

***Avoiding PPS
(Pew Potato Syndrome)
1 Kin 17:8-16***

Intro: The last two weeks I have used the term **Boat Potato** and I know some of you have been able to make the transition from **Boat Potato** their own walk of faith. Today I want to help make the transition from there to our church.

If the 11 men who remained in the boat when Peter stepped out are **Boat Potatoes** then Christians who set in their pews while others around them step out by faith to accomplish extraordinary things for the Lord would be **Pew Potatoes**. Hence, the meaning behind my sermons title for today, **Avoiding PPS (Pew Potato Syndrome)**.

One of my favorite heroes in Scripture is found in 1 Kings 17:8-16. She doesn't have a name, she is known only as **The Widow of Zarephath**. That's right...she is one of my favorite heroes. The reason is she doesn't suffer from **PPS (Pew Potato Syndrome)**. In this woman we find the **qualities necessary to Avoid PPS**.

[1 Kin 17:8-16/pray/Dismiss Jr. Church]

Ahab (873-851 B.C.) was one of Israel's strongest kings. He maintained military superiority over Syria, and in a vital battle with the Assyrians at Qarqar in 854 B.C., Ahab supplied the largest single force to the allied Palestinian forces that threw them back. Yet Ahab was an essentially weak individual. Spurred on by his strong-willed wife Jezebel, Ahab established Baal worship and wicked Asherah rites in Samaria itself, and set out to make his dangerous form of Baal worship the official religion of Israel. No wonder 16:33 says that **"Ahab did more to provoke the LORD**

God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him."

To this strong but weak king Elijah says that as a result of his evil ways there will be a long drought. Right away the Lord tells Elijah to hide by the brook Cherith. We might like to know how Elijah escaped from Ahab; but the whole story is marked by sudden appearances and disappearances. He flashes into sight and flames for a moment, and then is swallowed up in the darkness again. The exact position of the brook Cherith is doubtful but it seems natural to look for it across Jordan, a safer and more familiar ground to Elijah than any of the tributaries on the western side.

It is here that the Lord said he could drink from the brook and He had commanded the Ravens to feed him. But a good thing only lasts so long and after a while the brook dried up because of the lack of rain in the land. Now I am sure that Elijah thought, *"I could have told you this was going to happen; no rain always results in dry brooks."* So I imagine that he began to cry out to the Lord what he was to do next. And sure enough the Lord responded, he tells him to go to Zarephath, a town on the Mediterranean coast between Tyre and **Sidon** in Phoenicia, the homeland of Jezebel and the very heart of Baal worship...the false religion the started this entire story.

Because of his close relationship with his Lord even this directive didn't seem too out of place but certainly one he didn't look forward to. So he girded up his loins, and left, no doubt reluctantly, the brook for a city. How his heart must have been encouraged when the first person he sees outside the little 'city' is 'the widow'!

Begin a widow and living in a Gentile land she would not have been a rich widow but a poor one. Widows were usually the poorest people in the land and in Gentile during a drought even more so since Zaphath got all its food from Israel before the famine.

This poor widow woman was destitute and desolate and it is she whom God is going to command to care for his prophet. And, as we will see that by God's empowerment, she is both able and willing to care for him. It is God's way, and it is to his glory, to make use of the *weak and foolish things of the world* and put honour upon them. 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 tells us that, "**...God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and...the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised...and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.**"

In many ways he is the widows' God, and feeds them, and therefore they must learn what they should give to him. She was very poor and in need herself. She would have had, under normal circumstances, very little, but now, under these extraordinary circumstances she had nothing to live on but a handful of meal and a little oil. Her plans – not God's however – were to fix a meal for her son and herself, go eat it and then wait to die. She was so poor that she didn't even have fuel to cook on but had to go out and gather a few sticks to use as fuel. Looking at her current circumstances one would have to agree that she was in no situation to help anyone; in fact she was, herself, in need of help from some man with a good meal.

It was to her that God sent Elijah; now we can read the text and see that by God sending him to her it was another opportunity for God to provide for his faithful servant. But there was another reason God sent him to this widow woman; God didn't send Elijah to her to beg from her but to board with her and he was going to pay very well. God had compassion on her destitute and desperate circumstances and if she didn't suffer from **Pew Potato Syndrome** she would receive a blessing few before or since have realized.

It is in this widow woman that we find the qualities of someone who has overcome or avoided **Pew Potato Syndrome**.

What are the qualities necessary to Avoid Pew Potato Syndrome?

To Avoid Pew Potato Syndrome we...

