

The Word of the Lord is Truth  
1 Kings 17:8-24  
September 13, 2020  
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CenterPoint Church

Read 1 Kings 17:8-24

*"(Jesus) said, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'"* (Luke 11:28)

### **Introduction: The Miracle of the Multiplying Medicine**

I hope you know the story of Corrie ten Boom that she recorded in her book *The Hiding Place*. The ten Boom family were Dutch Christians who hid Jews in their home when the Nazis occupied the Netherlands in the early 1940s. Eventually they were found out, arrested, and sent to a concentration camp, where Corrie and her sister used a hidden Bible to teach the other prisoners about Jesus. One of the stories from the camp centered on Corrie's sister, Betsie, who became ill during their long imprisonment. Corrie would give her a drop of liquid vitamin from a bottle every day, but it was a small bottle and there was no ability to refill it. When it was gone, her sister would probably die. But there were other people sick in the camp, as well, and Corrie felt compelled to give them medicine as well, all the while expecting to run out each time. Eventually a little crowd gathered every day when Corrie administered the medicine because it was defying the laws of physics how much medicine had been used for as long as it had for as many people as it had from such a small bottle. Corrie tried to figure out how this was happening, but Betsie said, "Don't try too hard to explain it. Just accept it as a surprise from a Father who loves you." Eventually another prisoner brought some vitamins, and when Corrie went to use that old bottle, it had gone completely dry. It had provided for exactly as long as it needed to.<sup>1</sup>

Today's passage is the story of a time when God miraculously provided food for His people when there was none to be found and replenished. It comes after the other miraculous provision from last week's text. If you weren't here for last week's sermon, we kicked off our series by meeting the evil, idolatrous King Ahab and his evil, idolatrous wife, Jezebel. Then we met Elijah the prophet who showed up at Ahab's palace to tell him that there would be a drought. God hid Elijah after that announcement, and took him to a place where there was a brook to drink from and where ravens brought him food. You'll never believe what the name of the concentration camp where Corrie and her sister were held: Ravensbrook.

In Luke 4 (our Responsive Reading text), Jesus is in his hometown of Nazareth near the beginning of his ministry. He has read from a scroll containing the words from the prophet Isaiah and claimed that they referred to Him. And his hometown friends and family can't believe what they're hearing: how can this kid who grew up here think that He's some kind of prophet or sent by God? We know his parents, Joseph the carpenter. And Jesus replied: *"Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow."* (Luke 4:24-26) That's our story today, and that was Jesus' way of saying that He would be doing His ministry and miracles outside of His hometown because of the unbelief that He found there. Elijah, too, left Israel to find a woman that had faith and would accept his ministry. It was God's plan for him, and would involve several miracles while he was there.

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<sup>1</sup> Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* (New York: Bantam, 1971), pp. 202-3.

The first five verses show us

### **I. A Miracle of Godly Faith in Baal Country (vv. 8-12)**

*<sup>8</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to him, <sup>9</sup> "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you."<sup>10</sup> So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink."<sup>11</sup> And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."<sup>12</sup> And she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die."*

Why did God send Elijah to Zarephath? It was close to 100 miles away from where Elijah was living by the brook, which is a long journey on foot.<sup>2</sup> It doesn't say explicitly in the text, except that God had told a widow there to feed him. But God could have arranged that a lot closer. It's interesting to realize where Zarephath was located, in between Tyre and Sidon, which were the big cities of the Phoenician empire. Why is that significant? Well, the evil queen, Jezebel, was Phoenician, the daughter of the Sidonian king, and had brought her god, Baal, with her when she married Ahab, the king of Israel. In other words, Elijah left Israel and God's people, and relocated where Jezebel is from, where the Baal worship came from. And the widow is not an Israelite. Raymond Dillard says, "By demonstrating his power in Phoenicia and his power to remedy the effects of the drought as he pleased, Israel's God was also showing the impotence of Baal in his own homeland... Yahweh, the God of Israel, ruled also in the homeland of Jezebel's father. Her god had no power there."<sup>3</sup>

Why does God send Elijah to a widow? That's a really interesting choice, isn't it? Elijah was God's great prophet, why wouldn't He send him to some wealthy couple that could lavish big meals on him? Instead He sends him to this woman who has a handful of flour and a dash of oil left before she and her son starve to death. If I was Elijah, I'd have thought (sarcastically), "Wow, thanks, God. You really laid out the red carpet for me, treating me like a real VIP, aren't you?" And imagine this woman: she's resigned to dying with her son, and along comes a man who needs water and food from her. In the middle of a drought. Just what she needs, another mouth to feed. But God, as He so often does, was choosing the weak things of this world to accomplish His plans (1 Corinthians 1:27 – *"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong."*). We should read that verse every time we get excited that Justin Bieber has become a Christian, or that some high-profile athlete is a believer. It's great that they are, but don't expect revival to immediately happen. God is more likely to use the nobodies. Essentially, God was putting two desperate parties together so that He could bless them both with miracles to keep them all alive.

