

Survey of the Bible part 16

Last week we left Elijah with an unnamed woman and her son meeting in the town of Sidon. As they met Elijah he gave her a command according to the word of the Lord to bake some bread for him and to give him some water, to which she responded:

1 Kings 17:12 ¹² But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have no bread, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold, I am gathering a few sticks that I may go in and prepare for me and my son, that we may eat it and die."

Nobody talks like this unless they have reached a point in their lives where all hope is taken away. And with the drought and famine well established in the land it appears to be taking its toll on this woman and her son.

But Elijah gives her hope and notice her response.

1 Kings 17:13-15 ¹³ Then Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go, do as you have said, but make me a little bread cake from it first and bring *it* out to me, and afterward you may make *one* for yourself and for your son. ¹⁴ "For thus says the LORD God of Israel, "The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain on the face of the earth." ¹⁵ So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for *many* days.

What was her response and why did she respond in that way?

There could have been a couple of reasons. She may have responded because she had nothing to lose. I suspect no one else in all the land had ever given her such hope and she figured why not see if what this guy says comes to pass.

But more likely she was acknowledging the hope of this message as a message from God and she responds in faith.

And so, we might assume that with God's miraculous hand upon this woman and her son, together with Elijah, that they would all live happily ever after, but again we would be wrong.

How many times in our lives do we find ourselves in a situation where we are delivered from something that we consider to be less than desirable? All of the stress, all of the anguish and anxiety

finally comes to an end and we see God's hand in it and we praise Him for a time.

And just when we think that all is well and it will continue to be well, another situation arises, maybe worse than the last, and once again we are thrown into the pit of despair and we wonder, where is God and why would He allow this to happen?

Well, we wouldn't be alone and it wouldn't be a new phenomenon because all of the saints of old have gone through similar situations in one form or another.

Let's look at this situation of this woman and her son.

1 Kings 17:17-18 ¹⁷ Now it came about after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his sickness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. ¹⁸ So she said to Elijah, "What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance and to put my son to death!"

Now you've to wonder how can someone who has just been blessed by God in saving the lives of this woman and her son, can turn around and curse the God who has saved them?

Notice what happens here. We know that the woman and her son are being sustained miraculously by God for a period of time. We're not told how long but I think it's safe to assume that it was for a long period of time, at least long enough to where they were now comfortable in their situation, knowing that God was going to provide for them just as Elijah stated.

And so, they have been in a pattern to where she is able to make food from the flour and oil every day, and that she is reminded every day that no matter how much of the flour and oil she uses it is never exhausted. You can't help but marvel at such a thing and I'm sure she did.

But what happens next? She's taken back out of her comfort zone. For a time all is well. Her needs are being met. She feels blessed in that situation.

And then what happens?

Her son becomes sick.

Now, we've all been sick before. How does sickness usually work in the lives of people? I mean does sickness and death usually result in the same day?

More times than not sickness lingers and death may follow days later in extreme cases.

So, here's my question. If Elijah is in the house of this woman, did he know that the boy was sick?

Absolutely. If he knew that the boy was sick is it likely that he prayed to God for the boy's recovery?

If Elijah did in fact pray for the sick boy would Elijah have expected God to take the sickness away, especially in light of the fact that God brought him to that household to save them in the first place?

We're not told he prayed for the boy, but if he did God did not deliver him from the sickness. Instead, what did happen to the boy?

He dies. Now what happens next is interesting but understandable. This woman makes an accusation against Elijah that on the surface doesn't seem to fit with the way in which she and her son have been treated by God up to this point.

1 Kings 17:18 ¹⁸ So she said to Elijah, "What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance and to put my son to death!"

Why would she say this to Elijah, whom she obviously recognizes as a man of God, sent from God specifically to her and her son?

In her mind she has been harboring a thought that may have been there long before she met Elijah. And if we go back to the very first time we see this encounter between Elijah and her, what is it that she seems to be obsessed with?

Death. She seems to expect it and she seems to accept it. But in her mind, as we now see in this last exchange between her and Elijah, there seems to be a reason as to why she comes to grips with her lot in this life.

She seems to know that God is judging the land and the people. And it appears that she knows that even though God has saved her and her son, He has done so to bring a greater judgment on her. And that judgment is to take the one thing that is probably dearer to her than her own life and that is the life of her son.

But why would she think like this?

Notice the text.

1 Kings 17:18 ¹⁸ So she said to Elijah, "What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance and to put my son to death!"

What iniquity is she talking about?

We're not told. What we are told is that this woman is a widow, which means that her husband has died. If this is his son then we have a woman who is probably wondering why her husband was taken from her. There may have been some sin in the past that she could point to to suggest that God was judging her by taking her husband.

The word iniquity in our text could be translated guilt, or punishment for guilt.

