

Russell Kelfer

And the Lord Heard

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Series: Living Legends - Part 3

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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“And the Lord Heard...”

Try to place yourself in this household. The occupants and the experiences therein are hardly commonplace. There is, first of all, a widow. Not particularly a happy widow, either. Life has been difficult for her, and all the events of recent days have done little to alleviate the hurts of days gone by. How she lost her husband, we do not know. But we do know she has a son, the second member of the household, and we do know that in recent days, the nationwide drought which had shut off the heavenly water supply had taken its toll on them. In fact, it was only a few weeks ago that she determined that it was all over for her and her little boy. There was food enough for only one more meal, and the outlook was bleak.

It was at that point that she decided to go out to the city gate and pick up a few sticks, start a fire, and cook what little was left in the cupboard, divide it between her son and herself, and then the two of them would simply lie down and wait to die of starvation. It seemed almost an appropriate end, perhaps, to her life of weariness and hardship. But a funny thing happened on the way to the cemetery. She was there at the city gate, collecting a few straggling tree branches when this unusual man called out to her (almost as though he knew her), and asked her to fetch him a glass of water. He was a Jew, a different kind of Jew than most she'd met. He spoke with a kind of authority she was not used to. At any rate, the normal hospitality of her day left her no choice but to stop her wood gathering and go get the man a drink of water. This, of course, was not an easy task. Water was scarce, and the well was nearly dry. But, nonetheless, something inside of her compelled her to obey.

But as she was going, lo and behold, her newfound Jewish stranger added insult to injury. He called out and instructed her to add a slice of whole wheat to the menu. That did it. She replied: “Don't you understand, Sir, all I have to my name is a few handfuls of flour and a few drops of oil? When my son and I have eaten what we have, we plan to just roll over and die. I'll get the water, but the sandwich is your problem.”

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This amazing stranger replied to her, “No, go do as you suggest; but first, stop and make the same for me. I promise you one thing. If you do, the Lord God of Israel will see to it that neither the flour nor the oil will run out, until it rains again. This woman and the Lord God of Israel, of course, were not friends. She was a Gentile, and while she had heard many stories about this God called “Jehovah”, to trust nearly half of her final meal to this stranger who made promises from his God seemed hardly the logical thing to do. Nevertheless, for some strange reason, she went and she did what this man commanded.

Sure enough, every morning, when she arose, there was just enough flour in the pantry for that day’s meal, and just enough oil as well. Day after day, the same thing happened. Day after day, she fed the prophet, the boy and herself; and day after day, the supply miraculously was renewed.

She had given the prophet the use of the little upstairs bedroom, while she and her boy lived below. Just who he was, she still wasn’t sure; and just who his God was, she surely wasn’t sure; but one thing was for sure...she was alive, and she hadn’t expected to be. So it was an unusual household, to say the least...a sad widow, her son, and a visiting preacher, living one day at a time in a little town called Zarephath, amidst the worst drought in recent history. What we’ve been wondering is just why this man (Elijah’s his name) has been sent by His God to a place like this, and to an existence like this. It hardly seems an appropriate place for a man of his caliber, and it hardly seems an appropriate forum for his ministry. Nonetheless, there he is, barely existing, eating the final scraps from a widow’s table, day after day after day. What possibly could happen next? And why do you suppose his God sent him there? Let’s tune in again to the Living Legend of Elijah and find out.

Our title and our outline for this lesson are as follows: And the Lord Heard... (I Kings 17).

I- Crisis in the Emergency Room (verse 17)

II- Confession in the Counseling Room (verse 18)

III- Intercession in the Upper Room (verses 19-24)

We stopped reading in I Kings 17:17. We resume at that point:

Now it came about after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his

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sickness was so severe, that there was no breath left in him.
(I Kings 17:17 NASB)

I- CRISIS IN THE EMERGENCY ROOM

If you are wondering just where our prophet got the faith to believe that his God could do something like miraculously feed a widow and her son, you missed the first installment or two of this man’s life. God prepared him for this unusual ministry by moving him to an outdoor apartment complex by a drying brook, and letting him depend on a raven courier service for his daily meals. Twice a day, a bird lit on his shoulder with a burger (or its Jewish equivalent), and then off he flew into the heavens. So Elijah was no stranger to the principle that if you are in the will of God, He will provide your daily bread, often not in the ways you had planned, and often in ways that are downright humiliating; but He will provide.

