



Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 3

The Barrel of Meal and the Cruse of Oil

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 18th April, 1985**

Text: *“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which He spake by Elijah” (1 Kings 17. 16).*

Sometimes in our lives we look back, and as we look back, there is one thing that we have to admire. That is, the faithfulness of God. Despite all our faithlessness, despite all our unfaithfulness, the Lord has remained faithful. “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” We have to stand in wonder and amazement in looking back at divine faithfulness. The God of Elijah, the faithful God, is our God.

Yet, you see, like Elijah, we have to learn those lessons of dependence upon Him. Proud nature would be independent. Our carnal hearts would be independent. But the life of faith is a life of complete dependence on the Lord, leaning on Him, hanging on Him. And if we run away and become independent, then the Lord knows how to bring us back.

So when Elijah ascended up to heaven – one of the only two who did not die, a witness of eternal life to the Old Testament church – when Elijah had ascended up to heaven and his mantle fell on Elisha, Elisha took that mantle and asked a question: “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” It was a time of crisis in Israel, a time of personal sadness to Elisha. But where is now Elijah’s God? Blessedly did Elisha prove that if Elijah was gone, his God was not gone. If Elijah was no longer with Israel, Elijah’s God was still with Israel. And he immediately had the proof of it. There was before him a problem, a difficulty, an uncrossable stream. But he smote the waters with Elijah’s mantle, and proved that the God of Elijah still lived and reigned.

Tonight we still ask this question, “Where is now” – tonight – “the Lord God of Elijah?” Where is He? There are two answers to that question. The first answer is that He is in heaven. He sits on the throne. He is almighty. He ever lives and He ever reigns. “He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and

none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" The second answer to the question, "Where is now the Lord God of Elijah?" is this: He is with His people, still with them. He has not left them, nor forsaken them.

"There's a God in Israel still,
Lives and reigns and works His will;
Ever for His people cares;
All He is, or has, is theirs."

So, beloved friends, in this chapter we see the God of Elijah, and we see His wonderful faithfulness to His servant. This chapter begins abruptly: "And Elijah the Tishbite." Who is he? We have not heard of him before. He has not been introduced to us. He is unknown to us. He appears dramatically, suddenly, unannounced. This was a time of great wickedness and spiritual apostasy in Israel, but it does not matter how dark the time, how dreadful the day. When the Lord needs a man, that man is there. We had not heard of this man, Elijah. We did not know anything about him. But suddenly, like some unexpected meteor, he appears in Israel. God will never be wanting for a man. When a man is needed, the Lord provides him, the Lord raises him up. And God sent him with a very solemn message, to proclaim a drought, a famine, in Israel. Sin must be punished, and so Elijah has to appear suddenly, unexpectedly, to Israel, with a message of God's sovereign wrath: "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to My word."

But did you notice how this man of God prefaced his statement? "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, *before whom I stand.*" Now that is the secret of the whole of Elijah's life and mission and work. He stood before God. May you and I stand before God. May you and I be able to speak as Paul did in a later day: "Whose I am, and whom I serve." If we fear God, then we need fear no other.

"Fear Him, ye saints, and ye shall then
Have nothing else to fear;
Make but His service your delight,
Your wants shall be His care."

Now there is a principle here. May it be a vital principle in your life and mine. "The Lord God of Israel *before whom I stand.*" Now you

notice that when there are public calamities, when divine judgment falls on any nation, then the righteous suffer along with the wicked, and so did Elijah. He was God's own messenger, yet he too had to experience the famine, the drought. The difference is that with God's people His loving eye is upon them. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry." We read in one place, "to keep him alive in famine."

So the Lord gives a very simple, clear command to Elijah. It is a time of need. The faithful God will not forsake him, not fail him. The Lord commands that he should go and hide himself by the brook Cherith. There was one brook that had not run dry. The Lord saw to it that it had not run dry. The Lord knew where it was. "And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook."

Beloved friends, in all your times of need, the Lord will always have His brook Cheriths. "And I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." "All creatures obey His command." When the Lord commands, fire does not burn. When the Lord commands, lions do not bite. When the Lord commands, the very nature of ravens is changed, and they "brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook." This must have been a very sacred time in the life of Elijah, when he lived there in solitude, and in peace, and in complete dependence on God for all that he received he had to receive it directly from the hands of his God .

Then came the trial of faith. Elijah saw that little brook beginning to dry up. It must have been a terrible trial to Elijah. Had not God sent him there? Was not this God's provision? Is it possible that God's own provision can dry up? And the Lord had not spoken to him, had not revealed His will concerning anything else. Was he mistaken? Was it only imagination? Should he never have come to the brook Cherith? Day by day he sees that brook drying up, and still a silent God.

Perhaps some of you know an experience like that. You see your brook Cherith drying up day by day, and your God is silent. It was not until the brook dried completely up that God gave the intimation of His will. God is never in a hurry. God is never too late. It was only when the brook was dry that the Lord spoke. Really, He did not need to speak before. You and I like to know the Lord's will beforehand, but when we

need to know it, we *shall* know it. When we need the Lord to speak, He *will* speak.

