



How come when bad things happen we love to blame others? Just the other night we were at our house eating dinner at the kitchen table. Charity got Leah, our youngest daughter, a glass of juice to drink. To set the scene: like many 3-year-olds Leah snuck a toy to the table that night. I was sitting directly across from her watching the entire event unfold. As Leah moved her toy from one side of the table to the other, I had a front row seat to see the apple juice spilling all over the floor.

Now I didn't say anything but my first thought was: "What was my wife thinking giving Leah a cup of juice?" In my mind it was Charity's fault that Leah spilled her juice. It wasn't Leah's fault for breaking our family rule and bringing her toy to the table. It wasn't Leah's fault for not paying attention; no, it was my wife's fault for giving her such a full cup! How come I blamed my wife for my daughter's actions?

The blame game has been going on for years; it shouldn't shock us we love to blame others. It started with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had a unique relationship with God and then one day they ate the forbidden fruit. God questions Adam about what happened and immediately Adam points his finger at Eve, saying: "The woman you gave me did it!" The start of the blame game. In our E100 reading last week we saw Joseph's brothers blame their actions on a wild animal; lying to their father about the plight of their young brother.

My internal response to my daughter spilling her juice is the way many of us respond to God when bad things happen. When we encounter problems and we can't handle the pain, we defer responsibility, making it someone else's problem in an attempt to make ourselves feel better. When was the last time you encountered a difficult situation and your knee jerk response was to shift the blame to someone else? When was the last time you encountered an extremely difficult situation and found yourself blaming God for your trial instead of seeking Him in your pain? Open your Bible to 1 Kings 17 and let's see what happens when Elijah finds himself being blamed.

The Blame Game

Our story begins in 1 Kings 17:17 with these simple words: "*Some time later...*" meaning we need a quick recap on what's already happened. God called Elijah, a normal man, to confront King Ahab on his actions. The King of Israel, Ahab, had married Jezebel and followed the immoral ways of Baal worship. After confronting Ahab, Elijah heads to the Kerith Ravine where he is

fed by ravens and drinks from the brook. Once the brook dries up God leads him to a pagan nation to live in the home of a widow where God daily provides for him, giving flour and oil to make bread. Elijah has already encountered a few different seasons in his soul and he's about to enter a new season and a new opportunity to exercise his faith.

We think Elijah has been living in the home of this widow for almost two years, hence the words "some time later."

Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" (1 Kings 17:17–18).

At some point during Elijah's stay the widow's boy becomes ill and eventually stops breathing. In the Hebrew it says "stopped breathing." In English we would say "he died." So God has been faithfully providing just enough food for this widow and her son during the drought and now the boy dies.

Put yourself in the shoes of the widow for a minute. She already lost her husband, the father of her child. It's highly likely this is her only son and possibly could be her only living family member. In addition to losing her son she just lost her only hope of being cared for in her old age. She doesn't have a Roth IRA or a Social Security check coming to her house every month. She just lost her son and tied to the loss, she loses the hope of being taken care of when she becomes elderly. There's a reason James writes to us in the New Testament to make sure we take care of orphans and widows because they've lost the hope of relatives taking care of them; they need the local church (James 1:27).

I don't imagine the widow calmly blamed Elijah. No, it's more of an epic blow out fight with her yelling at him through tears and distress. In an emotionally charged encounter I imagine her walking out of her son's room in shock carrying his lifeless body. Tears are streaming down her face and her speech is difficult to understand through her screaming. All her hope in this life is lost and Elijah is the one to blame; ultimately blaming Elijah's God. We've all been in situations where we blamed someone for our suffering and said things we didn't mean, so understanding her loss makes the story all the harder to hear. This is more than a story penned on pages in ink; this is the real life pain of a hopeless mother.

As a pastor I've been given the opportunity to see some amazing things and be a part of joyous family moments. As a pastor I've also had a front row seat to the pain, suffering and death families encounter. Being a Student Ministries Pastor for almost a decade the weight of death is intensified when a minor passed away. Thankfully I haven't had to do many funerals for kids but I'll never forget attending Drew's funeral. Drew was a sophomore in high school who suddenly and unexpectedly died near the end of the school year. I wasn't officiating at the funeral but attended to support many of my students who knew Drew. As I waited in the lobby, the hearse pulled up and his casket was wheeled into the church. I'll never forget the sight of his mom throwing herself on the casket. To this day I can still hear her wailing and sobbing uncontrollably at the loss of her only son; it rocked me as a young father. Through all the emotions I was experiencing I had to remain calm because I was there to help my students, and if I was a mess I would be no help at all.

