

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

3/29/2020

2 Kings 4:18-37

### The Savior We ~~Want~~ Need: Someone to Defeat Death

Psalm 112:7 says, “[A righteous person] is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD.” 10 years ago, before I got married, it was a lot easier for me to follow this passage and believe it. Then I got married and suddenly there was someone to share my life with. I started having nightmares again and they always revolved around protecting my wife from those who would break into our house and do her harm. I had something to fear.

And then I had kids. And it got that much worse.

And so for me, this text before us, from 2 Kings 4, is devastating. A mother holds her young son in her lap as he dies in her arms. I can practically hear the panicked prayers. I can feel the crushing helplessness. And I know that there are those in our congregation who by personal experience know how horrible the events of this text are.

Death is devastating. It produces orphans. It produces widows. It crushes wives who are waiting for their husbands to come home from war. It brings to an end the long journey of marriage. It leaves a father alone to raise two kids on his own. It takes from us those closest to us. It leaves us in puddles of grief. Death is devastating.

But I mean to give you hope today. I mean to express to you the amazing events of 2 Kings 4. By the work of the Holy Spirit in your hearts, I mean to move you from saying, “Wouldn’t it be nice, if our Savior could take away death?” to saying, “The Savior we need is someone who has defeated death.”

This woman, of whom we never get a name, lived in a town called Shunem in northern Israel. She was seemingly content there with her own people. Her husband owned fields. He made a good living. She had a good home.

The prophet Elisha would often pass through town. And even though this was a very godless time, with Baal worship flourishing in the land, this woman showed

the prophet of God great hospitality. She fed him. She welcomed him. She even asked her husband to make a small room for him on their roof, with a bed, a table, and chair, and a lamp for him. They gave him a place to stay whenever he came to town.

And so Elisha wanted to do something nice for her. Elisha's servant, Gehazi noticed, "She has no son and her husband is old." She had not known the joys of carrying life inside her womb. She had not heard the cute coo's of a 4 month old. What precious gifts of God our children are! And so Elisha called her and said, "About this time next year, you will hold a son in your arms."

How did she respond, "No, my lord, don't mislead your servant, O man of God!" Yet, a year later, she had a son.

And then the worst happens. Years later, the son, still young, but able to speak, is out with his father in the field. The day started perhaps as any other. The son appeared to be doing fine. Until, suddenly, he complained about his head hurting. The father told one of his servants to carry the son back. For hours, his mother held him as he complained about the pain, and then perhaps he lost consciousness, until finally his mother felt the worst feeling of all—the lack his breathing against her skin. Death is devastating.

People will look for excuses of any sort in order to disbelieve God. One of those excuses is this story. Oh, I doubt the unbeliever knows this text. But the world knows this story. A mother, a father lose a son or daughter. They say, "How could a loving God allow this?" They say, "If there is a God and he allows this pain, then he doesn't deserve my faith." How quickly we forget that God never intended for us to die at all. We were supposed to be in the garden of Eden. But our rejection of him and his commands led us here.

And so how can we blame God for death? How can we blame him for it when he solves it for us?

But what sweet relief we have in the household of our God. What joyous comfort we share with each other! What peace beyond peace do we know because of the Savior we need, the Savior we have, someone to defeat death.

There is something fairly unique about this text that I want to highlight with you. It's this woman. It's her faith.

She didn't ask for this son. Elisha had promised it. She had even told him, "Don't get my hopes up!" Yet, she had a son. And she knew him for what he was, a gift of God. God's grace in her life. A promise from God through his prophet to her: God loves me.

And so, when his son died in her arms, what did she do? Wail for days on end in grief? She would have had every right to. Did she shut herself off from the world? Who would have blamed her? Did she rail at God for this injustice of it all? The world would have applauded her. No, instead, you see faith shine brightly. She knew that God loved her. She remembered that love and she trusted in that love. In faith, she went back to Elijah, trusting that God would look after again. Was she grieving? Yes, any mother would. Faith didn't make her immune to sadness or the pain of death. It doesn't for us either. But she still trusted in God even during what I assume would have been the worst day of her life.

And God listened. And God provided an answer. A lot of details for this miracle are given that I'm not going to get into because they really don't matter. What matters is that Elijah went to her house, shut the door so that it was just the body and him. And by God's power restored the boy to life.

Now, how emotional do you think the mother was outside of that door? Was she listening in? Was she pacing? Was her husband there to comfort her? How do you think she would have reacted when she recognized the sound of her son sneezing? What a marvel when that door opened and she rushed to hold her son again, to feel his breath again, to inspect every inch of him and make sure that he was ok, and to hear him say, "I'm ok, mom."

There are people in this congregation that know precisely the emotions of this mother. There are people in my own extended family that know this pain of loss. Death is devastating. But remember this and have hope dear friends in Christ: The Savior we need has defeated death.

To do so, he tasted death. He felt its sting, personally. He endured it. In fact, he knows the human experience better than I do because he has already underwent death. And he lived again after it so that you would know that our God is bigger than death. No human doctor can do what God can do. No scientist can recreate this miracle.

Christ has said these important lines:

- i. Little girl, I say to you, get up. (Mark 5:41)
- ii. Young man, I say to you, arise! (Luke 7:14)
- iii. Lazarus, come out! (John 11:43)

Our God is bigger than death. Death is devastating, but God has destroyed death. And the Lord who spoke these commands is the same Lord who will one day command each grave to empty.

I look forward to seeing all those mothers and fathers who buried their baptized children. I look forward to the joy on their faces as they too with the Shunammite woman will bow to the ground at the sight. I look forward to the day when those mothers and fathers will hold in their arms again their children and know full well the truth of this statement: God has destroyed death.

And so I encourage you to have the faith of the Shunammite woman. Her faith led her to see that God is the hero in this story. The woman didn't accomplish anything or even ask for anything, all she did was trust. We may have to wait longer than she did. But by God's grace, we will see that last chapter close on the book of death.

Like the Shunammite woman, trust in God because he already has a proven track record of loving you. He has fought valiantly for your forgiveness, sacrificing his Son in the process. Let that be the basis for your trust in his blessings yet to come. Death still exists. But wrapped up in grace of God, it's sting is gone. It's not as devastating as it used to be. For, one day, we will look back and realize our grief was but a mere moment, and we have infinite years of heaven yet to enjoy.

Let us hold firmly to the words of Jesus to who spoke to Martha in the midst of her grief and who speaks to us in the midst of ours, past, present, or future: **"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."**

Amen.

God bless you. God keep you safe. God keep you healthy. God keep you firmly rooted in his gospel. Amen.