

The Beginning of a God War

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[0 : 00] Welcome, indeed. Well, we're turning to our Bibles now. If you have a Bible with you, perhaps you would pick it up and turn it up now to 1 Kings chapter 16.

If you don't have one, there's red Bibles over at the sides, on either sides, at the front here and at the back. So if you need to grab one, go and grab one, then you'll be able to read along with us. Phil Copeland has been leading us through a series in 1 Kings, and we come this evening to chapter 17. We're going to read in from chapter 16, verse 29, and through to the end of chapter 17. So 1 Kings chapter 16 and verse 29.

In the 38th year of Asa, king of Judah, Ahab, the son of Omri, began to reign over Israel. And Ahab, the son of Omri, reigned over Israel in Samaria 22 years.

And Ahab, the son of Omri, did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him. And that's quite something if you read the verses that go before this.

[1 : 12] Ahab, the son of Omri, and as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbal, king of the Sidonians.

And he went and served Baal and worshipped him. He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made an Asherah.

Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. In his days, Hiel of Bethel built Jericho.

He laid its foundations at the cost of Abiram, his firstborn, and set up the gates at the cost of his youngest son, Seguv, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Joshua, the son of Nun. Now Elijah, the Tishbite of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my word.

[2 : 22] And the word of the Lord came to him, Depart from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.

So he went, and he did according to the word of the Lord. He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening.

And he drank from the brook. And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him, Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there.

Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you. So he arose, and he 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. As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.

[3 : 30] 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 and die.

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.

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.

And she went and did as Elijah had said. And she and he and her household ate for many days.

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.

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.

[4 : 46] And she said to Elijah, What have you against me, O man of God? You've come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son. 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 he laid him on his own bed. And he cried to the Lord, O Lord, my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourned by killing her son?

And 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. And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah.

And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother.

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.

[5 : 59] Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Well, good evening, and please do have your Bibles open to 1 Kings 16 and 17.

A passage that is really all about the beginning of a God war. A God war. Throughout history, certain names have become synonymous with great evil.

For example, Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot. I'm sure you can think of many others. But tonight, we're going to meet a king of Israel whose name will forever be linked with great evil.

Ahab. For friends, we will also hear of one who is immeasurably greater and more powerful than evil Ahab, and evil Ahab's God.

Here's our first point this evening. An evil enemy enters. An evil enemy enters. Looking at 16, verse 29 to 34. If you were here, last Sunday, we looked at the passage there in chapter 16, where we meet these five Israelite kings who reign one after the other, all of whom were evil, because they walked in the ways of Jeroboam, the first king of the kingdom of the north.

[7 : 43] That is, they maintained Jeroboam's bullcath cult. And they caused the rest of the nation, Israel, to follow them in sinning in that cult.

And just when we think things can't get any worse, Ahab enters the scene. And suddenly, we are dealing with a different caliber of evil altogether.

Look at verse 30. Ahab, the son of Omri, did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all before him.

And in verse 33, Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

And what did he do that was so evil? What did he do to have a permanent record like this in the Bible, next to his name? Well, during his reign, Ahab pumped raw, foul paganism into Israel.

He established Baal worship in Israel. It all begins with his choice of wife. In verse 31, He marries this Jezebel. Could have been set up as a marriage of a treaty through his father Omri, we don't know.

[8 : 59] But he marries this Jezebel, and she truly hates the Lord, the God of Israel, and she loves and adores Baal, the false god of Sidon, her home country.

In the coming chapters, we'll see that Jezebel's hatred of the Lord and her love for Baal is really obvious. But here, in these verses, it's merely implied by the little detail that we're told about her father, the king of Sidon.

His name was Ethbaal, which means, literally translated, with Baal. He was a king with Baal. In other words, Jezebel would have been raised in the fear and admonition of Baal.

And as an adult, it is clear that her heart has remained devoted to this idol. She practices, if you like, worldview Baalism.

And also in the coming chapters, we're going to see that she clearly wears the trousers in their marriage. She is the one who's really calling the shots in the kingdom, humanly speaking. She's got her husband wrapped around her little finger.

[10 : 08] And so it's no surprise that when Ahab comes to the throne, he starts to practice personal Baal worship. And he doesn't waste any time at all in establishing Baal worship on a national level.

Just run your eye over verse 30 and 31 and just notice the rapid repetition, Baal, Baal, Baal, Baal, that comes up, just to show how quickly Baal floods into the land.

