

“How to Get Out of the Fog You’re In!”  
Or, “A Tale of Two Widows”  
Pastor Sam Richards  
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Texts: 1 Kings 17; Luke 21:1-4

**21 And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. 2 And He saw a poor widow putting [a]in two [b]small copper coins. 3 And He said, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of *them*; 4 for they all out of their [c]surplus put into the [d]offering; but she out of her poverty put in all [e]that she had to live on.”<sup>1</sup>**

We have two widows, both are very poor. The woman Jesus observed putting her two mites (two copper coins) may have been shabbily dressed, or she may have been modestly attired. She probably lacked any frills or ornaments which the rich with whom she is contrasted most probably had. The rich may have seized this as a display moment as they put their gifts into the treasury. We just heard how they loved long robes, salutations in the marketplace (public acclaim, recognition) and they loved the places of honor at the feasts. They **devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers.** We are warned to beware of their hypocrisy *and the very next thing that comes into view* is this poor widow whose house may well have been devoured by the greedy. There were many homeless widows on the streets of Jerusalem at that time; they depended on the largess of the temple for survival. Because she has so little the little that she gives is enormous, more than all of them. Her two meager coins were evaluated above all of their gifts! She didn’t give enough to repair the roof, or to refresh the temple . . . or to fund the new organ! The gifts to the rich might have accomplished one, or all of those capital expenses. However, she gave out of her poverty which the Lord commends. The rich who only gave out of their abundance (their surplus, or discretionary monies) were, by comparison, less than generous. They, the rich, shall receive greater condemnation.

Here’s the bridge. The widow of Zarephath, a Gentile believer, is also poor. Indeed, despite owning her house, she is in extreme need of food. She is collecting sticks for her last baking and intends to bake bread for her and her son to eat before they die. Both are in a state of importunity. Yet the widow of Zarephath has been appointed to provide for Elijah the prophet. ***In a time of national emergency, brought about by the famine incurred by God’s wrath for apostasy, and idolatrous worship.*** The Brook Cherith having dried up, Elijah is

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<sup>1</sup>Footnotes

- a) [Luke 21:2](#) Lit *there*
- b) [Luke 21:2](#) Gr *lepta*
- c) [Luke 21:4](#) Or *abundance*
- d) [Luke 21:4](#) Lit *gifts*
- e) [Luke 21:4](#) Lit *the living that she had*

relocated. What the ravens did for him at the brook is replaced by what this widow has to offer—a little bread and water—no meat. The national catastrophe is being played out on a microcosmic level. God is using a weak, poor and under resourced woman *to provide for his prophet*, she is a home owner in desperate times! Elijah is in a divine witness protection plan. He plays a redemptive role in Zarephath. And he brings her to such a fullness of faith that she is, in the end, able to exclaim, in the midst of a drought: I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth. *Yet the famine continued. How dare God not deploy his power on behalf of almighty man?! How dare God punish idolatry by changing the climate (forbidding rain?) And claim we worship him alone!*

Both widows, note, are doing “what Jesus was doing.” Blessed are the poor! (Luke 6:20) Jesus wasn’t solving all the world’s problems. He wasn’t reforming society, or changing the world to establish equity in his realm of influence. He wasn’t abolishing poverty or even waging a war against crime and immorality. Doesn’t he care about social conditions? In fact Jesus wasn’t much of anything that social justice warriors might consider important, or vital. He wasn’t, if I dare suggest it, doing what he should have been doing. Not really. We presume to think that we are about a mission more apt/relevant; we are doing better than Jesus at saving the world, promoting a green world, a place for thriving wildlife and whales. He makes us righteous independent of circumstances—our fog. Jesus gave of himself—*that makes all the difference*. He calls us to do the same, just as you are, right where you are! Give in our poverty as he gave in his weakness! It transforms everyone and everything! But we, because of the fog we are, in can’t see our way forward through the fog of our circumstances—if only our eyes were on the living God instead. “When my heart is one,” David sings, “I will give it all to you, Lord.” God wants nothing we have; he wants our hearts alone.

