

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“Running on Empty”
1 Kings 17:1-16
October 30, 2016

Sometimes it feels like it's been 100 years since you've been here at church, doesn't it? A week, maybe two go by and you haven't been in worship. You haven't seen anyone from here and you're feeling a bit disconnected.

It's not even how long you've been gone, it's just that your weeks are so jam packed full, that a thousand things have taken place since you last walked through these doors. You know the feeling?

It's like you've been sprinting day after day.

Your schedule has been packed tight, trying to fit in everything you want to cram into your life... or everything you think ***you have to*** cram into it to keep your head above water.

For a lot of you, your pace at work is relentless. There's a constant pressure of crisis to address. Projects to manage. Deadlines to meet. And you can't let up because it's all on your shoulders, right? People are depending on you. Co-workers are depending on you. And those things on your plate aren't going to get done by themselves.

So, you've been keeping this frantic pace for some time now. And there's really no end in sight. But there are just not enough hours in the day to get it all in. So you race from this to that, grinding the axe, chasing the fleeting hours in your week.

Or maybe for you it's been the schedule at home. You're chasing your kids' schedules, but there's not enough ***of you*** to meet ***all their*** needs, and to be at all their activities.

Not to mention you've got your own work.

And the laundry is always piling up. It never ends.

And the chores around the house get neglected because there are all those things you just can't get to.

You're running as fast as you can. Doing as much as you can. But there are just not enough hours in the day, or hours in your week to cram it all in... even though it's all good and important stuff that needs to get done.

The bills have to be paid; those projects at work have to get done. The kids' activities are part of their growth and development. Dinner's got to get on the table somehow.

And for some of us, there's homework to get done. It's not going to do itself.

So you stay up too late. Or you keep running from one thing to the next, always a bit behind, because there's just not enough time to cram it all in.

And, by the time you walk in these doors on Sunday morning, it feels like it's been 100 years since you've been here.

Well, I've got some good news for you. You're not crazy. This week it actually has been 100 years since you were here hearing Terry talk about David. 100 years have passed since King David was on the throne.

And the kingdom of Israel has had its own kind of crisis and unrest and now it is split into the Northern Kingdom, known as Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, known as Judah.

And many kings have ruled on the throne of Israel. And now King Ahab is on the throne.

And here's what we know about Ahab. Archeology tells us that Ahab was a successful and powerful King.

So, I assume that means he was also busy getting things done.

Managing this project and that,
keeping a full schedule himself.

He was probably the busiest man in the land. And so, he was successful in all kinds of areas. That's what archeology tells us.

At the same time, the scriptures tell us he was one of the most wicked of the kings of Israel. So, there's some real cognitive dissonance here. Apparently, God doesn't use the same measuring stick as the history books.

While he was out achieving a name for himself,
his soul was wasting away.

While he was chasing success.
his God was chasing him down.

And so out of nowhere, this nobody named Elijah shows up and declares that God is going to bring Ahab's efforts to a screeching halt with a relentless drought.

That seems to be the pattern when we start burning the candle at both ends. Have you noticed that along the way? ***The harder we push for success, the deeper a drought grows in the contours of our life.***

Sure, the bank account might be flourishing
and your kids list of activities to put on their college application might get longer, but it comes at a cost.

It often does. There is a dryness that begins deep within you and slowly starts working its way out. The dryness becomes cracks, which become crevasses, which become so hardened that even if it rains for just a bit, the water runs off, eroding the top soil, rather than soaking in, nourishing life in you.

Elijah shares the word of the Lord with Ahab, telling him there will be a drought. And as powerful and successful as Ahab was, there is absolutely nothing he can do to stop it.

No amount of striving,

No amount of personal resources.

No amount of clever thinking can stop the ground of his life from drying up and cracking open.

You see, the drought is an outward symbol of the reality that Ahab has cultivated in Israel.

Rather than trusting God, who is the source of all life, who is the source of all abundance, Ahab has been chasing power and success and ... shoot he's even been chasing multiple gods... because each one has their own little promise of power and security and success and strength.

Ahab had married Jezebel from Sidon and begun erecting idols to her gods because her gods promised economic success. After all, two gods are better than one, right? Might as well add Baal to his religious credentials. Might as well collect more and more.

Politically, Economically, Religiously, Ahab is hoarding more and more, collecting more and more. ***And whenever we do that, it's almost always because we are afraid that what we have may not be enough.***

We are living from a story of scarcity...

a story that says we better collect as much as we can, because... because we might just run out.

And we get trapped in the story of scarcity, where we're always chasing the next success.

Your business might not be enough,
so you'd better keep building it.

Your kids may not quite be the best. Of course you'd never tell them that. But you're nervous about their ability to succeed and to achieve, so you'd better put them in another activity.

Your salary isn't quite what you'd like it to be,
so you'd better put in more hours at the office, to be in line for that next promotion.

Your god might not be enough to fulfill you,
so you'd better throw in a few extra idols to make you feel good, and safe, and secure... you know, just in case your god doesn't come through.

It's the story of scarcity... scarcity in one part of your life or another. And it's a story that traps us in fear...

fear that there *simply isn't enough*...

or that *we ourselves... wont be* enough.

And I think in our most clear moments, something deep in our hearts knows that this story of scarcity is a tale of death. And so we try not to live by it. But we are bombarded with it all of the time... in all sorts of areas of our lives.

