



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Elijah the Prophet

“Irrationalism of Fidelity,” 1 Kings 17:1-16 – TRANSCRIPT

We look again in the first verse of the seventeenth chapter of 1 Kings which begins the biblical story of the prophet Elijah. So, will you turn in your Old Testament to chapter 17 of 1 Kings, and listen, as we read beginning with the first verse,

“And Elijah the Tishbite, an inhabitant of Gilead, said unto Ahab, ‘As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word.’ And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, ‘Get thee hence and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.’ And he went and did according unto the word of the LORD, for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening. And he drank of the brook. And it came to pass after a while that the brook had dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. And the word of the LORD came unto him saying, ‘Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain

thee. And he rose and went to Zarephath, and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow woman (I am reading, that is, the Hebrew text does not have the definite article)—and behold, a widow woman was there gathering up sticks. And he called to her and said, ‘Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel that I may drink.’ And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her and said, “Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.’ And she said, ‘As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel’”—

That word really means a jar and not a barrel. I think anyone who has ever kept meal – now I’m not posing as an authority, you understand – but anyone who has ever kept meal knows meal breeds worms. This is a jar.

““And a little oil in a cruse. And behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go ahead and dress it for me and my son that we may eat it and die.’ And Elijah said unto her, ‘Fear not. Go and do as thou hast said, but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. Arrest therefore, the God of Israel. The barrel (or the jar) of meal shall not waste, neither that the cruse (or the jug) of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.’ And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah, and she and he and her house did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD which he spake by Elijah.”

Now, if you will, let me ask you to turn with me, if you will, to the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament and we want to read just two verses which are part of a message that Jesus gave in the synagogue at Nazareth. Luke chapter 4 and verses 25 and 26. Isn’t

it interesting to know that the Lord Jesus Christ read and studied the same passages of Scripture that you and I have the privilege to read and study today. And perhaps as a little boy, as a child, he read these passages from Kings. And now later on in his ministry he refers to them to illustrate the messages that he gives. In the final analysis, the finest illustrations of biblical truth are found in the Scriptures themselves. The 25th verse of Luke chapter 4, he says,

“But I tell you the truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias (that is, Elijah), and the heaven was shut up three years and six months when great famine was throughout all the land. But unto none of them was Elijah sent, save unto Zareptah (Now that’s the New Testament translation of the word that means Zarephath), a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.”

May God bless this reading of his inspired word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the wonderful privilege of reading the Scriptures that Jesus Christ himself read and studied.

And we pray, O God, that as we read and reflect upon these great stories of the Old Testament, which contain such wonderful truths, we pray that the Holy Spirit, who was given without measure to him, and who has been given to us as our teacher, may instruct us in the word of God.

And we pray, O Father, that he may instruct us, as we are open to his ministry, in a way that he instructed our blessed Lord himself. We thank Thee for the true humanity of Jesus Christ. And as we think of the Incarnation at this Christmas season, may the spiritual reality which is summed up and epitomized in that great teaching, “Give us anew.”

And we pray, Lord, that amid all at the Christmas season, which sometimes detracts from the message, we pray that Thou would enable us to remember the real

significance of this great event. And there as a result of our Christmas season, a time of cheer and happiness and joy, may it also, Lord, be a time of spiritual maturing for each of us.

We thank you for the way in which Thou hast blessed us. And we thank you for this assembly of Christians. We thank Thee for Thy blessing upon the church. And we pray, O God, that Thou wilt hold and direct us in a way that will honor him who came to be in our midst and then died for us.

Lord, we pray that the spiritual needs that exist in the hearts of each one of us may be met through him who is now and forevermore the God-man. May the presence of the Holy Spirit cheer and guide us. And may, Lord, our faith be increased in these days, and give us, O God, the spiritual courage to lean upon Thee in spite of the circumstances.

And now we commit ourselves to Thee, and we commit each one here to Thee, for Thy blessings through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Message] This morning we are studying again, for the second time, the life of Elijah. And we're turning to the 17th Chapter of 1 Kings again. And the subject for this morning is the "Irrationalism of Fidelity." Or if I may add a subtitle some of the seminary students will understand and then you will in a moment, "The Irrationalism of Fidelity" or, "God is Rich Farmer."

