

"Others, but Not Me"

Text: 1 Kings 17:8-16

God grant to each of you the wisdom and the honesty to recognize that the law does not condemn others, it condemns you. But then also to recognize that you are therefore also included in the list of sinners whose debt has been paid in full by Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

All expressions to the contrary notwithstanding, I don't know that most young people are "dumb" or "stupid" so much as they are delusional. Okay, so some of us were both, but the majority of young people are aware, for example, that accidents happen and people get hurt. The problem is that they are fully convinced that that sort of thing will never happen to them. Others, but not me. They envision that their *"Hey y'all, watch this!"* will be followed by something truly amazing – and successful. Other people drink, drive, and get into wrecks or get slapped with a DUI, but not me. Other people try drugs, get addicted and ruin their lives, but not me. Other people marry the wrong person for the wrong reason and get divorced, but not me. Others stop going to church and fall from the faith as a result, but not me.

What about you? Others, but not you? Most if not all of us are probably more that way than we care to admit. Understand this isn't just about the negative things; it's also true when it comes to the positive. Awesome, incredible things happen to others, but not me. God's promises of protection and unfailing love apply to others, but not me. Even to the point that forgiveness is deserved and granted to others, but not me.

This morning we will explore both the negative and positive of that mindset. Our goal here is reality. Our goal is to gain a greater appreciation for, and understanding of, what our God tells us in his Word, and how that Word applies not just to others, but to me.

The text that will guide us this morning is found in the Book of First Kings, the 17th Chapter:

^{ESV} **1 Kings 17:8-16** *Then the word of the LORD came to him, ⁹ "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you." ¹⁰ So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink."*

¹¹ And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." ¹² And she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die." ¹³ And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.'" ¹⁵ And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶ The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

So far the very words of God. These are *God's* words, and they are therefore altogether true and right in every way. Resolve then to meditate on them- to *focus* on them – accordingly, for they most certainly apply also to you. To prepare our hearts for the study and individual application of God's own words, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

How do you read the miracles recorded in the Bible? In other words, do you read them in sort of a detached way as something that happened long ago to someone else, or do you apply and take comfort from them, personally? Take the miracle described in our text for this morning. Did you hear these words as speaking only of an isolated event that happened toward the end of the Ninth Century BC (almost 3000 years ago) to a man named Elijah and the widow who sheltered him, or did they hold promise and comfort also for you?

The honest answer is that we tend to read about miracles as that which happened to others. I wonder if Elijah would have had the same attitude if he had heard that this happened to someone else long before he was born. I wonder if Elijah would have heard such a story and reacted with an "others, but not me." Right up until it was him.

Oh but that's not fair, is it? This story is about a miraculous intervention by God for a specific purpose, which was to keep Elijah alive until he had completed the work that God had assigned to him. Besides, miracles like this happened in Bible times. Things don't work like that today.

And yet here you and I are, aren't we? How many of you remember times when you weren't exactly sure where the money was going to come from to buy food and feed yourself and your family? And yet here you are. How many of you remember times when you were convinced that you couldn't face one more day? And yet here you are. How many of you remember times when you were filled with apprehension and foreboding concerning some dark, unspecified disaster that you felt certain was about to come crashing down on you? And yet here you are.

True, we have no right to hold God to promises that he has never made - which means we have no right to expect God to provide us with a miraculous, never-ending supply of flour and oil as he did for Elijah, the widow, and her son. But God *has* made promises to us, hasn't he. He promised that he would **"never again curse the ground because of man."** He has promised that he *would* **"never again strike down every living creature"** as he did in Noah's flood. He has promised that **"while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."** He has promised that if you **"seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"** he himself will provide everything else that you need. And it is, of course, God who gets to determine what it is that you actually need. And Jesus himself promised **"to be with you always, to the very end of the age."**

And here you are – not just alive but God's adopted children through faith in Jesus Christ.

Clearly then these promises weren't made to nameless and faceless others; they were made to you. And God kept those promises, as has always kept every single one of his promises – to you, to me, to every single human being that has ever walked the earth. God, who is truth itself, could do no other.

How then are we to read texts like the one before us this morning? Not as detached observers and certainly not as doubting skeptics, not when it was God himself who said to us through the Apostle Paul that **"these things took place as examples for us."** (1 Corinthians 10:6) That means that what happened way back when was not only recorded for our benefit (although that would certainly be reason enough to pay attention) they actually *happened* for our benefit. Note how Paul didn't say, *"These things were written down and preserved for us."* He said that they **"took place"** for us. Detachment and indifference are thereby excluded.

But then if God hasn't promised to provide us today with a free, never-ending supply of flour and oil, how are we supposed to *apply* what is described in our text to our own lives today? First, by using these words to reinforce our own personal conviction that God is fully capable of caring for and providing for every single one of us even in the most impossible circumstances. And that's not just true for others. It's true for me – for you – personally and individually. Second, we rightly apply what we read here when we acknowledge God's extraordinary provision *for us*.

We could ask a question here, but we already know the answer: *"Who here can give one example where God failed to provide for one of his children?"* The answer is no one, because, again, God promised that he would. God never lies. God never fails. Instead of looking back at Elijah's day and feeling detached from the fact that he got to eat bread and oil for the better part of three years, try looking forward to what we have today from Elijah's perspective. You will recall that in the days prior to his time with the widow and her son, Elijah ate whatever scraps of meat and bread the ravens brought him. Another miracle, to be sure, but would anyone here care to trade places? Which means that you and I actually have it *better*.

