

God's Frowning Providence

1 Kings 17:17-24; 1 Corinthians 15:31

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God's providence is His absolute and sovereign control over all that He has created. *The Shorter Catechism* states it this way (Question 11):

What are God's works of providence?

God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

It is by God's providence that you enjoy the blessings of this life (Paul speaking to the Athenian leaders on Mars Hill—Acts 17:24,25,28). It is also by God providence that trials, tribulation, afflictions, and heartaches come into your life (Joseph—Genesis 45:7; Genesis 50:20).

It is not chance or luck, Satan or demons, kings or rulers among men that rule over all. It is our Sovereign and Almighty God that rules over all (Psalm 103:19; Psalm 135:6; Daniel 4:34-35).

From today's text, we see the hand of the Lord take this poor widow of Zarephath out of one dark providence (the starvation of her and her son) just to bring her into another dark providence (the death of her only son). The reaction of this widow, a new believer, is a reaction we have all had at one time or another to God's providence in taking us or our loved ones down a path we certainly would not have chosen for ourselves—but the Lord chose for us in order to glorify Himself and to grow us.

The main points from our text are: (1) God's Frowning Providence (1 Kings 17:17-18); (2) Out of Death Comes Life (1 Kings 17:19-22); (3) God's Compassion upon a Struggling Saint (1 Kings 17:23-24).

I. God's Frowning Providence (1 Kings 17:17-18).

A. When I say, "God's frowning providence", I mean it appears that way to us, but not that God intends it for the destruction of His people who trust Him and love Him. To the contrary, God brings you down a dark path in His providence to save you, to grow you in faith, love, and obedience, and to teach you that everything in this life is perishing—don't place your hope, joy, happiness, contentment, or peace in that which is perishing, but in the Lord Jesus who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

B. This poor widow was sovereignly loved and chosen by the Lord out of all of the widows in Israel (a Gentile) to be fed and cared for throughout the remaining years of this God-appointed drought and famine brought upon the land for its idolatry and covenant-breaking. This widow, her son, and Elijah did not have a variety of food, a king's portion of food, or a super abundance of food, but the Lord promised to supply their needs by daily providing a sufficient supply of meal and oil.

1. The widow and her son were snatched from the jaws of death by the love, mercy, and compassion of God (this was God's smiling providence upon the widow). But what lay around the corner which she could not see was God's frowning providence—a dark path that she would never have chosen for herself or her son (1 Kings 17:17).

2. What a turn of events! Her dear son—that treasure which was dearest to her of all things here upon the earth had been rescued from starvation just to die due to some sudden illness. Her faith and joy in God's daily provision was now severely tried by what appeared to be God's frowning providence. Here was a trial that shook her world so seriously, she forgot the promise of God and the provision of God in

multiplying the meal and the oil for her every day. All she could see was her lifeless son in her loving arms.

3. Here was the divinely-appointed test to the faith of this new believer.

a. **It was a test that she must let go of everything and cling only to the Lord in faith** (Job; Abraham; Matthew 16:24). What is it that you claim you must have in this world? Where is your treasure (Matthew 6:21)? What is your life (Luke 12:15; Philippians 1:21)?

b. **It was a test that God was in complete control**—not her, not her son, not Elijah, not any other creature or circumstance. Dear ones, at times it is in the midst of God’s blessings that you will be most severely tempted with God’s frowning providence. We think and act as if all these blessings in life are ours, but they are truly God’s and only loaned to us for as long as the Lord deems profitable to us (Job 1:21; Job 2:10). These were the trials this widow faced (and so will you). As a new believer, she did not respond well to this test of her faith in the Lord.

B. The widow’s immediately response was to directly lash out at Elijah (and indirectly to lash out at the Lord, 1 Kings 17:18).

1. This does not mean that she had not come to faith in the Lord, but it does mean that she was greatly struggling with what God had brought into her life in this dark providence (this struggle is not a sign of unbelief, but in the life of the true Christian it is a sign of faith wrestling against doubt and unbelief like David in the Psalms (Psalm 13:1-2). It is when one no longer struggles because he/she is given over to unbelief or some other sin or when one excuses or ignores sin that is the greater problem is revealed). The widow is asking Elijah, “What have I done to you? How have I injured you?” Though she is struggling, she clearly acknowledges Elijah to be God’s prophet (“O thou man of God”) and therefore Elijah’s God.

2. In the midst of this calamity, her conscience is stirred wondering whether some sin (past or present) has been detected by Elijah (or the Lord) and she is now suffering judgment for that sin.

a. Dear ones, when the Lord forgives your sin in your justification, He forgives it once and for all. God is no longer a vengeful judge seeking to get even with you for past sin. Through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, God is reconciled to you now and forever. He is your Father who only gives that which is good for you (Matthew 7:11).

b. But as a good and loving Father He does not erase the memory of your past sins (though they be forgiven) so that you never forget the wickedness from which Jesus Christ has rescued you, so that you are humbled before Him at His mercy and grace (rather than exalting yourself in pride before Him), so that you grow in hating those former sins and loving His holy commandments and walking therein, and so that you always remember that you are what you are by the grace of God alone and boast only in the cross of Jesus Christ. You must not live in those past sins forgetting the love and mercy of Jesus Christ, but you must not forget them so that you do not flirt with them but look to the death of Christ as your death to those sins and look to the resurrection of Christ as your victory over those sins.

