



Sermon Text: 1 Kings 17:17-24

Sermon Date: February 24, 2019

Every morning the widow of Zarephath awoke to a new miracle of God's mercy. Just as Elijah had promised, her meager provisions were never used up. She daily lived a praise song. But as our text opens, she is jolted by sudden tragedy. We walked through the text in 3 stages.

THE DEVASTATING PROVIDENCE OF GOD

In verse 17, the widow's young son gets sick and dies unexpectedly. When we step back and examine all of 1 Kings 17, we notice a perplexing pattern. God gives and takes. He supplies and strips. His providence dazzles and then devastates. When we read the widow's exasperated agony in verse 18, we can relate. We too have been devastated by God's providence and dumbfounded by His ways. In this unfiltered account of troubled faith, we can find, as Dale Ralph Davis puts it, "backhanded comfort in the rugged honesty of the Bible. It hides nothing but warns clearly that Yahweh both blesses and baffles his servants."

A DESPERATE PRAYER TO GOD

Next we saw Elijah respond with profound gentleness to the widow's agonized accusation. With great tenderness he takes the widow's son in his arms and Elijah carries him up to his room. There Elijah cries out to God in desperate prayer. First, Elijah cries a poignant complaint. He takes the widow's heartache, turns it into prayer, and then pleads to God from her perspective. Next, Elijah makes an audacious petition, pleading for God to let the child's life come into him again. Never before in history at this time has a person been raised from the dead. This is a prayer of faith without precedent. And in God's great mercy, He listens to Elijah's voice and does exactly what he requests—word for word!

THE DELIGHTFUL PURPOSES OF GOD

It is hard to imagine the happiness that erupted in the widow's heart when she saw Elijah carrying her son—alive and well—back into the room. By God's grace, the house of mourning is transformed into a home of joy. And in this story, we can glean three delightful purposes from God's devastating providence.

1. **For the deepening of our faith.** After the heartache—because of the heartache—the widow of Zarephath declares, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth." God was working to solidify her certainty, to enrich her understanding, to deepen her faith. We can be certain that God is doing something similar in our lives as well.
2. **For the demonstration of God's glory.** In all of 1 Kings 17, God is proving his superiority over Baal. Unlike Baal, who Canaanite mythology taught was seasonally defeated by Mot (Death), Yahweh rules death. The Lord's authority extends beyond the grave. He alone is God.
3. **For a display of the greater Savior.** Ultimately this story is to point our faith forward to Jesus Christ, who like Elijah demonstrated his power over death. But unlike Elijah, Jesus didn't simply bring the word of the one who can beat death—he is the one who can beat death. As Jesus declared, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Revelations 1:17-18).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?
2. In what ways do you find "backhanded comfort in the rugged honesty of the Bible"?
3. Explain a time of devastating providence in your life and the delight purposes God worked during that time. What did you learn about God? What good did God accomplish through it?