

## God Provides When We Live On Mission

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1 Kings 17:1-16

Good afternoon PC! As Kelley said...today we are starting our family series called "Days of Elijah"

- It's an exciting series about the wild ministry of Elijah the Prophet.

Today we're going to talk about God's provision as we live on mission for him... and as I was thinking about that...I was reminded of a Test that Kelley and I took several years ago.

- So...this was a Psychological Test: Kelley and I wanted to work for a particular organization...and before they would hire us...they required us to take a Psychological Evaluation.
- Now...this was a really long test...it had over 500 questions...it had some really strange questions...like
- T/F...the top of my head is frequently tender (Don't know what that's about...)
- T/F...I like repairing door latches. That was an actual question...
- T/F...my hands and feet are usually warm enough. They had some strange questions!

They also had some questions that were clearly designed to check your mental health...to kind of see if you were crazy...like

- T/F...I see things or animals that people around me do not see.
- T/F...my soul sometimes leaves my body.

But there was one question on this test that made me stop and think. It was this:

- T/F...I believe I am on a special mission from God (X2).
  - Now that made me stop and think...because it sounded like one of those mental health questions...like they're trying to see if I'm crazy!
  - But after thinking about it...I checked "T"...I believe I am on a special mission from God! And it was a Christian organization...so they hired us anyway!

But you know, as I thought about it this week...I realize that's actually a great question for each and every one of us to ask ourselves:

- Do you believe that you are on a special mission from God? Do you believe that?
- What is your mission?
- And what will happen if you truly live your life pursuing God's mission...his purposes...his plan for you?
  - Will God provide for you? Will he give you the things you need? Will he take care of you?
  - Or would you be safer on your own...living to take care of yourself?
- Are you—should you be—on a special mission for God?

Well...today as we start the story of Elijah...we're going to talk about living on mission for God.

- We're going to be introduced today...to 2 main characters in Elijah's story:
- One who lived life for his own goals...his own fulfillment...for his own mission...
- and one who lived his life on mission for God. To do God's will.

We're going to meet those 2 characters...and we're going to see what happens...if we live our lives on mission for God.

- Does God take care of us? Or does he leave us on our own?

Today we are going to look at 1 Kings 17:1-16 if you want to turn there in your Bibles...and here's what we're going to do:

1. We're going to walk through this first part of Elijah's story...and see God's provision as Elijah lived out his special mission for God...and then
2. We're going to talk about how that relates to you and me...and to us being on mission for God.

That's what we're going to look at today...and as we go through Elijah's story, today...and really all week...I want you to ask yourself the question "what is my mission from God?" What does he want me to accomplish today...right now?

Let's Pray...and then we'll jump into our story.

- So like I said...we are going to start this afternoon...by looking at the story of our passage...and the story is this:

God Provides for Elijah as he Lives on Mission (X2).

Let me show you what I mean: Our story begins after the time of Israel's good King David... And after the time of Israel's wise king Solomon... in the days of a wicked king...named Ahab

- Now... Ahab knew the true God. The God of Israel: He knew the 10 C... he knew that God wanted his special nation of Israel to worship only him.
- Ahab knew that he should live on mission for God.

But King Ahab chose a different path:

- Rather than trusting in God and serving him... Ahab chose to live for himself... by his own plan...doing whatever he thought was best for him.
- So Ahab made all kinds of alliances and agreements with the nations around him who didn't worship the Lord...which he was not supposed to do.
- And...in order to make a deal with a nearby nation called Sidon...Ahab married a very evil woman by the name of Jezebel.
  - Jezebel... and her father... and almost all of the people in the nation of Sidon worshipped a storm god... a rain god... a false god named Baal.

- And not only did Jezebel worship this false God named Baal... but she tried to keep other Israelites from worshipping the true God.
- She killed many of the priests of God... And she had Ahab build a big temple with a giant statue of Baal... And a statue of Baal's girlfriend Asherah.

Ahab knew better—he knew he should live for the Lord—but instead he made all these alliances and he married evil Jezebel... And he and many, many Israelites... started to worship Baal. He thought that was easier than living for God's mission.

- And at first... it seemed like his plan was working: Ahab fortified his cities... He built up his palace... His alliances seemed strong... and he had good crops.
- It seemed like his plan to live for himself was working great!

There was only one problem: God wasn't happy about what Ahab was doing.