So Ahab married the daughter of with Baal. Ahab built an altar to Baal. Ahab built a house for Baal. Ahab served Baal. And the house for Baal is a temple, a temple for Baal, right at the heart of the nation.

That's what he produced. That's what he built right in the capital city of Samaria. An obvious mimic of the altar and the temple of the Lord found down in Jerusalem in Judah.

Baal is swept into the land really, really quickly. And friends, clearly, all of this was more deplorable in the eyes of the Lord than what Jeroboam had done.

[11 : 15] Jeroboam's bull calf worship was like drinking polluted water. Ahab's imported paganism is like sucking raw sewage.

Neither is good, but one is clearly worse than the other. And as if that wasn't bad enough, the author gives us another chilling detail in verse 34 about Ahab's evil.

Look at verse 34. In his days, that is in Ahab's days, and that implies that what's about to come, it was Ahab's idea, Hael of Bethel built Jericho.

He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram, his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son, Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Joshua, the son of Nun.

Friends, Ahab was the king who commanded that Jericho be rebuilt up into a fortress city.

Remember centuries before, in the days of Joshua, Jericho had been a Canaanite stronghold until the day that the Lord had destroyed it and wiped it out.

[12 : 27] Fraser, I think I'm just booming just a little bit, bro. Thanks, dude. It's quite hard to hear from up there. Thanks, brother. So anyway, the Lord wiped out Jericho centuries before, and he handed it over graciously to his people when they just entered the promised land.

And in Joshua 6, the word of the Lord said through Joshua, if anyone ever rebuilds this place as a fortress city, terrible consequences will come on them.

Both their firstborn and their youngest child will die. And that is what happens to Ahab's building contractor, this high L of Bethel.

He rebuilds Jericho and he loses his children, just as the Lord had warned. What is the author of Kings telling us? Well, he's saying, this is just how things were in the days of Ahab.

Folks thought nothing about flying in the face of the word of the Lord. There was a time marked by blatant rejection of the scriptures and a disregard for any consequences that might follow.

[13 : 35] In short, this is a time when there was no fear of the Lord. And friends, let's just think about a lesson from this section for our lives today before we move on.

I talked about this this morning, I talked about it last week, but we are undoubtedly living in days that are evil. Days that are evil. We see the worship of idols everywhere.

The biggest being the worship of self. That is the big meaning of life according to our culture. Be true to yourself. Listen to yourself.

Listen to those inner desires, your inner wants, those inner feelings. Let them rule your life. Let them define who you are. Obey the inner you because that is the true you and that is the meaning of life.

That is the meaning of a, that's what it means to have a fulfilled life in this world. This idolatry of self. And all around us, hand in hand with that, is blatant rejection of the word of God.

[14 : 39] And friends, that is also rampant even within the professing church of God. Friends, we need to realize that the current state of things, it is bad, but let me just say this, it might not get any better within our lifetimes.

Things might well get worse and they might get worse at the same rate as Baalism took over Israel in the north.

One writer puts it like this, how often God's people assess their lives and find that they're facing cultural decadence, vanishing morality, godless government, and spiritual compromise, and deduce that things can't possibly get any worse.

this passage says, oh yes they can. Evil, whilst it's unstable, it is capable of progress.

You may have been scrapping with a Jeroboam level of evil and then find yourselves warring against an Ahab level of evil. friends, the Bible is too much of a loving book to have us play make-believe and false optimism.

[15 : 59] The Bible warns us to be realists, not pessimists, not doom and gloom, but to be real, be realists. Things in Scotland, things in Glasgow, they might not get any better in our lifetimes.

They might get worse and they might get worse very quickly indeed. The Bible warns us just to be ready for that possibility because, as a friend of mine once put it, to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Don't be surprised if that happens. It might not happen, I hope it doesn't happen, but let's be realists, says this passage. Well that's the first main point this evening, an evil enemy enters. Here's the second. In chapter 17, we see divine defense is deployed. Divine defense is deployed. So end of chapter 16, the author is just finished summarizing the dismal summary of Ahab's reign and his evil and then bang!

Verse 1, it's fired at us like a missile. It comes like a bullet. Verse 1, now Elijah, the Tishbite of Tishbe and Gilead said to Ahab, so did you get what's happening here?

[17:15] One second, we are faced with all this evil and then the next minute we are facing the prophet of the living God, the one who's carrying a much more powerful thing, which is the living word of God.

We are staring at the Lord's prophet in the face. Elijah actually means my God is the Lord and he's come to speak the powerful word of God to Israel.

