



The Widow's Son!

Alive #1 | March 3, 2024 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell

Series Introduction

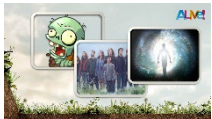
Today is the first Sunday of March, and (whether you are ready to believe it or not), that means Easter is only four weeks away! So, today we are going to begin a new sermon series that will lead us up to this central Christian holiday, focusing on one of the most prominent themes of the entire Bible: **resurrection!**



Resurrection. Dead, yet alive again!

If you've spent any time in the church or with Christians, you know that resurrection is a big deal. It is a defining feature of our faith. It is a theme that dominates and describes our outlook on life. There is nothing more quintessentially Christian than resurrection.


Yet, Satan has done a good job of coopting "resurrection" in our culture. He has invested so much in taking over this theme that when I say the phrase, "Dead, yet alive again!" it probably sounds a little creepy to many of you. Your first thoughts might be:



- **People who are "reanimated."** The "living dead" are ingrained in pop culture with television shows like *The Walking Dead*, movies like *Zombieland*, books like *Pet Sematary*, and video games like *The Last of Us*. Those who "live again" are rotting, decaying corpses intent on eating the living. They shuffle or sprint toward survivors (depending on the writers) in a relentless pursuit to ingest their brains.
- **People who are "returned."** Some portrayals, such as the French series *The Returned* or the ABC show *Resurrection*, focus less on corpses and more on people who are simply *back*. The dead return years after their death as fully functional human beings, unaware that they have died or that anything has changed. Yet something about these returned folks is just...off. They have some strange mannerisms or behaviors that turn the joy of their return into an uncertain fear.
- **People who are "reincarnated."** Other religions' ideas about the afterlife focus on an endless cycle of death and life. A person may die, but then he or she comes back to life as someone or something else. They have "past lives" that inform their present life. According to these ideas, you might have been a British chimney sweep, a Viking warrior, a Persian princess, or a salamander in a previous life...but now you are you...until you die and the cycle repeats, making your daily choices almost meaningless.

Satan may have hijacked the idea of being alive after death, but you and I know the truth. Resurrection is different, and it's better.


It is a gift from God, an outworking of the Holy Spirit and of Christ Jesus.



"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."
(Romans 8:11, ESV)

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Resurrection – the kind Jesus talks about – is our future! And Scripture does not paint it in scary terms; no, the Bible describes resurrection in terms of hope, joy, and glory! This is what we strive for! This is what we pursue and dream about:



"that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."
(Philippians 3:10-11, ESV)

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I don't want you to be skeptical of resurrection. I don't want you to be nervous about it, or afraid of it. I want you to embrace it, to know it in the terms that *Scripture* provides. I want you to see it as a current blessing and a future reality to pursue.

In short, I want you to be *ready for resurrection!*

In this series, we are going to jump into some stories of resurrection that we see in the Bible – some Old Testament, some New Testament. We'll explore what happened, and we will learn some lessons. Our goal will be both to gain knowledge and to gain some practical application.*

** On a side note, as I was explaining the series concept to my wife, that last phrase did not go over well. Deb keeps me in check, and this one just couldn't slip by. "What in the world is a 'practical application' of resurrection?" she said in disbelief. "What? Are you going to have some tips on how to pop up out of the grave? Or what to yell out for your first resurrected words? Or what position to be buried in so you can get up faster?" She laughed at me a lot...and it hurt just a little bit. But it's a valid question.*

What is a 'practical application' of resurrection?

*Let me explain what I mean. As we explore each story in this series, we'll learn more about **God's character, priorities, and goals** in each resurrection story. We'll see how those ideas **inform** and **transform** our daily lives even **before** we're resurrected...not after. That is what I mean by 'practical application.'*

But, in the meantime, if we do get some good tips for post-resurrection words or postures, I will pass those along, too! Deal?

Without delay, then, let's start looking at second life.





The Widow's Son (1 Kings 17:17-24)

Today's sermon is going to focus on the first resurrection we find in the Bible. It comes from the historical book of 1 Kings in your Old Testament, and it involves the great prophet, Elijah.

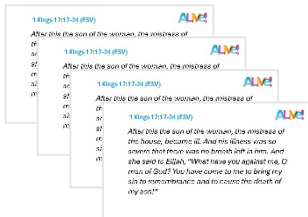
Before we read the passage (1 Kings 17:17ff), let me set the stage for you and explain the context of this miracle.



