



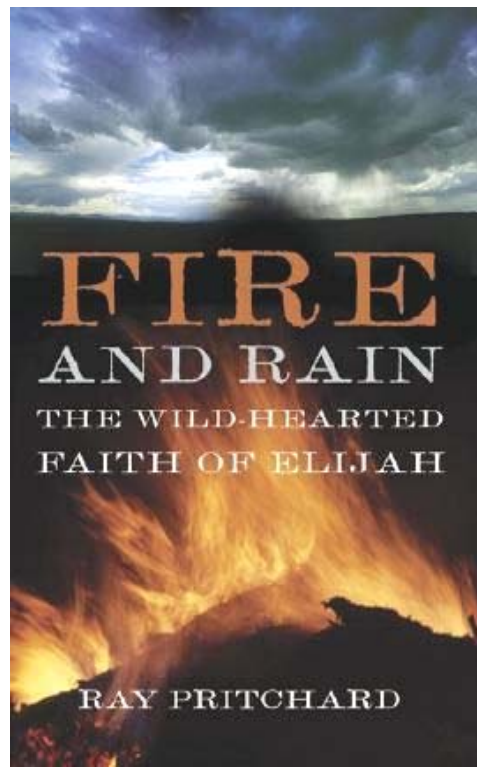
DEAN WELCH – TEACHER

Obedience  
Obedience and  
MORE OUT!!!

# WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JUNE 20, 2010

LESSON #3 FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:



# Obedience and MORE O-J-T!!!

The story is told of a man who was walking across the road when he was hit by a car. The impact knocked him on his head which caused him to be in a coma for a couple of days before he finally regained consciousness. When he opened his eyes, his loving wife was there beside his bed holding his hand. He said, "You know, Judy, you've always been right by my side. When I was a struggling college student, I failed again and again. But you were always there with me, encouraging me to go on trying." He said, "And when I got out of school and went for all of my interviews and failed to get any of the jobs, you stayed right there with me, cutting out more classifieds for me to check on..."

"Then I started work at this little firm and finally got the chance to handle a big contract. But I blew it because of one little mistake, and yet you were there beside me all the way. Then I finally got another job after being laid off for sometime. But I never seemed to be promoted and my hard work was never recognized. And so, I remained in the same position from the day I joined the company until now... And, through it all, you were right there by my side." Her eyes are starting to fill with tears as she listens. He says, "And now I've been in this accident and when I woke up, you're the first person I see. There's something I'll really like to say to you..."

He said, "Judy, I think you're just plain bad luck!"

I wonder if there are times when we treat God that way. Every time something bad happens, God is right there with us, getting us through the rough spots, holding us up, giving us strength, preparing and training us for what lies ahead. Yet, instead of appreciating and accepting it, we sometimes tend to blame God when bad things happen. Our hero today is **NOT** like that at all—even as he's headed for a little more **O-J-T**, or *on-the-job training!*

As we wrap up Week Three of our lesson from Dr. Ray Pritchard's book *Fire and Rain*, we see just the **opposite** response from Elijah, don't we? There's no blame game being directed toward God. Instead, we see Elijah's instant obedience and his growing faith in God—despite a 3½-year drought that causes him a problem. We've seen Elijah risk everything to become all that God wanted him to become in these last two weeks. And the challenge for each of us this morning is the same: **How much are YOU willing to RISK to become all God wants you to be?** Did anyone pray the prayer that we've talked about the past two weeks: **"Lord, do things I'm not used to?"** What will it take for you to become that man or woman that God wants you to be?

Open your Bible to **1 KINGS 17**. You will recall last week that we left Elijah at a brook in the Cherith Ravine after he appeared out of nowhere and confronted the evil King Ahab—telling him in **verse 1** that there would be no rain or dew for **years**—or until Elijah said otherwise. During the period that was what we called a *boot camp* in the ravine, you recall that God sent ravens to feed Elijah—bringing him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening. He drank from the brook until it went dry in verse 7! The result of his very prayer for no rain has resulted in HIS BROOK going dry too! So, what will Elijah do?

