

New Life From The Lord

A Sermon By
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Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. 1 Kings 17: 22

When Elijah traveled northward to the city of Zarephath he discovered a poor widow gathering sticks. He asked her to “bring me a little water in a cup that I may drink.” As she went to get the water he also asked her to “please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” All this poor widow had was a little flour and oil. She gathered sticks that she may prepare the flour and oil so she and her son may eat and then die.

The widow obeyed Elijah. She went and made a small cake and served Elijah first instead of herself and her son. Miraculously the flour was not used up, the oil did not run dry, and the widow and her household ate for many days.

On the surface this story of Elijah demonstrates his power, on the natural plane of life, to feed a poor widow and her household. She was destitute. She had accepted her fate and was prepared to die. Yet it was her belief and faith in Elijah that resulted in the abundance of food for her household.

On a deeper level this story of Elijah and the widow can represent something wonderful the Lord can do for us. We can know from the Heavenly Doctrine that Elijah represents the Lord as to the Word (AC 9198: 5). The widow is descriptive of a person “who has good and a desire for truth” (AC 9198:6). The wonderful reality living within this story is the power of the Lord with us in His Word.

But we must be willing to give water to Elijah and make a cake for him first. The Arcana tells us that giving water to Elijah represents obedience (AC 9198:7). Making a cake from oil and flour and giving it to Elijah represents “truth conjoined with good” (AC 9198:7). We join truth with good when we learn truth from the Word and then do the good that truth teaches. Joining truth with good is the heavenly life the Lord desires that we live. As we continue in obedience to the Lord we can eat for many days.

Miraculously the Lord can and will open our eyes so that day by day we may see how we must live. We can rest assured that the Lord will feed our desire for truth even when, like a poor widow, we feel empty and destitute.

In our story we see that an unfortunate circumstance came to pass. The son of the widow became seriously sick and died. The widow believed that a sin of hers was the cause of the boy’s death. Elijah the prophet told the woman to give him her son. She complied with his request and he took the boy to the upper room where he was staying and laid him on his own bed.

Then Elijah cried out to the Lord, stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the Lord again. The Lord heard the voice of Elijah “and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived.” And Elijah brought the child down from the upper room and handed him to his mother.

The death of the widow’s son was a most devastating event. All hopes of the young child growing up and living a normal life are shattered. The widow’s care of her son and dreams for his future have faded away and now are the source of despair and disappointment.

As we turn to the Heavenly Doctrine we learn that “in the internal sense of the Word ‘a son’ means truth” (AC 2623). When our “son” or “truth” is alive we can say these are times in our life when our vision is clear. We know what it is to open ourselves to the Lord’s leading because this is something all of us has done. It is true that our hearts have been filled with love of performing useful services. We know the Lord is with us because we have experienced the wonderful delights of heaven, our hearts and minds full with love from the Lord.

Our “son” has lived. Our relationships with one another have been peaceful. Most of the times we find contentment with our lot in life, thankful for the many blessing the Lord had bestowed upon us. All of this has been possible because we have been faithful and obedient to the Lord. All of this has been possible because we’ve accepted the Lord’s Word and allowed His truth to lead us to live the heavenly life.

Even though a widow represents a person “who has good and a desire for truth” (AC 9198:6) there may be times when something seems to have died. What can we make of this? The widow had trusted in Elijah. Now her son has died.

There will be times in our life when the Lord’s truth seems to have escaped us. The likelihood is that situations may arise in which it appears as if the Lord is not near. The widow believed that she had sinned and therefore as punishment Elijah brought about the death of her son: “What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?” What can it mean for us when our “son” or the Lord’s “truth” with us is dead?

We know that the Lord is the source of everything of life. In the Psalms of David we’re told that “for with You [the Lord] is the fountain of life (Psalm 36:9). When in the world the Lord said “I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). As long as we are receiving of the Lord, then we have life. But our “son” or the Lord’s “truth” with us is sometimes dead or seems to have died.

In the Apocalypse Explained we learn that “the Lord calls Himself the Life” (AE 186:12). And people who live and have life are people who “receive light which is Divine truth, from the Lord” (AE 186:12). On the other hand, people “who do not

receive it are said not to live, but to be dead” (AE 186:12). There could be many reasons why truth with a person may die or seem to be dead.

The death of the widow’s son can take form within a person who occasionally does not sense within himself an internal perception that he is on the way to heaven. This does not mean that a person should ever make a spiritual judgment about himself or someone else. This also does not mean that a person should look for outward signs or rely solely upon feelings. We are human beings living in this natural realm. We are not immune to doubt or despair.

The death of the widow’s son can stand for those states when we have a burning desire to continue obeying the Lord. We are motivated to embrace a life of good but we are weak, often frail, and may even feel spiritually drained. With most people, but not everyone, troubling states are not usually permanent conditions but are typically transitory ups and downs that we may experience. Still we should continue desiring the Lord’s truth. We must strive to compel ourselves to live the heavenly life that the Lord commands of us. Through it all we can pray to the Lord and ask that He build up our confidence in Him.

