

Can God Really Meet My Needs?

1 Kings 17:7-24

Be careful what you pray for you just might get it. That is exactly what happened to Elijah.

He took on the dubious joy of praying against his own nation as it fell deeper and deeper into sin. Jew and Gentile, young and old, person and livestock were all in the midst of a deep drought and the famine that went with it.

Why, because Ahab, King of Israel, had decided to worship the god of his wife, Jezebel.

It was a scant fifty years after Solomon when Ahab rose to power.

The once peaceful nation had been torn apart by warfare both from within and without.

They had split into a Northern and Southern kingdom and of the six kings who had ruled in Israel three of them had been murdered.

Now to complicate matter Baal, a Canaanite god often linked to rain had begun to be worshipped in earnest in Samaria.

And God had had enough. If the people wanted to worship this Baal then let Baal provide the rains.

In chapter 17 we see Elijah on the run.

This servant of the Lord has been kept by a stream and fed by ravens—an unclean bird to Jews.

But now the creek had shriveled up from the drought and so it was time to move but where?

A reluctant, hopeless, and unlikely servant of the God of Israel is seen in Sidon the nation where Jezebel is from.

She's a single mother and is making preparations for her and her sons last supper when Elijah is there at the gate.

"Get me some water and if you please a loaf of bread" is what Elijah asks for.

What this woman discovers is that her obedience to this request unleashes God's greatness and blessings in her life in unexpected ways.

I think you can tell by the way she refers to "your God" that she isn't thrilled with what is happening.

Her limitations make it difficult to trust this God she didn't know as well as this strange man.

Lastly what we discover is that God's provision becomes apparent when we live beyond our limitations as this woman did—as we step out on faith and obey.

Obedience:

The gospel song says, "count your many blessings name them one-by-one" and we can pretty well do that if we want.

The fact we can gather for worship, friends, family, clean water and safe food, are all part of the many blessings that we enjoy along with others in our nations.

We know many of the bible stories of God's blessings as well.

God gave Israel food while they wandered in the wilderness.

God said that he would take care of them and He did! When they left Egypt they did not leave empty handed for God gave them 400 years of back pay!!

(Exodus 3:21-22) *And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: 22 But every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians.*

Moses and the people were in the desert, but what was he going to do with them? They had to be fed, and feeding 2.5 million people requires a lot of food.

According to the Quartermaster General of the Army, it is calculated that Moses would have needed 1500 tons of food each day to feed the Israelites.

To bring that much food each day, two freight trains, each a mile long, would be required.

Besides that, you must remember, they were out in the desert, so they would have to have firewood to use in cooking the food.

This would take 4000 tons of wood and a few more freight trains, each a mile long, just for one day.

And just think, they were forty years in transit.

And oh yes! They would have to have water.

If they only had enough to drink, cook and wash a few dishes, it would take 11,000,000 gallons each day...and a freight train with tank cars, 3 miles long, just to bring water!

And then another thing! They had to get across the Red Sea in one night.

Now, if they went on a narrow path, double file, the line would be 800 miles long and would require 35 days and nights to get through. (Besides all of the people there were large droves of livestock.)

So, there had to be a space in the Red Sea three miles wide so that they could walk 5000 abreast to get over in one night.

But then, there is another problem. Each time they camped at the end of the day, a campground two-thirds the size of the state of Rhode Island was required; a total area of 750 square miles. Think of it...this space just for nightly camping!

Do you think Moses figured all this out before he left Egypt?

I think not! You see, Moses believed in God, and God took care of these things for him.

***Now, do you still think God has any problem taking care of all your needs?

There were the blessings of victory over cities like Jericho and against enemies faced by Gideon and David.

There were the provision of salvation in the Lion's den as Daniel remained true to his trust in the Lord and of course the blessing given to us by Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Yet common to all of the blessings is obedience.

Israel could only pick up enough food for one day except on Friday when they could gather enough for the Sabbath too.

Daniel wouldn't have fared as well had he decided to worship the king's statue and god.

David couldn't have destroyed Goliath dressed in Saul's armor.

And there is no way we can experience the salvation of God without believing what Jesus says about Himself.

This woman while facing Elijah faces a crossroads in her life.

One direction means salvation, food and God's provision.

The other direction lies death. It's black and white. There's no gray in this.

Starvation of something else.

It would be nice if it was as clear to this woman as it is to us who know the end of the story already, but it wasn't.

God tells Elijah that this widow had been told what to do.

