

The Widow's Message

1 Kings 17:17-24

Introduction

- T.V. station that airs old shows
 - I don't know what you consider an old show. I've heard several of you reference Andy Griffith. I'm familiar with that show.
 - BUT, this particular stations airs shows I remember from when I was a kid
 - Flintstones
 - Family Matters
 - All of these shows have similar things in common
 - They take you back to a time; where in our minds everything seemed right in the world
 - The biggest obstacles in life could be resolved in 30 minutes
 - In reality, this shows no matter what time they existed they were never a true picture of reality
 - There are very few problems in life that can be resolved in 30 minutes
 - I can't think of very many problems in life that once they were resolved, we all hugged and laughed
 - Maybe if anything was true about these shows is that you could always count on the next episode to address another relational obstacle.
 - Isn't it true that no matter how long it takes to address one problem in our life, there is always another episode that will arise the following week!
- Sermon Series: "God's Messenger: How Elijah Communicated During Uncertain Times"
 - Pastor, your message doesn't seem all that encouraging today!
 - You are just the bear of bad news!
 - It's quite possible that Elijah felt this way
 - Confronted King Ahab with a drought
 - Drought not only impacted King Ahab, but Elijah as well
 - In fact, it put Elijah in the direct path of a widow, who was trying to survive the drought with her son and Elijah added to the widow's burden by asking her to provide for him as well.
 - What we hope to accomplish through this series is a clearer understanding of how we can become God's messengers of hope during a time when our normal routines and way of life have been disrupted.
 - Something that we learned last week from Elijah's story is that hardships or obstacles in life are inevitable, but God's blessings are optional
 - God not only desires to speak to us, but through us- so while God wants to bless us through the obstacles we face in life, God also wants to use us to bless others.

- Elijah's message was more than just the words he spoke on behalf of God, but it was the way he lived his life that reiterated God's message of hope.
- Background
 - We got a glimpse last week of how Elijah's life spoke beyond just his words
 - Flee from King Ahab into the wilderness and depend that God would provide through a brook for water and ravens for food
 - Once the brook dried up, Elijah had to depend upon on a widow to provide
 - When it appeared that the widow had insufficient means to provide for not only Elijah, but her own family- God made something from nothing
 - All of God's blessings happened, "according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah (1 Kings 17:16b, ESV)."
 - For this moment, there was a sigh of relief.
 - Everything worked out
 - This episode was complete
 - The scene can be cut
 - On to the next episode

No Breath Left

- 1 Kings 17:17-19
 - Have you ever had the breath knocked out of you?
 - Immediate panic
 - We often breath without thinking about it
 - When something so routine and natural is taken from us panic sets in
 - The sigh of relief experienced at the end of the previous episode has now become a scene of panic
 - What is God doing? Why has God allowed this to happen?
 - We won't find the answer to those questions until the end of the chapter
 - If we were to pause and go to a commercial break right now, we could sense this description- "there was no breath left in him (1 Kings 17:17b, ESV)."
 - Discussion with pastors who are struggling through this pandemic
 - The normal routine of ministry is disrupted
 - The purpose of their ministry has been put on hold, but the needs of their church and community continues to grow.
 - Trying to adapt to things they have never been trained, equipped, or prepared for.
 - Need air, but the breath seems like it has left them
 - I don't know about you, but last Sunday felt like we could get a little air, some reprieve from the chaos.
 - Reminded of the faithfulness of God
 - What have you against me?
 - What have I done?

- Why would God allow this, especially after I was faithful?
- Questions that feel as though the widow is gasping for air, but there is no breath- her son has died.
- Elijah, God's messenger, has no words for the widow
 - Asks the same question of God, "Why have you done this (vs. 20)?"
 - Elijah feels this widow's burden and he has no adequate response, only to take her burden upon himself.
- Appreciate again a point we made last week
 - How many times have we just in this one chapter seen Elijah at the end of his rope?
 - How many times have we seen Elijah empty?
 - Last week, we talked about the significance of how God takes our nothing and makes something.
 - I would reiterate this point again, we may not have all the answers to the hardships we experience in life, but we need to take the opportunity to recognize our emptiness as an opportunity for God to take our nothing and make it into something.
 - When we feel out of breath, it seems like those are the moments that God chooses to show up.

Turn To What We Know

- We have this steep hill in our neighborhood
 - There's nothing about this hill that seems inviting to reach the top short of driving in a car to get to the top.
 - It makes a great hill though for cardio training
 - Even though this hill is steep, I know if I can run to the top of this hill it will help me run through just about anything.
 - At first, my breathing is very labored. The closer I get to the top the harder it is to breath
 - The more and more that I have trained running to the top of that hill my cardio breathing has become easier.
 - Overtime my body has adapted as my cardio training has increased. Instead of labored berating my body already knows how to respond when faced with a hill.
- So Elijah, God's Messenger, without the words to speak into this situation turns to the only thing he knows to do; the thing that he has trained to do
 - **1 Kings 17:20-21**
 - When there was no clear message, Elijah prayed
 - Elijah was a prophet
 - Mediator between God and the King and God and the people
 - Before Elijah has a message to share there is communication between God and Elijah

