

Fall at his feet in thanksgiving! He makes the dead live!

¹⁸ The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers. ¹⁹ “My head! My head!” he said to his father. His father told a servant, “Carry him to his mother.” ²⁰ After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. ²¹ She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out. ²² She called her husband and said, “Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return.” ²³ “Why go to him today?” he asked. “It’s not the New Moon or the Sabbath.” “It’s all right,” she said. ²⁴ She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, “Lead on; don’t slow down for me unless I tell you.” ²⁵ So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, “Look! There’s the Shunammite! ²⁶ Run to meet her and ask her, ‘Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?’” “Everything is all right,” she said. ²⁷ When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, “Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why.” ²⁸ “Did I ask you for a son, my lord?” she said. “Didn’t I tell you, ‘Don’t raise my hopes?’” ²⁹ Elisha said to Gehazi, “Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy’s face.” ³⁰ But the child’s mother said, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So he got up and followed her. ³¹ Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy’s face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, “The boy has not awakened.” ³² When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. ³³ He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite.” And he did. When she came, he said, “Take your son.” ³⁷ She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.

Thanks for having me speak to you today. It’s not often that I get to do this kind of thing. For those of you who don’t know me, my name is Elisha. I was one of the LORD’s prophets about 3,000 years ago. You probably remember my predecessor, Elijah. He had a thing for fire. He was the one who prayed to the LORD and fire came down from heaven consuming his altar and sacrificing, showing the false prophets of Baal and Asherah who the true God was (1Kings 18). Elijah was also the one who called down fire from heaven on 100 soldiers who came to capture him (2Kings 1). He had a thing for water too. He once prayed that it would not rain for 3 ½ years and it did. He then prayed

after that time and it rained again! (1Kings 18) On another occasion Elijah took his outer coat, struck the waters of the Jordan River with it and the water divided to the left and right so he could walk across on dry ground (2Kings 2).

I still remember the day he called me to be his successor. I and 11 other men were plowing a field with 12 yoke of oxen. Elijah came up to me and threw his coat on me. So I stopped my work, slaughtered the oxen, burned the plowing equipment and gave the food to my coworkers. Then I left and became his attendant (1Kings 19). One day Elijah asked me, "What can I do for you before I am taken from you?" He let me know that he was going to leave this earth soon and that I would be on my own. I said, "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit." He replied, "You have asked a difficult thing, but if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours, otherwise not." We kept walking and talking when suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated us and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. After I recovered from my initial shock I looked down and there was his cloak. It must have fallen off of him. I picked it up, sauntered over to the Jordan River, struck the water with it, and it divided to left and to the right and I crossed over on dry ground! (2Kings 2)

During my subsequent ministry I often traveled through the village of Shunem, located between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. A well-to-do woman lived in Shunem. One day she invited me into her home and fed me supper. From that time on, whenever I visited Shunem, I stopped by the woman's house for dinner. She came to realize that I was a man of God, a prophet, and constructed a guest room for me on the flat roof of their home, completely furnished. One day while I was visiting I asked this woman how I could repay her for her generosity, "Could I speak to the king on your behalf?" Very humbly she replied that she was very content with what she had and where she lived. I asked my servant, Gehazi, what I could possibly give her. He pointed out that she had no children and her husband was old. In our society it was a disgrace if you did not have children because children were a blessing from the LORD. So I promised her that by this time next year she would be holding her own son in her arms. At first she thought I was mocking her. It was impossible for children to be born to parents in old age. But, just like Abraham and Sarah nothing is impossible with God. Sure enough, the LORD blessed her with a baby boy. However, the same LORD who graciously provided a generous blessing was the same LORD who would permit serious troubles to enter her life.

One day her son was out in the field being a big helper for daddy and his workers as they harvested the grain. Unfortunately he must have suffered from heatstroke. His father had a servant carry him to his mother in the house. She rocked that poor little boy in her lap until noon... and then he died. She carried his limp body up the stairs to my guest room and laid him on my bed and closed the door. This way no one would know what had happened to the boy. She then went to her husband to ask if she could go visit me.

Notice the faithfulness on part of this woman and the unbelief of her husband. She was the one with the idea to provide me with meals. She initiated the construction of my guest room. When her son was faint in the fields the father did not carry his son, but had

a servant do the work. He was more concerned with his work in the field. Despite her great loss she was the one who immediately sought out the help of a man of God. Not once did the husband ask how the boy was but instead questioned her request to go see the prophet when it wasn't required. It was not a New Moon festival celebration day or a Sabbath day when one normally went to church. I'm sure you see this attitude in some husbands today who work hard to provide material benefits for their family but forego their most important responsibility; provide spiritual benefits in the home. But we see the great faithfulness of this woman.

The Shunammite woman set off with great determination, telling her servant not to slow down. While all this was going on I happened to be on Mount Carmel, near the Mediterranean, about 20 miles away. I saw her approaching in the distance. I sent my servant Gehazi to ask if everything was ok. She told him, "Yes, everything is fine." But when she reached me, she fell facedown on the ground and grabbed hold of my feet. My servant tried to push her away, but I rebuked him, because I could see she was in great distress, but I did not know why. The LORD had not revealed it to me.

