

LET THIS LIFE COME BACK AGAIN

I Kings 17: 17-24 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Today, the Bible gives us part three in Elijah's preparation for the showdown of God Almighty and the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. The university preparation was intense, but Elijah passed all his tests. Let me call Elijah's education first, Cherith Bone Dry College, then in Zarephath, grad school at Flour Jar and Oil Jug Not Empty University, and finally, after grad school, for his doctorate, still in Zarephath, south of Sidon, Elijah took his hardest course at "Let This Child Live Again School of Resurrection." It all sounds so easy when we read it, until, we put ourselves in Elijah's place, in these three and a half years of preparing for his Mt. Carmel showdown with Ahab and the prophets of Baal and Asherah. This third stage of Elijah's preparation for Mt. Carmel came to a surprising climax in the widow's home in Zarephath. Everything Elijah told the widow came true, and Elijah lived with the widow and her son for many days, I Kings 17: 15. The widow and her son never died, as she told Elijah she was making plans to do. God supplied water and oil day after day, week after week, and month after month. There is something about all three of Elijah's learning experiences that keeps the hair on the back of my neck standing on end, and the way God spoke to Elijah and through him, each time, it gives me goosebumps.

Ten years ago, I don't know where I was, but I was staying overnight in a motel somewhere in our Intermountain West. It happened on April 14, 2009 on a program called "Britain's Got Talent." It was an event where one woman stunned Britain, America, and the entire world. She has become a household word--Susan Boyle. I have one of her CD's. She wowed the world that night with her disarming performance of "I Dreamed a Dream," from Les Miserables. From the first line of the song, the audience began to stand and clap. Her voice was stunning, her performance was perfect, and her appearance, that's what threw everyone off. Her appearance was not stunning; it was awkward; she looked a bit disheveled; scattered, and the crowd was thinking, "Let's get this over with." Susan Boyle, an ordinary 47-year old Scottish woman was against all odds that moment as this had walked out on stage to sing. The audience rolled their eyes and the judges snickered and were even, sarcastic. That is, until Susan started to sing, and many people started to think the whole world sort of shook on its axis. Jaws dropped; eyes widened. At that moment, everything people thought they knew, everything they expected to happen, melted away. This woman should have failed. They predicted she would butcher and destroy a beautiful song. But that didn't happen. Not even close. Rather, she delivered a jaw-dropping performance, revealing a voice no one assumed she could ever have had, and essentially Susan started breaking the rules on how everyone thought the world worked. For that moment,

all the rules of logic were broken. Susan Boyle, a plump middle-aged woman harnessed the world as her audience. She got her chance and it changed her life. I listened to her twice on Friday, and the performance still gives me goose bumps.

Elijah was that kind of a prophet. We keep getting surprised by him. By this time, each of us have identified with Elijah to some extent. Who would dream that this backwoodsman from Tishbe, had any more accounts of him that God would document in His sacred Word? Second only to Moses, Elijah comes in first. His amazing story started out in I Kings 17 where he does not appear as a top contestant in a contest of “Which Prophet Is Most Likely to Succeed.” He was doing well in Zarephath where this unnamed widow gave him an upper room on the second floor of her home. All was well until the mistress of at the widow’s house, watched the wheels fall off her wagon. Her son unexpectedly became ill and his illness was unto death. He died. He had no breath left in his beloved body. As I have studied this amazing account, there are four lessons God has been impressing me with, that all of us must learn. Please learn these lessons along with me.

WE AS GOD’S SERVANTS MUST GET USED TO BEING MISUNDERSTOOD, ACCUSED, BLAMED AND SPOKEN AGAINST. (I.)

Notice I Kings 17: 17-18. “After this, the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was not breath left in him. And she said to Elijah, “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son.” It goes with the territory of being a man or woman of God, being one of the Lord’s anointed. When you speak for God, many times you are doomed both by what you say and what you don’t say. If you warn people about sin or danger ahead, you are wrong, meddling, and interfering in something that is none of your business. If you fail to say something, you are just as much an accused false prophet who doesn’t have the guts to speak up for God. And like this widow, perhaps there is some sarcasm in the voices of those who would call us, “a man or a woman of God.” We can be on a pedestal one moment, and a moment later, we are the worst person in the world. In this account, the wheels do appear to fall off the covered wagon. Things did not go according to plan. The widow's son fell ill. There was no breath left in him. The boy was saved from starvation. only to die of a severe illness. And it happened on Elijah’s watch. Without an explanation for the boy's illness nor any authoritative word on how this event figured into God's plan, this son was dead. This unexpected turn of events left the widow and Elijah searching for answers.

