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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 11, 2016
17th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Thessalonians 5:14-24; Matthew 25:14-30

Hymns: 243; 410; 413; 50 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 Kings 17:17-24

Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. 18 So 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?"

19 And he said to her, "Give me your son." So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. 20 Then he cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?" 21 And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him." 22 Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived.

23 And 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 lives!”

24 Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Death overtakes us often without warning.

Today is the fifteenth anniversary of a great horror in American history. It was on September 11, 2001 that the terrorists skyjacked the airplanes that were used to murder over 2000 people in New York and Washington and Pennsylvania. It was a horror that was seared into our memories for the remainder of our earthly lives. There are images from that day imprinted on my mind that I wish weren't in my mind; images that illustrate the horror of death.

We remember the innocent lives that were lost. We remember that there is evil in this world. There is great evil in this world! While we commemorate those who were victims and honor the brave men and women who went towards the disasters, or sacrificed their own lives to try to save the lives of others, we don't celebrate the anniversary of that day. There are those who do. There are many who do. Rather there are many that see that day as evidence that their god was and is more powerful than the LORD, the only true God who made heaven and earth.

This is where the importance of the lesson of our text comes into our thinking for our God is the Lord of heaven and earth. He is the Lord of life!--

**THEME: Elijah Restoring the Widow's Son Reveals
The LORD's Victory over Death.**

What we observe first in our text is –

I. The Bitterness of Death.

1 Kings 17:17-18 “Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. 18 So 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?”

When I read this woman's response I see it as a normal human response to the sting of death. This isn't a reaction of unbelief that she hates God, but rather that she is deeply shaken in her faith. This is the same woman we read of in our Old Testament lesson last Sunday. She was not one of the people of Israel but rather a Phoenician, from the region around Sidon. She had heard of the God of Israel. She acknowledged Elijah as a prophet of the God of Israel. She had acted according to the promise Elijah had made as the Lord's spokesman. She took the last bit of food she had and prepared it for Elijah, leaving nothing for herself and her son but a promise, a promise from the God of Israel that her flour and oil would not run out until rain returned to the land. And so it was that she and her son and Elijah ate for many days. She had a room built for Elijah on the flat roof of her house so that

he had a proper place to stay as long as he remained with her. She served the Lord according to His Word.

And then all of sudden her son got sick, seriously ill, so sick that his breath left him. Her son died, and she was torn to pieces by this sudden tragedy in her life. And so she is the perfect exhibit to show the bitterness of death. In her bitterness she turns on 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?”**

We see a bitterness towards God’s prophet, and so a bitterness against the Lord as well. It was as if to say, “Why did you have to show up here at my house anyway?” She is bitter that when she had been given hope that now that hope was dashed, and her son who she earlier had admitted was soon destined to starve to death, now was taken by sudden illness. Why would the Lord play such a foul trick on her? Was it all just to bring her sin to remembrance? It’s the “What did I do to deserve this?” point in her life, and she knows! It was her sin that brought the bitterness of death into her ho use. This wasn’t the first time she had dealt with this bitterness of death. She was the *widow* of Zarephath after all. However that makes the pill of death no less bitter.

It is sin that plagues the troubled heart. It is the conviction that we do deserve death, even if one can’t point to the one sin we feel is so bad that it is bad enough to bring such harsh judgment. The Scriptures clearly teaches **“the wages of sin is death”** (Romans 6:23). And **“through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned”** Romans 5:12). And **“The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law”** (1 Cor. 15:56).

We all are condemned to death. We all shall know the same bitterness. We all struggle with questioning God, perhaps more when a loved one is taken than when one faces one's own death. It is bitter for in the face of sin and death one sees the justice of God, and the end which we deserve. One might conclude that God is the God of death!

What this incident in the life of Elijah reveals is that --

II. The LORD is Lord of Life!

1 Kings 17:19-22 “And he said to her, “Give me your son.” So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. 20 Then he cried out to the LORD and said, “O LORD my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?” 21 And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the LORD and said, “O LORD my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him.” 22 Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived.

It is apparent that this struck home with Elijah, this powerful prophet of God. It struck his heart that the woman who had cared for him in his need, cared for him from her own poverty would be struck with such a tragedy. His response was to take this matter to the Lord in intercessory prayer. Elijah took the child in his arms and carried the boy's body to Elijah's own bed and prayed earnestly and fervently to the Lord. Elijah “**cried out to the LORD and said, ‘O LORD my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him.’**”

Have you ever prayed for the impossible? Wasn't that exactly what Elijah was doing? Dead people don't come back to life again. When one is dead, one is dead and gone, and that's the way it is! *Unless you are the Lord of life!* “**The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**” (Romans 6:23). That was as true in the days of Elijah the prophet as it is today. Yes, it was already true hundreds of years before Jesus was even born into this world because the promises of God are sure. And so it is as true today as it was in the days of Elijah the prophet, as true as the day Jesus rose from the grave and showed the world that He is the Lord of life!

It also reveals to us the power of prayer, for the Lord who cares for us and loved us with an everlasting love in Jesus Christ our Savior, hears our prayers, and cares about that which burdens our hearts. According to His gracious good will for us, He acts upon those prayers and petitions and the supplications we pour before His throne of grace. He **hears**, and with God nothing is impossible! He **hears** and He **saves**, and He brings us **life** because the LORD our God is the Lord of life!

And so we see the evidence of this truth is the raising of this widow's son.

1 Kings 17:23 “And 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 lives!’”

This is the message that we need to hear and hold in our hearts. We need to comprehend by faith its fullest implications. We need to comprehend this wondrous truth that the LORD is the Lord of life. Even in the face of death we know that through faith in Jesus. And this is

exactly where the Spirit leads us even as He led the widow to trust --

III. The Gospel Truth.

1 Kings 17:24 “Then the woman said to Elijah, ‘Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth.’”

This powerful sign of God’s power over death assured the widow that the words of the prophet had behind them the authority of Almighty God. He wasn’t simply using fair words and fine speeches to present false hopes and dreams as the prophets of the gods of this world did (and still do today). The word of the prophet was true, and powerful to save for it was the Word of God! Receiving her son back to her the woman also received the confidence of faith that few of the people of Israel held in their hearts. It was the rare gift of faith that the Lord had bestowed upon her through the working of His grace through the prophets and the events of that day.

And so it is with each of us yet today. By the power of the Holy Spirit the Lord has convinced us, through the testimony of the apostles and prophets, through the perfect fulfillment of the Word that the words written and presented to us through prophets are the truth, the very truth of God with the power to save.

And so the Lord also brings us through trials and tribulations in the days of our earthly sojourn that we might learn that we need to rely upon Him, and His grace and power. He leads us through this life and delivers us from every evil that we might know His faithfulness. His Word is truth. The gospel of God’s love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus is true. The life which He has secured for

us is real. It is not some false hope or dream. Our Lord Jesus who died and rose again for us and for our salvation is indeed the Lord of life.

“We have a sure prophetic Word
By inspiration of the Lord;
And tho’ assailed on ev’ry hand,
Jehovah’s Word shall ever stand.

“Lo, what the Word in times of old
Of future days and deeds foretold
Is all fulfilled while agers roll
As traced by the prophetic scroll.

“Abiding, steadfast, firm, and sure
The teachings of the Word endure
Blest he who trusts this steadfast Word
His anchor holds in Christ, the Lord.”

(The Lutheran hymnal 290:1,3,4)

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)