- Elijah has been disciplined in prayer- it is something that comes natural, prayer is a practice and a habit
- Breathing is natural for us
 - When our breathing is threatened, we immediately feel as though we are going to die
 - We panic, We gasp for air because these are natural reactions when we can't breath.
- I know there is an image in our minds and throughout our society today of the words: "I can't breath"
 - That image is one that has stuck with us of a police officer with his knee on the neck of George Floyd
 - I don't want to seem disrespectful or insensitive, but I feel like that moment represents a weight on all of our necks collectively causing us to feel as though we can't breath
 - It is the weight of our sin
 - It is the weight hardship
 - It is the weight of injustice
 - It is the weight of racism
 - It is the weight of morality
 - It is the weight of personal burdens and the burdens we share as a society
 - "I can't breath!"
- All the while, God has a message for all of us- How will we react when we feel like we can't breath?
 - We turn to what we know
 - Unfortunately, what we are all too familiar with is to respond reactively to the emotion of the moment
 - Elijah had the same questions as the widow
 - Elijah felt responsible for what had happened as though the widow's blame was justified
 - Yet, Elijah didn't respond to the emotion of the widow-
 - He didn't try to justify himself
 - He didn't try to run from the situation
 - Elijah responded out of a discipline that God had established in his life
 - He took the widow's burden upon himself by taking her dead son to his room
 - Elijah prayed
 - And when Elijah prayed, he did not know why God had allowed this tragedy to happen and he didn't know how God would respond
 - Elijah only knew that he was nothing without the grace of God to intervene
 - When the breath has been knocked out of us, we turn to what we know
 - Some become angry

- Some lose their faith
- Some blame others
- Some try to justify themselves
- Some try to put others in their place
- OH, but may we turn to the God we know through the discipline of prayer before we react to the emotion of the episode!
- You can't deliver a message until you have stopped, humbled yourself, acknowledged your nothing- and then God will give you Something!

Message Revealed

- **1 Kings 17:22-24**
 - Given what Elijah and the widow had already been through and their faithful response, this particular episode of the widow's son becoming ill did not make sense.
 - Why would God allow this to happen?
 - I told you we wouldn't find the answer to this question until the end.
 - Ironically, the answer doesn't come from Elijah, but from the widow- **"Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth (1 Kings 17:24)."**
 - While this is a difficult episode in both the life of Elijah and the widow, God works his purposes through the difficult challenge
- This isn't the only instance where God chooses to reveal himself through crisis
- **John 11** Jesus' close friend Lazarus becomes ill
 - Lazarus' family sends for Jesus to come and heal Lazarus
 - Instead of responding immediately Jesus stays back to minister to the crowds for two additional days before coming to the aid of Lazarus
 - Within those two days, Lazarus dies and the family blames Jesus for not arriving immediately at their request
 - This was not an example of Jesus being lazy, but instead it was another example of God's greater plan at work
 - **"This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so the the Son of God may be glorified through it (John 11:4, ESV)."**
 - **"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this (John 11:25-26, ESV)?"**
 - Jesus then raises Lazarus from the dead and it provides a picture of what will ultimately take place in Jesus' own life as he dies on the cross and raised from the dead
- God chooses to reveal himself in ways that we can't always predict or understand
 - In both instances we can see that God has a purpose and a direct message

- But in both instances God's people have to wait to receive that message before they can understand what God is trying to say.
- The prophet is not the one who speaks the message, but instead it is the widow who acknowledges the work of God through Elijah's faithfulness.
- It is not the words that Elijah spoke, but the way he lived his life that spoke to the widow!
- You can't deliver a message until you have stopped, humbled yourself, acknowledged your nothing- and then God will give you Something!
- It should not be lost on us that Elijah stretched himself over the boy and prayed 3 times!
- This is not a only speaks to the persistence that Elijah practiced through prayer, but also to the resurrection power that God chooses to reveal himself; not only in this story but in the story of Jesus Christ.
- Notice that the message that Elijah seeks to deliver is not the one that he communicates, but instead it is the message that comes from the widow
 - "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth (1 Kings 17:24)."
 - The widow gives testimony to the truth she sees in Elijah's life
 - Again the message that Elijah delivers is not so much in what he says, but in the way he lives

Conclusion

- God not only desires to speak to us, but through us
 - Until we get to the point where we acknowledge that we are nothing, God can't give us something
 - When the difficult episodes of life come up, we turn to what we know
 - We develop the discipline of prayer throughout our life, not just when times get tough, but in all the episodes of our life.
 - Then when we don't know what to say or why things are happening the way they are we can turn to the God who IS.
 - If we wait upon the Lord, he will not only reveal Himself to us, but He will reveal himself through us to others.
- The most powerful message that we can deliver is not necessarily the one we preach with our mouth, but the one we preach everyday through the way we live.
 - The widow first asked if the reason that her son died was a result of her own sin
 - The reality is that we have all sinned and until we acknowledge our sin which is what makes us nothing- we can't experience God's resurrection power in our life.
 - God has a message for you to share. God is waiting on you to stretch yourself out before Him so that your life can speak to God's resurrection power.