Elijah is a prophet who has been called to confront the sins of the northern kingdom of Israel. This country (which had separated from the southern kingdom of Judah after the death of King Solomon) had a history of rebellion against God. They worshiped idols; they rejected God's Word. Israel is in desperate need of correction, and God is ready to provide it. So, God sends the prophet Elijah to proclaim judgment, this time coming in the form of a three-year drought.

While Israel suffers for her sins, God continues to care for the faithful. During the drought, God miraculously provides for Elijah's needs...first while he was in hiding by a brook east of the Jordan River, then when he goes to a city next to the coast north of Israel, the town of Zarephath. In Zarephath, Elijah finds shelter at the home of a widow and her son. Though food is scarce, God miraculously provides enough each day in the form of never-ending oil and flour to take care of the needs of the widow, her son, and Elijah, too. All this is described in 1 Kings 17:1-16.

Now we come to today's passage, starting in verse 17.



"After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him.

And she said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!"

And he said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. And he cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again."

And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives."

And 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." (1 Kings 17:17-24, ESV)



Death, the Stealer of Life

Real Life Sadness

As I read this story, one of the first things that strikes me is the reaction of the widow. I have never lost a child...and if you have, then I apologize if this story strikes a nerve...but I can only imagine the emotions she was going through.

Like with all grief, there is a mixture of thoughts swirling through the situation. There are questions like:

- **Why now?** When we first met the widow earlier in the chapter (v. 8-16), she was out of food. She was gathering the last little bit she had so she and her son could eat and then die. At that point, Elijah showed up, the food was miraculously sustained, and they all lived! Looking at her son's lifeless body, she didn't understand why God would save her son only to let him die now and leave her here in grief.
- **Why us?** The widow feels singled out. If Elijah hadn't shown up, maybe she and her son could have flown under the radar. But the prophet's presence and his righteousness served to highlight the sins that had been in her own life (whatever they were) and to expose her to judgment. "What do you have against *us*?!" is a cry of lost anonymity.
- **Why, God?** The widow vents her emotion on Elijah, but the name she calls him ("O man of *God*") shows that her focus isn't on Elijah himself but on the One who sent him. The death of her son is God's fault. It is a spiritual tragedy as well as a personal loss.

Watching illness overtake her child, the widow's experience is an intense example of real-life sadness. It shows the crippling effect that death can have when it steals life away.

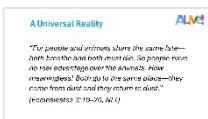
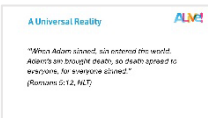
A Universal Reality

The widow's experience was painful, but it was far from unique. Romans 5:12 talks about the painful **scope** of death:

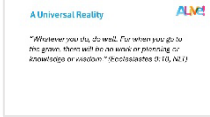
"When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned." (Romans 5:12, NLT)

Ecclesiastes 3 talks about the inescapable **process** of death.

"For people and animals share the same fate—both breathe and both must die. So people have no real advantage over the animals. How meaningless! Both go to the same place—they came from dust and they return to dust." (Ecclesiastes 3:19–20, NLT)



In the Hebrew understanding of the afterlife, those who died went to the realm of the dead, a place known as *Sheol*. Pictured as a pit, or a hollow place under the earth, Sheol was the place where the dead were gathered, regardless of whether they were good or bad in life. It was thought to be an end state of nothingness, so your life here on earth was your one chance to enjoy good things.



"Whatever you do, do well. For when you go to the grave, there will be no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom." (Ecclesiastes 9:10, NLT)

The widow pictures this kind of reality as her son is gathered to his people in death. His life is done, stolen away by the grave.

Hope After Life?

Yet, Elijah doesn't give up.

You and I have lost the shock of this story because we live in a faith where resurrection is the norm. We talk about it, we plan for it in our spiritual future, and we experience it in so many places in life, whether in pop culture or real-life examples.



- Superman dies, but he is revived in the *Justice League* movie.
- Harry Potter dies, but he comes back to life in the final book.
- The Ford Bronco dies, but it starts coming off the production line again in 2020.
- Israel dies, but the country returns to the map millennia later in 1948.

