

Sermon Notes – November 7, 2021
(I Kings 17:8-16)

I want to share with you today about Elijah the Old Testament prophet. He was the religious leader at the time in the nation of Israel, and he had to take bad news to King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. King Ahab was one of the most corrupt kings that Israel ever had. He married a woman who was a pagan and she believed in Baal. She so influenced her husband, King Ahab, that he pronounced that the state religion of Israel was Baal-Worship. He tore down some of the temples to Yahweh and he built temples to Baal. Elijah was sent by the Lord to tell King Ahab, “If you don’t turn around, repent, and return to Yahweh, I’m going to send a severe drought and famine in the land.” Well, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel didn’t listen and they kept doing the same old stuff. Finally, God decided to punish Israel and sent a severe drought and a famine on the land. Elijah had to go on the run; he had to seek a place of refuge. So, God sent Elijah away from Israel and into pagan territory. There he met a woman that God said would supply him with food.

Have you ever had anything unexpected to happen? Sometimes, it’s good and sometimes it’s bad. The woman in our Old Testament lesson today had something unexpected to happen. But, I want to tell you about another woman a few years ago who was on “Britain’s Got Talent,” and she had something unexpected to happen. She was a woman who didn’t have the appearance of a musical star or celebrity; she was kind of disheveled in her appearance; her speech was not the best; and she did not look like a star. She got up and presented herself as 47-years old, from England, and had always wanted to be a singer. She had not had a lot of training, but she had a beautiful voice. But, what I want to tell you is that the judges and everybody in the audience had low expectations of this woman. Based on her appearance and speech, they thought, “Nothing good is going to come out of this woman. Who does she think she is coming up here to try-out?” When she opened her mouth and sang, “I Dreamed a Dream” from Les Miserables, faces of those in the audience dropped – their jaws dropped, their eyes got big, and everybody stood up and started applauding. The voice that came out... the sound

that came out was amazing. Do you remember her name? ... Susan Boyles. Nobody expected her to have such a beautiful voice. Good things come unexpectedly sometimes, don't they?

Sometimes unexpected things happen and they are good for us and sometimes they seem bad. The woman in our story was a poor, widowed woman who was a pagan. ***But, I want you to notice in our story today that: God provides for his own; God cares for all people and God moves in mysterious ways to make himself known*** -- he works through people, history, and events to make his wonders known and to make himself known -- that he is the God, the great Yahweh God.

Elijah is seeking refuge from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. He goes to this widow in pagan territory and he asks for bread and water. Now, don't you wonder, if she was so poor and destitute and she's going to make her last meal and says, "I'm going to make a last meal and then we're going to die" -- she's pretty desperate, wasn't she? Have you ever been that desperate where you thought you didn't have the money to pay the electric bill or to buy groceries for the week -- you just felt desperate? She was desperate; she was ready to give up and die. *But, Elijah brought her hope.* He came and said, "Let me have a little bit of water and let me have a little bit of bread." I almost wonder if she thought, "Well, who do you think you are coming and asking for bread from me? I don't have enough for me and my son, much less for you." But, she didn't say that. *Do you know why? ... Because hospitality was important to Middle-Easterners. It was almost a virtue.* So, if somebody came as a stranger, they would offer you bread or water or a place to stay, even if you were a stranger. So, she offers him a place to stay and gives him food and water. **God was providing for Elijah through a woman in a foreign country, who was a pagan and poor and widowed. Doesn't that seem like God must have a sense of humor?** God's providing for his own children through somebody who was a non-believer and poor. The story also says to us that God can use any of us, no matter what our means, no matter how poor or how rich we are, we each have something to share. She shared what little she had and God made sure it didn't run out. God provides for his own. But, I want you to notice something else: God

loves all people: believers and non-believers, because in providing for Elijah, he also provided for the widow and her son. She never ran out of flour, water, or oil.

