

GOD'S SECRET SANTA

I Kings 17, 1-24

February 4, 2007 Sunday a.m.

INTRODUCTION

- A. Three, week's ago Kansas City's ailing Secret Santa passed away.
 - 1. For the past 26 years he would search for needy faces, and without sharing his name, give out \$100 bills.
 - 2. After years of giving, Santa's donations totaled \$1.3 million.
 - 3. Only last year did Larry Stewart reveal his identity.
 - 4. He was suffering from esophageal cancer and thought it might be his last Christmas. It was.
 - 5. He wanted to make sure the giving continued after him.
- B. In I Kings 17 we can read about another Secret Santa. We don't know her name, but we know she was a widow from Zarephath, a coastal city in Phoenicia, today Lebanon.
 - 1. She was the famous Prophet Elijah's Secret Santa.
 - 2. She didn't give out \$1.3 million, but in some ways she gave even more, because she gave the prophet every thing she had, even down to her last meal.
 - 3. She didn't receive a generous spirit suddenly. It developed over a period of time. It followed a process.
 - 4. The same is true for most faithful givers today. They usually don't develop into givers overnight, it follows a process similar to the one this widow followed.
 - 5. What is it? How do people become Secret Santa's?

I. THE FIRST STEP INVOLVES A PERSONAL HISTORY OF SEEING GOD COMING THROUGH FOR US.

- A. Elijah teaches us this.
 - 1. God told him to announce a coming drought in Israel as judgment for their wickedness- **v.1**
 - 2. God then told him to hide from wicked king Ahab and he would be provided for miraculously-**v.2**.
 - 3. He obeyed God on both counts and God did take care of him-**vv.3-6**.
 - 4. He was not only fed, he was well fed. Meat was a luxury even in good times, but especially during a drought.
 - 5. When the brook finally ran dry due to the drought, God asked Elijah to trust him again to take care of him-**vv.7-10a**.
 - a. He was to ask a non Jewish widow to take care of him.
 - b. Few people in society would have been poorer.
 - c. He may have been tempted to stay where the ravens were.
 - d. Why did he leave two gourmet meals a day to trust a poor widow? Because he had a history of God taking care of him, meeting his needs.
- B. Do you have a history of God taking care of you and your needs?
 - 1. Many people here today do.
 - 2. Gay and I have such a history too.
 - a. Early in our marriage while I was attending OBU, money was so tight we didn't even have dish washing soap. Gay prayed about it one day while she was at work and when she came home that day a sack hung on our apartment door with a sample of dishwashing soap inside.
 - b. One Christmas in seminary money was even more scarce and someone anonymously gave \$300 to go to a needy seminary student. We used most of it to pay my tuition for the next semester and bought groceries with the rest. It was a wonderful Christmas that year because God met our needs.
 - c. Just last year God did it again. After paying our high medical deductible following my angio plasty surgery, we were faced with borrowing a large sum of money to

pay an outstanding debt. We began to pray about it. We would have to seek a loan if something didn't happen soon. One week before the money was due someone who isn't even a member of our church gave us a check that was within fifty dollars of the exact amount we needed. We have a history of God meeting our needs.

3. How about you? This history with God gives us confidence to trust God in the future.

II. THERE ARE OTHER STEPS INVOLVED IN BECOMING A GIVER. WE CAN SEE THEM ILLUSTRATED IN THIS WIDOW'S EXPERIENCE.

A. The first step is belief.

1. This widow, although not a Jew, believed in Yahweh-**v.12a**.
2. Before God commanded her to give anything to his prophet he already had a connection with her.
3. Trusting God can be scary. That's why God must win our heart before he can win our trust.
4. Has God won your heart?

B. The second step involves small tests.

1. Elijah asked this widow for water before he ever asked her for food. Remember there was a drought going on. Water was scarce too, but not as scarce as food. It was a small test but she passed it-**v.10b**.
2. Have you tested God in small ways in the past? When he meets smaller needs it gives us confidence to approach him with an even larger one.

C. The third step is to face a bigger challenge from God.

1. Elijah asked for her help a second time, but this time he asked for something more scarce, food. Her initial response is similar to the one people give God today-they just can't afford to give anything to God-**vv.11-12**.
2. Elijah challenged her to trust God by giving him food first-**v 13**.
3. If she would pass this bigger challenge, the prophet promised God would meet her needs-**v.14**.
4. How did Elijah know this? Because he had a history with God.
5. There comes a time in a Christian's life when God challenges us to trust him to meet our needs by giving to him first-**Malachi 3:10**.
 - a. This widow could have fed her son and herself first then if she had anything left over she could give it to God. She trusted God first, though—**vv.15-16**.
 - b. Many today promise God they will give just as soon as they can afford too. This widow couldn't afford not to give, because only when she did so did God meet her needs then and in the future. God will do the same for us if you trust him.

D. Giving then is a process.

1. It begins in giving our hearts to God.
2. It continues when we learn to trust God in small ways.
3. It becomes a reality only when God asks us to trust him in some radical way.

III. WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF BECOMING A GIVER?

A. A 4-year-old was in church when the juice and crackers were passed out for the Lord's Supper. His mother leaned over and told him that he was not old enough to take Communion.

Later, when the offering plate came by, his mother again leaned over and tried to coax the nickel out of his clenched fist. He held firm, though, and said, "If I can't eat, I won't pay!" He wanted results for his money.

B. What results can see in this story?

1. First, the needs of God's prophet were met. This woman's faithfulness resulted in ministry.
2. Second, the needs of the widow and her son were met.
3. Third, God met an even graver need in this widow's life when her son died-**vv.17-24**.

- a. This story reminds us that Christians, even faithful ones, are not exempt from tragedy.
- b. It also teaches us we can trust God for our biggest needs.

CONCLUSION

- A. On Dudley's birthday, there was a pilot in his small town who offered to take him for an airplane ride. After they came down following a thirty minute ride over this small town in West Virginia, one of Dudley's friends asked him if he was scared. Dudley said, "Well, no, but I never put my full weight down."
- B. Some people go through all their lives and never put their full weight down on God. You will never know how much you can trust God until you do.