

# ***BESIDE THE DRY BROOK***

***1 Kings 17:1-14***

***By Pastor John Paul Miller***

They were very dark and difficult times. The corn was withered on the stalk. The wheat lay dry on the parched ground. Israel was in the midst of drought and famine. Why? I believe the root cause was the peoples' sin. You see, Ahab the most wicked king up to this point in Israel's history - was on the throne. Ahab had married a foreign woman named Jezebel, who had introduced Baal worship to the nation of Israel. The statues of Baal archaeologists have unearthed often portray him with a lightning bolt in his hand, for Baal was the god of weather, the god of the storm, the god who controlled the elements. The people of Israel had turned away from the true and living God, who made the heavens and brings the rains, and instead worshipped a statue. So God sent the prophet Elijah to tell them that there would be no dew or rain for a three-year period. Moses had warned them back in the Book of Deuteronomy that their sin would bring this kind of punishment.

I like the way Clovis Chapel put it when he said, 'It was sin that had cut off their water supply. It was sin that had withered their gardens. It was sin that had parched their fields. It was sin that had blighted their fruit trees. It was sin that had changed the land into a desert. Sin is ever the mother of desolation and death.' How true that is. In our own lives, it is always sin that will turn our lives into a desert spiritually speaking. The joy of salvation disappears, and the power to live a holy life dissipates because of sin. The peace that passes understanding is no longer my experience when I allow sin to reign in my life. Surely, sin is ever the mother of desolation and death. Sin separates me from God. Sin can destroy my marriage. Sin can ruin my relationship with my children. Sin is deadly because it separates us from God and each other.

**And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Aha, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.**

**1 Kings 17:1**

It was because of Israel's sin that Elijah was sent to the court of King Ahab to predict there would be neither dew nor rain. It took a lot of courage for Elijah to do this because Ahab could have wiped him out instantly. In verse 1, we see that Elijah found strength in the living God. He knew that God was alive, that God was a living God. The second realization, which gave Elijah strength, is that he knew he was the servant of God. Elijah was not only aware of the fact that God was alive and on the throne, but that he himself was the Lord's servant as he stood before Ahab.

**And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.**

**I Kings 17:2-4**

After Elijah had given his weather report, in verse 2, God said to him, 'I want you to go to the brook Cherith and hide yourself there.' So Elijah most likely went north a little ways over the Jordan, and there found the quiet brook known as Cherith. Although we have no physical description of this area, I imagine tall trees over a deep canyon, which would form a natural canopy to protect Elijah from the wind and sun. And because he was a country preacher from the region of Tishba, Elijah must have felt in his element at Cherith. 'I don't belong in the court of the king,' he must have thought. 'I belong out here in nature.'

**So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.**

**I Kings 17:5-6**

At this time the entire nation was suffering because of the blight of their sin, but Elijah had bread and flesh every morning and every evening. For water, he could drink from the stream. Isn't it neat the way the Lord provides for His children - both supernaturally and naturally? After all, it's not natural for ravens to airlift food to people every morning and every evening! By Levitical law, the raven is an unclean bird. Therefore, Elijah could have thought, 'Ooh, yucky. There's a bird slobbering on my food. I don't know about that.' But I'm sure he was just glad to be eating and that the Lord was providing supernaturally. Can you imagine having a raven bring you food every morning? You'd get up, put your bib on, and wait with fork and spoon in hand for the bird to show up with food for your plate. The way God provides is so cool!

One morning when Elijah awoke and went down to the brook to get a drink, he noticed that the water level had dropped a little bit. I wonder if at this point, he began to think, 'Hmmm. Wonder what's going on here.' The next morning when Elijah awoke, he found the water level had dropped again. And this time perhaps he was more concerned, wondering, 'Lord, where are You?' The third morning, when the water level dropped even further, Elijah must have thought, 'I'm had.' Maybe he even stuck a stick in the middle of the stream, measured the depth, and predicted how much time had had left. Finally, Elijah woke one morning and noticed that the song of the stream had been silenced. Dry sand had replaced his source of refreshment. The brook was completely dry. Perhaps now, Elijah began to wonder, 'God, where are You?'

