

Inspiring Moments

GREATER TRAGEDY, GREATER MIRACLE

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In 1 Kings Chapter 17, we see God performed three miracles before He sent Elijah to fight against the false prophets in Mt. Carmel. Every Sunday School student knows what happened at Mt. Carmel. But few of us know or appreciate what happened before Mt. Carmel. One cannot fully appreciate what happened at Mt. Carmel unless one understands what happened to Elijah before Mt. Carmel. Where did Elijah get the confidence and boldness to fight the 850 false prophets single-handedly? What if he called upon God and God did not send fire down from the heavens? Elijah would have been killed and slaughtered into pieces.

So what happened to Elijah before Mt Carmel?

First Miracle: God used ravens to feed Elijah

Israel, under King Ahab (a bad king) had sinned so badly that God had to punish Israel by sending a severe drought. Drought means famine and famine means death. So almost the whole of Israel dried up. God told Elijah to go to a brook in Kerith where God would provide him with water and food. Food? God told Elijah that he would command the ravens to feed him with food. Whoever heard of ravens feeding people? Ravens do not give food to people, they steal food from people. They are 'ravenous' creatures, always hungry (hence the expression 'ravenous') and they are pests. If you were Elijah, how would you respond to God? True to God's word, the ravens came and faithfully fed Elijah with bread and meat every morning and evening. Sometimes God uses the most unlikely source to help us in our need.

At times we go through 'drought periods' in our lives where everything in our lives seems to 'dry' up. During such time of need, help may come from an unlikely source. God may send the most unlikely person to come to your help. Also, it may not come in the form of a person but an encouragement from God. Recently, I have been experiencing a 'drought period' in my law practice (cash-flow problem, all business people know what this is). While I was struggling through this period, I was surprisingly awarded "The Boutique Law Firm Of The Year, 2015" (in Singapore) by the Global Legal Experts. It was a blessing

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from God because I did not ask for it and I did not expect it. Sometimes the best things in life are often the things we never seek for.

Second miracle: God used the widow to feed Elijah

The drought situation in Israel became so bad that soon the brook at Kerith dried up. God told Elijah to go to Zarephath where a widow would feed him. If you are dying of hunger, you do not visit a widow. A widow, by definition, was a poor woman, in the Old Testament times. First, God sent Elijah to be fed by ravens. Now, God sends Elijah to be fed by a widow. Both are unlikely sources of help. But that is how God works sometimes.

So Elijah went to the village of Zarephath and found a widow at the city gates (not sure how he knew she was a widow). He asked her for a cup of water to drink. As she went to get the cup of water, Elijah decided to change the menu and asked her to include some bread as well (if she did not mind). The order of the second item on the menu spooked her. She replied, "I don't have a single piece of bread in the house. And I only have a handful of flour in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug". Here comes the real stinger, "I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die". Oh dear, Elijah, what have you done? Now Elijah discovered two things: first, this widow was not alone, she had a son. That meant two mouths to feed. Secondly, this was going to be their 'last supper'. They were going to have the last meal, then die! Elijah might have wondered, "Oh God, why did you send me to this poor widow? This must be a mistake".

As Elijah later discovered, God never makes mistakes. An apparent mistake may turn out to be God's perfect instrument for a miracle. Just watch what Elijah did. Amazingly he instructed the widow, "Don't be afraid! Go ahead and cook that 'last meal', but bake me a little loaf of bread first (wise guy). Afterwards there will still be enough food for you and your son". Where did Elijah's confidence come from? Here is the clue: "For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'There will always be plenty of flour and oil left in your container until the time when the Lord sends rain and crops grow again!'" True to God's word, Elijah, the widow and her son were fed for many days and the food did not run out.

Do you ever find your resources run dry? You have scraped the bottom of the barrel and there is not much left. What do you do? Like the widow in Zarephath, surrender whatever meagre amount you have to God. But the widow must first surrender whatever she had to God before God could multiply her resources. Tell the Lord, "Lord, this is all I have. Take it. Do whatever you want with it." Watch and see how the Lord is going to deliver you.

Third miracle: God used Elijah to resurrect the widow's dead son

Just when things were going so well, tragedy struck. Suddenly, the widow's son died. She accused Elijah of bringing bad luck to her family ("O man of God, what have you done to me? Have you come here to punish my sins by killing my son?"). Elijah had no reply except to ask her to hand over her dead son to him. He took her son to the upper room, where he stayed, and pleaded to the Lord to resurrect the dead body. What an audacious prayer request!

A greater tragedy calls for a greater miracle. So far Elijah had seen God perform a double miracle using ravens and the widow to feed him. But this was, by far, a more dire situation. The boy had died. God heard Elijah's plea and resurrected the dead boy to life. This was the ultimate miracle, greater than the two previous miracles. The widow told Elijah, "Now I know for sure you are a man of God, and that the Lord truly speaks through you."

Unknown to the poor widow, her simple utterance had profoundly affirmed two things. Jehovah was the true God and Elijah was God's chosen spokesman. God would demonstrate He is the true God through Elijah at Mt. Carmel. The Kerith miracle and the Zarephath miracle sealed this intimate relationship between God and Elijah. So when Elijah called upon God to send fire on top of Mt. Carmel, he had no doubt at all that God would act. If God could raise the dead to life, why couldn't God send fire? In fact, the battle in Mt. Carmel was already won at Kerith and Zarephath even before Elijah set foot on Mt. Carmel.

Just a last word. If you are going through a very dire situation, perhaps God is preparing to send you help of a scale you may not have imagined. The greater the tragedy, the greater the miracle.