

Elijah Raises the Dead

by Charles Alexander

The story of Elijah raising the dead is a token of God's presence in our lives and a reminder that God is working mysteriously and marvelously.

Duration: 37:29

Scripture: Matthew 15:22

Topics: "Miracles"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the significance of Jesus sending his disciples outside the borders of Israel to spread the Gospel. This act symbolizes the breaking of boundaries and the equal access to divine mercy and grace for all people. The feeding of the 7,000 is mentioned as a representation of the spreading of the Gospel to the whole world. The preacher emphasizes the importance of personal belief and seeking God's help for salvation, even if there may not be an immediate answer or visible change.

Transcript

1 Kings chapter 17, the story of Elijah. We read again from verse 17, the distress of the widow woman of Zarephath, where Elijah was sheltered during the remaining years of the great famine. And it came to pass after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick.

And his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him. And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? He said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own body.

Let this child's soul come into him again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother.

Elijah said, See, thy son liveth. And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth. The story is familiar with most of us, especially the older ones of us.

And the fact that it has been read two Sundays in succession may help to fix it upon the attention of the younger and more virile minds of our younger men and women who are amongst us this evening. And oh,

that it might, with all of us, impress at least one of the great lessons which this story contains, and that is the reality of God's work on our behalf and our own necessity for it in the salvation of our souls. If indeed the dead have been raised, as we have the story in this passage, then we have here a token that God is in the midst, in the midst of our race all the time, and is working his will mysteriously, marvelously, in ways which are beyond our understanding, to raise the dead.

Oh, this is the greatest miracle of all, is it not, on the natural level. To recall again from the shades of death the soul, back again into its earthly tenements, that the blood may race through the veins once more, the heart may begin to beat, the eyes may begin to open, consciousness return, and as from some strange dream, the departed come back to life again. We often wonder, don't we, in the very isolated cases in the Bible of those who've been raised from the dead, very isolated, doesn't happen very often, wouldn't do for it to happen often, and always for a very, very special reason.

We often wonder, people sometimes ask the question, maybe you are asking the question, what memory did the dead bring back with them from the other world? What about Lazarus, for instance, who'd been in the grave four days, and his body had actually begun to corrupt. He was recalled from the tomb, with the wrappings of the tomb upon him, when he was released and restored to his home and loved ones, what stories he might have had to tell them about conditions beyond death. I suppose the thought has often occurred to most of us here present.

Well, the answer is, of course, that he brought back no memory with him, nor did the widow's son of Zarathustra, nor the widow's son of Nain, nor the girl over whom, at the age of twelve years she was, the Lord spoke the remarkable Hebrew words, Talith Hakumi, Damsel, I say unto thee arise, all because these words occur in the 51st and 52nd chapters of Isaiah. That's why the Lord used the Hebrew, at the bedside of the girl, and why John, or the particular evangelist, Mark, I think it was, actually recorded the words, that we might have a pointer back to prophecy, and all that it meant, the raising of this girl from the dead. In all these cases, we have no reason to believe that they carried any memory back from the other world.

All they knew about it was that they had fallen asleep into unconsciousness, as we do every night of our lives, and then waken up and we don't know what has happened, except we've had some strange dreams sometimes. If you've got an afflicted mind like I've got, you dream strange dreams every time and all the time. Behold, this dreamer cometh, they might have said of me when I was born, because I've been dreaming ever since.

They're very vivid dreams too, they're remarkable. Sometimes I get instruction by them. I've dreamt of texts and what they mean.

Remarkable things one dreams, we don't always remember our dreams. But, in the case of these who rose from the dead, we may conjecture, and every reason for doing so too, that they have no recollection except insofar as they may have had a sort of a dream. I dreamt I was in heaven anyway, and wakened up and wished I hadn't wakened up.

It was so glorious, so wonderful. I closed my eyes and tried to sleep to resume my dream again, but of course you can't do that. You fall asleep, it's always another dream.

