

Faith in the God of Resurrection Life

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 October 2025

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] So this evening we're going to look at this story, the next story in the life of Elisha. So that we can see what it is to have faith in the God of resurrection life.

But we're going to begin by thinking about airline pilots. I am told that very early on in pilot school, pilot training, a vital skill that they need to learn is the ability to fly by their instruments, to be able to look at those super complicated dials and controls in order to fly straight, to land safely, to know where they're going in any weather conditions.

You know, when the storm clouds come in, when the fog gathers, when you can't see naturally, you need to be able to fly by the instruments. And there's something helpful, I think, in that as we think about the picture of our own lives as something of a journey.

Times in our lives when those storm clouds gather. And at that point we will find ourselves instinctively turning to something to give us guidance and stability.

What is it that will keep us steady? What is it that will guide us home safely? We perhaps recognize that many people in our world are in a moment where they have rejected ideas of God and ultimate meaning and higher purpose.

[1 : 31] And lots of people are beginning to see, this is not working for me. There's that sense of instability, especially perhaps in times of trouble. And so you listen to commentators on society and they say, well, we're living in the age of anxiety.

Whether that's about the environment or politics or about our own financial situation. Or people will say, we live in the age of consumption. And so we've never had it better and we're always consuming more.

But the things that we are consuming are not tracking with happiness, but rather we're becoming more anxious and struggling with more fears. We live in what's known as the disenchanting age. We're being told, people have been told for years, there is nothing beyond ourselves. So just kind of make what you can of the world. But again, people are beginning to wrestle with this reality of knowing that there is something more.

And so we live in a really interesting moment where people are turning to consider the spiritual and people are looking and seeking for transcendence. Where can hope be found?

[2 : 39] It's a question in every age and it's certainly a question in ours. It was a question in the time of Elisha as well. We have seen, especially in the time of Elijah, that most of the people in Israel, as they were looking for hope, had turned to the idol Baal.

But it wasn't just then that people turned to idols. There's that instinct within our hearts at all times. If we think about Martin Luther, I think, has a really helpful definition of idolatry.

Whatever we expect to provide all good and in which we take refuge in our distress, that's what our idol is.

And so again, people are still looking for where am I going to find ultimate good? Where am I going to find a safe refuge? But outside of the God of the Bible, people are failing to provide and find solid hope.

And in that setting, and relevant for our setting, we see in this woman from Shunem a picture of faith. Here is a woman who knows her God.

[3 : 45] And as we see, she lives for her God. And when things go wrong in her life, and they absolutely do, she runs to her God to find hope.

And for us, as we pick up her story, and as we see the beginning and the end, we know that there is wonderful joy beyond the sorrow. And the story as a whole offers hope to us too, especially as we think about it in light of the gospel.

When we think about the reality that God has sent His man Jesus to offer us renewal and resurrection life. He is God's final prophet. He is God's final word. And to lay hold on Him is to lay hold on a hope that will not fail. That in knowing God through His Son Jesus, we find that stability that we are looking for. We find that direction and meaning in the fog. And we have the promise of a true homecoming. And the joy of resurrection life. So we're going to do a couple of things this evening. [4 : 54] First, we're going to put faith in focus. And then we'll think about having faith in the God of resurrection life. So, to our story, verse 8.

One day, Elisha went to Shunem and a well-to-do woman was there who urged him to stay for a meal. So it's interesting. If you were here last week, we saw Elisha encountering a poor, starving woman.

This time, a well-to-do woman who has enough to offer generous hospitality. God's going to show grace to them both. God's going to exercise His power in both of their stories, which always reminds us that God's grace runs wide.

His kingdom is wide. Here is a woman who lives for God's glory. Here is a woman who's learned to rest in God's grace to her. And we see it, first of all, in her service.

She urges Elisha to stay for a meal. And then she said to her husband in verse 9, I know this man who comes our way is a holy man of God. Let's make a small room for him.

[5 : 55] So there are their meals. She uses her resources to build an additional room up on the roof. Her life is one that makes room to encourage and to serve God's prophet.

This is mission support. Because she knows Elisha is God's man, God's representative, who is bringing God's word into her region.

So as she offers support and a base of operations, it becomes evident she wants the kingdom of God to grow. She wants others to hear the true message from God that they might believe and trust.

Jesus would approve of her faith. We know this because in Matthew 10, he says, whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. But then he goes on to say, even a cup of water offered in my name, well, that'll get a reward too.