- So God chose a prophet...and sent him on a mission: Look at 1 K. 17:1

Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."

The prophet God chose was from the western part of Israel...his name was Elijah...which means "The Lord is God"...

- And the prophet's name fit perfectly with the mission God had given him...because God gave Elijah the mission...of calling Israel away from the worship of Baal...and back to the worship of the True God.
- That was Elijah's mission: And this was a mission that would take several years...it was a big mission...but it was the mission God had called him to.

God called Elijah to that mission. And as you can see from the verse we just read... God chose to start this mission...by telling Elijah to do a very brave thing:

- Something that took a lot of faith. See...Baal was supposed to be a storm God... lightning and rain we're supposed to be Baal's specialty.
- Every year when it was time for the rains to start, the prophets of Baal would worship at his altar... and make sacrifices... trying to bring Baal back from the underworld... so that the rains could start.
- Ahab and all the followers of Baal believed that Baal...was in control of the rain!
- So God called Elijah to go before king Ahab...and tell him that there would be no rain (no showers... No storms... no sprinkles... no fog... not even dew on the grass)... there would be no rain until the real God said so.
- Now...that took a lot of faith...because it made Ahab very angry when Elijah said that... but that was part of the mission...God had given to Elijah.

And I want you to notice something: While Elijah was on mission...God provided for him. And God didn't just provide for Elijah...God provided for Elijah through a very unlikely source!

- Look at vv.2-4 2 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: 3 “Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. 4 You will drink from the brook (now listen to this) and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.”

So... Elijah has obeyed God... he has started his mission to call Israel back to God by telling Ahab that there is going to be a drought with no rain...

- Now God knows that once that drought starts and things get really tough... Ahab and Jezebel are going to try to do to Elijah what they've done to the other prophets of the Lord. They're going to try and kill him.
- God knows this... but God has a plan.

He tells Elijah to go and hide in a deep Canyon way back in the wilderness where there was a little brook—a little stream of water to drink.

- And then God tells Elijah that he is going to feed him... using Ravens!
- Ravens! Like, big black birds that look like crows and live in the mountains.
- That's what God is going to use... to feed Elijah.

Now... it might not sound strange to us... to say that God is going to use Ravens to bring food to someone...

- but if you lived in ancient Israel... and you knew anything about Ravens... you would find that idea shocking...and very unlikely...for 2 reasons:
- First... Ravens were ceremonially...religiously...unclean.
  - Israelites were not supposed to eat them because Ravens were scavengers. They sometimes ate dead things, so they were unclean.
  - So you would never think God would use a Raven to feed a godly prophet.

And secondly...Ravens don't share! Ravens are like... some of the least likely animals on the planet to give you food. Ravens don't share food... they steal food!

And I didn't know that... Until we had a run-in with some Ravens in Zimbabwe.

- This was when Calvin and Elizabeth were little... like... 1st and 3rd grade.
  - We had spent some time in a place called Nyanga in the mountains...
  - And I had noticed all weekend that there was a Raven kind of watching us.
- Well... we had a little truck with a Topper on it... And as we were loading the truck to go back to town...we all went back in the house to get something...
- and as I stepped out... here came a Raven flying out of the back of my truck.
- And it looked like he had something in his mouth!
- I thought... “I wonder what he's up to?”...

So we had Kelly move a bunch of big stuff around and get the Raven's attention...

- and while it was looking at Kelley...Calvin and Elizabeth and I crawled in the back of the truck...under the topper...and covered ourselves with a blanket.

- Then we watched the Raven... and as soon as he saw Kelly go back inside... he flew right inside the Topper into the back of the truck...where we were hidden... and we watched him through the blanket as he stole our food!
- He fished around in a grocery bag until he found a package of Maury biscuits...which are these...they're like big round Graham crackers...
- And then that raven kept bobbing his head because he was trying to fit not 1 MB...not 2 MB's... but 3 MB's in his mouth! Then he flew off with our food!

Now the point is... Ravens are a very unlikely source for Elijah's food!

- They are unclean... and they are thieves! I read an article this week where Ravens are stealing steaks and short ribs out of people's carts at Costco in Seattle.

But that's how God says he's going to feed Elijah. And here's the thing: Apparently it worked!

- Look at vv.5-6 5 So he did what the Lord had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

God fed Elijah by the unlikeliest of sources!