Now the experience of Elijah is not unique to him at all, for I believe that every single one of us has sat beside drying brooks. There has been a point in time, in each of our lives, when the source of blessing, encouragement and strength has

dried up and passed away. Perhaps today you're sitting beside the drying brook of worldly prosperity. Maybe you've lost your job and your source of income. At one time, you had the money to take vacations and buy extra things and enjoy life the way you wanted to. You had a nice little nest egg in the bank. Now, drawing from your savings week after week, you're watching your brook dwindle. Maybe, like Elijah, as you look at your bank account, knowing you much you need to live every week, you can predict accurately to the day when you're going to be broke.

Perhaps you're sitting by the brook of good health, and you're seeing it slowly dry up. You're not as strong as you once were. You're living in constant pain. You're losing strength daily. Perhaps you're sitting by the drying brook of ambitions and dreams. The career you wanted, the place you wanted to live, the person you wanted to marry, or the children you wanted to have haven't happened. Your hopes and dreams hover on the brink of despair and drought. Perhaps you're sitting by the drying brook of tender human love. Maybe the love, devotion, and commitment you had to one another as husband and wife has dried up. The excitement and the love you had for one another when you were first dating has been replaced by fighting, bickering, arguing, strife and tension. Now there's hatred where there once was love, a pulling away where there once was support. The brook of tender human love of a husband, wife, family member or friend is now only sand.

Why did Elijah's brook dry up? Why do our brooks dry up? It is a natural response to ask why, but I believe very rarely does God let us know or understand why our brooks dry up, or why calamity comes into our lives. I am learning more and more all the time that God does not allow me the privilege of knowing why certain things happen in my life. I'm convinced as well that if I knew why certain things happen, it wouldn't necessarily bring me comfort. If you break your arm and go to the doctor and the doctor gives you all the medical explanations as to how your arm broke, does that bless your heart? No. As a matter of fact, if he shows you the X-ray, and you see how severe the break is, your arm might hurt even more! But when he tells you, 'We can fix it up and in a few months, it'll be good as new' - that's what blesses your heart. What we need when we're hurting is not explanations but promises. Not understanding but hope. We need to believe that God is still on the throne, that He is concerned for us, that He's going to work out our problems.

Even though we do not need an explanation for why God allows certain things, there are some things we do need to know . . . The brook dried up not because God forgot Elijah. When brooks begin to dry up in our lives, we think, 'That's it. God has forgotten me. I'm sure of it. He's too busy with the Universe and other people who are more important than me. He's answering their prayers, but He's forgotten me.' No. God has not forgotten you. The Bible says that God has the very hairs of your head numbered. 'How great are thy thoughts unto me, O God,' declared the Psalmist. 'They are like the sand which is upon the seashore.' As many grains of sand on the seashores of the entire world are how many thoughts

God has about you. When you go to bed at night and you're not thinking about God, God's thinking about you. When you're busy at work, going through the hustle of the day and not thinking about God, God's thinking about you. When you're in your home and the pressure's mounting because of strife in your house, God's thinking about you. When you're all alone and you think no one in the world understands or knows or cares, God knows. God understands. God cares. It was Frances Havergill who said, 'In perplexities, when we cannot tell what to do; when we cannot understand what is going on around us, let us be calm and stayed and patient by the thought that what is hidden from us is not hidden from Him.' Whichever of your brooks is drying up, God knows exactly what you're going through.

**The brook dried up not because God stopped loving Elijah.** - Something goes wrong and we say, 'I knew it. God doesn't love me.' No. The Bible says that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. God will never stop loving you.

**The brook dried up not because Elijah had sinned.** - Often we think, 'I know. It's because I've sinned that God has allowed this to happen to me.' We go through an endless series of mental gymnastics, torturing ourselves, saying, 'I shouldn't have said that. I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have married him. I made a mistake. I did this wrong. Back in the fourth grade I cheated on that math test, and ever since then, God has been after me.' No, no, no. It's kind of like Job. He had all kinds of problems, and his friends showed up and for the first three days or so; they just sat with him in silence. They spoke and said, 'OK, Job. Out with it. Fess up, buddy. You know you've sinned. You've done something wrong. Surely all these calamities have come into your life because you sinned.' Elijah might have felt that way. You may feel that way. 'Surely this is going wrong in my life because of sin.' But, like Job, Elijah had not sinned. Like Job, Elijah had done nothing wrong.