Many years ago, a man by the name of J.M. Darby wrote a book called *The Irrationalism of Infidelity*. And in that book, he expressed a very great truth, that is that ultimately, to disbelieve in the God of Abraham is irrational. That is, when you look at the greatness of God, when we understand him to be who he is, and when we understand what he has done, it is utterly irrational not to believe in this God. It is irrational to be an infidel.

Then we look at man, and consider man's helplessness, his weakness, man's hopelessness, then I think we can understand what we mean when we say that the Bible

also teaches the irrationalism of fidelity. And I want to illustrate this. I want to try to show you that in many places in the New Testament, in many places in the Old Testament, it seems to be an absolutely irrational thing to believe what God says is going to come to pass.

Let’s just think for a moment of Noah. Noah was told that he should build an ark. As far as we know from Scripture, there had arisen a mist upon the ground but there had been no rain. And now Noah is told by God that there is to be a flood. And so Noah goes out and tells his sons that they’re going to construct an ark. And you know one of my favorite comedians is Bob Newhart. And there are so many situations in which this comedian can bring home to us the situation to us in a way that ordinary people could not. But I think I can just imagine Noah’s family when he told them they were going to construct an ark, and the questions that they asked, and the replies that he gave.

Now I think that if he realized that it had never rained, as far as we know, and Noah tells them that there is going to be a great flood. It’s going to rain, and water is going to come down from heaven. And there’s going to be so much rain that the whole earth is going to be covered. And that they must construct a boat – I don’t suppose they even knew what a boat was – a boat, a gigantic boat, and it is through this boat that they are going to be saved.

Now I know, that after he gave that information to his family, that the kids must have gotten together and said, “Age is too much for dad [laughter]. We’ll humor him and go along with him.” Now it was, as far as they were concerned, it was utterly irrational to believe the word of God.

Or take the taking of the City of Jericho. The children of Israel under the leadership of Joshua arrive at that city, and Joshua now tells them, men, we’re going to try a new strategy with the City of Jericho. We’re not going to storm it, as we’ve stormed other cities. We’re not going to use our battering rams and our ladders. We’re going to try a new strategy. Some of the soldiers say, “Joshua, that’s a good idea, it’s good to keep

them guessing. What are you going to try this time?” Well, we’re going to try marching around the city. Well, that’s interesting; what else are we going to do?

Well as a matter of fact, we’re going to march around the city once, each day, for six days. We’re not going to do anything, Joshua? No, we’re just going to march around the city. Now we must observe a particular order. We must have the men of war, we must have the priests. Don’t tell me the priests are going to fight, Joshua. The priests are going to be there, and they’re going to be blowing their trumpets. Well that’s an interesting twist. And we’re going to take the Ark of Jehovah, and we’re going to also have a rearward. And that’s the way we’re going to march.

And again, I can think of Bob Newhart, you know, and the questions that might be asked, and now the question comes, “Well, what are we going to do then, Joshua?” Well, on the Seventh Day, we’re going to march around the city seven times, not just once, but seven times. Well, Joshua, what effect is this going to have on the walls of Jericho? Well, you just wait. On the seventh day, as we go around the city, then at a certain signal, when the trumpets give a long blast, and then when the people shout, the walls are going to fall down.

And they look at the walls. And they look at Joshua. [Laughter] And I imagine that some of the men came together and said, poor Joshua, I sure wish Moses was back [laughter]. He was a man of action. It was utterly irrational to think they were going to blow those wall down. And yet that is exactly what happened.

Then I think of the time God came to Abraham. And he said to Abraham, who was about 100 years of age, and Sarah, who was about 100 years of age. Paul says that Abram was dead. That is, he was dead as far as procreation was concerned. Sarah’s womb was dead. And God said to them you’re going to have a child, and Abram, this child is going to come from your own loins. Well, when the news came to Sarah, she laughed. And rightly so. It was utterly irrational.

And yet, in the New Testament we read, that Abraham staggered at the promise not, but he became strong in faith, and in becoming strong in faith, he gave glory to God. It was utterly irrational. But yet it was the irrationalism of fidelity. Because you see it is by faith that the power of God is touched.

