

“For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.”

One of my favorite characters in the whole of Scripture, is the prophet Elijah. And the reason is not because I have the same name as him, or because of the great and the grand miracles God does through him, or how he acts with such righteousness in a time of wickedness. It's really because Elijah's life is a story is so similar to each of our own. Elijah shows the toll of living as a Christian in a world that keeps knocking you down, and the quiet strength of the LORD which helps you back up to your feet.

This text is the beginning of that story, the story of Elijah's prophetic career. He just hops into the book of Kings, drowning in a challenging time. This is the period of the Divided Kingdom, where after King Solomon, the nation is split under two kingdoms. Elijah is in the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the dynasty of Kings called the Omrides, specifically, King Ahab.

It's a time of extremes. Under the Omrides, and especially King Ahab, Israel was doing probably the best they ever had externally. Strong military, so much so that he is the leader of a coalition against Assyria. Economically strong, they are doing very well in trade and production. Strong leader who is able to protect Israel from foreign nations.

But on the other extreme, for as amazingly well that they were doing in the world, that is how bad they were doing spiritually. He marries Queen Jezebel of Sidon, who worshiped Baal. And she egged Ahab on to promote Baal worship and to wipe out the worship of the LORD. Under King Ahab, Israel has shifted from syncretism, worship the LORD alongside other gods, to outright defiance of God.

And it is in this time God plops Elijah down, to be his prophet. Elijah is tasked with announcing to Ahab that there will be no rain in this land for years because of his wickedness. He then flees from the King and holes up next to a brook where he has water and God feeds him as ravens bring him bread and meat.

But the brook dries up.

God gives Elijah a command: **“Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with**

food.” This may seem like a practical piece of advice. But in reality this wouldn't have made much, if any sense to someone in Elijah's shoes.

Zarephath is in Sidon. This is outside of the land of Israel. This is the exact nation that wicked queen Jezebel the pagan is from. A foreign nation, a gentile nation. And on top of that, how is it that God is going to provide for me? From a widow. A widow of someone from a different place and nation. Possibly of a different religion. These are the most vulnerable people of society who don't have access to regular income. People whom God commands for the self sufficient to take care of. Someone who's not supposed to be one doing the regular providing.

But Elijah goes. There he sees the woman whom God has spoken to him about, gathering some sticks. Elijah calls out to her: **“Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?... And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”**

But you see, Elijah isn't the only one with challenges. The woman replies: **“I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gather a few stick to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”** How heartbreaking is that? Those of you with children know what you would put on the line for your kids safety. You would give it all up to make them happy and healthy. And this woman had. She had given everything she could, and it wasn't enough. They were starving to death.

She's a widow and doesn't have an income. The drought has been so severe that its effects are felt outside of Israel in this northern land. No doubt she has been fighting to keep her son healthy, scraping to keep him fed, but now there's nothing left. She's beyond the point of fighting back and now only can offer to her son a bit of comfort before the end. A final little meal before they starve. She has run out.

And running out is heartbreaking. It is knowing that you are in need of something but your supply is gone, there is nowhere else to get it from. You know how hard this is. You've probably had times where you look at the payments due, and you say there just isn't enough. But that's not the only thing that we find our jars running empty on.

Sometimes you may hear the alarm have been beaten down by our jobs, and I just don't if I have the strength to do it again. Things in the family have been hard. Fights, and arguments, and things going well just to be hurt again, and I don't know how I can keep fighting, I've got nothing left.

I have been trying so hard, what I do, it's never good enough, I am rejected time after time, I just need someone anyone to give me a little reassurance that I am worth something, and I have no where to get it. I'm not happy with who I am, and how I've acted and I just need to know that someone, anyone, loves me, sees me, cares about me.

You have fought, you have scraped, you have rationed, but now it's empty, and I can't find any more. I am past the point of solutions, I am past fighting, now all there is left is the acceptance that it is at the end, and there is nothing else, there is nothing more, it's all run out.

This seems like a strange point for God to say through Elijah: **“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.”**

God asks some tough things in this account. To Elijah go to the unknown and I will take care of you through what you do not think is possible. God tells the widow trade what you have and what you can see for what you can't. Take all that you have, you will still not run out. Trust in your God, in things that don't make sense, that seem backwards, and I will provide for you.

And he does: **“For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.”** Look at all the things that were supposed to run out. The flour was going to run out. The oil was supposed to run out. The water was supposed to run out. Life was supposed to run out. But it didn't. It didn't run out. The flour, every morning of every day, continued to have enough. The oil when poured again and again, it never was empty. Life that appeared to be at its end and final moment, continued on.

Every day as Elijah and the widow and her son ate their little cakes of bread, they were reminded that God could be trusted—for another day. Whether you are God's prophet fleeing for your life from a wicked King, God does not run

out. If you a poor widow worried that you are about to eat your last meal, God does not run out.

There is nothing that you need that God will run out of. It does not matter who you are and what you have done. It does not matter what kind of mess you find yourself in, God's grace never runs out. You have the same God. You can trust in that God. Even though what you see with your eyes doesn't seem to line up with what God promises, his promises will always be true. Even though the ways that God says he will save may seem impossible, God works in spite of the impossible.

As your supply of strength comes to it's end to face another day and it's challenges, your God remains. And day after day, you can trust it him and he will grant you your strength. As you are at the bottom, and have the feeling that there is nowhere to get some comfort from, God's promise to you never runs dry. Day after day his promise remains that he loves you more than you will ever know, he sees you, and hears you.

But most importantly of all, if you have fallen into despair. When you wonder if there a God who could ever love someone like you. When you wonder if this is the time that maybe God's forgiveness meets it's end. Do not be afraid, your God's grace does not run out. Every moment of every day, God's love, his forgiveness will always be there. It will never run out.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I don't know what it is that you are running out of at this moment. But I promise you that God has enough of it for you. God's strength, his peace, his love, his forgiveness, will always be full. Whatever you need, whatever is at its end for you, that is not God's end. Trust in your Lord. Whatever you need, your God will not run out for you.