

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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GOD'S CARE OF ELIJAH.

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## A Sermon

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"And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there."—1 Kings xvii. 4.

WHAT a mighty master of the art of prayer was Elijah the Tishbite! He was one of those who had the power to shut up heaven, so that it did not rain. He did not merely prophesy, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain but according to my word," but he prayed that it might be so; so, that he was not only the messenger of the drought, but in some sense, the cause of it. It was his act stopped the bottles of heaven; it was his prevailing prayer which brought down that heavy chastisement upon the sinful people.

But perceive, dear friends, that though Elias was mighty in prayer, and could prevail with God, yet he did not therefore escape from suffering; nay, his very prayer in its answer, brought him into suffering. If there should be a drought throughout all the land, he himself must feel the pinch as well as the rest of the people. If the brooks be dried up, they shall be dried up for him, and if there be no corn in the land, there shall be no corn for him, unless God shall be pleased specially to interpose on his behalf. Elias suffers, then, in the common evil. The effect of his own prayer is, as it were, to bring down the house of the Philistines upon his own head, as well as upon theirs.

Let us learn from this, dear friends, that the highest degree of grace cannot save us from affliction, nay, that it even entails it.

We may grow in grace until our faith never staggers; we may progress in the art of wrestling with God until we know how to grapple with the angel as Jacob did at Jabbok with, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me,"—but the impartial hand of trial will knock at our door as well as at the door of the chief of sinners. The path of sorrow we still must tread. Still shall we have to go under the rod of the covenant, and feel Christ's yoke upon our shoulders. The child of God cannot escape the rod even though he be an Elijah. He may call down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice, but no fire from heaven can consume his trouble; he must bear it, he must pass through it, as well as the weakest and commonest of God's people. Let us, therefore, settle it in our hearts to be resigned to this. If it be the common lot of God's people, why should we repine? If the Prince himself once went through the Valley of Humiliation, why should we murmur at following in his footsteps? God had one son without sin, but never a son without affliction. Let us not ask to be the first; but be content to share the portion of those whose inheritance is to be ours for ever in the Paradise of our God.

To-night, and God grant that it may be for our profit, we shall talk of our text, handling it in three ways: first, you will perceive that, *God is at no loss to supply the wants of his children*; when we have talked of that, I would have you notice, secondly, that *God hath power to make all creatures obedient to his will*; and then, thirdly, I shall ask you to notice, that *there is a possibility of a creature in some way serving God and yet remaining an unclean creature still*; just as the ravens fed Elijah, but were ravens still, so you and I may be serviceable in the Lord's cause to some extent, and yet, after all, be utter strangers to the things of Christ.

I. First, then, we certainly gather from the whole incident related concerning Elijah here, and indeed from the whole of the prophet's life, that **GOD IS AT NO LOSS TO SUPPLY HIS SERVANT'S NEEDS.**

This narrative seems to tell us, first of all, *that God's people shall always have enough.* Do they want drink in a parched land? They shall "drink of the brook." Do they want food? "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." Elijah never had short commons. He had no luxuries: just bread, meat, and water, and these were enough. No doubt, Jezebel's priests fed much more sumptuously, and many of God's servants not so well, for we read of Obadiah that he took the prophets of God and hid them by fifties in a cave, and fed them upon bread and water. Now Elijah did get on better than this for he had bread and meat whilst they had only bread. God, however, was not pleased to give Elijah dainties. Delicate things are not promised to the children of God, and his prophets at any rate should not seek after them. They that fare delicately and are clothed sumptuously are in king's houses, and are often nothing better than reeds shaken by the wind. Let us learn, then, from this, that although God will provide for the wants of his people, yet he hath never promised to give them more than enough. The promise runs, "Thy bread shall be given

thee, and thy water shall be sure;" but it goes no further. We are instructed each day to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," which means "Give us a sufficiency;" and, indeed, if God's inspiration had not taught us so to pray, wisdom would teach us to do it, for Agur's prayer is one which philosophy might justify as well as grace,—"Give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with food convenient for me." It is that middle path of the "enough" which is perhaps, the most pleasant, and certainly the most safe. "Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content."

"Let others stretch their arms like seas,  
And grasp in all the shore;  
Grant me the presence of thy love,  
And I will ask no more."