So her service is showing her faith. But I think we can also say that her secure identity shows that she has a real faith in her God. So here we find in verse 11 through to 13, first of all, Elisha and Gehazi are having a chat.

[7 : 11] And then Elisha says to Gehazi, his servant, tell her, you've gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?

So remember, she knows this is God's holy man. She knows that Elisha works with God's power. So when Elisha comes to her house and says to her, what can I do for you? This is a massive offer. This is a finding the golden ticket kind of a moment. But the woman, even as she's offered like prestige and new connections, how does she reply?

I have a home among my own people. She is content. She is content among her family, her connections within the community. She has this privilege of knowing and serving the God of glory by welcoming Elisha.

God has given me this life and I'm content. She has a secure identity because her faith is in God. But we also see her faith and focus in her suffering.

[8 : 21] Because there is this wonderful announcement that God would give her a son. But this son that brings so much joy will also bring grief.

We know that principle, don't we? Sometimes the gifts that we give or that we get, they can bring both gladness and they can bring sadness. We in our family, we can still remember getting our new puppy, a cute little bundle of fluff, joy.

But then when you want to kind of settle down and just pet them and you discover and you've brought into the house a tiny shark that wants to chew your arm off, it's a little bit sad and frustrating. Sometimes the gifts that we receive, they bring gladness and sadness.

And that's true of the gifts that God gives also. That this wonderful, precious gift of a son will become, in time, a source of her grief.

We read of it, didn't we? We read of the boy's sudden illness. This promised, precious son, one day comes out to his father complaining, my head, my head.

[9 : 36] And he's carried home and he spends some hours in his mother's arms and he dies there. And all of a sudden life has taken a very different, unexpected turn and faith is shaken to the core. And she is very honest. We know in verse 27, as she arrives to meet Elisha, that her bitter distress is clear.

Verse 28, we hear her words, Did I ask you for a son, my Lord? Didn't I tell you don't raise my hopes? So the storm clouds of grief, absolutely they've come rolling in. The light of God's love and kindness perhaps isn't evident in her situation, but she doesn't fall apart. And she doesn't give way to bitterness, but rather she runs to her God.

There's a very clear direction of travel in her life. What does she do? It's really interesting. The first thing she does in verse 21 is she takes the boy and laid him on the bed of the man of God.

[10 : 57] What's she saying there? It's a recognition that she's going to bring this situation, bring her son to the Lord through Elisha. And then immediately that's what she does.

She saddles up and prepares for her journey. And on this journey, she's not going to be distracted. She doesn't tell her husband.

She tells her servant, make sure that we don't slow down. When Gehazi comes and greets her, is everything okay? We understand that no one else but God's prophet will do in her story.

But when she comes to God's man, when she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet.

And she pours out her heart. Because prayer is the breath of faith. She says to him in verse 30, As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.

[12 : 05] Actually, the same words that Elisha spoke about Elijah back in chapter 2 when he knew that Elijah was going to be taken up to heaven. As the storm clouds roll in, as she flies by the instruments of her faith, we see so clearly, here is a woman who looks to God.

Here is God's man, and therefore I am going to him with my problem, with my lament. He is going to be my refuge in distress.

He is where I'm going to look to find good in this situation. And she is not disappointed. And that matters for us when we understand that for us, the man of God we run to is none other than the Lord Jesus.

He is the one who is full of compassion. He invites us to pour out our hearts to him, to rest in his promise that he will be with us, that he will show us mercy.

We look to our Lord and our Savior for that renewal that we need, for the promise of resurrection life in our experience.

[13 : 30] So as God brings the woman's faith into focus for ourselves, it helps us, I think, to reflect on our own faith and to ask ourselves some questions.

As we see her sacrificial service, and as we understand that she saw herself as a vehicle, as a means for God's kingdom to be extended, as we understand what the Bible says, that the local church is God's plan, his mission plan for spreading his glory, and as we thought this morning, we have the wonderful privilege of being united together by God's grace within a local church family, are we involving ourselves in that privilege that God gives?

Are we willing to serve and to commit ourselves? Here we get a wonderful little picture of how somebody can use their resources for the good of others.

Here in particular, it was Elisha. How can we use our home, our money, our time as a tangible way to bless someone else?

I think we've been encouraged as a church to see that from grace and peace. It's not going to look the same for us, but what will it look like? How will we as individuals and as a collective show that we want our life to be guided by the glory of Jesus and a concern for his kingdom?

[15 : 09] As we think about this woman's contentment and her secure identity, and as we recognize that we live in a time where advertising and social media is set up to fuel our discontent, psychologists are talking about that.