You can't get back to where you were. I wonder if they have some sensation, some glory, some wonderful experience, which they couldn't give a name to. We don't know, but we may be sure that our conjecture is right that it would never have done for them to come back and talk about a world upon which their eyes

have been opened, and they'd last closed upon this world.

Nowhere do we read that any of them ever brought a message back with them. It was just themselves, the fact that here was a man, a child, a woman, a girl, raised again from the dead. Can we believe it? We raised this question last week.

I just pass over it this week with some additional evidences that we might ponder upon. Some of us believe it. We're quite happy about believing it simply because it's in the Word of God, and we've got such a reliance upon the Bible and such a long acquaintance with it that we have long since learned to be satisfied with any Bible statement at all, because we have proved within ourselves that this is the Word of God, the living Word of God.

Nowhere have we been deceived by it, but always blessed through it. But we may say, covering a little bit of the ground of last week, something you may have forgotten so we remind you, that if any Jewish scribe had set out to invent the story of Elijah and his preservation, when the king of Israel was looking for him in order to slay him as the man who brought all the troubles upon the land. You know, Ahab was not prepared to recognise that he was the man who troubled Israel.

So it was easy to put the blame upon somebody else, isn't it? Anything goes wrong, oh well, so and so and so and so. Very often the trouble is in ourselves, isn't it? Well, this is an old story too. But if any Jewish scribe from that age or some subsequent age might have set out to invent a story about God's prophet raising somebody from the dead, he would have some motive for doing so.

His only possible motive would be to exalt the land and the religion of Israel. What else would he invent a story like this for? Well obviously it would be to exalt Israel, that the heathen around might know what a wonderful people they were. The only people with the right religion, and this is a proof of it.

Why? Even the dead are raised by our religion, they would say. All right, it was invented by a Jewish scribe to exalt the Jewish people. Rather a pity, isn't it, that he didn't raise somebody out of the house of Israel on this occasion, but he had to go to a heathen country, the region of Syro-Phoenicia.

One of the most polluted gentile countries on the face of the earth that ever was. And eventually this had to be blotted out from the record altogether in the providence of God. Now no Jewish scribe, if he'd been inventing a story of this nature, would have chosen a gentile mother's child for the purpose of being raised from the dead.

Such a thing would never have entered into the dishonest mind of anyone trying to invent a religious fable and foist it on the minds of decent people. The very fact that it took place where it did, against a whole mountain of Jewish prejudice, proves, as the story of Jonah proves, who was sent to a gentile city named Nineveh, which was a potential oppressor of the people of God in Israel, and indeed became an actual oppressor of them, that a Jewish prophet should be sent to such a country as that, devoted to destruction as it was, and they should be spared for another century that destruction, because they repented at that preaching of Jonah. And so Jonah wasn't swallowed by the whale.

Whales don't do things like that. The whole thing's a fable. Well, we've gone over that ground before, haven't we, and reminded you of the specific examples in recent history of men who were swallowed by whales and survived to tell the story.

Yes, in modern times. The greatest proof of the truth of that story is that it came from Jewish sources and yet it was not Jews who were benefited by it at all, but a heathen people whom they hated and despised. Now, you've got to account for these things.

It's all very well someone with scientific knowledge say, well, you can't raise the dead. It can't be done. The thing must be a fable.

When you put everything together, you find that it's more difficult to prove that it's a lie than to accept it as truth. It bears the whole stamp of truth from beginning to end. No inventor would have invented these circumstances at such a time and in such a place.

And then there is a greater and wider proof than that, that we have something happening in the experience of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, which we have read in the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 15, which occurs also in Mark, chapter 7, with some embellishment there too, that the Lord goes into the same region of Tyre and Sidon. And this is not a very big region. He couldn't have been very far from Zarephath.

Indeed, everything points to the fact that it was in the same vicinity where Elijah worked this miracle. But there was no reason why our Lord should go to Tyre and Sidon. No reason why he should go across the border of Galilee into a heathen country only about twice in his life did he ever cross the borders of Israel.

