

Easter

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THE RESURRECTION FOR LIFE THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE 1 KINGS 17:17-24

INTRODUCTION.

There is much in life that does not seem to make sense. Suzy and I were supposed to celebrate our 43rd wedding anniversary this past Thursday. After many long months of waiting she was finally getting physical therapy for her back. She was having success at Weight Watchers. Her diabetes was getting under control. We had no clue that her earthly life was on the brink of eternity. Because of our Christian convictions, we have no doubt that life is better for her, but I am not so happy to have her gone.

I suspect that life does not make sense for many of the friends and family members of the 1200 Israelis who were killed 18 months ago by Hamas in Israel, or for the friends and family members of the 251 people who were taken hostage. The ones killed and taken hostage included babies and women and children. Many of the killings were barbaric.

Ukraine has a higher percentage of evangelicals than most other countries in Europe. Yet this country has suffered at the hands of a bigger country which is led by an evil dictator. Christians in areas occupied by the Russians have been treated badly. Several pastors have been killed.

Some stories in the Bible don't seem to make sense. Abraham waits until his old age to see God's promise fulfilled about having a son who would be born to his wife Sarah. Then God tells him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice at this place called Mount Moriah. At the time that did not make sense.

Not too long ago we had a sermon series on the life of David. At one point God was upset about something in David's life. So the Lord caused a plague to come upon the Jewish people. Thousands of people died. The plague was about to spread to the city of Jerusalem when God called upon the angel of the Lord to stop at the threshing floor of a guy named Araunah, which is also on this same hill called Moriah near Jerusalem. What is the point of this? Why should so many people suffer because of something that David did wrong?

There are certain to be things going on in the lives of many of you this morning that may not make sense. My thesis is that for life to make sense we need to have God's perspective, and God's perspective inevitably involves resurrection and the message of Easter.

I.

(PROJECTOR ON--- I. ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH) I would like for us to consider an incident in the life of Elijah. It is the story of ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW

OF ZAREPHATH. It is described in 1 Kings #17. Elijah lived in the ninth century before Christ. The northern kingdom of Israel had strayed away from the God of the Bible. (DIVIDED KINGDOM) God sent Elijah to tell the Jews in the north and their leaders to repent. He was a prophet. At one point Elijah declares a drought upon the land. So the sources of water dry up, and there is a famine.

Elijah himself is forced to go into nearby Gentile territory to survive. (ZAREPHATH MAP) He shows up at this town called Zarephath and encounters a widow who is gathering sticks at the gate of the city. Elijah asks her for a drink of water and for a piece of bread. She says to him in v. 12 of #17 (1 KINGS 17:12), **“As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.”**

So Elijah tells this widow that God will not allow the bowl of flour or the jug of oil to go empty until rain returns to the land. The widow feeds Elijah, and God miraculously keeps flour and oil in these containers. This goes on for what the text calls “many days.” Thus we read in v. 16 (1 KINGS 17:16), **“The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.”**

So everything is going along fine. Life is at least tolerable. But then in v. 17 comes a problem and a challenge. (1 KINGS 17:17) **“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.”** The son dies. Verse 18 (1 KINGS 17 :18): **“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!’”**

Life makes no sense to this poor woman. She has lost her husband. She apparently has this one son, who in that culture embodies any hope that she has at all for the future. The two of them had been about to die when this prophet came on the scene. He has a reputation for telling people to repent of their sins and turn to God. His presence has made her sensitive to her own sins. But he also has rescued her and her son from starvation. But now this only son has died. What sense does it make?

II.

(II. JOHN THE BAPTIST) Consider another character in the Bible--- JOHN THE BAPTIST. In the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, the prophet is quoting the words of God. He says in v. 1 (MALACHI 3:1) of #3, **“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.”** This passage will later be interpreted by Jesus and New Testament writers as referring to John the Baptist and his ministry of preparing the way for the coming Messiah.

Also in Malachi in #4 v. 5 and the first part of v. 6 God again speaks through the prophet, saying (MALACHI 4:5), **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of**

fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers..." What is the deal here? Malachi was living several centuries after Elijah lived. Elijah is coming back?