Luther said once, “If you have believed, you must crucify the question, ‘How?’” And I think he expressed a great truth. When we look at the life of Elijah, we see just this kind of faith. He is a prophet of deeds, he’s a prophet of dynamics, he’s a prophet of denunciations, but above all else, he’s a prophet of faith. Now, of course, he is also a man, and he is a prophet of unbelief, too. But he’s a prophet of faith, of great faith – that’s why he’s such a great prophet.

Over ten years ago, when my daughter was in Sunday School, she was studying the life of Elijah. And in the morning meetings I was giving a lesson on Elijah. I was interested in her opinion of Elijah, and I was fishing for some response as a kid to the messages I was giving. So I said to her one night, “What do you think of Elijah?”

She said, “Boy, he’s a neat prophet.” Now that was when the word “neat” was first begin used by our kids. “Boy, he’s a neat prophet.” And what she meant was that the experiences of Elijah were exciting experiences, and they surely were. They were characterized by the irrationalism of fidelity.

Now Elijah has made his great prophecy to Ahab in the 17th chapter and the 1st verse. He has been, perhaps, somewhat surprised, to receive the command of God to go and hide himself. It appeared that after years of preparation, Elijah is now ready to make his impact upon the nation, but instead, God has allowed him to give the message to Ahab and then he has said, Elijah, I want you to hide yourself in the east, by the side of the brook Cherith. And so Elijah is now forced to turn aside and deal with himself and with God for some time.

He of course, learns some very important things, for one of the climaxes of his career will come shortly after this when he stands on Mt. Carmel with the victory over the

prophets of Baal. And so that year that he spent by the brook Cherith was a year of spiritual strengthening. There he listened to the word of God, and he spent time in communion with God. And he was prepared for further exercises. It was characterized by obedience, because he was told that he would be fed at a particular place. God said, “I have commanded the ravens”—unlikely birds—irrational to believe that ravens would feed anyone. But Elijah went by the brook Cherith and in the morning the ravens—this irrational, this irrational method of fidelity—the ravens arrived each morning, bread and flesh, and each evening, bread and flesh, and he drank of the brook Cherith for his liquid nourishment.

Now then, Elijah has a problem. His problem is the kind of problem that many people have, many Christians have. In days of inflation, we see the dollar becoming smaller and smaller and smaller. We are beginning to understand what it must have meant to Elijah as he looked at the brook. And at the end of his stay he looked at the brook Cherith and began to notice that the brook was becoming smaller and smaller. And finally, it was just a thin, silver stream that came down the mountain. And ultimately, there were just some pools where some of the holes in the little creek had been. And the water is now drying up. He’s faced with a problem; what shall he do?

This spring, Mr. Schultz, in my favorite comic strip, had a little strip in which Linus and Charlie Brown are speaking. And Linus says, “If you have some problem in your life, do you believe you should try to solve it right away or think about it for a while?”

Charlie Brown typically says, “Oh, think about it, by all means. I believe you should think about it for a while.”

Linus says, “To give yourself time to do the right thing about the problem?”

“No, to give it time to go away.” [Laughter]

Elijah sat by that stream and he had his problem, but that problem did not go away. That water, as it began to diminish, introduced other great problems in the mind of

Elijah. For after a year now, the brook is singing less cheerily. And Elijah has this tremendous problem. He's in a quandary. What's he going to do?

Well, our text says in the seventh verse, and it came to pass that after a while the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. After all, Elijah, at least outwardly, was the real reason why there had been no rain. And the word of Lord came to him saying, arise, get thee to Zarephath which belongeth to Sidon and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain him.

So here is the prophet in a quandary. In fact, a calamity has occurred. The ravens have arrived morning after morning, but the brook is now dried up. What is he going to do? And if I know Elijah, because, after all, the New Testament says he was a man of like passions with us, I don't think it was nearly so simple as it appears in this book. I think that the last month of that year that he spent by the brook Cherith, as he saw the water diminishing must have been a month of severe self-questioning. I think as he saw the water begin to diminish in the brook, he must have thought things like this: has God forgotten me? It is possible that I have missed his will after all? Is it possible that it was just an accident that I happened to go to the brook Cherith, and the brook Cherith, of all the brooks in the land, had water in it? Now that the water is going and as it came to its last, he might well have thought, I just wonder if I am in the will of God after all.