It's the story you hear every time you turn on the TV and another commercial comes on.

And it's the story you hear from every politician you hear speak, whether Republican or Democrat.

And it's the story you hear around the water cooler at the office,

And the story you hear in the pick up line at your kids' school from other parents.

It's the story of the market place, and the story of our society.

Grab ahold of what you can.

Get all you can.

Do more than you can... because one day you may just come up empty.

But the bible tells us a different story. The scriptures tell us a story of a world that is created by the God of abundance... a God who creates a world of goodness and blesses it to be fruitful and multiply.

The Scriptures tells us the story of a God who provides manna in the wilderness, day after day. Even when your landscape is arid and it makes no sense, there is always enough for this day.

It's the story of a God who even enters into death and brings about new life and resurrection. The Christian story is the story of a God of abundance... a God whose force of life has been let loose in the world.

As Christians, this is the story we're invited to live into. But we are always being pulled back into the story of death... the story of scarcity. In fact, Bruggeman says that whether we are liberal Christians or conservative Christians... **"the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between**

our attraction to the good news of God's abundance

and the power of our belief in scarcity—a belief that makes us greedy, mean, and un-neighborly. We spend our lives trying to sort out that ambiguity."¹

¹ Walter Brueggemann, "The Liturgy of Abundance. The Myth of Scarcity."

Elijah is sorting out that story in his time. So, he tells Ahab about the drought, a drought that is created by Ahab's desire for more and more. But Elijah goes and embodies a different way of living, a different kind of trust.

He follows the invitation of God to go to a simple brook. And there the ravens bring him food... never more than he needs but always enough. It's just like the Hebrew Israelites were back in the days of the Wilderness Wandering... where they lived on the Manna that God sent from heaven each day...

just their daily bread,
...nothing more, but always enough.

Elijah embodies that story again, living day-to-day next to this brook by God's provision. It seems foolish. In fact, his brook eventually dries up, and in our way of thinking, we want to say, "See, he shouldn't have trusted."

But that's because we don't believe the story of abundance. The abundant God of Elijah isn't limited by one dried up brook... In fact, from there, God sends Elijah to go and embody God's great surprising abundance to a world trapped in scarcity...

God sends Elijah to a particular widow in the region of Sidon... who has become trapped in the story of scarcity herself, trapped in the drought Ahab has created.

And there's some real playful irony here. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, is from this land of Sidon. In other words, God's making inroads to Jezebel's homeland... God sends Elijah to a widow there.

And when Elijah meets her, we can hear how clearly she is trapped in a reality of scarcity. When he asks for something to eat she says:

"I have *nothing* baked.
I have *just a handful* of flour
... a *little* bit of oil.
Barely enough for one last meal... so that my son and I might eat it and *die*."

She is stuck in this story of scarcity... a story that leads to death. You can't blame her for not wanting to give some to Elijah... this hungry stranger she's just met.

But into the midst of her scarcity, Elijah proclaims a seemingly foolish idea of a God of abundance...

"Do not be afraid..." he says to her. It's that great phrase used again and again in the scriptures. **"Do not be afraid, because there is a God of abundance who's life is flowing to you."**

"Do not be afraid. There is a God of abundance who will not let your oil and flour run dry."

This is the story, the reality into which the widow is invited. But in order to enter that reality, she has to trust it. There was only one way for her to experience that Abundance... to experience the life of God let loose in her world.

She had to let go of her fear. It took an act of faith on her part. She had to choose to trust God with the little bit of flour and the little bit of oil that she had.

It's the craziest thing in the world to do. And who knows what she was thinking when she does it.

She may have been thinking she was crazy.

Or she may be thinking, "I hope it's true."

Or she may have been thinking, "What do I have to lose?"

I don't know.

But I do know that she went...

and she fed Elijah...

and she fed her son.

and she fed herself.

Day after day, there was always enough. It didn't make any sense. It didn't fit the story that Ahab had created in their world.

But day after day, even in the midst of the drought,

God provided for them their daily bread.

This is what God does when we begin to trust God with the little bit of flour and little bit of oil that make up our lives. Even in the midst of a world that looks like it's trapped in drought... there is a God of abundant life.

Even in a world where you think you must do more and more,

Even in your particular life, where you are sure there are not enough hours in the day,

and you need to do more and more at work,

and there is more piling up at home,

and your kids need more from you,

and your parents need more from you,

and if you don't do it, who will?

God says to us, **"Stop striving. Be still and know that I am God."**

That exhaustion you feel, the burn-out growing in you, those are symptoms that you're living trapped in the story of scarcity. There is a deadly drought growing in your life.

But if you will begin to practice a rhythm of rest, of stillness...

a rhythm of Sabbath in some way,

if you will take a great act of resistance and say, "no" to the culture of "now",

you'll begin to see that God will provide enough.... there will be enough. And your life will become marked by something other than drought. Your life will be marked by wholeness and contentment, and joy... abundant joy, where life is fruitful and multiplying.

So, Dayspring, do not be afraid.
Offer what scarce flour and oil you have left to God.
And you will be astonished to find that our God is able to accomplish in you
“abundantly more than you could possibly ask or imagine.”

Amen.

Reflection

“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” Ephesians 3:20-21