

“Faith Tested”
1 Kings 17:17-24
(Preached at Trinity, June 27, 2021)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The end of **Chapter 16** deals with Israel's new king following the death of King Omri. Ahab his son was crowned his successor. He was more wicked than all who preceded him. He married Jezebel, the princess from Sidon and established Baalism as the chief religion of Israel. The judgment of God fell like a hammer.
2. **Chapter 17** opens with the introduction of Elijah. Nothing is known about him. He simply arrives and proclaims a devastating drought. God then tells Elijah to leave town and travel to a brook east of the Jordan. As the drought progressed, the brook dried up and God told Elijah to travel to Zerephath where he would be provided for by a Gentile widow who remains nameless.
3. Thus far, in this account the drought has been the central focus. As we continue to the end of the chapter there is another situation of life or death.
1 Kings 17:17 NAU - "Now it came about after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his sickness was so severe that there was no breath left in him."
4. The widow's young child has become gravely ill and has died. Her heart would have been ripped from her bosom.
This great trial came upon the widow even while she was in service to God. She was acting in obedience to God, caring for God's prophet and trusting in God's provision. But now her child has become sick and died. We tend to expect things to go well when we do well.
5. The widow is new to the faith.
 - A. At the beginning she had heard of Yahweh, but she saw Him as Elijah's God.
1 Kings 17:11-12 NAU - "As she was going to get *it*, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand." ¹² But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have no bread"
 - B. But she has witnessed God's provision day after day and has trusted in His care. Still, her faith is a young faith. She had not yet experienced the trial of her faith. Genuine faith is always a tested faith.
1 Peter 1:6-7 NAU - "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;"
6. The widow is devastated in the death of her child. She accuses Elijah of deception. That he had come to bring God's judgment upon her sin. Some interpret **Verse 18** – “What do you have against me?”
7. The widow of Zerephath is about to have her faith strengthened as she goes through this ordeal.

- I. First, she is reminded again that God is the Lord over life and death.
- A. For many days God had miraculously provided for those in her house
1. She couldn't explain it. All she knew is every morning when she went to scoop out some flour and pour in the oil the ingredients were there. It was just the amount needed.
Thus far, this has been the focus. God provides and sustains.
 - a. God provided for Elijah during the drought, feeding him with bread and meat from the mouths of ravens.
 - b. And then He provided for Elijah and the poor widow from Zerephath.
 2. The widow knew that God was Lord over life and the sustaining of life. But this was different. It wasn't a matter of God healing her son. Her son was dead.
 3. She is about to learn that God is Lord not only over life, but also over death.
1 Samuel 2:6-7 NAU - "The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up. ⁷ "The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts."
Acts 17:28 KJV - "For in him we live, and move, and have our being"
Job 1:21 NAU - "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."
- B. Notice in each case, God works through the use of means.
1. He used the ravens. He used the widow and the flour and oil.
 2. Now God uses Elijah to restore life to this boy.
 3. Now Elijah prays twice and lays on the child three times.
Elijah was a mighty man of prayer. James wrote:
James 5:16-18 NAU - "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit."
 4. Elijah prays twice and both times begins, "O LORD my God." It was a prayer of faith; the prayer of one who knew God.
Elijah was a righteous man and he was a man of fervent prayer. He was a righteous man, but he was a human being. So he sought for a reason. "Have you caused grief to this dear woman?"
 5. Elijah prayed and God heard.
1 Kings 17:22 NAU - "The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived."

