

<sup>17</sup> After this, the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. His illness became very severe until no breath remained in him. <sup>18</sup> She said to Elijah, “Man of God, what do we have in common? Have you come to remind me of my guilt and to kill my son?”

<sup>19</sup> But Elijah said to her, “Give me your son.” So he took him from her arms, brought him up to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. <sup>20</sup> Then he cried out to the LORD and said, “My LORD God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow I am staying with by killing her son?” <sup>21</sup> Then he stretched himself out over the boy three times. He cried out to the LORD and said, “My LORD God, please let this boy’s life return to him!”

<sup>22</sup> So the LORD listened to Elijah’s voice, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived. <sup>23</sup> Then Elijah took the boy, brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. Elijah said, “Look, your son is alive.”

<sup>24</sup> 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.”

### **God Is There**

There once was a young man who got married and almost immediately started getting hurt. Shortly after their wedding while cutting the bumper off his truck the cutting torch grazed his leg and he didn’t jump fast enough. It was oozing mess for weeks and his new wife took care of him, changed his bandages, and put up with him. Not long after that this same young man was trying to break down steel barefoot in the back yard. The hacksaw slipped and plunged into a toe. He left a trail up to his apartment where his wife said, “You should go to the hospital. You need stitches.” To this he replied, “I think I’ll get a second opinion.” She went with him. Took care of him and watched over his recovery once again. Finally, he had another accident. His finger was pulled into a disc sander and it took the tip right off. His wife was upset but she still drove him to the hospital, dropped him off, and there he sat contemplating his life’s decisions. When she came to pick him up, he came to the conclusion, “You’ve always been here for me. You’ve always put me back together and taken care of me... you’ve always been there but now I see clearly... You are bad luck. The problem is you.”

That never happened but if it had I would hope she would smack the stupidity right out of her husband right then and there. But often, that’s what we do with God when bad things happen. God is always there for us in good times and bad, watching over us, giving us help and strength along the way. He’s always there even when we are completely unaware of it. That may make us a little uneasy, like the Widow of Zarephath, because God is well aware of our sin, the wrong we’ve done, but he isn’t there to smite. He’s here to help, forgive, and restore.

But if God is there then why is Elijah in Sidon? There is a famine in the Promised Land. But isn’t this supposed to be the land flowing with milk and honey? Why is there a drought? They have broken their covenant with God. They have turned to the god’s of the Canaanites. After God

delivered them from Egypt, after he carted them through the wilderness for forty years, and gift wrapped the Promised Land for them – they turned away from him to other gods.

Even in their good times, God was there, they still weren't satisfied. *Abab went and served Baal and worshiped him. did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.* Elijah delivered a message. It won't rain, just as there was a spiritual drought there will be a physical drought. God sent his prophet Elijah outside of Israel first to a stream where he was fed by ravens and then later to Zarephath to a widow who would provide for him.

It's a depressing situation of despair. She greets Elijah with, *"I don't have any bread."* She's gathering sticks for a final meal before she and her son eat and die. This is extreme and desperate poverty. Her means of income, protection, provision is gone and yet God is there. God delivers them from death. The flour did not run out and their oil did not run dry. Their fortunes had changed. They found comfort in the middle of a famine. A man of God had entered her house. They were able to *"eat for many days."* But then our lesson takes a turn for the worst. Her son dies. How is she repaid for all that she has done? After all of her hard work she is left holding her child dead in her arms. God is there.

She blames Elijah. She blames herself. This is all your fault. *"What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"* She assumes that this man of God has brought God too close for comfort. And that it was because of his presence in her house that God discovered her sin and decides to smite her son. She made the connection that it was because of her sin that his death occurred and he's only half true. It is because of sin, but not hers. Elijah takes the child rushes upstairs and pleads with God, *"LORD my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow... by causing her son to die?"* Elijah pleads with God. He takes her problems upon himself, *"How could you do this to me?"* He pleads, begs God. And God is there.