You have, perhaps, been struggling, and trying to rise in the world, and after long and arduous efforts find yourself just where you were. You did make money fast at one time, but now you have lost it all again. Well, dear friends, what doth this matter after all, so long as your God is still faithful to you? He never promised you riches; he did, however, promise you that you should lack no good thing, and if riches had been a good thing for you, you would have had them. Perhaps you are one of the hyssops that grow best upon the wall; or one of the ferns that flourish best down in some shady place. Too much sunlight and exposure might have been ill for you. Thank God that you have enough, and if you have not enough just now, and are a believer in Christ take your case before the Lord, and he will command even the ravens to feed you sooner than that you shall know any serious lack. I ought to say before I leave this point that Elijah had enough, but *it did not always come to him in the nicest way*; for I do not imagine that these ravens knew how to get bread and meat always cut into nicest shape. Perhaps they snatched a rough bit of meat here, and perhaps a crust of bread there, and it came in all sorts of ugly pieces, but still, there it was, and it was enough. "Beggars are not to be choosers," we say, and certainly pensioners on God's bounty must not pick holes and find fault with the Lord's providing. Whatever God gives thee be grateful for, for if too proud to take from the raven's mouth, it will be well for thee to go without, until thine hunger consume thy pride. God promises his people enough, but not more than enough, and even that enough may not come to us in the way we should choose.

Observe again, that though the Lord can provide for his people yet *he often chooseth to do it by littles and littles*. How did the ravens bring the prophet his supplies? They brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening. God did not send him a great supply at once. Not bread and meat to last him for a week. There must be daily supplies. Enough for the morning's meal, and enough for the evening's repast, but there

shall be no stock in hand. And is not this God's usual method of dealing with his people?

"Day by day the manna fell,  
Oh! to learn this lesson well."

Remember, too, the prayer which I quoted just now—"Give us this day our *daily* bread." Not "our *weekly* bread," not "our *monthly* bread," not "our *annual* stores," but—"give us—our *daily* bread." God is pleased to give some of his servants in the bulk, but there are many others who only "live from hand to mouth;" and perhaps though not best for the flesh, it is best for faith, for we are apt when mercies come regularly to forget whence they flow. The first three or four times that manna fell in the wilderness, I daresay the Israelites thought it a wonderful miracle, and never ceased talking of it, but after a week or two it got so common that at last they said, "Our soul loatheth this light bread." If God were to send an angel to your door with bread and meat you would think a great deal of it at first, but after a dozen times you would think it commonplace, and see no miracle in it. A miracle constantly repeated ceases to be a miracle, and falls then into ordinary law. God changes the modes in which he sends our supplies, that we may more clearly see his hand in them all, and be compelled to say, "It is Jehovah only, who can add "Jireh" to his name, for the Lord alone can provide for his people."

So, then, we are not to ask for a great stock in hand. You will none of you have dying grace yet, as you have not yet to die. And we do not get grace for the furnace, until we come to the furnace. The manna of old, you know, bred worms and stank when it was a day old, and very often treasures laid up on earth are full of moth and rust, and so God sends us, day by day, what we want, that there may be neither moth nor rust, but that we may constantly see his hand and bless his name. There shall be enough, but it shall often come by littles.

Again, our text has another thought, very prominent on its front: *the provision which God sends us may often come in the most unlikely way.* It was a very unlikely way for the prophet to receive water, to send him to a brook. Why not to Jordan? It would probably be the last river to dry up. Why send him to a brook; above all, why to the brook Cherith, for the very name signifies "drought"! Very likely it was the first brook to dry up. Yet Elijah is sent to that! And we have known the Lord supply his people by the most unlikely means, the first to dry up has been made the very last. For a year, at least, the prophet sat among the rushes hiding all day and the water never failed. So God sometimes uses means which we have despised, and enables us "to provide things honest in the sight of all men." Then, as for Elijah's meat, it was sent by ravens, as the little hymn says,—

"More likely to rob and to thieve,  
Than give to the prophet his wants."

Yet these birds that feed on carrion were constrained to bring the

prophet fresh meat. Strange thing, that these birds of prey should bring meat to keep alive the servant of God! Their natural propensities overruled because God commanded them. Ah! God knows how to make our enemies to minister to our good, both temporally and spiritually. Once in old Popish times, a good woman condemned to starve, was asked by the judge in derision, "Now that you are condemned to starve, what can your God do for you?" She boldly answered, "He can feed me off your table if he pleases." It so happened that the judge's wife, melted to compassion by the boldness of one of her own sex, daily abstracted a portion of her own food to give to the poor woman in prison, and so her life was prolonged. If the Lord could not feed his people anyhow else, I believe he would use ravens over again. But he knows how to use ravens in human guise, and he will bend their wills to serve his people's needs. They who would be wolves to his sheep he can make to act as shepherds leading them into the green pastures.

