

I Kings 17:17-24; Matt. 15:21-28; The Widow's Son Restored I. The Widow's Words II. Elijah's Prayer III. The Gracious Answer

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how do we respond to grief? As you may know, there are various stages of grief that most people go through. Usually after the death of a loved one, people find themselves in a state of shock, unbelief, anger and even denial and depression at some point in the grieving process. The widow before us this morning suffers in no less of a human and natural way. But her normal and expected response is going to be met with an unexpected reply by the time we close this chapter. The last stage in the grieving process is acceptance and hope. But just what truth will this widow accept? Over the last weeks we have seen the battle continue between the truth and the lie- between light and darkness- between life and death. We noted that the kings of Israel and Sidon are powerless. King Ahab cannot provide for his citizens- and King Ethbaal cannot provide bread for his subjects. The famine rages in both Israel and in Zarephath. And the idols- they are nothing! Instead of providing bread, those who serve Baal are starving under a famine. In Canaan mythology, even Baal was killed by Mot- the god of death- for a time. But the God of Israel- He never dies- and He can and does provide as we saw last week with the miraculous provision of bread. Those who serve Asherah are not increasing in number- but rather their children are dying. It is this last point that we focus on today. The sons of Heil died because of Heil's sin- Asherah does not ensure the life of those who serve her. But what about the LORD- does He have the power to both extend and save the lives of those who worship Him? Will those who serve the LORD suffer the same fate as those who serve idols? Today we see that Jesus proves His power over the grave as the widow receives her child back from the dead.

### **I. The Widow's Words**

In our first point we consider the widows words in v. 18. After her son has died, the widow cries out in anguish- what have you against me- what have I done to deserve this? We can have great compassion on this widow- her husband had died and now her son- the only other member of her household- has

died as well. This boy is all she has- her hope and her future depend on this little's survival. Although she has enjoyed the miraculous provision of bread for these past months, that is far from her mind now. God has spared her life and the life of her son for a season- but for what? To take the life of her son now after sparing it for a time? And this widow links the presence of Elijah, Elijah's message, and Elijah's God with the presence of this sorrow. Did you come here to bring to mind my sin- what do you have against me? What have I done to deserve this? Why have you come to our house- only to delay the death of my son and cause me to linger on, alone? We have to remember the context as well. Back in 16:34, Heil of Jericho was punished for his sinful rebellion. Heil was cursed for rebuilding the city of Jericho- and it cost him his sons. Now, it appears that the widow suffers the same fate! Was she being punished because of some sin? The fact is, the presence of God's prophet and the hearing of God's word does in fact expose our sin and misery. We can understand what this widow says in v. 18- are you bringing my sins into remembrance? There is a truth in this statement- the more we come to know about God, the clearer our sins become! God is holy and just- and His justice demands that sins be paid for with death! Will God's justice require the death of our children to pay for our sins? Will the death of a beloved and only Son purchase the forgiveness and grace that we so desperately need? But this widow was also wrong in that she attributed the death of her son to her own sin and to the presence of Elijah. We read nothing of this in the text- it was not her sins- nor the presence of Elijah that brought about the death of her son. You see, the God of Israel- the one true God does not punish for sins that have been forgiven! As John 11 says- this sickness will not end in death but for the glory of God!

## **II. Elijah's Prayer**

So after the widow's plaintive plea has been heard, Elijah takes the boy into his arms. Note that he does not defend himself- nor does he offer any answers- but rather he goes to the LORD in prayer. He does not accuse the widow- nor does he defend himself or pretend to have the answers- he joins into the sorrow and seeks a solution from the LORD's hand! First, he weeps by the grave! And then, Elijah the

