**“Trustworthy”**

**What Does God Have to Do to Convince Us that He is…**

**Trustworthy?**

**1 Kings 17:8-24 & Matt. 6:24-34**

**Context**

King David has died and Ahab is king in the north and Jehoshaphat is king in the south.

They are not friends.

You get the sense of dissension; division; tension right from the get-go.

But that’s not the only struggle. Where there’s physical struggle there is sure to be spiritual struggle as well.

There’s this struggle between Yahwehism and Baalism.

You see Ahab made this political move in order to help protect his land from the Syrians. This imposing, wicked nation who if they didn’t do something they would be sure to come under attack and become slaves or worse.

So he had to do something…right? Isn’t that good leadership? Can’t sit idly by and let his people become slaves…so he fixes the problem on his own. Doesn’t consult Yahweh. He doesn’t pause. Trust. Wait. He makes the decision…and marries Jezebel.

Jezebel is a real prize isn’t she?

When Ahab marries Jezebel he makes a huge compromise. In order to appease Jezebel he builds her a temple where she can worship Baal.

Only thing it doesn’t take long and she doesn’t want her Baal worship to be private; on the margins, she wants Baal to be front and center.

She wanted her Baal god to usurp Yahweh. Kick Him off the throne. No longer be the centre but on the margins.

That is so what sin is always in the business of doing isn’t it?

Give it an inch it will be sure to take a mile. Eventually suck all the joy out of you; all the life; all the purpose.

I came across this quote by Thomas Brooks.

“Little sins often slide into the soul, and breed, and work secretly and undiscernibly in the soul, till they come to be so strong, as to trample upon the soul, and to cut the throat of the soul.”

That’s what Ball worship did to the nation of Israel.

It all started small and behind the scenes. Culturally acceptable.

Being the fertility god Baal worship was all about fertility.

Baal is considered to be the storm god. They believed he brought about rain, and in a dry climate like Israel rain is critical. No survival without rain.

But Baal wasn’t the only god they believed in. There was also this god called Mot. God of death who was believed to bring about death and barrenness.

So in dry season, when there was no rain, it was believed that Baal was dead. Unable to act. In the Underworld for a season.

Involved temple prostitution. Human sacrifice – give the first born to Baal to ensure you would have more children. As well as violent and ecstatic worship where you would work yourself into an emotional frenzy. All to appease the god.

It was a feel good deity. It captured the senses. It involved the eye gate. It promised to satisfy. Promised to deliver.

**Along comes this prophet Elijah.**

He’s not the only Prophet either.

There are said to be 400 prophets of Baal also kicking around. 400 prophets of Asherah and 400 so called prophets of Yahweh.

All there to tell King Ahab what he wanted to hear.

Tickle his ear. Honey on his tongue.

Pr. 27:6 says, “The wounds of a friend are trustworthy but the enemy multiplies kisses.”

Elijah was Ahab’s true friend because he was willing to say the hard word. The fierce word. The fierce conversation.

**We all need friends like that don’t we?**

Pretty amazing fella. Full of godly zeal. He was all about exposing Baal for what it was. Impotent. Powerless. Empty.

Sure it was good for a season but in the end it brought destruction.

He hated Baal worship as much as Jezebel loved the cult.

His desire was to see Baal worship die and for the people to return to Yahweh.

Reformer in the true sense of the word.

He was a Multi faceted leader.

Prophet. Preacher. Political Leader. Miracle Worker.

Man if he was alive today in North America, we could go on tour. He could have made it big. Had his own leer-jet and leisure suit.

I like Elijah because he believed in the small. He didn’t take the wide road of popularity and success; he was found advancing God’s Kingdom through the small, the obscure, the one.

Sure there is a time when there is a big showdown on Mt Carmel, but it only happens once.

He must find a way to expose Baal worship for what it truly is…impotent. Powerless. Unable to act. Unable to provide.

His calling is to re-establish Yahweh in the people’s minds and hearts as all-powerful and good.

Call people to an ethical standard, moral benchmark that would not flow out of self-preservation but commitment to the living God.

**So the question posed in this text is who is our provider? Who is the one who gives life? Who is the one who is in charge?**

**So who are what might be your Baal? Who or what might be your Jezebel?**

Pretty relevant text in our time b/c we all have Baal’s. Our own little Jezebels that we go to in order to fix our problems.

Like I shared last CWG I think we all have trust issues with God.

For some of us it might be difficult to trust God with our kids. With our future. With our money. Health?

This passage is all about trust.

Can I really trust God to provide? I’m not sure so will I take care of it myself Or will I trust?

