

Kings and Prophets 14-02-21a

This is Friday, February the 21st, 2014. We continue our study of kings and prophets. We're going to try to summarize our study of the two great prophets in the initial times of the divided kingdom, Elijah and Elisha.

In particular, their dealings with the ladies who had children, who had needs, who were personally known to and had fellowship with these prophets, and the nature of the details that are supplied to us in the accounts of those times where Elijah is in the home of the widow in Zarephath and Elisha is ultimately in the home of the Shunammite woman. Let's take a moment to dedicate our time and our concentration to God and to the Lord Jesus, to appreciate Christ as our Savior and to ensure that as we spend this time looking at the truth of God's word, it will be meaningful and effective and God's purpose for it will be accomplished. Shall we pray? Father, we're grateful for this opportunity to spend time together in fellowship and in the study of your word.

We recognize that there are several of us that are not at full health or not well at all and unable to participate in normal functions and our normal duties. We ask your blessing on those who are trying to get over various ailments and we pray that your purpose in these things will be fulfilled, that each of us in whatever role related to illness will be strengthened and we'll have opportunity to avail ourselves of righteousness by faith and of the function of spiritual gifts and the fruits and benefits of fellowship and that in all things, whether they are seemingly positive or seemingly negative, that they will reflect your glory and your presence in our lives. We ask your blessing on our study tonight on this portion of your word, that God the Holy Spirit will bless it to our hearts and we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, having looked at Elijah and his experience with the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings chapter 17, we noticed the sort of sparse details involved in that. She is the target rather than the initiator.

God tells Elijah to leave the brook Jareth and go find this woman. And when he finds her, he initiates the conversation. He starts the dialogue and it is a challenge to her faith that begins that process.

She is gathering sticks to make a fire to cook the last of her oil and flour so that she and her son can eat a little meal and then die. So she says, I am going to die. My son is going to die.

And Elijah says, well, before you die and before you make that last supper, why don't you make me a meal first and bring it to me? Because God has said the flour and oil will not cease until rain comes back, until the famine is over. Well, she believes the word of the prophet and so she takes the flour and oil on faith, makes him a meal first, and based on that faith response, she receives the fulfillment of the promise. And the jar of oil does not run dry, and the little container of flour does not run empty for the remainder, for the duration of the famine in the

land, the drought in the land.

But it is an interesting model. It is an interesting set of details. The prophet comes and challenges the woman with an opportunity for faith in God.

She rises to that challenge. She answers in faith, acting in faith. And it is sort of a sacrificial thing.

This is the last of her food, not just for her, but for her son. You can imagine how many times you say, well, people are taking food out of my children's mouths, and that is essentially what the prophet asks her to do, and she does so. It is a very strong act of faith.

But in that faith response, God is able to bless her. Then we have a second association of that same son with death. The first time we hear about the son, she says, I and my son are going to eat this last little dab of food, and then he and I are going to die.

The second time we encounter the son, in 1 Kings 17, he gets so sick that there is no breath left in him, no spirit left in him. In other words, he dies. And she goes to the prophet and says, have you come to bring my sins to remembrance, and basically take the life of my child? So then Elijah goes to the Lord, and basically communicates that question to the Lord.

And if you read the specific text there in 17:18 of 1 Kings, she said to Elijah, what have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to kill my son? And you have the association, her recognition, that the wages of sin is death. And that this can be by association. You remember the disciples asked Jesus, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? There is a known association that the effects of sin can spread beyond the individual to the family of the individual, up or down the chain.

This is a well-known principle in Israel. My sin, is that what's causing my son to die? So Elijah cries out to the Lord in verse 20, O Lord my God, have you also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge by killing her son? The widow and Elijah both recognize that the young boy's life is in God's hands. Which, in a backhanded way, is also an expression of faith, is it not? She doesn't attribute it to the actions of Baal, or that the famine was just too much for the little guy, or fate, bad genes, caught a germ somewhere.

She says, this seems to be a spiritual issue, does this have something to do with my sin, that you've brought them to remembrance, and you have killed my son, and Elijah makes the same case to the Lord God. Verse 22, the Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came back to him. He prayed, let the child's soul come back to him.

So, after taking the child to the upper room, we've seen these details, stretching himself out on the child three times and crying out, he comes back to life. So you've got the number three, you've got this stretching out identification. What we started doing last time is trying to step back from this and look at what it means in a larger sense.