Unlike most prophets we're given almost nothing about his backstory, he just appears. And friends, this sudden intervention, it should actually thrill us as the people of the Lord because it tells us that our God, he has never taken aback by evil.

He's never surprised. He wasn't surprised by anything that Ahab was doing. In fact, all this time, whilst the evil enemy entered Israel, the Lord has his prophet ready for deployment at just the right moment.

Listen to how an old Scottish minister puts it. This is a great quote. It's long, but I hope you follow along because I've been thinking about this all week. He says this, to see Elijah appear so suddenly reminds us that we need not despair when we see great movements of evil achieving spectacular success on earth.

[18:33] For you and I can be sure that God in unexpected places has already secretly prepared his counter movement. God has always his ways of working underground to undermine the stability of evil.

God can raise up men for his service from nowhere. Therefore, the situation is never hopeless where God is concerned. Wherever evil flourishes, it is always a superficial flourishing.

For at the height of the triumph of evil, our Lord God will be there. Ready with his man and his movement and his plans to ensure that his own cause will never fail.

I should really put a bit of steel into our spines, should it not, as the church today? Our God is not taken aback by evil. He is always ready. In fact, indeed, he is sovereign even over evil.

We saw that last Sunday. Well, Elijah will eventually condemn Ahab and the whole of the rest of the house of Almri to which he belongs in chapter 21.

[19:41] But before then, the Lord sends Elijah to expose the reality about Baal. That Baal is nothing but a false god who doesn't actually exist.

He's just a figment of the imagination of man. He's not to be trusted. You see, once again, friends, the Lord here, and we've seen this again and again and again throughout Kings, the Lord is incredibly kind, patient, and merciful with rebels.

Instead of sending his judgment immediately, he delays judgment and often tries to expose the folly of the people's idolatry so that they will turn back to him and so that they will see that he is the living God and give their lives to him again.

Friends, even Ahab is given time. That is how patient our Lord is. And in chapter 17, what we are seeing, as I said, is really the beginning of a God war.

It is the Lord against Baal. It's going to be a little one-sided. I'll spoil the plot for you. But that's what's going on here. And as we see, the Lord doing some incredible things, incredible things through Elijah.

[21:00] What the Lord is doing here is he's actually ridiculing Baal and exposing Baal for the dead idol that he is. And at the same time, he is showing himself to be the living God, the only true God.

So with that in mind, let's run through chapter 14 under four points. Firstly, number one, verse one. The Lord alone is God over the rain.

The Lord alone is God over the rain. Please look at verse one. Elijah says, As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these days except by my

word.

So Elijah announces that the Lord is going to bring a dreaded covenant curse upon the land because of the evil that was found within it. Excuse me.

But notice just how Elijah tees up the curse. Look at what he says. He declares that the God of Israel is the God who lives. Straight away, he is announcing the truth.

[22 : 13] The Lord is not some product of human imagination. He is not like Baal. He is the living God whom Elijah stands before that is a reference to the fact that Elijah is the prophet of the Lord who's been called to be the Lord's mouthpiece.

And as I see, Elijah's first message from the Lord is that curse is coming in the form of deadly drought. It's coming on the land because the Lord is going to shut off the rain.

There won't be even a drop of dew found anywhere in Israel. And friends, this shouldn't surprise anyone back then because in Deuteronomy 28, the Lord said that if his people were unfaithful to him in the promised land, if they spurned his grace and refused to walk by the obedience of faith, he would bring these just curses upon them.

But here's a question. Why this curse? Yes? There were all sorts of other curses that the Lord could have brought out. There was pestilence, plague, there was war, there was exile.

Why does the Lord choose this no rain curse? And the answer, of course, is to do with Baal. Back then, according to the Sidonians, Baal was believed to be the God of fertility and the God of the storms.

[23 : 36] The God who controls the rain. That was his specialist area. And so you can see that announcing this curse, shutting off the rain, and the Lord is saying, you want to know who rules the climate?

You want to know who rules the weather? You want to know who's in control of the rain? I'll show you. No more rain. It's me, not Baal. And friends, the Lord brings about what he promises.

From that moment on, not a drop of moisture falls from the sky in Israel. Not a bit of dew appears on the ground. The land dries up, it shrivels up in a devastating drought.

And there's a subsequent famine that follows. And friends, with each new crack that appears on the scorched earth, the Lord is one bit by bit demolishing Baal's reputation in Israel.

But let's just be clear. This, whilst it's severe, it is a mercy. It is a severe mercy of the Lord because, as I said, he is doing this to show his people the truth.

