

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST June 13, 16 & 17, 2007
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

CHRISTIANS ARE NOT EXEMPT 1 Kings 17:17-24

At times when we listen to some Christian televangelists and preachers they give you the impression that a person who is a Christian never has any problems. We are led to believe that Christians don't battle against addictions to pornography, drugs or alcohol. They make it seem that every Christian family is problem and trouble free – husband wife are always getting along in perfect harmony – children are always obedient and respectful. You are led to believe that if you are following Jesus Christ then you won't face any financial problems. You won't be stricken with an incurable disease. You won't have some chronic illness. You will live to a ripe old age and then just die in your sleep. This all sounds nice. But the reality is that Christians face the same struggles, the same problems, the same temptations, the same diseases and trials as everyone else. As the Bible says, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man." (1 Corinthians 10:13a)

Today we are continuing our summer sermon series on the ministry of the Prophet Elijah. Last week we saw him go to the city of Zarephath in Sidon along the Mediterranean Sea to be fed by a poor widow. There was a drought in Israel by the command of the Lord and everything was drying up. There was little to no water and there weren't many crops producing because of the lack of rainfall. The Lord promised this poor widow that she would have food from a jar of flour that would not be used up and from a jug of oil that would not run dry. So the Lord provided food for Elijah, the widow and her son. Even though the famine was increasing in the land, the widow, her son and Elijah always had food. However, some time later the widow's son became ill and died. As we look at what happened and how the prophet Elijah dealt with this situation we are reminded of an important truth – **CHRISTIANS ARE NOT EXEMPT**. Just because you and I trust in the Lord Jesus as our Savior from sin does not mean that we will not experience temptations, troubles, sicknesses and death in our lives. As we listen to the widow's words to Elijah at her son's death we realize **I) We All Are Infected With Sin**. As we watch the prophet we also are comforted with the truth **II) The Lord Hears Our Plea For Mercy**.

WE ARE INFECTED WITH SIN

The widow of Zarephath must have been extremely grateful and happy that she and her son had been spared from death by starvation. When she had first met the prophet Elijah, she had told him that she was gathering sticks so that she could go home and cook the handful of flour and the little oil that she had left for a meal for herself and her son and then they would wait to die from starvation. By the promise of the Lord they had been spared such a terrible death. But now suddenly and unexpectedly her son contracts an illness and it gets worse and her son stops breathing. He dies.

What was the woman's reaction? Listen to her words to Elijah. "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" (v. 18) The widow expresses anger and upset with the prophet of God. Then the woman was confronted with her imperfection. As she dealt with the death of her son, she felt the guilt of her own sin. It almost appears that the woman believed that it was because of some past sin that she had committed that her son was now dead.

Isn't her reaction typical? How often doesn't it happen when we become ill or a loved one dies unexpectedly or we face some unexpected problem that we become upset and then express anger toward God? How could a good and loving God allow this to happen to my loved one or to me? He was such a good man. How could God do this to him? Or what have I done to deserve this? We blame God for what has happened. It's his fault. If he is so loving, kind and compassionate, why on earth does he allow this to happen to me?

But then the woman moves on and reflects on her own life. She knows that she isn't perfect. She now feels that God is punishing her for some particular sin that she has committed in the past. This response is so typical.

When you and I are diagnosed with some disease or we have some chronic condition or problem, how often don't we think that same as this woman? God is now punishing me for some particular sin I have committed. We often like to think that we are good people. We try and live decent, moral and upright lives. Yet bad things still happen to us. These bad things are not God punishing us for some specific sin. For the Bible says, "There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) When those things occur we then are confronted with the reality that we aren't such good people. We are infected with that cursed disease of sin. Then we are willing to admit at least to ourselves in our thoughts, "I'm not such a good person. I have some skeletons in my closet. I have done, said and thought things that I am ashamed of and now God is going to even the score with me." The troubles, problems and sicknesses of life do remind us of our sinfulness. Why as we get older, do we find our eyesight failing, our hearing growing dim, our memory not as sharp? It's the reality that we are wasting away as the Apostle Paul once wrote. We are in the process of dying and death is the consequence of sin. Why when we are younger are we often restless, impatient and rebellious. We want things our way. We assume we know it all and we have all the right answers. We dislike rules and we aren't quick to listen to the advice or counsel of anyone else. It's because of the cancer of sin that we have been born with and inheres in us until the day we die.

As Christians we are not exempt from the consequences of sin. We have a basically evil nature that we were born with. As we often confess in our confession of sins, "I am by nature sinful and unclean." We are not talking about what we do, say or think. We are talking about a condition that we have. That condition shows itself daily in our lives. When we recognize how totally depraved, helpless and out of control we are, we can only run to God and plead for mercy and help. That's what the prophet Elijah did for the woman and her son.

THE LORD HEARS OUR PLEA FOR MERCY

When the woman came to Elijah, he immediately took her son and carried him to the upper room where he was staying and laid him on his bed. The Elijah prayed to the Lord, "O LORD, my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" (v. 20) Elijah then prays that the Lord would restore the boy's life. The writer of 1 Kings tells us, "Then Elijah stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, 'O LORD, my God, let this boy's life return to him!'" (v. 21) The Lord heard Elijah's cry and the boy's life was restored. Elijah then took the young lad and gave him back to his mother. He said to her, "Look, your son is alive!" (v. 23c) Naturally, the woman was overjoyed. She said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth." (v. 24) This miracle that Elijah had performed validated all that he said. The woman knew that he was a man of God and what he said was the truth.

A similar miracle occurred close to 900 years later. A prophet from Nazareth had spoken the word of the LORD. He had told his enemies, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days." (John 2:19) The temple that Jesus was talking about was his body. His enemies did destroy the temple of his body. They crucified him on a cross and buried him in a tomb. But lo and behold the words that Elijah has spoken to the widow, "Look, your son is alive!" were echoed again when God raised his Son Jesus back to life on Easter morning. Jesus' resurrection from the dead validated his words also. Just as the resurrection of the widow's son validated the words of the prophet Elijah. The words that Jesus has spoken are the truth.

What are those words? They are the words of encouragement, of pardon and strength. They are the words of Jesus when we are dealing with sicknesses, problems and troubles, "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart I have overcome the world." (John 16:33b) They are the words of our Savior when we are overcome with guilt and shame for some particular sin, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." They are the words of our Lord who promises us when we feel all alone and forsaken, "Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20b) They are the words of the Savior when he says, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned. But whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." (John 3:18) They are the words of our God when it comes to our giving and sharing our wealth with others, "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. Whoever

sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion. For God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 6-8)

How comforting and encouraging to know that the Word of God is the truth. When we read the Bible, we are not reading stories dreamt up by someone centuries ago. We are listening to the very words of our God. When we are overcome with our sinfulness and the messes we have made of our lives by the wrong choices and decisions we have made, we have someone we can turn to. We can turn to our Savior. Who invites us to come to him and to lay our cares, our worries and fears on him for he cares for us. Just as Elijah turned to the Lord and cried for mercy for the widow’s son so we can always turn to our Savior and seek his mercy and love and we will never be disappointed.

Amen.