

GOD'S WORD IS POWER OVER DEATH

It has declared us free of punishment -- It has promised us eternal life.

1 Kings 17:17-24

TEXT: *Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" "Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!" The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, 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 from your mouth is the truth."*

In Jesus' name, fellow redeemed:

Except for a baby girl that did not live out her first year, Kate Luther succeeded in nursing her other six children through all those sixteenth century childhood killer-diseases which our medically-blessed generation rarely thinks about. But when their daughter Magdalena barely reached the age of 14, a summer virus sent her to her sick bed. Though she had been a strong girl, the infection raged for nearly two months and caused her great pain. Kate was exhausted from weeping, and Martin Luther, the great Reformer, was wearing out under the emotional roller-coaster of hope and prayer as he finally could see for himself that the Lord he had served was about to call her home.

Many who have read the account of Magdalena's death know the poignant interchange between Luther and his daughter just before she died: **"Little daughter, you'd like to stay here with me, with your father, but you are also willing to go to that other father, are you not?" "Yes, whatever God wants."** Kate collapsed, and Martin burst into sobs and a prayer for the Lord to release her spirit. Finally, when morning came, she breathed her last.

Her child's coffin was brought in, but her body was too swollen to fit it. The carpenters had to force the lid upon her body to nail it down. Luther had to leave the room, shouting, **"Hammer away! On doomsday she will rise again!"**

If a great man of God, like Martin Luther, must confront death in such a painful way, what about the rest of us who are far less concerned about the Kingdom of God than he and his wife ever were? What about us "lesser people" of the Kingdom?

Martin Luther would say to us: don't focus on the man, focus on God's Word. We have the same Word of God as the Great Reformer of the Church. And as it was for Martin Luther, so it is for us: **GOD'S WORD IS POWER OVER DEATH:** It has declared us free of punishment; It has promised us eternal life.

The child whom Elijah raised from the dead is no great personality of like Martin Luther. He and his mother have remained nameless. She is simply called "a widow from the town of Zarephath." She is the one to whom the Lord sent Elijah during a great famine He had sent as a judgment upon Israel and her wicked King Ahab. She was the one who was going to use up her last bit of flour and oil to make one last meal for herself and her son. But Elijah commanded her to make the meal for him with the promise that the Lord would keep the oil jar and the flour bin filled until the famine ended. Now, the Bible says: ***Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"***

We wonder: what could have been this woman's sin? Was it real or imagined? Was there something from her past that she had tried to put behind her but now came before her as her just reward? Or, was it that she had lived a relatively good life and was truly confused as to why the Lord would treat her like this? This is enough to make any one of us here today wonder when the Lord is going to strike us! For surely we all have sinned! Or, if we have lived a relatively good life, we see that the Lord brings such disasters even upon the

good people, like this widow, or Martin and Katie Luther! What about us? When will we be next? Should we “cross our fingers” or “knock on wood”? When is God going to deal with me?

Such are the terrors of the conscience and the Old Adam. It looks at God as a cruel and heartless being who strikes without compassion. Since the Old Adam is part of us from our conception to the moment of death, we cannot escape such terrible thoughts and fears: “I’m being punished!” or, “What have I done to deserve this?” Grief allowed the woman’s Old Adam to talk this way: *What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?*

In contrast stands Psalm 103: *The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love... he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.* Will you believe these words when faced with disaster or grief? Will you replace the superstitious heart, the “knocking on wood” with God’s declaration of freedom from all punishment? Will you counter the boisterous complaints and cries of the sinful nature with the assurance that God, in Christ, has removed your sins from you *as high as the heavens are above the earth*, and, *as far as the east is from the west*? This is the Word upon which we stand. Declared free from punishment, we know that when death comes into our lives, we do not die. It is the fulfillment of another great Word of our Lord who declares: *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.* Jn 11 Whom shall we believe?

The Word of God that has power over death also has promised you eternal life!

The Bible says: *“Give me your son,” Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the LORD, “O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?” Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, let this boy’s life return to him!” The LORD heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived...* Why did the Lord answer Elijah’s prayer and restore this boy’s life? The Bible says: *Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth.”* She needed this. We don’t. We know God’s Word is true.

But then again, we do still need it. Sometimes we pray and pray and pray, like Martin and Katie Luther prayed for the life of their daughter, but the Lord does not heal. Instead, He takes the life. Or, consider Job. Job was a believer and a model Christian, yet the Lord allowed Satan to destroy all of Job’s children in one day. Yet, by the power of God’s Holy Spirit Job declared: *Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.*

We need God’s Word for this power, and that is OUR miracle! The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians (15:54) *When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Where is the power and sting of death? It’s there! Ask the Luther’s as they stuffed their little daughter’s body in that too-small casket! Ask Job! Ask the sobbing widow of Zarephath. Ask anyone in this congregation who has already lost a loved one! Yet ask them where their loved one who dies in Christ is, they will say: *...thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Each of us will confront death quite often before we experience our own. Always know that no matter how much it stings and hurts the heart, Christ has removed our sins so that death is never a punishment, but our doorway to eternal life.

Can you even imagine the pain and grief of those who must confront death without these promises assured us in God’s Word? I can’t imagine. You and I do not have to imagine what God has made certain to us through the resurrection of Jesus! Amen.