

**Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing.** <sup>18</sup> She said to Elijah, “What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?”

<sup>19</sup> “Give me your son,” Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. <sup>20</sup> Then he cried out 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?” <sup>21</sup> Then he 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!”

<sup>22</sup> The LORD heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived. <sup>23</sup> Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, “Look, your son is alive!” (NIV84)

Theme: Trust your powerful, compassionate God.

1. He will raise your loved ones.
2. He will raise you.

You’ve seen the scene numerous times. It plays out something like this: Someone dies, perhaps he is shot, stabbed, has a heart attacked, or something else. Then a loved one—a parent or child, a good friend, or so on, rushes to his side. They are beside themselves, typically screaming at the top of their lungs—“Nooo.” They hold the dead in their arms against their chests, sobbing, rubbing his head. They are distraught—a total mess.

It’s a scene we have seen many times in movies; but if only that scene were reserved for movies. Sadly, it happens each and every day in real life. People die. It’s the result and wages of sin. Death comes to your loved ones and eventually it comes to you too. You can’t escape it—no one can. There is only one hope—Christ. Today you are told to trust your powerful, compassionate God. For he will raise your loved ones from the dead and he will raise you from the dead.

The prophet Elijah had met this woman earlier. There was a severe famine going on so God sent Elijah to her. She was a widow—unable

to work and had no money. She was gathering sticks to make some bread with the last little bit of oil and flour she had for her and her son. That would be their last meal, and then they would die of starvation. But Elijah convinced her to make him some bread for him first and the flour and oil would never run out. And as long as Elijah stayed with her they had enough to eat and drink. Then sometime later, we don’t know exactly how long, the woman’s boy died.

By some illness, we don’t know what, he breathed his last. Her only child, dead. She was distraught. She had no family left. She had no way to make money and no one to support her. She was helpless and angry. And so she complained about God and his prophet. **What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?**

God has blessed me so far. Three out of four of my grandparents are still alive. So are both of my parents, all my siblings, close relatives, or good friends. I don’t have much experience with someone close to me dying—whether unexpectedly or not. Perhaps you can say the same. Or maybe not. Perhaps you have experienced the death of those close to you. You may have even been present when they died. Maybe it was a spouse or a sibling; parent or grandparent, or maybe even one of your own children. A close friend, a relative, or perhaps a friend of one of your children. You’ve held the dead in your arms. You have seen them buried in the ground—where their now lifeless body decays, turning into dust. You used to enjoy their company, their laugh and smile. But now all that is gone—never again to see their face or hear their voice. By personal experience you have felt the pain and sting of death.

And at times we may feel helpless. You lost your loved one. They meant everything to you. Perhaps they supported you, whether it is physically or emotionally. Their very presence cheered your heart. So now, you don’t know how you are going to continue. You’re distraught and afraid. And so you question God. “How could he let this happen? Why did he take away my loved one?” At times, we may wonder why God would allow this to happen like Elijah did. **O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?**

But God would rather have someone live than die. For he has compassion on us. And he uses his power for our good. That is what he did with the widow. Elijah took the boy from his mother's clinging arms. Then he carried him up to his room and laid him on his own bed. Then, for some reason, he laid on the boy three times. At the same time, he prayed to God. **O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!** Elijah knew where the power came from. It came from God. He has power to do whatever he wants. And if he wanted he could raise the boy from the dead.

And that's exactly what happened. The boy's life returned to him. He was no longer dead, but alive. So Elijah took him back downstairs and gave him to his mother. Her sorrow and angst removed. She was no longer helpless or hopeless. But she confessed her faith in the Lord and his power.

Maybe you have felt the same pain as this mother and widow. Or maybe not. But whether you have or haven't, you will some day. Your loved ones will die. You will feel, first-hand, the effects of sin. You will know exactly how that widow felt. But there is no need to complain or worry. For we have a powerful and compassionate God. Jesus knows what's it's like living in this world. He knew that pain first hand when his good friend, Lazarus, died.

And just as he had compassion on the widow of Zarephath he will have compassion on you. Just as he raised those boys from the dead so he will also raise your loved ones from the dead. Their bodies may be in the grave—decaying. You may never see their face or hear their voice again—on earth. But you will see them again in heaven. For when Christ returns on the Last Day he will raise up all people. And so all believers will live with him in heaven forever. And there you live side-by-side with your loved-ones who died as believers. As Paul says in 1 Thessalonians, **We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.** We may mourn when a loved one dies for we will no longer see him in this life. But we rejoice that we will see him again. Only this time it will be with a perfect relationship and with a perfect God—forever.

Now its one thing to face the death of someone else, but it's a completely different matter when face with your own death. Then death becomes real. You feel sad when a loved one dies. But eventually that pain goes away, or at least dwindles a little. But their death doesn't affect you. That is, it doesn't affect your eternal life. But not so with your death. That affects you directly and immensely. When you die, that's it. No second chances—instant judgment. Maybe death is immanent for you. Your sick. Your body is failing. You know that sooner rather than later, you will be no more. Or perhaps your healthy, but going down hill. Your middle aged and your best days are behind you. Your body is growing larger yet weaker; you are relying more and more on medication, glasses, and so on. And you know that you've probably lived through more days than are yet to come. Or perhaps your young. Your healthy—your death is something you look at in the far future—you have many good days ahead of you. Yet death is coming. No matter who you are or how healthy you are, death will eventually come. It could come today. It's just one heart attack, one bout with cancer, one car accident, one natural disaster away. You may not live to see tomorrow. You will, eventually, face death. And that's a little scary. It's only natural to be a little afraid of death. For death is the unknown. It's not like we have any eye witness accounts—so that we could know exactly what happens at death. And so you ask yourself this one important question: What will happen to me when I die? Are you sure you will be in heaven when you die? And what makes you so sure? You know all the sins you have committed—all the horrible acts you have done—and you wonder: will I really be in heaven when I die?

Scripture answers that question emphatically and often. John says in chapter 20, **these (words) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.** You can rest assured that you will be in heaven. How? You're a sinner. And you know that the **wages of sin is death.** But you also know that **the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Christ has paid for our sins by his suffering and death on the cross. **He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.** Through his life, death, and resurrection we are saved from eternal damnation.

Because of Christ and him alone we have eternal life. Because Christ died and now lives, we too will live when we die. In fact, his resurrection is a guarantee that we will follow him. **Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** Jesus rose from the dead—he was the first one. And there are more to follow. Jesus says something similar. **Because I live, you too will live.** Because he lives, we know that we too will live. He defeated death for us. And so we don't have to be afraid of death. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, **Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Jesus once told Martha at the death of her brother and his friend, Lazarus, **I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live, even though he dies. Whoever believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?** Do you believe this? All who believe receive the gift that Christ has won. Through faith we inherit eternal salvation. **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is a gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.** It is all the work of Christ. And so you don't have to be afraid of death. For eternal life doesn't depend on you and what you have done—but on Christ and what he has done for you already. Through Christ you can be confident when we face our own death. And so you can say with Job, **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 within me!**

Death doesn't just happen in movies. It happens each and every day. It has come to your loved ones. And eventually, it will come to you too. But death is nothing to be afraid of. For just as God raised the widow's son from the dead, so God will raise all people from the dead. Through faith you will live with your loved ones again in heaven, standing side-by-side with all other believers, singing the praises of our powerful and compassionate Lord forever. Amen.