Just one or two observations here. If the Lord has clearly directed you in a matter, it does not mean that that is for ever. No-one had a clearer leading in all Scripture than Elijah did to go to the brook Cherith, but that did not mean that he was to be there for ever. Many a dear child of God has felt the leading so clear that he has felt this is the place where he must live and die, and then he is so tried when the Lord begins to stir up his nest. But because the Lord leads you in a matter, it does not mean it is for ever, for all the days of your life.

Then we may ask the question, “Why did the Lord permit the brook Cherith to dry up? Could the Lord not have caused it still to flow?” Of course He could! It was a miracle, the ravens morning and evening bringing the bread and flesh, and it was a miracle the brook not drying up. But if we have a miracle performed every day of our life, we can easily become hardened to it, and that is very solemn. It is part of our carnal nature; so easily we begin to take things for granted. I have often given you the illustration of that case I knew of, the old man who lived by himself, and the widow who lived next door kindly promised to make him his midday meal every day throughout the year. The old man was delighted and overwhelmed with gratitude, but after a time, he forgot to say, “Thank you,” and as the years passed, eventually he was grumbling and complaining and knocking on the wall, asking why it was late, until at length, the widow woman said, “Well, I am not going to do it for you again.” The poor man had not any redress. He had only himself to blame.

But aren't you and I just like that old man? We receive some favour from the hand of God. We are overwhelmed with His kindness, but after a time we begin to take it for granted. If we do, the Lord takes it away. It was so with the children of Israel. They had that wonderful provision, the manna, but after a while they took it for granted. You will find this in your life, if you have begun to take God's mercies for granted, they will dry up, and it will be to prove this:

“When all created streams are dried,
Thy fulness is the same.”

As soon as the brook was dry, the word of the Lord came to Elijah – not before, but not too late. But what a strange word it was: “Arise, get thee to Zarephath” – right outside the borders of Israel, among the heathen nations – “which belongeth to Zidon” – the very territory from which wicked Jezebel came! “And dwell there.” Not just to visit for a day, but to dwell there. And to crown it all: “I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” – not a king or a queen, but a woman brought into great need herself.

“So he arose and went.” Now that is grace. We do not read that Elijah argued about it. We do not read that he delayed. “He arose and went.” It reminds me of Philip when he was preaching to the multitude in Samaria and the Lord told him to go to Gaza, and he arose and went. That is grace. O to be blessed with sufficient grace to move when the Lord speaks and also to stand still when He does not speak.

So we see Elijah hastening to Zarephath, and as soon as he comes there, there is the widow woman. He might have thought, “How shall I find her?” but there she is, waiting for him.

Some people say the Lord has told them to do something and it all goes wrong. Well, it is not from God. Mind you, sometimes there is the trial of faith, and things seem to go wrong, but it will work out in the end, as it did here, if the Lord has spoken.

Well, here is the widow woman. O but the trial of faith! She is gathering sticks and she is going to make a cake and eat and she and her son are going die. But Elijah said, “Fear not.”

“Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.”

“Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.” So there was this wonderful provision. There was this daily miracle. Elijah proved the faithfulness of his God. He proved that His name is Jehovah Jireh, the Lord will provide. The barrel of meal

wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail. O how Elijah proved the faithfulness of God, His faithfulness to His servant, His faithfulness to His Word.

God will always be faithful to His own Word. He cannot deny Himself. “Sooner all nature shall change, than one of God’s promises fail.” You can rest on God’s unchanging Word. O the faithfulness of God! “Tell of His wondrous faithfulness.”

“The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the Word of the Lord.” Jehovah Jireh, the Lord will provide. In a New Testament sense, “My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” All of them. There may not seem to be any means, or the means may seem to be small, but the Lord still has His ravens and His brook Cheriths and His widow women and His barrels of meal and His cruses of oil. He says, “The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,” and “the cattle upon a thousand hills.” “My God shall supply all your need” – the needs of your body, the needs in providence, the needs of your soul – *all* your needs. It is a wonderful promise, isn’t it? We love to contemplate it, and we do try it and prove it.

But never forget when you contemplate that point, all your needs, all of them, that *one thing* is needful. That is the vital point. May it be well engraven on your heart. “One thing is needful,” and every sinner taught by the Holy Spirit and called by grace is brought to this point, to feel his need of Christ. “My God shall supply all your need,” but, “One thing is needful.”

It is not everything that we *think* that we need, or just what our carnal hearts want. O the Lord knows what we need, and beloved friends, if you need something tonight, you shall have it, whether it is wisdom and strength you need, or whether it is Christ you need, or whether it is money you need. “All your need.” There is a word for you: “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”

“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail.” Of course, this was a miracle. It was a display of divine, almighty power. “With God nothing shall be impossible.” Yet this *was* impossible. You think of it, just a handful of meal at the bottom of the barrel, and you

use it up, but the next time you go, there is still some there. And a little oil in the cruse, and you keep on using it, but it is still there. It is like the multiplying of the loaves and fishes, and the feeding of the five thousand, and that word, “He Himself knew what He would do.” The disciples did not, neither did the people, but “He Himself knew what He would do.”