Now of course, he has some lessons that God wants him to learn. The prophet must learn these lessons that he may communicate these lessons to others, just as every teacher of God's word must learn the things that he teaches about in personal experience, or else he will not be nearly so effective in teaching the word of God. So I think the first thing that Elijah learns here is that he must distinguish between the giver and his gift.

You see, it is very easy for us, if we have blessings from the Lord, to begin to look at these blessings and see them as the end in themselves. And as the flesh arrived in the morning with the bread, and the water by his side, it was very easy after a time to forget all about God. And so now he must learn that though the brook has failed, God has not

failed. The same God is there to care for Elijah. And if I may intersperse a word by way of practical application, it is a lesson we need to learn, too.

We need to learn that though our outward blessings fail, we still have the God who has provided them. And that is very important for us. And not only for prophets, and not only for widows, as the widow of Zarephath; it is a necessary thing for all Christians to remember, that when God is blessing you, the important thing is not the blessing itself, it is the giver of the blessing who is really important. And if we miss that, then we are liable to expose ourselves to some other lessons which it should be unnecessary for us to learn by experience.

Now Elijah learns another thing. He must learn that the plans for his life are made by God, and not by himself. The Bible says that he who believeth shall not make haste. And I think that I see in this some evidence of the faith of Elijah that he stays there to the bitter end. If he had been a 20th Century Christian in business, he would have already formed a new company for the development of water resources to the east of the Jordan in order to supply his needs. But he sat. And he stayed by that stream, because God, you see, had told him to stay there. It was irrational, and where there was nothing but a pool in that little creek, to sit still by the pool. If Elijah had friends at all, it must have exposed him to a great deal of ridicule: Elijah, do you still want to stick by the pool; the water’s going, can’t you see it’s going? Nevertheless, God had told him to stay there, and he stayed there.

Because, you see, after all, God had promised to take care of his prophet, and he will direct him. Now, I wish I had all the heads of the theological seminaries and mission agencies and churches all over the United States in this room at once, because I think that this is a lesson that we—and I include myself—that we as Christians today need to learn. We need to learn that the same irrationalism of fidelity is God’s message today just as it has always been. It is still his method.

For you see, it is from this message that God gets the glory. That’s the way he operates. He’s not a selfish God. He’s a righteous God. He operates according to truth, and he deserves the glory, and he will get it. Very difficult, of course, to sit still when the brook is drying up. It’s very difficult to stay in one place when there seems to be every natural leading to transfer your locale.

Dr. Chafer had told us an old story, and I’m sure you’ve heard it, of the preacher who received a call to a church who had a great deal more members and provided a great deal larger salary. And he had announced to his congregation and received this call and was praying about it. And one of the members called on the house during the week and knocked on the door, and one of the children came to the door, and the member hesitantly asked, “Well, how is the decision coming?” And the little child said, “Father’s in the study praying, and mamma’s upstairs packing.” [Laughter] You know, in the New Testament, this irrationalism of fidelity, how important it is.

Now, there’s another thing that we’re learning from this, this problem that Elijah had. It is that we can, as believers, count on the care of God amidst the drying brook. Suppose you’re having difficulty in your business. Can you count upon God, then? Yes, you can. Suppose you are having a time of waning health. Can you count upon God, then? Yes, you can count upon God then. Suppose that you are in the midst of some deep disappointment of a personal character. Can you count upon God, then? Yes, you can count upon God, then. As long as you are in the Lord God, you know that he guarantees to meet all of your needs.

Now he may wait until the last moment to deliver you, as he did for the disciples who are in the midst of the storm on the Sea of Galilee. He waited until the fourth watch of the night, when it is the darkest to come, but he did come with his supernatural deliverance, and so here. Elijah has waited, and it’s the fourth watch of the night. The ravens may be coming, but he needs water and he must have it. And now he receives the word of God. In the eighth verse we read, “And the LORD came unto him saying,

arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there.” Notice the emphasis on the little word, “there”: Behold, I have commanded a widow woman *there* to sustain thee.