[24 : 46] He wants them to turn back to him to find life. And friends, sometimes the Lord has to do that today with his church. Sometimes the Lord will do that in our lives.

When we've wandered away, he has to bring about severe mercies that will make us sit up and pay attention and come back to him. It's severe, but it's a mercy.

Well, secondly, in verses 2 to 7, we see that the Lord alone is God in Israel. The Lord alone is God in Israel. As soon as he announces the dreaded curse, in verse 2, the word of the Lord tells Elijah to immediately remove himself from the public scene.

And in verse 3, he's told to travel eastward to go beyond the river Jordan and camp out at this place called Cherith. And what's implied here is that this is an isolated place, an uninhabited place, an area where it would be hard for anyone to live at the best of times, let alone during a time of drought and famine.

But the Lord says, that's where I want you to go. And verse 4, the Lord says, don't worry, I will provide for you, Elijah, all your needs. even in this deserted part of Israel because I am Lord over Israel.

[26 : 09] And he says to Elijah, I'm even going to use the most surprising of agents to feed you. Ravens, ravens. The Lord promises to use these birds to bring Elijah bread and meat both morning and evening.

And as for water, the Lord says, there will be a brook for drinking water in that place. And verse 5, Elijah responds by the obedience of faith.

You want to know what faith looks like? Here it is. He hears what the Lord's word says and he does it. Real faith. And verse 6, it works out exactly as the Lord promised it would.

Elijah's fully provided for with water from the brook, food from the raisins. Let's just think about this.

Why does the Lord tell Elijah to move to this place?

Why is he doing that? Well, it could be that the Lord is showing that he is God in Israel by protecting his prophet from any possible attacks from Ahab and Jezebel.

[27 : 12] We know from later on in the story that they love to attack the prophets of the Lord. Could be that the Lord is showing that he is God in Israel by safeguarding his servants from Baal's servants.

That could be the answer. But I think the Lord is also declaring his lordship over Israel by removing his word. Sovereignly taking his word away from his people.

As if the Lord is saying to them, you think so little of my word? Okay. I'll take it away. And you can have a time of silence from me.

There will be a drought of rain. There will also be a drought of God's word. And as your livestock dies, as your food supply diminishes, maybe, just maybe, you will desperately want to seek out my word.

And you'll desperately want to seek out me, the true God of Israel. Well, verse 7, time passes and with no rainfall, the brook that Elijah was drinking from, it dries up.

[28 : 20] And so he tells his prophet to move again. And that brings me on to my third point in chapter 17. Verses 8 to 16, the Lord alone is God of the nations.

The Lord alone is God of the nations. It's a truth we heard about this morning. God is the Lord even over Babylon. For God is the Lord of all the nations. Please look at verse 8.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, Arise and go to Zaretha, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. So Elijah is told to travel out of the promised land, to go up north, to go into pagan Gentile country.

And friends, not just any old pagan Gentile country, Elijah was to go to Zarephath of Sidon, a place under the jurisdiction of Jezebel's dad.

A place that would have been thought of as Baalsville, the home of Baal, a place where Baal supposedly called the shots. And again, what we will see in this section is that the Lord God is showing off his power and his supremacy over Baal.

[29 : 34] in verse 8, again, the Lord promises to provide for Elijah when he reaches his destination. And again, the Lord says, I'm going to use the most surprising of agents to be my provider.

Not ravens this time, but verse 9, a widow. Back then, widows were some of the most vulnerable people around. Now, this is a scandalous thought for us today, but back then, a woman without the care and protection of a man was as good as dead in these ancient cultures.

How could a widow, a vulnerable woman, provide for herself, let alone for the prophet Elijah? And on top of this, this isn't just any old widow, she is a Sidonian, that is, she would have been raised like Jezebel in the faith of Baal.

Is she really the Lord's promised means of sustaining Elijah? It seems so unlikely, but yet again, the Lord says it's the case, and so Elijah responds by the obedience of faith.

He does what the Lord says and he goes. And again, friends, everything pans out in precisely the way that the Lord promises. In verse 10, Elijah arrives at the gates of the city and behold, just look who happens to be there.

[30 : 59] Who happens to be the precise minute of those gates? What a funny coincidence. It's the widow. And Elijah asks her for a drink of water and she obliges.

And in verse 11, as she walks over with the water, Elijah asks her for a snack to eat as well. And in verse 12, we find out that actually she's even more of an unlikely source of provision.

Look at what she says, verse 12, Here's a widow and our son in great peril.