You know, I read an article this week on social comparison, advertising, and consumer discontent. It's not subtle. It's deliberate. How can we stand apart?

How can we show that we find our identity in Christ and not the stuff that we purchase and not in our digital presence?

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he said to him, godliness with contentment is great gain. That's very countercultural, to be godly and to be content.

But what a wonderful opportunity for us to bear witness to the fact that all we have is Christ. All that we need is Christ. We have something that money can't buy.

[16:15] We have a secure identity that is not based on the whims of social media likes or dislikes. Are we hearing, are we preaching the gospel to ourselves that we are saved by Christ?

We are united to Christ. We are loved by our Father in heaven in Christ. The Spirit dwells in us that we belong to the Lord.

And when suffering comes, and the Bible is so honest and tells us that in a fallen, in a broken world, suffering does come. Everybody hurts.

That in a life of faith, we're not spared those hurts, that tests and trials do come our way. What is our response? Will we run to the God whose ways we don't and won't always understand?

Because we know that he is good and he does what is good. Can we trust that God has established an everlasting covenant to delight in doing us good, even when we can't understand how our present circumstance could possibly be called good?

[17:37] Are we able to have faith that says with Paul, I know that God works all things, all things, for the good of those who love him?

Can we pray with King David, when I am afraid, I put my trust in you, in God whose word I praise, in God I trust and am not afraid.

Can we follow the example of Jesus our Savior going through the unimaginable spiritual agony of bearing the sins of his people and suffering the wrath of God still able to cry, my God, my God.

Because as Joe was reflecting with us this morning, a vital part of our witness a vital part of our good news is going to be communicating how we are able to live with hope.

How is it that we don't fall apart? And those moments and those situations give us the privilege of pointing to Jesus, our strength and our hope.

[18:50] To point people to Jesus who is God's great gift to the world, his own son sent to save us, the one who came to enter this broken world to bring healing.

And every miracle that we find in the life of Jesus speaks to that great reality. We remember the Jesus we encounter in John chapter 11.

When Jesus encountered another family mourning, Mary and Martha had lost their brother Lazarus. And we're told at the beginning of the text, Jesus will demonstrate his glory.

And Jesus speaks words of truth to Martha. I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though they die.

Do you believe this? A question for Martha. But it becomes a question for us all. Do we believe that God gives hope beyond death?

[19:53] That he gives resurrection life? On that day, he proved it. Calling Lazarus from the grave. And he would prove it in his own life. The Lord of life who rises from the dead in victory.

And so faith for us focuses on the Lord Jesus. That regardless of circumstances to know that he is the Lord, he is present, he does supply grace, he does speak words that are true and words that speak life.

Well, let's flip from having faith in focus in the context of the women to think about faith in the God of resurrection life.

Because what happens next in the story is really striking. You know, from time to time, we will come across or we'll hear powerful stories of someone choosing to identify with others in their suffering.

You know, maybe we hear extreme examples on the news of maybe doctors without borders going into war zones and risking everything for the sake of patience.

[21:04] Maybe closer to home. You know, the powerful witness of the body of Christ caring for a new mom or for a grieving family. But the power of seeing someone identify with and stand with another.

Well, central to the hope of this story and actually central to the hope that we have, central to the hope that we offer to the world is this reality of God's prophet coming so close as to identify with this boy in his death.

And through that action, resurrection life comes. So we'll pick up the action as the woman reaches Elisha. Verse 27, Which reached the man of God at the mountain.

She took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away. But the man of God said, Leave her alone. She's in bitter distress. But the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me why. That's significant, isn't it?

There is going to be absolutely no doubt within this story who the power and glory belongs to. And it's not to Elisha because in this moment we see his limited wisdom.

[22 : 17] It belongs to Almighty God. As the story moves on, the cause of distress is clear in verse 28 that the boy has died.

And so the question now becomes, How will the boy be revived? Will there be hope found in this story? And if so, how? And to think about the wider question, How can the wreckage and the rubble of our society, of our life, become something beautiful?

How can we see renewal come out of the wreckage? That's the tension within the story. Well, we discover one way that's not going to happen.

It's not going to happen through the staff, the stick. In verse 29, we discover that Elisha sends Gehazi to take Elisha's staff and to lay the staff on the boy's face.

But as we discover in verse 31, there was no sound, no response. The boy has not awakened. The staff worked in Moses' day. Remember in the book of Exodus, power and glory of God demonstrated through the symbol of the staff.