Why should he do it? What is the object of going there? He went there specifically to show mercy to a poor woman whose daughter, whose young daughter was grievously afflicted by being possessed of demonic power. There are many like cases in Israel. Why should he go amongst the heathen and to the same place where centuries before he himself had sent Elijah on the same mission? Not only that his life might be preserved, but a mark might be made upon history which would have gospel signification to the end of time, proving not only that God can raise the dead, but proving that the gospel preached from this pulpit and a thousand other pulpits in this land today, the gospel here preached is valid and real and the experience we have of the forgiveness of sins and deliverance therefrom and the sure and certain hope we have of heaven to come that we shall enter there is guaranteed to us.

We have the evidence of it in the word of God and in the experience of divine grace which has been given unto us in the course of our lives that the thing is true. Now note that the Lord said to this woman in the same region where Elijah had been and worked that great miracle. When she followed and cried after him saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with the devil.

And he answered her not a word. And the disciples got wearied of this woman crying out and said, Send her away, send her away. But instead of sending her away the Lord gave her an answer.

He turned and he said, I am not sent to you people, I am sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Why should you cry after me? Ah, she said. And she came down and worshipped him and fell down to his feet.

She had nothing else to say but this, Lord help me. And as though that were not enough he treated her roughly still. He said, It isn't me.

It isn't the right thing to do to take the bread from the children and to cast it to dogs. She knew what he meant. As far as Israel was concerned the Gentiles were simply dogs.

Why take the blessings which he had come to bestow upon Israel, upon the Jewish people, and give them instead of giving to the Jews, give them to the likes of her. What right did she to expect? It is not me, he said, to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. Even that didn't turn her away.

Even that didn't discourage her. She had her answer. Truth, Lord.

You are quite right in what you say, but remember this, even the dogs lick up the crumbs that fall from the master's table. Is there not a crumb for me? O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt, and her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

O wonderful faith indeed. Why did the Lord treat the woman thus? Because he wanted to make a mark upon the divine record of the faith, the great faith, the wonderful faith. Such faith had not been found in all Israel, we are told in another place.

I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. That a mark should be made upon the divine record, that we might know that faith comes, and the reward of faith comes to those who press their claim upon Christ and will not take no for an answer. O Lord, save me, O Lord, help me.

Why should I help you? What qualifications of you were expecting that I should help the likes of you? But Lord, even the dogs lick up the crumbs which fall from the master's table. I believe there's something for me in your grace and in your word. And so it happened.

Faith is tried, usually before it becomes a valid thing within us. Of course she had faith all along, that's why she pressed it so much. But there's some people who say, oh yes, I believe in Jesus Christ, my sins forgiven, I'll come now.

Yes, I'll come now. And some unwise people say, well all you've got to do is accept him and the thing's done. And a hundred thousand people have done this and nothing has happened.

They'll go away and say, well there was nothing in it was there. What went wrong? Well they were under a temporary impression. They thought it was just a mere matter of saying, oh well I believe therefore my sins are forgiven.

And they never were concerned about their sins. Just a temporary emotion perhaps, carrying them through. And so they come out in the hundreds, sometimes in the thousands, a big campaign.

And you can't find them afterwards. No, sometimes not one in a hundred. Something's wrong with the method.

These people oughtn't to be deceived like that. We ought to be careful how we present the word of God. Remember this, that faith will be tried and tested and proved.

The Lord knows if there's faith there or not, of course. He doesn't need to try and test and prove it for his own sake. But for our sakes it needs to be tried and tested and proved that you might know the value and the worth of faith.

It's worth all the world besides. What was anything worth in this world to that woman? If she'd had a hundred thousand pounds in the bank, she'd have given it all if she could only get relief for her daughter. Her daughter was her world.

Her daughter was her life. She was concerned only about that poor child to be delivered. Not what she was concerned about.

She prepared to go to any length. If anyone said they would give her a fortune, if she'd only stopped crying about her daughter, she would say, what is a fortune to me? My daughter is my fortune. And your soul is your life.

Let us remember that. Your soul is your life. We can understand what our soul is.

