

## **“ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW AT ZAREPHATH, II.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Text for the Sermon: I Kings 17:17-24**

### **Introduction:**

We have been looking forward to this vacation for some time now. One, to see Reed and Jenea and little Kohen. It is hard knowing he is growing up not knowing us well, and that his other grandparents see him almost every day. Second, because Catalina is such a blessing to us, a beautiful place that we can afford because of the company our son works for.

We find ourselves wondering if we like it a little too much, if it too important to us.

This week has been a roller coaster week for us. At the beginning of the week it appeared God was taking this vacation away, it died for about 24 hours, and then God gave it back.

Natalie starting having contractions at 34 weeks, and we need to be here to take care of their other kids. We are their contingency plan, their back up.

And then some other things happened that made it look like it would be impossible to go. I admit it was really hard to accept. After three straight weeks of funerals, I was thinking I needed a break. But God's ways are not our ways, and He doesn't think the same way we do.

And then some people stepped in to cover for us while we are gone, making it possible for us to go. We went from life to death, back to life again.

Now I am not meaning to imply that our brief loss was anything near the loss of this poor widow, it is merely an example of having something important, losing it for a time and then receiving it back by the grace of God.

### **I Kings 17:17-24**

For some two years Elijah lived in the upper room of the widow's home. For two years every day she went to the jar of flour and the jar of oil and it was always there. Day in and day out, everyday another miracle.

Do we see our daily provision as a miracle of God's grace? He supplies, He maintains. God's providence extends down to the smallest of details, like flour and oil. God means for us to live on daily bread, even daily asking for our daily bread.

We must never forget the daily miracle of God's providence in our lives. He never ceases to maintain all creation and each one of us every moment of every day.

If God were to make the sun stand still again, wouldn't we all marvel at the miracle. But when the sun comes up every morning, we think nothing of it. When do miracles start to seem routine?

Everything around us is a miracle of grace. When you opened your cupboards this morning were they full, were all your needs and wants supplied? Yet the same hand that filled the widows jars, was the hand that filled yours. Where is our gratitude, our awareness of the divine?

Four lessons from our text:

**We should never presume to be exempt from trial.**

Suddenly tragedy strikes, unexpectedly. From miraculous daily provision to terrible loss.

Death is always hard, but so much more so the death of a child. It strikes us as so unnatural. Yes we are all supposed to live ready to die and to expect it, but the old, not the young.

This poor widow has already lost her husband and now the only thing left in this life, her dear only son. He was her future and her hope, her provision in old age.

*Notice*, you can be in the service of the Lord, you can be exercising your spiritual gifts for the sake of others, you can be serving the prophet of God, daily attending to him, and you can still experience severe afflictions while doing what God has called you to do.

It would be easy to assume or presume if you have a prophet of God living in your house and you are the recipient of daily grace and special provision that you would have extra protection from troubles and trials.

God's own people, even His closest servants and friends, are liable, susceptible to providential troubles and trials and tests.

You can be walking in total obedience to God and have the closest of relationships with the Father, and still be sent into a wilderness, into tribulation.

**Psalm 30:6-7** As for me, I said in my prosperity, "I shall never be moved."

7 By your favor, O Lord, you made my mountain stand strong;  
you hid your face; I was dismayed.

We are never in this life exempt from trials, troubles, testings. We are never immune from calamity. Our character is never finished being refined in the furnace of affliction.

**Deuteronomy 8:2** You shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.

*Notice*, even when we have the clearest evidences of God's grace and goodness and provision toward us daily, we are not beyond being rebuked, corrected, tested. Our hearts are idol factories and all of God's good gifts can quickly become poison in our hearts.

In the midst of peace and prosperity, in the midst of all is well with my soul, comes waves, storms, confusion that suddenly throws us off course.

**We should never presume to know the full meaning of every trial.**

How is that God blesses every day with a miracle to save them from starvation and then, allows death to come instantly to her son? God's grace juxtaposed to God's severity.

How could she possibly understand God's ways and purposes? She grasps for understanding, is Elijah the cause? Is this because of some sin or some past guilt plaguing her? Is God punishing her? Was Israel's God like the pagan gods, unpredictable, unreliable, vindictive, malicious?

She is trying to make sense of it all. And this is where we get in trouble and often jump to the wrong conclusions. Trials and troubles don't always mean you are outside of God's will.

Was I foolish to plan a vacation so close to Natalie's due date? Was God rebuking my selfishness, my lack of love, my unwillingness to die to myself and lay down my wants?

Sudden and unexpected troubles rattle us and throw us into doubt and confusion. We might say and do things we don't really mean of believe.

Trials and times of testing challenge our theology of suffering and why bad things happen and where God is in the midst of it all.

The whole book of Job is a study in trying to understand the ways of God in the midst of suffering. For dozens of chapters there is recorded the bad theology and advice of Job's friends.

The disciples fall into the same discussion and confusion.

**John 9:2-3** His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

This happened that the purposes of the Lord might be displayed, His glory.

Remember a couple of weeks ago I shared about what happened on our last vacation, how our plane got canceled and we had to scramble around trying to get to Chicago. I said I didn't know why God did all that? All things must work for good but we don't always know what that is.

