

**Text: 1 Kings 17:17-24**

**Theme: Elijah-A man of Heroism and Humility: Standing in the Shadow of God**

**Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Evening Worship Service on 22/09/2013 at 6.00pm**

At the beginning of the chapter, we saw Elijah as a man of prayer. He prayed that there would be no rain in direct confrontation to Baal the weather god, and God listened to him. I find it interesting that Elijah is not included in God's "hall of faith." Even though Elijah's was a life characterized by one act of faith after another, God chose not to mention him, at least by name. Yet when we come to this statement- "women received back their dead by resurrection" (Hebrews 11: 35), I am convinced the Lord did have Elijah's faith in mind, for one of those women who received back their dead happened on Elijah's watch. It was God who brought about this miracle, using His prophet and servant Elijah.

The first question that comes to mind as I read this opening line of the story is "After what things?" What were the circumstances that led up to this moment for Elijah? Remember with me as I rehearse the previous events.

First, God gave Elijah the courage to confront Ahab and announce a drought. Following closely on the heels of that announcement, God told Elijah to do an incredible thing: He was not to stay before the public; instead, he was to run and hide by the brook Cherith. While there, he was to be fed by the ravens twice a day, and he was to draw his water from the brook-which later dried up. At Cherith, for an undisclosed period of time, Elijah simply waited on God in the solitude of obscurity.

God fed him using a raven- a bird that was not considered clean. The escape to the Brook Cherith was for more than protection. It was also to train Elijah in dependence upon the LORD. In a season of drought, he had to trust that God could keep this brook flowing. He also had to accept food from **the ravens**, an unclean animal. The name **Cherith** comes from the ancient Hebrew root meaning, *to cut away, to cut up or off*. This shows that God had some cutting to do in the life of Elijah during this period. Charles Spurgeon drew two points of application from this event, likening the food the ravens brought to spiritual food. First, he recognized that God may bring a good word to us through an unclean vessel, a spiritually unclean like a raven. Second, that one can bring spiritual food to others and still be unclean spiritually themselves. "But see, too, how possible it is for us to carry bread and meat to God's servants, and do, some good things for his church, and yet be ravens still!" (Spurgeon)

Each day the water was a little lower. At first, it was probably not too noticeable, but eventually it became very discernible. The water level was dropping. The drought was working. Hallelujah! Well maybe not. How do you think Elijah felt? Every day, he looked and wondered and waited. He was living by a drying brook.

Have you ever lived by a drying brook? It may be a drying brook of physical ability as we get older. The knees just don't work like they used to. We all do that. But some are having to battle cancer, diabetes, heart problems, Alzheimer's, and other debilitating conditions. Life is not as pleasant as it used to be. Some are living by a drying brook of finances. We have jobs and some are facing disaster in this economy. Even those who are not directly involved, will probably have some spin off repercussions. Many, if not all of us will have to endure this. Will it ever be good again? We cannot tell. We are there, every day. Looking at the drying brook.

Just to help with some perspective, we need to check another E, Ezekiel about what happens to “dry bones.” God can work a miracle. God will work a miracle. And I want to be here and be a part of that. But, we cannot deny that right now this is a drying brook. Every week we look at the statistics and see people leaving. Giving is down. More people leave because who wants to be in a loser church? What, where is the bottom? No one knows. this is a drying brook.

Take your temperature. God, is the God who is there—and, according to Francis Schaeffer, He is not silent. The Word of the Lord came to Elijah. The Word of the Lord came to Jim. The Word of the Lord came to you. The Word of the Lord came to your family. The Word of the Lord came to your situation.

Next, God sent Elijah to Zarephath - a considerable distance in the plain when a price tag was on his head. He had to trust God to protect him and to Zarephath he must go. He needed to be trained and refined in God’s school. So, he arose and went to Zarephath. This is a lose, lose, lose, lose, lose situation. She is poor, it is a drought, she is a foreigner and a Gentile, and she is an unattached woman. But Elijah just hiked up his skirts and took off for Zarephath. Good for him. The safest place to be is at the centre of the Lord’s will. Thinking about fire reminds me of Azariah, Hananiah, and Mischael. You may recognize them by their Babylonian names...Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Nebuchadnezzar said, “Bow down to my idol or in the furnace you go.” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said, “God CAN save us from this fiery furnace, but even if He does not, we will not bow down to that hunk of ugly junk.” Who was safer? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace, which was probably used to refine iron from its ores or Nebuchadnezzar? Who was scared and amazed? And who got to visit with “a son of the gods” according to Nebuchadnezzar? Ironically all the fire was able to burn was the ropes that held them. Sometimes God uses furnace experiences to remove our shackles and free us. And we are worried about the heat.