At any rate, by now Elijah must have settled into the routine of round two of his missionary training service, and was probably beginning to see the widow as part of what God was doing. He was being used as a vessel to feed a woman and her son; he was being fed himself in the midst of a horrible drought; and he was seeing on a day-to-day basis, the wonderful provisions of his God. Oh, well, this being a missionary wasn’t all that bad after all. Then, lo and behold, a crisis in the emergency room.

It is Tuesday afternoon at the widow’s house, and Elijah is upstairs watching “The 700 Club” on TV, when he hears this horrible scream. It is Mrs. Widow, no less, and she comes flying up the stairs crying, “My son is sick; my son is sick.” This wasn’t in Elijah’s playbook any more than a drying brook or an empty jug of oil. And the boy didn’t just have a bad cold, either. There was a flu bug going around Zarephath those days, but whatever bug had bitten widow boy was for real, because the Scripture says, “His sickness was so severe, that there was no breath left in him.” Now, in case you’re not a doctor or not into heavy medical terminology, what that means is the kid had stopped breathing. In other words, he was legally dead.

Apparently God wasn’t finished trying to reveal Himself to this widow woman, and He wasn’t finished using Elijah. And if you carefully search the Scriptures, you will see that there are at least four things God can touch to literally get our attention immediately. They are: our health, our mates, our children, or

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our material possessions. Now think about it; and you will no doubt agree that almost every time in Scripture God wanted to reveal Himself to someone, He would touch one of those things in that person's life to get their attention. Look at Job. What did God allow Satan to touch? His children, his possessions, his health. In Job's case, Satan left his wife alone, because she turned out to be an extra thorn in the man's side, rather than a source of comfort. But those are the four things Satan usually goes for, and those are the four things God usually allows him to go for, so He can tenderize our hearts to spiritual things.

Now Mrs. Widow had already lost her mate, and her food supply was down for the count of nine and a half, so it only stood to reason that if God was going to make one more stab at getting her to see who He was, He would have to let Satan touch her son. Beloved, whenever there is a trauma in your life that affects your health, your children, your mates, or your possessions, pay close attention. The Lord God of Eternity, Creator of Heaven and Earth, Sustainer and Deliverer, Master and King...is trying to get your attention. The problem is, we often don't respond properly. This woman didn't.

So she said to Elijah, “What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance and to put my son to death!”

(I Kings 17:18 NASB)

II- CONFESSION IN THE COUNSELING ROOM

Look out! Here comes another Scriptural principle, flying off the pages of I Kings, chapter seventeen. It's the principle of unreconciled guilt. All you have to do is hang around a few hospital rooms or counseling rooms to realize that whenever crisis strikes or death looms as a possibility on the horizon, people begin spilling their sins, and confessing them, as though whatever it was that was happening *might be the result of something in their past*; and just maybe, like that thief on the cross, a last-minute confession will do the trick. What they forget is that the thief on the cross still died. He didn't avoid the consequences, but he found God.

Just watch human nature. Watch the average man on the street. Let something happen to their children or to their own health or bank account, and suddenly people do one of three things: they get “religion”, they get bitter, or there is genuine

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repentance. The first two responses are deadly. One is non-productive; the other counterproductive. Those who get religion cover their sins with “spiritual” activity to try to appease God. This accomplishes nothing. Those who get bitter justify their sins by expressing anger that God could allow such things to happen. This not only dodges the real issue, it creates a new base of resentment and makes it virtually impossible for God to get their attention.

This woman apparently had several problems.

1) She had a short memory. Had it not been for Elijah and his God, neither she nor her son would be alive at this point. Short memories and ungrateful spirits often rob us of seeing what God is really after.

2) She had unconfessed sin. We don’t know, and don’t need to know what her problem was; but we do know that the minute calamity struck, up came this sin to her remembrance.

3) She couldn’t handle being around a believer at a time like this. His holiness was more than her sin could bear, and his God was more than she could cope with. So she did what most unbelievers do at a time like this...she blamed God. (She blamed Elijah, God’s spokesman, since she didn’t know God.) She accused him of coming to Zarephath just to make her uncomfortable, and she accused him of killing her son to atone for her sins.

She really missed the point of it all. This man’s God was one day going to *take His own Son to atone for her sins*. He had not sent Elijah to condemn her, but to save her. What a familiar theme! Now, I don’t know about you, but at this point, I think I would have broken into a theological discussion with this woman about grace and mercy and rebuked her along the way for her ungrateful spirit. Elijah, of course, was more attuned to the will of God than that. He saw the son’s sickness and the woman’s bitterness as an open door for God to show Himself strong on their behalf. So he responded like this:

And he said to her, “Give me your son.” Then he took him from her bosom and carried him up to the upper room where he was living, and laid him on his own bed.