God is always there for us, in good times and terrible times. But when times are good we tend to forget the giver of every good and perfect gift. The devil wants to deprive us of all good, cause harm to God by hurting you, and turning you against him. Just think of all the good that God has done for you. Think back of the many times that God has gotten you through one thing or another. I remember one time when my index finger was wrapped up for Christmas, typing was slow and painful, but somehow we made it through that ordeal.

But we get this idea that life will always work out the way we want it to. Karma weasels its way in and says, *"If I do good things, good will come back to me. If you do the right things, follow the right principles, read your bible, attend church, and worship God – no problems, easy life."* That's what this widow thought.

But there are things we have no control over: the death of a loved one. It's supposed to be the honor of children to bury their parents, not the other way around. Some of you have lost children, spouses, and family. We too find ourselves in hopeless situations. At those times do we fall into despair and then blame God? Do we make God responsible for cruel acts that if true would make him fit for prison and not for worship? Do we accuse him of spending his time

evaluating human behavior and then handing out punishment? If that's what we assume it's no wonder this widow wanted Elijah and God to go. It's no wonder that we will often wallow on our own away from others. But God is there.

Elijah was angry and frustrated and he took that anger and frustration to God in prayer, three times even. God is there.

Elijah took the boy to his room. He prayed to God. He poured out his heart. He fell back on the fact that God is a gracious and merciful God – not repaying us according to what we have done. Elijah cried out, “*Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!*” *The LORD heard and acted. Elijah picked up the child and gave him back to his mother, “Your son is alive!” Then the woman said, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth.”* Now? You think she would have known that after the first miracle, the miraculous provision of food. But this is different. No one has ever come back from the dead, at least not yet in the history of God's people. There was no promise from God that this would work. Elijah has no promise to cling to; he came as a beggar, pleading with God to restore this child. Whether she lost her son or received him back God is there.

Why did he stretch out over the child three times? I don't know. There are many answers but none are satisfactory. Some says he was saying to God, “My life for his. Let me take his place.” Instead of being infected by the body, he communicates life.

Elijah doesn't pray to just any god but to the LORD. Who is this LORD? He's not Mot the ancient god of death and the underworld. Nor is he Baal the god of life. He is the LORD over life and death and this is what God wanted this woman to understand and know. This is the LORD who was interested in the life of this widow outside of Israel. He could have cared for his prophet by the brook but instead he sends Elijah to her, not only for her good but also for his. God was preparing Elijah for what would come next.

Her confession changes, It's no longer, “*The LORD your God*” vs. 12. *But the LORD and his word spoken through his prophet.* She is a forerunner of Gentiles brought into the family of God. The prophet had come to her house. There was physical and spiritual food for them to eat and drink. God is there even when her son died, he was there when he falsely accused, and he was still there to restore her son.

She thought God had repaid her evil for good but look at what God had done for her. He gave her good for her evil. He gave her back her son and he did more than this as he would send his sin; Jesus who was given evil for his perfect life. Jesus was falsely accused although he helped the poor, healed the blind, and brought back another son from the dead for the Widow of Nain. How was Jesus treated? He endured hostility, mocked, mistreated, and put to death. Jesus extended himself over us on the cross as if to say, “My life for theirs.”

Jesus died for you and in your place. He rose from the grave for you. Because of this there is no more need for a prophet; you can go directly to God with your prayers, concerns, anger and frustration. He's there. It doesn't matter how hopeless the situation, hope reaches out for faith and the object of our faith, Jesus death and resurrection, gives us joy and peace now. God is there and God cares. So as hurting and as horrible as this world is now, we have peace with God. We know we will die and so will those we know and love but there is hope beyond this world.

And when we are angry and frustrated, that doesn't mean we don't have faith. It means we hurt and that happens in this world. But no matter what happens God is there for us.

He's promised to hear us. Accuse, question, ask, but don't blame him. We come as beggars. He makes us sons. He gives good and perfect gifts. He knows our hearts and minds. He knows what we need and how to strengthen us for the road ahead, even if the process is painful – God is there.

But he's not to blame, nor is my wife the problem, at least not those times. It would be foolish for me to blame her. Thanks be to God he puts up with our accusations, he forgives our sins, and uses burns, cuts, open wounds and even death to strengthen and sustain faith in him. Even in those moments he is there. Amen.