

The Living God

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- [0 : 0 0] So, we should just kind of set the scene quickly as we jump back into this. What's happening in 1 Kings? Well, times are bad. Times are bad in Israel and 1 Kings.
- It's been about 150 years since David and Solomon, which was the golden age. Everything was going well. And since then, there was a civil war. It divided Israel into north and south.
- And they've faced this ongoing political and economic and military failure. Basically, the countries have just declined and gotten weaker and smaller. They've lost battles. And they've had this series of terrible kings that have just continually led them as a nation away from God and led them to worship false gods from the area.
- And so, things are not good. They're not good practically or spiritually. And into this darkness, God speaks. And he speaks by sending prophets. And he sends Elijah here in these chapters.
- And Elijah comes and works these powerful signs. And God sends a drought to try to get everybody's attention and turn them around. And in 1 Kings, and in this section in particular, there's a lot of little stories about God saving Elijah from harm.
- [1 : 1 1] But we need to see them as part of the bigger story. And so, God is saving Elijah and he's preserving Elijah because he wants to use Elijah to save all of Israel. He's using them for a really big purpose.
- And God, in fact, in 1 Kings, is resolutely working to save his people, to bring them back, to turn things around. And his methods are very, very surprising. If you've ever read through 1 Kings, you know, and 2 Kings as well, there's some very, very strange stories in there.
- And God is working in ways that nobody expects in this book. So, that's where we are. And today is the last of a set of three stories about God saving Elijah in some surprising ways.
- And so, last week, you heard about this poor widow and Elijah and the widow's son. And they're all about to starve. And then they check the pantry every single day. And God keeps miraculously filling their jars back up with just enough food.
- So, he's providing for them in the middle of this drought. And they just, they're trusting God. And God is keeping his promise. And he's moving his plan forward. And it's going really well.
- [2 : 2 0] But this week is a little different. I don't know if you noticed. What happens when you hold your hands out to God and you're waiting on him and you're trusting him day by day.
- And then he hands you suffering. And that's what happens in this passage. So, we're going to start out and we're going to look at suffering. And then we'll look at Elijah's prayer, how he responds.
- And then we'll close by talking about what this says about our faith in Christ. So, verse 17. After this, the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill.

And his illness was so severe that there was no 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.

All right. So, you see this. We pick up after this. So, right after that lovely story about the daily miracle of flour and oil. And we've got this foreign widow. And she's someone outside of God's people.

[3 : 24] And yet, she's just this amazing example of trusting God. To the point where Jesus actually, and Luke, he's like, hey guys, remember that widow? Like, she's way more faithful than any of you. And so, she's just trusting God.

And God is providing. And everyone's obeying. It's going great. And then her son gets sick and dies. It's very abrupt. And we know that life is like this.

Right? We all know healthy people that have gotten cancer. Or faithful people that have gotten laid off. Or good people that have lost their spouse or a child.

And we know that in this world, these things happen. But it doesn't soften the pain of it. Right? And these things happen. And we say, God, why?

I was trusting you. Why did you let this happen? We all know this feeling. And this grief. And this question, why?

[4 : 24] And the widow actually thinks she has an answer. She says, Elijah, you've come to bring remembrance to my sin. To cause the death of my son. So, Elijah, you're this big prophet.

You're really important. And you came here into my house. And God noticed me all of a sudden. He looked at me. And once he noticed me, he noticed my sin. And now that he's seen my sin, he's given me what I deserve.

Which is punishment. And I wonder if this feeling is perhaps familiar for us as well. This feeling that if God were to turn his attention on us.

Or he was to look too hard. Kind of under the service. He would find a lot of things that he didn't love. This feeling that maybe things are going well. But there's like a hammer that's just going to drop.

This can't last. God is going to see me for what I am. He's going to find out. I'm a hypocrite. I'm a fraud. I'm never going to measure up to his love. I don't deserve it. And this is something like the story that perhaps this widow has.

[5 : 29] This story about herself. I deserve punishment. And alongside that story is a story about who God is. He's out to punish me. So like I said, she lives outside of Israel.

She doesn't know the story of the exodus. Perhaps she assumes that, well, the God of Israel has just turned out to be like all the other gods. And maybe you've read mythology and you know those gods are pretty vicious, aren't they?

Okay. So, you know, I guess he's kind of like Baal or one of these other guys. He demands a lot and he gives very little back. He's vicious and he's vengeful.

He's unreliable. One day he gives you food and the next day he takes your son. So, who is the God of Israel? That's one of the questions that we face here.

Is he actually good? Can he actually protect and provide for his people? Can we actually trust him when things go wrong? Elijah takes this to God in prayer.

[6 : 27] In verse 19, he says, And he said to her, Give me your son. And he took him from her arms, carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, 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? Then he 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.

So, let's look first at what Elijah does and then we'll look at what he says. What he does, he takes the boy into his arms. He carries him upstairs into his room, puts them on his own bed, and then he's doing this action.

He's like throwing himself on the boy's body three times. It's unclear what he's doing here or why he's throwing himself on the boy three times.

