

## 1 Kings 17:17-24 – Elijah confirmed as a prophet

### **Old Testament Reading: 1 Kings 17:17-24**

<sup>17</sup> Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. <sup>18</sup> 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?"

<sup>19</sup> "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, "LORD my God, have you brought tragedy even on 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 out to the LORD, "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!"

<sup>24</sup> 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."

### **New Testament Reading - John 11:17-44**

#### **Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus**

<sup>17</sup> On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. <sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, <sup>19</sup> and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. <sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

<sup>21</sup> "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "**Your brother will rise again.**"

<sup>24</sup> Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

<sup>27</sup> "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

<sup>28</sup> After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." <sup>29</sup> When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup> When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

<sup>32</sup> When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.

<sup>36</sup> Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

<sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

### **Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead**

<sup>38</sup> Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. <sup>39</sup> "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

<sup>40</sup> Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

<sup>43</sup> When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

## Introduction

There is a party game that many teenagers love to play, although I am unsure how often it is actually played. The game is called Truth or Dare. In this game, if it is your turn, you have to decide if you want truth or dare. If you choose truth, you have to answer a question truthfully. Questions that come up are quite often very personal or may cause you to reveal a deep, dark secret that you may have been intending to never share with anyone. If you choose dare, someone will give you a dare which you must complete. Dares can quite often be humiliating, embarrassing, awkward or dangerous.

In 2018, a horror movie of the same name was released. In the movie, a group of friends go to Mexico for a vacation and meet a guy named Sam who tricks them into going to an old church where they start a game of Truth or Dare. The friends realise that Sam had tricked them because he was dared to when it was his turn. The friends also learn that the game has deadly consequences. This is because a demon was released and took over the game. The only way for the friends to end the game is to trap the demon by completing a ritual that only Sam can complete. Unfortunately, Sam ends up getting killed before the ritual can be completed, forcing one of the friends to post a video on social media asking more players to join the game. Getting

back to the consequences of the game. Failing to tell the truth or failing to complete a dare, results in death.

Today, I want to give each of you a dare. My dare to each of you is to trust God no matter what. You may be thinking, “Matt, that’s easy. I already trust God.” Do you? Do you really? Sometimes it can be hard to trust God, particularly when bad things happen to us or we see all the bad things happening around us and in the world. We read things like Jeremiah 29:11, “I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord. “Plans to prosper you, not to harm you.” It makes us ask the question can God actually be trusted? The answer is, yes, he can! God can be trusted, no matter what. 1 Kings 17:17-24 reminds us of this. It gives us three reasons as to why God can be trusted:

1. God is control and knows what he is doing, even if we don’t
2. God hears our prayers and answers them
3. God has the power over life and death

But just before we get there, we need to take a quick look at what happened last week.

### Context

In chapter 17, we are introduced to Elijah, who pops up out of nowhere, a bit like a Jack-in-the-box but not quite. We are not told exactly who Elijah is, but we know from later chapters that he is a prophet. He pronounces that there will be no rain in the land until he says so, according to God’s word. This is a pronouncement of judgment against Ahab because of his sin and a challenge to Baal, as Baal was believed to be the god of fertility and rain and, yet, God has decided to withhold the rain. God tells Elijah to go to Kerith Ravine, where ravens are sent by God to provide him with bread and meat. God then tells Elijah to continue on to a town called

Zarephath near Sidon in Phoenicia and God has caused a widow to take care of Elijah. However, the widow barely has enough for her and her son. In fact, she only has enough oil and flour for one more small loaf of bread, which she was going to make for her and her son and then they were going to starve to death. Elijah tells her to make some bread for him first and then for her and her son. The widow does as Elijah says and God, through Elijah, gives the widow and her son food until it rains again. Apparently, the drought in Israel has stretched as far as Zarephath.

After this provision of food by God through Elijah, things are looking pretty good for the widow and her son. Elijah stays with her and they have plenty of food. It looks as though they will make it through the drought .... This brings us to our passage for today and, unfortunately, we are greeted with bad news. News that may cause us to doubt God and lose our trust in him. This brings us to the first point.

### **1. God is control and knows what he is doing (v. 17-18 and John 11:1-21, 32)**

Let's have a look at verses 17 and 18 again. It reads, *"Sometime 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?"*

Elijah has been in the house for some time now. We are not told how much time has elapsed since verse 16 but a significant amount of time has passed. Now the woman's son becomes ill, his condition gets worse until, eventually, he dies. Given that God has just given them food to last until it rains again, this seems unfair and somewhat cruel. However, we must understand that whilst God gave them food until it rains again (v.16), he never guaranteed that they would actually stay alive. We must also remember that God has a plan in place. He knows what he is doing and he works in mysterious ways. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, *"For **my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither***

***are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.***

God's ways are so different from ours that we won't always know or even understand what God is doing or why. This is the whole point of trusting God. That's why they call it a leap of faith. We have to trust God, even when things do not make sense to us.