It's a fascinating story, but we're not studying it so that when one of us gets sick unto death or dies, we have some procedure to follow to have them restored to life. Obviously, people are born, people live, and people die. And if God is going to resuscitate someone and bring them back, if he's going to allow them to die in an untimely manner in the first place, and then bring them back, this has a larger significance in Scripture.

It's a rare occurrence. It happens, but it's rare. And when it happens, it is designed for our instruction.

It's not just, wow, isn't God powerful? We know that. God is the author of life. God determines the span of life.

But if God contravenes the normal, natural course of human life, and it is normal and natural for children in some cases to pass away. We consider it extremely tragic, but it's not out of the norm. It happens every day somewhere.

And as much as we find it regretful and tragic and a great occasion for mourning, we don't consider it unusual. Accidental deaths, diseases that get ahead of any medical efforts to stop them, these things occur. But in the Bible, the record of these things, in these extraordinary circumstances, isn't here just to show us that God can do whatever he wants to.

They have a communication value. They have a symbolic value. So we want to step back now, having exhaustively studied the details, and try to get that message.

This is a message coming across on a different frequency. We're not just looking at the literal level now. We're trying to hear the greater truth, the higher message that God has expressed in this story.

Well, one of the ways we can do that, one of the ways we can, it reminds me of a short wave, and this won't mean anything to anybody except somebody that's messed with a short wave a little bit, but there are ways you can communicate where you use more than one frequency. You use sideband, and it's by combining the two channels. Stereo is a better example.

You can hear music much more clearly if you have two channels and you play them both at the same time. You get the left channel and the right channel, and this gives you the impression that you're listening with your two ears to all of the ambient music in the room, and you're hearing the reflections and the position of the instruments. If you plug one ear, or if, as happens frequently to my daughter, an animal jumps on you and rips the wire out of one of your earbuds, I've repaired the same pair of earbuds this weekend.

Tomorrow will be the fourth time. But, of course, it's not nearly, especially once you get used to hearing stereo, if one of those channels goes out, well, it's just very unsatisfying. It's flat, it's one-sided, it just doesn't seem distinct at all.

Two channels are better than one when it comes to hearing, and we have two channels here.

We have stereo, we've got the left and the right, and the beauty of it is they're not the same. You know what happens when you put the same signal in both your earbuds.

Yes, you can hear it a little better, but it's flat. Everything sounds like it's coming out of the middle of your head because there's no variation. With Elijah and Elisha, with the two widow stories, if you will, the two woman stories in each, we have a stereo Elijah story, we have a stereo Elisha story, and we can put those two together, and we have a higher pair of accounts.

And because they are slightly different, this gives us the spectrum. This paints the panorama. We can hear the whole orchestra playing the truth of God in these accounts.

So what we need to do is, having observed these now, try to synthesize what we are hearing. What does it all mean? How do we answer the time-honored question, so what? Interesting, little kids dying, coming back to life, food appearing out of nowhere, people surviving seemingly unsurvivable droughts, that's all great, but it was a long time ago, I'm not in a drought, I don't have a child that has died, I'm not going to go find a prophet, and he's not going to stretch out on him and raise him back to life, so what is the importance of this to me? Well, let's load up the data here so that we can play it and try to perceive this bigger message. The essentials in the Elijah account.

Same woman, two different episodes. First episode, we're about to die, Elijah initiates contact based on the word of the Lord. The word of the Lord says, There is a woman in Zarephath, there is a widow, you go see her.

I have assigned her the task of providing for you, sustaining you. I wish I had time to do that Hebrew word, for providing for you, for feeding you, it's a real interesting word. It's one I'm not going to go into, because I don't have time.

But it sounds cool when you say it in Hebrew, it's all K's and L's. And when you put U on the end, which is also another K, you get K-L-K-L-K, it's just like cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck, it's like chickens clucking, sort of. Be that as it may.

God initiates this, God tells the prophet, go to this woman, she's not expecting the prophet, she didn't ask for the prophet, apparently, we don't have any record. I think based on the fact that she's a woman of faith, maybe she has done some praying, we're not told. But the key is, God initiates the contact.

