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**You Want
Me to Go
Where, Lord?**

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Series: Living Legends - Part 3

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Look at him over there! A pathetic looking sort of character, wouldn't you say? I wonder what he did to offend God? I mean, this guy had great potential. He was first-string material. Why, when Jehovah needed someone to confront Ahab with the weather report, that's the guy He chose.

He had eyes of steel, a long bony finger of judgment to point at the king, and the kind of self-confident arrogance that leaders are made of. Now look at him. All alone. No one to talk to. Not even the tools to hunt for his own food. He just sits there day after day by that little brook. Every morning, a raven comes and lights on his shoulder with something in his beak. Yuk! It's breakfast. Ravens, you know, aren't exactly the McDonald's serving line. They live on insects, don't they?

Nevertheless, every morning (and every evening, too) this bird comes and delivers a corned beef on rye and then leaves. That's it. No fries, no apple turnovers, no chicken McNuggets, not even a kosher dill pickle. Nothing. Just meat and bread. No Seven-Up or Diet Slice, either. The guy just dips his noggin in the brook and slurps up a little river water. That's it. He must be in exile or something. *No one in his right mind would live that kind of life by choice.*

Who is he? His name is Elijah, and those of us who are "preacher watchers", were expecting great things of this guy. We had him pegged as the next Billy Graham, Bill Gothard, and Chuck Swindoll all rolled into one. But God must have known something we didn't know, or God must've seen something we didn't see. Indeed! Now look what's happening. That silly river is about to run out of water.

No rain, you see. This guy Elijah had been God's spokesman to warn the king and his people that because of the judgment of God, there would be no rain in the land, *not even dew in the morning*, until God decided to change the weather forecast. Now the prophet is being affected by his own prophecy. The brook's

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drying up! But this guy Elijah is not budging! Still he sits. Still he waits. He waits for the raven. And he waits for the next word from his God.

Don't you just wonder where God might send him next? So do I. Well, let's wonder no more. Let's tune in to I Kings channel 17, and fine tune our receivers to verse 7. There we will see the next act unfold as God continues to paint, in bold strokes, on the canvas of eternity, the ever-exciting saga of the Living Legend of Elijah.

Our outline, the second part of the four-part overview we gave you in the last study, looks like this:

III- You Want Me to Go Where, Lord? (verses 7-9)

A- The "Sometime Later...Then" Principle

B- The "Go-Stay" Command

C- Where, Lord? Why, Lord? Me, Lord?

IV- Now Look What Happened, Lord! (verses 10-16)

A- So He Went

B- With Mustard, Please

C- This Is What the Lord Says

D- She Went and She Did

E- In Keeping With the Word

III- YOU WANT ME TO GO WHERE LORD?

God watched as His living legend sat still by a drying brook, much more still than most of us would have been. God watched as Elijah waited, and waited, and waited. Now let's read what happens next:

Sometime later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.

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."

(I Kings 17:7-9 NIV)

A- Sometime Later...Then

"Sometime later" the Scripture records, the brook dried up. We don't know how much later. To Elijah, it must have seemed like years. In reality, it may have been only days or weeks. But the phrase, "because there had been no rain," indicates that it was a process, and a drought that completely dries up a brook is

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no overnight thing. So it's quite possible that Elijah sat by that stream for a month or more. And the passage goes on... "then the Word of the LORD came."

Not a second too late the Word of the Lord came. At the precise time that the brook ran dry, God spoke. Not a minute before. But, praise God, not a minute later, either. It is the timing of God's miracles and of God's direction that accrue such glory to Him. Oh, that we Christians would come to understand the "sometime later...then" principle. We so desperately want God to open the book to the final chapter and tell us how it's all going to turn out. We so desperately want a "preview" so we can begin to bolster our faith based on what we know God will do. But that's not faith. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is confidence in a person when that person offers no tangible proof that what He says He'll do, He'll do. You simply must take Him at His word. That's faith. And the longer He makes us wait, the greater the amount of faith is required.

Wherever you are in your pilgrimage right now, take the "sometime later...then" principle to heart. God knows you're hurting. He knows the river's running dry. He knows the sun is scorching, and your throat is parched and longing for Living Water. He knows. He will come to you and He will touch you and He will meet your needs at precisely the second that will best honor His Name. It will be "sometime later", after the process He has designed to change you has run its course. And it may well be much, much, later than you expect. But, trust Him, child. When it pleases His heart and glorifies His Son, sometime later... then He'll come to you and speak to you and show you the next step in His wonderful will for your life.

B- Go and Stay!

God spoke to Elijah now, and He was precise, as always. He told him all he needed to know at the moment to reach his destination. He didn't tell him what would happen when he got there. Chances are, Elijah might not have gone. No, *God reveals just as much of His will as is necessary to direct us*, but not enough to give us the chance to question His wisdom. You mark it. His next word to this legend of ours was, "Now get up and go. Go to Zarephath and stay there."