The first chapter of Luke's Gospel in the New Testament describes the birth of John the Baptist. There is this old priest by the name of Zacharias who has been unable to have children by his wife Elizabeth. But one day when he is serving in the temple in Jerusalem, an angel appears to him and says that he is going to have a special son whose name will be John. The angel tells Zacharias that this son will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

In v. 17 of #1 the angel makes this statement to Zacharias about his son John the Baptist (LUKE 1:17A), **"... and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children..."** The "him" seems to be the Messiah. But notice that John is going to have the spirit and the power of Elijah. Then the angel in Luke's gospel quotes the prophecy from Malachi about Elijah coming again and turning the hearts of the fathers to the children.

The rest of v. 17 of # 1 reads (LUKE 1:17B), **"...and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."** This John the Baptist is going to be like Elijah in that he is going to make people aware of their sin, and he is going to point them to God. Specifically he is going to point them to Jesus Christ, who is God in the flesh. In the process he is going to prepare people for the Lord.

In #3 of Luke's Gospel we are told a little more about the public ministry of John the Baptist, who seems to have been the cousin of Jesus. In v. 3 we are told (LUKE 3:3), **"And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."** Soon after this Jesus appeared on the scene. John told people that Jesus was the real deal. John even handed off some of his disciples to become disciples of Jesus.

Eventually John's bold preaching about sin and the need for people to repent got him into trouble with this king working for the Romans by the name of Herod Antipas, who was the son of Herod the Great. Herod Antipas threw John into prison. Later Herod Antipas had him beheaded. What sense did that make? Where was God in this?

Yet John fulfilled his God-appointed role. He also seemed to embody many of the characteristics of Elijah in the Old Testament, who was described by the widow of Zarephath in this way (1 KINGS 17:18): **"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!"** Such is the difficulty some people have today. Sometimes it seems as if God is against us.

III.

We come then to JESUS AND HIS DEATH. (III. JESUS AND HIS DEATH) Most of us are pretty familiar with the story. Jesus was born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of a prophecy recorded by the Old Testament prophet Micah that Bethlehem would be the

birthplace of the future Messiah. He and his parents had to flee to Egypt when evil King Herod the Great tried to kill him. When Herod died, his parents returned with Jesus to their home in Nazareth in Galilee in the north of Israel.

When Jesus was about thirty years old, he began presenting himself as a rabbi with disciples who followed Him around. But He was more than a typical rabbi. He claimed to have a special relationship with God. In fact he claimed to be God in the flesh. Some took offense at this. On one occasion the people of his hometown of Nazareth tried to kill Him for blasphemy. On a couple of occasions religious people in Jerusalem tried to kill Him for blasphemy when He claimed in the temple to be God.

The Old Testament in several places spoke of a future Messiah who would deliver His people from their sins and would lead them in a glorious earthly kingdom. He would free the captives and give the blind sight and raise up the lame. Jesus indeed went around healing people, curing people of leprosy, giving sight to the blind, casting out demons, and causing the lame to walk.

But the religious leaders weren't buying His story. He was threatening their authority. They were convinced that He was a fraud and needed to be killed. They accused Him of blasphemy. That charge did not carry much weight with the Roman governor Pontius Pilate who had to give the OK for Him to be executed. So the Jewish leaders accused Him of claiming to be king of the Jews. To say that anyone other than Caesar was king presented a problem. Pontius Pilate could not allow such a claim to stand. To do that would put his own head on the line. So Jesus was crucified by the place that was once known as Mt. Moriah, where Abraham was told to sacrifice his son, and where the angel of the Lord stopped the plague in the days of King David. This is the story of Good Friday.

The death of Jesus made no sense to His disciples. They had been convinced that He really was the Messiah. They believed that He was going to lead His people in an earthly kingdom. But now He was dead and buried. His tomb was sealed up and guarded by soldiers under orders from the Roman governor.