**So what does God have to do to convince us that He is not trustworthy?**

**To answer that question let’s read the text.**

**1 Kings 17:1-24**

People believe, Jezebel is declaring Baal to be in charge; the one that brings rain and plenty – and in order to expose Baal as impotent Elijah gives this prophetic declaration that their world won’t produce rain or dew for the next several years.

Drought. Barrenness. This happening in a season where there should be rain. All to make clear; your god is impotent. Powerless. Doesn’t have what it takes to deliver.

This promise is based upon the fact that he knows Yahweh. That he serves Yahweh. That Yahweh hears.

Just like you and I, his authority flows out of his intimacy with the Father.

Unlike Baal who is unable to act; Yahweh is alive and well and able to act.

No matter what season it is He is in control. He doesn’t take a holiday or go south for the winter. He’s always on call.

So Elijah is obedient and where does it leave him?

In trouble. Now he has to run for his life.

Ever think that because you did what God asked you to do that all would go well? God would make it easy?

Such a lie.

Here Elijah trusts God and listens and then God tells him he better hide, and he knows just the place.

In the wilderness. Not the city. Not in some palace. Living protected by 4 walls, but alone in the desert.

There’s a good gift for us in our wilderness places.

Here Yahweh promises to send Elijah Ravens to bring him food, meat and bread 2 X per day, morning and evening. And the brook would provide fresh water for him to drink.

Harsh circumstances – but Elijah experiences God’s presence.

In an article by Brian Grogan he says, “If someone asked you to give them another name for God, you could use the word Presence, for that is what God is. When Moses asked Yahweh His name, Yahweh replied, “I am who I am. which means I am present. God is really saying, “I will be there for you.”

God was present with Elijah in the wilderness, and showed Himself faithful.

Elijah trusted God and it led Him to a greater realization or experience of God’s presence, protection and provision.

You’ve heard it said before, there’s no “safer” place to be than the centre of God’s will.

Yes, harsh circumstances…seemingly into nothing, but it was all to serve a greater purpose. To trust.

Trust is the Issue

We so often treat God like a distant relative and as a result we miss out on so much that intimacy that God has to offer.

1. **So what does God have to do to convince us that He is trustworthy?**

**Lead us to wilderness places where we can encounter His presence and know Him as our Provider.**

God often has to put us in harsh situations where we have to depend. Trust. Experience Him as enough.

Psalm 59:10 "God in dependable love, shows up on time." The Message

Wilderness gave a greater opportunity for Elijah to trust.

Interesting that this situation didn’t last.

Ravens bringing food. Own little brook. Well, eventually the brook dried up.

God knew it would dry up. Wasn’t a surprise. God wasn’t out to get Elijah. It wasn’t a bad thing it was a good thing. Leading Him to something better.

I think God allowed this to happen because He knows how quickly we get self-reliant. We get into a rut where we don’t think we need God. Where it gets too predictable.

God doesn’t like predictable. Safe. Tame.

God also knew it wasn’t merely about Elijah. It was about others.

Yahweh now leads Elijah to go live in the village of Zarephath. There he will meet a widow who God has commanded to provide for Elijah.

This is comical. And quite profound where and to whom God leads Elijah.

Zarephath – right in the heart of Phoenicia. Heart of Baalism. Where it’s most dark. That’s where God led Elijah.

Reminds me of that famous quote by CT Studd. “Some wish to live within the sound of a chapel bell; I wish to run a rescue mission within a yard from hell.”

This is where Yahweh sends Elijah. Smack dab in the middle of temple prostitution; elicit sex, child sacrifice, where it is most dark.

For what? For one.

Not for the masses, but for one poor lonely widow.

I wonder how Elijah felt when Yahweh said I have instructed a widow to take care of your needs in Zarephath.

Really? Zarephath? Maybe that makes sense b/c they would never expect me to hide in their own territory.

But a widow? Really? Like she’s gonna have enough?

But likely Elijah knew what to expect. He knew God well enough to know that there would be no sugar daddy waiting to supply his every need around the corner, but someone with nothing.

This is the irony in the story. God sends this poor prophet to be cared for by this poor destitute woman.

So like God isn’t it?

Yes God will at times lead us to people who are wealthy but not too often. More often Yahweh is about using the weak, the small to provide rich treasure.

I have at times found myself praying that God will bring the River some really wealthy people. With truck loads of cash – who are really generous and can help us achieve big dreams for Squamish.

At times I have gotten angry with God – come on. You sent us another family struggling financially…out of work….with not two pennies together! Really?

