



Reflections on 1Kings 17:1-16 [2] Waiting in a lock-down

There are many things we might focus on in these events, but this aspect especially struck me, in our present situation. Both Elijah and the widow were forced into a lock-down. Elijah is sent into complete social isolation, and the widow and her son are sliding into the ultimate isolation of death. Both of them, in their own situations were waiting for the lock-down to end. They are waiting. But the ending is not for them to determine. They are participants in a situation that they have no control over. The ending of the crisis, the ending of their lock-down waits on God's purposes and timing.

The widow and her son are trapped in a famine. Like us they had no idea that events in another nation would lead to their suffering, to their lock-down. We and she are both doing what we can to get through. And sadly so many people in our situation are confronted by death. She had no idea that God was coming to rescue her; by contrast, however, we are like Elijah, we are waiting in trust in the Lord, trusting in Him, waiting while the crisis unfolds, under His sovereign authority. Elijah knew that one day God would call him back to declare the end of the drought. But between his being used to call the drought into being and the certainty of his being used to bring its ending there was nothing he could do but wait. First, totally alone. Then as a boarder in the house of a stranger, in a land that was not his own. Waiting for God to bring all things through to His timing.

Yet I wonder, as a question, whether we, in our own current situation are waiting more like the widow and her son than Elijah? They waited as victims of events. Elijah waited as a trust-holder in the sovereignty of God. Do we see 'waiting' as wasted time between the hope of and the arrival of going back to normal? But it may be that God calls us to see it as His preparation time, for making us ready to cope with His new future. A time calling us to deepen our relationship with Him. A time to stand firm in our hopes in Him. A time in which the struggles of depending upon Him challenge our tendency to depend on ourselves and so [re]form us for the life He will call us into, after the waiting is over. This may be as an individual, as a family of faith, but it will be a new life.

Elijah's God-called waiting reminded me of Abraham and Sarah waiting for Isaac, and then, in the enjoyment of the gift of the child, Abraham's faith being tested by God's call to sacrifice Isaac. A call to a challenging obedience which turned out to be God's way of proving Abraham's faith as genuine, and affirming his fitness to be the father of faith through whom God's worldwide blessing could flow.

And it reminded me of Joseph, waiting in the dungeons of Pharaoh for so many years and then, in his freedom as the 2nd in the kingdom preparing that community for a famine, he meets his brothers again, who had sold him into slavery. He could have imprisoned them, but instead he forgave them, facing and overcoming a test of mercy. And it reminded me of David, anointed to be king as a boy by Samuel, suffering years of waiting while Saul still ruled. Saul indeed endeavouring several times over many years to kill David. And David himself facing an opportunity to come into his kingship by killing Saul. The temptation he refused to take.

And it reminded me of Jesus, who waited from before creation for the right time to save us, and then waited in social obscurity, in the flesh, for some 30 years - waiting for the right time to come into His mission, calling us to the kingdom, evading enemies, all the while waiting for the right time to surrender Himself to the cross.

Is this lock-down for us, a time just to get through, a time to be suffered until once more we can hug what we have been missing? Are we like travellers caught in an unexpected and wearisome detour that frustrates our ways? Yet may it be that our wait is God's way to re-form our faith and trust in Him, our togetherness with each other and our approach to being His light for others, a preparation for times of challenge coming – perhaps to us as individuals, perhaps to us a church family - times of faith choices; times when we'll be called to put what God wants first, not what we want; to put the new things of God before the things we used to do; times of invitation to take up our cross; times for fresh faith choices; times when we need to be able to walk clearly and straightly and truly in the Lord, without looking back, as the Israelites did, to how things used to be, times when we are to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus who leads us forward into His new future, times for which God is preparing us to trust Him for His care and protection as we enter His new kingship future. Amen.