

UNEDITED DRAFT

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's message is called truth and consequences. So let me begin by explaining the big-picture concept we are considering today. God has revealed to us his truth. He has called on us to hear and believe. The truth is there like a massive rock. You can either stand upon it and build your life upon it. Or you can resent that massive rock, and bash yourself up against it trying to destroy it. The rock does not move regardless of how you consider it. But there are real consequences for you in how you consider it.

So also with God's truth. He has revealed his truth. It is strong, foundational, unmoving, unbreakable, it's life changing. How you personally regard it has no influence whatsoever on its reality, its eternal nature, its power and its strength. Believe it or reject it, God's truth is what God's truth is. But there are consequences for you, whether you build your life on it, or decide to bash yourself up against it.

Now, let me briefly explain what it means to believe God's truth. Look at these statements that show a misunderstanding in what faith is.

- "I know what the Bible says so I must have faith." To believe is not the same as **to know** (to have knowledge.) There are people that know God's truth very well, and they do not believe it.
- "I believe there is a God." Faith is also not just **to be convinced** of God's existence. "I believe there is a God." That is to say, the person is completely convinced of God's existence. **THAT IS NOT FAITH!** Did you know that Satan himself is completely convinced that there is a God? He knows it for a fact. But that is not faith.
- "I believe God will just take everyone to heaven." Faith is not a hunch. It's not positive thinking. Faith is not the same as being optimistic or hoping for a good outcome. The spouse of a man convicted of fraud may say, "I believe with all my heart that my husband is innocent." This in spite of irrefutable proof and evidence that he is guilty. She desires with all her heart that he be innocent. But that is not faith. Rather, it is unfounded hope. There is nothing objective on which that faith is based, it's just the strong hope of a good outcome. True faith is based on the objective words and promise of God.
- "I hope I will get to heaven because I have a lot of faith." Faith itself is not a power and is not something that merits God's favor.

"I believe that I am not right with God and cannot fix it myself.

I believe Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. He fixed it through his perfect life and innocent death." So what is faith as defined in God's Word? **Faith is a trust and a confidence in God's Word and promises...** that his Word is true for you – to rely upon it. To rest your full weight upon it. To build your life on that truth. Faith. And where there is such faith, there are amazing consequences!

In our Bible lesson today we will see God's truth and the consequences of belief or rejection. We will look primarily at 1 Kings 17:7-16. **Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to [Elijah]: "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there.**

Now clearly we're starting in the middle of a narrative here. It's a fascinating one, so let me bring you up to speed quickly. Elijah was a prophet of the Lord. He was called to speak God's Word to the wicked king of Israel, Ahab, and to the people of Israel. Idolatry was rampant. No longer did the people care to listen to the Word of the Lord.

17:1 fills us in: **Now Elijah... said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."** So, God had spoken his truth to the King... his truth to the people. But they chose to reject God and his truth. Elijah says, "Well, Ahab, there are consequences for rebelling against the Lord. There would be a severe drought in the land, and that drought would be a reminder of the Lord's anger and judgment. The drought would continue for 3 ½ years.

TRUTH: Where God's truth is shared but faith fails, the word departs and God's blessings go with it. Now in this case, there was an earthly sign or warning: the drought and subsequent famine. But those were just warnings about the real problem: These people were under God's judgment. What they were truly lacking was the water of life and the bread of life. Separate from God, they would die eternally.

APPL: God has shared his Word of truth with us too. Do you take seriously his warning about sin? Do you rely upon fully his promise of forgiveness in Christ Jesus?

Doesn't it often happen that we believe what we want and when we want. When it comes to disobedience to God, we're perfectly willing to condemn the sins we don't currently struggle with, but conveniently downplay or rationalize those same sins if we do them. What I want to challenge you to do is to be honest before God right now. Where in your life are you choosing to ignore God's will, and do as you want to do?

- Are you cheating at school?
- Are you not being the husband or wife God wants you to be?
- Do you frequently criticize your children and fail to show them unconditional love?
- What do you love and cherish more than God?
- Did someone do something in your past that you just can't forgive?
- Did you do something in your past, and you can't forgive yourself?
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Typically, unbelief does not start with a wholesale rejection of all of God's Word. It starts with isolated unbelief of particular command or promises of God. Honestly evaluate: where do you struggle in your life to believe what God says?

The warning in our text is one we must take to heart. Where there is rejection of God's truth there is a dangerous consequence. God's blessings depart with that truth. It's not unusual for there to be earthly consequences to unbelief. Where we choose to reject God and his truth, life typically goes worse. Earthly consequences for sin and isolated unbelief include: broken relationships, financial stresses, sleepless nights, bitterness and anger, to name a few. These are earthly warnings from God that you are separating yourself from the source of every blessing. The more separated you are from God, the more unhappy and imbalanced your life becomes.