Elijah's Gentleness

Just like I needed to remain calm in the church that afternoon, Elijah needed to remain calm in his home. If Elijah were to freak out it wouldn't help the situation one bit. So how does a prophet respond to suffering?

"Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the Lord, "Lord my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, "Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!"

The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived (verses 19–22).

Elijah has been in training here in Zarephath preparing in this season God has him in. Elijah's response is an example of what God had been doing in his life—teaching him lessons in gentleness. I love what Charles Swindoll says in reference to Elijah's response: "There the woman stands, holding the limp, lifeless body of her only child. Her world has come crashing down, suddenly and unexpectedly. And Elijah simply says: 'Give him to me'... He simply asks her to place her burden in his arms."

It was impossible for Elijah to believe God would daily provide the right amount of food for this family only to allow the boy to die from an unknown illness. In full gentleness Elijah bears the widow's burden and carries the lifeless body upstairs to his room. It's intriguing Elijah carries him up to his bedroom. What's so special about this room? Some people think this is the place where Elijah spent hours with the Lord; this is the room where God was preparing the heart of the prophet for his ministry. This is the room where Elijah spent hours in prayer with his Lord; the

room where Elijah meditated on Scripture and sought the face of The Lord. Elijah knew if he was going to get God involved in this situation he needed to go where he met with God. Do you have a place like this in your home? Do you have a place where you go to meet with God? A place you run to and cry out to God when tragedy strikes? A place where you sit to meet with God, a place where you read His word and a place where you sit to listen to God's voice? If you don't, I encourage you to find a place like this, a place to meet with God.

While Elijah remained calm before the widow downstairs his demeanor changes when he enters his room. It's in the privacy of his room where Elijah has the boldness to ask God the difficult questions about the family he's staying with. This morning you may be facing a difficult situation or find yourself in the midst of suffering. Do you know that God is big enough to handle your questions? Do you know that it's ok to ask God the tough questions you're struggling with? Asking these questions provides an opportunity for your faith to grow and for God to continue shaping you into the person He knows you can be! When you ask the tough questions you must be prepared for God's response.

Going back to Elijah, you have to understand the situation Elijah placed himself in here. In Leviticus we read about rules for priests or for the men of God. Leviticus 21 tells us it was forbidden for a man of God to even be around a dead body, let alone touch a dead body. It was unfathomable that a man of God would carry the dead body of a pagan boy and place him on the bed. Elijah is willfully making himself unclean; breaking all the rules here, showing the love of God and demonstrating God's compassion for all people.

Elijah then stretches himself out over the boy's dead body three times and prays a simple yet powerful prayer: "Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!" What a prayer of faith! One night in Bible College we began talking in class about faith. Our professor was talking about the Apostle Paul and his leadership in Corinth. Somehow the conversation turned to faith and at one point my professor posed the question: "How do you spell faith?" After asking the question I wanted to raise my hand and say F-A-I-T-H but he turned around and wrote his answer on the white board one letter at a time: R-I-S-K. Just because my professor gave the example doesn't mean it's always true. Faith isn't always spelled R-I-S-K and every risk isn't an act of F-A-I-T-H but there is an element of risk here in Elijah's faith-filled prayer.

That year in Zarephath God had been growing Elijah's faith and it was time for it to be exercised. You may be wondering why Elijah stretched himself over the boy three times. The truth is we don't exactly know why he stretched himself over the dead body three times during this prayer. Some scholars think it might be a foreshadowing of Jesus raising from the dead after spending three days in the grave and another scholar thinks God may have

spoken this to Elijah while he was praying. It could have been Elijah praying over the boy, seeing no change and stretching himself over the lifeless body again in prayer until his life was restored. Elijah had faith God would heal him and this motivated his prayer. Elijah knew if God was able to intervene from heaven and fill the jar with oil and flour, God must be able to restore life to the boy. Elijah models an important lesson for us here: trust in God's faithfulness, especially in your suffering.

This is a risky prayer. Elijah is going out on a limb here by asking God to do something no one has seen before. Elijah didn't have a copy of the New Testament but the words of Jesus ring true in this instance. *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you"* (Matthew 7:7). Even though Elijah had no previous record of someone's life being restored to them after dying he had the faith to ask God to do something miraculous.

Evidence God Listens

You're probably wondering how the story ends. Let's read verses 22–24.

The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"

Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth."

This is the first account we have in Scripture of someone being raised from the dead. We have evidence, right here, that God listens to our prayers when we cry out to Him. As Meyer observed: "The mighty great cares about the mighty small." Elijah takes the boy, calmly walks downstairs and hands him back to his mother with a simple, yet powerful, statement: "Look, your son is alive!" The widow started out blaming God for her son dying and now she is confessing God is truth. What better response from a mother could we expect?

