

# There's Something You Don't See Every Day

*Finding God in an Age of Unbelief*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Kings 17:17-24  
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Today we're going to continue our study in the life of Elijah and we're going to take another look at this widow of Zarephath that we've been looking at for the last four weeks and, in fact, what we find out in today's story is that she was driven by guilt and anger and indignation with a response that she had to draw back from. But keep in mind as we look at today's passage and in really every episode that involves Elijah, that there is a sub-plot that's going on and figures into almost everything and that sub-plot is Baal or Jehovah? Who is real and who is the pretender? Who has power and who is impotent and who is really in control?

The story that we look at today really has four movements in it and the first of the four is: the boy dies. Now, you can recall that this woman in the story, the widow of Zarephath, what you notice about her is that she has already resigned her son to death once. She has told Elijah sometime before that she was gathering sticks to bake up his last meal so that she and her son would eat and die. Now, in our society, in our culture, we have stepped back for the most part from the edge of death; that is not something that we typically have to deal with on a day to day basis. We busy our lives with other concerns instead but this lady lived with the specter of death as a persistent reality.

Elijah pulled them, the widow and her son, back from the edge only to have death revisit her. Her son became ill. My guess is that it happened relatively quickly because Elijah doesn't get involved until after the fact, after he had died, and one would think that Elijah, had he been present, would have gotten involved earlier but the boy's condition came about so quickly that he died without Elijah being present. And I believe that this woman was stricken with grief, having dodged one bullet miraculously to have him die now in a fashion that seemed so senseless. I like what A. W. Pink said about this, he said, "It often happens that God exercises his people with the heaviest trials when they have been recipients of his richest blessings."

We read this opening of this account in 1 Kings 17:17 where the Scriptures read,

17 Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing.

The second movement of the story is that the woman reacts. John's Gospel recites the story of a man who had been born without eyesight and a theological discussion amongst the disciples and Jesus precipitated that blind man's healing. Jesus was asked in John 9:2, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Now, people in that day had the misinformed notion that there was a necessary link between one's physical condition and one's sinful behavior. It can be the case but it's not necessarily the case and Jesus' response came without hesitation. In John 9:3 it says, "It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." And the same can be true to the widow of Zarephath and her son.

So the woman's first response to Elijah after her son's death was this, she said, "What do you have against me, man of God?" Or in other words, "What have I done to you?" And then she mentions her sin which was likely her previous propensity to worship Baal. She had come to worship Jehovah now and she is concerned that this prophet of Jehovah described as the man of God will now take revenge on her and her son and she is angry and she is feeling guilty for her former worship of Baal and she is a bit indignant so she lashes out at the closest person she can and it is Elijah and her's is an anger that is conceived by grief and driven by guilt and indignation. We read this in 1 Kings 17:18,

18 She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

The third movement of the four is that Elijah acts. Elijah takes the boy and carries him to the upper room where Elijah has been living. Elijah laid the child on the bed – keep in mind now, in the Hebrew mind to touch the dead body was an ultimate act of uncleanness. In Luke 11, Jesus is firing off a series of woes against a corrupt religious establishment and he says, "Woe to you because you are like unmarked graves and people walk over them without knowing it." Jesus was saying that they are like dead people in the ground who create uncleanness just by people unknowingly stepping over their graves. So for Elijah to stretch out on this boy, on top of this boy, touching this boy three times, was to absorb the uncleanness of the boy's death in his own body.

Now, it doesn't take too much imagination to see that this is pointing to our Lord Jesus who absorbed the death of sin in his own body for those he loved to salvation. Elijah could have just as easily prayed at a distance for the boy but the imagery and the fact of the uncleanness of death is necessary imagery of Jesus' substitutionary death that Jesus himself became unclean so that we might become clean. Elijah suffered spiritual uncleanness for the boy's physical life. Jesus suffered spiritual uncleanness for our eternal lives.

And the boy lived again and Elijah brought him down for witnesses to this resurrection. Jehovah had beaten Baal again. Jehovah has conquered even death and so we read in 1 Kings 17:19-23 this segment of the story,

19 And he said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid

him on his own bed. 20 And he cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?" 21 Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again." 22 And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. 23 And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives."

The fourth movement of this story is the woman's repentance. Having witnessed the miracle, she is reminded that there is no God like Jehovah. She is brought back to her nascent faith and acknowledges Jehovah as the true God and the God of truth. Elijah is now acknowledged, now in a rational moment, as a true man of God. And the two things that we learn is that Jehovah is established as the giver of life and not Baal and God alone has the power of life both indirectly through water and bread – incidentally, just like Moses in the wilderness – and indirectly through prayer, but directly through the absorbing of the uncleanness of death from a person by way of a substitute.

So that's the short little story of the widow of Zarephath. It is somewhat obscure in that it is one chapter of the Bible and only about 2/3 of that chapter deal with this widow of Zarephath but it's powerfully etched into the minds of the people for Jesus referenced it some 900 years later. Luke 4:25-26, "I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon." Then two verses later, Luke 4:28-29, "All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff." They didn't like the idea that this widow of Zarephath had been singled out as a woman of faith and now part of God's covenant people. And there is one other passage that deals with this, it's in Hebrews 11:35, that great chapter of...some call it God's Hall of Fame. It says, "Women received back their dead by resurrection." Many commentators believe that when the author of Hebrews wrote that, that they had this widow of Zarephath in mind, this 2/3 of a chapter making its way through the Scriptures into the New Testament some 900 years later.

