

Old Testament Lesson—1 Kings 17:8-24

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so 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." But she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son." For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth." She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, 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; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. She then said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!" But he said to her, "Give me your son." He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed. He cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again." The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." So 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."

New Testament Lesson—Luke 4:16-30

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum." And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Question for y'all this morning...

Did you know that when Jesus raised the dead—arguably Jesus's best remembered, most impressive miracle, right?—that it was really wasn't anything new to the Jewish people?

Super amazing? Yes! Incredibly rare? Absolutely. But unique? Nope. His raising the dead didn't break through any miraculous glass ceilings or anything.

No, there was a precedent for it—a storied history of resurrection in Israel's memory. Jesus was certainly not the first Jewish prophet to bring someone back to life.

Now, I'm not trying to take anything away from Jesus. I just want to put what he did in context—to show how it fits within the larger picture of God's people.

Raising the dead was something Elijah the prophet had done way back in the day—long before the time of Jesus. In fact, it's one of the reasons why some believe Jesus to be the second coming of Elijah—Elijah born again if you will.

Other than Moses, maybe, there was never a prophet of Israel that did flashier miracles on the regular than Elijah. We'll get to what's probably his flashiest miracle next Sunday.

Y'all: He was a big deal in Jesus's day—Elijah's legacy and legend very much alive in the first century Jewish world. The memory of Elijah and his prophecy was larger than life—which is saying something considering he doesn't have a scroll named after him. There's no book of Elijah, right?

And yet, later prophets would come to believe that Elijah's return—or someone like him—would be a sign—a signal from God that the Messiah was near! Elijah back on the scene meant the Savior of the world would soon arrive.

I can't overstate how important he was in Jesus's day. After all, it wasn't Isaiah or Jeremiah or Micah that popped up alongside Jesus during the Transfiguration, right? Oh yeah, that was Elijah.

Y'all, were talking about one of the greatest prophets to ever live! We're talking about just one of only two people in the whole Bible that do not die! Elijah never dies. Instead, he's scooped up by a fiery chariot and taken into heaven on a whirlwind!

Yeah! Beat that, Ezekiel!

We're talking about Elijah—the one who heard God in a “still, small voice”—the one who took on an apprentice that loved him so much he refused to leave his side.

Sidebar: Why did Elijah have to pick an apprentice whose name sounds just like his? Elisha? Really? I'm convinced just to mess with us; but, that's a conversation for another day...

Today, as we continue our sermon series on the miracles in Scripture, we're also talking about a prophet who raised the dead—who gave us a glimpse of Easter before Easter.

It's an extraordinary story here in 1 Kings. We know a terrible famine had struck the whole land. Food was scarce. Uncertainty loomed large everywhere.

What's a true blue prophet of Israel to do? Maybe go minister to some Israelites in need? Maybe tend to some fellow Jews that are struggling? You would think so, right? I mean, that would make sense. But, no, that's not what God calls Elijah to do.

In fact, he does something pretty darn unexpected. Except, what he does feels remarkably similar to what Jesus does much later...time and time again.

Instead of going to his own people—God's “chosen” people—Elijah goes to “those” people! He goes to the Gentiles—to non-Jews! He goes to where the Canaanite god Baal is worshipped! During a time like this, Elijah? Seriously?

What about all the people that need help in your own country? What about our widows? What about our sick children? Huh?

Why should those people get the hope of resurrection? They're not even Jewish! Why should they get to have such a powerful representative of God's blessing and presence?

Clearly, God's "chosen" people—even the *frozen* chosen—aren't the only ones God cares about! Can you believe it? Clearly, even in the worst of times, the mercies of God can be found all over the place—(especially, perhaps, in the worst of times).

And clearly this was an important story for Jesus. Luke tells us how Christ brings up the prophet Elijah's ministry to Gentiles when Jesus kicks off his own ministry from his hometown Nazareth synagogue.

Christ is there to do what prophets do. He's there to bring good news to the poor, to release the captives, to restore sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

However, Jesus knows that many there—people he grew up with and knows personally—these folks aren't interested in God's justice. They're not interested in the things that prophets like Elijah are worried about.

Jesus, in only the way he can, perceives what these folks are really here for. He peers into their hearts. They want the flashy stuff. They want him to do some more miracles like they've heard about. They want Christ to perform spectacles like Elijah did.

Unfortunately for them, Jesus knows the two go hand in hand. A prophet performs wonders in the service of God's justice. Reality check: You can't have one without the other. After all, the justice of God is a miraculous thing in and of itself.

You want to see the supernatural? You want something spectacular that you'll never forget? Do you *really*? Then let's talk about what the Lord requires: doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.

Let's talk about the equitable distribution of resources. Let's talk about dismantling empire. Let's talk about protecting the most vulnerable of society. Because: In making those a reality, you will see miracles!

Listen up Nazarenes: If you refuse to be a light to the nations, as God's called you to be, then (just like Elijah), I will bring new life and new hope elsewhere. I will shine God's light in other places to other peoples. I will teach you an important lesson...

To you, they may be "other"—foreigners—Gentiles. But all people belong to God. And there are no "others" in God's Kingdom—only neighbors—only family.

You see: Elijah's example really throws a wrench into the idea of a "chosen" people in the best possible way. His ministry and prophecy show that God's love and justice have no borders. Not even the worship of other gods like Baal can separate you from the love of God.

In fact, nothing in all Creation can do that. Not ever.

So, I ask you in all seriousness, siblings in Christ: Is there a flashier miracle than that? Amen.