

See, Your Son Lives!

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[0 : 00] Well, would you please turn with me to the words that we read there in 1 Kings 17, 1 Kings 17, and reading at verse 23, 1 Kings 17 and verse 23, where we read Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house.

He gave him to his mother and said, Luke, your son is alive. Luke, your son is alive. I want to focus this evening on this well-known story with you.

We're going to be looking at really the section verses 17 down to the end of the chapter, verses 17 to 24.

And what I want to focus on is very much the picture, the portrait of the living God that is really brought to us from this passage.

Because what we find in all these Old Testament narratives is it's not so much about the characters who are presented in these texts as it is the character of God who is revealed in them.

[1 : 16] So I want to look at the passage really under three headings. We're going to look at the perplexity, then the prayer, and finally the power. Perplexity, prayer, and power.

First, we have the perplexity, verses 17 and 18. And here the author focuses on the perplexity of the widow, the perplexity of the widow. Now, as we come to these verses, let's consider the context. In verses 1 to 6, the author records the Lord's providence, the Lord's provision at Cherith or Cherith. The northern kingdom of Israel are presently under the tyrannical reign of King Ahab.

Ligon Duncan describes Ahab as the vilest toad to ever squat on the throne of Israel. Both Ahab and the nation were now engaging in idolatrous worship of Baal.

And suddenly the prophet Elijah bursts onto the scene, saying, As the Lord, the God whom I stand before, lives, there shall be neither rain nor dew these years except at my word.

[2 : 21] The Lord then directs Elijah to go to Cherith, where he proceeds to provide Elijah with bread, with meat, and with water during this period while there is no rain.

Then in verses 7 to 16, the author records the Lord's provision at Zarephath. Eventually, the brook at Cherith dries up, and the Lord commands Elijah to go to Zarephath, a village outside the borders of Israel, where a widow will feed him.

Elijah goes and he approaches the widow, and he asks her to give him something to eat, and she's on the brink of collapse. She is terrified. She doesn't know what will happen to her.

She feels that she has no food, that she's just about to die with her son. And Elijah says that the Lord will provide food for her during this season of drought.

The Lord will preserve the life of her and her household. And she and her household are able to eat for many days. They enjoy the Lord's daily provision.

[3 : 22] So we have the provision at Zarephath. We have the provision at Cherith. And with that context in mind, we come to the crisis in verse 17. We read that the son of the widow became ill.

The author refers to her here as literally the mistress of the house. Now, that might indicate that she was a woman of some means, which had allowed her to accommodate Elijah during this period of time.

However, the author has already noted that she had very little food. And were it not for the Lord's miraculous provision, she and her son would surely have died. It's more likely, then, that in being referred to as the mistress of the house, the author is indicating that her husband is dead and that she is left to face this trial alone.

And the trial is spelled out as we're told that her son became ill. It's a completely unexpected downturn in her fortunes. Everything had been going well.

And then all of a sudden, her son becomes sick. But worse follows because we read that the illness led to death. The illness is so severe that we're told there is no breath left in the boy.

[4 : 31] He's dead. There's no doubt over this fact. The woman acknowledges that to be the case in verse 18. The prophet acknowledges this to be the case in verse 20. Now, this death is a major crisis in this woman's life.

She has already suffered the heartbreaking loss of her husband. But the death of her son is especially crushing. This boy was meant to perpetuate the family name.

This boy was meant to provide for her in her old age. And now he's gone and all her hopes, all her dreams, her very future seems to have died with him.

And in the face of the crisis, the woman comes to Elijah with a cry. Look at verse 18. She cries, what have you against me, O man of God? You have come to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son.

The woman begins by asking, what have you against me, O man of God? She clearly recognizes that Elijah is a prophet. He is a spokesman. He is a man of God.

[5 : 35] And she wants to know what this man of God has against her, what has come between them, what has disrupted their relationship. And she carries on by saying, you have come to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son.

She interprets the devastating death of her son as a punishment for her sin. She sees the arrival of this prophet into her home as the means of bringing the memory of some past sin, some secret sin, some forgotten sin to the attention of the Lord who has proceeded to take her son from her.

She is left perplexed. And, you know, friends, as we consider the perplexity of this widow, we're being reminded that the Lord is a God whose providence can be mysterious.

His providence can be perplexing. Let's think about this widow. She's taken a prophet, a man of God, into her home and she's fed him. She has believed and acted on all the promises that the Lord had given her.

She has experienced the Lord's wonderful provision. And then suddenly death comes into her home and claims her son, her only son, the son whom she loved.

