

Sermon Text (1 Kings 17:7–24 ESV)

⁷ And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to [Elijah], ⁹ “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” ¹⁰ So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” ¹¹ And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” ¹² And she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.” ¹³ And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son.” ¹⁴ For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’” ¹⁵ And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶ The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

¹⁷ After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. ¹⁸ And she said to Elijah, “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!” ¹⁹ And he said to her, “Give me your son.” And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. ²⁰ And he cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?” ²¹ Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, let this child’s life come into him again.” ²² And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. ²³ And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives.” ²⁴ And the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.”

God Gives Us What We Need

In our sermon for today, we will focus on the first part of our reading. In that first part of our reading, we hear of a widow who was a steward of very little. What does it mean to be a steward? A steward is someone who is entrusted with things that belong to someone else. A person can be either a good steward or a bad steward. To be a good steward, a person must take good care of those things that have been entrusted to him and put them to good use. So, with that definition

in mind, was the widow in our reading for today a good steward? As you think about that, allow me to provide you with some additional context to our reading.

In the verses prior to our reading for the today, we are told that “Ahab the son of Omri began to reign over Israel” (1 Kings 16:29) and that he “did evil in the sight of the LORD” (1 Kings 16:30). Now, this might not sound like anything new. After all, it had become a pattern for the kings of Israel to do evil. However, Ahab was different. The Bible says that “Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (1 Kings 16:33). And so, God sent the prophet Elijah to Ahab, who said to him, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word” (1 Kings 17:1).

The word of the LORD came true. We hear in the first verse of our reading for today that “after a while the brook [Cherith] dried up, because there was no rain in the land” (verse 7). And this drought was not limited to the land of Israel. It had affected the neighboring Gentile lands as well, which we see when Elijah goes to Zarephath, a small coastal town of Phoenicia between Tyre and Sidon, at the LORD’s command.

When Elijah “came to the gate of the city” (verse 10), he met a widow who had nothing but “a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug” (verse 12) as a result of the drought. These ingredients were about enough to make one more meal for her and her son, after which, she expected both of them to eventually die. In fact, she was in the middle of collecting a couple of sticks that she planned to use in preparation for that last meal. It can be easy to imagine just how scared she was. And yet, what is it that Elijah says to her? He says, “Do not fear” (verse 13). Do not fear? That’s something that’s easier said than done, especially in a situation as dire as hers. What’s more, Elijah goes on to say, “[F]irst make me a little cake of [the flour and oil] and bring

it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth’” (verses 13–14).

First Elijah tells the widow not to fear, and then he tells her to use some of her very little remaining ingredients to make food for him first. Even with the promise of God attached to it, it still sounds like a lot to ask of her. And yet, despite the seemingly hopeless situation that the widow and her son were in, “she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah” (verses 15–16).

So, was the widow a good steward? Yes, she was. She, like all of us, was God’s steward. Everything that we have, from our possessions to our talents, are things that God has entrusted us with. There is not a single thing that we have that was not entrusted to us by God. Therefore, if God wants you to do something with what he has entrusted you with, you should do it, putting your trust in God that he knows what he is doing. The widow, despite having so little ingredients left, trusted the words of God and did as he commanded, and she was rewarded for it.

If you were in the widow’s situation, would you do as Elijah said? Since we have the benefit of knowing how this account plays out, we may think that we would listen to the words of God’s prophet, but would we actually listen? Even though we know how this account plays out, and even though we have promises from God in which he says that he will provide us with what we need, do we trust God to keep his promises, or do we find ourselves worrying about the future?

We may not find ourselves suffering from a drought to such an extreme that we are running out of food and water. However, we do find ourselves living in a time when, even though we are pretty well off, all things considered, we can still find ourselves struggling to find a home to live

in and to pay for everything that we need. Even when our pay goes up, everything around us only seems to get more and more expensive so that we are unable to pay our employees; our insurance; our bills; even our food. We can look at how much harder it is getting to make ends meet and can become scared as we think about what is coming in the future as a result.

In times like these, what do we think it means to be a good steward? God wants us to use everything that he has entrusted to us to his glory, but do we do that? Do we do what we can to help and provide for others, or do we only look out for ourselves and no one else? Do we give our first fruits to God, or do we only give him our leftovers, if we give him anything at all? Do we use our talents to benefit the Church and the spreading of the gospel, or do we focus instead on using our talents for our own benefit, even if it means spending less and less time helping out at church? We can find ourselves thinking that being a good steward means that we do what best benefits us, especially in difficult times. However, when all we do is worry about ourselves and what we can do to help ourselves, we are no longer trusting in God, and, as a result, we can find ourselves living a life of fear and uncertainty. And yet, despite all of this fear and uncertainty that we face, what does God tell us? He tells us not to worry and to trust in him.

Jesus says, “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? . . . And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” (Matthew 6:26, 28–30).

God takes care of the birds and the flowers, even though they are less valuable than you are. The value between them and you can be seen plainly in what Jesus was willing to do for you.

Jesus did not leave his throne in heaven to live with the birds. He did not live a perfect life for the sake of the flowers. He did not willingly lay down his life and die an innocent death on the cross so that birds may be saved from their sins. He did not suffer hell itself on the cross to keep the flowers from being thrown into the fire. But who did he do all of that for? He did all of that for you. Jesus left his throne in heaven for you. He lived a perfect life for you. He willingly laid down his life for you. And he suffered hell itself for you.

If Jesus did all of that for you when he did not do it for the birds and flowers, then how much more will he provide for you and take care of you when he already provides for and takes care of the birds and flowers? Does that mean that no hardships will ever come your way? No, but it does mean that we can trust that God will always give us what we need. After all, he already gave us what we needed most of all, the forgiveness of sins by the perfect life and innocent death of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

Knowing that we can trust in God to satisfy our every need, and knowing what he has already done for us, we are moved to be truly good stewards of everything that God has entrusted to us. No longer do we feel the need to selfishly look out for only ourselves. We are now moved to do whatever is most beneficial for the glory of God. Will we do it perfectly? No, but when we fail, we turn to the one who never did fail, the one who forgives us for all our sins and values us more than anything else. What more do we need than that?