- I **Must Be Humble and industrious** Vv.10, 12
 - a) Elijah found her gathering sticks and preparing to go to her home and bake her bread.
 - i) She isn't setting around waiting on a handout from someone
 - ii) She is taking things into her own hand
 - iii) She may not have a lot but she isn't going to rollover and play dead.
 - iv) She is going to go down fighting – **That's industrious**
 - b) She didn't complain about her hardship nor did she try to argue with God's man and by extension God's divine will for hold back the rain
 - i) She simply told him her situation and plans – I only have a handful of meal and a small curse of oil; I had planned to make my son and me a cake and then wait to die.

- ii) After doing so she accommodated herself to his request as best she could
- c) Her humility comes through in another way as well.
 - i) When Elijah asks her for a *"morsel of bread..."* in verse 11 her response shows a very humble heart.
 - ii) Her response is the kind of response necessary for those who seek salvation through Christ
 - iii) We must acknowledge that God, not just any God as the world might have us believe but
 - (1) The very, God spoken of in Scripture...
 - (2) The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
 - (3) The God who was and is and is to come
 - (4) The God who humbled Himself and wrapped Himself in frail humanity in the form of Jesus Christ and came to pay our sin debt
 - (5) The God who raised Christ from the grave
 - iv) Whether this widow knew God or know of him she humbled herself when she said *'As the Lord thy God liveth...'*
 - v) Thank God that the Holy Spirit humbled my heart to acknowledge the living God
- d) What does some with **The Pew Potato Syndrome** look like?
 - i) **Pew Potatoes** tend to make excuses as to why they can't do something by faith:
 - (1) If this woman would have been suffering from **Pew Potato Syndrome** she would have said things like:
 - (a) Man don't you know there is a drought going on?
 - (b) There is barely enough water for me and my family

- (2) How to tell if you suffer from **Pew Potato Syndrome**
 - (a) Do you make excuses when asked to give of your meager holdings?
 - (b) Do you tend to argue – maybe not out loud but in your mind – with God's man when he speaks of needing volunteers, helpers or special offering or tithe and Faith Promise?
 - (c) Do you duck behind the person setting in front of you when an announcement is made that a group needs some help setting up for some ministry?
 - (d) Do you actually look for excuses to keep from giving money or belongings to the church or church families in need?
 - (e) Do you tend to think "Me First" when it comes to any request for help at the church
 - (f) Do we tend to use the "I'll pray about it" as a way to say no when asked to sign-up for a retreat or conference.
 - (g) If you can relate to any of these – and there are plenty more – then you might suffer from **Pew Potato Syndrome**

To Avoid Pew Potato Syndrome we... Must Be Humble and Industrious

- II **Need To Be Charitable and Generous** Vv. 10, 11
 - a) Elijah asks her to bring him a small vessel of water so he could have a drink
 - i) When the man of God asked her to get him a drink of water she willingly and readily went off on the first word

- (1) This may not seem like a big deal to you but remember what is going on – they were in the middle of a drought.
- (2) Water would have been at a premium – but she didn't object even with the scarcity of water
- ii) Neither did she ask him what he was going to give her for the water – by now, with the drought it would have been worth something
- iii) She didn't use that fact that he was a stranger and a foreigner and an Israelite
 - (1) It is highly likely that Sidonians and the Israelites cared little for each other by this time
 - (2) The Sidonians were no more than Gentile dogs to the Jew much like the Samaritians.
- iv) She didn't excuse herself on account of her lack due to the famine
- v) She didn't use the urgency of her own situation
- vi) She didn't tell him she didn't have time or something more important to do that run errand for him
- vii) She stopped what she was doing – gathering sticks -- didn't complain but just started off to get him a drink.
- b) **The Pew Potato Syndrome** compared
 - i) A symptom of **The Pew Potato Syndrome** is a selfish, me first, self-centered focus.
 - ii) They tend to be a strong unwillingness to help others
 - iii) They tend to think in terms of **“What's in it for me”** when asked to give or help others even when their church asks.
 - iv) They tend to find excuses not to give or participate – they set in the pew and watch while others do
 - v) Because of...selfish and self-centered
 - (1) Their circumstances ...more important
 - (2) Their time...more valuable

- c) You might be suffering from **The Pew Potato Syndrome**
 - i) If, when the annual budget is presented your only reason for attending is to make sure you don't have to give more or that your pet program or ministry doesn't get cut
 - ii) If you find yourself unwilling to be moved to help in any situation at church
 - iii) If, when the annual faith promise commitment is taken, you are either conveniently sick or out of town or sick to avoid having to make the commitment
 - iv) If you find yourself asking “What do I get giving the tithe each week?”
 - v) If these and other thoughts like them come to you then you might suffer from **Pew Potato Syndrome**

To Avoid Pew Potato Syndrome we...Must Be Humble and industrious; Charitable and Generous

