

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"When a Child Is Taken – Part I."*

Please open your Bibles to **1 Kin 17**.

After the events of this past week, I didn't feel like I could preach the sermon that I had prepared on wisdom.

I wanted to bring scripture to bear on the situation, which means looking at the accounts of people losing children. It occurs in scripture more often than you might expect, and I believe it's because it occurs in our lives more often than we might expect. We live in a fallen world, and this is one of the worst realities of it.

Many of us have experienced miscarriages and I hope these sermons will encourage you too...but with that said, while miscarriages are difficult and I don't want to seem insensitive to people who have experienced them - especially late in pregnancy - I don't think they compare with the loss of a child that has been born.

One other reason this sermon is important is even if you're fortunate enough to never lose a child, as a member of the body of Christ, you need to know how to minister to people who have.

We know how much the Raleys have been through, so I did ask them if they thought these sermons would be too personal for them, but they said they thought they'd be good for them and the congregation.

This sermon is going to be different in that instead of being expositional, it's going to be more devotional. I didn't think that this was the best time to have a deeply theological or academic sermon with you feeling like I'm preaching at you. Instead I hope you feel like I'm talking with you.

This is the first sermon I've ever preached that I didn't look at any commentaries. I wanted to do my best to share what God gave me to share, versus something I gained from someone else.

Let's begin with **1 Kings 17**...

1 Kings 17:17 After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. **18** And she 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!"

This woman just lost her son, and we can learn from how she felt...and this brings us to lesson one...

LESSON 1: IT'S OKAY TO BE UPSET.

I've told you before that the bible contains imperatives – or commands – and indicatives – or statements. The imperatives are prescriptive and the indicatives are descriptive.

The descriptive accounts often tell us how people are feeling so we can identify w/ them. They will be upset, angry, depressed, sad, emotional. You see this especially in the Psalms.

This is one such account.

The verses don't indicate why the child died, and in most of the other accounts we'll look at we also don't learn why the child died. So that's not the point.

The point is that we get to see how this woman felt. She was upset and God is showing us that through these verses so any parents in her situation can identify with her.

If there's one time in all of life that people are going to be upset, angry, depressed, and emotional, it's going to be when they lose a child.

We shouldn't give ourselves over to these emotions and sin...but these feelings are normal...and it seems God wants us to know that through accounts like this.

LESSON 2: GOD ISN'T PUNISHING YOU.

She mentions her sin and seems to think that's the cause. But God wasn't upset with her. She hadn't done anything wrong.

Losing a child is one of the worst things people can experience, and one of the only things that can make it worse is when parents think God is punishing them.

God wasn't punishing this woman, and parents who have lost children need to resist the temptation to think God is punishing them.

A close secondary temptation is for parents to punish themselves.

This mother wondered if it was her fault, but:

- She shouldn't be blaming herself.
- She had nothing to do with her child's death.

She needed to do her best to convince herself of that truth.

The most common way people punish themselves is by playing through all the, "What-ifs..."

If a child was hit by a car the parents could be tempted to play through so many different scenarios:

- *What if we had done this...*
- *What if we hadn't let him do this...*
- *What if we had been there...*

This is a form of punishing ourselves, and again parents need to do their best to avoid this.

Look at verse 19...

1 Kings 17:19 And he said to her, “Give me your son.” And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed.

One of the difficulties at times with scripture is figuring out tone. We must guess the way people said things.

I think Elijah said this very gently to the woman. He lived with her and her son for three years. He provided for them during the drought and the accompanying famine. They must have become close.

When he said, “Give me your son,” I’m sure he said it tenderly. Then he took the boy in his arms and carried him up.

And this brings us to lesson three...

LESSON 3: JESUS TAKES BELIEVING CHILDREN IN HIS ARMS.

If we want to know what Jesus is like in heaven we can look at Him on earth. I don’t see any reason to think He’d be different in heaven than He was on earth, especially since **Heb 13:8** says **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**

When we were at the hospital Wednesday night, on more than one occasion people said, “Brandan is in Jesus’ arms.” People said this to Jim and Kris to encourage them, and Jim and Kris said this to themselves to encourage themselves.

And I don’t think it’s a sentimental thought that we tell ourselves that has no backing in scripture.

When I share about Jesus taking up a child in His arms it’s more than a devotional thought, because the bible describes Him doing this:

- **Mark 9:36** [Jesus] took a child...and **TAKING HIM IN HIS ARMS, he said to them,**
- **Mark 10:16** [Jesus] took [the children] **IN HIS ARMS and blessed them, laying his hands on them.**

If Jesus would take children up in his arms during His earthly life, why would we think he wouldn’t do the same thing in heaven?