In **1 KINGS 17: 8**, we see the LORD speaking to Elijah and telling him exactly what to do. Follow along as I read a portion of **verses 8-10 (NIV)**: *<sup>8</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to him: <sup>9</sup>"Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. <sup>10</sup>So he went to Zarephath..."* Let's stop there for a moment. Look at the first part of verse 9 and the first part of verse 10 that I read. **What do you notice about Elijah? We see here a hint of why Elijah was used by God. What was it? [GOD TOLD ELIJAH WHAT TO DO AND HE DID IT—WITHOUT QUESTION OR HESITATION—IN INSTANT OBEDIENCE.]**

Last week we said that God sent Elijah to the brook not only for his protection—but for what else? HIS TRAINING! Well, guess what? His training is moving to the next level and Elijah's going to

experience a little *advanced ON-THE-JOB-TRAINING* in a place called Zarephath. I don't know how much Elijah knew about geography. It's possible he had never heard of Zarephath before. It was a small town along the Mediterranean coast in the land of Phoenicia. Although he may not have heard of Zarephath before, you can be certain that he had heard of **Sidon**. That was Jezebel's home town, the capital of Phoenicia. It was a center for worship of Baal and Ashteroth. Why in the world would God send Elijah to Zarephath, a suburb of Sidon? It didn't make any sense.

If I were Elijah, I would have asked some questions. "Lord, do you know what you're doing? Jezebel is after my scalp. Why in the world are you sending me into the shadow of her hometown?" He'd be a stranger in town and everybody in a small town would know he was there. If he introduced himself, he would be in danger of being arrested. There could even be relatives of Jezebel living in Zarephath for all he knew. Why there? **Have you ever questioned God like that and asked him, "Why?"**

Zarephath would prove to be a "**crucible**" for Elijah—a *place designed by God to further refine the prophet and make a major difference in the remainder of his life*. Chuck Swindoll, in his book on *Elijah*, says it was almost as if the Lord were saying to His servant: *"Elijah, I will turn up the furnace and melt you so that I might mold you far more exactly into the kind of man I need to fulfill the purposes I have in mind."* If you walk with the Lord long enough, you will discover that His tests often come back-to-back. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say back-to-back-to-back-to-back! As most of us know, usually His preparatory tests don't start with one or two. They multiply. As soon as we crawl out of one, there's another and the flames are hotter. But, it's during these times that we become more Christlike! Yet, how do **we** usually respond to an intense trial and time of preparation in our individual life? Do we say, *"Bring it on, LORD?"*

*In the western forest of the United States, there's found a pine tree with a unique method of reproduction. The cones from this*

*tree will only bear seed when subjected to the intense heat of a forest fire. Without the fire, the tree cannot reproduce. Difficulty and hardship often play a similar role in the life of the believer, although it is often painful and unwelcome. We are reminded that the blaze of trouble we experience is used by the Lord to multiply our fruitfulness in His kingdom and to prepare us for what's ahead.* Can you identify with this statement: **"You'll never know that God is all you need until God is all you've got?"**

Turn to **1 PETER 1:7 (NLT)** and follow along as I read a great verse about times of testing and trial: *"These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world."*

This verse helps me understand some of the "WHYs" I have about times of testing in my life. The specific reference that Peter makes about being tested as *fire tests and purifies gold* reminds me of something very similar from the Old Testament. Malachi 3:3 says that God sits as a refiner and purifier of silver—that God is like a silversmith. Several years ago at a craft show, I heard a silversmith describe his job. Here's what the silversmith says he does when refining the silver: *"I must sit with my eyes steadily fixed on the furnace, for if the time necessary for refining be exceeded in the slightest degree, the silver will be injured." And in that interview he said, "I never take my eye off of the silver in the furnace. I don't want to take it out too early because if I take it out too early, it won't be purified. But I don't want to leave it in too late because if I leave it in too late, it will be injured." So he said, "When the silver is in the fire, I focus. I don't let anything distract me, I let nothing take off my focus. I watch that silver carefully, waiting for that right moment to take it out." And they asked him, "When's the right moment?" And he said, "I know the silver is pure when I can see my face reflected in it."*