[6 : 50] And she's left perplexed and full of questions, full of tears, full of cries to the man of God. And, you know, friends, God's word teaches us that sometimes God's providence can be perplexing.

He does things. He brings things to pass. He intervenes in the lives of his people that leaves them completely bewildered. We see that with Joseph. You think about Joseph.

He's so faithful to God while living in Egypt and then he finds himself in prison, forgotten and rejected by everyone. Or we can think of the psalmist in Psalm 102 as he cries out, Oh Lord, you raised me up only to throw me down, only to cast me to the ground.

Or we can think of the disciples and the gospels and they obediently follow the commands of Jesus and they go into their boat in obedience to Jesus' command and they find themselves in a life-threatening storm at sea.

This is the God whose providence can perplex his people. And perhaps that applies to you this evening. Perhaps things have happened in your home.

[8 : 02] Perhaps things have happened in your family. Perhaps things have happened in your marriage. Perhaps things have happened in your work. Perhaps things have happened in your circle of friends that have perplexed you.

Perhaps things have happened to you that just don't make sense. You're confused. You're hurt. You're angry. You don't know what the Lord's actually doing with you. You're completely bewildered.

Today, friends, as we consider this widow, we're being reminded that sometimes the Lord's providence is perplexing. Sometimes the Lord's people can enter into seasons of affliction. They can enter into frowning providences where there seems to be no simple or straightforward answer to the perplexing question, why? Maybe that's you tonight.

I don't know. I don't know anyone in this congregation. But it might well be that there is someone here tonight who is feeling utterly perplexed and there is going to be no simple answer for you, no straightforward answer for you.

[9 : 05] The only answer that this passage presents you with is that God's providence can be perplexing and God's people can be left with nothing but questions.

But we move from the perplexity to the prayer in verses 19 to 22. And here the author focuses on the prayer of the prophet.

Verses 19 to 21, we hear Elijah's two requests. Now, in many ways, this is a sore trial for Elijah as much as it's a sore trial for the widow. The Lord had brought Elijah and his family together through a series of remarkable events.

He had known the joy of seeing this woman and her son learning to live by faith in the Lord and his promises. And, you know, there is no greater joy for a pastor. There is no greater joy for a minister. There is no greater joy for a Christian than to see someone coming to that place of faith. But now a crisis has come and the household has shrunk from three to two.

[10:13] The congregation has shrunk from two to one. And the one remaining member of Elijah's congregation now wants to leave. That is a sore trial for Elijah. This very sensitive prophet, this prophet whom we'll find in the coming chapters, is left crying out, Lord, take my life, because he finds his ministry to be such a failure.

And it's at this point that Elijah makes a request of the woman, verse 19. He doesn't attempt to defend his ministry. He doesn't attempt to suggest that the woman's accusations were unjust. He doesn't attempt to give the woman a lecture on why bad things happen to good people. He doesn't say to her, well, let me take you to an apologetics talk, an apologetics course, and you'll find out why bad things happen to the likes of you.

No, Elijah doesn't say any of those things. Instead, he gently says, give me your son. And having made that request, Elijah now makes a request of the Lord.

Look at verses 19 to 21. We're told that he took the child from his mother's arms. We're told that he carried the child into the upper chamber. We're told that he laid the child on the bed.

[11:28] And we're told that he cried out to the Lord. He's crying to the Lord, crying to the God of the covenant, crying to the God who makes and keeps his promises.

And he asks, oh, Lord, my God, have you brought calamity even upon this widow? There is a real earnestness in Elijah's prayer. It's not made up of polite platitudes.

Elijah's not giving some run-of-the-mill rehearsed prayer that he had heard many times before. No, this is a passionate prayer that is full of heartfelt questions.

Lord, my God, have you brought calamity even on the widow? And we're then told that he stretched himself out upon the child three times.

It's a highly unusual action, especially in a culture where contact with a corpse would normally render a person unclean. But here is Elijah, and he's symbolically saying, Lord, let this boy's lifeless body be as my living body.

[12:31] Let the life that is seen in my body be seen in his body. Finally, we're told that Elijah once again cried out to the Lord in prayer.

Elijah refuses to give up in prayer. Instead, he presses on. He plods on. He persists. He perseveres. He cries out, Lord, my God, let his life return to him.

Elijah doesn't leave the Lord in any doubt as to what is on his mind, what is on his heart. He doesn't play riddles and games with the Lord. He doesn't do that thing that maybe you and I do, where we sometimes want something and we give hints that we want it, but we don't actually say it.

No, Elijah says, Lord, my God, let his life return to him. That brings us to the response to Elijah's request.