With tears in her eyes, with a face that showed hope had been shattered, she looked up at me and cried, "Did I ask you for a son? Didn't I tell you, don't raise my hopes?" This must have seemed like a cruel joke to her. She had arrived at an age where she accepted the fact that she would die childless and now this! How would you feel after months or years of experiencing the joy of raising your own child and then they suddenly precede you in death? Why even give me this joy if there would be so much sorrow later on? While she showed frustration and grief, she also demonstrated her faithfulness by coming to see me, knowing that God had power even over death.

The death of a child is a solemn reminder that even children are born with sinful hearts. The LORD tells us in his holy Word that death comes to all because all have sin and that sin came from Adam. Satan wants us to forget this and think that there is a "stage" in life when children can be excused from God's judgment, or a time when teenagers or young adults can sow their wild oats, forget God and pass safely through. God has not promised that we will see our next birthday. That young boy deserved to die, just like you and I do, because he, like us, was spiritually a stillborn child. Some might say, "But he was an innocent little boy! What mother deserves this?" True, other than the grim reality that sinful human beings, including you and me, no matter how old or young we are, deserve sin's awful consequence, at a time determined by God's divine wisdom.

The child was dead. But the LORD used these terrible circumstances to bring strength to this mother's faith and to show you what the LORD, the God of compassion and mercy, can do. The three of us traveled back to the house. I walked up the stairs to my guest room and immediately shut the door on my servant and the mother. There I stood, all alone, facing a dead boy on my bed. I thought back to mentor Elijah. He had faced a similar situation with a widow in Zarephath whose son had died (1 Kings 17:21). So I followed his example. The very first thing I did was engage the LORD in earnest prayer. Only he had the power to raise this dead boy. Then I did as my mentor had done with the widow's son. I laid on top of the boy, face to face, hands to hands, and as I did the boy's

cold body became warm. But he wasn't alive yet. The LORD was testing my faith. He would raise this boy in his time, in his way. I paced back and forth in the room and then tried again. This time the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. He was alive!

Some folks might say the LORD brought this boy life again because he and his mother deserved it. The woman was a selfless, generous woman. But that's not it at all. This resurrection happened only because of God's grace. More importantly, it was the LORD's undeserved love that brought this mother and her son to life spiritually, just like me. We were all looking forward to the Messiah, the one who was prophesied to come and make the spiritual dead live. Although the Shunammite woman called me holy, a man of God, I was still a sinner. I too needed a Savior. I clung to promises of the LORD in his Word.

We had the book of Psalms written by David. Through the Psalms I knew that the LORD would one day forsake his own Son so that I would not have to be forsaken because of my sins (Psalm 22:1). From the Scriptures I also knew that the LORD would put his Son to death for my sin and my sins, so that I would be put to death forever in hell. The LORD also promised that he would not abandon his Son in grave (Psalm 16:9,10) but would raise him again. Because of these promises, I knew I could die in peace, having the same trust that King David had. The LORD would not abandon me. I had the assurance that when I died I would see Elijah again and see my LORD face to face as Job prophesied, **"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes, I and not another. How my heart yearns with me!"** 19:26,27

Just like the mother and her son, you did not deserve to have life eternal. By birth you're born sinful. In addition every day you do things that do not please God. You could use human reason and say you do more good than bad, but the bad is still there. No matter how much good you do, it is still not good enough in God's sight. You're not perfect. Your works are dead, just like you are. You need God to make you alive again. That's exactly what he did.

Through your baptism he raised you from spiritual death to spiritual life. When the water and word were poured on you, Christ's life and death were applied to you. Christ accomplished perfection by living a life free from sin. That life is yours through baptism. You were also baptized into Christ's death. When Christ died on the cross he took your sin and your sins with him to the grave, ever to be seen again. Through baptism you also receive the benefits of Christ's resurrection. You, through your baptism have been raised from spiritual death to spiritual life. Because you have new life through your baptism into Christ's life and death, he will one day escort you into eternal life.

This is why baptism is so important for children and infants, because like that little boy, and like you and me, we do not know when our Heavenly Father will call us home. But since our children are baptized, we know they have faith in their Savior. We know they

have eternal life. When you face death you know that you yourself have eternal life because you have been baptized. What a great comfort! What blessed assurance!

Like any gift received we want to say thanks. When I opened the door to my room and the Shunammite woman saw her son alive, she did not first run to the boy and embrace him, but she fell at my feet, bowed to the ground, and thanked the LORD for his mercy. So also you will fall down on your knees everyday and thank your LORD for your baptism. In thanksgiving you will look back at that day when he raised you from death to life. Everyday you will look forward to that day when you will pass from physical death to eternal life, and join me in heaven, with the Shunammite woman and her son and live with your resurrected and living Savior.

To him alone be the glory! Amen.