The brook dried up not because Elijah was out of the will of God. A lot of times when you start having difficulties in your marriage, you begin to question the will of God. 'I knew it, I shouldn't have married him.' It's a sad thing when people begin to question God's will. Was Elijah in the will of God? You bet he was. He was dead center in the will of God - but his brook dried up nonetheless.

**The brook dried up not because God is limited.** - God is not limited in the face of our difficulties. God is able to deliver. When all the streams were drying up, God could have miraculously kept Elijah's brook bubbling. God is able to sustain us. God is in control. But we often doubt that, and wonder, 'Could God not have prevented this?'

**And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.**

**1 Kings 17:7**

**The brook dried up simply because there was no rain.** - What was the reason for the brook drying up? It's rather amazing when, in verse 7, we discover the simple answer: The brook dried up because there was no rain. I hear people say, 'I pray. I give tithes. I go to church. I teach Sunday school. I even raise my hands during worship. I'm spiritual. Why is this difficulty happening to me?' My question, however, is, Why wouldn't it happen to you? This is a sinful, wicked, corrupt world. Why do we as Christians think nothing should go wrong? People think that because I'm a pastor, I have a red phone in my house which I can pick up and say, 'Hi, God, I got Mike here. He wants to know why his car blew up.' I don't know why what happens to me happens to me. So how can I tell you why what happens to you happens to you? I have no idea! There was Elijah, thinking, 'Maybe God doesn't love me. Maybe God's forgotten me. Maybe there's sin in my life. Maybe I'm out of the will of God.' 'Just cool it, Elijah,' God said. 'The brook dried up simply because there's no rain. It's part of life.'

There are no Christian fall-out shelters. The rain falls on the just and on the unjust. And because the root cause of the drought was the peoples' sin, even though Elijah was in the will of God and had done nothing wrong, he was suffering with the unrighteous. You may be a righteous man, but you're still in a world full of sin. Christians get robbed. Christians get mugged. Christians get flat tires. Christians run out of gas on the freeway. Christians get old. Christians face the same trials and troubles and difficulties the world does. And here we see Elijah suffering right along with the wicked. You and I are suffering as Christians today because of the crimes of the ungodly. Even though we teach God's Word and seek to have godly homes, we suffer right along with the ungodly. We have to groan in creation with everyone else. So we need to be careful not to try to plague ourselves too severely as to why God allows certain things in our lives. God may never let us know. But what we can do is turn our calamities into gain. We can capitalize on our difficulties and use them for us instead of against us.

What lessons do we learn from the dried-up brook?

**1. God is not to blame** - First, we need to remember that God is not to blame. If your baby dies just after birth, God is not to blame. If your marriage ends in divorce, God is not to blame. If your teenagers rebel, God is not to blame. If you don't get the job you want, God is not to blame. If you lose your health, God is not to blame. So many times people blame God for the calamities that come into their lives. But every time I see a suffering world, I remind myself that God suffered in the Person of Jesus, on the cross, along with it. It would be hard to believe that there is a loving and caring God if it weren't for the suffering of Christ at Calvary.

God became a Man and He suffered along with us. He was born in poverty. He worked hard and was subject to His parents, growing up. He was thirsty. He was tired. He was left alone. He was lied about. He was crucified. He bled. He died. He hung on a cross. God died for you. Certainly He cares. Certainly He understands. 'Shall not the judge of the earth do right?' asked Abraham. The answer is, 'Yes!' So God is not to blame for the drying brook.

**2. God is not helpless** - Secondly, we need to learn that while God is not the author of evil, He is not helpless in the face of evil. Why does God allow evil in the world? The Bible says that God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man. The Bible also says that in God there is no shadow of turning, no changing. God is good. God is holy. God is righteous. He always has been. He always will be. He never changes. Why, then doesn't God get rid of evil in the world? For Him to rid the world of evil, He'd have to eliminate all human beings - including you and me - because the heart is deceitful. The heart is desperately wicked. That's why we need to be regenerated. That's why we need to be born again. We need the new life that only God can give.

**And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.**

**1 Kings 17:8-9**

St. Augustine said, 'God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist.' In Elijah's case, although the brook had dried up, God had Plan B. Now I don't believe God gave Elijah Plan B until the brook was completely dry. When Elijah came out the first morning and found the water level had dropped a bit, he probably would have appreciated it if God would have rang him up right then and said, 'Don't sweat it, Elijah. You've got about a week left. And at the end of that week, I'm going to send you somewhere else where you'll be taken care of.' No, I think God let the brook go completely dry maybe even for a day or two before He spoke to Elijah. That's the way God works often. Maybe Elijah was on his knees in the middle of the brook, crying, 'G-o-d!' finally the Lord said, 'Get down to Zarephath' Elijah probably said, 'Alright!' - until he heard that it would be a widow who would take care of him. 'A widow?' he must have wondered. 'Are You sure You have that right, Lord?'