With the death of her son, the woman is, understandably, upset. Since the woman is a widow and has no husband, it was expected that her son would take **care** of her in her old age but now, this will not be possible. She has no one to look after her. She seems to think that the death of her son is somehow Elijah's doing. Verse 18 makes this abundantly clear: "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come here to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" This woman seems to think that her son's death is a punishment for a sin that she has committed and that Elijah is the one doing the punishing.

On the one hand, this was a normal reaction to a tragedy like this. Job's friends, for instance, thought Job was being punished for his sins when Job had to suffer.

*Job 8:4 – When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin.*

Jesus' disciples had a similar reaction in John 9:1-3 when they passed a man who had been born blind. The disciples then asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered that it was neither the man or his parents that had sinned. Instead, it was God's doing so that God's work might be displayed in this man. Jesus then goes on to heal the man of his blindness.

Illustration - The TV show My Name is Earl is about a man named Earl who, after winning the lottery, runs out onto the road in celebration and gets hit by a car. He loses the lottery ticket and ends up in hospital. It is whilst he is in hospital that he comes to the realisation that he is there because of karma. He was a bad person, therefore only bad things happened to him. He thought if he could become a better person, good things would come his way.

This kind of thinking, however, is foolish. Thinking like this only leads us to put our trust in other things. Things that will probably not last. Trusting in things of this earth is foolish because things of this earth are perishable and will not last. Not to mention, things or people might let us down and hurt us. The only one who is totally trustworthy is God. He will never let us down and He is eternal. God knows what he is doing and he is total control of all things.

This is similar to both Mary and Martha in John 11:1-44. Their brother, Lazarus, had become ill and they sent for Jesus to come so that Jesus could come and heal Lazarus from his illness but Jesus had a different idea. He deliberately stays away for two days before coming to the home of Mary and Martha. When he got there, Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Martha hears that Jesus has arrived and goes out to meet him. Martha, in verse 21, says, "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." In verse 32, Mary comes out to meet Jesus and says the exact same thing, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Both Mary and Martha seem to think Jesus could have saved Lazarus. That's why they sent for him in verse 3. They wanted Jesus to come and heal Lazarus of his illness. They had probably seen Jesus perform miracles. If not, they had heard that he could. Now, Lazarus is dead and neither Martha nor Mary believes that Jesus can raise Lazarus from the dead. If Jesus had gotten there, he would have been able to save Lazarus. It's Jesus' fault. Or, at least, that's what Mary and Martha seem to be saying.

It is easy for us to doubt God or even lose our faith in him. Generally, when we decide to trust someone with something and that person lets us down, we find it very difficult to trust that person again. We may even decide to never trust them again. It can be the same with God. When we are struggling, going through bad times, suffering, it can be really hard to trust God but what we need to do is to trust him. Blaming others or looking for an explanation when there may not be one is useless

and a waste of time. We must do as the Psalmist says in Psalm 37:5 - *Commit your way to the LORD; trust him and he will do this:*

Or how about Romans 8:28 – *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.*

## **2. God hears our prayers and answers them (v.19-22 and John 11:41-42)**

It seems like there is no hope for this woman. Her son is dead and there is no account of a resurrection in the bible so far. Elijah, seeing how distraught the woman is and, thinking perhaps that something unjust and unfair has just happened, is spurred into action. He does not answer the woman nor does he get angry with her. He stays calm but decides to act on this. He is brought back into the game and tells the woman to give him her son but it seems she did not want to or, at least, she was reluctant to. Elijah has to take the boy from her arms and carries him upstairs to his room and lays the boy on his bed. Elijah here is intent on dealing with this, on confronting God in private.

Elijah is also confused and puzzled by the death of the boy. He brings the woman's complaint to God (v.20). Elijah has been tested by God in a few ways already in this chapter. He was fed by ravens, drank from a brook and has had to suffer the humiliating thought of being fed by a widow. Elijah trusted God and has seen miracles being performed. Now he has to deal with the death of this widow's son and the false accusation of the woman. But Elijah, despite all this, has compassion on the woman so he is now going to intercede on her behalf.

Elijah stretches himself out over the boy three times and asks God to give the boy his life back (v.21). This practice of stretching oneself over the body is a sign of humility on Elijah's part. Elijah comes into contact with a corpse and renders himself unclean according to Jewish law (Num. 19:10). Elijah, after getting his outrage out of the way,

now humbly submits himself to God and asks God to bring the boy back to life. Elijah does not stretch himself over the boy once, he does it three times. Elijah is persistent in his prayer for the boy. This kind of thing is seen in two other places in the bible:

In **2 Kings 4:34-35** we read – “Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy’s body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.”

**Acts 20:9-12** – “Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “He’s alive.” We skip to verse 12 which reads, “The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

In survival books and guides, there is a survival technique which can be used when it’s really cold and you have no way of keeping warm. It’s called shared bodily warmth. This involves huddling up against one another and using each other’s body heat to stay warm, even in the cold. This is what Elijah does. He uses his bodily warmth to generate enough heat in order for the boy to be able to wake up.