- And you know... when I first read this...I was kind of feeling sorry for Elijah... I was thinking "do you really want to eat bread and meat from a Raven?"
- I was thinking it was probably roadkill!
- But now I realize it was probably short ribs and Marie biscuits... so Elijah was doing just fine!

OK...so God asked Elijah to take a step of faith...

- and God provided through a very unlikely source! To show Elijah that he's got this: Elijah can live on mission because God can provide.
- But if we keep reading... God asks Elijah to take an even bigger step of faith...
- Look at verses 7 to 9  
7 Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. 8 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: 9 "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."

Now...like I said... this is a much bigger step of faith:

- I mean, first of all... look at where God calls Elijah to go. He says "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there"
- Sidon... do you recognize that word? Sidon wasn't a city or region in Israel... it was a completely different country!
- In fact... Sidon was the country ruled by evil queen Jezebel's dad...And it was the very center of Baal worship!
- Now God is not sending Elijah to some little no name Creek to hide out...Now he's sending him to Baal city! To Paganville... to Idolburgh... you get the picture!

This is the very last place you would want to go if you were Elijah!

And if that's not bad enough... look at how God is going to feed him: The Lord says "I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." A widow!

- Listen... can I tell you something? If there's one thing on the planet less likely to feed a Jewish prophet in a drought than a Raven... it's a widow from Sidon.
  - I mean to begin with... like the Raven... she was religiously unclean. She came from a country of Baal worshippers.
  - But even more than that... she was a widow! Widows in Elijah's day were extremely poor! And this is in the middle of a drought... in enemy territory!
- This is now not just a very unlikely source of food... it's a very very unlikely source!

And sure enough...she was poor... look at vv.10-12

10 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?" 11 As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread." 12 "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 for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die."

Whoa! Elijah gets to Zarapheth...and our worst fears are confirmed!

- This widow's not just poor...she's starving to death.
- Elijah comes upon her in the moment when she is preparing for her last supper.
- She is gathering up some sticks...she's going to take what little flour she has, and what little oil she has...she's going to make it into a couple of cakes...and she and her son are going to eat it and then they're going to starve to death.
- How on earth is she supposed to feed Elijah?

See what I mean? She is an even less likely source of food for Elijah!

It seems hopeless. But you know what? God has a plan. Look at vv.13-14

- 13 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. 14 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 day the Lord gives rain on the land.' "

God tells Elijah his plan. And Elijah talks to the widow...And just like Elijah had to take a step of faith: just like he had to have the faith to speak to king Ahab...

- Just like he had to have the faith to go to the brook to get fed by the Ravens...
- Just like he had to have the faith to go to Sidon and meet this widow...
- Elijah asks this woman to also take a step of faith.

He asks her to give the first part of her flour...and the first part of her oil to God...by making a cake and giving it...to him

And he promises that if she gives the first part of what she has to God... If she gives God his part first... then God will provide for her needs...

- And there will be enough flour...and enough oil...that she...and her son...and Elijah...can eat a meal not just that day...
- but every day until the famine is over in the rain starts again.

That's what Elijah promises her... And that's what happened. Look at vv.15-16:

- 15 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. 16 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.

The oil and the flour were never used up.

- Every day that widow looked in the jar...And every day there was just enough...to make a meal for her...and for her son...and for Elijah. Day after day after day.

So that's the story... of how God provided for Elijah... as he lived out the mission...that God had given him.

- God protected Elijah in Israel...and even in Sidon. And he used Ravens and Widows...to feed him while Elijah lived on mission for him.
  - So that's the story...now how does this relate to you and me?
  - Well...the application of this story is pretty simple:

God can provide for us as we live on mission for him (X2).

God can take care of us... he can give us everything we need.

And the story shows that God can provide through the unlikelyest of means:

- I mean... God provides through Ravens—and that's not an accident! He deliberately chooses Ravens: these unclean and unsharing birds!
- God provides protection in Sidon—and he deliberately chooses Sidon: the very center of Baal worship.
- God provides through a starving Gentile widow—and he deliberately chooses a starving Gentile widow: because God wants to show that he can provide in the most unlikely circumstances...through the most unlikely means.

He provides through the unlikely. And guys... God does this in our lives:

- As we live on mission for God... he regularly supplies our needs...
- and he almost never provides in the way we think he will.