Now here there are going to be some further tests for his faith. I think that Elijah must have felt something like the children of Israel when Joshua announced the strategy for the taking of Jericho. For after all, what is he going to do to have to get to Zarephath? Well, in the first place, Zarephath was 100 miles away. He had to travel through the territory that was extremely hostile to him, because they knew that he was responsible for this drought in the land. And Jezebel, and her courtmen, and also the prophets of Baal, and others were anxious to get at the throat of Elijah. And I think also that no doubt some of the Israelites themselves were very angry and irritated with the prophet who had been responsible for the drought. And so now he is told that he must go to Zarephath, but further, if you’ll remember, Zarephath, as we said, belongs to Sidon.

Now Sidon, it happens, is the home country of Jezebel. It’s the very place where Baal worship was at its strongest. And so he is told, first of all, that he must go to a Gentile land, he must go to the country of Baal, and not only the country of Baal, but it is the home territory of the dreaded Jezebel. Now I think that the prophet Elijah must have wondered, did I really get the right message? And finally, it states that he is to go there, and he is to be fed by a widow.

Now, historically, widows were not wealthy in Israel. That’s why in the Old Testament you have so many references to the fact that God cares for the widow. They need him, his care. So here is a desolate, dependent woman herself, in a strange land, in the home territory of Baal and Jezebel, and it is there that God is to be provided for the prophet Elijah. Oh, the irrationalism of fidelity. Irrational. Utterly irrational. It is not the wise thing to do. But it is God’s word. That’s the important thing: it’s God’s word.

Now today if we were told that we were to be fed by widows, we couldn’t believe it. [Laughter] Our financial journals tell us that the great majority of the resources of the

United States rest in the hands of the women, the widows of the land. That’s because we men are such nice people. We’ve given it to them. But then, it was quite different.

And so now, Zarephath is before Elijah, and he must travel there. I think that he must have gone by night. It does not say it, but I have a hunch he went by night. I have a hunch that he was not anxious at all that people should see him. And he finally comes to the place that is called Zarephath.

And it is there that God is going to give him a new experience. For he arrives in the vicinity, and he looks forward to the meeting with the woman. Now of course, he does not know anything about this woman. He does not know who she is. The only thing he has been told is that he’s going to find a widow there, and that widow is going to sustain him. And so I think you’ll see that as he arrives in the vicinity, he’s on the lookout for the woman who might be the one destined by God to provide for him. And what a beautiful picture of divine providence we find.

Elijah, as he nears the city, may well have thought something like Eleazar, the servant of Abraham did, when he went out to look for a bride for Isaac. You’ll remember that Eleazar, as he came into the territory, he said, now, Lord, as I go up to this well, if I see a woman coming down to the well, and I ask her, give me something to drink and she says I will give you something to drink and your camels also, Lord, let that be the woman. And so he went up, and that’s exactly what happened.

Perhaps Elijah, thinking of this, sees a woman, a desolate-looking woman with pallid cheeks, sunken eyes. Obviously she’s been in great poverty and distress, and hunger. And so as he arrives in the city, just at that particular moment there happens to be a woman who is at the gate of the city.

Now, as we gather from the incident that is given here, it is obvious that this woman has gone out—she is at the end of her resources. And Elijah is at the end of his. And the two meet precisely at the gate of the city. She’s looking for a couple of sticks to build a fire, and by building the fire to cook the last little bit of meal and oil that she has,

and Elijah is looking for the woman who has been supernaturally provided by God to provide or to nourish him. So they arrive at the precise moment. They meet.

Now it was not an accident. It was not an accident at all. It was one of those wonderful, providential dealings that God has with men. Now I think that at the end of the day, they sat down together and they must have marveled at the wonderful way in which God had brought them together. Wasn’t it striking that this woman with this great need, and this prophet with this great need should arrive at the same point at the same time?

Now do not think that Sidon was just a little village. It was not. It was a comparatively large city at this time. This was something that in itself signified the hand of God was upon the prophet. So first of all, he speaks to the woman and says, fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel that I may drink. Now it was a sacred eastern custom to give a drink if requested, so this was a rather mild test for the woman. But she turns – she is apparently going to do her best to meet the prophet’s needs – and so she turns to fetch it, and Elijah, since he has gotten a response affirmative in his first request, now asks for something else. He says, as she moves away from him to get the water, he says, oh, also, would you bring me a [indist.] a bowl full of bread in my hand? Now this, of course will be a firmer, or a deeper test for her, and in fact, it will draw in her faith, and as a matter of fact it will unseal a tale of woe which this woman has.

