

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
June 9, 2013**

**1 Kings 17:17-24**

**Death Comes with Questions**

- 1. *Death is Difficult***
- 2. *Witness the Widow at Zarephath***
- 3. *God's Purpose in Death***

**Hymns: 186 – 185 – 210 -- 606**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

I hadn't been to too many funerals in my life, but I had never heard anything close to what I was hearing this day. A classmate from high school had lost her brother, still in his 20's, to a sudden and massive heart attack. Certainly grief and sadness were to be expected, but I wasn't prepared for what I saw and heard there that day. As soon as I stepped into the church, there was the sound of loud wailing, like nothing I had ever heard before. It was unexpected and it made me wonder. This was a Christian funeral with a Christian family, and that wailing was coming from Christian people. My mind immediately went to Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 4 where he commends Christians not to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. What I heard that day was grieving and wailing like there was no hope. And it was difficult to hear.

It was a wailing reminder that death can be very difficult, even for the Christian. It can be difficult even though we know why death comes. It can be difficult even though we know that Jesus has conquered death. Through his work, the uncertainty has been taken away. And yet, there remains this feeling like death still takes from us. Quite obviously, it takes from us physically. Someone who was here and with us is suddenly gone. So, that means there is an emptiness in lives where there once was not; at the dinner table, in the car, at the movie, in the pew. It might take away the person who cooked and put food on our tables. It might take away the person who took care of all the bills and ran all the errands. But way beyond that physical loss, death often takes from us in other painful ways. Death might take from you your source of joy, or your source of laughter,

or your source of pride. It might take from you the person who seemingly kept your life together, or the person whom you counted on when you needed someone the most. It might take from you your beloved spouse, or your precious children, or your dearest friend.

And it doesn't matter whether we see death coming for many years, or we experience it suddenly and unexpectedly. It doesn't matter if you are a child of God, or as Jesus weeping at Lazarus' death showed us, the Son of God. When death comes and takes from us, it also tears at our emotions. It can fill us with sadness and grief. It might lead to anger and frustration. It might fill us with helplessness and despair. And in the midst of those emotions, Satan has a powerful tool in his hands. When death grips our lives and takes from us, Satan also uses death to tempt us. When we are met with the reality of our mortality, our trust and faith in the words and promises of God face their stiffest challenge. 1) Satan uses that cold, lifeless body to question God's promise of life. 2) He uses those hard days of adjustment to question God's abiding love and steadfast care. 3) He uses all of the hurt and sadness and anger to question God's purpose and power. Death always comes with questions, "Why did this happen?" "Why now?" "What will I do?" "How will I go on?" "How could God let it happen?" "Does God really love me?" Does God really have power?" All who have experienced death know those questions. All who have experienced death know its difficulties. Like nothing else in this world can do, death can even make us question our faith.

It was no different for the woman that we see before us in our Bible story for this morning, a woman we know only as the widow at Zarephath. From this one chapter of the Bible, we learn a great deal about her. Today, what we hear about this servant of God is that death came and took from her.

And we know from her title that this was not the first time that death had done so. As a widow, she had already once experienced the difficulties of death when she lost her husband, and the father of her child. And now, once again, death came into her life, this time taking her son from her suddenly. Imagine the pain that must've come stinging back into this woman's life as another man in her life was taken. And not surprisingly, along with death came the questions, "**What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?**"

As he often does, Satan used death to tempt this woman. First, she blamed Elijah for the hurt and loss that had come crashing into her life. It is easy to feel the betrayal in her words as she cried out to this man for whom she had done so much. But, really, what she was doing with her harsh words was blaming God. “Man of God,” she stressed with spite filling her words. She knew that Elijah was from God, and the he rarely spoke and acted without God’s direction. Though she blamed Elijah with her words, she was blaming God with her heart. She was questioning his love, questioning his care, questioning his plans.

But Satan also used death to tempt this woman in another way. While she blamed God, she also blamed herself. In the face of death, this woman was reminded why death comes – it is the wages of sin. And though she was a believer, though she knew God’s forgiveness, as death broke into her life once again, she couldn’t help but wonder if God was punishing her directly for the sins that she had committed in life. Death made her question whether God was really forgiving. Ultimately, death did this woman what it does to so many. Like nothing else in this world can do, death made this woman question her faith.

Yet even as this woman questioned God, and became angry with God; God would continue to show his love to her. In a remarkable way, God would tell her that he was not taking from her; he was not punishing her with death. Instead, He would show her how he works even in death. He would show her he has power over death. He would show that he gives, even in death. Listen to what God did to answer death.

**“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. <sup>20</sup> 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?” <sup>21</sup> 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!” <sup>22</sup> The LORD heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived. <sup>23</sup> 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!”**

Look at all of the ways that God gave in this scene. He gave to Elijah an opportunity to be bold and confident in prayer. He gave him a reminder that God always has a plan. He gave to the widow powerful proof of his control, even over death. He

gave her a way to show her faith, a test that she at first failed, but which strengthened her in the end. To all involved, God gave one of the most powerful displays of his love - a display that few in the Old Testament would see – God controls death.

And what a reminder this story is to us, people who have and will certainly continue to deal with death and all of the questions that it brings with it. When Satan uses death to cause us to doubt; when Satan uses death to have us question God, remember that God never takes from us in death. Instead, he always gives. He gives displays of his love and grace. He gives as the almighty and all-knowing heavenly Father.

To those who die in the faith, God gives the eternal glories of heaven. He gives relief from the pains and discomforts of this life. He gives rescue from the attacks of Satan and sin. Those gifts from God are our comfort as we face death ourselves, they take away the fear and uncertainty.

But what we are focusing on today is not on those who die, but those who are left behind. And God also gives to those who remain; he gives to those who are left often asking the questions. As we are met by the deaths of loved ones, God gives. God gives us a way to show our faith in him, like he gave to Elijah. God gives a way to be strengthened in our faith in him, like he gave to the widow of Zarephath. God gives also a way to share our faith in him.

When problems arise in this life, we can often find the answers on our own. But when death comes, there is no human solution. Despite all searching, man has not found a way to defeat death and it never will. We can’t find answers in this world to any of the questions that death brings. If we want an answer to death, we can only look to God and to the promises and assurances that he gives to us in his Holy Word. And so in death, God gives us a way to show our faith in him. When we face death, we can look to God for the assurance that all punishment and fear have been taken away through the forgiveness that God has given through his Son. We can look to him and trust his plans and purposes, even when so many doubt. We can look to God and find comfort, even when so many grieve

And an amazing thing happens when we look to God: the more that we look to him, the more we will see his power at work. And the more that we see his power at work, the stronger our faith becomes. And that means that in death, God is actually giving us a way to grow stronger in our faith.

And when we grow stronger in our faith, we will be more ready to share our hope with those who do not have it. Death brings questions for Christians, but it brings even more for those who do not know God and his love. As God gives us ways to be strengthened in our faith through death, he also often gives us opportunities to share. He gives us a message of sure hope to give to others who have been shaken by death.

In so many ways, even in death, God gives us his love. And when we know God's love, the questions that death brings are very different. For the Christian, death asks us to be trusting. Death asks us to show our faith in God and his promises. Death asks us to share what we know with others.

When death brings questions into your lives, may faith lead you to look to God, who gives all the answers, because of his love for you. Amen.