



Back to Life – Part 2

Death and Personal Reality

Last week, we took a break from our series in Acts, **Sent**, to spend some time looking at various resurrection stories in Scripture as we approach Easter. Ezekiel 37 reveals that resurrection is the absolute reality of the Christian experience. For anyone to become a Christian, they must be brought back to life, or in other words, resurrected. To use Jesus' words, to be a Christian you must be "born again." The vision pertains to Israel specifically (particularly its future national restoration), but it has implications for the Church as well.

This week, we will examine **2 Kings 4:8-37**, the story of Elisha resurrecting the son of the Shunammite woman. As we are often reminded, death is a certainty and a problem for us all. Faith in God understands that death cannot be avoided, but it also believes that all who place their hope in Jesus can live again. Long before Jesus' death and resurrection, God the Father had been moving amongst His people in Israel displaying His mighty power. The great faith of the Shunammite woman made room for God to work His miracle, and His actions through Elisha picture for us the saving power of the Cross.



BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- How is everyone's week going? Life updates?
 - What is something we can be praying about this week?
 - What is something we can praise this week?

 - Do you know who the prophet Elisha is?
 - Were you aware God resurrected people prior to Jesus' time?
 - In your mind, does God work in seemingly ordinary or overtly strange ways?
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BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

Elisha's miracle is set amidst the division of the Jewish kingdom into a northern and southern state, a dark time in Israel's history characterized by rampant idolatry, political corruption, and above all a rejection of God's prophets. At the beginning of 2 Kings, before his predecessor Elijah's ascension into Heaven, Elisha requested of him, "please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." This was an incredible request, given the prolific prophet that Elijah was, but God granted him this power. The resurrection of the Shunammite woman's son is but one of the several miracles Elisha was empowered by God to perform.

Faith Understands that Death Cannot Be Avoided

2 Kings 4:8-21 (ESV)

⁸ One day Elisha went on to Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to eat some food. So whenever he passed that way, he would turn in there to eat food. ⁹ And she said to her husband, "Behold now, I know that this is a holy man of God who is continually passing our way. ¹⁰ Let us make a small room on the roof with walls and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that whenever he comes to us, he can go in there." ¹¹ One day he came there, and he turned into the chamber and rested there. ¹² And he said to Gehazi his servant, "Call this Shunammite." When he had called her, she stood before him. ¹³ And he said to him, "Say now to her, 'See, you have taken all this trouble for us; what is to be done for you? Would you have a word spoken on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?'" She answered, "I dwell among my own people." ¹⁴ And he said, "What then is to be done for her?" Gehazi answered, "Well, she has no son, and her husband is old." ¹⁵ He said, "Call her." And when he had called her, she stood in the doorway. ¹⁶ And he said, "At this season, about this time next year, you shall embrace a son." And she said, "No, my lord, O man of God; do not lie to your servant." ¹⁷ But the woman conceived, and she bore a son about that time the following spring, as Elisha had said to her. ¹⁸ When the child had grown, he went out one day to his father among the reapers. ¹⁹ And he said to his father, "Oh, my head, my head!" The father said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother." ²⁰ And when he had lifted him and brought him to his mother, the child sat on her lap till noon, and then he died. ²¹ And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God and shut the door behind him and went out.



In a society such as the northern kingdom of Israel that had become largely pagan, this display of friendship by the Shunammite woman was quite remarkable, indicating she probably possessed faith in the God of Israel despite the Jews' spiritual falling away. She and her husband's great wealth allowed them to show exceptional hospitality towards Elisha, preparing for him an entire room to use whenever he passed through the region. Grateful for this favorable treatment, which was likely uncommon for prophets such as him during this time, Elisha asks the woman if there was anything he can do for her as a gift of his appreciation. Despite the rule of ungodly kings in Israel, Elisha as God's prophet still possessed influence within the monarchy, enough for him to speak to the king on the woman's behalf. However, the Shunammite displays contentment living amongst her people, perhaps because, due to her great wealth, she did not have much need for government assistance or political privilege.

The woman never requests anything from Elisha, but the prophet's servant Gehazi points out the Shunammite woman has not borne a son despite her husband being very old. It's possible the woman was barren and unable to conceive a child, a sign in her pagan culture that she was cursed by the gods. Contrary to this misheld belief, God promises through Elisha to deliver her a son in light of her potential circumstances. The son is borne at the appropriate time according to Elisha's words, but in a strange turn of events, no sooner has the Shunammite woman been gifted her child, the child dies. We see here that the Lord has the power to miraculously give life, yet death remains a universal problem that no one is exempt from. The woman was rich, yet no amount of money could keep her boy from dying. The boy was youthful, yet in a matter of hours he was dead in his mother's lap. It's unknown whether her son possessed any health problems prior to his passing, but for all intents and purposes he was healthy until suddenly he wasn't.