And so she speaks to Elijah, when he asks for the bread, and she says, as the Lord your God liveth – by the way, you’ll notice, “as the Lord *thy* God liveth”—apparently at this point it’s the language of unbelieving reason. It’s the language of good common sense. But it’s the language of unbelief, for the language of good common sense is often the language of unbelief. She has her eyes upon the barrel. She does not have her eyes upon God.

She says, “As the Lord Thy God liveth”—how did she know Elijah had a God? How did she know that he had the God of Israel? Was it perhaps the prophet’s dress

gave him away? Was it because he was known all over the land as that prophet with the leather garment, that mantle thrown about his shoulders, and that long, shaggy hair that looked like one of the Beatles? Was he so well known that she recognized him, or at least she saw that he was one of the prophets?

Well, at any rate, she speaks up, and you can sense the note of complaint. As the Lord they God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in the barrel and a little oil in the cruse, and I’m just gathering sticks that I may gather it for me and my son that we may eat it and die. So, her eyes are upon those meager little resources instead of upon the great God in heaven.

The first week on Thursday morning in chapel, Jack Wordstrom, who heads the Word of Life was speaking to us, and telling us some of the experiences that God has had in the saving and developing young people for the Lord Jesus. He said that in one particular meeting, he was expressing some of the needs of the Word of Life work, and at the conclusion, after he had expressed a tremendous need, and they wanted to step in and take advantage of it, he spoke of this very need, and then, as he concluded he said, “You know, it’s a wonderful thing that we know the one who owns the cattle on a thousand hills.” And there was a kid in the audience who was a very new Christian, and he didn’t understand exactly what he was talking about. And after the meeting he went over to a friend of his and he said, you know, it’s a wonderful thing that Jack Wordstrom knows such a rich farmer. [Laughter]

And that is exactly the person that we know. And it makes all the difference in the world when the Christian realizes that his God is a great God. It makes all the difference in the world when we realize our needs may be met by him. It makes all the difference in the world when we realize that although it may seem utterly irrational, if it is God’s word to us, it is the most rational thing in the world.

And naturally, if we look at it from the standpoint of men, always, it is the irrationalism of fidelity. It, of course, reaches its climax in the virgin birth. Utterly

irrational. And the death of Jesus Christ. And salvation through him. The whole Christian faith may be classed as foolishness, which is exactly what Paul does.

So, now the woman. She might well have had reason, you know, because after all, if he’s the prophet of God, why is he in such need? Why should the prophet of God come to me that I might be the means of keeping him alive? If his God is so great, why won’t his God supply all his needs? She had some very good rational reasons for refusing this request. But there was something about Elijah that had strangely won this woman, apparently. There was something about his being, there was something about him that convinced her that God was with him, apparently. Because whatever he said, she does. And so, a reaction now, after he has said, fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel that I may drink, and added the request for the bread, and she has poured out her complaint, and Elijah replies, now fear not, go and do as thou has said, but, when thou preparest that bread, and make that little cake, when you cook it and when you pour the oil upon it, give me one first. Prepare one for me first. And then feed your son. Imagine. [Laughter]

The nerve of the man. He first asks me for a little water, now he asks me to give him some bread. Now, after I’ve told him all I have is just a little bit, he asks me that he be fed first, and then my poor son who is about to die from hunger, and myself. And then, Elijah adds a promise. He says in verse 14, “For thus saith the LORD God of Israel,”—now wait a minute, thus saith the LORD God of Israel?!—what kind of a god is he? Well, this is the God who humbled proud Pharaoh; in an irrational way, that irrational way of opening up a path through the sea to lead the children of Israel out. This is the great God who saved the nation of Israel, apparently hundreds of thousands of people for forty years in the desert, by ordering manna from heaven. This is the great God who for forty years so fed them that their shoes never wore out (Floresheim would have loved to have had the secret [laughter]). When the children of Israel came through

the years of the wilderness, their shoes were just as they had been in the beginning. They walked through the sea dry shod. It’s the LORD God of Israel! The LORD God of Israel.