Whatever sin it is, what is the one thing that we have to acknowledge about this sin, at least as far as she is concerned?

That this sin is unforgivable and that God has been waiting for just the right moment to torment her for that sin. Her husband has died, she was starving along with her son and was ready to accept God's judgment by preparing her last meal.

God comes along through this man of God and holds out some hope for her, but in the back of her mind she was wondering if and when her sin would finally catch up with her and now God seems to drop the hammer and finally takes out His wrath on her by putting her son to death.

If Elijah had been praying for the boy while he was sick you can imagine what was going through her mind when he was not getting well. And now that he dies she finally realizes that God has decided to deal with her sin.

1 Kings 17:18 You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance and to put my son to death!"

'Elijah, I know that God sent you here to judge me by taking my son's life', is essentially what she is saying.

How many times have we at least entertained the idea that God was doing something in our lives because He was angry with us?

But we need to ask this question: if we are children of God through our faith in the shed blood of the risen Christ, can God be angry with us in the sense that He is willing to pour out His wrath on us?

Romans 7:22-25 ²² For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, ²³ but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Romans 8:1-4 ^{NAU} Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³ For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:1-9 ^{NAU} And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you

have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Romans 5:9 ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath *of God* through Him.

To suggest that because of some past sin, or even a present sin in our lives, that God is out to destroy us is to miss the entire point of why Christ died on the cross for our sin. Prior to us coming to Christ, or more appropriately, Him coming to us, we were lost and we were enemies of God. His Holy and righteous anger burns against such people because they are not friends because they are by nature children of wrath.

So, for the believer what has changed?

Our status before a holy God. We have been brought near by the blood of Christ and we have become friends and actual children of God putting us in a new status; that of righteous, not guilty because of the righteousness of Christ put to our account.

This does not mean that bad things don't happen to God's children. But for a child of God it's not because God wants to pour out His wrath on us, it may be something as simple, as we saw last week, that we happen to have gotten caught in the middle of God's judgment of those around us.

Elijah was a man of God and yet he was suffering for the sin of Ahab. Paul was a man of God and yet he suffered because of the sin of the Judaizers and their hatred of Christ. And so, the sin of others may spill over to us at times in our lives.

And yet sometimes God will actually use adversity in our lives to either discipline us or to simply cause us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Unfortunately, in this present world we will always experience adversity.

The difference is that we experience adversity knowing that God is our Father and loves us with an everlasting love and will never let us go, and that one day there will no longer be any mourning or pain or suffering.

Revelation 21:3-7 ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from

their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." ⁶ Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. ⁷ "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.

There's the tendency for some Christians to think that once we come to Christ that we will live happily ever after on this present world. That could not be further from the truth. But it doesn't mean we won't live happily ever after. It's just going to be delayed for a time until that day when God makes the new heavens and new earth.

So, what do we do in the meantime when hard times come our way?

The best we can with the knowledge that we have of our God and Savior and that He does all things to our good and His glory.

Elijah would remind this woman that God's anger against her for her iniquity is something that He forgives and that even in death God makes all things right as we simply trust Him.

1 Kings 17:19-24 ¹⁹ He said to her, "Give me your son." Then he took him from her bosom and carried him up to the upper room where he was living, and laid him on his own bed. ²⁰ He called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, have You also brought calamity to the widow with whom I am staying, by causing her son to die?" ²¹ Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray You, let this child's life return to him." ²² The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived. ²³ Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house and gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." ²⁴ Then 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."

This mother is holding her dead child. We don't know how old the child is, but the implication seems to be that by holding him in her bosom that he may be a small child. You can imagine the anguish she's experiencing, but Elijah doesn't even seem to consult with

her. He simply takes the child out of her arms and goes upstairs with him.

And at this point even Elijah is wondering what God is doing in the life of this mother and this boy. It's not as though he seems to understand, but the one thing he is willing to do is to go to God and ask for mercy on this boy and his mother.

He asks for it all. He asks for the boy's life back. And we're told that God hears the prayer of Elijah.

What does that tell us about God?

That He's always listening to His people and that He hears His people.

Does this always mean He does what His people ask?

No. But we shouldn't stop asking and expecting, knowing that we still live in a world affected by sin and the curse and that sometimes God can and does use those things to cause us to grow closer to Him.

This woman acknowledges the Lord through the life of Elijah as she sees first hand the grace of God that finally captures her attention in a way where she can't deny the power and authority of God.

A little flour and oil worked for a short time, but bringing her son back to life forces her into the reality that God is alive and enters into her life in a way that shows Him to be the Creator who is actively involved in the affairs of His people.

Sometimes we get to see God at work in our lives in a way that captures our attention and other times we don't. But the hope of life should always be at the forefront of our lives as we look forward to the life we have in Christ.