Apparently, Elijah's request for water and bread comes across a lot more politely in the original Hebrew than it does in our ESV translation: *"bring me water... bring me bread"* sounds very demanding.<sup>4</sup> Since the woman has been told by God that she is to be helping His prophet, she knows that Elijah's God is Yahweh; she begins her speech to him: *"As the Lord your God lives."* She hasn't said "my God" yet. But despite living in Baal country, she apparently knows who Yahweh is

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<sup>2</sup> John Woodhouse, *1 Kings: Power, Politics, and the Hope of the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), p. 474.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Dillard, *Faith in the Face of Apostasy: The Gospel According to Elijah & Elisha* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1999), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Woodhouse, p. 477.

and that He is a living God. And as much as she'd like to help Elijah, she is preparing her last meal, in fact gathering sticks to make a fire to cook it, before she and her son starve to death.

The next four verses show us how God accomplished blessing both Elijah and this family in

## **II. A Miracle of Multiplied Food (vv. 13-16)**

*13 And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. 14 For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth." 15 And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. 16 The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.*

Feed me first, Elijah said. Again, that sounds demanding, but there's a little bit of a test of the woman's faith. God had told her to feed him, and then Elijah promised that God will provide flour and oil for the rest of the drought. Will she believe it? Or will she hoard what she has? We had a similar question before us when COVID first hit and there was no toilet paper and there were rumors that grocery stores were going to start running out of things. I don't fault anyone for buying what their family needed, but was your thought process: "I'll get what I need before everyone else, too bad for them"? Or was your thought process "I'll get what I need and see if I can bless others too"?

Thankfully, the widow responded in faith and God supernaturally made flour and oil replenish in their containers. The living God brought life to this house instead of the death that they had expected. Jesus promised in Matthew 10:41 that *"the one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward,"* and that is what happened here: the widow received the prophet into her house, gave him everything he asked, and did everything he told her to do. And God's blessings meant for Elijah extended to her and her son as well.

But there is a greater miracle in the last 8 verses:

## **III. A Miracle of a Resurrected Son (vv. 17-24)**

*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. 18 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!" 19 And he said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. 20 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?" 21 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." 22 And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. 23 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." 24 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."*

So even though they've got enough food, now the woman's son becomes ill and dies. This is not like *The Princess Bride* where someone can be "mostly dead" and Miracle Max can bring them back with a pill. This was not a case where the EMTs could pull out the paddles and resuscitate him. This child's life had left him. Keep in mind that the widow had been resigned for her son and her to die when Elijah first arrived, probably months ago. And the Lord kept them alive with a miracle. Apparently she believed that meant they had been promised a long life; rather than being thankful

for the extra time they got from the Lord, she is angry that her son has died. But God can handle her anger, just like He can handle ours.

Look at how the woman reacts to her son's death: who does she blame? Well, first Elijah – *"What have you against me, O man of God?"* But look closer, she thinks maybe it's her sin that has caused this- *"You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!"* Perhaps she assumes that because Elijah is a man of God, that Elijah has brought this on her to punish her for her sin. This is the kind of thinking that Job's friends brought to him: if you have had bad things happen to you, if the Lord has allowed your children to die, you must have sinned really badly to deserve it! There's an easy formula: good people get good things from God and bad people get punished, so just admit the terrible secret things you did to deserve these things. But is that how it always works?

Kath and I had a good friend who died of cancer. She was part of our church for a time, possessed a strong faith that she shared with her husband, passed on to her kids, and witnessed to the world around her. She went through the roller coaster emotions of hope and crushing diagnoses at the different stages of her cancer; at several points, they thought they had removed the cancer but it would return and that would make her feel that it was even worse to get her hopes up. At one of her down points, she confided to Kath that she felt that her cancer must be a judgment from God.

Have you suspected that when you've suffered? How do we answer these kinds of questions? Are the people who have died from COVID being judged by God because of their sin? In Luke 13, people asked Jesus similar questions and He replied, *"Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them; do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you: but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."* That judgment was not a specific act of God to punish their sins, as if they were any worse than you all. But, Jesus says, any time there is death, you should be thinking about eternity and the nature of sin and death, and that should drive you to repentance. That's something that I pray when I am praying after someone has died and their family and friends are in mourning: "Lord, please use this to turn their hearts to You. Use this to set their minds on eternal questions; help them to repent and follow Jesus."