That evening after I shared that, I found out something good that came out of it. Kent and Becky called to tell us they are pregnant, and due next May. Phama and I were talking about how hard it would be to schedule flights to Chicago not knowing when we should go, and how expensive last minute tickets are. And then both of us at the same time said, wait, we have two travel vouchers we can use any time, and at the last minute at no charge. God had it all worked out. Amazing grace. Why did I grumble faithlessly back when it was happening?

God delights to display His glory, His grace, His goodness, His works in our world.

We should not jump to conclusion and think we can figure out what God is doing. God often has far bigger and greater purposes in mind.

What God was doing had less to do with the widow, or her sin, or whether she had been kind to Elijah and more about God's glory. God's purpose was to transform and strengthen Elijah as a man of faith for the challenges soon coming into his life. God want to demonstrate His great power to Elijah so that Elijah would trust God in greater trials.

Furthermore, God was writing into OT history a foretaste of God's power and sovereignty over death. When Jesus raised a widow's son to life the people would know He was a man of God.

And God was preparing His people to know He is sovereign over life and death and able to do resurrections.

Our perspective is so limited. We commonly see things only in light of what is happening at the moment, but there is a bigger picture. When God brings purpose out of our pain He is giving us an eternal perspective, a perspective that is more than for this life only.

**In the midst of trial we should always turn to God.**

Notice Elijah's honest prayer, how he prays and what he prays.

First of all, he makes no answer to her. He has no answer, he doesn't know what to say. So he wisely turns to the Lord. He doesn't have the answer but he knows who does.

Prayer is God's main means of giving grace in our greatest difficulties. God wants us to know the helplessness that leads to prayer.

"We must carefully ponder those portions of His Word which chronicle cases of prevailing intercession, that we may learn the secrets of successful prayer. In this instance we may note the following points.

**First**, Elijah's retiring to his own private chamber, that he might be alone with God.

**Second**, his fervency: he "cried unto the Lord"—no mere lip-service was this.

**Third**, his reliance upon his own personal relationship with the Lord: "O Lord, my God."

**Fourth**, his encouraging himself in God's attributes: He acknowledges God's sovereignty, that God has done this, it is the Lord's doing, "you are the one who brought calamity on the widow."

**Fifth**, his earnestness and importunity: evidenced by his "stretching himself upon the child" no less than three times. (Like Jesus in garden, like Paul with thorn).

**Sixth**, his appeal to God's tender mercy: "the widow with whom I sojourn."

He appeals to God's compassion. Why has He so afflicted one who is already afflicted?

**Finally**, the definiteness of his petition, particular, specific: "Let this child's soul come into him again" (A.W. Pink, *The Life of Elijah*, p. 90-91).

How is it that Elijah would ask for such a thing? This is unprecedented. No one before this in Scripture has been raised from the dead. With faith and humility he believed for the impossible.

Are we men and women of faith and prayer? Are we setting an example for our families and our church? Do we give God dead things to bring to life? To breathe life into dead souls, dead situations, dead hopes? Do we pray for things that can only come from God? Do we pray for spiritual blessings beyond anything we have ever experienced?

**We should see every trial as an opportunity to deepen our faith and trust in God.**

The joy of this first resurrection, like the resurrection of Jesus, brings great faith and belief.

**I Kings 17:24** The woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth."

What a gift to see and experience the power of God's salvation, God's Spirit, God's grace.

I felt God's grace, His compassion, His lovingkindness in restoring our trip. But even this I must hold loosely, God could in His perfect providence take it away, for His glory and the eternal good of my soul.

She goes from seeing Elijah as a good religious person, to seeing him as a true man of God, a man whose words and action line up, have integrity, are connected to the true source of power.

This is her confession of faith. Now she knows without doubt that God is faithful, true to His Word and promises.

### **Conclusion: The glory of the resurrection.**

This is a sign of God's power and authority and it anticipates Jesus' resurrection. God in Jesus crosses into our wilderness, into the territory of the prince of this world for us.

God is the living God and the God of life, He has the keys of death and hell.

Resurrection changes everything. If there is no resurrection then death is the end, and after that nothing. There is no future hope. Eat, drink and be merry, and then you die.

Resurrection means there is meaning and purpose, and that what we do now and how we live now matters for eternity, raised to eternal death or raised to eternal life.

Paul concludes his long chapter on the resurrection with these hope filled words:

**I Corinthians 15:58** Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

What is our confession? Is it made on the basis of being raised to new life by the resurrecting power of Jesus Christ?

Do others see our lives, the way we live and act and respond to the world, and see in us the power of God working in us and through us? Do they see a difference between us and the rest of the world?

It is in us by the power of the Holy Spirit to live free from fear, anxiety, doubt, anger, hate, greed, lust, malice, revenge.

Do our lives lend truth to the Gospel, to the reality of a risen Savior, to our faith in a sovereign, good God?

Would someone watching our life come to the conclusion we are a man of God or a woman of God, a child of God? That the Word of God is in us? That we believe in a future hope because of the resurrection?