



Lessons from Elijah's Life

New Life for a Weeping Widow

Date: 5 February 2020

Text: 1 Kings 17:17-24

Key Lesson: God wants us to trust Him during the trials of life.

And It Came to Pass

Elijah has been facing many difficult challenges. Facing King Ahab with bad news from God was certainly a difficult challenge, but that was only the beginning. The next several weeks or months, he spent hiding in a deep valley alongside the Cherith wadi. He drank from the brook and received his daily food from the beaks or claws of ravens. Then the day came when the brook dried up and God told him to move to Zarephath beyond the northern border of Israel and to live with a poor widow. God challenged his faith, and the faith of the widow, as He provided their daily bread from the handful of meal and a little oil. Just how long he had been living in the loft (a roof-room, common in those days) above the widow's house is unknown, but the opening words of our text today announce "and it came to pass after these things." Perhaps about the time their faith in God was becoming steadfast, God allowed a trial to come that would again test their faith.

The Widow's Son Died

The widow was the mistress or owner of the house in which they lived. Her son became sick. As this burdened mother cared for her weakening son, her emotions welled up within her. God does not tell us how rapidly the sickness overtook the lad, but eventually her motherly nursing failed and the boy died. Sometime before Elijah had arrived at her home, she had endured the grief of her husband's death. It appears that she had no children other than this son. Now he was dead. She was left alone in this world. Why would God allow this? God's ways do not always make sense from a human perspective (Isa 55:8-9). We must remember that with God there are no accidents. Nothing ever surprises God. God allows trials to come in our lives in order to perfect us.

Pastor Alan Carr points out that "the Bible teaches us a different truth. God isn't *correcting* His prophet, He is *perfecting* Him. God is teaching Elijah lessons that can be learned in no other fashion than through trial and difficulty. You see, it is in the storms of life that we learn God can walk on the waves. It is in the valleys of life that we learn that He is the Lily of the Valleys. Sometimes we must go through the fires of life to find out that He will go with us every step of the way."¹

Phillips Brooks once said, "O, do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger men! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks."²

The Widow's Grief

Grief is an emotional time that shakes a person to the core. Grieving is a healthy and good bridge between loss and recovery. It seems that the number-one question that haunts the grieving is "Why?" While searching for the answer to this question, the widow became bitter and lashed out at Elijah blaming him (v.18). Indirectly she blamed Elijah's God. Then she blamed her past sin. During trials, the grieving often wonder if God is punishing them for their past sins. While that may be true sometimes, it is not always true. Her heart was broken with grief. Her eyes were so filled with tears that she could not see life from God's perspective.

Though extremely difficult, a better question to ask during grief is "What does God have me to learn through this?" Through grief, we can learn increase dependence on God, assurance of God's love, greater hope in the resurrection, and empathy for others.

Elijah Stayed Encouraged

This tragic event could have greatly discouraged Elijah. God was using this widow as his source of food and shelter and now she lost her cherished son, was left alone and bitterly blamed Elijah for the whole situation. When we get discouraged, like David of old, we must encourage ourselves in the Lord.

Alan Carr relates this touching illustration.³ *W. A. Criswell was perhaps the best-known pastor in the world during his long tenure at the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. His sermons, personal efforts, and multiplied books have been the means of winning untold numbers to Christ.*

¹ Pastor Alan Carr, https://www.sermonnotebook.org/elijah/1%20Kings%2017_17-24.htm

² Quoted by Keathley, <https://bible.org/seriespage/death-and-resurrection-widow%E2%80%99s-son-1-kings-1717-24>

³ Carr

But in Criswell's biography, author Billy Keith tells an interesting story about the man who led Criswell to the Lord. It was when W. A. was ten years old, and Rev. John Hicks came to his small Texas town to conduct a revival meeting. Hicks stayed in the Criswell home during his two week campaign. Young W. A. was greatly taken with John Hicks, and one day he asked permission to leave school to attend the ten o'clock services at the church. Entering the chapel, he sat directly behind his mother and drank in every word that Hicks spoke. When Hicks gave the invitation, the lad went forward and, with tears, took Jesus Christ as his Savior.

Years later, when Criswell was a world-renowned pastor, he recounted his conversion to a friend of his, Wallace Basset.

"Would you repeat that, W. A.?" Basset asked.

He repeated the story.

"I just can't imagine that," Basset said. "Johnny Hicks was a dear friend of mine, and he was here in Baylor Hospital in his last illness of which he died. I went often to see Johnny, and one day as I sat beside him, he said, 'Wallace, my life is over, my preaching days are done, and I've never done anything for Jesus. I've failed, Wallace, I've failed.'"

Those were the last words the old preacher ever spoke. He didn't realize how successful he had been in that one conversion.

The lesson? Never discount what the Lord is doing in you, through you, to you and around you. He has a plan, and if you are a part of that plan, all will be well in the end! Therefore, fight discouragement as if you were fighting for your life, for in a sense you are!

Elijah Went to God for Help

Elijah remained calm and simply said, "Give me thy son." (v.19) He took the body of the youth up into his loft and laid him upon his own bed. He wanted a quiet place, away from the weeping widow, a place where he could get alone with God. Then he began to pray (v.20). In his prayer, Elijah asked a similar question. However, he did not ask it in an accusing way, but with a heart to know God's mind. "O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon this widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" Elijah believed that God was in control of what had taken place. He also believed that God could give the boy life again if He so desired.

Elijah stretched himself upon the child. This seems to indicate that the lad was perhaps a teenager. Elijah did this three times, evidently praying for his resurrection each time (v.21). We have no Bible record of anyone being raised back to life prior to this event. Asking God for this miracle was a major request. Why did Elijah need to repeat this stretching and prayer three times? Perhaps it is to teach us persistence in prayer as Jesus taught in Luke 18. Persistence is not us repeatedly twisting God's arm until He gives in; it is God repeatedly testing our sincerity and faith in Him. Jesus said that believing faith is the key to getting prayer answered. (Matthew 21:22) "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

God Resurrected the Lad

The LORD answered Elijah's prayer (v.22). Not only did the LORD audibly hear the voice of Elijah, the sound of his voice had moved the heart of God. The child came to life again. This first recorded resurrection was of the son of a Gentile widow. We do not need more eloquent prayers to impress the ear of God, but more sincere prayers of faith to reach the heart of God.

Elijah then presented the child alive to his mother (v.23). Imagine the joy and gladness in that house! Mourning had turned to laughter!

The Widow's Confession

This miracle from God confirmed her faith (v.24). If she had not previously trusted the Lord for salvation, her words here indicate that she now had. She believed that the word of the LORD (spoken by Elijah) was truth.

God strengthened Elijah's faith (and the widow's faith) by this trial. They now knew firsthand that God could do the impossible. God had specifically answered Elijah's prayer for the impossible.

God is able to do miracles today just as He did in Elijah's day, but he does not always choose to do so. God views our lives from a much broader perspective. He knows what is best. He also knows what is needed to move us to give Him the glory.

"Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you." (1 Peter 5:7)