The widow’s sad first response was to turn on the prophet Elijah. What kind of a man of God saves a mother and her son from starving only to allow the son to die of illness? For this mother, to have died beside her son from starvation seemed to

her a kinder fate than seeing him live only to watch him die later of a strange, unknown disease? This widow put it strongly to Elijah in her grief, “What do you have against me, O man of God?” If that calling Elijah a man of God wasn’t sarcastic, it must have meant something like, “What kind of a cruel God do you have who would save my son from starvation, but is powerless to save him from this unknown sickness?” Then the accusations went deeper. “Did you just come here to learn about my awful past sins and then to see I get punished for them?” What would Elijah say? Tony Evans once said, “Everything in the universe is either caused by God or allowed by God, and there is no third category.” This son didn’t get sick by chance, and he didn’t die by chance. His sickness and his death were both part of the sovereign plan of God. But if you ask me, “Why did this son die? I have no answer. As pastors we are asked over and over why this cancer, why this heart attack, why this sudden infant death syndrome, why this miscarriage, why this adulterous affair, why this dishonoring of you two as parents, and the list goes on and on. None of us honestly have the full answer.

Yet, there’s another puzzle we must examine. This mother’s response to her son’s death was to feel guilty, and to believe God killed her child as His way of punishing her for her past sins. When a loved one dies, millions of people believe it is their fault, or as this widow, they blame someone else. When people walk away and become prodigals, people often blame their pastors or parents. This widow blamed Elijah for her son’s death. Somehow this widow recognized the presence of God in Elijah, but she expected his presence would prevent her from trouble or death. She had a false dependence upon Elijah, thinking his presence was like a rabbit’s foot or a cross worn around our neck. Perhaps this widow thought God had informed Elijah of her past sins and Elijah had called down the judgment of God. As the disciples of Jesus asked him about a blind man in John 9: 2, they asked Him, “Master, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?” Jesus answer to His disciples was “Neither this man or his parents are the reason for his blindness, but that the works/glorify of God might be displayed in him.”

There are at least three problems with this widow’s thinking. First, she thought Elijah’s presence was a talisman or good luck charm, that made her immune from suffering. Secondly, she thought her sins caused her son’s death. Thirdly, she searched for someone to blame for the death of her son—Elijah was the closest person she could find. It is very human to blame each other when tragedy strikes. Beloved, be sure you will be blamed often when trouble strikes. Husbands blame wives, wives blame husbands, children blame their parents, church members blame their pastors, citizens blame the president, and on it goes. Peter prepares us in I Peter 4: 12 for this, saying, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening.” 2ndly,

WE AS GOD’S SERVANTS MUST LEARN BETTER WAYS OF RESPONDING THAN OUR NORMAL DEFENSIVENESS THAT

USUALLY KICKS IN. (II.) Notice this man of God, Elijah in I Kings 17: 19-20. How did he respond? It is amazing. “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 he laid him on his own bed. 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?” I hope you will join me in asking God to help us learn to respond as Elijah responded. Elijah didn’t talk back to the widow, saying, “Why me? What have I done?” or “I can’t believe you are talking to me this way.” He didn’t get angry and proudly rebuke her either, saying, “How dare you speak this way to me, a man of God? Don’t you know where your flour and oil come from?” He didn’t send this woman on a guilt trip. Somehow Elijah understood her grief. There is nothing that seems more unnatural than for parents to bury their children. It is to be the privilege, honor, and duty of children to bury their parents. It is not supposed to be the other way around. It has been said, “The death of a child is like a period before the end of the sentence. Elijah never got angry, he never argued with her, and he never began the foolish nonsense of trying to explain why her son died.

What did he do? He somehow remained calm with repose while this widow was losing her head and blaming him. He was passing his exam at the Zarephath University. Somehow Elijah rose above the curse of our generation—the desire to always be understood. He was successfully coping with being misunderstood. He didn’t defend himself, panic, or conclude falsely that he must not be a man of God. No, he just said to woman, “Give me your son.” The greatest freedom when we want to defend ourselves is sensing/knowing we have nothing to prove—we decide not to take the tantrum, the accusation, or the mocking sarcasm personally. Elijah never focused on the woman, but now on the dead child. He carried this young boy he loved up to his upstairs bedroom, perhaps, the roof of the widow’s home. There on the roof top bedroom, he cried out to the Lord the question the widow’s words left him with. He began to reason with God. “O Lord, my God, have you really brought this calamity on this widow with whom I am sojourning? Have you willfully killed her son?” This is my lesson, whether you need this or not. I do. God wants me as God wants you all to take our burdens to the Lord, to Him personally and leave them there. He wants us to pour out our hearts to Him, but not to debate those who speak harshly, accusingly, mockingly, sarcastically, and viciously with us. Elijah couldn’t quite believe God would miraculously spare this widow and her son, only to turn around and let the son die. It didn’t make sense to Elijah. A lot of things God does or allows don’t make sense to us. Don’t try to defend God. He is our Defender. God to Him and pour out the pain, the sorrow, the personal hurt, and the deep desire to defend yourself to Him. Thirdly,

WE AS GOD’S SERVANTS MUST PULL OUT THE STOPS WITH GOD WHEN WE FACE THE WORST DISASTERS THAT WE CAN IMAGINE.