When he got there, he found a widow and her child on the verge of starvation. At God's direction, Elijah moved in with them. Elijah said to the widow, in effect, "We will trust God on a day-by-day basis," And, sure enough, God came through day after day (as He always does). The flour bin was never empty, and the little jar of oil never ran dry. Each and every day God provided for their needs.

And thus, it was that in this context of hiding and testing, "after these things," Elijah faced another impossible situation. But there is difference. By now, Elijah has become accustomed to facing the impossible. His faith has matured. He's ready for the next test, confident in His God. A DEATH IN THE FAMILY

We are not told what was wrong with the widow's son, but the illness was so severe that the boy died. And when that happened, his mother looked around for someone to blame. That's natural reaction. This extremely adverse development brought all of this woman’s suppressed fears to the surface. In essence, she said that Elijah should have let her die back when they first met. A characteristic of a taker is that it is better to have nothing than to have a little. That is the type of “song” often heard from the Israelites on the other side of the Red Sea and Egypt. In spite of being witnesses to God’s glorious deliverance in Egypt and through the Red Sea eliciting their exuberant praises and rejoicing, the first challenge to them saw these people clamouring to return to Egypt where they were treated as princes and princesses and ate at the king’s table. They had easily forgotten that they were slaves who preferred death to their lowly and degrading positions.

“Why didn’t you just let me die, instead of giving me hope. Now you just snatched it away. It would have been better if we had never met.” I guess she did not subscribe to the axiom: “Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.” She accused Elijah, and God, of just stretching out her life so that they (He) could punish her for her sin. **A mistaken image of God is a big ogre in the sky just waiting to pounce on us whenever we make any mistake. How I wish everyone will know that our God is One who is at hand to lift you up when you fall.**

And look at Elijah’s response. Remember he could have shot back at her that she was an ungrateful wretch and did not deserve anything anyway. She should be happy for what little she had and now please hush up. This is bad theology and bad philosophy. Instead, Elijah returned to applied pastoring. He did not rebuke, refute, nor recriminate. (I do not believe that he had to think about it. He was a walking evidence of God’s compassion. It was the natural thing to do, to try to help.) He just said, “Give me the boy.”

Even though the prophet had done nothing to deserve her reaction, even though she and her son had been sustained through the miraculous provision of food each day, thanks to the presence of Elijah and the power of his God, she blamed him. But let's not judge her too severely. Those who have lost a loved one, especially a child, understand her grief. Sometimes in situations like that we say things we later regret. So, we understand what this bereaved mother might have been thinking and feeling when she looked at Elijah and said, "O man of God, what have you done to me? Have you come to punish my sins by killing my son?" (NLT).

She stands there, tears streaming down her face, holding the body of her son in her arms. And at that precise moment Elijah hold out *his* arms and says, "Give him to me." Do you know what really impresses me here? It's the silence of Elijah. Somehow, he knows that nothing he can say at this moment will satisfy this grieving mother. No words from him can soothe her stricken spirit. So, he does not argue with her. He does not rebuke her. He does not try to reason with her. He doesn't remind her of all she owes him or how ashamed she should be for blaming him. He simply asks her to place her burden in his arms.

Pause for a moment to realize that Elijah is again in a situation that, at least from a human point of view, he doesn't deserve. He has obeyed God by going to Ahab then hiding at Cherith. He has walked with God from Cherith to Zarephath. He has done *exactly* as the Lord instructed. He's trusted God, and now he's receiving the brunt of this woman's blame.

God sometimes seems to put us in the vise, and then He tightens it and tightens it more, until we think, in the pain of His sovereign squeeze, "What's He trying to do to me?" We walk closer to Him and even closer to Him. **We don't see how we could walk any closer, but still more tests come, one on top of another. That's where Elijah is, but he doesn't waver. He stands tall and silent in the shadow of God, grounded in faith, confident of his Lord's power. That's humility at its best.**

He doesn't question God. He doesn't fall apart at the seams. He doesn't lose control. He doesn't argue with the woman. He simply says, with quiet compassion, "Give me the boy."

I am also impressed with this grieving mother. She, without question or hesitation, places her precious, lifeless son into Elijah's arms. Perhaps the prophet's gentleness

suddenly melted her and prompted her, once again, to trust him.

What do you do when tragedy strikes? What do you do when a test comes? What's your first response? Is it to complain? To blame? To try to reason your way out of it? Or have you formed the habit of doing what Elijah did? Do you go to your special place and get alone with God? Elijah provides a wonderful example for us. No panic. No fear. No rush. No doubt. Why should he?

