

The Gift That Keeps On Giving

1 Kings 17:8-15

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A. Begins with Obedience Not Convenience (vs. 8-12):

1. The word of the Lord came – From the One who does not forsake His covenant, and has the power and authority to fulfill what He says, repeatedly verbally communicated to Elijah the direction He needed for Him to take despite the obstacles ahead.

a) Elijah was running from Ahab, living in the northern kingdom called Israel. He had left Samaria after proclaiming the divine judgment of God to Ahab and went to hide in Jordan at the brook of Cherith. After the brook ran dry, God sent Elijah to a widow whom God had commanded to care for him and his time of hiding in these two places probably lasted a little over two years.

b) Lack of rain (1 Kings 17:1) was one of the curses of the covenant that would result from disobedience (Deut. 28:23–24). Zarephath (1 Kings 17:9) was situated between Tyre and Sidon, the very center of the Baal cult. There Elijah would demonstrate God's power to provide flour, oil, and rain—blessings customarily attributed to Baal. Also, this section emphasizes that God can protect the faithful—in this case, Elijah and the widow—even when outside of the land of Israel. This would be a powerful lesson to the Israelites in captivity in Babylon that God can bless his faithful people anywhere. The

point of the resurrection of the widow's son was found in the widow's response to the miracle (17:24). The prophet's word was truth, even though the king and other Israelites did not believe it. ^[1]

2. Saying – God spoke directly to Elijah, so there is no possibility that anything could be misinterpreted.

3. Arise – Elijah had to gather himself and find the strength to make this long journey as God directed him. God did not ask for Elijah to understand. God demanded obedience.

4. Go—Elijah must focus on this until he gets to Zarephath. God demanded obedience before His resolution became a reality.

a) God's Word always leads God's servant in the time of testing. But what strange commandments: "Go to Gentile territory where a widow will feed you." See Luke 4:22–26. "Zarephath" means "refining"; and God was certainly putting his servant through the furnace. Imagine Elijah's feelings when he discovered how poor the widow was, and that she was about to prepare her last meal. But God's commands are never wrong; for when the widow put God first (by obeying Elijah's commands), God provided for her, her son, and her guest. Note in v. 14 that Elijah honored the Lord God of Israel before this Gentile woman. All God asks is that we give Him what we have, and He will take care of the rest. He can feed thousands with only a few loaves and fishes. ^[2]

5. And stay there – Elijah must set in his mind that he will remain in this city until God directs him elsewhere. This place not only feeds him, it protects him from those who are seeking to kill him.

a) It is ironic that Elijah, fleeing the promoter of a Phoenician god, should find refuge in Phoenicia! The widow whom he met was willing enough to fetch him a drink of water, but when he asked for some bread as well she was forced to admit her abject poverty and near-starvation. She also appears to recognize him as a prophet of the God of Israel. (Was there something distinctive about the appearance of Yahweh's prophets in Elijah's time? See below on 20:41 and 2 Ki. 2:23–25.) [\[3\]](#)

6. I have commanded – The Lord has gained the widow's attention, and as her Lord got her to commit herself to be available to serve Elijah.

7. Provide, sustainer—Knowing this widow was poor, the Lord ordered her to supply food to Elijah.

a) Elijah, as the bearer of God's word, was now to be sustained by human hands. Still, they were the hands of a poor widow facing starvation (v.12). She was, moreover, from outside the circle of God's own people (Lk. 4:25-26)—in fact, she was from the pagan nation that at that time (much like Egypt earlier and Babylon later) represented the forces arrayed against God's kingdom.

8. So he arose – Elijah immediately accepted the Lord’s command, gathered himself, and found the strength to make this long journey as God directed him. The Lord expected no delay, and Elijah required no explanation from God.

9. Went to Zarephath – Obeying the Lord’s command became all Elijah focused on completing. Elijah’s life was completely surrendered to God without questions, need for understanding, or fear of what may happen.

10. And when he came to the gate - Elijah continuously focused on obeying the Lord’s command, which led him to meet with the widow on time.

a) The city gate was a center of commerce and civic activity. People experiencing poverty were more likely to find scraps of food and other useful items in this location.