But then God rebukes me.

As nice as that sounds is that the way God works? No, as Paul says in Corinthians “He is so about using the small and the foolish to shame the wise.”

So Elijah arrives at the city gate and he sees a widow gathering sticks.

He tests the waters and asks her to give him a cup of water and as she is going to get water, he asks her to get him a bite of bread too.

This woman replies, “I don’t have a single piece of bread in the house. Just a handful of flour and enough oil to make some bread. Then my son will eat it and die.”

Here’s the test. In a land where it is believed that Baal is dead. Drought has swept over the land. There is no hope. Along comes Yahweh who has power over things where Baal has failed.

In the absence of Baal who lies impotent in the Underworld, Yahweh steps in to rescue the widow and her son, all this done smack dab in Baal’s territory.

Right in Jezebel’s back yard.

How does God do it?

Elijah cares for her heart. “Don’t be afraid.” Don’t fear. You’re not alone. God sees.

Then he says the kicker.

“Go ahead and do what you have said but make a little bread for me first. Then use what is left to prepare a meal for you and your son.”

For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says. “There will always be enough flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the Lord sends rain and the crops will grow again!”

This is where we are given a promise with a condition.

Give first, and then God will meet your needs.

Logic might tell you, take care of yourself first. Then if there’s anything left over, take care of others.

But no, the Kingdom of God doesn’t work that way.

The Kingdom of God is counter-intuitive.

One of the most difficult areas we have a tough time trusting God is with our money.

Our wallet.

Jesus spoke more about money than he did hell or heaven.

In the time of Jesus the Hebrew people practiced something called a tithe. Where they were instructed to set apart the first 10th and give it to God.

The tithe in the OT was given to take care of the priests and their families. The sacrifice was offered to God and then eaten by the priests.

Without the people’s tithe the priests would starve.

But this was also set up to care for the widow and the orphan. To poor.

But it was considered to be first fruits. Not harvest and then bring it to market, and use it for yourself and then see if there’s anything left over, then give that to God.

Yes it is true that in the NT under the new covenant there are no commandments to tithe 10%. But from what I see it actually calls us to be governed by a different value. Generosity. Giving more.

Acts 2 – we see believers selling off half their possessions giving to those in need.

Acts 11 – Church in Antioch sent financial assistance to the church in Jerusalem – gave money to Barnabas and Saul to distribute.

2 Cor. 8 – Church in Macedonia gave out of their poverty; gave not what they could afford but far more.

We see this precedent of generosity. In reflection of God’s generosity in giving His Son.

“He who was rich became poor, so that in Him we might become rich.”

Paul was bivocational. A tentmaker, but often relied upon the gifts of the church to survive.

Many of my pastor friends are bivocational; that works for them. They have two degrees. Seems to work for them. I have sought God’s face on this but have never felt God has given us the permission to do that.

This text we see this symbiotic relationship between Elijah and the Widow. Here the widow needed her Prophet so she could grow in trust. Without Him, she wouldn’t have learned this important lesson.

It dawned on me this morning. We are the same. We need one another. I need you to learn dependence. You need a pastor to learn to trust God – without me you wouldn’t have any reason to trust God with your money.

This isn’t abnormal either. Even in the NT Paul admonished the church to give to Timothy.

But interesting Paul sends out Timothy to be a pastor and Paul then instructs the churches caring for Timothy to take care of Timothy.

**1 Timothy 5:18** says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and the worker deserves his wages.”

I am called to pastor.

You pay me to pastor the River, as well as the community. You pay me to pastor kids. Take kids out on Fridays. Pastor people at Hilltop and the hospital.

That’s my Calling. That’s our Calling.

**This narrative is amazing.**

First the woman is called to give the little that she has away first – then God will provide.

Kingdom mindset is so different – Kingdom says we give out of the little, out of weakness.

Our intuition; our inkling is self-preservation. Jezebel whispers to us. You can’t trust God with this. It’s all about you. Take care of yourself first. You can’t trust God that there will be enough if you give that away.

The World says we only give once we’re wealthy. Once we have enough we’ll share. The world says we give out of our strength.

Here the widow is called to give out of the little that she has.

And God promises that He sees. That He will bless every time we take steps of faith. Every time we take steps to trust.

We will never grow this trust muscle without exercising it. Never experience God’s faithfulness if we’re never taking steps where God has to come through.

Let me ask you this question? Do you see faith in your budget?

Sure it’s good and wise to live within your means; to only spend what we have; don't extend yourself beyond your budget.

But nowhere in scripture do we see this idea that we only give once we ourselves are taken care of.