[23 : 30] It was held out and judgments came. It was held out and the Red Sea parted. Moses struck the rock and water came gushing out. But that's not how it works in this story. How will the boy be revived?

It's as the prophet literally stretches himself out to identify with him in his death. It's there in verse 34, he lay on the boy mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands.

As he stretched himself out and the boy's body grew warm, he walks around some more, he stretched out on him once more, the boy sneezed and opened his eyes. God breathes life as his prophet enters in and identifies with him in his day.

And this woman has the privilege and the joy of resurrection life because she ran to the God of resurrection life. It's amazing to see in this single Old Testament story so many truths revealed about God that he is infinitely complex, that he's always bigger than our ability to place him within a box.

So we discover that he is good and gracious. You know, often in the Bible when somebody can't have a child and then a child is given, it's because the child to be born will be so significant within the storyline of redemption.

[24 : 58] But not here. God just wants to be kind to this woman because he loves to be kind and generous. We discover in verse 16 from the woman's words a reminder that God cannot mislead anybody.

God is absolute rock-solid truth. And at the same time, we discover that God can perplex and confuse us because he does allow unexpected and painful things to happen.

And he is able to bring ultimate good even from awful and evil things. And we discover that he is the Lord of life, he gave the gift of life, and he is the Lord of resurrection life.

And it's as if God is saying to the woman and saying to Israel and saying to the church and saying to us today, trust me, place your hope in me.

Don't place your hope in a small, limited idol. Rather, live by faith in the God of the Bible, the one who gives resurrection life.

[26 : 09] We read in Luke chapter 7. So we fast forward hundreds of years, but we're still in the same geographical area. Shunem and Nain are just two miles apart.

And here we find Jesus coming into this mountainous region, and he comes upon a funeral procession. There's more grief and there's mourning, and Jesus canceled the funeral.

And how did he do it? He identified with the dead man. He did what was unthinkable. He touched the coffin. And he spoke to the man to command life.

And life came. Remember what the crowd said? A great prophet has appeared among us. God has come to help his people. Did they remember the story passed down from their region of what Elisha had done from the women of Shunem?

Perhaps. But they understand the connection that when someone comes and speaks to a dead man and life comes, this is a man from God.

[27 : 13] And he's come to help and to save. And then we move to another mountain. We move to Mount Calvary.

And there we see Jesus, the great prophet, stretched out in death to identify with his people so that in his death and his resurrection, we can find resurrection life if we believe in him.

And that's only possible because Jesus identifies with us. We know that because he became one of us. He humbled himself to add humanity to his perfect divinity.

He entered into the world that he made to live that life of perfect obedience and perfect love that you and I should but can. And he came to take death as the punishment for law-breaking, for our lack of love, the punishment that we should take, but now we don't have to if our faith is in Jesus. He takes our humanity, he takes our death, he completes God's plan of salvation and by his wounds, we are healed because Jesus is the Lord of resurrection life.

[28 : 36] Risen from the dead, he now gives spiritual life in the place of spiritual death when we turn from our sin to trust in him. He gives us living hope in place of despair when our eyes are fixed on him.

This is a story that matters. It matters because it reminds us that Jesus is our hope for salvation. How can I be right with God? How can I be forgiven of my sin? How can I be welcomed back into friendship with the God that I've turned my back on?

It's through God's grace to us in Jesus. His finished work on the cross. His call to repent and believe.

But it also matters for us when we think about the mission of the church. Because we are not called into mission to rely on our own strength and power.

[29 : 40] Rather, we rely on the power of God. We go in the strength of God's gospel promises. He is the one who can change the hardest heart.

He is the one who can enter into the most broken of lives. He is the one who is pleased. He delights to show grace to those who seem the most unlikely candidates.

And because that's true and because it's God who saves, it's God who gives new life, that gives us confidence that God will save, will give new life to all He is calling.

And so we can share faith, we can present the gospel, trusting in the God who can bring life where previously there was death. But it also matters when we find ourselves like this woman going through the storms of life.

Because we know it won't always be sunshine and smooth sailing and Jesus never promised us that. But in the story of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, in His identifying with us in order to save us, we have found who we are to fix our eyes on as the right source of our hope, none other than the risen ruling Lord Jesus.

[31 : 05] There's where we go for that hope that will not fail. So as God reveals to us through this story His power to bring resurrection life, He invites us all to find living hope in Him, to find that powerful hope, to find that life and death hope through knowing Jesus as our Lord and our Savior.

Let's pray. holy