Besides, if you think of it, the ravens were unlikely to feed the prophet, for *they were as poor as the prophet was*. They sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet poor as the prophet, they feed him! How frequently have the poor been the best friends of the poor. Sometimes in life, not knowing poverty, has steeled the heart, but having known and felt it opens the heart, to help others in greater need. The ravens owe their own meat day by day to God's providing, and yet he employs them for the supply of his servant. So poor saints, deeply dependent on God for their humblest needs, he enables to help saints yet poorer still. His prophet shall be sustained by ravens, who, perhaps, have little ones that cry for their food. The Lord will provide; we know not how, but he has his own ways and methods, and, as a quaint old writer says, "when it comes to the point, and the Lord cannot take care of his people *under* heaven, he will take them up *into* heaven," and when there is no bread for them to eat on earth, he will take away the need of eating it and take them where they shall eat bread in the kingdom of their Father beyond the skies.

I want to mention this point, too, that this bread came in sufficient quantity, in little, by unlikely means, and yet *it surely came*. Not once did Elijah miss his breakfast, not once find that the water had dried up; until the appointed time came there it was, sure and certain! What a strange thing we are so unbelieving! It is strange, is it not, that a saint who for forty years has trusted his Father and been upheld, should ever doubt his faithfulness to the very end? It is strange, I say, but I must confess how strangely true of myself, and how cunningly old Unbelief still creepeth in. Oh! that wicked Unbelief! that wicked Unbelief. Mr. Bunyan says, "Old Mr. Unbelief was a nimble chap and could never be taken by the heels, or else the king's officers would have hanged him!" I wish he could be taken and then there would be a clear riddance of him, but he manages somehow, in spite of all our watchfulness, to escape; and we get to doubting after ten thousand proofs

that there is no cause whatever for doubting. Our bread is sure. Let us write this down, both in spirituals and temporals, "The Lord will provide."

But observe also, and then I think I must leave this point, that *Elijah got his bread and meat in the path of obedience*. He was told to go and hide himself. This was not pleasant for the prophet. I confess I should not have liked it—to go and creep into a hole in some craggy rock or lie down and conceal himself among the reeds from every passer-by. Everything he had to do from morning to night was just to find out the most secluded spot where no one could catch a glimpse of him. And this was the hero prophet of God! I should have wanted to be preaching. I should have said, "Why, there are the people of Israel, needing someone to speak to them. Why, Lord, is it that I am condemned to be dumb? Why should I be hiding away among the rushes and reeds? Now is surely the time for me to boldly witness in thy name. The heavens drop no dew, and the earth is dry: now, perhaps, the hearts of men will tremble: now let thine Elijah speak. Lord, give me words of power, clothe me now with salvation and help me to stir this degenerate people." Would not you have felt the same? And yet God had commanded him to hide himself! If he had gone out contrary to the Divine command I am not sure that he would have been fed: but being told to hide and, obeying, he found the path of duty and obedience was the path of Divine upholding and he was fed. So, dear friends, let us take care that we abide in the path of obedience to God and he will faithfully sustain. Some men are lazy and will not work; God will not provide for such, for they are far away from the path of duty. "If they will not work, neither shall they eat." Some, on the other hand, put themselves by some great folly out of a position where their bread would have been given them. Well, if they run before God's pillar of cloud or fire, and are not led of him, they must not expect that they will have his miraculous protection; for the path of duty is the only one where God has solemnly pledged himself to protect his children walking therein. I believe that if we wait upon the Lord, commit our ways to him, and acknowledge him in them all, and it be our constant endeavour to serve him, seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all other things shall be added unto us. But if we choose to run counter to God's command we may live to know even the want of bread. David could say, "I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." David could say that, but I cannot, and I believe there are many Christian people who cannot say it. David gave his honest personal experience, but that is not the personal experience of all observers. If you are the child of a true servant of God, and yet you turn out a vagabond, you will have to beg your bread as well as other vagabonds, and it does not matter how good your mother and father may have been. If *you* do not walk near to God yourself, you may have your feet yet upon the cold ground, and yet have to cry for bread. If you live in profligacy

or vice, or deep indolence, it will bring you, though the child of godly parents, as surely and soon to poverty as it will any other child. We must not pride ourselves, nor trust in any degree upon what our parents were. Personal faith and a personal seeking of the kingdom of God and his righteousness are the only things that will bring us sure provision; nothing short of these will avail.

I have only to remind you to remember that *God is the same God still, and he that helped Elijah will help you.* No raven may come flying into your window, but he will send you bread in another way. He is just as faithful now as ever. Elias, remember, was a man of like passions with you. God help you to exercise this faith, and he will never fail you.

II. Now, for the second part of our theme we will notice, with holy admiration, that GOD HATH POWER TO MAKE ALL CREATURES OBEDIENT TO HIS WILL.