Look at verse 22. Elijah's cried out to the Lord. It was a passionate cry. It was a personal cry. It was a persistent cry. And the author tells us that the cry was heard.

[13:35] We read, the Lord listened to the prayer, the voice of Elijah. It's a marvelous statement that should put fuel in the prayers of all God's people.

The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. Derek Thomas writes concerning this, that it seems almost that the Lord heard the very tone of Elijah's voice and that the Lord was moved with compassion.

The Lord was moved to respond. Well, friends, as we consider this prayer of this prophet, we're being reminded that the Lord is a God who hears prayer.

The Lord is a God who hears prayer. We see that in these verses. The Lord's brought Elijah to the place of need, the place of desperation, the place of earnest prayer.

The Lord's brought Elijah to the place of praying in faith, praying that the God for whom nothing is impossible might somehow restore the life of this dead child.

[14:40] And the Lord hears the voice. He hears the cry. He hears the prayer of Elijah. And throughout God's word, we are confronted with the truth again and again and again that the Lord hears the prayers of all his people.

Psalm 18, we read, in my distress, I called upon the Lord. To my God, I cried for help. From his temple, he heard my voice and my cry to him reached his ear.

Psalm 86, we read, truly God has listened. He has attended to the voice of my prayer. Psalm 145, we read, he fulfills the desires of those who fear him.

He hears their cry and he saves them. The Lord is a God who hears prayer. And that should be such an encouragement to us.

Sometimes we might be tempted to think that prayer is pointless or prayer is peripheral. But God's word tells us that there is a covenant God who hears and answers prayer.

[15:42] He listens to their cry. And we are invited to go to him as individuals and as a congregation and to pray. As the old hymn puts it, we love singing it in our congregation.

What a friend we have in Jesus. And we sing these words. Oh, what grief we often forfeit. Oh, what take it to the Lord in prayer. It's that wonderful truth.

Have we trials? Have we temptations? Have we tribulations? We take it to the Lord in prayer. Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Take it to the Lord in prayer. That is the message of that hymn.

And that is the message of God's word. When something is bothering you, when something is troubling you, you take it to the Lord in prayer. Well, today, friends, I hope that none of us would hold back from coming to the Lord in prayer.

Let's not be afraid to pray for spiritual blessings to be poured out on our congregation or on our community or on our country or on our world that could only come from the sovereign hand of a sovereign God.

[16:50] Let's not be hesitant, friends, in acknowledging our weaknesses and our limitations as we call out to this God for divine help. Let's not be reluctant to come to this God.

That is what prayer is. Prayer is saying to God, I can't, but you can. Prayer is saying to God, I need your help. Prayer is saying to God, I am in a situation that is beyond my abilities, that is beyond my intellect, that is beyond my physique, that is beyond me completely.

I need you. And God is glorified in the dependence, the desperation of his people as they lean on him, as they wait on him.

Friends, let's not hold back from this God, this God who says to his people, one of the most beautiful verses we find in his words. Song of Solomon, chapter eight.

Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet. Isn't that a lovely thought? That we think so often that our prayers are pretty worthless.

[17:55] We think to ourselves, if only I could pray like someone else. We think to ourselves, I wonder if God even bothers listening to me. And he says to us in his word, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet.

And our voices are sweet because we pray in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who is altogether lovely.

But we move third and finally to the power in verses 22 to 24. And here the author focuses on the power of the Lord.

Verses 22 and 23, we see the conquest of death. The author tells us that the life of the child came into him. Verse 23. In Psalm 139, we're told that not even Sheol, not even the underworld, can limit the Lord.

A person may find themselves held captive in this environment, but they are not beyond the scope of the Lord's reach. They are not beyond the sound of his voice. And here in 1 Kings 17, we find the Lord bringing this child who had no breath back to life.

[19:12] And the author proceeds to tell us that Elijah gave the child back to his mother. Look at verse 23. Look at what Elijah does. He takes the child. He brings the child down from the upper chamber.

He gives the child to his mother. It's a dramatic reversal of the steps taken in verse 19. Verse 19, Elijah took the child from his mother, carried him up to the upper chamber, laid him on the bed. But now those steps are reversed. Verse 23. But also look at what Elijah says. Verse 19. Elijah said, give me your son. Now in verse 23, Elijah says, here is your son.

Was lost and he's been found. He was dead and he is alive. And that leads us then to the confession of the woman in verse 24.

You know, there have been a great deal at stake in this crisis. For a brief moment, the Lord's providence, taking the life of this child, had seemed to run counter to his promise to preserve this

woman and her family.

