

Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters

There is a programme on SBS, by a man called Michael Mosley. You may have seen it: “Trust me, I’m a doctor”.... It’s quite interesting and it raises an important question: Do you trust your doctor?... It’s so important isn’t it? Especially when you’re in surgery, or under anaesthetic, and your life is in his hands.

That raises another question. If it’s important to trust your doctor with your body. What about your soul? Who do you trust for that? If you trust your doctor in this this life, who do you trust for eternity? If you trust your doctor in this world, who do you trust for the world to come, the world that lies beyond this one?

That’s why our passage is so important. In it God says: “Trust me, I’m God. I’m the only one worthy of your love, your worship and your trust. Don’t trust Baal, anyone or anything else. Trust me”.

Before we look at that more closely, let’s look at some background: It’s the time of King Ahab in the northern Kingdom of Israel. He’s the absolute worst King. He has married Jezebel, a foreigner. She has imported the worship of Baal and that has become the state religion in Israel. Now God’s people are worshipping Baal. That’s important because Baal was the god of fertility; the god who brought the rain and made the crops grow.

But wait! There’s a problem. There was no rain, there were no crops. It was a time of famine. What had happened? Was this a bad season for farming? No. Just before, Elijah, a prophet of the true God, had told Ahab: “There will be no dew, no rain, until I say so.” God was making a point and the people could not escape it: Baal is a useless and pathetic god. He can’t even do what is his specialty. So, don’t trust him. Trust me, I’m God.

Today we are going to see why we should do the same. As we do, let’s not forget that we face the same issue, although in a more modern and up-to-date form. Today, some trust in their goodness, or piety, to get them into heaven. Others trust in their super-package or savings to give them security. Some trust in their good looks or health to give them a good life. Others trust in anything that will mask the pain. But this passage shows us that only God is worthy of our trust and we see that in three different places. First, we go the brook. Then with Elijah to the widow’s house. Then.. well, we’ll see!

At The Brook

We begin at the brook. As this verse is read, please listen for anything that seems odd. Vs 2 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: 3 “Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. 4 You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there.”

Does that strike you as odd? Water from the brook – in a time of drought? Ravens to bring meat? A raven is a scavenging bird, something like a crow. What chance would a piece of bread, or meat,

have in a raven's mouth? Also, in God's eyes they're a dirty bird, an unclean bird. And any meat they brought would most likely be from a dead body, something like our roadkill. Would you like to eat that?... If Elijah is going to survive, this would have to be a miracle!

So, what happens? Vs 5 So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. Elijah trusted God. He took him at his Word and lived in the light of that. And the Lord sustained him! He lived while many of his countrymen died.

Because the Lord sustained him in that miraculous way, we see another famine in the land. Not a famine of food – but a famine of the Word of God. We must remember that Elijah is not just any Tom, Dick or Harry. He's a prophet, God's messenger, the one who brings God's Word to God's people. When he goes into hiding, God's Word goes into hiding. What would happen then?

Let's hear what Jesus said about this when he was in the desert, just before he began his earthly ministry. Unlike Elijah, who had been fed by a miracle from God, Jesus had been fasting for forty days and night. Then Satan said to him: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread". You can imagine the force of this temptation. Jesus replies, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matt. 4:4).

These words are a reminder that there are two – and only two – types of people in the world. Those who live on bread alone; they live as if God and the Gospel did not exist and this world was all there is. And then there are those who live by the Word of God, the Bible.

Notice how important this is. The stakes could not be higher. If you live on bread alone, your soul will wither and die. And if your soul withers and dies, how can you get to heaven when this life ends? On the Day of Judgement, you won't have a leg to stand on. And when you go through dark and difficult times, no one will be there to supply the grace and mercy you need. It's a tragedy when your soul withers and dies.

That's what was happening in Israel at the time: there was a famine of the Word of God. It is happening in Australia today. Could it be happening in our lives too?

Some might say: We're not starved for the Word of God. We have Bibles at home, and on our phones and tablets. We have sermons in church. Yes. But is it part of our daily diet, and our family routine? Is its truth changing us? Is it guiding us on the journey of life? Is it where we go when the wheels fall off the wagon of life?

It's so sad when people starve their bodies. It's much, much worse when they starve their souls. Today, let God feed you through His Word. You will not be disappointed. God says: Trust me. I'm God. As I fed Elijah. I will feed your soul for life eternal.

The Widow's House

Now let's take a trip with Elijah. The brook dries up. God sends Elijah away. And we join him at the widow's house. Vs 8 Then the word of the LORD came to him: 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." 10 So he went to Zarephath. This is strange! God could have sent Elijah to any number of widows in Israel. But he chooses to send him to Zarephath, well to the West, near the Mediterranean Sea. Jesus speaks of this in Lk 4:25 and you can look that up later if you want some more detail. The thing to

note is: this is Baal's heartland! This was where Jezebel came from. Elijah was putting his head in the lion's mouth!

But, once again, he trusts God. He takes him at his Word and so he finds the widow. As expected, she is a worshipper of Baal. But, to make matters worse, she is at death's door, gathering sticks so that she and her son could eat their final meal – and die!