II. **Out of Death Comes Life (1 Kings 17:19-22).**

A. Rather than returning a tongue lashing to the struggling new believer over the death of her dear son, Elijah does not believe he has to defend himself to the widow. He simply says, “Give me thy son.”

1. Here we see the gentleness of this man of God. It is easy and natural to respond in the same way that others speak to you. But it is hard and supernatural to respond in speaking the truth in love when you are addressed in anger, in ridicule, or in rebellion against your authority as a parent. God help us to grow in being a lamb in our own cause and a lion in the cause of Jesus Christ.

2. Elijah calls the widow to exercise faith in the Lord once again by commanding her to give him her son. He doesn’t take the boy out to bury him, but takes him to his own room and places him gently and compassionately upon his bed (out of the view of everyone—unlike those ministers who seek for the greatest publicity, Elijah did the work of the Lord in the privacy of his small room). Are you content to do that

which is right and honorable even if no one else but the Lord sees?

B. In 1 Kings 17:20-21, we see another example of the strange means that the Lord uses to bring about His healing and His mighty acts of mercy in the lives of His people.

1. Elijah could have simply prayed and cried out to the Lord to raise this child from the dead, but instead, he lays on top of the child three different times crying out in fervency for the Lord to return the soul of this child to his body. In so doing, Elijah is graphically identifying with this dead child. He feels the coldness of death. He identifies with the sorrow of the mother. He shows his own compassion for this child in surrounding this child with his own sorrow and love. This is a picture of the Lord Jesus who identified with you as God's people who were dead in your trespasses and sins. He covered you in His righteousness. He surrounded you with His love. He suffered your guilt and shame upon the cross that you might be raised spiritually from the dead to new life. This is your union with Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Just as the Lord heard the prayer of Elijah to bring this child from death to life, so the Father heard the prayer of Jesus to bring all of you who trust Him from death to life. Elijah, the prophet, is a beautiful picture of Jesus, our greater Prophet.

2. This is the first recorded instance in Scripture of one who was dead being raised.

a. This resurrection ultimately points to the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ (who was not raised to die again) and finally points to the resurrection of all believers in Christ.

b. All such resurrections speak of the almighty power of God that brings life out of death (whether it be spiritual resurrection out of death in regeneration, whether it be daily resurrection out of sin in applying the death and resurrection of Christ in your sanctification, whether it be resurrection of your marriage that seems dead, whether it be resurrection of a diseased body that seems dead, whether it be the resurrection of hope where you have fallen into hopelessness and despair).

c. Jesus Christ is the resurrection and life. That child could not raise itself from the dead—nor could you raise yourself from your sins and trespasses. Not all children that died at that time were raised from the dead, but this child was so raised. God was not unfair to the other children, but showed mercy to this child. So likewise, God was not unfair to others who were not raised spiritually from the dead, but showed mercy to you.

d. Dear ones, Jesus gave a simple parable about life out of death in John 12:24. It is not by means of bigger buildings, contemporary music and bands, entertaining sermons, following a liturgical calendar, and programs for every age group in the family that the Lord Jesus promises life and growth to the Church of Jesus Christ, or life and growth in your marriage, or life and growth in your personal lives, but rather it is by means of dying to self with Jesus Christ that true life and growth will spring forth. The biblical principle of growth is that out of death God brings forth life. Every day you must die with Christ to the world, the flesh, and the devil in order to live ("I die daily" 1 Corinthians 15:31). How do you die daily? By reckoning by faith Christ's death to be your death to sin, and Christ's resurrection to be your resurrection to life, growth, and victory over sin. It is dying to what pleases you, and living to what pleases the Lord.

III. God's Compassion upon a Struggling Saint (1 Kings 17:23-24).

A. In closing, I would have you note the compassion of the Lord revealed in restoring to life this child to his mother. This miracle was intended to teach greater truths concerning Jesus Christ (as already noted earlier). However, this miracle also reveals the tender mercies and undeserved love of the Lord for those He chose from all eternity and redeemed at the cross and justified by faith alone in Christ alone. Think of the sorrow and grief of this poor widow who apparently had no other relative. This was her greatest earthly blessing, and the Lord took him from her. But in compassion the Lord restored him to her (Luke 7:11-15).

B. The Lord had compassion upon this sorrowing mother who had already witnessed her son given life by the miracle of multiplying the meal and the oil. She was prepared to die with her son due to lack of

food, but she was not prepared for his death that suddenly fell upon her in God's providence.

1. When blessings abound from the Lord, enjoy those blessings to the glory of God; but rest not secure in the thought that this will always be the case, for the Lord may swallow up 7 years of prosperity with 7 years of famine (as was the case in Egypt). Be daily prepared that the Lord may test and try your faith and commitment to Him. However, when trials, afflictions, and sorrows abound from the Lord, fall not into despair; but remember this scriptural principle of the Lord—out of death God delights to bring life.

2. Can you imagine the joy of this mother? Her son that was dead was now alive. Though the Lord did not owe this widow any further confirmation of His greatness and power to rescue and save, in mercy He gave her (and us) this sign to further strengthen and confirm her faith that the God of Elijah reigns over life and death (1 Kings 17:24).

Dear ones, death is an appointment for which neither you nor I will be late. You may be late for appointments now. You may cancel appointments now. You may move appointments to another day. But you will not miss or be late for the appointment of death. Are you ready to die? I am not being gloomy, but honest. For there will be no life out of your death if you do not now prepare for death. Turn in faith to Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life. Only He can bring life out of death. Only He can rescue you from what your sin deserves from God—hell—and present you faultless before His throne. Amen.

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