God knows what the future holds for Elijah, even though Elijah doesn't have a clue. Yet, we've seen a great example of obedience and faith in Elijah. Follow along with me as we finish reading our scripture from **1 KINGS 17: 10-16 (NIV)**: *<sup>10</sup>...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?" <sup>11</sup>As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread." <sup>12</sup>"As surely as the LORD your God lives," 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." <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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.' " <sup>15</sup>She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. <sup>16</sup>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.*

Let's think about Elijah coming from the backwoods—the mountain—to confront the king and then being told to LEAVE and HIDE by the river—which has now DRIED UP! He's been obedient all the way and look what happens! Let me ask you how you respond when God leads you to do something that YOU may not agree with? Look back at **verse 9**. The Lord is basically saying, "By the way, Elijah, I've arranged room and board for you. I've picked out a poor woman who is about to starve to death. She'll take care of you." If Zarephath didn't make sense, that made even less sense. So, how do you think Elijah must have felt? He was asked by God to be totally dependent upon a Gentile resident of a pagan town. And not merely a Gentile, but a woman. And not just a woman, but one who was a widow. And not just any widow, but a destitute widow.

Notice that God did NOT say, *"I have commanded you to go to Zarephath so that YOU might provide for a poor widow woman."* No. Instead, the poor widow was going to provide for this famous prophet of the Lord who stood before the king. Wow! This is a great reminder that it is often the most humbling tasks that prepare us for the higher, greater tasks. We often don't understand the circumstances or tests of our lives, do we? Joni Eareckson Tada says, *"When life is rosy, we may slide by with knowing about Jesus, with imitating him and quoting him and speaking of him. But only in suffering will we know Jesus."* We learn things about God in times of testing that we can't learn any other way. Why is that?

I think a trial of faith was also directed at the widow. I have to admire her determination. Several commentaries say that this widow of Zarephath was only around 20 years old. She had a young son that she dedicated her life to. She lived a very meager existence, struggling day-by-day, not just to make ends meet, but just to survive. Every morning she would walk about gathering sticks for the fire. For 3½ years there had been no rain. The ground was hard and cracked. There was no harvest in the field where she could have gleaned from what was left by the harvesters.

Wonder how many nights she went to bed crying out in her heart, "Where will I find the food for us to survive another day?" Somehow she had managed to scrape together just enough oil and just enough flour to bake one last cake. It probably wasn't even going to be enough to fill the hunger of her son and yet they must both somehow survive on it for a while. They were already weak from hunger and tired of the struggle. One more cake; one more fire; one more meal and then there would be nothing left. There was no supermarket, no corner grocery store, no neighbor to borrow from – nothing – nothing but another day to suffer and soon it would be over. They couldn't last long in their weakened condition.

Then along comes this prophet of Israel. She had some knowledge of who he was but not much. It seems that God had been preparing **HER** for Elijah's arrival. Maybe it was in a dream or a vision. Or maybe it was just in a still small voice that whispered in her heart that somehow she would make it through. Or, maybe it was just the fact that she had grown too tired, too weak or too hopeless to say no.

Yet, look again at how the widow responded in **1 KINGS 17:13-16**, reading this time from Peterson's paraphrase in *The Message*:  
*"<sup>13-14</sup> Elijah said to her, "Don't worry about a thing. Go ahead and do what you've said. But first make a small biscuit for me and bring it back here. Then go ahead and make a meal from what's left for you and your son. This is the word of the God of Israel: 'The jar of flour will not run out and the bottle of oil will not become empty before God sends rain on the land and ends this drought.'"<sup>15-16</sup> And she went right off and did it, did just as Elijah asked. And it turned out as he said—daily food for her and her family. The jar of meal didn't run out and the bottle of oil didn't become empty: God's promise fulfilled to the letter, exactly as Elijah had delivered it!*