(III.) Notice verses 21-22. “The Elijah 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.” And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived.” We must look, not for answers to our questions, but for answers to our prayers. This is the first record in the OT of the resurrection of a dead person. The evidence is clear. The widow’s son was dead; not in a coma or in a faint. He stopped breathing, v. 17, “no breath was left in him. His spirit had left his body, for Elijah prayed for his life or spirit to come back into him. James 2: 26 tells us that “the body apart from the spirit is dead.” Elijah asked the question of God, “have You killed her son?” Don’t ever get the idea this was a swoon or a coma or a barely breathing boy. He was as dead as Lazarus in the tomb four days.

No one really knows exactly why Elijah laid down once, much less twice or three times. To do anything for this boy, Elijah had to go to extreme measures. It is wrong to touch a dead body, as a Jew, but extreme cases call for extreme measures. By lying down on the body of this little child, Elijah was saying, in essence, “Oh Lord, somehow take some of my life from within me and give it to this boy.” He prayed for a miracle because he believed God’s power was stronger than death. Desperate times call for desperate measures. Listen to his prayer. Beloved, there are times we must get down on our knees, flat on the floor, or like Elijah, covering up this little dead boy with his warm body. Then when we pray, we must lay hold of the horns of the altar. With God, there is hope even in the most hopeless situations. We must rely on God’s word and no other as the last word. No diagnosis, no cat-scan, no MRI, no ultrasound, no doctor and nothing but God will be our last word. Now what will we do? Plead the blood of Jesus over this person. Cry out for the breath of God to break into this person’s heart and chest and cry for a heart-beat, for a healing, and for a miracle. Cry out to God to give this person and their family out of this test and trial, a testimony, before the congregation, a testimony that will bring the lost to Jesus and a testimony that will glorify only the Lord. Thank God for His mercy, cry “Have mercy on this child, this friend, this brother, this mother or father.” Cry, “Lord, you can see more than all the tests can see. Speak life and victory and healing into them. Thank You there is victory in Jesus. Touch them, help their heart to beat again, the cancer to be gone, the terrible wound to heal, the baby to live, the lost person to be found, and bring the prodigal back home on Your shoulders, Lord.” Stand in agreement with others. Pray together. Pray separately, pray fervently and pull out the stops. Ask God to deliver the person and cast out a demon if a demon has shown himself. Call for God to cover this person with His precious Name, His precious blood, and call for life back again. If God heals or if He revives, or if we would ever see God bring back

from the dead someone we pray for, give God all the glory! If God does not heal, and His last word is taking this person Home to His arms, be sure you have, along with me, prayed with God's tender love and bold authority. Then fully, graciously, peacefully, rest, and accept God's decision as the last word. Fourthly and lastly,

WE AS GOD'S SERVANTS MUST KNOW GOD WILL VINDICATE US HIS SERVANTS AND HE WILL USE OUR FAITHFULNESS AS A MEANS OF DRAWING THE LOST TO HIS ARMS. (IV.) Notice verses 23-24. "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. And the woman said to Elijah (this was the day of her full conversion) She said, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth." Elijah now was vindicated, God was vindicated, and God's truth was vindicated. The result of this miracle was the public confession of this widow's faith in the God of Israel. She now knew Elijah was a true prophet and man of God and that the truths he had taught her from the Word of God were true. She had seen that God was not only the sustainer of life with the flour and the oil. But she had seen that God is also the resurrection and the life. He that believes in Him though he is dead, yet shall he live. The oil and the flour didn't run out, and now the boy is raised from the dead. This widow left Baal for good, and all the other gods of Sidon and Zarephath behind that day. Elijah learned to do business with God, and God was preparing him to call down fire one day soon on Mt. Carmel.

Jesus used this amazing story of this widow in Zarephath as preaching material for His message in the synagogue in Nazareth. Read Luke 4: 16-30. At first the people loved him for his gracious words, they spoke well of Him and they marveled at His command and authority with God's Word. Yet God's love for the lost is not just for one group or race or tribe or nation. Jesus came to die for all the sinners and the sin of the world. So in Nazareth, Jesus opened the blind eyes of those open to Him and He infuriated most of them by telling them His heart for the lost, and His sovereign grace that reaches to the ends of the earth, to Turkmen, to native Americans, to Asians, Africans, Mexicans, Indians from India, people from Eurasia, people from the Middle East, and from the islands of the seas. What did Jesus say? Jesus used the widow of Zarephath as proof of His love for everyone and the Nazarites hated Him for it. He said in Luke 6: 23-27, "Doubtless you will quote to Me this proverb, "Physician, heal yourself." What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who

was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” This love for the lost all over the world ate up the hearts of Jesus’ fellow Nazarites. They rose up and drove Him out of the town and brought Him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, so that they could throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went away.” Beloved, God loves us all, the widows of Zarephath, the dead widow’s son He makes alive, the misunderstood Jews and Christians like Elijah, the leprous captains of Syria—yes Jesus loves us all, and today, as we cry out to Him in prayer, He is waiting to speak life into the open hearts of all of you who come to Him. Will you give Him your hearts? Let’s pray.