

1 Kings 17:12 (R) 67909

Bible Treasury: Volume 12, Two Sticks: 1 Kings 18:12

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How many believers in this day are culpably like the poor widow of Sarepta before she met the Tishbite. They know so little of the wonderful service they are predestined of the Lord to fulfill for Him here, that they are, ignobly enough, looking only for a couple of sticks, accounting that they have just sufficient in the barrel and the cruse to die upon, but far from enough to live upon! They have so little understood the wonderful fact that they have present possession of Christ and of the Holy Ghost, as the inexhaustible resources of faith—of which the meal (or wheaten flour) and the oil were types—that they go along with their eyes upon the ground; and their piety chiefly consists in a suitable preparation for death! It may be in the near, or it may be in the distant, horizon, but this only is looming before their souls. These are they who religiously affirm that “in the midst of life we are in death,” never having learned how much happier it is to be able to say, and how much more divinely true it is to the saint, that in the midst of death we are in life, not knowing either how incomparably greater a thing it is to be fit to live than to be fit to die.

When the famine had long raged throughout the land, and even beyond its borders, the prophet of God was directed to forsake Israel's dried-up rivulet, Cherith, for Zarephath of Zidon, for there had Jehovah commanded a widow woman to sustain him; the many widows of Israel being passed over, that a Gentile might taste of His goodness, and be also the almoner of His resources. At the very gate of the city they met, and he, being entitled to draw at once upon her supplies, requests of her bread and water, only to elicit the disclosure of her abject penury. Everything but the last mouthful was gone, and she and her son were at the point of death.

Elijah's reply, “Fear not,” &c., beautifully asserts the ascendancy of his faith. Be it that the famine was at its height, and that the person upon whom he was billeted was an embodiment of wretchedness and misery the most profound, he had gone there in the name and at the word of the God of Israel, to live, and not to die, and to announce, as well as to receive, succor. And as the two mites dropped into the Lord's treasury by the Jewish widow of another and a later day, met the commendation that she had cast in more than all the rest, so were the “two sticks” of this Gentile widow, gathered with a view to the last desperate morsel before death, to be used for preparing, by the bounty of Jehovah, “enough and to spare,” the prelude of a new lease of life to herself and to the prophet, and the pledge of unmeasured mercy and grace to the Gentiles. She had gone forth of the city, having no object higher or happier than the “two sticks,” but she found the Lord, as it were, at the gate; for there she met His prophet, and there she heard His word. How many believers are like her, as she sallied forth that eventful day, full of their own thoughts and forebodings! In what they have, and what they seek, they have self for their motive, thus rising no higher, and seeing no further, than the couple of sticks, for they have not yet met the Lord at the gate, or, in other words, have not yet got their commission—the service for Himself He has assigned to them here.

What a revolution of soul must she have experienced as the word of Jehovah fell from the mouth of His prophet! Retracing her steps now, not to be the prey of death, but as one taken out of the world, and afresh sent into the world, she enters the city with composure and with dignity, as hostess of the servant of the living God. Henceforth the famine is over for her and for her household, and she ranks as a commissioned officer in the commissariat of the Lord of hosts. In a marked manner is she identified with His interests on earth, and that primarily, for the prophet had said, “Make me, therefore, a little cake first.” Her faith and her self-denial ran together as twin-sisters, for she did so, and she and her house did eat a full year, even until Jehovah sent rain upon the earth. Had anyone told her that morning that before the sun set she should eat abundantly, and her household, and that also she should entertain the same day as her guest the most distinguished man upon earth, even him at whose word the heavens had so long been shut up, would he not have been unto her as one that mocked?

And in like manner, how little now do saints, generally recognize that no higher dignity and no greater privilege could be conferred upon us than are ours already, in being sent here to find in the interests of Christ our first consideration, and in being made competent, by the divine resources we possess, to minister of them as freely to others as we have partaken of them abundantly ourselves! How simply and how confidently did the Zidonian widow receive and act upon the Tishbite's testimony! She goes back into Sarepta ennobled by faith, and enriched with promises; qualified and commissioned by Jehovah to dispense His bounty to His honored servant, and to be the witness of divine superiority to the deepest human exigencies, as to, herself and her house; a poor Gentile by nature, but bound up now in the bundle of life with Elijah and Elijah's God!

Nevertheless she has practically to learn death. Upon the old ground she had met the wreck of every earthly hope in becoming a widow, but this would not suffice. Upon the new ground of divine favor and exhaustless benefits, death must be experimentally brought home to her heart. And so the son of her bosom is out off before her eyes, but she receives him again at the hand of the Lord, plus the incalculable gain that the sentence of death carries with it to faith. She held him before, upon the uncertain tenure of the old creation, as the fruit of her womb; she gets him back upon new creation tenure as the fruit of resurrection. Moreover, the man of God (figure of Christ) and the word of the Lord are both established before her soul— “Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.”

Surely all this is full of instruction for ourselves, and beautiful in its season, for the scene around is one of dearth, and drought, and death; and how happy and how blessed is the discovery made to faith, that in the antitypes of the flour and the oil we have Christ our life, and the Holy Ghost its power, in such present plenitude as to render us eminently superior to everything here, so that the famine prevailing in the old creation only enhances more and more unto our souls the immeasurable and unailing resources of the new.

How little do they know of this who resemble the widow—before she met Elijah, under pressure of what she felt powerless to avert, and only seeking to pass, without further suffering, out of this blighted scene—a sight as painful and as pitiable as a stranded ship on a barren coast! But the truly-taught saint of God should be like a noble merchantman, freighted with a cargo more precious than gold of Ophir, filling her sails with every heavenly breeze, touching at every open port to discharge somewhat of her unworldly and exhaustless treasure, carrying divine blessing wherever she is welcomed; and knowing, moreover, that she is homeward bound, having everything taut and trim to enter harbor in full sail, “for so,” says the apostle Peter, “an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” R.

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