He called to the Lord and said, “O, Lord my God, have You also brought calamity to the widow with whom I am staying by causing her son to die?”

Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and

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called to the Lord, and said, “O Lord My God, I pray You, let this child’s life return to him.”

The Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived.

Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house and gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, “See, your son is alive.”

Then 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.”
(I Kings 17:19-24 NASB)

III- INTERCESSION IN THE UPPER ROOM

Elijah, for the moment, at least, dispensed with the theology and went to the boy. He said, “Give me your son!” If God is going to do a work in those we love, we have to first relinquish them and consider them as good as dead, except for a miracle at the hand of the King. Until we give them up, there’s little God can do. To her, all hope was gone. Now God was ready to act. The prophet gathered the boy in his arms, took him to that upper room where he lived, laid him on his own bed, and began to pray.

It’s pretty tough to analyze Elijah’s prayer. But it would appear that at this point, at least, he was a bit frustrated with God himself. It sounds a bit like he was saying, “Lord, this is the last straw! Surely, you’re not going to take this poor woman’s boy from her. You’re not going to cause this woman’s boy to die, are you, Lord?”

But though there was an ounce of frustration, there was a pound of faith. The very fact that he was praying over this boy indicated that he thought he had a God who could raise the dead. The kid had stopped breathing. He never even assumed the child was still alive. He prayed: “O Lord, my God, I pray Thee, let this child’s life return to him.”

The next words ought to flood our hearts with comfort. They read like this:

The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived.
(I Kings 17:22 NASB)

You say, but if it wasn’t God’s will for this boy to die, then why did He let the child get sick? For at least two reasons:

He let the child get sick so He could demonstrate to Elijah, among other things, that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous

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man availeth much. Elijah wasn't through praying for miracles. This one was just the beginning.

And it would appear that, at this crucial time in history, at this, what appears to be the moment of Truth for the Church in our day, we who have the ear of God are seemingly unmindful of the magnificent power that God has made available to us through prayer. When God, in His Wisdom was searching for an example of how and why and when to pray, He reached back through the annals of time, and he came back to this man Elijah for His example. In James, chapter five we read this:

...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. (James 5:16-18)

Elijah was a man with the same kinds of problems we have; but he knew how to pray. And so God entrusted him with the responsibility of praying for something that affected the whole world. God honored his prayer, not because he was perfect, but because he prayed effectually, fervently, consistently, in the will of God. An interesting sidelight is the fact that so often those who know how to pray end up on the front lines, as part of the answer to their own prayers. We'll see that develop in the next few studies, as God takes His praying prophet and puts feet to his prayers.

The kind of praying Elijah did seems pretty much absent from the church in our generation. It is the kind of praying that moved the heart of God and undergirded the great revivals in history, the kind of praying that has uprooted kingdoms, torn asunder the reigns of the wicked, and lifted the banner of holiness and righteousness to the heavens. It is the kind of praying that caused sinners who had been given up as hopeless to fall to their knees in abandonment to a Holy God.

God needed a man like that in Elijah's day. He needed a man who knew how to pray down rain, pray down fire, and pray down life into the body of a breathless little boy. And God searched planet earth till He found that kind of man; and He used him to change his world.

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God needs men and women like that today, as well. Even this moment, He is searching our hearts to see if any of us are willing to spend the time, to pay the price, to assume His heart the way Elijah did. The first thing God was doing at the restoration of the widow's son was reminding us and reminding Elijah that prayer still works. God wanted to demonstrate the power of prayer to Elijah, because Elijah was about to be used to demonstrate the power of prayer to a whole nation.

But there was a second reason God let that child get sick. There was a widow down in Zarephath that God really cared about. That woman just happened to be this boy's mother. And even though she was a Gentile, God sent His prophet all the way down there to feed her, and care for her, and to show Himself strong on her behalf. But still she did not believe. So God, in His infinite wisdom, started to take from her the one thing she had left, so He could give it back to her in such a way that she would see Him for who He is. And sure enough, she did.

Because when Elijah handed the woman her child, and said, “See your son is alive,” we read that then 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.”

At last, she believed. When God did a work in her boy's life, she believed. For weeks she had been miraculously kept alive one day at a time by a self-restoring grocery store, and still she did not believe. And when calamity struck, she didn't pray to Elijah's God, the One who had supernaturally kept them alive; she railed at Elijah for confronting her with her sins. She still did not know Elijah's God.