11. Behold the widow was gathering sticks – When the widow went to take care of what she needed to accomplish, as a faithful mother, she had no idea that our obedience to God and her commitment to her family would become her blessing.

a) Meeting, at his entrance into the town, the very woman who was appointed by divine providence to support him, his faith was severely tested by learning from her that her supplies were exhausted and that she was preparing her last meal for herself and son. The Spirit of God having prompted him to ask, and her to grant, some necessary succor, she received a prophet’s reward (Mt 10:41, 42), and for the one meal afforded to him, God, by a miraculous increase of the little stock, afforded many to her. ^[4]

12. Behold the widow was gathering sticks – “Presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice....” is our worship before the Lord that leads to blessings. It is a sacrifice, but is it living? It produces life when we sacrificially offer ourselves to God.

a) Here was a Gentile woman in Phoenicia who believed in the Lord; she said she believed He is alive (As surely as the LORD your God lives; cf. v. 1; 18:10).

b) From the fact that she was gathering sticks it is evident that the woman was poor and forsaken. To test whether she were the person who was to provide for him, wearied by his journey in the heat of the sun, he begs her first of all for a drink of water (by **כִּי** a drinking-cup which he had brought from the brook Cherith is to be understood). [\[5\]](#)

13. Behold, the widow was gathering sticks – God sent a man who had no food to a widow (not a Jewish widow; the law takes care of her, not a Canaanite widow, no law) who had no food or way to make food. Obedience NEVER depends on common sense (Proverbs 3:5-6), but it will always require faith.

“Samuel said, “Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.” (1

Samuel 15:22; NASU)

B. No Fear (vs. 13-14):

1. And he called to her – Elijah made a specific sustained shout with the expectation that this widow would respond.
2. Said - Elijah was bent on doing what the Lord said. We often want God's blessings as if they do not do not require obedience (John 15:7- 10).
3. Please, now – Elijah made this request with intense urgency. The journey must have made him thirsty, especially in a drought.
4. Bring me – Elijah commanded the widow to focus all her energy on doing what he said. Could you imagine how some people would have responded to this order? I don't know Elijah; she is not a Jew, but she obeyed just because of what God commanded her to do.
 - a) Elijah was not sent to this widow to be safely hidden at her house, although this object was better attained thereby than by his remaining longer in Israel, because of her faith, namely, to strengthen and to increase it, he was sent to her, and not to one of the many widows in Israel, a man of whom would also have received the prophet if he had rescued them from the pressure of the famine
5. As the Lord lives - The widow does not mind telling Elijah that she can only give water because all the bread she has left is just enough for the day. She must be responsible for her family first.

6. As the Lord lives – The widow's response, “As the Lord your God lives..,” means despite her circumstances, the Lord is still the Ruler of our life. She has accepted that He is still in control.

7. Behold – The widow draws Elijah’s attention to the sticks she has to prepare her last meal. This also means she is poor. Our circumstances often create insecurities that determine our response to God’s commands.

8. I may go and prepare to die – She has accepted her fate but still believes in the Lord God.

9. Then Elijah said to her – Elijah knew the Lord had arranged this meeting and what the Lord said would take place. So, despite what the widow said, he had no intention of changing what he was continuously requiring the widow to do; after all, what the Lord said would take place has materialized. When the Lord’s Word comes to light, this should empower us more, no matter the circumstances.

10. Don’t fear – The widow had a great reason to believe she would die, but Elijah instructed her not to respond to what makes common sense. She must not allow her circumstances to control her faith.

a) The prophetic words of assurance given by the man of God were the woman’s criterion for conduct, as with unquestioning obedience, she carried out the prophet's command . For a Gentile woman, her faith is unsurpassed. Our Lord’s endorsement of this widow is found in Lk 4:26.

11. Don’t fear – Fear and faith do not mix like oil and water. Fear reflects our understanding as it relates to our circumstances, but faith is trust in God’s Word, no matter what our circumstances may seem to dictate.

12. Go and do as you said – Elijah did not try to stop the widow from doing what is right concerning taking care of her family. However, she must demonstrate her trust in the Lord by giving to Him first.

a) In Israel, honoring the LORD with . . . the first fruits of all one's crops was a way of expressing gratitude to Him for His provisions (Deut. 26:1-3, 9-11). It was a way of acknowledging God and our present help (Prov. 3:6).

13. Go and make – The widow, who did not know Elijah but knew what the Lord had instructed her to do, willingly obeyed Elijah's command despite her desperate circumstances. This is how faith erases fear (James 2:14-26)

14. Make me a little bread – Elijah was willing to wait for the widow to do all she needed to accomplish what God instructed her to do. God does not remove work as the mechanism that leads to providing her gifts. Since she was willing, the Lord could have made the bread for her and Elijah. This is how faith kills fear, giving way to the Lord's promises.

15. Make me a little bread – Elijah relied on her obedience to God by not going with the widow. This is a command she must purpose on her own to fulfill.