[20 : 21] For a brief moment, the Lord has seemed to be as unreliable, as unable, as all the other ancient Near Eastern gods. But the Lord has now shown himself to be faithful, unable to keep his promises, even in the face of death, even in the valley of the shadow of death.

And with all that in mind, the woman now speaks and she says to Elijah, now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.

She knows that Elijah is a man of God. She knows he is a prophet of God. She knows that he is a spokesman for God. This miracle has vindicated the Lord and his promises.

But it's also vindicated the Lord's mouthpiece, the Lord's prophet, this man, Elijah. Now I know that you are a man of God.

Well, friends, as we consider the power of the Lord, we are being reminded that the Lord is a God who has authority. He has supremacy, even over death.

[21 : 28] We see that in this episode, in his commentary, Ian Proven writes, here is the ultimate test of the Lord's authority. It is one thing to rescue people from the jaws of death, but can he do anything when death has clamped tight its jaws and swallowed the victim up?

He can act across the border from Israel and Sidon, but is there a border that he ultimately cannot cross? Is there a kingdom in which he has no power? When faced by death, must the Lord, like Baal, bow the knee?

And here we find the Lord showing that even death must bow the knee to him. And that is the truth that the Old Testament repeatedly brings out.

The Lord is sovereign. The Lord is supreme, even over death. Deuteronomy 32. There is no God beside me. I kill and I make alive. I wound and I heal.

There is none who can deliver out of my hand. 1 Samuel chapter 2. The Lord kills and brings to life. He brings to Sheol and raises up. Isaiah 25.

[22 : 34] The Lord will swallow up death forever. And in the New Testament, we see that Jesus, this God in the flesh, is sovereign over death.

He's the one who raises the dead. Isn't it interesting that all four Gospels testify to him raising the dead? He's the one who raises the dead daughter of Jairus.

He's the one who raises the dead son of the widow and name. He's the one who raises his dead friend Lazarus back from the dead and brings him to life. But he's not simply the one who raises the dead.

He's also the one who is raised from the dead. He dies and he's placed in a tomb. An event that crushes and perplexes his followers leaves him with that question, why?

But on the third day, he is raised from the dead with invincible life. Death couldn't hold him. Death couldn't defeat him. Death didn't have the last word on him.

[23 : 33] He's the one who can truly claim to possess the keys of death and Hades. He's the one who can truly claim to be the resurrection and the life. And he's the one who will return.

And at his voice, all those who have died in him will be raised and caught up with him in glory. Well, today, friends, as we consider this passage, we're being reminded, aren't we, of just how powerful Jesus is.

You know, death can appear to be so powerful. No one can say to death, don't come here. No one can say to death, don't come right now.

Death is powerful. And when it invades, no one can stop it. No one can resist it. No one can subdue it. It is so final. And if this last year has taught us anything, it has shown us that people, whether they say it or not, are afraid of death.

Our governments in Holyrood and Westminster have gone to extraordinary and well-intentioned efforts to halt the invasion of death. To stop people from dying.

[24 : 42] But the reality is, friends, virus or no virus, death will eventually come to each of us. No amount of mask wearing.

No amount of social distancing. No amount of self-isolating. No amount of vaccinations will prevent each and every one of us from one day lying in the earth, our story over.

Our tale told. But Jesus is stronger than death. Death can't place a person beyond the scope of his reach or the sound of his voice.

Death won't be able to prevent Jesus from saying to his people on that glorious resurrection morning, arise and come with me. Death won't be able to prevent those whom Jesus addresses in

this way from rising up and walking with him into that spring of singing where all shadows have finally fled away.

Instead, Jesus will say on that day. Oh, death. Oh, death. Where is your victory? Oh, grave. Where is your sting?

[25 : 56] And there will be no answer. Because death will have finally, completely, fully died.

Death defeated. Well, in a world where people are so afraid. Where people will do anything and everything to cling to life.

I want to ask tonight in closing. Are you relying on this powerful saviour? Are you resting on this powerful saviour?

Who has come to deliver his people from death. And hasn't simply come to deliver them from death. But has come to deliver them even from the fear of death.

Now, that doesn't mean that we're not afraid of the process of dying. I'm sure every one of us would say, well, we are afraid of the process. We are afraid of how we will die. But we don't need to fear what lies on the other side.

[27 : 04] Because there is one who has gone before us. The author, perfecter of our faith. The Lord Jesus Christ. He has gone through the valley of the shadow of death.

And now this good shepherd comes to us and he says, follow me. I've been through this valley. And I know the way out.

Come with me. We don't need to fear what lies. On the other side. On the other side. Finally. ...

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