If our “son” or “truth” has died or seems to be dead we may ask the Lord to strengthen our trust in Him. The Heavenly Doctrine says that people “who have a perception of the Lord’s presence also have a perception that every single thing that happens to them is conducive to their own welfare and that no evil influences can reach them. This is what gives them the peace they enjoy. Without such faith or trust in the Lord no one can ever attain that peace, nor accordingly the bliss which joy brings since that bliss resides within such peace” (AC 5963). Let’s trust that the Lord has power to strengthen us and revive our souls.

In our story we see that Elijah carried the widow’s son to the upper room. Then he cried out to the Lord, stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the Lord again. The Lord heard the voice of Elijah “and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived.” And Elijah brought the child down from the upper room and handed him to his mother.

Elijah restoring the child to life is a wonderful symbol of the Lord transforming us from death to life. This transformation is a gradual process whereby the Lord regenerates our souls, as He builds a new will within us. All the while the Lord is leading us from death to life. The Lord teaches in the Heavenly Doctrine that “regeneration is resurrection, in that when a person is being regenerated he is being turned from one who is dead into one who is alive, thus is rising again” (AC 6554).

When He was in the world the Lord said, “most assuredly, I say unto you, he who hears My Word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but shall pass from death into life” (John 5: 24). In the Apocalypse Explained the Lord says “to pass from death into life signifies resurrection and life in heaven” (AE 899:7). This is so because “from death” means “not only from natural death

into eternal life, thus a resurrection, but also from spiritual death, which is condemnation, into eternal life” AE 899:7).

It is by means of His truths that the Lord can make us anew. If we are obedience to the Lord’s truth we can pass from death into life. It is by means of our obedience to the Lord’s Word that we make it possible for Him to ever so softly reshape our loves, our thoughts, and the life we live. Then and only then may the Lord raise us up from the depths of the destruction we’ve caused ourselves. Then and only then may we see the Lord’s truth in a new light.

In our New Testament lesson the Lord approached the gated of the city of Nain where a dead man was being carried, the only son of a widow. Having compassion on her, the Lord touched the open coffin, and said “Young man, I say to you, arise.” So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

The widow of Nain was weeping because her son had died. The widow in Zarephath lamented over the death of her son saying to Elijah “have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?” Let’s realize that in the eyes of the Lord people are His special treasure. He touches each and every one of us in a way that specially addresses our individual needs.

The resurrection of the son of the widow in Zarephath and in Nain speaks of how the Lord can raise all of us from the dark recesses of spiritual death. If we open our hearts to the Lord we allow Him to heal all our sicknesses and resurrect our love of obeying His commandments. He can awaken within us a fresh love for His church, for caring and supporting each other in our daily walk down the path of salvation.

Our task this week is to continue our study of the Lord’s Word. As we turn to His truths we must ask that He open our eyes, dispel our darkness, and touch our understanding that we may see His Word in a new light.

We can pray theses words in the Psalms of David: “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Psalm 119: 18).

Amen.

1st Lesson: 1 Kings 17: 16 – 24:

16. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah. 17. Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. 18. So she said to Elijah, “What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?” 19. And he said to her, “Give me your son.” So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. 20. Then he cried out to the Lord and said, “O Lord my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?” 21. And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the Lord and said, “O Lord my God, I pray, let this child’s soul come back to him.” 22. Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. 23. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives!” 24. Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth.”

2nd Lesson – Luke 7: 11- 17

11. Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. 12. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. 13. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” 14. Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” 15. So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. 16. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen up among us”; and, “God has visited His people.” 17. And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

3rd Lesson: AC 2261: 2, 3

[2] Regarded in themselves truths do not confer life; but goods do so. Truths are simply the recipients of life, that is, of good. Nobody is ever able to say therefore that he can be saved by means of truths or as is commonly asserted, by faith alone- not, that is, unless within the truths, which are part of the faith, good is present. And this good which must exist within them must be the good that flows from charity. This explains why in the internal sense faith itself is nothing else than charity, as shown above in 2231. When people say that the acknowledgement of truth is the faith that saves, it should be recognized that no acknowledgement can possibly exist with people who lead lives immersed in things contrary to charity, only some kind of persuasion which has the life of self-love or of the love of the world allied to it, so that the acknowledgement which they speak of does not have within it the life of the faith which is that of charity. The worst people of all, acting from self-love or from love of the world, that is, acting for the sake

of excelling others in what are called intelligence and wisdom, and so acting for the sake of earning exalted positions, reputation, and gain, have the ability to grasp the truths of faith and to confirm them in many ways; but with them those truths are nevertheless dead. The life of truth and so of faith comes solely from the Lord, who is Life itself.

[3] The Lord's life is mercy, which is that of love towards the whole human race. Those people cannot possibly be drawing on the life that is the Lord's who, although they profess the truths of faith, despise others in comparison with themselves, and who, where their self-love and love of the world are affected, harbor hatred towards the neighbor and are delighted when he experiences loss of wealth, position, reputation, and life. But the position with the truths of faith is that it is by means of them that one is regenerated, for they are the actual vessels for receiving good. As are the truths therefore, also the goods within those truths, and the combination of those truths and goods and from this their capacity to be perfected in the next life, so is the state of blessedness and happiness of that person after death.