16. And bring it to me – To bring it to Elijah was to offer her sacrifice to the Lord . She was ensuring that the Lord's agenda, which the Lord was using Elijah to execute, was accomplished. When believers put God first by willfully choosing to support what He is commanding them to give, they sacrifice their commitment to His ministry, which is truly an act of worship (2 Corinthians 9:10-12; Hebrews 13:28-29).

C. Our Gift Discharges His Promises (vs. 14-16):

1. Thus says the Lord God of Israel – This is a command that even a Gentile must fulfill.

2. The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, finished – God is completely committed and purposeful not to stop serving her need. Her obedience is smaller than God's supply. Her obedience is for a particular time and place, but the Lord's supply is continuous with no end in sight (Luke 6:38).

a) Grain and oil were two of the major exports of the city of Zarephath. The fact that they were in short supply indicates how severe the drought was. They are also two of the most essential commodities for survival. As staple products, they represent the major arena in which fertility can be observed. The contest between Yahweh and Baal continues as Yahweh demonstrates that He is able to provide for "Baal's people" in "Baal's territory" just as quickly as He is able to provide for his own people and just as quickly as He is able to withhold from whomever he chooses.

3. The jar of oil will not be empty – God's grace is sufficient. She will never lack flour or oil until the rain return. Her obedience saved her life and her family's life for a long time.

4. Until the Lord sends the rains – Her obedience and commitment to worship God bless her while those who worship Baal suffer for bringing their gifts to a false god. We may give all we can to all the world has to offer, but when a drought comes, we suffer, and those who obey God remain blessed whether there is a drought or not (Matthew 6:19-24).

a) We can rely on this world to provide for us, and things will dry up (Mt. 16:26), but with God, there can be a drought, and God still provides “all our needs according to His riches in glory.” (Luke 12:29-34).

5. Until the Lord sends the rains– Until the rains come, her supply is guaranteed to continue. Her blessings will never end as a promise from God (Proverbs 3:9-10).

a) It stops when it rains because God believes in work to eat. Adam in a perfect garden, had to work to eat. This same is true in 2 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12.

6. So she went– The widow immediately obeyed the Word of God spoken through Elijah, demonstrating her commitment to live by faith and not by sight (she never intended to stop until she completed what she was supposed to do). It exposed her genuine relationship with the Lord God even though she was a Canaanite. Elijah could not live among his people because they had turned their backs on God only to come to a Canaanite to be blessed by her obedience to God.

7. Did according to the word – The widow was completely committed, fully surrendered to trust all that Elijah told her to do endlessly.

8. Did according to the word, The widow’s continuous actions demonstrated her commitment to live by faith and prepare for Elijah, the bake he requested, then come back and serve her family, expecting the flour and the oil not to run out. The nature of faith is that it fully trusts that the Lord’s Word is true.

9. Did according to the word – We hear God’s Word on giving to Him but how we act determines how His promises will be fulfilled. She had to make the bake and pick up the flour and oil pot each time, expecting God’s Word to be fulfilled (Proverbs 10:22; 11:24-25; 28:19-20).

10. The bowl of flour or oil was not exhausted or become empty – The bowl always contained flour and oil. It remained full, meaning it automatically filled up every time she poured out flour or oil God is faithful in fulfilling His promises because He can never lie (Hebrews 6:18).

11. The word of the Lord – This is not a word from Elijah; the widow said this is ‘the’ word that came from ‘the’ Lord. There are no other words to listen to or obey. We must learn the truth, be committed to keeping it pure, and obey it as the Spirit of God guides us (John 14:16-17; 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:10-15). *“Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.”* (Ps 119:105; NASU)

12. He spoke through Elijah – The word of the Lord has been verbally clearly communicated to the widow through Elijah as it is through the disciples to us (John 17:13-18). The same principle relates to us (Romans 12:2).

a) The widow had addressed Elijah as a man of God previously (v. 18), but after he, by the power of God, raised her son from the dead, she knew in a much more experiential way that he truly was a prophet of the Lord [“man of God” was a common way of referring to a prophet (13:1; Dt. 18:18; 33:1; 1 Sam. 2:27; 9:9-10)].

^[1] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). [Tyndale concise Bible commentary](#) (p. 136). Tyndale House Publishers.

[2] Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). [Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament](#) (1 Ki 17). Victor Books.

[3] Bimson, J. J. (1994). [1 and 2 Kings](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 358). Inter-Varsity Press.

[4] Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (1 Ki 17:8). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

[5] Lange, J. P., Schaff, P., Bähr, K. C. W. F., Harwood, E., & Sumner, B. A. (2008). *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: 1 Kings* (pp. 194–195). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.