These are loving warnings from God that you're on a path that could end with an eternal separation from God. Isolated from God in eternity is the worst fate imaginable! A person is completely cut off from all of God's blessings – cut off from the only source of all that is good and right and happy and blessed and true.

But what are the consequences where God's truth is known and believed? Let's read on: **16 Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.** [So God had been providing for his prophet during the drought. He stayed near a brook that didn't dry up and God miraculously provided him with food twice each day as ravens came and dropped the food off. But now the brook was dried up.

Then the word of the Lord came to him: "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."

Now we read this command and rolls off our ears as just another place and just another food source. But consider how shocking this command was!

1) Zarephath. This town was in Sidon to the north and west of Israel near the Mediterranean Sea in the region of Phoenicia. Outside of Israel. God was withdrawing his truth and his prophet from his people. What a horrible punishment from God! The worst thing a person could hear from God is... *nothing*. And that's what Israel heard. God was done talking to them. God bypassed all of the widows in Israel, and sent his prophet outside of the promised land.

How odd then that God would send his prophet to a non-Israelite (Gentile) town that worship other gods! When you hear "Zarephath of Sidon" think, Baalsville of Gentileland. These were people outside the promise of God worshipping the false god Baal. What good could come of going to such a heathen place? But the prophet obeyed.

So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" [Not a difficult request... a little water.] **As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."** [This was a problem. Remember, the whole land is experiencing a severe drought. This woman was a widow meaning there was no man of the house to provide an income. In those days, women did not work outside the home. Yet Elijah asks for the bread.] **"As surely as the Lord your God lives** [note: Lord *your* God. This woman did not appear to yet know the true God!], **she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die."** [What a desperate situation! One more meal, then starve to death. That was the situation.]

Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'"

This woman who had not previously been exposed to the truth of God, now was. She didn't know a lot. But she has God's promise. "Don't be afraid." God wants her to know that there is nothing to fear... she must have been full of fear. Make me the bread, and God promises your resources will not run out until this famine ends.

Wow! There it is. The TRUTH. What will she do with that truth? Believe it? Or tell the foreign prophet of a foreign God to take a flying leap?

She went away and did as Elijah had told her. This is faith! That's what it looks like! She heard God's truth and then she relied up on it. She trusted it. She had confidence that it was true. And her actions were the evidence of her faith. She used up what appeared to be the last of her resources to make a small loaf for the prophet. She gave it to him. And God kept his promise.

So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

Where God's truth is believed, blessings follow. What God said didn't make sense. I couldn't have made logical sense to Elijah. Go outside of Israel? That doesn't make sense. A widow will supply what I need? If there is anyone ill equipped to supply the prophet's needs during a famine, it's a widow. And Elijah's command to the woman was just as unbelievable! Give you my last food and the supply will never run out? She knew basic math. If you have one, and you subtract one, you're left with zero!

There was no way to figure out ahead of time how God could possibly keep these promises. Yet he made them. And he invited them to simply believe. It seemed impossible. But Elijah trust. She trusted, and God did it! God worked through the most unlikely means to keep his word of Truth. And the consequence for those who believed? They enjoyed God's abundant and sufficient provision.

Friends, we talked earlier about the commands and promises of God that we struggle to believe. Yet God has invited you to believe, just as he did with Elijah, and the widow. He has invited you to believe that he is a God will provide. And he invites you: "cast all your cares, sins, anxieties upon me. I will take care of it all." Unbelievable! "Trust me," he says! "I will forgive you all your sins, cleanse you, restore you and make you holy and perfect in my sight." To which we want to push back. "I can handle this! I can do this! I can help and restore myself. I don't need your charity, God!"

But we do. Believe God: you do. Your sins have separated you from your God. Confess to him in humility.

Here's the incredible thing: God provides for our need of forgiveness. And just as that widow was an unlikely provider for Elijah, God has an unlikely provider for us. Jesus. God sent to earth his very best. Jesus gave the glory and majesty of heaven to do live among us on this sinful broken planet as true man. (Impossible! Why would he? There must be another way – an easier way to way to forgive us!) God says, no, Jesus is the way. The truth. The life. His perfect life was given on the cross as a the perfect sacrifice for all of your sins. That which separates you from God (sin) was taken by Jesus. That which connects you to God (righteousness) was given to you be Jesus. Rescue and forgiveness are found in him alone!

The one thing you can expect of God is that the fulfillment of his promises come in an unexpected way.

Know it. Believe it. Be convinced that Jesus is the Savior *of you*. Rest your full weight upon him. Rely on him completely. That is faith. Friends, believe this truth, and the consequences? A connection to God for all eternity... a connection that starts already today.

Listen to his truth. Believe it. Follow it. Live it. Build your life on that rock that never moves. Trust him and obey even when you can't figure out how it could possibly work. God will get it done... and most likely in a way you would never imagine. That's God's truth. Enjoy the consequences! Amen.