We are no strangers to resurrection...but Elijah was!

He didn't have any experience to point to. Elijah didn't have any history to reference. He didn't know whether resurrection was possible or not, because up to this point, it hadn't happened! Every person who had died prior to this had stayed dead.

It comes as a great surprise, then, that Elijah fights against death. He asks for the boy's body in hopes that God might do something big. The widow goes along with it (a striking display of trust, even in the midst of her grief and despair), but none of them should have had any hope based on past experience.

Elijah carries the boy upstairs and lays him on his own bed. He prays over the boy's body, fervently. He questions God's intentions. But then he prays one of the boldest prayers recorded in Scripture:



"And he stretched himself out over the child three times and cried out to the LORD, 'O LORD my God, please let this child's life return to him.'" (1 Kings 17:21, NLT)



God, The Giver of Life

“Nephesh”

It’s not just the boy’s breath that Elijah prays for. He’s not asking just for a pulse or for oxygen flow. Elijah implores for God to give the boy’s *nephesh* back.

Can we go on a little lexical rabbit trail? *Nephesh* is an important theological word in Hebrew.¹

At its root, the word literally means “throat.” Like when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, they complain about not having fresh produce from Egypt and they say,

“But now our NEPHESH is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.” (Numbers 11:6, ESV)

But just like in English your *heart* means more than the organ contracting in your chest (it means your emotion, your will), in Hebrew your *throat* isn’t just a neck tube. Because all that you need for life passes through the throat (air, food), your *nephesh* could also refer to the **entire person**.

This is why *nephesh* is also translated “breath” or “soul” or “life.” It refers to your full being, all that you are, with all your capabilities and capacities.

Elijah prays, “O God, let his NEPHESH return!”

Why can he ask this? Because God is the One who made us a NEPHESH in the first place! Go back to the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2, and read this statement:

“then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” (Genesis 2:7, ESV)

The man (the “Adam”) became a living creature – a NEPHESH.

Just like God breathed life into Adam, Elijah asks for God to breathe life again into this boy. It is a beautiful thing, reminding us of God’s role as the giver of life. He is the giver both the first time (in creation), and He is the giver the second time (in resurrection)!

Nothing else can give life!

In pop culture, the false imitations of resurrection rely on some ridiculous source of reanimation. Zombies are always caused by a virus or fungus that brings the body back to life. As a result, the people who come “back to life” aren’t really alive. They are moving, but not thinking. They are driven by impulses, not emotion and reason. In other words, they aren’t a full, living NEPHESH.

¹ [Shema Soul Script-References.pdf \(d1bsmz3sdihplr.cloudfront.net\)](#)



But if the Author of Life says “live,” He has the power to imbue every last bit of life that we need. He is the God...



“...who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”
(Romans 4:17, ESV).

Dry Bones



Do you remember the story of another prophet, Ezekiel? In one of his well-known visions, Ezekiel sees a valley of dry, lifeless bones.

“The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry.

*And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O **dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.** Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and **you shall live.** And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.”*
(Ezekiel 37:1–6, ESV)



If you know Elevation Worship’s song, “Rattle!” then you’ll recognize the chorus. “This is the sound of dry bones rattling.” You’ll hear Ezekiel’s cry echo over and over. “LIVE! (Live!) LIVE! (Live!) Dry bones hear the Word of the Lord!”

Whether it is spiritual life or physical life, Scripture makes it clear that life – created or resurrected – comes from God!

The Widow’s Son



The widow and her son found this out!

“And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives.” And 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.”
(1 Kings 17:22–24, ESV)

Her son is back! Her grief is gone! And even the painful name from earlier (“O man of God”) that reminded the widow of her sin and her sorrow now becomes a name that brings joy. “Now I know you are a man of God,” she says. Elijah becomes the vehicle by which life and truth and trust in God comes back into the widow’s situation.

God shows himself to be the giver of life.

Life in the Resurrection

As we come back around to our topic of resurrection, then, we've discovered a key principle for those who become "dead, yet alive again."



Life comes from God.

Simple? Yes. Trivial? No.

Life comes from God!

There is nothing else that gets you long-term life. There is nothing else that gives you second life. We can trust science and medicine to a point, even to the point of resuscitation in some cases. But *life*, especially the eternal life of resurrection, is only going to come from God.