Do you see the humility of Elijah in this story? Elijah doesn't come down from the room and say: "Thankfully I was here to pray for him or else he would still be dead" or "Look what I did! The boy is alive." Elijah makes no attempts to take the credit for himself. Instead he makes sure all the glory for restoring life goes to God. Elijah wants credit to go where credit is due and credit is attributed to the Lord in this story.

It's important to understand the pagan culture of the time period and the local deities of Phoenicia. The people of Phoenicia worshipped Baal, the same Baal Jezebel had introduced in Israel. Baal was supposedly the god of rain and fertility but Ancient Near Eastern thought tells us Baal had to submit to a greater god, one named "Mot." Mot was the god of death and at times

Mot would require Baal to submit to him for a period of time. The people in Phoenicia thought this was one of those periods of time. When the widow holds her son's warm body against her chest she knows the God of Israel is the true, living, active God. This God does not submit to Baal or Mot and she is convinced of the truth Elijah has been living out in her home. Iain W. Provan puts it like this: "In one sense she already believed it, but now that she has seen death transformed into life, she knows it."

It's easy for us to see how important this day was for the widow and how obvious the power of God working through Elijah was. When you take into account the culture of Phoenicia and factor in God's power over death it takes the strength of God to another level. This story gives hope to a hopeless woman and is a bold statement of God's power. It reveals God is not a distant God who is uninterested in the daily lives of mankind but a God who cares about us. This morning you may be wondering if God is listening to the prayers you've laid before Him; this story is a strong reminder that God listens. We can know all of this but you may still be wondering: How does this story apply to my life?

As we close this chapter in 1 Kings, we've seen God at work in marvelous ways, with an overarching theme here being "The Word of The Lord." As we wrap up the message let's look at four different lessons we've seen from Elijah and apply them to our lives as we follow Christ on the Peninsula. The first lesson of faith we learn from Elijah is: Elijah rested in his position. As you're in the place God has you, **rest in your position** trusting God to provide all your needs. When God called Elijah to a foreign country where he had no debit card to buy food, no money to pay rent, or any friends, he didn't freak out. Elijah rested in his position and trusted God in this season of his soul.

Next, Elijah remained calm. When Elijah could have freaked out, lashed out or joined in the blame game he chose to remain calm and humble in the position God put him in. The next time you find yourself in a place that could shake your faith take a page from Elijah's playbook and **remain calm**. We all encounter situations, maybe on a daily basis, that are going to test our patience and humility. When we encounter these situations it's a chance to remain calm. Take, for example, the next time you're driving and someone cuts you off. If your natural response is to raise your voice use this as an opportunity to remain calm; your wife will thank you for your humble response in front of the kids.

When you remain calm it's really you saying **I trust God, even if all hope is lost**. Elijah prayed a risky prayer and took a huge step of faith trusting God to answer him in his time of need. No one in this room has stopped breathing right now; we are all physically alive. Some in this room, however, are spiritually dead. Some of you are like the little boy in your spirit: physically you are breathing but spiritually you're dead. You're like the boy; you

have more life to live and God isn't done with you. There is a reason you're here this morning! I invite you to turn your eyes to the Lord, and to trust God with your whole heart. You don't need to pray a fancy prayer but a homespun prayer like Elijah. A prayer addressing God in a personal way where you cry out to Him and share what's on your heart. A simple prayer of repentance, confessing you're going to trust Him.

Trusting God is going to look different for every single one of us. For those of you who've already trusted God with your life, I invite you to trust God in new ways. This could be trusting God to penetrate new areas in your life; areas you've left "off limits" until now. You're living but there are dead spots in your soul, areas you've deemed "off limits" to God. This could look like more time in the secret place with God, praying homespun prayers. In these prayers you're trusting God to impact those areas of impatience, joylessness, pride, selfishness, bitterness or the greed you've concealed. This means addressing the burden you've been carrying and exercising the faith God has been growing in you. This morning I invite you to remain in the season God has you in,

to continue to learn the lessons God is teaching you and to trust Him more in this season.

The final lesson we learn is Elijah gave God the glory. When it would have been easy to point the spotlight on himself, Elijah turned the focus to God. I want to encourage all of us to **look for opportunities to give God the glory**. Look for opportunities at home, at the store, in your job and at the gym to give God the glory. As we work together to give God the glory for His working in our lives, it's going to make space for those around us to see God. The coolest part about this is, this is exactly what Vision 2020 is about. It's about God using CPC to do amazing things on the Peninsula and when these opportunities arise we get to give God all the glory.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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