Listen, you who live in nineteen hundred and sixty-seven, the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the LORD God of Israel! The LORD God of Israel is the God of Believer’s Chapel. It’s the God of the believers here; the LORD God of Israel! It may be irrational to follow him, but it’s the irrationalism of fidelity. And in it the power of God is seen! I know he has saved me. I know he has saved you. If he can do that, he can do anything.

I come back all the time to the statement of Mr. Telica, who has said that he does not believe that there shall be any clergyman in heaven who is not surprised that he is there. I think that’s true. That’s true of every single Christian, too.

So, we read in the 15th verse, so she went and did according to the saying of Elijah. Oh, woman, great is thy faith. Here she believes this prophet of Israel. And she now goes and she takes that little bit of bread that she has, that little bit of oil, she takes it out of the dwindling jar and the jug, and she bakes a little cake, just as Elijah said, and she bakes the first one for the prophet Elijah.

I read a story that kind of touched me this past week. It concerned W.R. Sangston, who was a great preacher. He went to visit a little girl, and she was going blind. And she spoke to Mr. Sangston, who was a minister, and she said, “Oh Mr. Sangston, God is going to take away my sight.” He said he didn’t know what to say to her at first. And he finally said, “Jessie, don’t let him do it! Give it to him!” She said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Why just accept this as from God and pray this prayer, ‘Oh God, if you wish my sight, give me the grace to give it to you.’”

You see, the things that happen to us are things that happen within the will of God. And I don’t know this woman’s reasoning. But she may have said, apparently, Lord you want my last piece of bread. And you my last little bit of oil, so I’m going to give it to you. In other words, she accepted the situation. Very difficult to do that.

There was a hymn over at the seminary. We don’t have it anymore because we don’t sing from the old Presbyterian hymnal any more. We sing from – I started to say a modernistic one – wouldn’t it be terrible to do that? [Laughter] Now it’s not a modernistic one, it’s a modern one. But it’s not nearly so good, in many ways, as the old hymnals which has some good, solid hymns in them. Course, it had some hymns that weren’t so solid, too. But in this hymn, it used to be my favorite. Whenever Dr. Chafer called out, a smile came over my face – I’m sure a student said, there is his favorite – was hymn 572. I never forgot it. It’s been fifteen years since they had that hymnal, but I haven’t forgotten it. And it had a stanza in it, and the most beautiful tune, too, “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, only lean upon his word, thou wilt soon have cause to bless his eternal faithfulness.” The fidelity of God.

Now, the woman has done this. And we read, as we conclude our study this morning. She went and did according to Elijah, and she and he and her house did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not – it didn’t fail, the Hebrew text says – it didn’t fail, neither did the cruse of oil lack—by the way, that’s the same word that is used in Psalm 23:1: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack;” I shall not want, I shall not lack—and the cruse of oil did not lack, according to the word of the Lord which he spake by Elijah.

That handful of meal and that little bit of oil; apparently, they never increased. That’s very good they didn’t increase, because you see if God had given her a barrel of meal, it would have become contaminated. And so everyday she went to that little jar, and she went to that little jug, and she looked down in there, and she had a little bit of difficulty, no doubt, in getting the last little bit out of the jar, to make that food that they needed in the morning and in the evening. And she went and she poured out the oil, and as she poured out the little bit, there was always a little bit left. And as she took that jar, and she got out the last little bit of meal, and she put it back, there was always just a

little bit there. And so every day she looked up to God, and she thanked the LORD God of Israel.

I think that after the year or two, or the length of time that Elijah spent there, as she looked up, she must have finally said, “Oh glory be to the God of Israel! There’s never been a God like this!” Baal has never treated his servants like this. And so every day, it was there.

Now I don’t want to talk too much about the typology of this incident, because it’s not important. But it’s obvious that as you read the Bible, that the bread will ultimately point to one who is the bread of life, our Lord Jesus, who provided the manna in the Old Testament, who himself is the bread from heaven, now. The oil, of course, reminds us of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And by the combination of the ministry of a great God who presides through Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, that person who applies this to our heart, our needs are met in every age.