"I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." These ravens never croaked out a single objection, but did as they were bidden. Their instincts did not rebel, but they submitted absolutely to God's will, and I daresay, were quite as diligent and quite as happy in carrying the bread and meat to Elijah as they would have been if they had been taking it to their own young or feasting upon it themselves.

Observe, beloved, how *the whole world is obedient to God.* He spake once to the great water-floods; they were deep in the caverns of the earth; he called to them; he lifted up his voice in the clouds from that great sea beyond the firmament, and deep called unto deep at the noise of God's water-spouts; up they sprang from the vast caverns where they slept, and down they dashed, not in drops, but in terrible cataracts, and the whole earth was covered with their floods, until forty cubits upward, they prevailed over the tops of the mountains. And when God did but whisper to them, and bid them go back to their resting-places, where he would again set them about with bars, back they went, and the waters were assuaged from off the earth. The great deep knoweth its Master; and he hath but to speak and it obeyeth his behests. The Red Sea of old knew the power of Moses' rod, and when God commanded the floods stood upright as a heap, and the whole depths were congealed in the heart of the sea. Jordan, too, was driven back: the feet of the priests did but touch the edge of the stream, and straightway the whole host of Israel marched through as on dry land. Nor were the floods of earth merely obedient, for celestial bodies have confessed his power, for Joshua made the sun and the moon stand still while the Lord's warriors smote their foes. Nor is it inanimate things only that admit his sway. The lions crouch at Daniel's feet, the monster fish swallows but does not destroy the wayward Jonah. Nor do great things only obey him. The worm at God's command smote the root of Jonah's gourd, the locusts came upon Egypt, and he sent all manner of flies and lice in all their quarters. Creatures, however tremendous or minute, are alike moved by the impulses of the Divine will, and, like an army marching under some mighty

commander in strict order, battalion upon battalion, and rank upon rank, they march to the conflict when God biddeth them. Are not even the caterpillar and the palmer-worm part of God's great host, and do not they all obey his behests?

Is it not a sad, sad, strange thing that *man is the only creature that refuses to obey his creator?* I know that in the sense of the decree, God's will is done, and even Judas fulfils that to which he was appointed, but so far as his will is concerned, man remaineth a stout rebel against God. The raven, commanded to carry bread and meat, does it, but man bidden to believe in Christ, and to repent of his sins, to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, refuses to do it. Oh! the stubbornness of human nature! We are worse than ravens; there is no creature that in this can be compared with man. Bunyan's well-known wish, that he had been a frog or a toad rather than a man, might well be the wish of us all while we are in a state of sin for they know no rebellion against God; and we are full of it, as the sea is full of salt. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Are there any here in an unregenerate state? I fear there are. If so, let these ravens rebuke you. How is it that to the God who made you, who feeds you, that to the Christ who saith "Come unto me, ye weary, and I will give you rest;" that to that Spirit who alone can quicken you—you should be enemies and strangers? May a sense of your ingratitude fill your hearts with penitence and make you humble yourselves before God.

III. But, lastly, we have in the case before us, a very notable instance of HOW POSSIBLE IT IS FOR CREATURES TO SERVE GOD AFTER A FASHION, AND YET REMAIN UNCLEAN CREATURES STILL.

We read in the book of Leviticus that "the raven after his kind is unclean." Before these ravens brought Elijah's food they were unclean, and after they had done it they were still unclean. Elijah did not refuse the bread and meat because unclean birds brought it. No! oh! no, and I will not refuse a good and profitable saying even if the Devil spoke it. I would not prefer—I would not do it, in fact—to sit under the ministry of a man known to be an ill-liver, but if I happened to be where I heard him preach, and I heard him say good things I would not reject those good things because they came out of a raven's mouth. I would not choose to have my bread and meat from a raven, but if I knew that it was bread, and meat and that God had sent it, I would eat it, even though a raven brought it. But see, too, how possible it is for us to carry bread and meat to God's servants, and do some good things for his church, and yet be ravens still! There may be some Sunday-school teachers here who are not members of the church. I believe this will not apply to teachers in our school, but it will to many other schools. I am not clear as to whether unconverted teachers should be tolerated at all, whether it is not altogether wrong, and whether David's words may not be applied to such, "Unto the wicked God saith, 'What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?'" But if you be such a teacher, dear friend, do not, I pray you, conclude that

because of your teaching you yourself are saved? You may even be blessed in your teaching to the conversion of some of the children under your care, and yet, unless you have personally trusted Christ as your Saviour and been brought into vital union with him, you may lead the children to heaven and be yourself cast out. Beware, I say, lest in your teaching you imagine yourself to be a Christian.