Because she was willing to obey God, the widow, Elijah and her son were able to survive the long drought and famine. God provided **ALL** that they needed. Wasn't that what we learned in our memory verse last week from **PHILIPPIANS 4:19**? *"My God shall supply ALL YOUR NEED according to His riches in glory through Christ Jesus."* The oil would refill and the grain would multiply after every meal. God's power to provide for our need is not limited by what we see, only by what we can believe for and by the obedience and faith we put in him. Elijah was learning fast! What would have happened if the widow had disobeyed the prophet's command? She would have died, never having experienced the great miracle working power of God. Elijah, likewise, probably had his own plan for what to do to survive. **AND WE DO THE SAME**, don't we? We strategize and plan and say here's the way this should be done—yet we often leave out the

Master Planner—God! Your memory verse today is from **PROVERBS 16:9 (NLT)** and should be a help to you this week as you think about your plans: *"We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps."*

So, we've seen Elijah confront evil king Ahab, then he's told by God to LEAVE and HIDE by the brook at Cherith Ravine and last week we learned in **JAMES 5:17 (NIV)**: *"Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and **it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.**"* Then, the brook dries up and he's told to leave again and head to—a Sidon town over 100 miles away—and find a widow woman. OBEY! OBEY! OBEY! We see him following directions all the way. But, as is so often the case, before things can get better, they get worse.

Suddenly something happened that took both the widow and Elijah by surprise. Look at **1 KINGS 17:17 (ESV)**: *<sup>17</sup>After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him.* Here's another crisis in Elijah's life – and sometimes it seems that's what life is made up of, one crisis after another. You know what I'm talking about? You get one thing squared away and something else falls apart. You get one car running, and the other dies. You get the doctor bills cleared up and someone else in the family gets sick. It never stops – there just seems to be one thing after another. You've often heard it said, or said it yourself: *"When it rains it pours. When trouble comes, it seems to be in floods."*

And sometimes, the great crises in life come after some act of commitment, when you have determined to do God's will. There may be some area in your life where you struggle to do what God has called you to do, and you give way to the Lord and commit yourselves to obedience, and you think everything's going to be fine—but it's not. And you begin to wonder, *"What's going on? Here I am doing what God wants me to do and this is the result!"*

Somewhere we picked up the idea that doing God's will means that life will always go smoothly, that there will never be hard times or distressing circumstances. And that just simply isn't true.

In one of my favorite devotionals by Oswald Chambers, he talks about God's plan and our obedience this way: *"We tend to think that if Jesus Christ compels us to do something and we are obedient to Him, He will lead us to great success. We should never have the thought that our dreams of success are God's purpose for us. In fact, His purpose may be exactly the opposite. We have the idea that God is leading us toward a particular end or a desired goal, but He is not. The question of whether or not we arrive at a particular goal is of little importance, and reaching it becomes merely an episode along the way. What we see as only the process of reaching a particular end, God sees as the goal itself."* And one of the most significant points that Chambers makes in this devotional from July 28<sup>th</sup> is this: ***"We have nothing to do with what will follow our obedience..."*** WOW!

Continuing with our scripture from **1 KINGS 17**, reading **verses 18-24 (ESV)**: ***18**And she said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!" **19**And he said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. **20**And he cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?" **21**Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again." **22**And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. **23**And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives." **24**And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."*

What God is trying to do, throughout this account, is to bring Elijah and the widow to the end of themselves. It is only when we come to the end of ourselves and the end of our resources, when we use up all our own reserve, that we begin to recognize our great need for a dependence upon the Lord. And sometimes the Lord has to take us there because it's the only way he can get our attention and get us to realize what he can do for us.

As was pointed out by Dr. Pritchard in Day Five of your lesson this week, in our journey through Elijah's life, we have reached the end of his PREPARATION PERIOD. Next week we see him confronting the 450 prophets of Baal along with Ahab and Jezebel. Ugh! But, based on Elijah's experiences, what lessons can we learn for our lives?

**#1: *God's leading is often surprising; don't analyze it!*** If God leads you to Zarephath, don't try to make sense out of it. Just go! If God places you in a difficult situation, and you have peace that you are to STAY THERE, don't analyze it or run away from it. STAY PUT!