- III **Have Great Confidence In The Word Of God** Vv. 14 -16
 - a) As she goes – Elijah obviously seeing that she must have been the one the Lord had commanded – asks her to bring him a bite to eat too.
 - i) At his request she did take the occasion to tell God's man her circumstances – not complaining mind you just laying it on the line
 - ii) She didn't embellish it for his sake – things were really as bad as she said they were
 - b) Therefore, it was a great test of her faith and obedience when, after telling him how bad things were
 - i) That she had just enough to feed herself and her son and then wait to die
 - c) He asked her to go and make a cake for him and to make it for him first then for herself and her son.
 - i) If we stop to think about it, it is highly unlikely any one here has ever had their faith tested to such a degree

- ii) Who among us have been facing certain death except for one small thing and have the Lord tells us to give that one small thing to his use or his man?
 - iii) She could have said, *“Let the children first be served”* or *“charity begins at home don’t you know, I cannot be expected to give, having this little, and not knowing when it is gone where or when or even if there will be more”*
 - iv) She had more reason than Nabal to ask, **“Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?”** (1 Sam 25:3).
 - v) Elijah had mentioned the Lord God of Israel but what was that to her?
 - (1) There is not total agreement on whether this widow as a believer in the Jewish God because of the **“...As the LORD thy God...”**
 - (2) Some commentators get hung up on the word *thy* claiming that it means it was Elijah’s God not hers
 - (3) Others say it was a way of telling Elijah that she too believed in his God.
 - (4) I tend to believe that she was a believer in Elijah’s God
 - vi) Even if she had a reverence for the name of *Jehovah*, and valued the God of Israel as the one true God, yet what assurance had she that this stranger was his prophet or had any authority to speak in his name?
 - vii) It would have been very easy for a hungry vagrant to impose upon her.
- d) She gets over all these objections and obeys the precept in dependence upon the promise, **“...she went and did according to the saying of Elijah...”** (v. 15).
- i) What great faith this woman showed

- ii) There had not been a woman of such great faith before in all of Israel.
- iii) In many ways her faith might in fact be greater than the widow who, when she had but two mites, cast them into the treasury (Mk 12:42; Lk 21:2).
- iv) She took the prophet’s word, **“...thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth”** (V. 14).
 - (1) That she would not suffer loss by obeying
 - (2) That it would be repaid to her household with interest is seen in verse 16, **“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah”**
- e) **The Pew Potato Syndrome** compared
 - i) The person who suffers with **Pew Potato Syndrome** finds it nearly impossible to trust God’s Word
 - ii) They may pray like Peter did in the boat, *“If it is you bid me come”* but they hope in their hearts God doesn’t bid them come.
 - iii) When he responds by simply saying, *“Come”* they find themselves setting their among the 11 **Boat Potatoes** watching as others get the thrill of trusting in God’s mighty power and provision
 - iv) They cringe when they here the preacher announce that today text is Malachi 3:8 **“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.**
 - v) **Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding** (Prov 3:5) means noting to them but a cute saying

- vi) Matt. 6:33 doesn't faze them, **"...seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"**
- vii) Oh, you may be able to quote the verse but do you really apply it to your own circumstances.
 - (1) You know what the verse actually means, that if we seek God's righteousness and kingdom first all our material needs will be met
 - (2) You may know it but have never placed your trust in God's Word to the point of giving him your all...
 - (a) Accepting His righteousness
 - (b) Trusting His faithfulness
- f) You might be suffering from **Pew Potato Syndrome**
 - i) If you find yourself reading God's Word and seeing all his promises but thinking – I could never do that
 - ii) If you hear others speaking of how God has miraculously done something in their life and you ask yourself, *"Why don't I ever see any miracles?"*
 - iii) If you have heard this message and have never humbled yourself: To salvation or walking by faith
 - iv) If you are one of those who heard this message today and thought it was about tithing or giving.

Conclusion: When we read the last part of verse 15 and 16, **"...and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. ¹⁶And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah"**

I can't help but get excited. I can imagine the widow going each day to the barrel where her meal was kept, opening the lid and looking down inside and there it was another handful for the day. Then she would turn to the cruse of oil and pick it up to pour it into the meal to make the cake, knowing that when she last raised it every drop came out, yet she pours and out comes just enough for the cake she is making.

Just like the children as they wondered in the wilderness and each morning they would wake up, look out of their tents, and there it was manna. They would feast on it all through the day and at night there would be nothing left. It was new every morning.

How about you, are you suffering from **Pew Potato Syndrome?**

If so lean a lesson from the Widow woman; she avoided **Pew Potato Syndrome** by being: **Humble and industrious, Charitable and Generous** and above all she had **Great Confidence In The Word Of God**