This is where it gets interesting. Vs 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. 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.’ ”

Picture the widow. She is standing at a crossroads: Will she trust Baal, her god? (But he doesn't have a very good track record does he?...) Or will she trust the God of Elijah? Who has made a very special – and totally unbelievable – promise to her? That's all she had to go on. His Word, nothing more. And, to top it all off, Elijah wants her to feed him first!

What happens? God in his grace opens her heart to believe. She took God at his Word. She trusted him, in spite of how things looked. We read: “The jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry. Until the Lord sent rain on the land”.

We call it FAITH. We read about it in Heb 11 and we see it in the two examples there. Think of Noah: Why did Noah build a big boat, miles from any beach? Why did he endure years of abuse and ridicule?... And think of Abraham: Why did Abraham believe God could make him a great nation when he was past the age for that, and so was his wife? Because Noah and Abraham had faith.

So did the widow. She trusted God, she took him at his Word and blessing came to her life because of that.

What about us? Do you believe that a person can only be saved by putting their faith in Jesus?

Do you believe that he loves you as much on your worst day, as on your best day?

Do you believe that no matter how badly you have messed up. Or how far you have fallen. His arms are open to receive you when you come to him in faith?

Do you believe that nothing in all creation can separate us from his love?

Do you believe that Jesus will return and bring a new world with him?

At the widow's house we see a scene of rich blessing. In the midst of famine, God's blessing comes to those who trust him. Who take him at his Word and live in the light of that.

So, we come back to our question: Who or what do you really trust?...

Tragedy At Home

Back at the widow's house no one's hungry. It looks like one big happy family. But then, tragedy strikes and here we come to our third scene: 3TRAGEDY AT HOME. The widow's son dies. Her faith crumples in a heap, and she thinks that God has punished her for her sin. Elijah is struggling also. He pours out his heart to the Lord and prays for the impossible. Vs 20 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?" 21 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!" And, in an amazing turnaround, that's what happens. The boy is raised to life and restored to his mother.

What is the Lord teaching us here? That if we pray hard enough, and have faith strong enough, we will always get what we pray for? No. That did not happen with Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12) and would be a wrong application here. We must not forget the special setting of this passage, in Baal's heartland.

There are two lessons here: First, the Lord – not Baal – has **Power over death**. Baal couldn't even get grass to grow in his homeland, let alone free people from death. Compare that with Jesus, who said to dead Lazarus: "Lazarus, come out (of the grave)". And he did! In Luke 7, Jesus interrupted a funeral procession – how rude is that! – and raised a widow's only son. Unlike Baal, he had power over death. He died on a cross under the curse of God for our sin. But death couldn't hold him. He destroyed its power and drew its sting. He rose from the dead. That's why he calls himself "the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25).

Jesus – not Baal, or anyone else – has power over death. Will you trust him when death knocks at your door? Will you believe that he has gone there first and has blazed a trail to safety, and you can follow him without fear? This is the glorious truth of God's salvation for all who believe.

The second thing is that **We live in the mystery** (of faith). Many of us know Rom 8:28 "In all things, God works for the good of those who love him...". But we also know that sometimes it doesn't feel real good does it?

Years ago I failed some important exams. I didn't feel very good then. You may know the feeling. Have you ever been in a relationship that ended, badly? Or lost your job, or struggled to get one? How did it feel?

When you lose a loved one. Or have a spouse in a nursing home. Or struggle with mental health issues. Or pray for healing, for wayward children, for help in the struggle against sin – but nothing changes – that doesn't feel so good.

...That's the mystery. God's good plan doesn't seem so good at times.

What can help us?... The one thing about which there is no mystery – God's love for us. God so loved the world, he so loved us, that He sent His Son Jesus, into it, to die on cross of Calvary. Dwell on the implications of this for a moment. If God has said "I love you so much that I give my Son in your place". You can trust Him... You can trust him when you feel bad. You can trust him when nothing makes sense anymore.

At those times, go to the cross. Go to Jesus, the saviour. You will find comfort in the mystery. For he, too, has known mystery. Think of his cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46). At that point his life made no sense. He could not work out what God was doing, or why. Yet he clung to his God and Father with the fingernails of faith. He trusted God in his darkest, most difficult hour. If he has done that, you can too. For he has promised to give grace and mercy in your time of need. Trust him for that. You will not be disappointed.

As we think on all this, let's remember that if it's important to trust your doctor. It is VITAL to trust God. For then,

- Your soul will not shrivel and die. But, like Elijah at the brook, it will be fed for life eternal.
- You will know true blessing, the blessing of God sustaining you and providing all your needs, just like he did for the widow and her son.
- You will find comfort in the challenging times. And who of us does not need that?

Friends, take a moment to examine your hearts as you ask the question: Who, or what, do I really trust?... Trust God. Not Baal. Not anyone or anything else. Trust God. Take him at his Word. And live your life in the light of that. Just like Jesus did. You will not be disappointed. Amen.