But what's the takeaway from this? What do we learn from this story of this rather obscure widow of Zarephath? Well, the first is, Proverbs 28:1 says, "The wicked flee though no one pursues." This woman of Zarephath erupts at Elijah suggesting that he, Elijah, had himself brought about the death of the child of her house because of her worship of Baal. I want to suggest to you that guilt is one of those things that drive us to a necessary anger. I think we get angry and pop off at people because of the fear of exposure. We don't want people to see the mistakes we've made. Elijah's words could have been the same as Jesus, "Neither this boy's sin nor his parents' sin brought death to this house but that the work of God might be displayed in him." The miracles of the Bible are not gratuitous or capricious, the miracles in the Bible are performed to bring about faith. John wrote in his Gospel, "Many other miraculous signs were done in the presence

of many people but these were written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ and that believing you might have life in his name." "The wicked flee though no one pursues."

Second of all, I'd say that one of the things we learn from this story is that guilt clouds reason and judgment. When people are feeling the burden of guilt, their ability to see and interpret reality are hindered and if you're struggling with seeing the world like everybody else is seeing it, then maybe it's time to look at your heart and ask God to search you and to know you and to see if there's any hurtful way in you as the Psalmist said.

I think a third takeaway from this story is that Jesus Christ, as it were, stretched out on us three times. He didn't really stretch out on us three times but he went to the tomb for three days. In both instances, death was conquered and Jesus absorbed in his own body the uncleanness of sin and death which worked to our resurrection. You see, left to ourselves, God would have a problem with each and every one of us. The Bible says that there is no one righteous in Romans 3:10, "There is no one righteous, not even one." In Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." But, you know, I think that we don't often see ourselves quite that way. We look around and we say, "Well, I'm no worse than anybody else."

So look how the Bible breaks it down. Jesus says the first and the greatest commandment is this, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength," in Matthew 22, and that means putting God first at every minute of every day. That means putting God's agenda ahead of our agenda. Jesus says to love others as much as you love yourself and that means no selfishness, no self-centeredness, no self-absorption. In short, Jesus says to be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. And it is of no value to say that you may be better than the person sitting next to you or your in-laws or even your preacher, you could say that and you're probably right, but the Bible says that each of us will meet God one day and have to give an account of our own lives and the question will be: who will pay the price for your sin?

You see, sin isn't just an abstract concept. It has teeth and the Bible says that the wages of sin is death. Oftentimes physical death is used as a metaphor in the Scriptures for spiritual death, being dead to God, and such was the case in the story that we looked at today. Who will bring us from death to life? Can that miracle been done in our own lives? Who will take away the uncleanness of our own soul? Well, the worst news is that there is nothing that we can do about it in and of ourselves. We are dead spiritually, dead to God, and our default position is to get busy and try to offset our sin with some good works, try to get rid of our sin debt. Sometimes it's through philanthropy or maybe community service or going to religious services which are good deeds and each of these own things in and of themselves are good. I don't want you to go away here today saying, "My preacher said that good works are bad." Your preacher is not saying that. In fact, the Bible says though by good deeds shall no man be made right before God in Romans 3:20.

Well, if we have a problem of sin and if that sin creates separation from Almighty God and if there's nothing that we can do about it in and of ourselves, well, that's pretty sad. That's kind of fatalistic. There is no hope. "That's not good news, pastor. I came here today for some good news." Well, there is good news and the good news is that God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. Before the first breath was taken on this planet, the Holy Trinity went into counsel anticipating the problem of sin. The Son of God, second of the Trinity said, "I will go. I will become a part of our creation. I will be born miraculously. I will live a perfectly righteous life and then at the right time and at a place of our choosing, I will surrender myself and be tried and convicted and condemned and then crucified." And so it was. Having been condemned to crucifixion where Jesus, as it were, stretched out on us three times, on the cross God the Father imputed the sins of every one of his people, he credited the sins of every one of his people on Jesus and then he punished Jesus, pouring out his full wrath and fury on Jesus and on our sin. Ironically, on that day Jesus became the most sinful man in history because in that moment he bore the uncleanness of sin and death for every one of his people.

So when God says, "Who will pay for your sin?" the correct answer is, "Jesus Christ." If you in fact believe in Jesus Christ and you stand before Almighty God, that is your only hope. All that takes in this life is to repent and to believe; to turn from yourself as on your best day being able to earn or deserve God's favor; from turning from your sin, turning from your unrighteousness and then turning to God to live for him. And then believing the bad news that we have a problem with sin and there is nothing we can do about it. And then believing the good news that God in himself took care of that through the death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you say to me, "Well, John, that is just too easy," my old friend, Howard, said that. We went out to lunch one day and he said, "John, that's just too easy. It just seems too easy." Well, what I told Howard, what I would tell you is, "If it's too easy, then you've never done it because for the proud person, there is nothing harder than to die to yourself and to live to God."

We think it's a very important thing to get this settled in this life and so in the back of our bulletin we write down the fundamental tenets of this good news story. We believe that all mankind has a problem with sin. We believe that our only hope for forgiveness and life with God is through faith in God's provision for us in Jesus Christ. You can receive God's gift of forgiveness of sin and life with God, eternal life, right now and the following is a prayer that expresses that faith. "Lord Jesus, I know that I'm a sinner and in need of your forgiveness. I ask you to come into my life, forgive my sin and make me the kind of person you want me to be. Thank you for your gift of eternal life."

If you have not settled that with God, I would implore you today: get that settled with God, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whosoever should believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Shall we pray together?

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for the miracle of resurrection. Yes, the resurrection of Jesus Christ but more than that, our own resurrection for, God, our Lord Jesus has*

*stretched himself out and absorbed in his own body the uncleanness of our sin and death in order to make it possible for us to have life with you. Thank you for it.*