

## Serving The Lord First: The Widow's Obedience

A Sermon By  
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The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah. 1 Kings 17: 16

Ahab had become king of Israel, the land of the northern tribes. He “did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him” (1 Kings 16: 30). Elijah the prophet, the Tishbite, of Gilead confronted Ahab telling him that there would be a drought: “there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word” (1 Kings 17:1).

Then Elijah obeyed the Lord and went and stayed by the Brook Cherith. It was here that ravens brought Elijah bread and meat. But then, as there had been no rain in the land the brook dried up. Then the Lord sent Elijah up north to the region of Sidon.

So, Elijah traveled northward to the city of Zarephath. The Lord had told him a widow there would provide for him. When Elijah arrived at the gate of the city he observed something quite troubling: a poor widow gathering sticks. Instead of inquiring why she gathered sticks or offering assistance, Elijah asked her to do something for him: “bring me a little water in a cup that I may drink.” As the widow went to get the water, Elijah had another task for her: “please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.”

This widow was destitute. She was at the end of her life. She explained her predicament to Elijah that all she had was a little flour and oil. She gathered sticks that she may prepare the flour and oil so she and her son may eat and then die. In these most dire of circumstances her focus was upon helping herself and her son and not Elijah or anyone else. This is quite understandable given the emergent nature of the situation.

But Elijah persisted, saying “make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son.” As the Word says, the widow went and did and Elijah commanded. She made the cake and served Elijah first.

Miraculously, because she obeyed the Lord's prophet the widow and her household ate for many days. “The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah.”

And so we now turn to look and the deeper spiritual realities living within the Lord's Word. From the Heavenly Doctrine we learn that Elijah represents the Lord as to the Word (AC 9198: 5). We know without doubt that it is the Lord's Word that teaches us about the Lord and the life we should live.

The Lord told His followers “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him” (John 6: 56). However, because they did not understand what the Lord meant, many of His followers turned away. When the Lord asked His disciples if they

also wanted to go away Peter answered “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6: 68).

Elijah represents the Lord’s Word with us. Our task is to open our hearts and minds to receive the Lord’s love and His truths. This is the meaning of eating His flesh (which is His good) and drinking His blood (which is His truth) - AC 8313:2, AC 7850:2, AE 1082:2.

In our lesson we see that Elijah traveled to Zarephath of Sidon to a widow. As taught in the Lord’s Word of the Heavenly Doctrine, Zarephath of Sidon represents knowledge of good and truth while a widow means a person who has good and a desire for truth (AC 9198: 6). What we can make of this? As long as we are striving to become good people and our hearts are sincere, the Lord will always teach us. He will come to us with His Word, opening the understanding of our eyes to see.

As the Lord said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Matthew 7: 7-8). But for this to become possible for us we must be like the widow.

In the natural sense the widow is a woman whose husband has died. Yet, in the spiritual sense, as mentioned, a widow is a person who has good and at the same time a desire for truth (AC 9198: 6). The widow within us takes form in our willingness to live a good life. While we are so disposed to be good people, living a heavenly life, we also want to know how. Our desire is to learn from the Lord. That is the hope.

But like the widow we must be willing to give water to Elijah. We must be willing to give to the Lord. The Arcana tells us that the widow giving water to Elijah represents obedience along with the desire that good has for truth (AC 9198: 7). In other words, if we want to know and understand truth we must be willing to obey the Lord. We must trust that the Lord will enlighten us with His truth as long as we are willing to do what His commandments teach us.

An important event in our lesson is the widow’s obedience to Elijah. He asked her for water and a morsel of bread. At first she seemed reluctant to comply. In her hour of need she was destitute and had resolved in her mind that she would die. But she quickly yielded to Elijah. She served Him first.

The widow served Elijah a cake of bread. Again we turn to the Lord’s Word. The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that flour is truth that a person derives from doing good (AC 9198: 7). The oil represents the good of love (AC 9198:7). Like the widow our life must be one of making cake from oil and bread. The cake made from oil and bread is truth conjoined with good (AC 9198: 7).

From this we can know that we must join truth with the good that we do. Joining truth with good is more than an abstraction. An abstraction without some action is empty. In

other words, we can join truth with good only by doing what is good. There is no other way to see truth than by doing what is good. As taught in the Arcana, “truth is seen because of its end in view, which is good, or what amounts to the same, life” (AC 2979:2). Living a good life is the prerequisite for seeing truth.

