by God to the land of his enemy! God told him to stay there. The story didn't seem to make sense.

"What is God doing?", we might ask. A hint may be found in the name of Zarephath. Zarephath means "smelting furnace". Have you ever felt like you're in a smelting furnace, being melted down so God can remold or remake you? Zarephath is code name for times of testing. You might be thinking "OK, I'm there right now. I always wondered what to call it." Zarephath is an unwelcome destination. Why? Trials create character.

Elijah, parched, dusty and dry arrives at his destination and after searching, finds a woman at the gate dressed in rags and gathering sticks. *So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" And as she was going to get it, he called "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."*



And as she was going to get it, he called "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."

Could a woman be more desperate? I meet these women every week in Kasenga. She has a home that could collapse any day. She sleeps alone on a grass mat. She has empty shelves and a son she can't feed. And there's a fear that she can't shake- they're about to die. Remember, Elijah and the widow are both under assignment. She can't feed her

son. How can she possibly feed this prophet? *As surely as the Lord your God lives*, she replied. *“I don’t have any bread- only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal and my son, that we may eat it- and die”.*

You can almost hear the exasperation in her voice. “as surely as **YOUR** God lives”, she says. “Your God gave me the assignment without giving me the provision.”

She’s unconvinced and Elijah is unimpressed. After all, he’s just traveled 100 miles and is in enemy territory. But listen to what happens. “I’ve been in this situation before”, he’s thinking. “I’ve been in Kerith, where there were no crops and no fruit trees. Yet God cared for me in the ravines, so won’t He also provide for me now?” On the job training- Boot Camp Kerith- had developed a spiritual muscle, and now God was going to use that in Zarephath. Elijah doesn’t minimize the problem, but he maximizes the promise. *Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the Lord gives rain on the land.’”* 1 Kings 17:13-14

Do you see what Elijah is doing? He’s considering the track record of God. God gave him food day after day in the ravine. Will He not do it again? Or in the widow’s case, will the God who blessed you in your youth not take care of you in your old age? Will the God who gave you this job not also give you the capacity to fulfill it?

Faith- steadfast faith- has good recall. Steadfast faith remembers God’s blessings. Spiritual recall makes spiritual giants *Oh my soul, bless God and don’t forget a single blessing!* Psalm 103:1 MSG

That’s why David said ... “Won’t the God who’s provided in all my difficult situations also provide for me now? Has God’s character changed?” No, He’ll give you what you need.

Faith is contagious! The widow **heard** what Elijah said. Notice these words: *She **went away and did** as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.* 1 Kings 17:15-16 NIV

She **went** and **did** as Elijah had bid her. She didn’t complain. That’s called obedience. How many of you know that favor follows obedience? Turn to your neighbor and say “favor follows obedience”. We all know sometimes the commands of the Lord will challenge us.

“Noah, build an ark even though you’ve never seen rain”. Joshua was told to circle the walls for seven days; that’s an interesting military strategy. Peter is told, “get out of the boat and walk toward me”. And Jane, build a school for me, even if you don’t have the funds.

We’re told to trust God in affliction. Just obey. Just keep trusting. Elijah obeyed. The widow obeyed. *The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.* 1 Kings 17:14 NIV

There was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up, and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.”

Day after day, the prophet and the widow had a miracle for a meal. They lived centuries before Paul, but you can imagine them saying “Amen!” to what he wrote: *God is able to bless you abundantly so that in all things, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.* 2 Corinthians 9:8 NIV
“And God is able to bless you abundantly so that in all things, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”



If God demands, God will provide. That’s what I learned as I first decided to become a missionary. Oh, I never finished the story of the school!

In November 2022, I returned to the US just long enough to renew my passport. I shared with you what God had called me to do. Through you, and several individuals and churches, God provided the funds to build the school- \$70,000- in just three and a half weeks! God had a timeline which I didn't know about, and he was working fast. When the walls were just about completed for the school, I had a meeting with the District Superintendent. At the end of the meeting, I shared the story with her of how God had worked so quickly to provide the funds for the school. "That's very interesting", she said. "While you were gone, one of the government officials for the territory visited me and said that holding the classrooms in the church building was not acceptable. They stated that if the children were not in a proper school building for the



start of the 2023-24 school year that they would be forced to close the school!" God knew what was coming. God placed a call, and God provided. This is what God has accomplished in nine short months! As I speak today, about 280 children are using their new classrooms. Seven teachers have jobs, and the number of students and teachers will double in the next year or so as secondary classes are also added.

God's call on our lives is never finished. Even now, he has placed several other important projects on my heart which we will focus on in 2024. There's a very remote village called Mfuta that has never had a school. The logistics will be very difficult, but I know God will be with us. The church at Mfuta was refurbished last year, but was left without a roof. Imagine how that's going to work when the rains begin in October! Another church was completed in 2017, but has never been secure because no windows were installed. And a third church has outgrown its space- a good problem to have! They have purchased a new parcel of land, and we will work with the church to lay the new foundation. A list of these projects, and others, will be given to Pastor Scott, the Missions Committee and United Women in Faith.

God will give you what you need when you need it. We human beings want "everything right now", but that's not the way God works. God's message to the widow is the message for us *The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land. 1 Kings 17:14 NIV* read... It just won't run dry. They reacted with faith. Will we do the same?

I close today with a verse from Joshua: "Not one of all the Lord's good promises have failed." Your ministry in Zarephath is not easy, but it comes with a promise- God is with you. He has gone ahead of you. And God is already involved in your tomorrow.

May God bless you.