I want to share a fog illustration. Norman Harrison in *His in a Life of Prayer tells how Charles Inglis*, while making the voyage to America a number of years ago, learned from the devout and godly captain of an experience which he had had but recently with George Muller of Bristol. It seems that they had encountered a very dense fog. Because of it the captain had remained on the bridge continuously for twenty-four hours, when Mr. Muller came to him and said, “Captain, I have come to tell you that I must be in Quebec on Saturday afternoon.” When informed that it was impossible, he replied: “Very well, If the ship cannot take me, God will find some other way. I have never broken an engagement for fifty-seven years. [Imagine that?!] Let’s go down into the chart-room and pray,”

The captain continues the story thus: “I looked at that man of God and thought to myself, What lunatic asylum could that man have come from. I never heard such a thing as this. “Mr. Muller,” I said, “do you know how dense this fog is?” “No,” he replied, “my eye is not on the density of the fog, but on the living God, who controls every circumstance of my life.” [Again, picture that!] He knelt down and prayed one of the simplest prayers, and when he had finished, I was about to pray; but he put his hand on my shoulder and told me not to pray. “Firstly,” he said,

"because you do not believe God will, and, secondly, I believe God has, and there is no need whatever for you to pray about it." I looked at him, and George Muller said, "Captain, I have known my Lord for fifty-seven years, and there has never been a single day that I failed to get an audience with the King. Get up and open the door and you will find that the fog has gone." I got up and the fog was indeed gone. George Muller was in Quebec Saturday afternoon for his engagement."<sup>2</sup>

This illustration, as reported, from George Muller's life is remarkable on a number of accounts: on the human level, Muller claims to have never missed an engagement for fifty-seven years! Spiritually, we see Muller is a remarkable prayer warrior. Dense fog? No problem. Let's pray—that will defog matters. Thirdly, he relies solely on "the living God." His God is potent, alive and active—is ours? Of this God he claims "he controls every circumstance of my life." *God is in control* means nothing remains outside his purview, or his governance. Absolutely nothing! Circumstances do not excuse, or explain anything, friends, where a faith like this faith reigns. Fourthly, in the same fifty-seven years referenced earlier, Muller notes, he has never ever failed to get an audience with the King. This reminds me of Jesus' words, spoken on behalf of the bystanders at the tomb of Lazarus: Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you have always hear me . . . but I affirm this publicly for the sake of those around me *who question our relationship, my identity; or, perhaps, who doubt the efficacy of prayer*. Then, Muller restrains the captain from praying because of his unbelief, "you do not believe that God will (remove the fog) regardless of its density . . . and I believe he has!" We must pray in faith, believing that God is, that he hears us and that he is capable of answering prayer here and now—in real time. Let him who doubts expect nothing from God for he is double-minded. (James 1:6-8) "get up and open the door, captain, and you will find that the fog is gone." I think it goes without saying that what George Muller prayed was entirely within the will of God, or, assuredly, it would not have happened. He would have remained fogbound in Bristol.

If you believe in prayer, and have a burden to pray, we meet Sunday evenings for prayer at 7:00 pm in person and online. The King has reserved a place for you.

Our reading today dealt with the inauguration of the ministry of Elijah—the first prophet to arise in Israel since the days of Moses! A fog, a very dense fog had descended onto Israel as a result of the apostasy of King Ahab and his Baalist priestess wife, Jezebel. And those idolaters, all who worshipped Baal, who were practicing self-mutilation, who were indulging in cult prostitution and who were sacrificing infants, had so provoked God that God was full of anger. (1 Kings 16:33)

Some might say, "Well, what has that to do with us? We are living some thirty centuries latter." Well, yes, we are and yet today self-mutilation is a recommended therapeutic intervention for gender transitioning children. It is not something limited

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<sup>2</sup> This narrative is from Glenn Clark's *I Will Lift Up My Eyes*, Harper and Row, 1937 as quoted in N, Harrison's *His In a Life of prayer*," The Bible Institute, 1927.

solely to Old Testament times, or to primitive settings around the world! And, what about cult prostitution? Surely we aren't guilty of that? Really, I think the glorification of sex and the exaltation of sexual identity has resulted in a cultural setting where any need for cult prostitution has evaporated. We have child sex trafficking! Promiscuity and immoral conduct have loosed a flood of sexual acting-out—and some are proud of it, too—behavior such as would not even have been mentioned a generation, or two back is public today. And the parallels between infant sacrifice and abortion are too painfully obvious to even describe!

We are in a parallel universe to that of Ahab's day and our depravities are roughly on a par. And, God's response, I suggest is not an exuberant embrace of our sexual freedom and liberty, but a seething anger that we are in such bondage, that we are sexually wounding each other in wicked and evil ways. Immorality and sex trafficking are both offensive to God; not because he's old fashioned, and a prude, but because he is into sexual purity. Sexual misuse and sexual abuse are not his will for his children. Leviticus 18 makes this widely and abundantly clear! Read upon the forbidden activities and the fog surrounding such matters will lift from your mind! Scales will fall from your eyes.

