

WHEN THE BROOK DRIES UP

The Lord provides Elijah with a brook named Cherith, that keeps flowing and sends birds (ravens) that fly down to bring him meat each morning and evening. So for three years, while other prophets were existing on smuggled bread and water, Elijah sits out the judgment of God with his own private spring and special-delivery meals! Everything was great!

Then one day... the brook dried up.

Well, I had a similar experience of “the brook drying up” last year on my way to speak at an evangelistic crusade in Canada. I checked my bag onto the plane as I’ve done hundreds of times - the bag that contained all my notes and written messages. When I arrived in Canada and opened the bag to reach for my notes - they were gone! I immediately called my wife back in Texas and said, “Can you look for them? I think I left them there.”

She looked everywhere, but couldn’t find them. So then I thought, “*I’ve just come from New Zealand - I probably left them in New Zealand!*” There wasn’t anything I could do, so I just preached without them. Three months later we returned to New Zealand - but they weren’t there either.

The harsh reality finally hit me - I had left about 30 major messages (ones I had no copies of) in a motel somewhere! Now you’ve got to understand that I only get about one or two major new evangelistic messages each year, so 20 years of my life’s work had just vanished with those papers. They were gone and I had no idea where I’d left them. Probably some maid found them in a drawer and threw them out!

It was a horrible experience. Back at home I went over and over the list in my mind until I came to the grim conclusion that I had lost all of them! I wish I could say that was the end, but it only got worse.

A few days later I was checking my bag onto another plane, this time on my way to a Christian music festival. When we landed I headed down to baggage claim, waited for my bag, grabbed it in a mad dash, and then rushed off to the music festival. When I got there I opened the bag and everything inside was a mess. It looked like a tornado had ripped through my papers!

Apparently, the bag had popped open, spilling more of my papers all over the airport, and the baggage handlers had just stuffed everything back in and jammed the thing closed! My precious new notes were now blowing around an airport terminal that was at least an hour and a half away.

I couldn’t believe it! Almost no losses in 20 years of ministry and then suddenly two major losses in less than six months! All I could say to the Lord was what I had said at the start of my ministry: “*Well, if they all get lost, I’ll just have to start again from scratch and do it better the next*

time around.” It was right in the middle of this loss that I came across the story of the brook Cherith.

The brook dried up!

Suddenly everything Elijah had relied on or found security in was gone! Now when this happened the Lord said to him, “*Arise, go to Zarephath... I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.*” (1Kin. 17:9) And it was at this critical point that the Lord began to minister to me, revealing the amazing truths that abound in this story of Elijah.

Nobody Has All They Need!

In the 1930s, Henry Sloane Coffin wrote an insightful message called *Inspirations That Fail*. The major theme of that message went something like this: God has a course for His children. Everyone’s curriculum is different. The only thing that remains the same is His aim, and that is to keep you confident in depending on resources outside yourself.

No one has in himself all the wisdom, all the ability, or all the means to meet the needs of the hour. You were never made to be wholly and fully independent. Each one of you has a friend, teacher, church, ministry, book, or idea that has ministered to you.

A friend? Have you got close friends, people that stimulate your heart, soul, and mind, people that you enjoy just being around?

Maybe a teacher awakened your appreciation and pushed the door open to new realms of learning for you. Maybe one day you read a certain book and it blew your mind and gave you a whole new perspective on life.

Maybe your security has been in a home some sanctuary that, when you crawl home at midnight looking like Clark Kent, can still send you out the next morning looking like Superman! (Maybe your special place has a phone booth where you can get a new cloak from time to time!)

Maybe your “Cherith” is a church where there are people of like mind and heart. You really feel a part of something vibrant and alive there, like you’re going places for God.

Maybe your “river of God” is an idea, something that lights up your whole world with vision.

Maybe it’s a job, a business, or a ministry - and your “flowing stream” is the one thing you enjoy doing most in this world.

But One Day... The Brook Will Run Dry!

Has it happened to you? What happened to that one special friend? It wasn’t like you had a fight - as a matter of fact, you may still be on the best of terms. But something has changed,

and for some reason you just aren't that close anymore. You may see them just as much, but somehow it means less. And that's a really scary thing. Or perhaps your paths have moved in different directions and, slowly but surely, you have grown apart.

