

Elijah learning – how to receive from others who may be different. He had nothing & was utterly dependent on the widow. **Here is the challenge – we are a community of believers: put away any thoughts of independence & learn to receive.**

5. REACHING OUT TO MEET NEEDS

The family in Zarephath are already living on a miracle but the son becomes ill – it is serious & he dies. CRISIS? CALAMITY? **The great truth that I find here is this – Elijah didn't run!! He takes the boy into his arms & goes to prayer over him. Please note that this crisis throws up other issues -**

- The widow seems to attach some blame to Elijah
- The widow is confused about how God works

Elijah is on his own, in a foreign land – he has a lady in tears & confused. He has not faced anything like this before. Perhaps he has prayed for the boy when he became ill & the boy didn't get better but died.

CRISIS CAN HAPPEN IN BETWEEN – WHAT DO WE DO – RUN OR STAND?

We can do nothing better than Elijah – go to the Lord in prayer, but also, persevere in prayer. That is what we see Elijah doing – three times he prays – **“he stretched himself out on the child three time”** – there is nothing immoral in this but I see, in this action, Elijah stretching every part of himself for this boy – he is covering the boy in prayer.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH A CRISIS IN BETWEEN? Just accept things or run for someone else or pass it on to someone else. Elijah is learning – God is with you wherever. It does seem that Elijah had been learning about passionate, persevering praying during this time in his life (see James 5:17-18) & that is what we see here in this incident.

WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT CRISIS IN BETWEEN – an opportunity to stand on the God you have been taught about; an opportunity to reach out to Him for others. Without going any further – Elijah's actions made all the difference for the widow. That what we have been called for – to be the difference for someone.

CONCLUSION – The time in-between

- **Using the time to develop spiritual abilities**
- **Using the time to grow in perseverance**
- **Using the time to become more sensitive to God's voice & His ways**
- **Using the time to meet needs of people that are around you.**

READING – 1 KINGS 17:1 & 1 KINGS 18:1-2

THE QUESTION – WHAT HAPPENED IN-BETWEEN?

BACKGROUND – In 1 Kings 17:1 we have a man/prophet called Elijah suddenly appearing on the scene – he has been sent to face the King of Israel in Samaria. **This is how the Bible describes this king –**

1 Kings 16:30 – “Ahab....did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him”

1 Kings 21:25 – “There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife..”

The kings of Israel before Ahab had sunk very low as they led the nation into sin & idolatry but Ahab went further than them all. The Bible tells us that –

- He actually built a temple for the false god Baal
- An image of the wife of Baal was put on display
- Outright disobedience with the re-building of Jericho

This is what we read – 1 Kings 16:33 – “Ahab...did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.”

THE SCENE IS SET – the man that God is going to use is Elijah whose name means “The real God is Yahweh.” He is from the hill country of Gilead. His parents have named him Elijah & God is going to use Elijah to demonstrate that GOD IS GOD. And as we read in 1 Kings 17:1 – someone has described Elijah's words as the shortest sermon in history – we see the contest being set up. Baal was a fertility god – this god was looked to for rain, sun etc for harvest. The challenge that Elijah throws out is – how will you all get on with Baal with no rain around. It must have been a very dramatic confrontation – this man has appeared & told Ahab – **“there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”** **Some three years later – as we read in 1 Kings 18:1-2 – Elijah is back with Ahab & rain is announced. As you read 1 Kings 18 we read about the confrontation that took place at Carmel with Baal, the prophets of Baal &, of course Ahab & Jezebel.**

BUT THE QUESTION I WHAT US TO LOOK AT TODAY IS THIS – WHAT HAPPENED IN BETWEEN 1 KINGS 17:1 & 1 KINGS 18:1-2.

Elijah assignment is this part of his life was a confrontation with Ahab but what happened in between the two meetings that Elijah had with Ahab. I want to apply this to us today – what happens in between –

- **Sunday to Sunday** – perhaps you are part of the worship team or are responsible for some ministry on a Sunday or you are one of the ministers on a Sunday
- **Specific Calling** – you know that God has called you for some specific mission but it has happened yet
- **Acts of Service** – you have been used in a particular way with people & you are waiting for the next door to open

THE QUESTION – WHAT HAPPENS IN BETWEEN – CAN I LEARN SOMETHING FROM WHAT HAPPENED WITH ELIJAH IN BETWEEN HIS MEETINGS WITH AHAB?

I have five thoughts this morning – we may not cover them all.

Between 1 Kings 17:1 & 1 Kings 18:1-2 three specific incidents/experiences are mentioned in Elijah's life –

- He spent time on his own at a brook called Cherith
- He lived in the house of a widow, who had a son, in Zarephath
- He was faced with the death of the widow's son

It is from these three incidents that I want to draw some lessons for us. **Someone has written this “ 1 Kings 17 shows Elijah spending the next three years as God's college student.”**

1. GROWING IN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

What did Elijah learn about God in these three years – lessons that were preparing him for his next meetings with Ahab?

