

## Mother's Day Flour

### 1 Kings 17:7-24

#### **Slide 1**

Today on this Mother's Day, we're going to look at a woman of faith. This woman in our Scripture passage for today doesn't start out with much faith, but she ends up a woman of great faith.

Whoever you are, and whatever your faith is like, to end up as a person of great faith, you start out as a person of somewhat less faith.

Now that may seem obvious, but in many ways we just expect our faith to just be there.

Yet, God will use us even if we don't have a great faith, as we'll see this in our passage for today.

In this passage, we learn that the land was in the middle of a great drought, predicted by Elijah himself.

1 Kings 17:1, *"Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.'"*

After telling Ahab the bad news, God directed Elijah to go hid in a ravine so Ahab couldn't find him. So Elijah did as he was told and hid in the Kerith Ravine, a small tributary to the river Jordan.

It's here, in verse 9 where the word of the Lord comes to him directing him to go to Zarephath, a small village located in what's today the country of Lebanon.

1 Kings 17:9a, *"Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there."*

Now this isn't Elijah's first rodeo! He's been around and knows life's going to get difficult.

Kerith, where he was staying, means "*separated*." This name depicts Elijah's situation. He had been alone, and without human contact for an extended period of time.

Then God sends him to Zarephath, which means, "*fiery trial*," which depicted what his situation was going to be. In so many words, God's calling him out of the frying pan and into the fire.

You can imagine what Elijah was thinking as he walked to Zarephath. "*Holy Smoke, what in the world has God planned for me next?*"

Notice also that God's a little light on details here. He doesn't give Elijah much information.

1 Kings 17:9, "*Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.*"

Does the woman have a name? What will she be wearing? What's her address? Does she know I'm coming? Do I meet her in the morning? What if I'm late?

Has God ever done this to you? Life's moving along, you're doing your thing and bam, out of the blue something hits you and you ask, "*God, what's going on?*" You get no details, but you're still in a situation.

We saw this with Jonah. God doesn't give Jonah many details, but that might have been because Jonah would have chickened and not do as God asked.

But Elijah, he's different, he isn't like Jonah. He's bold, confident, strong, and faithful. Elijah is a man who'll do whatever God asks, so why the lack of details?

## Slide 2

Sometimes God's silent because we're like Jonah. We'll refuse to walk in faith if we know what's coming. Sometimes God's silent because His awesome power is revealed slowly.

Sometimes the time spent waiting will intensify the impact of the work of God on our lives. Sometimes the wait will make us more than ready to receive the Word of the Lord.

And here's a truth for you: If we have the details in advance, then we wouldn't be walking in faith would we? Therefore, Elijah must walk in faith, alone with minimal details, to Zarephath, his "*fiery trial*."

We want the details of our circumstances from God upfront, don't we? But God supplies the details as we walk in faith.

When we step out and arrive where God has directed us, there are the details, standing right in front of us.

When Elijah gets to the city gate, he finds our woman of faith, front and center. He doesn't even have to look in the phone book. He doesn't have to ask around, there she is.

But who was this woman? Her name isn't even mentioned. What we do know is that she is a single mother trying to survive, and it looks like she isn't going to make it.

She's desperately trying to take care of her son, but it's clear that she can't provide for him anymore. Usually, a widow would have family to help take care of her.

Many times, a brother would marry a widow in the family to make sure she was taken care of, but this woman apparently doesn't have anyone.

If she dies, no one will notice. As a woman she has low social standing and as a widow she has no social standing.

She's a nobody, a phantom to neighbors as she comes and goes from her house. She's so much a non-person that we never learn her name.

She's literally a nonentity. She has nothing, is nobody and yet... God will use her for great things.

### **Slide 3**

*1 Kings 17:10-11, "So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."*

As this woman is gathering sticks in verse 10, Elijah calls to her. What he does is play a trick on her, so to speak. He asks for a drink and as she is going to get the water he adds, *"And a piece of bread, too."*

In the ancient middle east hospitality was a very big deal. If someone asked for a drink of water, it was rude, an unspeakable act, to refuse that person a drink.

It would've been shameful for this woman to refuse him a drink of water. She might be broke, she might be at the end of her rope, but she still had her dignity.

She could perform this act of hospitality, so she heads for the water jar, but to give away her bread, that's another thing all together.

At this point the drought had been going on for about 3 1/2 years. She's at the end of her resources. Yet she's trapped by Elijah adding on that second request.

You must understand that second request was asking for all she had. That request was asking for her life and the life of her son.

1 Kings 17:12, *“As surely as the Lord your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”*

Hold out your hand, see that, that is all she had, what fits in the palm of her hand, about 1/3 cup.

Now understand, she isn’t saying “no,” she’s just pointing out the physical reality that there isn’t enough for herself, her son and Elijah.

Do you see what’s happening here? Do you understand what God is setting up for both the woman and Elijah?

2 Corinthians 12:10, *“That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

If God operates this way in the lives of those found in the Bible, why would you expect God to act differently in our life?

If the weakness of this widow makes her strong, if the weakness of Paul made him strong, why is it so hard to believe that the weakness in your life is what will make you strong?

What’s needed for God to use you for powerful things? A weakness. Why is that? Because when we’re weak, when we can’t do it on our own, this is when, we’re to let God take over.

But wait. Does this woman, who’s never even named in the passage, have any faith at all? What she has is despair, utter hopelessness, she’s lost.

Look at what she said to Elijah in verse 12, *“I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”*

Any faith that may have been there had evaporated. If there ever was a phrase that spoke of faith that was not it and yet she's able to have terrific faith!

#### **Slide 4**

Now, at this point we wonder if she even knows who God is? Remember, she's a pagan living in another land where they worship false gods.