What did this mean for the ministry of John the Baptist, who came in the power and spirit of Elijah, telling people to turn from their sins and to prepare their hearts for the coming of the Messiah? To outward appearances it seemed that it had all ended in the death of an only son, the one-of-a-kind Son of God. None of it made much sense.

IV.

We come then to THE HOPE OF RESURRECTION. (V. THE HOPE OF RESURRECTION) Back in the northern kingdom of Israel we were left with a grieving, Gentile widow for whom life made no sense. Her only son had died. She had helped out this prophet guy. Elijah had miraculously provided a continuing supply of food for this small family. But then the son died, her only son. In despair she cried out (1 KINGS 17:18), **"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!"**

But the story does not end there. In the following verses, which I did not have Don put on the screen, we read (PROJECTOR OFF), **“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. 20 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?’ 21 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.’ 22 And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. 23 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.’ 24 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.’”**

This poor widow knew that her only son was dead. She knew that somehow Elijah was involved in bringing him back to life. There could be no more doubt in her mind that he was from God and that the words that he spoke were from God. Life again made sense.

I don't know that life made complete sense to John the Baptist. He knew that his job was to prepare the way for the Messiah. That meant making his people aware of their sin and their need to turn to God. John knew that Jesus was the Messiah. But I don't know that John realized that he would have such a tragic end himself. Jesus said that there was no one born among humanity who was great as John. Rewards and honor for him must lie beyond the grave.

Like the disciples of Jesus I suspect that John was also hoping that Jesus would take the reigns of power in Israel and implement God's rule upon the earth. But like the widow of Zarephath said about Elijah, John's ministry would not only involve bringing sin to remembrance, but it would also lead to the death of a son--- the Son of God come in the flesh, the unique, only Son of God.

Then there were the disciples of Jesus. The death of Jesus made no sense to them. He tried to prepare them for it. On his last trip to Jerusalem He took the twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to Him. (PROJECTOR ON--- MARK 10:33) He said, **“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.” (MARK 10:34) “And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”**

But the apostles didn't get it. It went right over the heads. They didn't want to hear it, and at first when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He was treated as a hero. They had hopes that Jesus was going to start his kingdom soon. When Jesus was arrested by the authorities, they were taken aback. They left the scene of the arrest and fled. When He was crucified, they were stunned. It made no sense to them.

On the road from Jerusalem to the nearby village of Emmaus on the following Sunday two followers of Jesus were walking with a stranger and talking about the events of the previous days. One of them said (LUKE 24:21), **“But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.”** “We had hoped that this Jesus would save the Jews, but clearly that didn’t happen. He died. The whole thing doesn’t make much sense to us.”

The reality is that Jesus had just redeemed the Jews as well as the Gentiles. In dying on the cross the God-man Jesus had paid the penalty for the sins of the world. He had made life, eternal life, life after death, possible for those who would believe in Him. The stranger who was listening to these two men walking to Emmaus was Jesus risen from the dead. He was the resurrected Christ, but they did not at first recognize Him. (PROJECTOR OFF)

That same evening Jesus appeared to most of the members of the inner circle of the disciples. They were shocked. But they could not help but recognize that it was Jesus. The wounds from the crucifixion were still visible in His body. Thomas, who became known as the Doubter, was not among them on that occasion. He thought that his friends were crazy. He knew that people did not come back from the dead. There was indeed no doubt that Jesus was dead. The Romans did not let criminals escape from the cross. Besides that He had been buried in a sealed tomb.

But a week later Thomas was present when Jesus appeared among them again. Jesus invited Thomas to feel the wounds in His hands and in His side. (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 20:28) Thomas responded, **“My Lord and my God.”**

The widow of Zarephath was right. Anybody who pulls off a resurrection from the dead must be from God, and His words must be regarded as truth. The word from and about this Jesus was that He was not just from God. He was God. His death paid the penalty for the sins of mankind. His resurrection verified that He was who He said He was. The implication for us is that we need to trust Him as our Savior. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Life does not make sense without the Resurrection. Life did not make sense to a young couple in Charleston, South Carolina, in April of 1976. Their baby girl was born way too early. Her prospects did not look good. Dr. Edward West was on duty on April 28 at the hospital where she was born. It turns out that he was supposed to be at a meeting of fellow pediatricians. Somehow he did not get the memo about the meeting.