Pushing for Longevity



In church, we talk about and pray a lot for physical ailments. And understandably so. Sickness is a pressing concern that impacts length of life and quality of life. Cancer steals years from us; accidents cut things short.

It is reasonable to pray about such things.

And outside of church, many of you push for longevity. You invest hours and dollars in the pursuit of health. You get the right kinds of foods to have the best nutrition. You go to the gym and work out. You take supplements and vitamins and medicines to stave off the effects of aging. You do *that thing* where you move your legs faster than normal...running? (I think that's what it's called).

But in the words of a wise woman I knew from Kentucky,

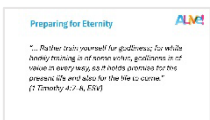
"Eat right. Exercise often. Die anyway." – Teresa Yost

At best, a better lifestyle on earth might net you an extra 20 years. But then this body ends up in box or an urn.

You want more? You want real longevity? Plan for resurrection!

Preparing for Eternity

Those physical activities may impact the quality of your life, but *life comes from God* and from God alone. The physical training we do can be helpful, but if you want to live longer, shift your perspective!



"... Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." (1 Timothy 4:7-8, ESV)

Are you investing in the spiritual training that will prepare you for resurrection? You can probably list some of the basics when it comes to “training for godliness.” Investing in regular worship, regular study, spending time on your knees in prayer. But take it a step further and ask:



- Are you **watching your calories**, not for the sake of losing a couple of inches, but **fasting** as part of your prayer life?
- Are you **cutting back on alcohol**, not because you read a study that said to limit your intake but so that you practice Spirit-given **self-control**?
- Are you **lifting weights**, not so you can look better in a swimsuit but so that you are able to **serve** others more effectively?
- Are you **getting in the pool**, not so you can do some cardio while swimming laps but so that you can get **baptized** and submit your life to Christ?

You can do both the physical and the spiritual. But when you remember that *resurrection* is your future, it should motivate you to prioritize the things that will outlast THIS body and carry forward to eternal life.

Closing



I hope that the story of the resurrection of the widow’s son reminds you of the importance of life – of your NEPHEISH. We should long for that NEPHEISH to continue, just like the widow did for her son. And just like Elijah, we should know that the only One who can breathe that life into us is God himself.

If you care about life, especially living past your death, you need to know where that life comes from. Your resurrection only comes from One place:

[Jesus said,] *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”* (John 10:10, ESV)

Life – whether first or second life – only comes from God!

Prayer

Invitation

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Notes

“Alive!” Sermon Series (Romans 8:11; Philippians 3:10-11)

The Widow’s Son (1 Kings 17:17-24)

Death, the Stealer of Life

Real Life Sadness

A Universal Reality (Romans 5:12; Ecclesiastes 3:19-20; 9:10)

Hope After Life? (1 Kings 17:21)

God, The Giver of Life

“Nephesh” (Genesis 2:7; Romans 4:17)

Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37:1-6)

The Widow’s Son (1 Kings 17:22-24)

Life in the Resurrection

Pushing for Longevity

Preparing for Eternity (1 Timothy 4:7-8; John 10:10)

Discussion Questions

Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- If you could have one person back in your life who has passed away, who would it be? Why?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Who are some pop culture examples of people who were dead, yet alive again? Are these portrayals positive and inspiring, or creepy and unsettling? Explain. Why do you think Satan has invested so much energy in corrupting the idea of life after death?
- Read Philippians 3:10-11. Do you share this attitude about resurrection? Why or why not?
- Read 1 Kings 17:17-24. If you were the widow, would you have had any hope that your son would live again? Who did she blame for her son's death?
- Who did Elijah trust to provide life? What qualities of God gave him hope that resurrection was possible?
- Read Genesis 2:7. Is the "breath of life" simply air? What else is implied by God's actions.
- Without God's involvement, can there be life? How does this inform your views on hot topics about reproduction (ex: abortion, in vitro fertilization)?
- If life comes from God – in creation and in resurrection – what are the most important actions to ensure long life (i.e. eternal life)?
- If resurrection is our future, is physical health important? Why? (See 1 Tim 4:7-8)
- What practices and habits can you do now that will carry over to impact your eternal, resurrected life?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Thank God for the gift of life, both physical and spiritual. Pray for those you know and love to prepare for resurrection by trusting Jesus!