Have you got a hard cause, an impossible cause, tonight? The Lord says, “Bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.” And rather than that He should fail to supply your need, He will perform a miracle of mercy for you.

“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail.” We see here that wonderful fulness. There was the full provision for Elijah and the widow woman and her son, all the time that they were in need. There was not any lack at all. There was not any shortage at all. That complete fulness.

Yet they had to receive it day by day. I suppose it would have been nice for them to have the barrel filled to overflowing and the cruse full. That is not God’s way. You and I would always like to have our barrel full so that we can look upon the fulness. Beloved, it is there, and it is there for you. But it is not your barrel. If we always had our barrel full, we should be independent. We should be able to manage without God. But He will keep us living upon Him, looking to Him day by day, in providence and in grace.

“The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail.” There is that beautiful word, “And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” You cannot receive His fulness, but you receive *of* His fulness. It is like the child filling his bucket at the edge of the sea. “Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” It means a lot of things, but one thing it means is this: grace for your need this evening, and grace for your need tomorrow, and then grace for your need the day after – all-sufficient grace, inexhaustible grace. It is a wonderful theme, the sufficiency in Christ providentially and spiritually. And He said, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” “God is able to make all grace abound toward you.” “And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail.”

Of course, there is the providential side to it. Many of God’s people in former days, in days of great poverty, proved that Elijah’s God

was their God, in supplying them with the meal and the oil even literally. But you see it in a way of grace also, the concerns of our soul, keeping us alive so that we live and do not die.

I believe that in eternity past God the Father viewed all the needs of all His people to the end of time. There was not one escaped His all-seeing eye, and He made full provision in Christ. “For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.” Those of you who fear God here tonight, your needs, great needs and small needs, providential needs, spiritual needs – “It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.” But He gives it out here and there, little by little, when it is needed and as much as is needed, not before, not more.

“No stock will keep upon my ground;
My all is in Thy storehouse found.”

Some of us look back over the years and our barrel of meal has not wasted, and our cruse of oil has not failed, in natural things and in spiritual things, despite all our fears, despite all our unworthiness. We look back, and we have proved the faithfulness of God.

And then we look forward with all our many, many needs. Beloved, do you look forward to the unknown way, and perhaps shrink from it? The barrel of meal will not waste, and the cruse of oil will not fail. “He giveth more grace.” He has it to give. He is not impoverished by giving it, but His people are enriched by receiving it. It is like the manna. There was provision for every Israelite for forty years in the wilderness, but the Lord gave it to them day by day. The manna fell morning by morning. They had to live that life of dependence, as pilgrims and strangers, and so it is with you and me. “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” Perhaps some of you are fearful of what lies before you. “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” We will be running forward, trying to meet tomorrow’s troubles before they come. It does not do us any good, and yet we do not learn the lesson. It may be that some of you have something even tomorrow. It is in the Lord’s hand. His promise covers it, and covers you, and covers those whom you love. It may be next week, it may be the day of your death that you fear, that you shrink from. It may be that special trying day, or perhaps the pain that you feel bodily, or something with your loved ones, or your family, or something in your business, or your relationships with other people, or something in the unknown way.

“Let not thy heart despond, and say,
‘How shall I stand the trying day?’
He has engaged, by firm decree,
That as thy days, thy strength shall be.”

And it is not just your strength, but all the wisdom you need. Do you feel to need wisdom? Well, there will always be a handful at the bottom of your barrel – not your wisdom, but divine wisdom, to show you how to act and to direct your steps – when you need it, when you come there.

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.” The strength, the wisdom you need, the grace you need, the divine help that you need – everything that you need, that full provision, but given to you, supplied to you, when you need it, not before. You will be dependent to your dying day. You will have to lean on Christ right to your dying day.

“His grace shall to the end
Stronger and brighter shine;
Nor present things, nor things to come,
Shall quench the spark divine.”

I believe when you come to the end of your pilgrimage and when you look back, you will prove the faithfulness of God in this: not one good thing has failed of all that the Lord has promised, behold, all has come to pass. You will look back and see that your barrel of meal has not wasted, your cruse of oil has not failed. Often-times you have failed, and often-times you have felt that the meal and the oil would fail, and you have never been permitted to have any stock in hand. We have not any stock in hand of grace. We have got to be brought to that daily life of faith and that daily life of dependence. But God never fails, and the grace never fails and the supplies never fail. “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.”

Then venture on, in all your need, your soul need your bodily need, your family need, your business need, your providential need, venture on looking only to Jesus, hanging only on Him, depending on Him, and you will prove His faithfulness. You will prove His power. “He will not fail

thee, nor forsake thee.” Your barrel of meal will not waste, neither will your cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord.”