It is just the same with all the officers of the church. Shall I take the ministry just now? Oh! my brethren, how easy it is to preach, aye, to win souls through God's grace, and yet, after all, to be a castaway! There have been authentic cases of men who have seemed to be very zealous and to burn with the pure celestial fire, who have no doubt been the means of directing others to heaven, but have not been themselves saved. Too many ministers are like the sign-posts on country roads; they hold out their hands and point the way, but never walk the road themselves; they, like the posts, still stand where they always did. God deliver us from being sign-posts on the road to heaven, and not going there ourselves! The builder uses many poles that are not part of the permanent building; but as soon as the house is up, down goes the scaffolding. So God may permit us to be scaffolding for his church, and when that church is completed he may take us down, and we may consume in the fire. Oh! may the Lord grant that this may never be so with any one of us. Deacons and elders of churches, the same may be said of you! If bearing the vessels of the Lord you are not clean, have not been washed in the great laver of the Saviour's atonement, do remember that this bearing the Lord's vessels will not save you. Just as the carrying of bread and meat by the ravens did not put them in the list of clean birds, but left them unclean still.

Now this is a very solemn subject, and applies to many of you now present. I do not know, but I am afraid that the worst place into which an unconverted sinner can go is into the church. While you make no profession of religion, and are still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity, we seem to know where you are, and we think you know where you are. You are, evidently, not on the Lord's side. But inside the church, and yet not converted, though you thought you were, what a terrible peril is this! You have been seen by the elders and they have carefully questioned you; the pastor has seen you, and used his best judgment, and been satisfied with you; the church has heard your verbal confession of faith and been content to receive you; you have been baptized upon a profession of your faith; and yet, if you are not soundly converted, the most dangerous place for you is in the church. We cannot get at you. When we preach our shots miss you. When we talk to the sinners you say, "Ah! that is not me—I am a Christian." You are numbered, you see, with God's children; you have "a name to live," and yet you are dead. If I were in a hospital, sick, I should like to have my disease correctly stated over my bed-head, but I should not like a card of convalescence to be there if deadly

maladies were still eating out my vitals. I would not discourage your making a profession. If you love Christ, keep his commandments, and declare that love. These are not the times when we can have a concealed Christianity. Profess it before men; other men profess their infidelity readily enough. Be you not ashamed of your Master; but oh! beware, beware lest you only be baptized into deeper sin, lest you eat and drink damnation to yourselves, not discerning the Lord's body when you come to his table.

Oh! beloved, I would be very earnest with you, and most earnest with those of us who occupy prominent positions in the church of God. We are so apt to think we may take our religion for granted. Take nothing for granted, my brethren, but our own possibility of self-deceit. Do not believe anything about yourselves, unless you have God's *ipse dixit* for it. I do love for myself to live upon God's naked promise. I cannot get farther than this, "He that believeth on him is not condemned." I do believe on him, my soul doth rest on him, I have no other hope, and no other confidence. There can be no erring here—if thou believest on the Lord Jesus Christ with all thy heart, thou art saved. Yet, remember, some make a profession of doing this, who are not saved. Oh! for God's sake, for Christ's sake, for his blood's sake, for his wounds' sake, for your own soul's sake, do not deceive yourselves. If faith does not make you holy, it is not worth a rap. If your faith does not make you hate sin and wean you from it, it is not the faith of God's elect.

We expect not sinless perfection this side the grave, but we do expect perfection in desire, perfection in intention, perfection in heart in regard to this matter. We would not tolerate sin; if we could get at it we would hew it in pieces as Samuel hewed Agag before the Lord.

O beloved, let these truths rest upon your minds and hearts! While there is comfort in the subject for the Christian as to providential circumstances, let there be a word also of self-examination both to him and to the unsaved sinner with regard to spiritual matters. May the Lord bring us all to his right hand in glory everlasting, and his shall be the praise for ever and ever. Amen.

### Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

#### PSALM CXVIII.

May the Good Spirit, who taught the psalmist to indite these words help us to feel their inward meaning!

Verse 1. *O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever.*

Now, do that, dear friends. Before we read another verse let us do that. In your hearts think of the goodness and mercy of God to you—to each one as an individual, and give him thanks now: no murmuring, no coldness of heart. Cast out everything, and give God thanks at this moment. It is the least we can do. It is to our own benefit to be grateful. How can we be holy if we are deficient in that simple matter? "Oh give thanks unto Jehovah, for he is good, because his mercy endureth for ever."

2. *Let Israel now say, that his mercy endureth for ever.*