Yet in her conversation with Elijah she seems to know nothing of God's command.

In fact, she makes a point by answering Elijah and saying, "I swear by Your God..."

God doesn't insist she build a temple or travel to strange lands.

Elijah asks for a simple loaf of bread and some water.

What complicates things is that he insists she make his first and then make hers and her sons.

And he asks this knowing that she only has enough for one loaf.

There's a story about a old sailor who ferried people across a river in a row boat.

His pride in his boat was seen even in the hand made oars he used.

When he had made them he had carved into one the word "Works" and into the other "Faith".

From time to time someone would ask about the oars and he'd explain by dropping one and stroking as hard as he could with the other. Needless to say the little boat would go in a circle.

Then he'd repeat the exercise with the other one.

As a believer in Jesus he took great joy in explaining that it was both "faith" and "works" that kept one going in the right direction.

Our obedience, our works, can become quite difficult at times for God calls us to give up our desire, our direction and our decisions in favor of Christ's call, Christ's commission, and Christ's command.

What can be even more difficult isn't giving up our money or time but to give up an attitude of hatred; a pet sin we really like; a grudge against our sister or brother; our excuses for not reading His word.

It is at times like these when we hear Christ clearly tell us what He wants us to do that we start paddling with one oar.

Limitations:

This woman was limited in how God could use her.

Her obvious lack of flour and oil limited what she could do.

She knew how much she had.

She was also externally limited by her gender and nationality.

She was a gentile. She was part of the religious tradition that Elijah fought against.

She was a single mother with apparently no extended family to care for her.

I can only guess at some of the internal limitations she faced as she met Elijah and those I assume come from the ones I've just mentioned.

Unfamiliar with Elijah's God had to limit her.

A sense of hopelessness as she readies herself for her families last meal and perhaps a sense of being an outcast as a single mom all had to weigh heavily against her serving God.

Elijah, God's man-of-the-hour, wasn't without limitations.

Externally he was a wanted man.

He had fled after the drought quite simply because no one wanted him around.

The drought and famine didn't just touch the bad people who worshipped the bad god.

It touched those who had remained true to God as well.
He was in a foreign land.
What's more it was the nation of Queen Jezebel herself.
Internally, one of the characteristics that we see Elijah carry with him throughout his service to God is one of running away from trouble.

Couple that with the need to overcome his Jewish and cultural concerns about talking to a woman in public who wasn't a relative and you see he too was limited.
These external and internal **limitations affect us today**.

Internally we are constantly in a battle with what the Apostle Paul calls the "Old Man" or "Old self".

That's our sinful nature that tends to work like inertia.
Once we're headed toward sin the desire is to keep going that direction and once we're comfortable in sin a resting object wants to remain where it is.
This type of internal limitations blinds us to seeing God's word.
It blinds us to God's future for us as well as for our congregation and community.
It limits our eyesight to only three people, Me, Myself and I.

God knows our limitations far better than we do.

In fact, God knows limitations we face that we don't even know about.
God allows these limitations in our lives for a reason.
The type and depth of commitment we make to Jesus in all areas of our life are how we express and show our thankfulness for Jesus' death and God's love.
And in this commitment we all fall well short even with our best efforts don't we?
After all which of us have lived life loving enough to pay back God for His love?
Have any of us fed enough hungry people, given a cup of water to enough thirsty children, clothed enough naked refugees, or visited enough prisoners to say we've done enough for Jesus to make up for what he did for us?

Overcoming the Limits:

As I said, **God knows our limitations and has to one extent or another placed us a limiting situation.**
Yet he does not excuse us from the obedience and commitment He demands from us.
In Elijah's life we see that only as this woman lived beyond her limitation did she discover her future was secure.
She didn't know her jar would be full when she baked the bread for Elijah.
She didn't know it would provide for her and her son as she brought the bread to the prophet.
It was only after she brings him the bread then goes to fix her meal that she finds the miracle has occurred.

It is when we stretch farther out on the limb of faith till where it's really thin do we discover that even when we fall we land in our the arms of our loving Father.
This woman moves beyond the limitation that life gave her.
When she did she found God provided for her and her family even though she wasn't one of God's people.
How much more should those who know Christ strive to move beyond our limits?

Are we going to remain bound and gagged by the limitations we face or are we willing to trust Jesus?

We shouldn't be surprised that God kept this woman and child fed because that's how God works.
The surprise comes when Christ meets our needs in His wonderful exciting ways.