

+ 1 Kings 17:1-16 + God's Grace Never Runs Dry + Seventh Sunday after Pentecost + 11 July 2010 +

We live in an area that has some of the highest annual amounts of moisture in the country. Now imagine if we went a year without any rain, mist, fog, sleet, or snow. Then another and another and six months more until three and a half years had passed without any precipitation at all. What would our region look like without any rain or snow for three and a half years?

Everything would be brown and withered. Streams would dry up and rivers would trickle along. Lakes would become glorified ponds. It would be depressing—no snow at Christmas, no rain in the spring, no thunderstorms in the summer, just bone dry all year long. Gardens and fields and orchards would never have a chance. Everything would be lifeless and how much running water we could use in our homes would be severely limited. Without water, everything else dries up. What a relief when the rains return!

Thankfully long droughts like the one I described don't happen here, but there are times in our lives when it seems what we have dries up and disappears. Maybe it's money in the bank account. Maybe it's good health you've had for so many years. Maybe it's hope and confidence for the future. Whatever it might be, times like that can feel like a long drought that withers the land and seems to last forever. We might cry out to the Lord and wonder where he is with his relief. We might wonder why he is allowing this blessing to dry up. We might even let our trust in him and his ability to care for us run dry. Today, however, our God has an answer for us as he cares for the prophet Elijah. You see, **GOD'S GRACE NEVER RUNS DRY.**

The Lord had had enough. The people of Israel and their kings had rejected the Lord time and again. A new king had come to power—Ahab, who ***“did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him.”*** He had married Jezebel, the pagan daughter of a pagan king, who introduced to Israel a disgusting form of idol worship to the fertility god Baal. She hunted down the Lord's prophets and conspired against his people.

To Israel, then, the Lord sent his prophet Elijah to come before Ahab and pronounce judgment on the land. ***“As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”*** A drought was coming that would last for three and a half years. This would devastate Israel—an already arid land that depended heavily on the annual rainy season and the heavy dews of the non-rainy season to keep their crops alive. Israel would become a lifeless desert.

That message to the hostile king would surely put God's prophet in danger, so the Lord sent Elijah into hiding. The Lord gave specific instructions as to where he should hide and how he would survive. God was going to miraculously provide food for Elijah. Ravens—scavenger birds—would actually bring the food to Elijah. Elijah would drink from a flowing brook. He trusted the Lord and went into hiding. The ravens brought bread and meat in the morning and the evening and he drank from the brook. God's grace wasn't about to run dry in his care for his faithful prophet. God protected and fed him until the brook ran dry because the water ran out.

Once again, the Lord poured out his grace in a time of physical and spiritual drought. When the brook dried up, God sent Elijah to an unbelieving region north of Israel, to a little village called Zarephath, where God had provided a believing widow to feed Elijah. The prophet went up there and found the widow outside the town gate gathering sticks. The drought had struck this region and this poor widow had only enough flour and oil to make one last meal of bread for her and her only son. They had no other food and no means to get food. Still Elijah asked her, ***“Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink? ...And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”*** The widow naturally hesitated because she knew had only enough for herself and her son. ***“As surely as the LORD your God lives...I don't have any bread... I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”***

Through Elijah, the Lord of grace brought relief to the despairing heart of this woman. Elijah told her, ***“Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.’”***

Remarkably the widow trusted the word of God's prophet and did just as Elijah had told her. God blessed her, her son, and Elijah. ***“There was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.”*** The Lord cared for his people, blessed the work of his Kingdom, and displayed his glorious grace.

God's grace never ran dry, but how often don't we forget that? How easy to forget what God and his grace have accomplished when you're having a tough time making ends meet in your household or as a

congregation. How easy to forget what God and his grace have accomplished when your health or the health of a loved one fails or when you grieve the loss of a loved one. How easy it is to forget when there's trouble at work or in your family or in your marriage, when worry or fear or uncertainty over the future robs you of hope and confidence. How easy it is to forget when you're troubled by the guilt of sins you committed years ago or just yesterday or when you fall into that awful sin of weakness once again and you're faced with the reality of the hell you deserve for those sins. How easy it is to forget when you get away from spending time in God's Word and worship and you find your strength or hope or peace or even your trust in God and his grace drying up.

Still God's grace never runs dry. It didn't run dry when our first parents, Adam and Eve, brought the spiritual drought of sin into our world. It didn't run dry when Ahab's evil brought judgment on Israel and only 7000 believers remained there. It didn't run dry even when God's people forgot his promises and were hauled off into exile. No, God continued to pour out his grace on his faithful people. He continued to not only care for them, but also strengthen them with his promises of a Savior to come. Then he opened the floodgates when a young virgin named Mary gave birth to the Son of God in a lowly Bethlehem stable. That grace of God kept pouring forth as Jesus later proclaimed the good news of sins forgiven, of God's grace, healed the sick and raised the dead. That grace poured forth from the wounds in his hands and feet and side and all over the body of Christ on the cross, but that grace didn't even run dry there on that barren hill called Golgotha. No, that grace burst forth three days later on Easter morning as God raised his Son from the dead. Miracles all, but all the grace of God that never ran dry.

Now you might say, "Pastor, those are wonderful, miraculous things, but God doesn't do that anymore, at least not in my life." Ah, doesn't he? You were conceived and born in sin, yet God poured out his grace on you through water poured on your head at the baptismal font. His grace poured out as he placed his name on you as a forgiven, redeemed child of God.

He still pours out his grace on you as his Holy Spirit strengthens that faith in your heart through the hearing of the good news of Christ Jesus, and as you hear from the lips of God's called servant, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." He pours out that grace as he gives you himself—his own body and blood with bread and wine in his Holy Supper—for the forgiveness of sins, new life, and salvation. He also pours out his grace on his Church by providing workers for his harvest fields and making you part of that work. He enables you to use your God-given abilities to share what you know about Jesus and gives you the means to support the work of sharing that Gospel here at home and abroad.

That's all great, but what about all those things that cause you to forget what God and his grace have accomplished? James (1:17) tells us, "**Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.**" It is God's grace that gives us all that we have and need. When God does allow need to come into our lives, however, he uses that time to drive us closer to him as the Source of every gift from above. Remember how he showed that to Elijah and the widow. He poured out his grace in their times of need and even enabled the poor widow to support the work of the Lord.

God still pours out his grace even in our times of need. Remember this is the same God who promised, "**never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.**" (Hebrews 13:5) God's grace will never run dry. That's why it's important for us to remember what God and his grace have accomplished, to trust in the Lord of free and faithful grace, to take him at his Word, and like the widow even put our God-given gifts to work in his Kingdom. That's not a pie-in-the-sky dream that if we just do this or that then God will take away our need forever. No, our God promises to bless the faithful use of the gifts he gives us. Surely we can stand on his promises confident that God will do what he has promised. After all, God's grace has never run dry. Why would it now?

How richly our God provides for his people! May the God of peace keep far from us the spiritual droughts of sin and worry and despair and may we marvel at the grace of our God who shows us again and again that all his blessings are miracles of his grace. Let us confess then with Elijah and the widow what we've seen today: God's grace never runs dry. Amen.