The only food they've got left is a little bit of flour, tiny bit of flour, tiny bit of oil in the cupboard. She would feed Elijah, but she's about to go and make her final meal for her and her son to enjoy a last bit of sustenance and food before they both sit around together and wait to die.

It's desperate. But just notice, please, that even within this widow and her bleak situation, there are little glimmerings of faith.

[32 : 25] Just look at verse 12. She refers to the Lord as the Lord. She uses the covenant name for the God of Israel. And she says, He is the God who lives.

She echoes Elijah's words at the start of the chapter. Already, the Lord seems to have been working in this woman's heart. Now friends, what happens next is remarkable.

But then again, we are dealing with a remarkable God here. In verse 13, Elijah tells her, don't be afraid. Go and do as you've said. Prepare the meal for you and your son.

But before you do that, make me a little cake. And don't worry about giving me this small portion because verse 14, 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.

Verse 15, this pagan Gentile woman who would have been a Baal worshiper in her youth, she responds by the obedience of faith.

[33 : 36] She hears the Lord's word, she hears what he says through his prophet and she goes and does it. Remarkable, that is remarkable, what a miracle. That's the miracle of this chapter as well, isn't it?

It's probably the greatest miracle. There's another great miracle in a second, but that is a miracle. She responds by the obedience of faith and she feeds Elijah the little cake from her tiny supply and the Lord keeps his promises to her.

Verse 15, she, her son, and the rest of her household, we're told there's others in that house, we don't know who, but the rest of the household ate for many days. In verse 16, throughout the entire time of the famine, the jar of flour never ran out and the jug of oil never became empty.

Friends, Baal had left this widow in the pit of hopelessness and on the verge of death. All was bleak and pointless until the Lord, the Lord God, graciously sought her and pressed her into his service for the benefit of his profit.

And yet, in the process of doing that, the Lord gives her far more than he demands from her. Listen to how one writer puts it, here is a Gentile woman, a Gentile widow, awash in the wilderness of God's mercy.

[35 : 03] Here is grace that moves beyond the boundaries of the covenant people and embraces one of Baal's most hopeless pawns. As she joins the lines of Melchizedek, Jethro, Rahab, Ruth and Nahum as those standing now within the circle of God's grace long before the glad day when Peter preached Jesus in Cornelius' house in Acts chapter 10.

Friends, what happens here in 1 Kings 17 is a little foretaste of that day when God would grant even to the Gentiles repentance that leads to life.

Who is God in Israel? The Lord. Who is God in Sidon? The Lord. Who is God in every nation and our nation? The Lord.

There is no other. And today, anyone from whatever nation, from whatever background, from whatever religion you might have been raised up in, from whatever superstition and man-made cult you might have been involved in, whatever background you come from, you can turn to the Lord and find that there is a wideness in God's mercy for even me.

And you will, if you turn to him, come under his wonderful sovereign care. no one is too far off, no one is too distant, no one is too bad, no one is too far gone.

[36 : 38] There is a wideness in God's mercy that is wider than the greatest sea. Well, before we look at the last section of this chapter, there is also a great challenge from this passage that we need to hear as a church.

Just think about this, later in history, Luke chapter four, I'm sure you know it, the Lord Jesus, he stood up in a synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, and Jesus said these words, listen, 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.

And you remember that when Jesus preached that sermon, everyone in the synagogue is absolutely raging with him, because they understood his point. Jesus was saying there were many of widows in Israel who qualified for Elijah's help, but the Lord directed Elijah to none of them in Israel.

The Lord directed them, him, to Gentile country, and in doing so, the Lord was bypassing Israel. In conferring his favor on this Gentile widow, the Lord was removing it from Israel.

Elijah's journey to Balsville, friends, therefore, it was actually not only merciful to the widow, but it was also an act of judgment upon Israel.

[38 : 21] And Jesus was warning when he preached to the unbelieving, hard-hearted Israel of his own day against repeating the sins of their fathers by rejecting him.

And friends, it's a solemn matter for us today as God's people and the professing covenant people of God. The Lord's grace was extended through Elijah beyond Israel because Israel had ignored that grace.

And that is a sober, personal warning for us today. because it could happen again. If you or I go on despising the Lord's word, then he may withdraw his light and allow us to walk in the darkness we

seem to prefer.

So friends, let's note the mercy and the severity of God in this passage. Well, fourthly, finally, verse 17 to 24, we see that the Lord alone is God over life and death.

