

Widow of Zarephath 7-30-00
1Kings 17:7-16/ Ps 59:16,17

We are going to take a short break from the attributes of God look briefly at a beautiful OT illustration of the New Covenant. Lord willing, sometime in the future we will do a study on the covenants. I have to thank Malcom Smith for the inspiration for this. I told you about the inspiring study he did on Romans 6-8 and in the end of 8 he shares the illustration of the widow of Zarephath which I would like to pass on to you this morning.

First I have to briefly share the background that led up to this illustration. We have talked about it before in Bible studies but it is worth going over again and again for it is at the foundation of our life in Christ. We know that Abramic covenant was a covenant that God made with himself to bring blessing to man through the seed of Abraham. Then later in the time of Moses the Sinaiatic covenant was made with the people of Israel. The author of Hebrews tells us that the Law was a school master to bring us to Christ. And then the Davidic Covenant with David, a salt covenant, that an heir of David would reign forever on his throne. So all these covenants were pointing toward Christ.

In the time of the prophets there was a new covenant spoken of. We should look at what they described by the Holy Spirit. It is first introduced in Is 49:8-11, one of Isaiah's five servant songs. ⁸ This is what the LORD says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances,⁹ to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' "They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill.¹⁰ They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water.¹¹ I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. Isaiah 49:8-11 (NIV)
Obviously referring to the Lord Jesus, God says, "I will make you to be a covenant for the people..." He is the New Covenant.

Then Jeremiah adds to the information: ³¹ "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.³⁴ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from

the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." Jer 31:31-34 (NIV)
Here Jeremiah adds the concept of God doing something with our mind and heart. There is a sense of intimacy with God for all people and the remission of sins.

Then Ezekiel adds that this difference of heart and mind is the indwelling Holy Spirit. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.²⁸ You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. Ezek 36:26-28 (NIV)

And now listen to the fulfillment of this in the words of Jesus: ²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." Luke 22:20 (NIV)

All the Covenants brought us to this New Covenant. It is the ultimate to which all the others were leading. It is Christ in us, the hope of glory. Communion is the spiritual reality of the New Covenant in picture form, taking Christ within us. We take his life (body and blood) and are changed – our minds have his law within them. Our hearts are made new by the Spirit of God, changed from stony hearts to hearts of flesh. The very life of Christ is in us.

That same night he spoke John 15:5⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5 (NIV)

Us in Him, He in us, the only way to be of value to the kingdom of God. Without Him we can do nothing. That is what the Apostle Paul was saying in Ro 7. Even when his heart was changed so that he wanted to do good, he could not do it. But in this sorry state of wanting to do what you aren't able he thanks God that there is victory – through the Lord Jesus. We will have to examine those three chapters carefully another time. But the point Paul is making is that there is a new law at work in him, the law of the Spirit of life. It is the very life of Jesus. He knows he can't do anything even if he wants to but that the life of Jesus in him can do the will of the Father. It can bear fruit. And so Jesus tells us we must remain in him and He in us to be fruitful, to advance the Kingdom of God.

²⁴ Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness--²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.²⁷ To them God has

chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Col 1:24-27 (NIV)

Phil 1:21 "For me to live is Christ" See how this new covenant is all wrapped up in the truth of the life of Christ in us? It is He that makes us able to obey the Father, ⁵ Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.⁶ He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Cor 3:5-6 (NIV)

The Spirit of Christ within us is our competence. His life within us makes us able to express our gifts, for they are an expression of his life. Everything we do and say should be an expression of the Son of God in you as a man or woman. That is the New Covenant. We get so frustrated and often slip back into trying to do for God in our own strength. After all we truly desire to do good, for our hearts have been changed, and we feel we should be able to for we are a new creation, but when we go to try to do it in our ability we find we are not able to do anything. Our weakness becomes our strength as we turn to the life of the Lord in us and let Him do it.

Time and time again we forget and try in our own strength. Most of my born again life I keep forgetting that without Him we can do nothing. I am destined to fail because if it is not his life through me, I just can't do any good thing. And so I turn again to his life and the minute I give up and ask Him – I have power operating in me beyond my own, wisdom that is from above, love that I was incapable of expressing.

And here is where the illustration of the widow comes in. When Elijah came she was gathering sticks to cook up her last pancake for her and her son. She had watched the oil and flour slowly disappear and this was the day she dreaded. Here comes this stranger and tells her to cook up some for him FIRST. Now I don't know how old that little boy was but I can imagine he might have been thinking, "Oh man there goes my last pancake!"

The widow tells him there is only enough for them. She's been watching it slowly disappear. She knows there isn't any more! But Elijah says there will be enough. She goes in, cleans out the flour jug, empties the oil jar and cooks up the last cake. When she brings it to Elijah he tells her to go cook for her and her son. She thinks, "right!" So she goes in and sticks her hand in that jug, scrapes the bottom and ...there is just enough flour left. What do ya know? And then she turns that oil jar upside and out comes just enough oil. Hey that was slick! No pun intended. But what about tomorrow morning?

She knows that jug and jar are empty. She scraped it twice. But they are hungry and there is a need. This prophet wants to eat again. What are you gonna do? Stick your hand down in that empty jug and WOE there's just enough flour in there. Turn that jar upside down and shake it and WOE just enough oil dripped out of there. You know she made about 3000 meals out of an empty jug and jar!

You think you've got just enough strength for just this one thing and here comes another. You know your earthen vessel is empty. You scraped it dry last time, but you reach in and WOE there is the bread of life. But you know what you need the Holy Spirit, because we know truth needs to be accompanied by the Spirit, the letter is dead without it, and you turn your empty jar upside down, and WOE out comes just enough to meet the need.

Empty? This trial too big for you. You've tried and you know your empty. But we live by faith not sight. It takes faith to please God. Reach down into your vessel where the promise of God says "I meet all your needs in Christ Jesus" and WOE there He is, living in you. His life comes out and satisfies the need. His Spirit is there manifesting itself through you again and again and again.

You know, I wish I could just learn to quit trying and just consistently reach in and grab hold of the life of Jesus. I'm an awful slow learner. I keep forgetting I can't do anything. I keep forgetting I'm dead and my life is hidden in Christ. So I try again, and fail again and then I remember it has to be Him. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. All you do is respond to his grace – He asks, "let me handle this" and you respond to that grace and allow Him to live through you each day.

¹⁶ But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.¹⁷ O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God. Psalms 59:16-17 (NIV)
How did David know? It wasn't in him it was in the Lord, The Lord was his strength, the Lord was his fortress, the Lord was his loving God.

What a wonderful covenant. Christ in you the hope of glory. What an awesome loving God!