

“Desperate Times”

1 Kings 17:8-24

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All Scripture quoted from ESV unless otherwise noted

Around the 9th century B.C., Israel was experiencing a drought, and Elijah was a prominent figure in it. It was he who informed Ahab that there would be no rain or dew until he said so. Immediately after that, God ordered him to stay at the Kerith Ravine, perhaps for as long as 2 years, where he was brought food by ravens and drank water from the brook. But when the brook dried up, then the Word of the Lord came to him, calling him to go to Zarephath, to a widow whom He had commanded to feed him (1 Kings 17:8-10). This widow was facing the most extreme circumstances that perhaps we could even imagine, and from the interaction between her, her son, and Elijah, there are four principles that we can glean regarding our own ability to trust God when we face difficult times.

The first principle is to trust God when expectations fail. This widow had trusted her husband’s ability to provide, but that failed when he died. Then she would trust in the hospitality of her countrymen, but the drought had taken so much from them that they didn’t have much left to give. She was so poor that she was out gathering sticks in order to cook one final, tiny meal for her and her son before they gave up and died. Her life had gone from one of hope and promise, to one of disappointment and sorrow. But *God is always working behind the scenes*. Elijah was called to go to Zarephath, whose king just happened to be Ahab’s father-in-law. This was practically his archenemy’s backyard, so Elijah was going to have to trust God even when fear made sense (1 Kings 17:10-16)

When Elijah arrived, he asked the widow for a drink and some food. But she had no money, no possessions, and sadly, no hope. She was not only broke; she was utterly broken. No hope, no expectations of survival, no plans for any kind of future at all. But Elijah says, “Do not fear.” And why was she not to fear? Put simply, because God. Of the 105x this expression appears throughout the Bible, it generally is followed by something like, “Because God is with you,” “Because God has delivered your enemy into your hands,” “Because God has something in store for you,” or, “Because God has heard you.”

Elijah gives her God’s promise of a miracle; that the flour and oil would not run out, and sure enough, there was always enough to feed themselves; the ingredients never ran out! So finally, it appears things were looking up. A glimmer of hope for their survival snuck its way into her heart. But that hope, that happiness was not to last, and now she would have to learn to trust God when hope betrays (1 Kings 17:17-18)

The sickness and finally, the death of her son has left her feeling angry, betrayed, lied to, and guilty. She asks if Elijah had come to bring her sin to remembrance, and while we don’t know what the sin is that she is referring to, but it seems like she is saying, ‘Maybe it’s my fault.’ Things were looking up; she had gone from facing her last meal of just a few biscuits to now having enough each day to make something for them to eat, but her hope was quickly dashed when her son, whose life had been spared through the miraculous multiplying of the flour and oil, lay dead.

Blame is the low-hanging fruit that is easily reachable in even your lowest of times. It has been around a long time – even as far back as the Garden of Eden, in which Adam blamed Eve for presenting him with the fruit, and Eve blamed the serpent for tricking her.

There are many reasons why you might blame others. Maybe we can simplify the list down to just three major reasons. The first is that we use blame as a *defense mechanism*. *If your family is running late for church and I leave the stove on, I can preserve my self-image by making it your fault. “If you hadn’t taken a 40-minute shower, we wouldn’t have been behind schedule and I would have remembered.”* This method of blame might be summarized by the saying, “It’s your fault, not mine.”

Secondly, we sometimes use blame to *justify our own actions*. After all, if my problems are your fault, then I feel like I have a reason for being angry at you; I feel justified in treating you harshly. If you are angry or upset with someone and you say, “You acted like a jerk first, so you deserve the words I’m about to spew at you,” it can make your actions seem appropriate. This method of blame can be summarized by the saying, “You deserve it.”

And a third broad description for why you might blame others is to *avoid the hard work of self-examination*. *Indeed, if I can place the responsibility for a problem on someone else, then I don’t need to change anything about myself. Like saying “If you were a better person, there would not be any problem to deal with. This method of blame can be summarized by the saying, “You need to change, not me.”*

When your hopes come crashing down, don’t play the blame game – rise above that. Trust God to fill you up, even when your circumstances threaten to deflate you. Maybe we can understand and possibly even defend her reaction to the devastating news and situation she finds herself in, but let’s see the rest of the story (Thank you, Paul Harvey) to find out what happens.