Therefore our life must be characterized by making a cake and giving it to Elijah. In simple terms our life must be characterized by doing good so that the Lord can continue helping us to see many of the wonderful ways to live a good life. The Lord can and will help us to see the many opportunities, as they arise, to truly do what is useful. Then as long as we sincerely seek to do what is good, something miraculous can happen for us.

After the widow obeyed Elijah “the bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah.” As is our custom we turn to the Lord’s Word to instruct us in the deeper spiritual reality for the salvation of our souls. His Heavenly Doctrine tells us that the oil and flour not running out represents being “enriched with the good of truth” (AC 9198: 7). So in plain terms it is from doing good that the Lord can enrich our understanding to see truth. As mentioned, “truth is seen because of its end in view, which is good” (AC 2979:2). With assurance we may conclude that truth is seen from doing what is good.

In our New Testament lesson we see the Lord feeding the multitude of 5,000 people. The Lord took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted (John 6: 11). From the Heavenly Doctrine we learn that in the spiritual sense, to eat and drink means to nourish oneself spiritually; to eat means to acquire good and to drink means to acquire truth (AE 617:2).

In the same manner as the five thousand people who ate as much as they wanted, we can do the same. The Lord continues offering food; the bread is His goodness and the fish is His truths about how we should live (AE 430:15). We can have as much as we want.

The Lord crossed the Sea of Galilee. When He reached the other side a multitude of people numbering five thousand followed Him up onto the mountain. He fed them bread and fish, “as much as they wanted.” The Lord will cross our Sea of Galilee and find us. It does not matter where we are or the situations in we find ourselves.

The Lord sent Elijah northward to Zarephath. There a poor widow served Elijah a morsel of bread. Consequently she and her household ate for many days and “the bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah.” As Elijah traveled to Zarephath, the Lord likewise will visit us and revive our desire for His truth so long as we love truth for the sake of doing good.

We know that the Lord alone is the source of all that is good, that from Him and no other source proceed things like love, tenderness, and innocence. He alone possesses the entire body of knowledge, all the truths about living a heavenly life. If we are hungry and unfulfilled the Lord will feed us. As He provided for the widow in Zarephath, He will

feed us to such an extent we could say “the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want” and that “my cup runs over” (Psalm 23: 1, 2).

This story of Elijah the prophet visiting the widow of Zarephath is the story of the Lord with us. He is forever present in our desire for truth even when, like a poor widow, we seem to have nothing. Surely, without the Lord we can do nothing. But as long as we trust in Him and strive to obey His Word, He will teach us His ways.

The Lord said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

*Amen.*

### 1<sup>st</sup> Lesson: 1 Kings 17: 7 - 16

7. And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. 8. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 9. "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." 10. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink." 11. And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." 12. So she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, 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 make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. 14. For thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.'" 15. So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. 16. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Lesson: John 6:1-14

1 After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. 2 Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. 3 And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. 4 Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. 5 Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" 6 But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. 7 Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little." 8 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, 9 "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" 10 Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11 And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." 13 Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. 14 Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Lesson: AC 5576:2, 3

Hunger in the spiritual world or in heaven is not hunger for food, because the angels do not feed upon material food, which is for the body that man carries about in the world;

but it is hunger for such food as nourishes their minds. This food, which is called spiritual food, is to understand truth and be wise in good; and wonderful to say the angels are nourished by this food...the angels continually long for the things of intelligence and wisdom, and that when they are in the evening, that is, in a state in which these things fail, they are so far in what is relatively not happiness, and they then hunger and long for nothing more than that the morning may dawn for them afresh, and that they may return into their life of happiness, which is of intelligence and wisdom. That to understand truth and to will good is spiritual food, may also appear to everyone who reflects that when anyone is enjoying material food for the nourishment of the body, his food is more nourishing if he is at the same time in cheerful spirits and conversing on agreeable topics, which is a sign that there is a correspondence between spiritual food for the soul and material food for the body. And the same is further evident from the fact that when one who longs to imbue his mind with the things of knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom is kept from them, he begins to be saddened and distressed, and like one who is famished longs to return to his spiritual food, and thereby to the nourishment of his soul.