That's the message of our text – that God will provide not just for others but for *me*, and that he does so in truly amazing ways. But is that all there is to this text? Undoubtedly not, for we have seen, time after time, that God's Word is anything but shallow, superficial, or strictly secular. Everything in God's Word points inexorably and ultimately to Christ. How so here?

God kept Elijah, the widow, and her son alive in a most unlikely way and during absolutely impossible conditions. There was no food to be found, and yet they ate and lived. Shift this story from the temporal to the eternal and Christ becomes instantly apparent.

First of all, the work that Elijah had yet to do had nothing to do with Israel itself; it had everything to do with one particular man, born of a Jewish mother, who would not come on the scene for another 850 years. God continued to call the Jews to repentance through his faithful prophets (like Elijah) not because the Jews were better than everyone else (they weren't) but because he had promised to send his Son, the Messiah, through this race.

And Israel survived, by God's miraculous intervention, and you and I are among the personal beneficiaries of God's miraculous preservation of the Jewish race.

As in our text, there were times in history when things looked impossibly dark for mankind, when just a few of the descendants of Israel remained and their survival looked extremely unlikely – but for the fact that God had promised. That was always the ray of sunshine that found its way through the gathering clouds, wasn't it? God had promised. When pagan idols dotted virtually every hilltop in Israel, God's promise remained. When the prophets of Baal and Asherah outnumbered the prophet of God 850 to 1, God's promises remained. When the northern 10 tribes were carried off by the Assyrians and ceased to exist as a people, God's promises remained. When Judah was virtually annihilated by Babylon and only a tiny remnant survived as exiles, God's promise remained. During the 430 years of silence that followed the last Book of the Old Testament and the last prophet of the Bible, Malachi, God's promise remained.

And then, when He alone determined that the time was just right, "**God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.**" (Galatians 4:4-5) Is there any greater miracle recorded in all of human history? Obviously not. And yet to whom does this the greatest of all miracles apply? For whom was it performed? For others, but not me?

You know what, don't answer that. The answer to a question of that import and magnitude is, as they say, beyond our pay grade. Man throwing out an answer to something this important just doesn't cut it. Instead, let's let God himself answer. His is, after all, the only judgment that matters.

God gave his answer through Paul, writing to Timothy: "**The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.**" Now *that* presents a question we can answer. *Am I a sinner?* No doubt about that. But does God's promise of forgiveness include only *other* sinners, but not me? God again in Romans 3: "**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.**" Note that God's forgiveness can't be for others, but not me, because he told us here that the number of those who have sinned (which is all of us) is the exact same number as those that he has declared to be not guilty of sins (justified) because of the sacrifice of his Son. Therefore the very thing that should rightly cause us such alarm (that the law condemns not others for their sins, but me) is the very thing that proves that God's forgiveness doesn't apply to others, but not me.

This then is *our* promise, *our* certain answer from God himself. This is why we are to read God's Word not as that written to or about others, but as that which is written to and for *me*. These are *my* promises – from God himself. Will some be lost on God's great Day of Judgment? Tragically, yes. But there, by God's own promise and grace, it actually *is* true – others, but not me. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Hebrews 9:24-28** For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, ²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

^{ESV} **Mark 12:38-44** And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces ³⁹ and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." ⁴¹ ¶ And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³ And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. ⁴⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

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The 24th Sunday after Pentecost – November 8, 2015

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 463 (*Verses 1-2, 4-6*) (*Red Hymnal*)

"For All the Saints"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Scripture Lessons: (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)

The First Lesson: (Hebrews 9:24-28) The theme for this morning's service is "Others, but Not Me." At times these words represent truth, while at times such an attitude identifies great danger in our lives. Our first reading assures us, for example, that Christ died once, for *all* sin. Of note is the fact that Christ did not pay only for all the sins of others, he paid for yours and mine too.

Psalm 121 (*Supplement page 42*) (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Second Lesson: (Mark 12:38-44) Our Gospel lesson reminds us that not only has Jesus paid the sin debt for every human being, every human being had a sin debt that needed to be paid. Those who do not recognize the terrible weight of their own personal sins see little need for a Savior. In keeping with this morning's theme ("Others, but Not Me") we also want to recognize the evil in expecting others to financially support the work we are all called to carry out.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 616 (*Verses 1-5*) (*Red Hymnal*)

"Forever with the Lord"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Kings 17:8-16 (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)

"Others, but Not Me"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 342 (*Red Hymnal*)

"Chief of Sinners Though I Be"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (*Brown Hymnal page 17*)

The Distribution -Hymn 308 & 312 (*Red Hymnal*)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (*Brown Hymnal page 20*)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 616 (*Verses 6-8*) (*Red Hymnal*)

"Forever with the Lord "

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (43) Average (49)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – CLC Treasurer James Sydow has announced his plans to retire after the 2016 CLC Convention. Please pass along to Pastor Roehl the names of any individuals who might be interested in applying for that position. A formal job description is available from the Pastor.

Bible Class – We are currently exploring Biblical apologetics in our Sunday Bible Class. Apologetics involves giving a defense of the Christian faith and thereby learning to identify and remove obstacles that might prevent unbelievers from truly hearing and believing the gospel. Since all of us are called by our God to **"be ready to give a defense"** of his truths, all should be acutely interested in this study, which will better equip you to serve your Lord and your neighbor.

Organ Update – We continue to explore all options. We have also now been in contact with a CLC member in Markesan, WI (Teacher Barry Hay, formerly of Lemmon, SD) who also sells organs. Mr. Hay has agreed to submit proposals in the coming days. For more information, please speak to a Council member or to the Pastor.