Elijah may have been silent before the woman, but not before God. It is before God that he raises his tough questions. "Lord, what are You doing? What are You trying to tell me? Why would You break the heart of this dear mother? I've obeyed You. I've waited upon You. I've urged her to wait upon You. And now this? This situation is beyond me; I can't seem to get above it. I can't get relief from it. Lord, what are You doing? What do You *mean* by this? **All alone in the shadow of God ... that's where we fight such battles. Elijah is able to be completely candid with his God because he's developed such familiarity over time in his own private place of struggle-in his own spiritual haven.**

"Did You bring trouble on this woman?" he might have asked. We do not hear the answer, but we see it. Elijah was not a trained paramedic. I honestly doubt that CPR would have revived the boy anyway. He was dead.

We learn two things here. One, do what you can. Don't panic. But if there is anything that can be tried go ahead. Just do not make things worse, of course. Elijah must have thought that it cannot hurt. And, I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit was directing him. When God tells you to do something, it is not foolish to do it. In fact, it is foolish not to do it. We may look like a fool for God, but anyone who believes that is foolish. Obeying God is the height of wisdom. But the second lesson is much more important. Expect a miracle. Notice that he prayed first. **We too often run around in a dither, trying everything that we can. When all else fails, we turn to prayer. Elijah went the wiser direction - Prayer first.**

Now wait a minute. What is going on here? Up to this point in Scripture there has been no account of anyone ever being raised from the dead. The closest to that would be Enoch, but he was not resurrected or resuscitated, because he didn't die. God simply took him to glory. "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:24). We know from Hebrews, that Abraham expected God to resurrect Isaac. The concept that God could raise the dead was not unknown. Elijah was going to be the first to witness it first-hand. If we expect God to do miracles, we will see things that no one has seen before. (As far as we know.) But seeing it for yourself has a way of cementing it into our memory. When our "miracles" are just ordinary, they fade with time.

What is Elijah thinking here? How does he dare ask God to do such an unprecedented thing? Elijah could not go back through the record like some spiritual attorney and try to find another case he could point to and say, "Ah! Precedence recorded in the Scriptures - there's a case like mine. God did it there. He will do it here." But God never claimed to provide a written record of *absolutely everything* He has ever done. And I believe He has left the record incomplete, so to speak, so that we will not trust in the past but in the God who is fresh and alive and creative and real, able to meet today's need *today*.

So, trusting in the living God, Elijah literally spread himself across the body of the dead

boy. Ceremonially, that was an unclean act, because a man of God was not to touch the dead. But this impossible situation called for an extreme exception. Therefore, Elijah got on the bed and laid himself on the body of that boy-leg to leg, arm to arm, face to face. "He stretched himself upon the child three times."

I don't know why he employed such an unusual method, nor why he did it three times. Perhaps, in the process of talking to the Lord, he had received an indication that this was what he was supposed to do. And apparently, he did not quit until he received the assurance from God that it was time to stop ... and leave it with Him. This was an unusual prayer technique, but Elijah had no precedent for this. It was not because of his prayer technique, but because of his faith that God answered this prayer. There is an almost irresistible desire to embellish on these wonderful accounts of the power of God but we must be careful not to impute to the passage what it does not intend.

Some of you may be in the process of placing your own life before the Lord in this way. Things are critical, and only a miracle can breathe new life into your situation. Circumstances are totally out of your control. So, you take it to your special place and, standing in the shadow of your God, you lay it out before Him prostrating yourself before Him, pleading His intervention, trusting completely in His miraculous power, leaning not on your own understanding.

Elijah did not say, "See what I did!" No! That's what we might have done, or perhaps that's what some televangelist might do ... but that's not what Elijah did. Elijah simply walked downstairs with the boy by his side and said, "See, your son is alive." Once again, words fail to describe the feelings of the mother, or the experience between mother and child at that moment.

If you wish to be a man or woman of God, it is essential that you face the impossible situations of life with faith, as Elijah did. If you are a young person who desires to live a godly life that will leave its mark upon this world, you must stand in the shadow of your God. The God of Elijah is your God, and He is still the God of impossible situations. He still does what no earthly individual can do. Elijah approached the impossible with calmness and contentment, with gentleness and self-control, with faith and humility. As I've mentioned from the beginning, Elijah was heroic in exploits of faith, but he was always a model of humility.

All over this world, around us every day, are people who are looking for the truth to be lived out in the lives of those who claim it. Just as the widow watched Elijah, there are people watching you. They hear what you say you believe, but mainly they are watching to see what you do.

Remember, you are here by God's appointment, you are in His keeping, you are under His training, for His time. Give Him the corpse of your life, and ask Him to revive those lifeless areas that need to be revived. If the situation calls for it, trust Him for a miracle, in His time, if it be His will, for your life.