God sends the prophet to the woman, the prophet hears the woman's dilemma, and in the power of God, addresses it and meets it, because there is the presence of faith. God initiates, there's a faith response, provision is made. And you think, okay, everything is good, not going to die of starvation, but instead of being threatened by death from starvation, the son, which is the future and the apple of the eye, the heart of this woman, her reason for being in many ways, to care for and raise her son, the first threat is passed, but the second one gets him, disease gets him, and he dies.

And she thinks, well, are you just playing with me to come in and preserve us from famine only to let my child die? Is this, I have sinned, you're going to hold my sins against me and slay my child despite having preserved me through the famine? And then we have the account of the resurrection. So, all of that is in the one household. You go over to 2 Kings and go over to the Elisha story.

One final thing in 1 Kings 17, Elijah took the child after he is resuscitated. It says in verse 23, Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house and gave him to his mother. He takes him up.

The resuscitation takes place out of observation. And then Elijah brings the child back down. The child is separated from and away from the mother.

Elijah goes to the child. Remember what David said when his son with Bathsheba died? Do you think that episode could at all have been in the mind of this woman where David lost a son and it was manifestly because of his sin? What did David say? After he is given the news that the sick child has actually died, David gets up off the floor, washes his face, and they say, you were so distraught when the child was alive. Now that he's died, you're not.

And he says, look, he cannot return to me. I can only go to him, in so many words. Well, when the child has died, the woman in the story model here doesn't go to the child.

The child is brought back to her. And so there is this separation and restoration motif, if you will. And in concluding the story, verse 24, the woman said to Elijah, now by this I know two things.

You are a man of God, and the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth. This, I think, suggests God and the nation of Israel. You think of the woman as representing the nation.

In the largest sense, the human race is represented in the feminine sense. People say the Bible is anti-woman. They haven't really studied it, because the Bible basically presents the woman as the most important element.

It is the seed of the woman that is going to do battle with Satan and ultimately prevail. He is not the seed of the man, he is the seed of the woman. And if you look at the divine family model, who is the father? Who do we call the father? God.

Who is the son? The Lord Jesus. Who is the mother of the son? Clue, not the Virgin Mary. Who is the mother of the son? He is the God-man, the human race.

God has, in a way, married himself too. God has entered into permanent covenant relationship with the human race. And his son, the God-man, the incarnate Jesus Christ, is the product of God the Father covenant relationship with humanity.

And it begins in the garden and goes all the way through until the last person comes into being

through natural processes. And the human race is, at that time, complete. But God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

And the son, in effect, does die for the sins of the mother, just as this woman in Zarephath suggests. Have you come to bring my sins to remembrance that you killed my son? Well, in a way, when you look at the cross, the answer to that question is yes, but he's coming back. And through the death of the son, these sins are remitted.

They are forgiven. They are atoned for. Propitiation and reconciliation and all these other things are accomplished.

So, in an odd way, the answer to the question is, well, yes, sort of. Sin is an issue in the death of the son. In fact, it is the issue when you look at the big picture.

But in resurrection, the point of it all, what's one of the biggest objections you hear from atheists and naysayers and ne'er-do-wells and skeptic Bible readers and all the rest of these haters on Christianity? What do they say? What kind of a God is it that demands blood sacrifice? He's not happy unless everybody's falling down and worshiping him. And he's egocentric and he's bloody. Why is it that death has to be the penalty for sin? Why can't he just do like a good parent would do today? Just say, oh, Sonny, that's okay.

Let's try to do better next time. Let me give you some positive reinforcement for your good behavior. Let's just try to minimize that bad stuff in the future.

People don't understand the dealings of God. The picture might be legitimate, the picture that they paint of a bloody God demanding death and bloodshed and so on, if it weren't for resurrection. All of their objections, look at all the people that got slaughtered, look at all the babies that were killed, look at all the pregnant women, oh, my goodness, your God is just this horrific genocidal maniac in the Old Testament.

You might be able to make that case, although not really, but it would have a little more traction if it weren't for resurrection. Every baby that ever died, every young child that ever passed away, God can raise them. Death, physical death in the human race for God is trivial.

It's easily reversed, as he has demonstrated over and over again. And if death was the permanent robbing of all things from someone, you might be able to make a case that God was unfair or God was cruel or God was a bloody insensitive God. But if you think about a Canaanite baby destined for being burned alive in some molten metal image of Baal or Molech, if you thought about the depraved culture in which he would have to grow up with no options to learn about God, with none of the beauties and the blessings that are going to come in the Millennial Kingdom, and you think about God exiting those children stage left with Israelite swords so that they can come back in the Millennial Kingdom, where it is the optimum human environment, how cruel is that death? Can God mercifully spare them the pains and the pangs that might be associated with such a death? Of course he can.