There’s another promise with condition in

**Malachi 3**, which says, “Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me. But you ask, what do you mean? When did we ever cheat you? You have cheated me of tithes and offerings due to me. You are under a curse for the whole nation is cheating me. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my temple. If you do, says the Lord of Heaven’s armies, I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have room to take it in. Try it. Put me to the test. Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not fall from the vine before they are ripe, says the Lord of heaven’s Armies. Then all nations will call you blessed.”

You know what I see in this text?

**If we don't give the tithe, it's ours to loose. We don't get to spend it.**

**What we hold back from a tithe is not ours to use but ours to lose.**

I have seen this all through my life as well.

The first thing Elijah said to the widow was don’t be afraid. Then he told her to give the little she had away.

We have this so upside down. We think the fear will only go away once our bank account is healthy enough. Once we have enough invested. Once we make it.

Then the fear will dissipate.

God’s Kingdom says that is a bankrupt way of thinking.

You want to deal with fear of losing it all. Give it away. Surrender to God what has a hold on you and you will be free. It no longer has control or power in your life. You are relinquishing it to God.

This kind of surrender brings freedom.

This woman simply obeyed and what did God do?

Never ran out. From that point on, in a land where Baal was dead, she had enough.

I think so many of us only give once it feels good, feels right, or we have enough to give. We don’t see this principle in scripture. We see trust.

Trust. Obedience.

We see this pattern in the text.

Trust is the Issue

1. **What does God have to do to convince us that He is trustworthy?**

God puts us in situations where He Calls us to give out of our poverty, so we can know Him as enough.

If Kenda and I didn’t give 10% or more away, we would be able to boast. We did it. We are doing it. It’s all about our good money management. It’s all about us; look at how good we are at managing our money.

Beautiful pattern in this text.

* God instructed Elijah to speak words to Ahab. Then go and hide at Keriath Brook …and scripture says Elijah did as the Lord told Him.
* Then God told Elijah to go to Zarapheth and Elijah did as the Lord told Him.
* Then Elijah told the widow to go make him bread, and scripture says he simply did as Elijah or Yahweh told her.

Hard to trust God and obey Him with our money.

But this is a command with a promise.

**Generosity and obedience makes room for God’s grace.**

**TS:** But what if our giving becomes utilitarian? I give in order to get something?

This is part of what I think is happening here.

The woman obeys. God provides. Her and her son’s needs are met.

Then tragedy strikes. The woman’s son becomes sick and eventually he dies.

We learn that our giving, our obedience doesn’t force God’s hand. Doesn’t guarantee all will go well. No more trouble.

She is a good Christian. She obeys God’s voice. She is obeying the prophet. And the worst thing imaginable happens.

Her son dies. The woman is beside herself.

“O man of God what have you done to me.”

Hard not to blame others or God in our grief.

Grief does this doesn’t it? It blinds us to what’s true. She totally forgot that through this man of God great blessing had come to her life.

Interesting, rather than take what we learned from God in trust, and now being able to see this new challenge as another opportunity for God, we think the worst.

Our natural default is often fear isn’t it?

Next question she asks, have you come here to point out my sins?

The Hebrew here seems to be saying that she is feeling guilty. Suddenly she is aware of her sin, and thinks that her sin caused her son to die. And Yahweh is using Elijah to point this out.

But it’s so not the case.

No comment from Elijah. He just takes the boy and cries out to God on his behalf – on her behalf.

Elijah goes to God. Why? God are you like Baal? No ability to sustain life? Are you impotent too? He eventually cries out to God, “Please let this child’s life return to him.”

Elijah puts himself out there.

He is watchful; mindful of what God wants to do.

He goes to bat for someone not even an Israelite.

He’s all about blessing.

The child revives. Yahweh hears from heaven and answers. Yahweh is God. Not Baal. Not Elijah.

Baal is dead. Yahweh is not.

As a result the woman responds No I know for sure you are a man of God and the Lord truly speaks through you – that Yahweh is God.

God goes to crazy lengths in order to teach Elijah and this widow and her son that he is faithful. That he is trustworthy.

What does God have to do to convince us that He is trustworthy?

1. **Sometimes allow us to experience the unthinkable. The most difficult losses. So we can learn to let God be God.**

Reducing us to absolute weakness. Helplessness. Absolute dependence. Like a child.

God’s ways are not our ways. His ways are higher.

God does wait until the stakes are at their highest.

But we have this hope.

**Psalm 59:**10 "God in dependable love, shows up on time." The Message

It’s crazy what they go through to learn trust.