So I love the language of this verse. I imagine Jesus saying, “Give me your son,” and **He takes the child in His arms and carries him up into the upper chamber where he lodges.**

If you ever lost a child, you might turn to this verse and read it and be encouraged.

Look at verse 20...

1 Kin 17:20 And he cried to the Lord, “O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?” 21 Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the Lord, “O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again.” 22 And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. 23 And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives.” 24 And 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.”

Obviously this account – and some of the others we’ll look at — break down at one of the most important points. This child was raised from the dead, but in our lives children aren’t raised from the dead. This needs to be addressed.

The New Testament states the Old Testament provides us with examples:

- **Rom 15:4 Whatever things were written [in the Old Testament] were written for our learning.**
- **1 Cor 10:6 These things [in the Old Testament] took place as examples for us...11 All these things happened [in the Old Testament] as examples**

So it’s not a question of, “*Do we learn from the Old Testament?*” or “*Are these examples for us?*”

The question is: “*What do we learn from the Old Testament, and how do these examples apply?*”

The best way to understand this miracle, and the other miracles in scripture is this...

They are physical pictures of what God does for us spiritually.

Let me use Jesus’ ministry as an example:

- When He healed blindness:
 - That’s not supposed to make us think He wants to heal every blind person.
 - But He wants to heal our spiritual blindness so we can spiritually see.
- When Jesus healed deafness:
 - That’s not supposed to make us think He heals every deaf person.
 - But He wants to heal our spiritual deafness so we can understand spiritual truths.
- When Jesus healed the paralytic:
 - That’s not supposed to make us think He heals every paralyzed person.
 - But He wants to heal our spiritual lameness so we can walk w/ God: **Rom 6:4 just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we SHOULD WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE.**
- When Jesus raised people from the dead:
 - That’s not supposed to make us think He’ll raise people the moment they die.
 - But He has victory over sin and death, and He wants to give us eternal life.

There is spiritual application to these physical realities.

And this brings us to Lesson 4...

LESSON 4: JESUS WILL RAISE BELIEVING CHILDREN.

Here's what I would LOVE to be able to say to people who have lost children...

"God is going to raise your child from the dead this moment, just like Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus did w/ children who died."

The problem is, that's not true!

But here's what is true...

If your child is a believer, God is going to raise that child from the dead to eternal life.

I don't know many things that are much more encouraging than this...or many things that are more important for parents to keep in mind if they have lost children.

Turn to **2 Kings 4** for the next account...

2 Kings 4:18 When the child had grown, he went out one day to his father among the reapers. **19** And he said to his father, "Oh, my head, my head!" The father said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother." **20** And when he had lifted him and brought him to his mother, the child sat on her lap till noon, and then he died.

I can't imagine how devastating this must have been.

2 Kings 4:21 And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God and shut the door behind him and went out.

LESSON 5: GO TO THE LORD WITH YOUR LOSS.

I'm giving you this lesson early, because I want you to look for it.

As we read the verses, notice this woman's persistency. She isn't going to let anyone or anything stop her from going to the prophet Elisha.

When I read these verses I couldn't help thinking that we should pursue the Lord w/ the same persistency if we lose a child.

Look at her example...

2 Kin 4:22 Then she called to her husband and said, “Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, that I may quickly go to the man of God and come back again.” **23** And he said, “Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath.” She said, “All is well.”

She wouldn't let her husband turn her away.

2 Kin 4:24 Then she saddled the donkey, and she said to her servant, “Urge the animal on; do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you.” **25** So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her coming, he said to Gehazi his servant, “Look, there is the Shunammite. **26** Run at once to meet her and say to her, ‘Is all well with you? Is all well with your husband? Is all well with the child?’” And she answered, “All is well.” **27a** And when she came to the mountain to the man of God, she caught hold of his feet.

She literally clung to him. She clung to him, like we need to cling to Christ.

2 Kin 4:27b And Gehazi came to push her away. But the man of God said, “Leave her alone, for she is in bitter distress, and the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me.”

She wouldn't be turned away, like we must not be turned away from Christ.

She knew she couldn't get help anywhere else...not even from her husband. Yes, you need your spouse if you lose a child – maybe more than any other time – but there are things even your spouse can't do for you.

Consider these verses...

Psa 34:18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Only the Lord can do this...no spouse, or pastor, or friend can.

Psalm 147:3 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

This is speaking of spiritual wounds.