The premature baby girl stopped breathing when he was on duty, and her heart stopped. She died. Of all the pediatricians who might have been available on that day, Dr. West was the only one who had been trained to resuscitate a premature baby. If he had received the memo about the staff meeting that day, he would not have been there, and the baby would have been sent away for burial.

But Dr. West brought this little girl back to life, and she was rushed to a nearby hospital that offered a greater level of care for endangered preemies like her. Dr. West

remembers passing the mother's room and saying something about her having a very sick baby. But he had been trained not to get too involved with parents in such a situation. He never bothered to learn the baby's name or the family's name. He didn't care very much about emotional connections. The important thing was taking care of the medical issues.

Some years later Dr. West began teaching the Bible in his church. He began to realize that he was lacking in compassion, especially compassion for the families of the little ones he dealt with in his medical care. There was a certain deadness in his emotional life. He began to pray for greater compassion.

On Jan. 28, 2013, he was on duty at Summerville Medical Center, 20 miles northwest of Charleston. The nurses were anticipating the birth of a 23-week premature baby. The hospital's neonatologist was not on duty. So West offered to stay until this doctor returned or the anticipated emergency was over. As they waited, Dr. West began to tell the nurse about his experience in 1976 with the little girl who died in his care and was revived. Another nurse came over to listen to the rest of the story. Dr. West said that he didn't know the baby's name. The second nurse responded, "It was Peggy Michelle Sanders, daughter of Charles and Kathy Sanders." "How do you know?" "I was that baby."

(PROJECTOR ON--- DR. EDWARD WEST) It turns out that Michelle Fulton, her married name, was a mother of two who had worked with West for several years, taking care of newborns, but neither until that moment had realized their earlier connection. God had, in a sense, resurrected this woman and brought her back into the doctor's life. This doctor needed compassion, and Michelle was a key instrument of bringing that into his life. As a Christian interviewer noted, Dr. West **"now sees how, back in 1976, the doctor saved the baby, and the baby began the process of saving the doctor, just the way God had it planned."** (*World* magazine, 1/25/2014) Life often does not make sense without resurrection.

Twelve year old Taylor Scout Smith (TAYLOR SCOUT SMITH) wrote a letter to herself on April 13, 2013. Just after Christmas that year she contracted pneumonia and died. Life did not make sense to her family. When her parents discovered that letter, they noted that it was to be opened ten years later "unless said otherwise." They took the occasion of her death as permission to open it.

In that letter (TAYLOR SCOUT SMITH LETTER) their daughter writes, **"How's your relationship with God? Have you prayed, worshipped, read the Bible or gone to serve the Lord recently? If not, get up and do so NOW! I don't care what point in our life we're in right now, do it. He was mocked, beaten, tortured, and crucified for you! A sinless man, who never did you or any other person any wrong!"**

Taylor ends her letter by writing, **"It's been ten years since I wrote this. Stuff has happened good and bad. That's how life works, and you have to go with it."** Life does often does not make sense. But the resurrection gives us hope. Many of you have

lost mates and other loved ones. I have joined your number. For we who are Christians, there is hope--- confident hope--- that we will see them again, that we will all have resurrection bodies. Because Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, there is hope for us in situations of apparent loss.

Jesus told his critics who criticized Him for healing a lame man on the Sabbath in the Gospel of John #5 vv. 28 & 29 (JOHN 5:28), **“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice... (JOHN 5:29) ...and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment..”** There will be a resurrection from the dead for everyone. The issue is what will happen to us at that resurrection. The issue at that resurrection will be what we have done with Jesus.

A few verses earlier Jesus told His audience (JOHN 5:24), **“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”**

Two chapters earlier this same Jesus is recorded as saying (JOHN 3:16), **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** Because this only Son really did die and really did rise from the dead, we need to listen to His message. We need to make sure that we have truly put our trust in Him for eternal life. In the end life makes sense because of the Resurrection.