

## From Whence Comes Your Bread?

Have you ever stopped to think, “Where does my food come from?” Around here, I suppose it isn’t much of a question. Most of us, in one way or another, see the sources of our food every day. Golden fields of swaying wheat. Green fields of hearty potatoes or sweet corn. It’s all around us. We don’t wonder about it. Many of our brothers and sisters across the county, though, don’t get to see what we see every day. They may see a farm every now and then during a road trip. Some may have small gardens in their backyards. But I can assure that there are children in cities and suburbs alike who think that the supermarket is the ultimate source of food. Granted, it’s kind of cute on some level for a kid to think that. On the other hand, it’s sad to think that so many people are so disconnected from the source of what they put into their bodies.

For the most part, this wasn’t the case in the time of Elijah. There were no supermarkets, grocery stores, factories, or food additives. Most people didn’t even live in large cities. As a whole, people were much more intimately connected to the sources of their food, even if they didn’t grow it themselves. In Elijah’s day, it was rare to buy something ready-made. You either grew your food, or you bought raw foods. Either way, you made your own food. It was easy to experience the connection between man and food.

The problem in our text, however, doesn’t have to do with bread. It doesn’t have to do with farming methods, gardening, or cooking. If these were problems, Elijah would be working for the food network, not as a prophet. This great prophet, who mysteriously appears in the narrative a couple of chapters earlier, brings an ominous message to the king of Israel. “Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to [King] Ahab, “As Yahweh, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.” A great famine was coming, one that would last for over 3 years. For farmer and non-farmer

alike, that spells bad news for the production of food. Anyone hearing that message knows that water is absolutely necessary for crops to grow. Irrigation, no matter how advanced, can only last so long without rain. Soon, the people would be without a way to consistently grow food.

As dire as this sounds, the problem goes well beyond a drought. The problem is much deeper than that for the people of Israel. Their king, Ahab, is described in 1 Kings as “doing evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him.” As if this weren’t enough, Ahab married Jezebel, a Phoenician princess, who worshipped one of the Baals. Even more, Ahab made it the official policy of his kingdom that Baal was to be worshipped, not Yahweh. The text tells us that, “He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho,” something that Yahweh had specifically commanded them not to do, something that would cost people the lives of their children. He even persecuted those who refused to worship Baal. Long story short, Ahab makes Baal worship official and widespread.

You see, Baal was the god of fertility – fertility of both the people and the land. People worshipped Baal as the one who could bring rain and bring forth the fruits of the earth. They did all kinds of crazy things to persuade Baal to do this, most of which are R-rated, at best. If you were to ask a Baal worshipper, “Where does your bread come from?” he would likely answer with something like, “From Baal, of course!” The problem in Israel was not just a physical problem; it didn’t just involve bread. Much more, it was a deep spiritual problem. The people looked for the source of their bread, even the source of their lives, from somewhere other than Yahweh.

Things seemed to be spiraling deeper into chaos. In the chapter before our text, Elijah had just finished slaughtering all 400 prophets of Baal. Many of you probably know the rather famous story. Elijah had challenged the prophets of Baal to a sacrificial duel, of sorts. The prophets of Baal couldn't get their god to set their sacrifice aflame. Elijah, on the other hand, prayed that Yahweh would engulf his soaked sacrifice. God answered, in a BIG way. He burned up the sacrifice, the water, and even the altar. Yahweh showed himself to be God, the one Creator of the universe. He himself was the source of life, fertility, and power. After the victory, Yahweh put the icing on the cake by sending rain at his own command.

Imagine how angry Jezebel must have been! Her god had been shamed, her prophets slaughtered. And all of this because of one Tishbite Troublemaker. In her anger, she warns Elijah that he has 24 hours before she does to him what he did to the prophets of Baal! Who could blame Elijah for running? The two most powerful people in the kingdom – Ahab and Jezebel – were after him with a vengeance. He was alone, in despair, and with no source of bread or water. That is, until a messenger from God appeared. “Arise and eat!” Elijah happily obliged. And a second time, “Arise and eat!” Again, Elijah enjoyed heavenly hotcakes. He was renewed, revived, and restored. His strength returned. With those heavenly hotcakes, with that blissful bread, Elijah had the strength to go on for *forty days and nights*!! With power, Yahweh showed Baal to be no god at all, even in his supposed realm of power. Yahweh, the source of all sustenance, showed his power over creation by sending rain. He proved himself able by giving that troublesome Tishbite blissful bread to strengthen him for over a month!

In our great country, it's hard for many of us to imagine going long without food, let alone forty days and nights. Even with much of the country in drought, markets are still stocked with easily accessible food. For some of us more than others, it may be hard to feel truly

dependent for anything as simple as a source of food. Yet, the fact is, we are dependent. We're very dependent. Our lives and well-being, especially our sources of food, depend on many factors. Seasonable weather. Water. Food prices. Transportation. I'm sure you can name a hundred more. But, ultimately, we are truly dependent on God as the source of our bread. Luther says in his explanation to the first article of the Creed, "He gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life...All this he does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me." Where we look for the source of our bread really is important. Where we look shows where our trust is. And what we trust can either save and sustain us, or ruin us.

But, just like with the people in our text, our problems run much deeper than drought and famine. They run much deeper than the need for rain or the longing for food to fill our bellies. Sometimes, we can't help but focus our attention on our "daily bread." We have worries about our needs for this life. And, for most of us, we worry about much more than bread. It's not just "What am I going to eat?" It's also, "Where is my next payment going to come from?" It's, "Where am I going to find work?" It's, "Where will my healing come from?" There's plenty in this life to bring us down. There's plenty to make us despair – like Elijah – and to cause us to want to "run for our lives." There's sure enough in this world to make us search high and low for a sure source of comfort, or healing, or security. And, try as we might, we can look far and wide without ever finding the strength to make it through a long, sometimes lonely journey.

But blessed be the Lord, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we don't have to search far and wide to find such security. In the midst of despair or doubt, when we are most hungry to be filled with hope, we have bread. Not bread from the supermarket. Not even

miraculous manna, which the Israelites ate and still perished. We even have bread more blissful than the baffling biscuits that the angel of the Lord brought to Elijah. Our bread comes straight down from heaven. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst...For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lost nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." Why then should we look far and wide to fill us up? Our bread is here! The bread of life – Jesus Christ – who has come down from heaven! In him is our strengthening source of bread to, as Paul says, "be renewed in the spirit of your minds." No longer do we fear famine or drought. No longer must we worry about our lives or well-being. No longer can despair keep hold of us. Even persecution cannot empty our souls of what has filled them. Our source of bread has come – Jesus Christ the Lord!

So when you hunger and thirst, look nowhere else; seek out that nuisance of a Nazarene, against whom the Jews grumbled. When you feel empty, fill your souls with the Bread of Heaven. If you fear death, partake of the strengthening food that will sustain you in this life and the next, the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ. "This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Go, then, strengthened and filled with the bread that is come down from heaven – Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen

SDG