man of faith, prays. And the prayer of the righteous man is a powerful thing! This time Elijah is not praying for the drought to continue on Israel- but rather he prays for the life to be restored to this boy. His prayer is a plaintive prayer- even crying out to God for an answer! Why have you brought this calamity on this widow as v. 20 says. We do not always know the reason why things happen- except that these happen for the good of those who love the LORD and for the glory of God's name! And God will have His name glorified through this trial. Since it is Pentecost Sunday, I want to draw to your attention that God's mercy and grace are not reserved for a select few in a limited area. Not only has Elijah been sent to Zarephath- in the area of Sidon- he has been sent with a message of mercy and grace! Yes, sins will be expose- but mercy and pardon will be proclaimed as well! Yes, we live in the context of death, but life is promised! The gospel is for all people- including this widow- and by God's grace, she is going to hear the whole message- the complete picture is going to be displayed before her eyes. Yes, God is sovereign over all- He gives and He takes away. But for those who love Him, ultimately, He takes away our sins and He gives us eternal life! This message is for all people- the promise of forgiveness and the resurrection for all nations! Earlier we read from Mt. 15 where we find Jesus in the same area- here in the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman had a sick child- her daughter was dying. What message did Jesus bring- what works did He perform? Although sent first to the lost people of Israel- sent to the Jewish people- Jesus graciously extends a message of comfort- eventual inclusion and healing is for this Gentile daughter of Abraham as well. Throughout the Old Testament, the focus is on the nation of Israel as God's people. But we catch glimpses of what is to come- with Rahab, Ruth, the citizens of Nineveh and this widow of Zarephath! So an outsider is brought in, she is prayed for, and her faith, though the size of a mustard seed, continues to be challenged and it grows. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. So Elijah takes the boy, prays for him, and really identifies with him. Elijah takes the boy to his room, lays him on his bed, and stretches over him 3 times. Normally touching a dead body would make you unclean, but as Jesus illustrates when he

touches the sick, unclean and dead- God has the power to take what is unclean and make it clean- to make what was once dead alive again!

### III. The Gracious Answer

And the LORD graciously hears and answers the prayer of His servant- and the life of this child is restored and he is revived again. In this context, the miracle proves the power of God, verifies the identity of Elijah as his servant, and proves the validity of His prophet's words. The LORD graciously restores the life of this little child, both for the sake of his mother and for the sake of Elijah's witness. His life returns, he is revived and restored to his mother again! Now this should be shocking for us- because this is in fact the first resurrection in the Bible. Although Enoch walked with God and was no more- and Abraham received his son back from the dead figuratively- here we find the first true and complete resurrection. This son was dead- and he was brought back to life! Jesus performs a similar sign in Luke 7 where He raises the son of the widow from Nain- as He touched the coffin and commanded the little boy to arise. Notice- what Elijah prays for, Jesus commands! Elijah presents a petition and request, while Jesus summons and declares. Truly Jesus is the resurrection and the life- He proves His power over death and the grave! Jesus not only lays down His life- but takes His life up again- and by the power of His hand, raises others to life as well! Before we close, we note a few direct applications. First of all, we note that our God hears and answers the prayers of His people. And by answering this prayer, the widow is able to see clearly that the God of Israel is the only true God and that Elijah is His faithful servant and prophet. Although this widow's son did not die because of the widow's sin, there is a Son who has died for this widow's sin! In raising this child back to life, our God proves His power over the grave. Both death and life are in His hands- and not only is death averted as we saw last week- death is fully conquered by the power of His hand! Not even death can separate us from God's love- the death of a believer is precious in His sight- added to this truth- death does not get the last word! We catch a glimpse of true and lasting life which has been secured and promised to all

those who embrace Jesus as the final and perfect prophet of the LORD! We also note that when the word of God is present, there is truth and life! As Elijah lives with this widow, she becomes conscious of her sin, misery and need. But that is only half of the story- as our passage concludes she becomes assured of mercy, pardon, forgiveness and life! Law and gospel are found here! Her doubting heart is calmed and she grows in faith- now I know that you are a man of God- now I know that your word is true! Now I know that there is a God- not only in Israel- but a God who can heal, provide and restore life even in Gentile lands! I have tasted and seen that the LORD is good!

To conclude, when we face grief, it is common to work through various stages. It is common to question- to negotiate with God- even to have anger in a time of great sorrow. But as this widow learns, the time comes for acceptance and hope! And the way in which this acceptance and hope arrives is through the answer of prayer and the restoration of life. What this widow receives is what we long for by faith- a resurrection from the dead! In our text, we are learning about the God who has power over the grave. Not Baal or Asherah, but the Lord God! Who is the true King that regards the petitions of His people? Here we find that Jesus proves His power over the grave as the widow receives her child back from the dead. So let our hearts rejoice in the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the dead!