That's just what it is. It's life. Your life.

It'll never die. It'll go on living. After it's passed this scene, it'll pass to another scene.

Will it be saved? Will it be happy? Will it be at peace? Will it be at rest? Will its joys be multiplied beyond anything that they could ever imagine in this world? Will this be so with you? Will it be so with me? Say, well, I'd like to believe like other people believe. Would you? You'd like to believe. Well, put it to the test.

Go to the Lord tonight. Say, Lord, help me. Lord, help me.

And then you won't get any answer, perhaps. None at all. Of course, the Lord won't answer you from heaven.

You won't hear a voice, anything like that. But you may look for something, some kind of a change within yourself, some kind of a peace coming in. But no, nothing's happened.

Ah, you say, I knew there was nothing in it. But all these other people, they found, they proved the same. Nothing in it at all.

Just all imagination. Religious notions, you know. And so it is that we give up.

We don't press into the Kingdom of God. We're not really concerned. Well, we wouldn't take no for an answer.

We wouldn't take silence for an answer. We go on and on and on. Yes, even if it takes years, we'll go on and on and on.

We'll say, Lord, I want this peace. I want this rest. I want the knowledge, the assurance of sins forgiven.

I want it more than all this world contains. I want it more than all the gold that's in the Bank of England or in Fort Knox in America. I want it more than all the wealth that is pouring out of the ground in the oil shakes of the Middle East and elsewhere.

I want these. These are the true riches, the forgiveness of sins, peace, joy, rest, the knowledge that there is an inheritance forming, waiting in the skies. Well, it is only thus.

Never mind, that's only the electric light gone. We've got plenty more left. It is only as we press, faith will be tried, that it might be proved to you whether you really set value upon eternal things.

That was the object of it. And so the Lord reveals it, as in the case of the woman at Surrency. So again, the woman of the New Testament, who pressed in and would not take no for an answer.

The Lord loves to be importuned. That means asked again and again, and yet again. You cannot weary the Lord with your much asking and your much coming.

You'll be the first to get tired of it, not the Lord. But don't be tired of it, don't be weary. Give almost anything that you can think that you might have Christ, that you might know him.

For he is the greatest value and the peace which he brings is all that life is worth in time and in eternity. Well, there's another very remarkable verse which is not usually quoted in this connection. There's a prophet, I nearly said a little prophet, because there aren't any little prophets.

He's a little prophet only in the sense that he writes the shortest book in the Old Testament, if not the shortest in the whole Bible. And his name is Obadiah. If you find Jonah, you'll find Obadiah, because he's the tiny little prophet.

That is only about one page of him before the prophet Jonah. And Obadiah wrote at the very end of this little chapter which he wrote, in verse 20, And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites even unto Zarephath. And the captivity of Jerusalem which is in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the south.

And Saviour shall come upon Mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau. And the kingdom shall be the Lord. You know, if you really want proof that God is in this business, and that that boy, the widow's son of Zarephath was in fact raised from the dead, you have it by putting the three scriptures together, each of them written at a different time centuries apart from the other.

There's Elijah's account. There is the account of Matthew and Mark in the New Testament of what Christ did in the same region. And now, in between the two, there's this strange, almost unknown prophet named Obadiah, who says that the captivity of Israel shall possess the land of the Canaanites even unto Zarephath.

Now why should Zarephath be mentioned? There's only a bit of a village. It has no place in history at all. Tyre and Sidon, yes.

Why? They occur right throughout history. The ships of Tyre and Sidon used to come to Cornwall for tin in almost days of prehistory. And they're still digging up tin in Cornwall to this day.

They came here because there are very few places on the face of the earth where you can get tin. Very few places indeed. And Cornwall happens to be one of them.

It's a very, very rare and precious metal. Necessary for the purpose of hardening other metals. That's its value.

And so the ships of Tyre and Sidon were well known. They sent their ships throughout the unknown world, away to the Far East. Their mariners were great men indeed.