We have to allow that it's possible that God is using an illness or an accident as judgment on someone – God afflicted Miriam with leprosy in Numbers 12 when she spoke out against Moses; He struck down Herod when he exalted himself in Acts 12. There is always that possibility! I don't think we can ever say today whether something that happens is a specific act of God; we don't have the assurance and authority of Scripture to say that. But there is no way that all individual suffering is a specific judgment for personal sin.

Here's how John Piper sums up his thoughts on the coronavirus and Christians (it applies to the bigger questions of suffering and judgment):

"The coronavirus is, therefore, never a clear and simple punishment on any person. The most loving, Spirit-filled Christian, whose sins are forgiven through Christ, may die of the coronavirus disease. But it is fitting that every one of us search our own heart to discern if our suffering is God's judgment on the way we live. If we come to Christ, we can know that our suffering is not the punitive judgment of God. We can know this because Jesus said, 'Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. *He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life*' (John 5:24). It is discipline, not destruction."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John Piper, *Coronavirus and Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), p. 72.

Well, we move from the woman verbalizing that either Elijah or her own sin is responsible for her son's death to Elijah taking action. He took the boy upstairs and started praying. We're expecting Elijah to have a mature, steadfast perspective, right? But what is the first part of his prayer? "God, are you killing this boy?" Wow, not what I was expecting from God's prophet. But a pretty honest, emotionally-torn question. But then Elijah prayed for God to bring the boy back to life. Never before had someone come back to life in the Bible. When David's son died, he accepted it and broke his fast and stopped praying because there was nothing to be done. But Elijah asked for the boy's life back, and God honored that prayer.

The prophet was able to walk downstairs and give the mother her son back. And she responded, *"Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth."* That's good, that's what a prophet wants to hear: that people believe his calling and that God speaks through him. But shouldn't the whole miraculous multiplying of flour and oil have already convinced her? It had to take a second, greater miracle for her to believe? How many miracles do we demand of God before we believe? I guess it's good that the woman believed; Jesus said that there were some who would not believe even if someone were to rise from the dead (Luke 16:31).

### **Conclusion**

We've got three miracles in this passage: a miracle of faith, a miracle of multiplied food, and a miracle of resurrection. Do we see these things in the New Testament, in the Gospels?

**-A Miracle of Faith in Foreign Land:** Whereas most of the Old Testament focused on Israel's faith and relationship with God, the life and ministry of Jesus sees the Gospel and the covenant of God moving to include people of all peoples, tribes, and tongues. In fact, there is a whole section in Mark 7 where Jesus ministers in two foreign lands: Tyre and Sidon; which is where this story took place.

**-A Miracle of Multiplied Food:** Each of the four Gospels records Jesus taking a few loaves of bread and a couple fish and multiplying the food enough to feed 5,000, and some Gospels record a second feeding of 4,000. Those numbers are low because they didn't count women and children, so both feedings were probably over 10,000 people. God supernaturally multiplied food to meet the hunger of the people in both places.

**-A Miracle of Resurrection:** In a beautiful parallel to Elijah's story, in Luke chapter 7, Jesus interrupted a funeral procession to raise the son of a widow back to life. He also raised the daughter of a man named Jairus; and more well-known, He brought His friend, Lazarus, back from the dead. Jesus demonstrated His power over death in other people's lives. But the greatest resurrection in all of Scripture was when God raised Jesus from the dead. God had designed and allowed the events that led to Jesus' death. Jesus' resurrection was the ultimate proof that He was God, and causes people to believe in Him. Think of doubting Thomas who has to touch Jesus' wounds, and when he does, he says, *"My Lord and my God!"* (John 20:28). It's an echo of what the widow in 1 Kings said, *"Now I know you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord is truth."* Jesus' ability to rise from the grave, to defeat death showed that He had no sin, that death had no claim on Him, and that He was God in the flesh. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:14 said, *"if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain."*

But Christ did rise from the dead, it's a documented fact of history. It's one thing for us to intellectually ascent to the truths that God took on human flesh in the person of Jesus, that Jesus lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial, atoning death, and rose from the dead. It's another thing to believe it in a way that places our faith in Him and says, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are God, that the Scriptures are true, and that your death and resurrection save me." When we do that, we receive resurrection in two ways in our lives:

1) The Holy Spirit changes our hearts, we are raised to life with Jesus into new life. We become new creations in Christ, living as His people in the world. Romans 6:4 says, *“just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”*

2) Then when we die, we can count on being raised from death to new life. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is the greatest miracle because it didn’t just raise Him to life, it raised all of His people to life after death. Romans 8:11 – *“If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”*

Through the miracle of resurrection in our lives, let us rejoice in faith that God is supplying all of our spiritual needs in Christ. Amen.

#### Benediction

Hebrews 13:20-21

*“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”*