The Lord alone is God over life and death. So some time passes and we might think that the widow's problems were over as day by day she has the same tokens of the Lord's grace constantly lying on her kitchen shelf in the jar of flour and the jar of oil.

[39 : 44] However, a new crisis arises out of the blue it would seem. So suddenly her son falls seriously ill and suddenly there was no breath left in him.

That is, he dies. He is dead. He's not in a coma. He's not passed out. This boy is dead. And you know, as readers, we are horrified.

It seemed to be that back in verse 14, the Lord had assured the widow that her and her son would live and be sustained through the coming days. And now she's there cradling her dead son in her arms.

What is the Lord doing? We might ask. What is the Lord doing? Why does the Lord do this? And friends, really, let me just say this, we aren't given any answers to that question.

sometimes the Lord's providence, it is totally perplexing. Sometimes the Lord's dealings with us are painful and baffling.

[40 : 54] And that is what this new convert widow is learning so painfully in our early walk with the Lord. And understandably, she's distraught. She's so upset.

In verse 18, she does what many Christians do when they experience suffering and loss. and she just assumes, I'm being punished. I'm being punished for sins of the past.

That's what she says to Elijah, doesn't she? She says, why has this happened? I'm being punished because of my sin. But it's clear that is not why.

Elijah doesn't even give her an answer to that question. He just ignores that question. He doesn't give her an answer. Elijah actually seems to be just as baffled as the poor widow. And he does the only thing that he can do in that moment, which is turn to the Lord God, who is our only hope.

So in verse 19, he asks for the boy's lifeless body, and he takes him from the widow's arms. And he goes upstairs with it into the upper room where he had been lodging.

[42 : 01] And verse 20, he cries out to the Lord in prayer. Look at what he says. Oh Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn by killing her son?

In verse 21, he stretches himself out on the boy three times. No one really knows why he does this. I have no idea. He is clearly not carrying out some pagan practice from his day.

That is not what he's doing. We can be certain of that. It could be that he's simply just identifying himself as the Lord's prophet with this boy and also identifying himself with the state of this boy and that Elijah too is just as helpless as the dead boy of raising the dead boy on his own.

Whatever this strange prophetic action was, we don't know. What we can be sure of is that after he's done that, Elijah cries out to the Lord again, Oh Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again.

verse 22, the Lord listened, the Lord that we were hearing about this morning who sees and hears all, he hears the voice of his prophet Elijah.

[43 : 17] And the life of the child came into him again and he revived. And Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him into his mother.

What a glorious reversal there is in the text there. If you zoomed out, you'll just see that this section mirrors each other. Elijah had taken the dead boy out of the mother's arms, he carried him upstairs into the upper chamber, the Lord brings him back to life through the prophet's prayer and intercession, and then he carries the boy down the stairs again, returns the boy back into the mother's arms alive.

A beautiful reversal from death to life. And right at the heart is the power of the living God. What relief, what sweet joy must have flooded into that mother's heart, not only because her son was alive, but because of what she came to know about the Lord God.

He is not like the pagan gods of her day, who were so capricious, fickle, and unpredictable, who constantly go back on their words and their wills. The Lord God is utterly trustworthy and true to his promises.

And he alone is God over life and death. He alone has the power to save from the grave. Baal and the rest of the man-made gods of her age, they are nothing.

[44 : 46] And friends, what joy this passage gives our lives today. For as you and I read this, we cannot help but think of another prophet of the Lord, the prophet of Lord, the Lord, capital P, one even greater than Elijah, one whose faith was even greater than Elijah.

This prophet, when he came, was none other than the Lord God himself, the God of the rain, the God of Israel, the God of the nations, in human flesh.

And throughout his public ministry, he showed continuously his authority over the jaws of death. He even raised children from the dead, Jairus' daughter, Mark chapter 5.

He even raised a widow's son, Luke chapter 7, all by the power of his word. And this prophet, after laying his own life down for the sins of his people, was raised from the grave in power.

And he opened up the kingdom of heaven for all who believe. He alone is the true and living God. And there is no other.

[45 : 57] Well, amen. Let's pray to this our God and our Savior. Our gracious God, we praise you that you alone are the true God.

You alone are the sovereign protector, almighty to rule and command, unchangeably faithful to save us even from death.

Lord, we pray that you will help us to walk by the obedience of faith, just like your servants Elijah and this unnamed widow. We praise you, heavenly father, for the goodness you've done in her life. We pray you would do the same in our lives. And we pray that we would recognize your true prophet, one even greater than Elijah, the Lord Jesus, casting all of our hope in him.

And we pray this in his name. Amen.