It would be one thing to go to Zarephath for a three-day

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evangelistic crusade. In all likelihood, Elijah didn't know a soul in Zarephath. No one. And he could probably see passing through, putting up his tent, and preaching for a few hours. But God had said...go...and stay. Now that puts a whole different light on His will. In other words, *If God were to tell you that the next place He sends you He plans for you to remain in*, wouldn't you be a bit more cautious in determining if you'd heard Him right? Think about it. There are so many places we don't mind passing through to do the will of God so long as we don't have to stay. We're willing to pass through the village of sickness, provided we get well. We're willing to pass through the town of poverty, provided it's only to visit a friend. We're willing to pass through the hospital corridors with our children, *provided that it's on the way back to the playground*. But, Beloved, the thing most of us can't handle is the long stay in the oven. God said, "Elijah, go to Zarephath and stay there." And Elijah said, "Yes sir." And Elijah went and did what the Lord commanded him.

Now I suspect that Elijah probably had to stop at an Exxon station at the edge of Sidon to ask directions. "You're going where?" the attendant may have asked. "Zarephath? Nobody goes to Zarephath," he might have mused. At any rate, such speculation aside, the prophet moved directly to his new destination, having been assured that a "widow in that place will supply you with food." This would be the ultimate humiliation. At least by that drying brook, nobody knew he was there but a raven, and ravens don't usually make the ten o'clock news. But now it would be front-page gossip in the denominational newsletter that Elijah doesn't have a church and is on welfare. A poor widow has to feed him, or he'll starve.

C- Where, Lord? Why, Lord? Me, Lord?

Now, Beloved, I think we will see unfold just how the will of God works. Here was a man, *who appeared destined for greatness*, but who, for some reason, had been shipped off to a more than rustic retreat house in the country, and allowed to watch as his provisions for existence ebbed slowly away. Now God was unfolding the second part of His plan. He was sending him to a little town *apparently* to be cared for by none other than a widow woman. It is at this point that we come to see magnified, like a transparency on a screen, a portrait of *the purpose of the will of God*.

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The will of God is not a plan designed by God to make man comfortable. It is not some kind of a plan book success for that, if we make the right moves, and find the right combination, will lead to a life of ease and prosperity. If it is, Paul was out of the will of God. Peter was out of the will of God. John was out of the will of God. Job was out of the will of God. And forgive me even for the analogy, if that is the will of God, then Jesus was out of it, too.

No, the will of God is not a spiritual ticket to easy street. It is often a one-way pass to "Tribulationville". Nor is it a plan designed simply to thwart the enemy's advances and make the best out of a bad world, as though God were in a corner and was simply trying to do the best He can. God has a strategy. His strategy is to take His soldiers out in the bushes long enough to make them soldiers, and train them. Then He takes them to *wherever the greatest need is* in the Kingdom and uses them. So the will of God is the plan of God to use the children of God to further the Kingdom of God.

That's why it's so pitiful to hear people make the will of God into a self-serving kind of theology. "Such and such church is not God's will for me," you hear people say, "because it doesn't meet my needs." Or "that job can't be the will of God for me, because I'm not fulfilled in that job." Or "I'm going to terminate this marriage because I don't love her anymore, so it can't be the will of God." Or "this ministry isn't the will of God for me because it's so hard." My friend, you search the Scriptures carefully. Then, I defy you to prove from the Word, that it is the will of God for the church to serve us. Jesus said He came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." Then He said to us: "As the Father hath sent me; so send I you." He didn't send us into the church to be served, but to serve. That's why, when someone calls you and says, "So-and-so in the church has a need, will you help?", the issue shouldn't be, "is it convenient," but "how can I help?"

You search the Scriptures and then tell me that your job is supposed to be the source of fulfillment in your life. So far as I can tell, work is the result of the curse, and it is to be done by the sweat of man's brow. It's probably going to be hard for most of us. The fulfillment comes from being in the will of God, and doing the will of God, which is working. The source of fulfillment in your life is Jesus Christ. Your job is God's way of a) meeting your financial needs, so you have something to give away, b) putting

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the heat on your character needs so you can grow, and c) placing you strategically on the mission field of planet earth where He wants you to be. Your job is not to enjoy it, but to do it. Don't be confused by today's "safe, secure, and successful" definitions of God's will. Just look at the Book, and decide for yourself how it works.

IV- NOW LOOK WHAT HAPPENED, LORD!