God loves little children more than any human being could possibly imagine. God can smooth the path from life into death and from death back to life again. And he does.

There's nobody that loves children more than God. Look at the Lord Jesus. Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.

Of such is the kingdom of heaven. And it's absurd to make these shallow, baseless accusations against God. God is a merciful God, merciful beyond what we can comprehend.

But this idea of resurrection is key. The death of the child is not tragic if the child comes back. Is the death of the child of the widow of Zarephath tragic or glorious? It ends up being glorious because he is brought back, and now she knows something she did not know before.

Now I know that you are a man of God, and I know that the word of God in your mouth is truth. And through this difficult experience, progress is made. Faith is rewarded.

So many blessings are obtained through this trip through the valley of the shadow. Well, in the larger sense, this is what God is doing in the human race. We go through this life.

We die a little bit every day. The older you get, the more dead you get. It's just a fact.

Our flesh fails. We're in the process of decaying. It's the presence of sin.

It's the corruption of God's perfect design because of our failure. And the whole creation groans under the weight of sin. Paul tells us in Romans, waiting for the redemption of the sons of God.

Waiting for the redemption of the sons of God. Waiting for the child to be raised. So, what is the point of application? What is the big idea when we think about this story? Would you expect there to be difficulties and hardships and seeming tragedies in life? It is the model at the largest macro view, the biggest scale in human history, that God puts man in the garden knowing he is going to fall.

Knowing he will be expelled from the garden. Knowing that dying he will die. Knowing that unto dust he will return.

God knew this. People raise this as an objection. Like, what kind of a stupid God would put people in the garden and give them a tree where they could fail? Well, it's not stupid at all.

It's the most astonishing wisdom beyond anything we could ever fully comprehend. God in grace is using death to give us an appreciation for life we could get in no other way. To give us an appreciation for him we can have in no other way.

To give us an appreciation for righteousness that will inoculate us and bulletproof us throughout the eternal future. Without having to monkey with our free will. Without having to strap us down on positive.

You know, my steering wheel is locked to the right and all I can ever do is turn right. God won't have to do that. He's got a beautiful plan by allowing us to experience the pains of death.

And that's what this life is. It is the experience of corruption and death due to sin. The wages of sin is death.

And we live it. We're immersed in it. We feel it in our very bones.

Literally. We are bereaved by it. We are sorrowful because of it.

We are enduring the pain of tragedy around us because of it. But, there is resurrection. Just as the death of this little boy is a momentary light affliction, he comes back the same day.

And is restored to his mother. Elijah joyfully brings him back down the steps and returns him to his mother. And she says, now I know something I could not have understood any other way.

I have come in contact with the truth of God in a permanently transforming manner. That's what our life is here. And if we can remember and if we can recognize when the hard things in life come.

Ill health. Financial reverse. Relationship setbacks.

The sins that we perpetrate on one another. The pain that we cause one another. Death in all of its hydra-headed manifestations because of sin.

What is it going to do? We are going to be this woman in the resurrection. Having life restored and enhanced by God. Appreciating God and appreciating His word as we could not have possibly done.

You know this if you have ever dealt with a child. You can tell a child something. Or you can see the lesson ingrained in the child's psyche by experience.

Be careful with that bicycle. I just took the training wheels off. You don't want to be too reckless now.

Don't get too crazy. Okay. That's just an academic notation.

But after a couple of wrecks and skinned knees and bruises. Now we understand it in a way that the admonition could never impress. Well, this is the beginning.

That's our left channel if you will. I guess in Hebrew you'd start with the right channel and then do the left. Go this way.

Elijah is the first channel. The first half of this great picture. We're going to pause here and take our break.

When we come back we're going to add to it the Elisha account. And by comparing both the

similarities and the differences. We want to again look for why did God put this in my Bible.

I'm not going to be appealing to a prophet. I'm hopefully not going to be needing to survive a famine or raise one of my children from the dead. Why is it here? What does it mean to me day by day? When we add this second channel in and see not only the historical application to Israel and to the human race.

But to eschatology and to the laying out of God's pattern and plan and program in the future. It will really raise up off the page. Let's pause here and take our break.