This woman had suffered so much over the course of her life, and had sacrificed so much. And now, the death of her son just seems like too much to bear. It seems like justice has escaped her once again. And so, we see the need to trust God when justice misleads you (1 Kings 17:19-24.)

Justice seems like it would say, ‘this woman has obeyed the word that Elijah brought. She had shared her meager supplies with this Jewish prophet – a stranger in both nationality and in religion – and so she deserves God’s favor.’ Maybe she felt like she was ‘on the inside track’ with God now, and if so, we can more easily understand her outburst (v.18.) Her perception of what is just and fair and right led her to believe everything was going to be okay... and yet her son was dead. He was her only hope for any kind of a future, and now he is gone. But God wasn’t done with her story yet.

Elijah took the child from her arms and took him to an upstairs room, where he pleaded with God for the child’s life. The woman had given up, choosing instead to grieve all alone downstairs. Elijah prayed intently, and maybe felt like God wasn’t answering. Finally, after a significant and no doubt lengthy prayer session, the child’s life is returned to his body. It wasn’t that Elijah was searching for the right words or some magical prayer formula – he was earnestly, whole-heartedly pleading for this child’s life with the God whom he served.

Prayer is not a formula; it’s a conversation. Have you ever felt like you can’t pray in front of people because you don’t know how, or you don’t know what to say? Just remember that prayer is a conversation, not a final exam for the speech class you’re taking in college. No one

is giving you a grade or written evaluation on the 'quality' of your prayer. If you are anxious about praying in front of others, it is obvious that you are focusing on them, rather than on God. Don't do that. Pray honestly, fearlessly, and if necessary, tearfully, and do it whether others are listening or not. After all, who cares? You are talking with God, not trying to impress others, right? That's what prayer is.

What a journey this widow had been on! Years of famine and the miraculous provision of flour and oil, the death of her husband and then the death and resurrection of her son must have been like an emotional roller coaster. But life is like that sometimes, isn't it? When you're on a roller coaster, you grab the bar and hold on. Grab hold of God and hold on. Hold on, through all of the trials and all of the blessings. Hold on, through all the twists and turns, crests and troughs. Trust God when all else fails – your expectations, your confidence, your hope, your sense of justice. *Desperate times call for desperate trust.* Trust God with a desperate, all-in trust. He will provide – He is always with you, and He is always good.

Resources

- <https://www.harleytherapy.co.uk/counselling/why-we-put-the-blame-on-others.htm>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201509/5-reasons-we-play-the-blame-game>
- <https://www.talkspace.com/blog/blame-others-mistakes/>
- <https://upjourney.com/why-do-we-blame-others-for-our-failures-mistakes-and-problems>

Takeaways from this message.

When all else fails...

Trust God when EXPECTATIONS fail

- *God is always WORKING behind the scenes*

Trust God when FEAR makes sense

- *"Do not FEAR," because GOD*

...trust God when HOPE betrays

- **Why we blame – 3 general reasons**
 - *As a DEFENSE MECHANISM*
 - *To justify our own ACTIONS*
 - *To avoid the hard work of SELF EXAMINATION*

Trust God when JUSTICE misleads you

- *Prayer is not a FORMULA – it's a conversation*

Desperate TIMES call for desperate TRUST

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

- 1. What was most surprising, unexpected, or helpful from today's passage/message? Why?**
- 2. How do you imagine Elijah felt about asking the widow for help? Why? What might the widow have naturally thought when he asked for a morsel of food?**
- 3. If you only had one food to eat for the rest of your life, what food would you choose?**
- 4. The widow speaks 3 times in this passage. What do you observe about how her faith might be changing through the course of these events?**
- 5. Jesus points out (Luke 4:25-26) that there were many widows in Israel at this time, yet Elijah was sent to Zarephath. What is He teaching us here?**
- 6. How does today's passage help you learn to trust God more?**
- 7. What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?**