Now listen as Elijah's experience unfolds. He had lots of cause to cry out to God, "Now look what happened, Lord". Here was God, sending him to nowhere to be fed by a widow woman. "Don't worry," God had forewarned him, "I have commanded a widow there to supply you with food." Now remember that phrase, please. And let's tune in again and see just what happens:

So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks... (I Kings 17:10 NIV)

A- So He Went

Perhaps those first three words are more indicative of Elijah's heart than any others. The words were "So he went". God said, "Go", "so he went". That's the mark of a man or woman of God. The plan seems to be strange, indeed, from man's perspective, and at this vantage point, there seems to be no purpose in it. If the cattle on a thousand hills are God's, then why must God use a widow to feed his spokesman? Why not another raven? Why not manna from heaven? Why not? We'll see why not in a minute. The important thing is that, though God's will didn't seem to be making much sense at the time, God said, "Go", and that was all the sense Elijah needed. "So he went". God help us to do the same.

B- With Mustard, Please!

Sure enough, once again, God kept His word. Elijah had no sooner pulled his set of Samsonite off the Greyhound loading dock than he looks around, and there's this widow, kneeling down on the ground, playing "pickup sticks". Elijah, as we have noted, was not the shy, retiring type. He wastes no time asking for "dinner". Listen to the dialogue:

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?"

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As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”
(1 Kings 17:10,11 NIV)

Elijah must have gone tourist class to Zarephath and only gotten dry roasted nuts. He was hungry before he ever set foot inside the city. Testing the first widow he came to, to see if she was the one God promised to take the raven’s place, he asks her for a glass of water. Water, incidentally, was a scarce commodity by now. Nonetheless, our not-so-bashful prophet asks for some in a jar to quench his thirst from all those peanuts, and the widow quietly agrees and heads for the well. By now, Elijah was getting bold. For as she was going (that is, as she was going to get his water), Elijah hollers out, “while you’re at it, how ‘bout a sandwich?” You almost expect him to add, “With mustard, please.”

I mean, if God had sent Elijah there, and it was to be this woman’s job to minister to him, then Elijah was ready for the ministering to begin. His stomach was growling like a Great Dane, and he’d had a long bus ride to this side of nowhere. The woman’s response was hardly what our hungry hero expected. Listen:

“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.”
(1 Kings 17:12 NIV)

I don’t know about you; but I would have had a pretty good discussion with God about now. First, the raven courier service stops, then the brook evaporates, and now a new assignment. Had I been old Elijah, I would have expected to be rewarded for my faithful time of retreat by that brook with a festive banquet at the hands of my new chef. So I make this long trek to wherever, find the mystery woman, and ask for a meager sandwich to tide me over till the big meal. Then my meal ticket turns to me and tells me she’s pickin’ up sticks to cook what little grub she has left and roll over and starve to death.

I would be saying, “Now look what happened, Lord.” I did what you said, came where you sent, and now this.” (Pretty much the same song next verse.) You say, what went wrong? Nothing. Don’t forget. Elijah was in the will of God. What is the will of God? Remember? The will of God is “the plan of God to use the children of God to further the Kingdom of God.” The issue wasn’t Elijah’s stomach. The issue was a widow’s need...and the glory of God.

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Oh, that we could begin to visualize every choice God makes, every place God sends us, every circumstance God brings into our lives from His perspective. Not how it affects us, but how it affects the kingdom. How quickly we would see that those “wild goose chases” God seems to send us on, were never for our benefit in the first place. God has a plan. People are God’s plan. And He uses people to touch people. So the will of God for Elijah was to go to Zarephath, but not for his sake!

C- This is What the Lord Says

Elijah responded without as much as hesitating. Listen to his answer:

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.’”

(I Kings 17:13,14 NIV)

“Don’t be afraid,” the prophet said comfortingly. “This is what the Lord says, ‘Go home and do what you were planning to do; but first, by faith, give what you have away. You won’t be treated to a banquet at the Marriott, but you’ll never go hungry, no matter how long it is until it rains again.’ Because this is what the Lord says, ‘The jar will not be used up, and the jug of oil will not run dry.’”

D- She Went and She Did

These verses capture her response:

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.

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.

(I Kings 17:15,16 NIV)

She went and she did as Elijah had told her, and God went and did just exactly what He had promised. Once again, we don’t know for sure how long it was. But it was a long, long time. And every day, the miracle recurred. Every day, that jar of flour continued to produce just enough to feed the woman, her family, and Elijah. And every day, the jug of oil provided just what was

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necessary to meet their needs. Like the manna in the wilderness, there was nothing left over; but there was never a day when there wasn't enough. So every day, both Elijah and that widow were reminded that God was God.

Now, do you see why God sent Elijah to Zarephath? It wasn't because he had been a good boy by that drying brook, and deserved to be cared for by a widow who had been careful and stored up groceries during a food shortage. It wasn't for Elijah's benefit. God could and would feed Elijah. He had already proved that, with His "Rapid Raven Catering Service". The issue was the will of God. It was the will of God for Elijah to go to Zarephath. Why? For at least three reasons.