- God is the Creator & Upholder of ALL THINGS – from the ravens at Cherith to the continuing supply of oil & flour at Zarephath to the raising of the dead son – **Elijah learned about the Power of God.**
- God is All Knowing & Sees Everything – from the specific directions to leave Samaria & “turn east & hide” to the command to leave Cherith & go to a widow – **Elijah learned about the All Encompassing Eye of God**
- God is Greater than all the gods of the world – from the protection he knew while in Samaria (I am sure that Jezebel was hunting Elijah in this period as she was hunting & killing the other prophets of Jehovah) to the time he spent in Zarephath which was in the land of Sidon whose king was Jezebel's father – **Elijah learned about as in the land the GOD WHO IS GREATER THAN ALL OF HIS ENEMIES.**

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN BETWEEN WITH YOU? I am learning in my life, at the moment, about the GOD who orders my day for His Glory. There is no limit to what we can learn about who God is – it will certainly help you & I to grow in our appreciation for Who He Is. I read this statement a little time ago - **one of the greatest sins in the church is that we have great thoughts about man but only little thoughts about God.** Here is something for us to grow in – letting God work in our lives for us to know that HE IS GREAT & AMAZING.

2. DEVELOPING IN THE FRUIT OF SEL-CONTROL (THE SPIRIT)

There are two things I want us to mention here –

- **Learning about a simple lifestyle** – Elijah had a simple diet of meat & bread at Cherith – two meals a day, which gave him all he needed. No mid-day snack – only water to drink. It wasn't starvation but it was adequate & enough. It may not have been very exciting but was healthy. ARE WE LEARNING ABOUT BEING CONTENT IN ALL OUR CIRCUMSTANCES – DO WE NEED THE LATEST GADGET OR THE LATEST FASHION TO GIVE US ENCOURAGEMENT?
- **Learning about solitude** – we don't know how long Elijah was at Cherith – perhaps it was only months but the only company he had were ravens twice a day. Loneliness can be a curse – perhaps we need to learn to be more open to those who live on their own BUT WE WILL ALL HAVE TIMES WHEN WE WILL BE ALONE. Are we learning to draw on God in those times for ourselves – turning those times into times of communion with God.

Elijah was going to face Ahab & the prophets of Baal alone – whether he knew this at Cherith, we don't know – but when he did face them, he knew that God was with him. I remember a time in my life – I went away to University & looking back it was a time of aloneness – would I seek to know God for myself in that time?

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN BETWEEN WITH YOU? Are you learning about turning your back on the temptation of things – filling your life with things OR are you learning about drawing on God?

3. TESTING OF YOUR FAITH IN GOD

Our faith is tested – please remember God doesn't test us for us to fail but to grow. Think of Elijah

- As he sits by the stream in Cherith, the water he notices is getting less & less as time goes by. But notice – he didn't move; in fact, he didn't move until God told him (vv8)
- As he goes to Zarephath with God's word – **“I have commanded a widow there to provide for you” – he meets the widow & the word is that she only has “a handful of flour in a jar & a little oil in a jug.” What reply does Elijah give – “Do not fear.”(vv13)**
- The house in Zarephath is already living on a miracle but then the widow's son dies. Seems that the boy took ill & perhaps Elijah prayed over him but the boy **“grew worse & worse”** & died.

HERE ARE SOME TESTS FOR OUR LIVES – we have got to ground all this to where we are today. We are all aware of the credit crunch – the promotion has now gone; your job is not safe; on top of all that, other things are happening – illness etc There is something in this whole story that has helped me in the last few weeks – The Lord had said to Elijah (he repeated this to the widow) **“The jar of flour will not be used up & the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.” THAT HAS ENCOURAGED ME IN THE SITUATION THAT I, ALONG WITH PAT, FIND OURSELVES IN AT THE PRESENT. The test is – who do we believe – Elijah was going to live on what God had said. Interestingly, at Carmel he made things more difficult by covering the sacrifice in water – DOES THAT SHOW HOW STRONG HE WAS IN FAITH – how impossible things can get naturally, from a physical point of view, THEY DO NOT LIMIT WHAT GOD CAN DO.**

4. LEARNING TO RECEIVE FROM OTHERS

God moved Elijah from the aloneness of Cherith to the house of a family in Zarephath. This lady was a Gentile (that is the implication of Jesus' words Luke 4:26-27). She was not part of the covenant & would have been seen as unclean. Reminds me a little of the story of the blanket of unclean animals that Peter was faced with in Acts 10 when God said to Peter – **“Do not call anything impure that God has cleaned.” Lesson here is this – God wants to bless us through people. CAN I ASK YOU TODAY – Is God putting people across your path to challenge any prejudice or judgemental attitudes that you have? Is God putting people across your path because they have something for you? Don't limit God to your sort of people – people that you may be naturally drawn to.**

Behind this particular incident in Elijah life I see God teaching community – none of us are to live our Christian lives in isolation – we are here to give but also receive.

Elijah came to this widow with no natural resources, so he had to learn to receive from a widow who. On her first words, only had enough for one more meal for her & her son – we like to be in the strong position where we are the capable ones; where we have everything – where we want people to be grateful to us.