**So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, AS the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.**

**I Kings 17:10-12**

When Elijah arrived at the widow's house, she was collecting sticks to make a fire. She had one little batch of meal to bake a little cake. She and her son were going to eat it and die. She heard a knock at the door, followed by a prophet saying, 'When's dinner?' 'See these sticks I just gathered?' she must have said. 'I'm going to make a fire, make a meal, and my son and I are going to die. Don't you know there's a famine in the land?'

**And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.**

**I Kings 17:13-14**

God was working in Elijah's life, for Elijah was able to speak words of hope to the widow because he had experienced God's hand in his own life. 'Lord,' we say, 'I could sure trust You a whole lot more if I was getting along with my husband, or if my kids were doing better, or if I had a job, or if my car hadn't blown up.' But the name of the game is to trust Him even when the brooks go dry.

**3. God is refining us** - The third lesson we learn is that our dry brooks are often God's refining process. They're God's way of refining us. He was preparing Elijah for greater things. Elijah was headed for Mt. Carmel to have a contest with the prophets of Baal. He would call down fire from heaven. He would see the prophets of Baal destroyed. He would see the nation of Israel on her face crying, 'The Lord is God.' Elijah didn't know what the Lord had in store. He didn't know what the future held. But God did, and He was preparing Elijah for tomorrow. Your brook may be dry. But you don't know what God has in store. He's refining you. He's teaching

you faith. He's preparing you for greater things. This dry brook taught Elijah to trust in the Lord and in His Word. As a result, when God spoke to Elijah, Elijah obeyed. God speaks to us as well, and we need to learn to surrender in obedience to His refining process in our lives.

It's difficult when God allows us to pass through times of difficulties and trials. But we need to learn to trust and obey Him, for God is teaching us faith. Faith is like a muscle - if you don't exercise it, the law of atrophy sets in and you go down. God loves you too much to allow you to get spiritually flabby and overweight. There are a lot of fat Christians around, spiritually speaking. They trust the Lord. They have a huge bank account. Their health is good. Their family's going smooth. Everything's fine. Oh, praise God! But when the brook starts to dry up and God gives them an opportunity to exercise faith, they say, 'I don't want to trust You, God. I don't want to exercise. I just want to get flabby.' But God just keeps putting us into those places where we have to trust in Him, where we have to exercise faith and obedience.

**Faith and Obedience** - How can we practically turn calamity into capital as Elijah did?

Two simple ways: Faith and Obedience.

In verse 2, the Word of the Lord came to Elijah.

In verse 5, he did according to the Word of the Lord.

In verse 8, the Word of the Lord came to Elijah.

In verse 10, he did according to the Word.

'I don't know what to do,' we cry. 'My brook is dry.' Try just obeying God. Open the Scripture. Hear Him speak. And obey Him. Husbands love your wives. Wives, be subject to your husbands. Children obey your parents. Give unto your employer what's due and equal. This is the will of God that you abstain from fornication. Read the Ten Commandments. You want to know what to do? Keep the Ten Commandments. Live a holy life.

The year was 1875, and a woman by the name of Louisa Stead was on the beach in Long Island Sound, New York. She was having a picnic with her husband and her four-year-old daughter, when, from the water, they heard the cries of distress. A young boy was drowning. Her husband rushed to his rescue, plunged in the water, and as often happens, the boy that was drowning pulled his rescuer under with him. There, a horrified mother and daughter watched as their husband and daddy disappeared under the water and drowned. In the weeks that followed, out of her 'why' struggle with God, Louisa Stead wrote these words:

*Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take Him at His Word, Just to  
rest upon His promise, just to know 'Thus saith the Lord.' Jesus.  
Jesus, how I trust Him. How I've proved Him o'er and o'er. Jesus,  
Jesus, precious Jesus, oh for faith to trust Him more.*

When the way is dark and you don't know what the future holds, when your  
brooks have dried up, all God wants you to do is simply trust and obey.