You know... whenever someone comes to me and tells me they are going to go to the mission field... Or to plant a church... or to do something where they have to raise support and live on faith... I always tell them one thing:

- "Your support... your provision... will never come from where you think it's going to come from. It always comes from unlikely places."

- When Kelly and I went to the mission field...we had friends, and relatives, and churches...that we were sure would support us...and we never heard from many of them.
- You know who did support us? People we would not normally think to ask:
- People who didn't know us well...or didn't seem to have much to give...or just didn't fit the profile. That's where our provision came from.

And let me just say... If you live your life on mission for God... if you really try to serve him at your job... or your school... or at Perry Creek church... you're going to find this to be true:

- If you live your life on mission, you're going to need things... and God is going to provide through the most unlikely of sources. That's the way he works!

Now... let me ask you a question: why does God do this?

- Why would God use an unlikely source... when he could use a likely one?
- I mean... I don't know if it's occurred to you... but God could have used a more likely source to protect and provide for Elijah: He could have sent Elijah to a rich man's estate...or to a King's castle... or to a spa!

Why did God choose to do it this way?

- God does it this way because he wants to build our faith: he wants to teach us to depend on him

I mean... think about it: Elijah doesn't know what's coming at the end of this drought:

- he doesn't know that he's going to take his life in his own hands...and face down 450 prophets of Baal by himself...And call down fire from heaven to light his sacrifice.
- He doesn't know that he's going to have to stand in that moment with complete confidence in God... trusting God to provide in a very public... very powerful way.
- He doesn't know that he's going to have to have that kind of faith.
- But if we know Elijah's story...we know it. We know that it's all coming.

So here's the question: how do you get ready for a big moment like that? How do you develop that kind of faith?

- You do it by having to depend on Ravens and widows.
- You do it by following God day to day in the little decisions that require faith.
- You do it by making the choice to speak up... when God gives you something to say.
- You do it by going where God calls you to go... whether that's to some little ravine you've barely ever heard of...or whether it's Baal City.
- You do it by eating food from a Raven... and by asking a widow for a drink.

You develop that kind of faith by watching God provide through unexpected sources.

If we will follow God... and live out his mission... he will lead us to places that teach us to trust him: He will lead us to places where he has to get bigger... and we will find that he does get bigger... and our faith will grow.



He provides through the unlikeliest of means to build our faith... and here's why he does that: so that we can live our lives on mission for him.

- You know... God has a mission for you. He has things in this life that he wants you to accomplish.
- He doesn't want you to live a life like Ahab's...A life of compromise...where you always pick the safest, easiest path...the path of least resistance.
  - He doesn't call us to that... he calls us to live on mission for him.

And guys... that looks different for every person. Because it's your individual mission at this particular time in your life.

- If you're a student at school... living on mission might mean that you take the social risk of telling people that you're a Christian... Or it might mean reaching out to make friends with people that aren't from your circle of friends.
- If you're a college student... it might mean saying “no” to things that everyone around you says “yes” to.
- If you're a young professional...living on mission might mean pursuing the same career God has called you to...but doing it in a different part of the world...where you can have a much bigger impact for God's Kingdom.
- For many of us... living on mission means working right here to help plant PC Church: allowing ourselves to be inconvenienced to serve... on days like the 4th of July...when you could have other plans.
- For some it means giving sacrificially...for others maybe it's a retirement that has a little less “me time.”

It looks different for each and every one of us... but God calls all of us to live our lives on mission.

- He calls us to be asking what does God want me to accomplish at this time...in this place?

And guys...you don't have to have your whole mission figured out!

- You don't have to understand “what is God's larger mission for my whole life?”
- God may give you that... but for most of us... the question is just “what does God want me to do right now... in this moment... to serve him?”
  - How does God want me to be on mission for him... while I'm walking around my block... While I'm at the grocery store... while I'm at school... or on the job.
  - How can I be of service right now?

That's the question. And that's why I said at the beginning of the sermon that I want you to be thinking all week long about this question:“What is my mission from God...what does he want me to accomplish today?”

If we live that way...if we ask that question...If we choose to do life like Elijah rather than Ahab...we'll be living on mission.

- And if we live on mission for God...God will show us that he can provide for us...even if it is through the unlikeliest of sources.
- God uses unlikely sources to provide...to build our faith...so that we can live on mission for him!