Maybe for you it's a teacher, somebody you've outgrown. A man or woman at whose feet you used to sit when you were 20, but now you're 30 or 40 and you may be viewing them a bit more critically.

Or maybe there's a book that 20 years ago blew your mind, but you read it again now and it's merely amusing. Perhaps it really was good, but like an old song full of nostalgia - it's just a sweet memory in unrepeatable history.

Maybe it's a place. How many times have you shifted houses? Is the place where you grew up, or spent the best years of your life, now gone? Maybe somebody else lives there now. Maybe it burned down or a developer ripped it up and it's no more. The brook dried up and you had to move on.

And even in ministry it's the same. Sometimes the work is done, or you can't do what you did before and somebody else comes in to take over. Or maybe the church that you are in has lost its spiritual appeal. People have moved or changed. Maybe you have changed and the water that used to be a fountain of heaven for you has diverted into side channels. And the ideas that changed the world for you then may not satisfy anymore. No one person, place, or thing throws light on all the mystery.

The brook has run dry.

Cherith Cannot Always Satisfy!

How easy it could have been for Elijah to stay by his brook! It was his ongoing testimony of the supernatural protection and provision of God. Cherith proved that he was watched over and cared for and loved by God. And herein lies the danger of our Cheriths. Hang around them too long, and you get attached to the situation. Stay by the brook too long and you may fall in love with the brook and forget the God who gave it to you.

Privilege Can Turn To Pride

Cheriths loved too long can make you proud. They can make you forget that you are a stranger and a pilgrim passing through - that this world is not your home and that beyond the brook there still lies a hurting world under the dealings of God.

Elijah could have enshrined his special secret spring. When the birds delivered breakfast each morning and Elijah contentedly dipped a jug into his private Perrier, he was probably tempted to think: *"It shows how special I am. God's provided the brook and the ravens - what other prophets ever got this kind of treatment?"*

Cherith Is For Rest... Not Recluse

Perhaps you've been tempted to rest from the quest for others - to become reclusive, quit the battle, and stay near a free-flowing stream. So God arranges the end of Cherith. The brook dries up. It is time to move on, and the drying up of the brook is the gentle nudge of God back into the work, which the Father has called you to do.

When Cherith stopped flowing, Elijah *had* to follow God's command to go to Zarephath. Here is a man who once destroyed false prophets, and now God is sending him to the home of a widow and her son who are about to share one last meal before they starve to death!

What kind of God is this who sends Elijah from a place of miraculous provision to this kind of scene? The same kind of God who loves all people as much as He loves His prophets! Sometimes constant provision and protection can insulate us from the sadness of our world until we no longer understand what it means to be outside of His care. We forget what it feels like to be lost.

Blessings Can Become Barriers

If the brook had kept on flowing, Elijah might have counted on it and forgotten the God who gave it. The blessings of God for our shelter and sustenance can sometimes become the very barriers that keep us from Him - and God will not allow that. Cheriths *cannot* be permanent.

We dwellers in the latter half of the 20th century live in a future-shock world where nothing seems to last. It is one of the single most frightening characteristics of our time. What lasts? What remains? What will always be there?

When we consider "created things" like people, ministries, places, or ideas, our experience tells us that little or nothing of what we know will stay the same. Best-selling books of years past are now in bargain bins, ideas change as fast as rock stars, and you are not the same as you were ten years ago.

As Thomas Hardy once said: *"It is the ongoing of the world that makes it sad. If the world stood still at a happy moment there would be no sadness in it. The sun and the moon standing still at Aijalon was not a catastrophe for Israel, but a type of paradise."* Yet even a stationary heaven and earth would become dull at last.

Child of God, don't cry too long over your brook. Lift up your eyes again to the God who gave these blessings - there is something better to come. Though you may miss your brook, you will not miss God! A brook and birds don't show you as much of God as a mother and child do. Your new course will move you from the valley to Bethlehem, and He will again hold your heart with the only thing that lasts forever, changeless and secure - Himself.