And while she did not understand these things, I can look back and I can see some foreshadowing of our Lord and the ministry of the Spirit. Well, I want to conclude just one or two points, real quickly. Aside from the great lesson of the irrationalism of fidelity, I want you to notice the sovereignty of divine grace. That’s one of the uses that Jesus makes of this. He stood in the synagogue in Nazareth, and he said, you who look at me with such anger and with such unbelief in your eyes, I want to remind you of the fact that in history God has often gone beyond Israel to bless. There were many widows in Israel during the days of Elijah. Why did he not go to one of them?

Well, the reason was the same as what exists now. In the first place, you are all opposed to Jesus Christ. You have fallen into heresy. You have fallen into backsliding. Your hearts are hardened before God, just as it was in the days of Elijah, and men began to worship Baal and run after the false gods. They did not love the God of Israel. And so it was necessary for Elijah to be sent entirely through the land, and out into the land of Sidon, the Gentile land. And so today, the teaching that I am bringing to you today is

being rejected, and God is going to go to the Gentiles, ultimately, for he will go to those whose hearts are open.

But of course, in the final analysis, the reason that Elijah went to the widow in Sidon, and the reason that the Lord Jesus goes to the Gentiles is because of the purpose of God. It is the wonderful sovereignty of the grace of God. It is God who has reached down and picked out this poor woman, whose heart has been prepared for the reception of the Son of God, the message that the prophet would bring. And she was prepared for the coming of the prophet, and as he gave the test, she responded. She responded to the water request. She responded to the bread request. And finally, she responded to the request that had to do, primarily with the LORD God of Israel. And through that experience, she came to know the LORD God of Israel, the great God of heaven had looked down and seen the heart of that widow and had moved upon the heart of that widow because he loved that widow, and had brought that widow unto himself.

Oh, the wonder of the sovereignty of the grace of God. I cannot explain it. I cannot begin to explain it. I merely rejoice in it, that he has included me. And then, of course, there is that illustration of the necessity of the obedience of faith. Elijah must obey. The woman must obey. And out of the obedience of faith, there comes salvation. There comes sustenance. And there comes a complete heart satisfaction in God.

I do not know your spiritual condition this morning. If you are here, and you have not believed in Jesus Christ, I remind you of God's great provision. It is the cross. There the Lord Jesus has taken your sins and mine, and as a result of the saving work which he accomplished, it is now possible for a holy God whose law has been satisfied by the sufferings of Christ, to offer to all, out of his great love, a salvation. It is irrational to believe, working as men, that we can be saved with trust in God. But it is the irrationalism of fidelity that brings salvation to the glory of God.

And when you put your trust in the Lord Jesus, who died for you, who made it possible for God to forgive you, who made it possible for you to sit in this audience this

morning and have the sense of the forgiveness of God. When you look to him, you say, thank you Lord, for dying for me. That's all. Thank you, Lord, for dying for me. That very moment, God gives you new life. You are born again. You stand justified before God, on the testimony of the word of God. Irrational? No, it's the rationalism of the great God of Israel, who has loved us and given himself to die for us.

So I do not ask you this morning to join the church. You cannot join anything in Believer's Chapel. I do not ask you for praying through. I do not ask you to do good works. I do not ask you to observe the ordinances, be baptized, above the Lord's Supper. Many of these things are good in themselves, but you cannot be saved by works, for by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

You can have this salvation through simple trust in the Lord Jesus. Wouldn't you like to be saved? Wouldn't you like to have this great God as your God? Wouldn't you like to know that in having him, your needs are met? And wouldn't you like to have some of the wonderful experiences of trusting in him? That's all you need, do. Say, thank you, Lord, for Jesus Christ. It's just an act of faith. It's just taking God at his word.

Someone asked a little girl, how old are you? She said, I don't feel like seven; I feel like six. But mother says I'm seven. You see, that's what the Bible says. It asks us to accept the testimony of God, that he loves the world, that he gave his Son to die for the world, that if you believe in his Son, we have life. You know that? That means that if you in your heart say, thank you Lord, I take Christ, you can walk out of this auditorium a transformed person. May God help you to make that decision. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, be and abide with all who know him in sincerity. And O Father, again we pray, give no rest nor peace, until those outside of Christ according to Thy purpose rest in him.

“Irrationalism of Fidelity” by S. Lewis Johnson
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For Jesus’ sake. Amen.