

Epiphany 4  
January 31, 2010  
1 Kings 17:7-16

Intro – Economic downturns, such as our present experience, rapidly coming to be known as The Great Recession, do negatively affect many things. Besides our own daily lives to retirement plans to the daily lives and plans of many people, besides business and government, it does affect the work of the Gospel.

After hearing me read the verses I just read to you from 1 Kings, maybe the thought enters our hearts, that the work of the Gospel must go on even when people, even when we, don't have as much in material things.

I wonder if our part in the Lord's work of rescuing people from sin and sin's child, death, should need to be cut back as much as it is being cut back? Has sin cut back? Is death backing off? Is the devil being cautious? If a person who does not trust in the only Savior Jesus dies, is hell less likely for him/her now than before? To all these questions we all know the answer. Should we, then, do less about spreading the Word of Jesus, the world's one and only Redeemer and Savior, than before? Same answer, right? Were we doing so much Gospel work before that we can afford to cut back a little now? We know the answer to that one, too, don't we?

If we consider only what we can do, it's no wonder we get afraid and nervous in times like this and start cutting back even on doing Gospel work. We need to look elsewhere, however. We need to consider our God, His power, His promises, His blessings! His Gospel is what will strengthen our faith in Jesus, especially in tough times.

Let Us Trust God's Good News Especially When  
Things Are Tough.

In Elijah's day things were tough. It was especially spiritually speaking, in regard to religion, that things were really bad. Oh, there was plenty of faith; lots of religion. Unfortunately the people's faith was Not in the LORD. Their religious practice was the invention of man, not God. For 200 years already, the kings of the Northern Kingdom had promoted the worship of two golden calves. The most famous location was at Bethel. Lately, it had gotten even worse. King Ahab and his foreign wife, from Sidon, daughter of the king there, Ethbaal, had imported Baal and Asherah worship as the state religion. Jezebel, the queen, was actually trying to stamp out any and all prophets of the LORD, like Elijah.

Baal was supposedly the god of rain and storm, Asherah, the goddess of fertility.

The vast majority of the population of Israel had rejected the one true God and His Word. They cut themselves off from all of the promises and truth of God's Word. This included God's promise to bless His faithful followers with rain and fruitful fields, flocks, and

herds. Since they paid no attention to God's Word, God sent Elijah to Ahab to tell Ahab there'd been no rain at all until further notice. Crops would fail; flocks and herds decline; people would begin to go hungry. So much for Baal and Asherah

This was meant to be a mini judgment of God. Its aim was to turn the people back to the LORD, thus keeping them from the judgment of hell.

But remember, all of this did affect those who did still rely on the LORD, like Elijah and the 7000. So, what were they to do during those hard times? They needed to look all the more intently to their Savior. It was a time for them to work even harder at showing their faith in the promised Redeemer, putting Him first in their lives.

In our day, too, many also have rejected the only Savior/Redeemer. They refuse to believe or listen to God's Word, the Bible. We don't have a direct revelation from God telling us that the current long recession is a mini judgment on an increasingly pagan society. But surely what is happening was, in part, due to greed and a substitution of reliance on money for God. Surely, God knows about current events. Certainly it happens with His permission, at the least.

Yes, these economic trials do also affect Christ's people! Let these days convince us even more of what we cannot do on our own. May such times cause us even more to look only to our Savior/God for blessing, help and ultimately eternal salvation. Surely God's will needs to be carried out by God's people more than ever.

God's Good News applies to us especially in tough times.

After Elijah made the announcement to Ahab, Jezebel wanted Elijah dead. God sent the prophet to a hiding place, a deep ravine in which ran a little brook. There God also sent food every morning and evening by raven. These hording birds became sharing. Then the brook dried up. I wonder how the prophet felt as he watched the flow dwindle to nothing.

God gave Elijah plan B. God sent him north out of Israel entirely, to a place named Zarephath, neat Sidon. What? To Queen Jezebel's home territory, where her father ruled as king, to the place from which Baal worship had been imported into Israel? More than that, God sent His prophet to a widow with a young son. In general, widows had little. In times like that, they had less. This one, it turns out, had almost nothing.

Did this make sense? Elijah would not overrule God's Word and promise by human reason. Human reason would have stirred up nothing but fear and doubt and none of the Rest would have happened. But Elijah obeyed God's Word and went. You might say he was sent to that widow!

The widow, at the very moment Elijah arrived at the gates of Zarephath, was picking up a few sticks to make a little fire to bake the last of her flour and oil into a last meal for herself and her son. She expected slowly to die of starvation thereafter.

The prophet requested a drink. She went to get it. Then he asked for a piece of bread. She explained her situation and what she was doing. He told her to do just as she had planned, except to use that handful of flour and bit of oil to bake a little flat cake for him, the Lord's prophet, first, to bring it to him and then something for her and her son. And, it was then that Elijah gave her a specific promise from the LORD God, "The flour won't run out and neither will the oil until the Lord sends rain again."

Clearly, Elijah was identifying himself as a prophet of the LORD. She had heard of the LORD for she used His Name in her reply to Elijah when he asked for a piece of bread. Elijah told her she had nothing to fear. He was confident of the LORD. Remember, Elijah had nothing either! He was relying on this promise, too.

Again, looked at logically, this made no sense. At best, Elijah would get his last meal and they'd all three starve to death then. But the LORD keeps His promises. Elijah had come, sent by the LORD. And that poor widow trusted God's extraordinary promise. She put God's prophet first. Then there was enough flour and oil for their meal, too. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year for three years plus. There was always that handful, true daily bread. She didn't find a fortune in gold! God didn't multiply the handful into a ton that first day. They didn't get rich, except in spirit. That widow became a royal daughter of God. It brought her the life that would become eternal.

Elijah and the widow trusted God's Word put their lives into His hands. These two did what very few were doing in Israel. There almost everybody impenitently refused God and His Word.

May our faith in our Savior grow. Only the Gospel can make it grow. May our faith show as it puts Jesus first in our whole life, as the widow put the Lord first, ahead of her needs, as she supported the Lord's prophet.

And remember, it really did not cost Elijah anything to share his Savior with the widow. When you and I direct people to Jesus and His reliable Word, that really doesn't cost us anything, does it? Like the widow, support the Lord's workers. Like Elijah, share our Lord and Savior with everyone, and especially in tough times. Amen.