1- God needed to further test Elijah's ability to obey and his ability to believe. Because not too far into the future, this man was going to have to believe God enough to do what no other man had ever done. Before he could play in the big leagues, he had to do his turn in the minors. That's why God often takes some of us through the back roads and into the little villages of weeping. He's trying to see if we can learn to trust Him when brooks dry up and widows go hungry. He's equipping us to stand. It's why He's called us. It's called basic training.

2- God wanted to teach Elijah about the purpose of the will of God. You see, if Elijah had ridden into Zarephath on his Honda, and been treated to dinner at the Ritz, and lived happily ever after, he'd have never understood why God sends people where he does. He would have thought God was in the "GAIPY" business. You know what GAIPY stands for, don't you? It means, "Gimme, and I'll Praise You". God had a whole nation of people who would praise Him when He'd give 'em what they wanted. He needed at least one man who could learn to praise Him for who He is. So He called one man, and He took one man into the dark recesses of no-man's land and let him see what life was all about.

3- God wanted to reveal Himself to a widow and her son. The best way to do that was to send someone with His Word. Then, once she had heard His Word, He could keep His Word, and He would be glorified. So God called a man who had stood before kings, and who would one day stand before a whole nation, and He led him out to a little village called Zarephath, to see that a widow and her son were fed. That's how much God cared.

Don't you see, Beloved, what God was after? He needed to

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minister to her; He needed to teach Elijah; and He needed to test Elijah. So He planned this whole, seemingly unlikely journey because He is a Sovereign God, a patient God, and a loving God. It didn't just happen. God told Elijah just where to go, to whom to go, and what to do. He told Elijah just what to tell the woman, so the woman would know what to do, and who told her to do it. The will of God is not a vague, uncertain unfolding of events almost within the grasp of a frustrated Deity. It isn't some kind of general plan that leaves us to fill in all the blanks. It is specific. It is exacting. It is personal. And it is wonderful.

E- In Keeping With the Word...

And it was all "in keeping with the Word". That's what God was about. He was "keeping His Word". He was doing just exactly what He said He would do. That's why He can expect us to go and do what He tells us to. He always keeps His Word. The less we can see, the more faith we can have, based solely upon His Promises.

Wherever you are today in your walk with God, may I remind you that God has a personal, private, wonderful plan for your life. It may include drying brooks and starving widows; it may include standing before kings and presidents. It may include neither. But one thing is for sure. God has to take you to some out-of-the way places if He's ever going to use you. He's going to have to let some rivers run dry to teach you to trust, then let some people with needs cross your path, to teach you to love...all in keeping with the Word.

He's trying desperately to communicate to you and to me, just what the will of God is. It isn't manipulating God into improving our circumstances. It's the plan of God for taking the children of God where they can be used to further the Kingdom of God.

That's why you are where you are today. That's why the brook is drying up. That's why the one you counted on to care for you has come to you and is hurting. It's your turn to be used of God. It's your turn to stop taking and start giving. It's your turn to stop struggling and start letting God flow through you into the lives of those about you, whatever the personal cost.

It's called doing the will of God. So whatever God calls you to do in the days just ahead, why not plan on responding as Elijah did. He went and He did what the Lord commanded. He didn't answer "You want me to go where, Lord?"

He answered, "You want me to go? Where, Lord? I'll go."

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For Application

1- Try to imagine your response had you been Elijah by that drying brook. Can you think of situations in your life, or even perhaps circumstances in your life today, that are similar? What is your natural tendency when the brook begins to run dry? What did Elijah do?

2- Think about the “sometime-then” principle. Have you ever stopped to thank God for not showing you too much of the future at one time? Can you imagine your response had he shown you what would happen in that job? that relationship? That decision? Praise Him that He shows us enough to follow Him, but not enough to doubt Him.

3- Consider the “go-stay” principle, as well. How often we are willing to “pass through” life’s difficult places, so long as we can see sunlight on the other side. How often we are willing to take “short-term” tours of duty in the Kingdom, so long as we can be assured that we will return to the safe confines of what we are comfortable with, when it’s over. Get down on your knees and acknowledge before God that you want to be willing to not only “go” where He leads you, but to “stay” as long as He needs you.

4- Have you ever, like Elijah, been sent to a situation that you simply knew was a reward for being faithful, only to reach that situation and find a whole new set of problems? Have you stopped and asked God why? Most of us have. Elijah’s life serves as a reminder that God’s will is to strategically place us for the Kingdom’s sake, not ours.

5- Read the next incident in Elijah’s life (verses 17-24), in preparation for the lesson to come.

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