In verse 22, we read, *“The LORD heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived.”* God hears Elijah’s prayer. It doesn’t fall on deaf ears. God does not ignore Elijah or pretend that he cannot hear or is not listening. No. God hears Elijah’s prayer and, upon hearing it, answers it! God responds to Elijah. God is called upon by Elijah and God responds by answering Elijah’s prayer.

In John 11:41-42, just after Jesus has asked for the stone to be moved out of the entrance of the tomb where Lazarus is buried, Jesus prays. He says, *“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”*

This is a remarkable prayer. Jesus acknowledges that the Father has heard Jesus and always hears him. Jesus says this to let those who are standing there and us know that God always hears our prayers. He is always ready to listen and will answer. He might not answer us straight away or give us the answer we want. He may not answer in the way we expect him to, but this should not stop us from praying.

### Application

1. Elijah’s persistence in prayer should remind us that we need to be persistent in our prayers. We should not pray for something once and then forget about it. We should continually pray to God as the apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:18, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, **be alert** and **always keep on praying** for all the saints.”

This brings us to our third point; we can trust God because God has power over life and death.

### 3. **God has power over life and death (v22-24 and John 11:22-27, 43-44)**

After Elijah prays, God answers his prayers and gives the boy his life back. This is our first indication that God has the power over life and death. This is also the first occurrence of a resurrection in the bible. God commands not only life but death as

well. God has power over death and is not defeated nor will He ever be defeated by death.

Elijah then takes the boy back to his mother, who was downstairs and tells her, “Look, your son is alive.” Upon seeing that her son is alive, the woman acknowledges Elijah for who he truly is – a man of God and that when Elijah speaks the word of the LORD, she will know it is the truth. She can now trust Elijah, and subsequently, God. God has been in control this whole time. His purpose in causing the boy’s death in the first place is twofold – firstly, it shows that he does have the power over life and death and, secondly, it gives Elijah his credentials as a prophet. This woman can now see that Elijah really is a man of God. This confirms that Elijah is a prophet and it shows that Elijah is a foreshadow of something better to come.

In John 11:22-27, after Martha accuses Jesus of causing Lazarus’ death, she says that God will give Jesus whatever he asks for. Jesus then reassures Martha that Lazarus will come back to life again but, like the disciples earlier on in the chapter, she is a little bit dim-witted at this point. She thinks that Jesus is talking about the resurrection at the last day. When Jesus returns, all those who have died will be raised up to life. Martha believes it is when this happens that she will see Lazarus again. But this is not what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus then goes on to make a very big claim. He says, “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.” This is a big statement by Jesus, although not surprising. Jesus has been saying this sort of thing all throughout the gospel of John. In fact, the whole reason John wrote this gospel is found in John 20:31 – *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* Life is a key theme in John’s gospel. In just about every chapter, this idea pops up. Here a few quick examples:

John 3:16 – For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 4:13 – Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

John 6:35 – I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 14:6 – I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

The point is clear. Jesus is the one in whom we should put our trust. For in him, life is found. Getting back to chapter 11, when Jesus asks Martha if she believes that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, Martha says she believes! What incredible faith. Jesus then raises Lazarus by calling him to come out of the grave and he does. This proves that Jesus is what he says he is – the resurrection and the life.

Elijah had to call upon God to save the boy but Jesus is even greater than Elijah. Jesus raised Lazarus just by speaking. Even more than this, Jesus raised himself from the dead, thus defeating death once and for all. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again to rescue from our sin and death and has now given us eternal life if we will only trust him. This means that God can be trusted because he has power over life and death and, more than that, he has defeated death for us through his Son, Jesus.

So, what should we make of all this? What can we learn from this?

[Application](#)

There are three things I want us to take away from this passage today.

1. Trust God and have faith in him, I want you to **continue in your faith. Continue trusting him.** It won't be easy. The bible does not say it will be easy. In fact, it's going to be tough but if you persevere in your faith then you will have eternal life. That's the hope we have.
2. Elijah's persistence in prayer should remind us that we need to be persistent in our prayers. We should not pray for something once and then forget about it. We should continually pray to God as the apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:18, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, **be alert** and **always keep on praying** for all the saints." When we do this Philippians 4:7 says, "*and the peace of God that transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your mind in Christ Jesus.*"
3. Take heart and be comforted, knowing that death is not the end of the story. We have the hope of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. This is great news. This means that death has been beaten. 1 John 5:11 – *God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

## Conclusion

As you face all that life throws at you. As you go about your daily life, remember that God is in control, God hears our prayers and answers them and God has power over life and death. He has given us the victory over death, as the Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:55-58 – 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.

So, trust God no matter what. I dare you.

Let me pray.

*Dear Lord and heavenly Father,*

*We thank you so much for the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom, we have the hope of eternal life. I thank you for giving us forgiveness of sins and for your love and grace.*

*Please help us to trust you no matter what. Please help us to know that you are always there and will hear us and answer our prayers if we would only bring our requests to you.*

*In your name, we pray, amen.*