But I think there is something that's really clear, which is that he's grieving. He's not just kind of observing this thing from distance, like, oh, okay, that kid died.

[7 : 41] I don't know, I've got important stuff to do for God. He's actually owning the reality of this. He has felt this at a gut level. And I was thinking about this recently in terms of, you know, all the horrible things that happen in our world.

And, you know, you read about a new shooting every day and just all the other things that are happening. And sometimes I feel as if I just step away from it or it's just, it's too much.

I just kind of shut down. I can't look at it anymore, distract myself from it. That's not what Elijah does in this situation, right?

He's not cold-hearted. He's put himself into this situation. He picks the boy up, puts him in his own bed, grieves over him. And it's from that place and that posture that he prays.

So there are two prayers. And the first prayer is really more like an accusation. I don't know if you caught that. And he says, essentially, God, this woman was showing faith and she was taking care of me and she was doing all of the right things and she was trusting you.

[8 : 54] Why did you do this to her? What I admire about Elijah in this situation is that he doesn't try to come up with a quick answer for God. He doesn't theorize.

About why. But he does bring it to God. He puts the question to God. Why did you do this? And I wonder if we pray like that. And again, this has to do with our story about who God is.

Is he like a boss that we kind of need to butter up and, you know, kind of give him some compliments before he'll answer? Or will he, maybe he'll listen if we say it nicely, but if we kind of are too aggressive, you know, he's going to get angry.

Is God able to hear a real prayer? Or is he fragile? And the answer of people who pray in the Bible is, yes, God can handle it.

We can come to him raw and wrecked. And if you read the lament psalms, it's like, these shouldn't be in the Bible. They're like, these people are coming after God. They accuse him.

[10 : 00] They're saying, you're not defending me. You're not taking care of me. We can come to God that way when we feel that way. When we're angry and confused. And if we don't, we should question, you know, what's our story about who God is and what kind of relationship do I actually have with God?

Now, the second prayer is super different, isn't it? The second prayer is pure dependence. And so we see that while on the one hand, Elijah is grieving and he's angry and he's accusatory, on the other hand, he still trusts that God can do something.

He still trusts that God can help. Lord, let this child live. He begs for help. Elijah doesn't raise the boy, right?

He doesn't have any power to do such a thing. He waits on God's answer. He's dependent like all of us. And again, we could ask, do we pray like that, in that dependency?

It might be easier to bargain or reason or explain, you know, something to God or hedge our disappointment before we even really ask. And Elijah comes in weakness, but also with this outrageous hope.

[11 : 22] And it's audacious for him even to think, to ask such a thing. And so this is the first time in the Bible where someone has ever come back after they've died.

This is the first miracle of a dead person being resuscitated. And so this is not just part of the stock prophetic playbook. You know, you can imagine Elijah calling down fire from heaven, never-ending jars of food, prayers of resurrection, right?

This has never happened before. And so this shows a tremendous amount of faith, that God could actually, is more powerful than we can imagine, that he could do a thing that no one has even really thought of him being able to do before.

And that it shows his belief in who God is, that despite this suffering and disaster and perplexity that he's facing, he believes that God is good, that God is not vicious, that he's a God that does actually desire to save and protect people.

He's a God who wants life to prosper. He wants death to be defeated, and he has power to do that. And that's exactly what he does. We see this in verse 22.

[12 : 36] The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. The life of the child came into him again, and he revived. 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, Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth. God works the impossible.

And this woman's story about herself and about who God is is changed because of it. You are a man of God.

The word of the Lord in your mouth is truth. So she's saying that she's realizing God's promise to protect and provide and to work away for his people is a true promise.

That he is a God that is going to show up for people who trust him. And that's what it means that his word is truth. That he can and will reach out to save. That he will keep his promises. So what does this mean for us as we look back at this story through the cross?

[13 : 48] Well, we see that this same promise extends to us. God sent his own son, Jesus, to die. And at the time, it seemed like a disaster, didn't it?

Until God raised him back to life. And then everything was changed. In Jesus' death and resurrection, we hear the true and final story about ourselves and about God.

The story that the widow and the Elijah are pointing us to is that true story, right? That true, who am I before God and who is God actually? And we see it fully in Christ. That while we were still sinners, he sent his son to die for us and to bring us back.

That God does love us. It's not that he's just not looking carefully. He is for us. He is faithful. He is able to save. And yes, we don't deserve it.

But as we trust him, he gives us his grace anyway. It doesn't mean that bad things won't happen. They aren't happening because God is punishing us.

[14 : 54] And Jesus promises that his followers will suffer. But it doesn't mean he doesn't love us. Or that he doesn't have us securely in his grasp. And this particular story is much bigger than the 80 years or so that we spend on earth.

And we see that God is able to reach through life and across death and into eternity. And that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. So as we face this inevitable why of suffering, remember that we can bring it to God.

That God knows the pain of a son's death. And he knows our pain. And in full honesty and with all that we are, we can come in dependence and outrageous hope. Knowing that this God brings the dead to life.

And that he keeps his promises. His word is truth. Amen. Amen.