Then, I want you to notice: God moves in mysterious ways. God took Elijah from his home country of Israel – took him to a pagan country and introduced him to this widowed woman who provided for him. Who would have ever thought God would’ve worked that way? *I want to tell you an interesting story about God working in mysterious ways.* This is a true story based on a Methodist Church in Swan Quarter, North Carolina (in the eastern part of the state). Over 100 years ago, the Methodists wanted to build a little church in the center of town. The man they approached, about buying the land where they wanted to build their church, turned them down. He said, “No way. I’m not selling that land.” Finally, the church board met and they decided that they would buy a piece of property right at the edge of town on Oyster Road. They built that little church there and when they finished it, it was a little-white framed church with a steeple on the top of it. After they had built it, they decided to have a dedication that Sunday. They dedicated the church and then three days later, there was a big storm. The winds howled and the rains came and the rivers and the creeks flooded throughout the town. That little church came off its pilings and floated downtown. Guess where it ended? ... on the vacant lot in the center of town. Now, I want you to know that two or three days later, when the waters receded and the people could get out and see all the damage and what was done, they found their church was no longer on Oyster Road. Somebody said, “It’s downtown!” They said, “Where?” “You know that vacant lot we wanted? It’s down on the vacant lot.” I want you to know a few days later, the man who owned that property came to the church board (the Deacons) and said, “Here’s the deed to the property. Evidently, God must want you in downtown.”

God works in unexpected ways, doesn’t he... in mysterious ways? Look at how God multiplied the meal (the flour and the oil) so that they never ran out - all during this drought and famine in Israel, Phoenicia, Tyre, Sidon, and all that area. They still had water and they still had food to

eat. But, that wasn't quite enough to get this woman to turn from pagan Baal-Worship to Yahweh-Worship. All of a sudden, the unexpected happened - her son got sick and he died. It was more than she could handle and those of you that have lost children know what that's like. She went to Elijah and she was upset. "Is God trying to punish me by taking my son? Is it some sin I've committed?" Even Elijah the prophet didn't understand and he said, "God, why have you taken this woman's son? This is the woman you provided for me to stay with and be taken care of." Then, Elijah takes the boy to his room and prays by himself. God answered Elijah's prayer and raised him from death to life. (Maybe that's a pre-cursor to Christ's resurrection.) All of a sudden, this woman said, "I know now that you're a man of God and the Word of the Lord that comes from your mouth is the truth." God brought her to faith through the death of her son - through something unexpected - through something bad that happened. He brought her to faith. But, guess what a powerful testimony this woman was to the pagans in Phoenicia? She was able to say, "Let me tell you about God! Let me tell you about the One who raised my son from the dead! Let me tell you!" She went on to be a powerful witness. God works in mysterious ways.

Sometimes, God asks us to do things that we don't want to do, doesn't he? Elijah probably didn't want to go to pagan territory, but the Bible says, "He was obedient and he went." Many years ago, when I left First Baptist, Forest City to go to First Baptist, Concord, I didn't want to go. They came back three times asking if I would come and I kept saying, "No, no." I just didn't want to go there. Have you ever had those feelings when you didn't want to take a job or you didn't want to do something? I didn't feel like that was what I needed to do at the time or wanted to do. But, when I finally said on the third time, "Ok, Lord, if that's what you want, I'll go." I felt peace and I went. I want you to know that it was one of the best church experiences that I've had and I spent 11 years there. It was a growing experience for me - a challenging experience, but I'm glad I was obedient and went there.

Sometimes, God asks us to do things that we don't want to do, but he wants us to be obedient. Sometimes, God does the unexpected and he

works in mysterious ways, so that he can show us who he is, his power, and his love. Sometimes, it's not always the way that we expect that he accomplishes his good in us. May you look out this week for how God wants to work in your life. May you also remember that this woman extended hospitality. I wonder sometimes if we extend hospitality to people today, except we do it in different ways. In those days, people weren't afraid to go and stay with somebody. Today, we worry about doing that because of thieves, scam artists, con artists, or sex offenders. We're afraid to do that. But, maybe there are other ways for us to extend Christian hospitality. God provided for Elijah and He provided for the woman in need who was poor.

I want you to know something else about that story of Elijah: In Luke, Chapter 4, Jesus refers back to Elijah and Elisha, the one who succeeded Elijah. Jesus had been rejected in his own hometown of Nazareth. Elijah had been rejected in the nation of Israel because he told them what they didn't want to hear. And yet, he had a ministry with some pagans and God used him. In Luke 4, Jesus said there were many lepers in the nation of Israel during the time of Elisha, but God did not send Elisha to any of them in Israel, but only to Naman, the Syrian. And God said there were many widows in Israel during the time of Elijah the prophet, but God didn't send Elijah to any of them. God sent him to a poor widow in Zarephath, in foreign territory and a country of non-believers in Yahweh God.

God loves all people, believers and non-believers. God provides for his children's needs - sometimes in unexpected ways, and God moves (works) in mysterious ways to make Himself known. May God bless and use His Word to strengthen us in our faith walk.