

Session 3

August 8, 2021

SERVE THROUGH PRAYER

1 Kings 17:17-24

It is interesting that Elijah does not show up by name in the Hebrews 11 “Hall of Faith.” His presence on the list is inferred, however, by Hebrews 11:35, “Women received their dead raised to life again.” The prophet’s reputation is better memorialized in the New Testament as an example of the effects of powerful praying (see James 5:16-18). In this week’s focal passage, both his *faith* and his *praying* are highlighted. The drama plays out in five scenes.

There is death (v. 17). Some time has passed since chapter 16, likely a year or more. The widow and her son and the prophet of God have been provided for in the midst of the drought. Life was certainly difficult, but bearable...until the unthinkable happened. The son of this hostess to Elijah fell ill. That *there was no breath left in him* means he was dead. It was tragic enough that this woman had lost her husband. But now that pain is multiplied in the loss of her son.

I have often said the cruelest of sin’s consequences is the death of a son or daughter. Men will bury their parents; that much is expected. But no parent should ever have to bury a child. A year earlier, she had consigned herself to the fact that both she and her son would eat their last meal and lie down to die. But God’s prophet had intervened. And while God had appointed her to provide for Elijah, Elijah had instead provided for her. Her household had become dependent on the oil and flour miraculously replenished every day. For a year, her despair had been turned to joy. And now the joy was gone. For reflection: *How do you react when life isn’t fair, and you find yourself in despair?*

There is doubt (v. 18). In the immediate pain of losing her son, the widow’s natural doubts crept in. While some commentators see these questions as legitimate inquiries, I see them as the bitter accusations of a woman grieving. Four biting accusations are made: *Man of God* was likely in derision. In other words, “Some Man of God you turned out to be!” *What do we have in common?* Means, “How could you possibly understand what I am going through?” *Have you come to remind me of my guilt?* could be, “As a foreigner and a gentile, and a sinner...are you now drawing God’s attention and subsequent judgment down on me? *And to kill my son?* indicates her anger. The idea is that God *executed* her son or *struck him down*. For reflection: *What kind of counsel would you provide for someone in a similar situation?*

There is deliverance (vv. 19-22). These verses record the first time in the Bible that someone is raised from the dead. The renowned fervor of Elijah’s praying (see James 5:16) is demonstrated in the *actions* accompanying Elijah’s words. He *took* him; he *brought* him; he *laid* him down (v. 19). He *cried out* (v. 20). He *stretched out* over the boy three times; then he *cried out* a second time (v. 21) before the Lord moved. In verse 22, it was God’s turn to act in response to the prophet’s earnest pleas. For reflection: *Why do you think God answered Elijah’s prayer? Did Elijah change God’s mind? How do you see God’s sovereignty in relation to our praying?*

There is delight (v. 23). Imagine the thrill of Elijah as he felt this young boy draw a sudden breath and stir beneath him. Imagine the shock of the boy...waking from death and finding this hairy old man lying on top of him! But those emotions cannot compare with the delight of his

mother when Elijah descended from the upper room, not carrying the dead child in his arms but walking the living child down those steps. Elijah calmly, serenely, reverently, delivers him to his mother, and says simply, “Look...your son is alive.” For reflection: *How does Elijah’s faith factor into this? What kind of effort did he put into his praying? Do we pray with a similar fervor?*

There is a declaration (v. 24). “Then the woman said to Elijah, ‘Now I know you are a man of God and the Lord’s word from your mouth is true.’”

Elijah walked into this chapter as *Elijah the Tishbite*. He is nobody that matters, from no place that matters. But two years and three miracles later, he is declared a *man of God*. For reflection: *Notice the widow’s connection of Elijah’s role and his word. What applications can you draw from this woman’s declaration?*