

Perth Bible Class – October to December 2004

Study 2 – Widow of Sarepta (Zarephath) – Serving

Reading - Luke 4 v 16 - 32
1 Kings 17 v 8 - 24

Luke ch. 4 is a chapter of 3 locations

v 1 - 13 In the wilderness – a time of temptation

v 14 - 30 In Nazareth – a time of rejection

v 31 - 41 In Capernaum – a time of acclamation

In the wilderness the Lord Jesus knew a time of temptation and his resource was the word of God. Note “it is written” v 4 & v 8 also “it is said” v 12. In Capernaum a place of many miracles and demonstration of divine power and here they were “astonished” v 32 and “amazed” v 36 and “the people sought him” v 42. Yet in ch 10 we read “Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven shalt be thrust down to hell”. Places that have the privilege of hearing the word of god and seeing it demonstrated in changed lives will very much be held accountable in a future day when god judges. When we consider Nazareth a city that had seen the Lord Jesus grow up in their midst, when they hear him read “is not this Joseph’s son” v 22 .The mood however changes when the Saviour makes application and intimates that like those from the old testament he would be rejected. Truly “He came unto his own and his own people received him not” John 1 v 11. We note in the section his consistency of life “as his custom was” v 16 also his accuracy in the reading. When we compare the account in Luke with the scripture in Isaiah 61 from which the saviour is quoting we find that he stops in the middle of a verse. How important this was as the quotation goes on to speak of “the day of vengeance of our God” Isa 61 v 2. We remember that the Lord at this time came not to condemn but to save.

Having made the application then the Lord Jesus reminds us of these two old testament incidents when Elijah in a day of famine is sent to this widow woman of Sarepta despite the fact that there were many widows in Israel at the time and in the case of Elisha despite many lepers being in Israel it was a Syrian that was healed. God shows that he can use those of a gentile background in his service – the widow woman, and also bring blessing to gentiles – the healing of Naaman. Notice both days were marked by severe departure on the part of Israel. In our recent studies in Daniel we noted that a gentile Nebuchadnezzar was used to take Israel away into captivity and at a later time Darius (not the same man as in our study in Daniel 6) to begin the return of Israel into their land and the building of the wall and temple at Jerusalem.

Lessons from the widow.

HUMILITY – like others in our study her name is not given. In any service for God the servant whom God chooses to use is unimportant. In Genesis 24 the servant who is charged with the important task of bringing the bride for Isaac is not named. Little is known of this lady and as far as we know she will never feature again in scripture. God could take any servant up and use him over a period of time or with only one specific task to fulfil.

POVERTY – There is a depth to this women's poverty that we can hardly imagine. Not only was she poor as to her condition naturally having no husband to provide for her and the probability that her son was too young to support her. She would enjoy no benefit from the state or any pension provision as we might expect in our day. This woman was living in a period when there had been famine gripping the area for a period up to 3 ½ years. She sums up her situation as "handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse" 1 Kings 17 v 12. God sometimes brings us to the end of self before he will use us in his service. Nothing of the flesh can be of benefit in his service his power alone will suffice. Paul's confidence was never in his background but he did say "all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" Phil 4 v 13.

ADVERSITY – As if the famine was not enough there comes the further test of the death of her son. In this section we see **faith tested**. Earlier when Elijah came she recognised him in her expression v 12 "as the Lord thy God liveth". She is tested with Elijah's demands v 13 "make me thereof a little cake first". In putting Elijah first she bows to the claim in Matt 6 v 33 "seek ye first". We must never loose sight that what we do for others has its impact above. This is clearly the teaching of Acts 9 v 4 "why persecutest thou me" also Matt 25 v 40 "ye have done it unto me". In this first test the widow's faith is good v 15 "she went and did according to the saying of Elijah". We note now **faith triumphs** v 16 "the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail". When the second test comes in the death of her son there may be the indication that **faith fails** as the widow immediately feels under judgment for some previous sin. However the "man of God" v 24 intervenes and takes this to God in prayer and what a remarkable miracle. Never before had one been raised from the dead. This time the faith of God's servant triumphs and the child is restored.

The incident concludes with the confession of the widow "the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth" v 24.

A gentile woman is so used by God to provide for His servant and come into the blessing of knowing and owning Him as LORD.