But now she believed. She believed Elijah was who he said he was, which meant his God was who he said He was, and that the Word of his God was what Elijah said it was... perfect. I'd have to say that God was mighty patient with this woman. He sent His number one man miles out of his way to witness to her, fed her supernaturally for weeks, then when she blamed Him for her calamity, He patiently waited for His man to pray, then graciously heard that prayer, and saved the lad. Why? So she would believe.

God's middle name is patience. There are some listening to and reading this story right now who have resisted the love of God for years. Again and again, God has come to you, cared for you, called to you, and waited for you to respond. But you refused.

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On occasion, God even allowed the enemy to take from you those very things you cared for most, to get your attention, so He could give you something far more important—life eternal. Yet still, you ignored His advances, and even railed at Him for confronting you with your sins, or taking from you what was yours.

By rights, God should have written you off years ago. But this very moment, He is once again calling to you in love. He has taken you way out of your way, or taken someone way out of their way, or taken a tape, or a story, or something, and He has sent it airmail, special delivery, right to your heart. You can keep on resisting or you can relent, once and for all, and let God have His way in your life. You say, why did God go to such extremes to win this woman? Why has He gone to such extremes to win you?

It is because He still has plans for your life, even as He did for her. He still wants to take you and break you and make you into a new person. He still wants to draw you into His arms and guarantee you eternal, unending, blissful life in Heaven. He still wants you to be flooded with the reality of forgiveness, and let the river of God’s grace flow through your soul and wash away that bitterness, and anger, and grief, once and for all.

You aren’t fooling God. When that woman met Elijah and was planning to just roll over and die, God heard her. And He fed her. When she screamed at God and blamed God for confronting her with reality, God heard her. But His goal was not retaliation, but restoration. So though He heard her railings, He didn’t stop pursuing her heart. God is well aware of all your sins, of all your bitterness, of all your frustration. You’ve screamed at Him time and again, and He heard you. But it hasn’t affected His love for you. It can’t. The Love of God is unchangeable. It is eternal. It is perfect.

Now He is waiting for you to bow your head and ask Him to take over your life. He is waiting for you to open your heart and ask Him in. And when you do, He’ll hear you. No matter what you’ve done, He’ll hear you. And He will come to you, and forgive you, and redeem you, and accept you just as you are into His Family.

The scenario in I Kings 17 was this: The child died. The woman cried. Elijah prayed. The Lord heard. The child lived. The woman believed. That same pattern exists for you right now. You are, if you have never trusted Christ, dead in trespasses and sins. There

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is no hope for you. You are bound for an endless eternity in hell, separated by choice from the love of a Holy God. But there are those who have been, and are, praying for you even this moment. It is not the will of God that you perish, but that you have eternal life. So Jesus has come to breathe new life into you and to break the shackles of death and set you free. All you have to do is what the widow did. You have to believe. You have to cry out to God, seeing that He has raised His Son from the dead, and pray with the widow, “Now I know...now I believe!”

Jesus Christ will enter your sin-scarred heart and make it whole. Life will reign where death once held you captive. Love will reign where bitterness once cast its grip upon your heart. Peace will reign where fear and frustration once controlled your life.

You will be able to say, with Elijah, “I prayed, and the Lord heard.”

The Lord heard, indeed.

Won't you ask Jesus into your heart right now?

Like that widow in Zarephath you will shout it to the rooftops...

“Now I know!”

...And you will.

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Assignment for Applying this Lesson

1- Examine the woman’s response to her son’s illness. What two things did she charge Elijah with? Can you think of others in Scripture who responded in a like manner to personal tragedy? Who? How has your response in the past to disappointments mirrored the widow’s response?

2- Why do you think the widow failed to be grateful that Elijah’s God had kept her alive thus far? Can you find Scripture to back up your assumption?

3- What is it that causes unbelievers to immediately think of their sins when tragedy strikes? Why should a Christian react differently?

4- What basic philosophy of man reveals itself in the widow’s assumption that her boy’s death was a result of her sin?

5- Read and re-read Elijah’s prayer in verses 20-21. Try to find key words that indicate his heart concerning what has happened. Do you think he was angry? Confused? Afraid? Confident?

6- What were the elements of Elijah’s prayer life that seem so absent in today’s churches? Define “effectual”. Define “Fervent”. Define “righteous”.

7- Describe in your own words how to achieve faith (the ability to believe what you cannot see), while avoiding presumption (assuming the mind of God to achieve our own desires). Was Elijah’s prayer in I Kings 17 balanced? If so, in what way?

8- Look again at how you pray in the light of Elijah’

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