She's not a Hebrew, she's not a believer. Does God expect a person to act in faith where there is no faith?

Yet, we see that she does have a tiny, twinkle of faith. This is seen at the beginning of verse 12 when she says, *“As surely as the Lord your God lives.”*

She acknowledges that there is a God. That's a start of faith, isn't it? Now Look at the first part of verse 15, *“She went away and did as Elijah had told her.”* Did you see that leap?

She goes from a teeny tiny faith to an enormously huge faith. She goes from the person with the least amount of faith in town to the person with the greatest faith in town, in the blink of an eye. Amazing!

Elijah asked for the impossible. He asked to be fed first, which would pretty much take all she has.

1 Kings 17:13, *“Elijah said to her, “Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.”*

He wants her to make a loaf of bread, bring it to him and then go back and make some more loaves. She understands that she can't divide what's left to make sure she and her son gets some.

She knows that she can't make the loaves and then change her mind when she sees there is not enough flour left. She must give away what she has first.

By all logic and common sense, she's choosing death for herself and her son. But God, He defies our logic. We see our faith as holding on, when God sees our faith as letting go.

When a friend has asked you how things are going in a difficult time in your life have you ever responded, *"I'm just holding on?"*

What you mean is that you're holding on to your faith – right? But here, we see the opposite, letting go.

Elijah then encourages her with the powerful Word of God. In so many words he tells her *"Don't be afraid."*

1 Kings 17:14, *"For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.'"*

I believe it's right there where something inside her says, *"Take the step."* It doesn't make sense, it defies logic, it runs contrary to everything she has ever done in her life.

Then she turns to walk to her house with something that she didn't have before a second ago, real faith.

I mean who in this room could do this? Who here could give up all they have, knowing that it would directly lead to their death, and their child's death.

I don't think there's one of us who could, but I also don't think she could either. God blessed her with the faith to take that first step, and she responded.

It's clear that the Spirit came upon her giving her the faith she needed to take that first step toward the house, and continue on the path of faith.

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See, instead of holding on, instead of holding tight to the last thing she has, she let go, and upon her came the Spirit. It's one thing to say you believe and another thing to take action on that belief.

God didn't ask her to do anything way out of the ordinary. God didn't ask her to build some great church or be a missionary in a foreign land.

He didn't ask her to give up her house, or testify to crowds of people, He only asked her for a small piece of bread.

Granted, it was all she had, but it wasn't something that was beyond her everyday life. Faith isn't about huge projects, it's about everyday life.

God uses ordinary, everyday, even somewhat boring, been there done that, ways to build our faith. Yet notice, it's a spiritual thing that hits her, not a material thing.

She had to believe before she took the action of making the bread, or she wouldn't have made the loaf of bread. Remember what Paul said, *"For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

The woman lets go and the blessings come raining down. The flour and the oil don't run out. The handful, that limited inventory, the one thing that was between her and death, she let it go.



That tiny bit of faith expands, but amazingly she really doesn't believe yet. I mean, it's clear that she believes to some degree, but she doesn't have a convicted belief.

So, this miracle goes on day after day. The ridiculous amount of flour and oil never run out and life goes on.

The great leap of faith that the woman experienced, that amazing moment, becomes routine. What was once so incredible is now expected.

Elijah's probably thinking, *"This place is called fiery trial, yet it's been nothing but endless eating. What in the world is around the corner?"*

## **Slide 6**

1 Kings 17:17, *"Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing."*

There's the fiery trial. For this single mother, what good is an endless jar of flour, if her son can't share in the blessing? So, what happens? She becomes angry.

1 Kings 17:18, *"She said to Elijah, 'What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?'"*

This woman had an amazing leap faith and on top of that she's seen the same event repeat itself on a daily bases, reminding her that her faith is not an illusion.

It's not something she's deluded herself into believing. She's seen a daily miracle, but the death of her son is just too much.

Then, in verse 19, we see Elijah step into action, *“Give me your son,” Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed.”*

Why does he take the boy out of the arms of his mother and into another room? If you're a mother, you know that Elijah didn't take the boy without his mother giving him up, without letting go.

I see that moment as the same as when she turned to go make the loaves of bread, that moment where she let go instead of holding on.

Right here she does it again, and again she finds herself in weakness, yet she doesn't hold on. What does she do? She let's go.

Kings 20-21, *“Then he cried out to the Lord, “Lord my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?” Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, “Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!”*

Elijah takes the boy up to his room and lays him on his bed, stretching himself out three times Elijah cried, *“O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!”*, *“O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!”*, *“O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!”*

You know the outcome. God heard his cry, then God answered his prayer, and the son lived. Talk about a Mother's Day present.

## **Slide 7**

### **Conclusion**

This woman had a leap of faith when the flour and oil wouldn't run out, but this time it's different.

I don't think calling it a leap of faith does it justice. It's more of a cementing of faith. You know that she had to believe before, but this is unprecedented.

1 Kings 17:24, *"Then the woman said to Elijah, 'Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.'"*

Before, I suppose she suspected this was all real, but clearly she had her doubts. Now, with the resurrection of her son, there's no denying that the Word of God is real and active.

This single mother started off as a woman who had a tiny sparkle of faith, a faith that was only enough to see her through one more meal.

But you know what, that was enough. It was enough for God to change her world in a split second.

It's like teaching your kids how to ride a bike. You walk next to the bike, then you run next to the bike, and then comes the moment, that nano second of time when they stop holding on to your arm.

They actually start riding the bike, which is parallel to our experience in faith; to get there we must let go.

Stop waiting for the details. Stop holding on to what you have. Stop holding on to that thing you have been holding on to and just let go. Let God!!