

Introduction: Anything less than all out, full hearted worship to The Covenant God, motivated by His gracious LOVE to us, sinful people, is an abomination to Him. Some one hundred fifty years after Elijah confronted Ahab, Yahweh spoke through His prophet Isaiah to explain why He was about to send ten tribes of His people into exile. They were going through the motions of worship as taught by Moses, but their hearts were full of iniquity (perversion and greed) and their hands were shedding innocent blood. ‘Bring Me no more vain offerings; incense (prayer) is an abomination to Me ... Sabbaths, calling (sacred) assemblies ... iniquity ... when you make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood’ (*Isaiah 1:13-15*, RSV) *** God has a second chosen people – the poor. James asked a rhetorical question of his wealthy brothers in Christ, ‘Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith?’ (*James 2:5*, ESV) With this, The Holy Spirit is clarifying what He inspired in Isaiah some seven hundred fifty years earlier, ‘When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I, The Covenant God, will answer them’ (*Isaiah 41:17*, ESV). *** The Word of God through Isaiah is directly applicable to both our passage about Ahab and Elijah, and Jesus’ parable about the Pharisee and tax collector. Proud people will be humbled by God. But poor widows who give all to God out of their poverty, and sinners who cry out to Him for mercy, will be lifted into His Presence. *** Let’s seek these truths in God’s Word.

I. The Covenant God sends the prophet Elijah to Ahab, king of Israel, to announce an extended drought, and makes a two part provision for His prophet. (*1 Kings 17:1-16*)

A. After Elijah speaks to Ahab for the living God of Israel about no rain, he receives a word from Yahweh to go to a seasonal river for water and food. (*Verses 1-7*)

1. Then Elijah the Tishbite said to Ahab, ‘Living Yahweh, the God of Israel, whom I have stood before, there will not be these years, dew and rain except by my word’. (*Verse 1*)

Elijah: Elijah, My God (is) Yahweh, is a sojourner from ‘captivity’ in the rocky region.

Ahab: Ahab, brother of father (uncle) is the most wicked of forty rulers of Israel and Judah after Solomon. He married the wicked idol worshipper Jezebel who murdered the innocent Naboth in Ahab’s name to get the vineyard next to their estate (*1 Kings 21*).

Word is drought: Elijah, speaking for Yahweh, says there will be an extreme drought for many years.

2. And it came to pass: The Word of Yahweh came to him: ‘Go, turn east and hide by a brook east of the Jordan, you will drink from the brook and I have commanded ravens to feed you’. (*Verses 2-4*)

Go and hide: Knowing Ahab’s evil heart, The Covenant God commands Elijah to go and hide. The chosen brook means ‘cutting’. Perhaps, those seeking to harm Elijah will be cut.

3. Then he went and did according to Yahweh’s Word, and ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning and evening. (*Verses 5-6*)

Obeded: Elijah obeyed the Word of his God.

Ravens: Ravens are scavengers, so Elijah’s was eating ‘meat and potatoes’ from a one-star diner. However, it kept him alive.

4. And it came to pass, after days, the brook dried up because there was no rain. (*Verse 7*)

Seasonal: Many brooks in Palestine are seasonal – torrents after the rainy season, then dry most of the year. Because of the long drought brought on by Ahab’s wickedness this brook fully dried up. Because Ahab would not repent, many thousands of people suffered as the water supply dried up, and Ahab’s soul dried up. Therefore, may we learn to repent of all sin.

UN-repent sin leads to dryness

B. When the river dries up, Yahweh sends him to a poor widow in Zarephath who gives what little she has to the prophet at his word, and Yahweh provides for them. (*Verses 8-16*)

1. Then The Word of Yahweh came to him, ‘Arise, go to Zarephath, which (is) to Sidon, and dwell there; behold, I have commanded a widow to feed you. (*Verses 8-9*)

Place: He is being sent to ‘refinery’ in a region of hunters. In those days many types of metals and ores, precious minerals, were refined. So, Zarephath had wealthy people.

Covenant God: However, God did not send His prophet to these wealthy people, but chose one of the poorest of the poor to feed Elijah.

2. Then he rose and went to Zarephath, and behold, at the gate, a widow gathering sticks; he called to her, ‘take to me please a little water’; as she went, he called to her, ‘take to me please a piece of bread’. (*Verses 10-11*)

Behold, a widow: The first person Elijah saw was a poor widow gathering sticks to make a small fire to bake the small portion of flour left to her.

Two commands: He commanded her to bring him a little water to drink and a morsel of bread to eat.

3. Then she said, ‘(By) Living Yahweh your God, I do not have cake, but only a handful of flour and a little oil, I am gathering sticks to prepare it for me and my son to eat and die’. (*Verse 12*)

No cake: She does not have a loaf of bread, or even a small muffin.