Only the Lord can heal the brokenhearted and bind up the spiritual and emotional wounds they're experiencing.

I don't know if it sounds discouraging to think that we can't do more for people, but this is actually freeing. It means we don't have to feel responsible for trying to do something only the Lord can do.

But it should cause us to direct them to the Lord when we're with them during their times of grieving, vs. giving them clichés and platitudes.

I've been with parents a few times when they lost children. If I had to use one word to describe how I felt, it's helpless.

No matter how long I pastor, I tend to think this isn't going to get any better.

I feel like the greatest help I can offer is directing people toward Christ.

Wow

I'm either sitting there quietly or I try to do one of two other things:

- I pray with them, which is pointing them to Christ and praying that he will help them.
- I read scripture with them, which is nothing more than helping them find comfort in Him.

And I would say, if you're ever wondering what you can do to help people who have lost a child, aside from simply being with them, praying with them and offering to read scripture to them are the best things you can do.

I would discourage you from trying to share about some loss you experienced.

Look at verse 28...

2 Kin 4:28 Then she said, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me?'"

LESSON 6: YOU CAN BE CONFUSED.

This is another verse that I think many parents who have lost children can probably identify with. You ask God, "*Why did You give me a child if you were just going to take him or her from me?*"

During our miscarriages, this is the question I had: "*Why did Katie even get pregnant in the first place?*"

Again, I don't think this verse is here to tell us why we lose children.

I think it's here so we can identify with this woman and her hurt and confusion...and understand that it's normal to be hurt and confused.

Consider these two verses:

- **Deut 29:29 "The secret things belong to the Lord our God.**
- **1 Cor 13:12 Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.**

These verses make the point that we don't understand everything. We generally quote them regarding theological topics, for example God's sovereignty versus man's free will. We say...

"How can both be true? This secret belongs to the Lord. We can't fully see how they're both true. We only see dimly and in part."

And I think this is a fitting use of these verses.

But another way they apply relates to God's will. Things happen in our lives that we don't understand. They're confusing to us.

And I don't think there are many things more confusing than children's deaths.

So it's okay to be confused and not have any answers.

The events of this past week were terribly tragic and confusing for two churches and hundreds of people.

When Pastor Nathan and I were driving to and from the hospital we were talking about the good God would bring from this. We didn't know what the good would be, and to be candid with you, it seemed – and still seems – hard to find. But because of **Rom 8:28** we know it's there...

Romans 8:28 We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Even this verse communicates that the good is for believers. Everyone loves to quote the first half of the verse and say God works all things together for good but that's not all it says. It says for those who are called according to his purpose, which refers to Christians.

This still leaves the same question: What is the good God is doing from this?

I think it'd be very arrogant of me to say that I know the answer, but I will say this...

Every death is a reminder that this life is temporary and not our home.

It's good to be reminded of this...

LESSON 7: DEATH REMINDS US LIFE IS TEMPORARY.

Every death is tragic, b/c we recognize it's not the way things should be. We live in a fallen world, and this is one of the worst consequences.

But if there's one good thing death does, it's remind us that this life is temporary. It prevents us from getting too comfortable on this side of heaven, and it causes us to do what Pastor Nathan preached about the last two weeks: keep an eternal perspective.

The bad news is Death is the enemy we all face.

Let me show you the good news. Turn to **1 Cor 15:26**...

1 Cor 15:26 The last enemy *that will be destroyed is death.*

Death is an enemy that Christ defeats for us!

Listen to these wonderful verses...

1 Cor 15:54 So when this corruptible (referring to our earthly bodies) has put on incorruption (referring to the glorified bodies we'll receive), and this mortal has put on immortality (referring to the eternal life we receive), then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: **“Death is swallowed up in victory.”**

55 **“O Death, where is your sting?** (Death can no longer hurt us)

O Hades, where is your victory?” (Hades is another way to refer to death, and it has no victory over us)

57 But thanks *be* to God, who **GIVES US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.**

In most Bibles, **Death** is capitalized, b/c God wants to personify it:

- He wants it to seem like a person...
- He wants it to seem like an enemy that Jesus defeated...

To show just how clearly Death is defeated, **Rev 20:14** says **Death [is] cast into the lake of fire.**

You've got death going to hell!

That's how confident God wants you to be regarding Death's defeat and your victory over it!

Let me close with this...

Be comforted that Jesus has risen from the grave and that His death is the death of Death. It is eternal life. We can be thankful today for the God of comfort, who comforts, saves, and heals.

Let's pray.