Death isn't just universal, but personal. It is the death of those we personally love and cherish that strikes the human heart deepest, and only few can ever know the pain of losing a child like the Shunammite woman. Faith in God understands death is not something that can be controlled, and it can strike at any time, even against those so innocent, against the last person you would expect.



Faith Believes that We Can Live Again

2 Kings 4:22-30 (ESV)

²² Then she called to her husband and said, "Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, that I may quickly go to the man of God and come back again." ²³ And he said, "Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath." She said, "All is well." ²⁴ Then she saddled the donkey, and she said to her servant, "Urge the animal on; do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you." ²⁵ So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her coming, he said to Gehazi his servant, "Look, there is the Shunammite. ²⁶ Run at once to meet her and say to her, 'Is all well with you? Is all well with your husband? Is all well with the child?'" And she answered, "All is well." ²⁷ And when she came to the mountain to the man of God, she caught hold of his feet. And Gehazi came to push her away. But the man of God said, "Leave her alone, for she is in bitter distress, and the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me." ²⁸ Then she said, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me?'" ²⁹ He said to Gehazi, "Tie up your garment and take my staff in your hand and go. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not reply. And lay my staff on the face of the child." ³⁰ Then the mother of the child said, "As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So he arose and followed her.

Immediately following her son's death, the Shunammite woman prepares to leave home to find Elisha. She recognizes that death is a problem to be solved, not a reality to accept, and springs into action rather than entering the normal process of grief. This is because she believes there is a solution to the problem of death, and God is that solution. God speaks and works through the prophets in the land of Israel, so Elisha, representing God on earth, is the logical choice to request assistance. The Shunammite woman has already witnessed one miracle: the birth of her son. She has no doubt God can raise someone from the dead.

Notice the progression this woman goes through as her faith becomes obvious. First, she refused to speak to anyone who isn't the prophet. Then, she refuses to let go of the prophet. Finally, she refused to leave the prophet. Ultimately, she shows us that real faith is a faith that relentlessly pursues, knowing that we can live again, and laying hold of the one who can solve the problem. The imagery of the Shunammite woman clinging to the prophet brings to mind the story of the woman grabbing Jesus' cloak to



be healed. Both laid hold of the one who could save, and so were rewarded for their faith.

Many of us need to seek God and a kind of faith that lives dependently on God, knowing He can fix any of our problems. Maybe then, like the Shunammite woman, we too could say, "All is well," regardless of the situation.

Faith Knows How We Can Live Again

2 Kings 4:31-37 (ESV)

³¹ Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the face of the child, but there was no sound or sign of life. Therefore he returned to meet him and told him, "The child has not awakened."³² When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. ³³ So he went in and shut the door behind the two of them and prayed to the Lord. ³⁴ Then he went up and lay on the child, putting his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands. And as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm. ³⁵ Then he got up again and walked once back and forth in the house, and went up and stretched himself upon him. The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. ³⁶ Then he summoned Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite." So he called her. And when she came to him, he said, "Pick up your son." ³⁷ She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground. Then she picked up her son and went out.

Gehazi's initial attempt to resurrect the son fails despite Elisha's confidence in sending him ahead. Instead, the miracle will require Elisha's direct presence, and the series of events that follow are strange to say the least. The text says Elisha lays directly on top of the boy face to face, mouth to mouth, body to body, and hand to hand. The first time Elisha does this, the boy's body becomes warm once again. The second time, the child sneezes seven times, opens his eyes, and comes back to life. Keep in mind that the number seven in many biblical texts represents perfection because God created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh. The number seven being present in the story is a proof of God's presence within Elisha's miracle.

The boy was not saved by magic, but by the power of God. In that day, even sincere worshippers of the God of Israel would have viewed the



resurrection as a result of magical power bestowed upon Elisha by God, mistaking Elisha for having been gifted with unique personal power. However, there was nothing special about Elisha that resurrected the boy. He was simply a channel for God's own power to manifest in the world, making his success entirely dependent on his being strengthened by the Lord. Ultimately, this story reminds us that resurrection can only come by being covered by the living God. If we could view Elisha's miracle from God's perspective in Heaven looking down, we would not see the Shunammite woman's son, but rather Elisha only, completely covering his body. In the same way, for those who have accepted Christ, the only thing that God sees when He looks down upon us is His Son Jesus. Jesus' death on the Cross covers our sin, and Jesus' perfect life is all that God sees in its place. Death is a problem, but death is a problem with a solution. Real faith knows how we live again, and the answer is the same as it was for the Shunammite woman. The God of Israel, the one who's power brought back to life the son of the woman, has appeared in history in human flesh to bring new life to all who would call on His name and be saved.

BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- What was the purpose of God giving the Shunammite woman a child knowing the child would die a premature death?
- What do you make of the Shunammite woman's response to her son's death? Is this how you would react?
- What does real faith look like when faced with tragic reality like that experienced by the Shunammite woman?
- How does Elisha resurrecting the woman's son parallel our salvation in Jesus Christ?