Scant ingredients: She has less than a handful of common flour and a little (olive) oil.

Expects to die: Still, she will make what she has for the sake of her son. She expects they will die.

4. Then Elijah says to her, ‘Fear not! Go, do what you have said, but make me a little cake first and bring it to me; and, to you and your son, make afterward’. (*Verse 13*)

Do not fear: When God is stretching the faith of His people, He always reassures them that they must not be afraid to do what He has commanded them to do.

Serve me first: Elijah asks her to change her motherly priorities and serve God's prophet first.

5. Because thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, the jar of (common) flour shall not be finished, nor the jug of oil diminish until the day Yahweh sends rain on the earth. (*Verse 14*)

Word of Yahweh: What a Word from Yahweh to this poor widow! How could she possibly have flour and oil months into the future? But, this is the generosity of The Covenant God to His faithfully obedient people!

God provides for those who give everything to Him

6. Then she went and did as the word of Elijah, then ate she and he days; the jar of flour was not finished nor the jug of oil diminished, according to The Word of Yahweh He spoke by Elijah. (*Verses 15-16*)

Obedience: She believed God's word and obeyed it. Nine hundred years later the Church at Corinth similarly obeyed God to give sacrificially (*2 Corinthians 8:1-5*).

Ate for days: The three of them continued to have food to eat throughout the famine.

Not empty: The Covenant God keeps His Word. May we believe that when God calls us to give all to Him, He will fully provide for us.

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II. Jesus tells a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector to teach that self-righteous people are not justified by God and will be humbled; but, those who are humble will be exalted. (*Luke 18:10-14*)

- A. The Pharisee sets himself apart and thanks God he does not grasp at money, is not unjust or immoral, but he fasts and gives tithes. (*Verses 10-12*)

Reason for parable: And He said also to some, having become convinced in themselves that they are righteous and treating with contempt the rest, this parable. (*Verse 9*)

1. Two men went up into the Temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. (*Verse 10*)

Opposites in Temple: Pharisees were priests striving to keep all the instruction God gave His people through Moses; tax collectors were Jews working for Rome to collect state taxes, but often collected extra from their own people to enrich themselves. Jews admired the former and despised the latter.

2. The Pharisee, having stood to himself, these he was praying, 'God I am thanking Thee that I am not just as the other men: grasping extortionists, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector; I am fasting twice in the week, I am giving tithes on as much as all I am possessing'. (*Verses 11-12*)

He thanks God he is superior: He does not take money by violence, he is fair, he is sexually faithful, and he does not betray his people using the power of the Roman occupiers of Jerusalem.

He does good works: And he denies himself food (and prays) twice a week while giving God ten percent of all that he possesses.

- B. The tax collector is not able to lift his eyes to heaven, beats his chest and asks God to be merciful to him – a sinner; and, Jesus says he is justified. (*Verses 13-14*)

1. But the tax collector, far off having stood, not could he desire (not even) eyes to lift to heaven; but, he was beating his chest, saying, 'God be merciful to me, the sinner'. (*Verse 13*)

Can NOT look into heaven: He is so overwhelmed by his sins that he cannot, in any way, bring himself to look toward God in heaven.

Beats chest: He kept on beating his chest in an act of remorse and contrition.

Mercy: He can only throw himself on God's great quality of LOVE to mankind: Mercy!

2. He said to the (self-righteous) listeners, 'I am saying to you all, this one went down into his house having been justified over that one. (*Verse 14a*)

Jesus: Jesus is teaching that humble people who show remorse and beg for mercy from God will be justified by Him over and above those filled with self-righteous pride. May we always fear the danger of our being proud and self-righteous. And, may we learn from examples of materially and spiritually poor people to always approach God in humility and obedience.

3. For everyone exalting himself will be humbled. (*Verse 14b*)

Proud will be humbled: Jesus is affirming a theme that flows through Scripture. (*Deuteronomy 8:1-3; Psalm 68:30-35; Isaiah 2:6-22*)

4. But he humbling himself (before God) will be exalted. (*Verse 14c*)

Humble will be exalted: This truth comes from (The Son of) God Himself. Let us echo the tax collector as we approach God: Here I am. I'm not much. Please have mercy on me. If this is our true heart attitude, Jesus says we will be justified IN Him and reconciled to His Father as sons and daughters, and as little brothers and sisters of Jesus.

So, let us surrender all our pride and all we think we are to God in order to receive His grace, mercy and LOVE.

God provides for those who give everything to Him.

Conclusion: Idolatry and half hearted worship are offensive to God and He will humble all such people; but, poor people willing to give generously out of their poverty and sinners who beg for mercy will be lifted into fellowship with God.

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