- II. Not only is God the Lord of physical life, He is also the Lord of spiritual life
- A. The truth came from the lips of the widow herself.
- 1 Kings 17:12 NAU** - "As the LORD your God lives"
1. At that point she didn't understand the fullness of her statement
 2. She was beginning to see the contrast. God is Lord of all.
Baal was the god of rain, the god of the storm and yet there was this drought. Baal was lifeless, helpless, and useless.
 3. God is the living God. He is the sustainer. His promises are true and can be trusted.
- 1 Kings 17:15 NAU** - "So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for *many* days."
- a. This was the faith of Abraham – he believed the promise of God
Genesis 15:5-6 NAU - "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶ Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."
 - b. Believing in the promise of God is the essence of our faith
Galatians 3:7 NAU - "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham."
4. Now we read that her child has become sick and then he died. There was no breath left in him. He was dead. There was finality. It was hopeless, but was it? Was there any hope?
 5. The power over death that is revealed clearly in the resurrection is foreshadowed here. Jesus told Martha:
John 11:25-26 NAU - "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die."
 6. At this point we should notice there is no mention of Baal at all. He is irrelevant—weak, impotent. Elijah will make this crystal clear in the next chapter.
- B. We aren't told of the spiritual condition of the boy who was raised from death to life. He isn't the focus. The focus here is upon the widow.
1. How is it this Gentile widow has become convinced of the supremacy of God? It is because God has opened her heart. It is because God is able to bring sinners from spiritual death to life.
 2. So far, these stories are mainly about physical life. The widow had witnessed that God is able to sustain and provide through drought. But this is different. Her son has died. Now she learns that God is the God over all life.
 3. God is the God of spiritual life. He is the God that can bring us from spiritual death to life. This Gentile widow was given the life necessary for her to trust God.
John 8:12 NAU - "Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."
2 Corinthians 4:6 NAU - "For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Ephesians 2:4-6 NAU - "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,"

III. The widow's faith was strengthened

- A. With the death of her son her faith was shaken
1. She certainly wasn't a stranger to suffering.
 - a. She was a single parent trying to provide for her young son. She had experienced the loss of her husband. And then the drought hit and there was no food to be found.
Then Elijah showed up and there was for a better life. God would provide.
 - b. So how was she to process her current trial? First the sickness of her son and he wasn't getting better. And then he died.
What did it mean? Had God forsaken her? Was it judgment upon sin? Why didn't Elijah tell her this from the beginning?
 - c. She came before Elijah with an accusatory tone. Elijah was a man of grace. He could be firm as with Ahab. But with this widow he was gentle. Rather than defending himself or speaking harshly to her Elijah simply replied, "Give me your son."
 2. It wasn't unbelief but confusion. It was disbelief rather than unbelief. His death was a terrible blow. It left her spinning in doubt.
Philip Ryken described it – "She had faith enough for the good times, but not the bad times—for life, but not for death. This is easy to understand, for this poor woman lost everything when she lost her son. She lost her closest companion, her only family member, and almost all security for her old age."¹
 3. Why would God provide miraculously to sustain Elijah along with her and her child only to allow him to get sick and die?
 4. Was it all about bringing the guilt of her sin upon her?
Notice she is not denying her sin. She understood her sin and she understood God's condemnation.
 5. Perhaps she had in mind her idolatry in Baal worship. By now she would have understood God's judgment in sending the drought upon Israel's idolatry. She knew her own involvement with this sin. She didn't fully comprehend the nature of grace. She had a guilty conscience and didn't yet understand the peace of forgiveness.
- B. Elijah goes before God and questions Him. Was the fear of the woman true? Did God cause the death of the child as the consequence of this woman's sin. Elijah's questions showed he didn't have the answers any more than the widow. But he prayed and he trusted.
God's answer was demonstrated by restoring the child to life.

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Kings*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Iain M. Duguid, and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 458.

1. God's purpose in the death of the child was to validate Elijah as God's prophet.
2. It was also to strengthen and confirm the widow's faith
1 Kings 17:24 NAU - "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."
3. This stands as a model to what was spoken by James.
James 5:14-16 NAU - "Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

Conclusion:

1. It is easy to trust God when the sun is shining and the waters are smooth. But what about when the storm clouds form and the waves grow ominous? What about when the fiery trials come upon us.
2. God's charge to us is, "Be anxious for nothing." He is always faithful and He has promised us His peace. We aren't promised a life free from suffering. In fact, just the opposite is true. We should expect it.
3. This widow faced several trials, one after the other. Yet, God proved Himself faithful.
4. And we cannot dismiss, this was also a trial for Elijah's faith. He had never faced anything like this before. It is the first case in the Bible of prayer resulting in someone returning from the grave.
Elijah prayed in faith and God heard him. This is mentioned as an example of faith in **Hebrews 11:35** – "Women received *back* their dead by resurrection"