As a result, Elijah declared a national drought. And, with the drought will eventually come the death of livestock, reduction of food supply . . . and famine. I suppose this could be framed as incidental climate change; but, assuredly, it is more moral than that. It is a judgment of God, as was the earlier flood of Noah's day, as God decided to destroy the wicked globally—yes, the sexually perverse idolaters of Israel were brought under the judgment of God in Israel. While Jesus came proclaiming the good news, Elijah proclaimed a long, withering drought.

Then the word of God came to Elijah: Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the River Jordan. Elijah was obedient and God protected and cared for him there—he drank from that brook and ravens fed him bread and meat, morning by morning and evening by evening. God rescues Elijah on his way to redeeming his people! Meanwhile, Israel began to suffer under the anger of God. The climate became, as it were, a moral bludgeon with which God struck the sinful rebels. Did the rebels know better? Of course, they did. The God they abandoned had instructed them in the way they should go and they rebelliously chose to defy God *and to worship other gods*. They went with the popular culture—exactly as God had forbidden them to do.

As the drought sets in, the brook dries up. So Elijah is relocated a second time. This time to Zarephath, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you. (v. 9) But the appointed woman, a believer, was in terrible shape. She was gathering sticks for her last fire, to cook her last meal and die; she and her son. In a scene that precedes Jesus' encounter at the well of Sychar, Elijah, a Jew, asks the woman, a Gentile, for a drink of water and Please a morsel of bread in your hand. (vv. 10-11) Zarephath is about seven miles south of Sihon, a Baalist stronghold, *we must not lose sight of the spiritual battle raging between Baalists and true*

Israelites. . . pagan/unbelievers and believers on an epic, national plain. **That battle continues in our day, in our setting** , , , fallen angels versus the Church of God. Elijah tells the woman, Do not fear, go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake of it first.

He is saying, “Take your eyes off your circumstances, dire and extreme though they be, and obey the commandment of God to provide for me; obey me as well. By faith then make the small cake first and bring it to me for the bin/crock? of flour shall not be used up/or depleted, and the jar/cruse of oil shall not run dry, until the day that the Lord sends rain. (vv. 13-14) She was obedient. God is rescuing her and Israel through Elijah! She didn’t think that Elijah was an escapee from the lunatic asylum! A mad man! And, I am quite sure, she had very limited experience of the miraculous—*however, that is a surmise, none of that is mentioned in the text.* She was confirmed in her trust; she was like Muller, of course, convinced the fog had lifted . . . but only partially.

The fog was going to be further lifted when she, the homeowner, experienced the death of her son. Please remember that this is against a backdrop of those dying of starvation all around her. Her son gets sick and dies. A fog of despondency, and of self-recrimination envelops her. Have you come to bring my sin to remembrance? Well, no. Elijah’s story pales in comparison with the latter mirror episode in Elisha’s life—in the later scenario the woman saddles up her donkey and makes a wild trip to the mountain to find her rescuer. Anyway, Elijah simply says, Give me your son. We have this marvelous note that Elijah carries the body to the upper room, by the exterior access he had, which would preserve the widow and his reputation! This is important because the chasteness of their relationship contrasts vividly with what was going on in the culture!

Elijah’s prayer addresses the catastrophe of the widow’s son’s death against the backdrop of the national circumstances of famine and distress. The boy is deceased but that doesn’t prevent Elijah from praying” O Lord, my God, I pray, let this child’s soul come back to him.” Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. Now the fog is entirely lifted—*it is gone.* *Open the door and you will find* is on a par with *See, your son lives.* (V. 23) Now, what is carried by the resurrection of the boy is this full-faith expression: the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth. *Gracious, plenteous mercy and truth.* (Psalm 86:15).

O Lord my God, an intimate, personal phrase, is used twice in Psalm 86—first from a place of agony and distress (v. 2) and the second from a place of ecstatic joy (v. 12). When Elijah utters this cry it is in the place of agony, of deep distress over the death of the widow’s son. It is very significant that God hears the cry of Elijah (just as God heard the cry of Jesus outside the tomb of Lazarus) and the boy’s soul returns; he is raised from the dead just like Lazarus! We will all experience resurrection when the Lord comes.

David, for one, did not believe that the world would go from worse to worse! He believed that the word of truth would prevail. The whole world would learn righteousness, trust in its Savior and worship him alone. All nations whom You have made/ Shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great, and do wondrous things (like redemption of the lost, like forgiveness of sins, like raising the faithful from the dead); you alone are God. (Psalm 86)

To believe otherwise is to dampen our zeal from missions, evangelism and Faith formation as well and that result is so unscriptural. Such doom and gloom does not associate with prophecy, does not honor God and does not inspire the church. Look up, for the Lord cometh to establish his throne, bringing back from all the nations all his own. **Amen**