Days when shipping was only in its infancy. And yet it doesn't mention Tyre and Sidon. It mentions Zarephath.

Now why should Obadiah be inspired to mention Zarephath without any explanation at all? Simply because God had a prophetic purpose in sending Elijah to that village. And the Lord had a prophetic purpose to overstep the boundaries of the land of Israel. For only the second time in his life, the first time

was when as a child, a baby, was carried down into Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod.

And now he comes to Zarephath. And why? In fulfillment of Obadiah's prophecy. To show, for this is what the prophecy means, that the gospel was going to come to the Gentiles and overstep all boundaries in order to reach you and me in our need.

And the fact of the matter is, that we here, far beyond the boundaries of Israel, are listening to the living word of God this evening. And seeing the fresh evidence that it is true. That against all reasons to the contrary, this little village of Zarephath comes in three times into the word of God.

This region where great things were destined to happen. And what can it mean but that God who sent Elijah to Zarephath saying, I have commanded a widow woman to sustain you there. Go to Zarephath.

And so he went to Zarephath. And why, why, why did he send him outside the borders of Israel? To that place. And such great things should happen there.

Because God was preparing a testimony and an evidence that the gospel would break all bounds when Christ should come and over spread the whole earth. And there should no longer be a privileged nation like Israel. But all on the same level, with equal access to divine mercy and grace and to the bread of life.

And significant that in Matthew's account, the next thing we read about is the feeding of the 7,000. Not the feeding of the 5,000, that was a different occasion. But the feeding of the 7,000, which seems to me to indicate the spreading of the gospel to, in a seven fold sense, because seven is the number of completeness in the Bible to the whole wide world.

And that is why it is associated in Matthew's gospel with the widow, the woman from Syrophenicia who cried after the Lord for the healing of her daughter. Is there any more proof than anybody wants? Any more proof at all? Do you not see from this that God even in Elijah's day, centuries before the time of the gospel, was preparing an answer to Jewish prejudice and an encouragement to Gentile faith. The faith of the outcast, the faith of those who are only dogs, licking up the crumbs which fall from the master's table, who are not worthy to be there and not fit to be there.

And no special undertaking that they should be there. But here we are dear friends, you and me, old and young of us, here we are at the Lord's table, the master's table, and there are crumbs falling from it tonight. Crumbs for you and for me.

Only a crumb. Oh, I prefer the whole of the loaf. Well a crumb of the bread of life is enough for anybody because the Lord took the seven loaves as he took the twelve loaves for the feeding of the five thousand.

So the seven loaves for the feeding of the seven thousand. He required even less bread to feed them. Well five loaves and two fishes wasn't it in the case of the five thousand, that's right.

Now seven for the seven thousand. And any crumb from seven loaves among seven thousand people, if they were all to get something it would be a crumb wouldn't it? Such a small crumb you'd hardly be able to see it in your hand. This is all I'm getting but keep on eating it and you'll find that crumb lasts forever.

All the bread in the world couldn't do what that crumb would do for you. Oh, the dogs lick up the crumbs which fall from the master's table and there are crumbs falling from this table this evening. And they're falling for you and falling for me.

Take one of them up tonight, some crumb of comfort, some crumb of faith, let it be added to it and take and eat Christ has come who is the bread of life and here he is as it were on offer to you and to me. I don't despise the use of that term offer by the way. I know some people object to it but there's a sense in which it ought to be used and I believe it is used in Holy Scripture.

An encouragement to everybody to come and that if you don't come then the poverty in which you shall live and die and which you shall suffer throughout all eternity will be your own poverty. Not the poverty of God because here was a crumb for you tonight. All just to take, just to receive, just to put it upon your tongue and say oh Lord yes this one promise of thine that if I believe you will receive.

If I believe you will bestow. That the Lord Jesus died for sinners and a sinner am I, nor have I gotten but what I've received. Grace has bestowed it since I have believed.

Boasting excluded pride I abase. I'm only a sinner saved by grace. It's only a crumb that you need, that's what you start with and you find you've got the whole loaf.

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