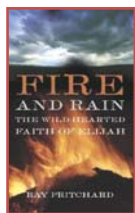
**#2: *The beginning days are often the hardest days—don't quit!*** First impressions can cause us to panic and want to give up and quit. Don't! Our adversary, the devil, loves to derail us, discourage us, and tempt us to quit altogether. Learn from Elijah's example. Not even a poor widow, who hardly had enough energy to gather a few sticks of firewood to cook her last meal, discouraged him. And God used his faith to ignite new hope in her and provide a reason to go on.

**#3: *God's promises often hinge on obedience; don't ignore your part!*** A promise fulfilled is often the result of our obedience. Before we can get to Step 2, we have to be obedient and do STEP ONE! Elijah obeyed the LORD and went and confronted Ahab. He then left and hid. He left again and found the widow woman. God's promises were fulfilled as the result of his OBEDIENCE.

**#4: God's provisions are often just enough; don't fail to thank Him!** Maybe you don't have the job you wanted, but you do have a job. Maybe you don't have the position you planned on, but His provisions are enough...just enough. If you postpone your gratitude until all your dreams are fulfilled, you could wait a lifetime and turn into a bitter and cranky Christian, always waiting for more.

If you want to really be a man or woman of God, it is essential that you face the impossible situations of life with faith, as Elijah did. Elijah approached the impossible with calmness and contentment, with gentleness and self-control, with faith and humility. Examine your own life for these character traits and take them one by one before God. He IS able! *"With God, nothing is impossible."* Because Elijah believed in the *"God of Impossibilities,"* not even death caused him to doubt. He lived his life standing in the shadow of God! And so must I! And so must you!

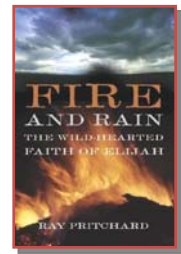
**Let's Pray:** Father, we thank you for this story which speaks to us on so many levels. We thank you for its encouragement. Lord, we confess that all of us have questions we can't answer. You do things we don't understand and put us in places that may seem to have no purpose. But we thank you that you are a God of providential purpose. Thank you for the gift of prayer. Give us Elijah-like faith. Forgive us for holding back and doubting instead of trusting you for the impossible. Teach us to pray effective, fervent, boiling prayers that the world may look at us and may say, "Now we know the living God is in this place." In Jesus' name. Amen.



© 2010 R. DEAN WELCH  
JUNE 20, 2010

# 3

## Obedience and MORE OJT!!!



1. God told Elijah what to do and he \_\_\_\_\_ It—without question or hesitation—in instant \_\_\_\_\_.
  
2. Zarephath would prove to be a “\_\_\_\_\_” for Elijah—a place designed by God to further \_\_\_\_\_ the prophet and make a major difference in the remainder of his life.
  - ✿ If you walk with the Lord long enough, you will discover that His tests often come back-to-back. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_!
  
3. **1 PETER 1:7 (NLT)** says, *“These trials will show that your faith is \_\_\_\_\_. It is being tested as \_\_\_\_\_ tests and \_\_\_\_\_ gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.”*
  - ✿ Malachi 3:3 says that God sits as a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of silver—that God is like a silversmith.
  
4. It is often the most \_\_\_\_\_ tasks that \_\_\_\_\_ us for the higher, greater tasks. We often don’t understand the circumstances or tests of our lives... We learn things about God in times of testing that we can’t learn any other way!
  
5. God’s power to provide for our need is not limited by what we \_\_\_\_\_, only by what we can \_\_\_\_\_ and by the \_\_\_\_\_ and faith we put in Him.
  
6. **PROVERBS 16: 9 (NIV)** says, *“We can make our \_\_\_\_\_, but the Lord determines our \_\_\_\_\_.”*
  
7. *One of the most significant points that Oswald Chambers makes in his devotional from July 28th is, “We have \_\_\_\_\_ to do with what will \_\_\_\_\_ our obedience...”*