

The Dead Shall Rise: A City-Wide Prayer and Fasting Initiative (HCPN)

In Response to a Faith-Filled Request (2 Kings 4:18-37)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC English Service on March 16, 2025

Introduction

- ❖ Last week, Pastor Henry helped kickstart a new sermon series that we're doing in conjunction with numerous churches across the city – churches all connected with the Houston Church Planting Network. We're a partner church of what is described as, "a network of networks committed to strengthening church planters to multiply churches to reach every man, woman and child in the greater Houston region." That's HCPN's mission. And they were instrumental in providing the training and support that Jonathan needed to plant Ethnos Church out of HCC over a year ago. We love HCPN and what it stands for.

- ❖ **In the past few years, during the Lenten season, HCPN has been organizing a city-wide initiative of prayer and fasting.** Encouraging churches to pray for revival – for God to cause a spiritual awakening in our lives, our families, our churches, and in our city at-large. It's called *Awaken Houston*. **We've been encouraging everyone to make a commitment to pray on a daily basis for the gospel to bear fruit in our lives. Especially for the salvation of those in our lives who are far from God.** And we want you to consider fasting from a meal or some other daily convenience. Not as a form of punishment or to merit favor. But as a means to go deeper with God. Diverting the time you would've spent eating a meal, or on your phone, or on social media – to spend more time with God in the Word and in prayer.
 - So if you haven't sign up to join us, please do in the lobby after service. You'll get a wristband to help remind you to pray daily. And you'll have access to a GroupMe to share praises and prayer requests with others at HCC who are committed to daily prayer and fasting during the 47-days of Lent.

- ❖ Now on top of encouraging members to daily prayer and fasting, churches involved in *Awaken Houston* are preaching through a shared series called *The Dead Shall Rise*. **Each Sunday, we'll look at a text, from the Old or New Testament, where God raises someone from the dead.** Leading up, of course, to Jesus's Resurrection on Easter Sunday.
 - The point of revisiting these biblical stories is to highlight the power of God – his power over life and death. And to inspire you to make faith-filled prayers, asking God to exercise that same power in your life and in the lives of those far from God, who are still dead in their sins, in need of spiritual life. My hope, this morning, is that you'll come away encouraged to join us in this prayer and fasting initiative.

- ❖ **The particular story we're looking at centers on the prophet Elisha and his interaction with a wealthy woman from the town of Shunem.** We learn earlier in vv8-10 that she made a point to offer hospitality to Elisha whenever he passed through that region. She even managed to convince her husband to build an extra guesthouse on her roof to accommodate the prophet whenever he's in town.
 - **So the picture we're given is of a woman of significant means who had great respect for God's prophet.** Which in those days meant a great respect for God's Word (since prophets were bearers of God's Word to God's people). So basically she's one of us.

- ❖ Most of us are people of significant means. Or we grew up (or we're growing up) in a household of no little means. And most of us have great respect for God's Word – a high view of Scripture. So we can see ourselves in this Shunammite woman. So the lesson she learned would equally apply to us. **And what she came to realize is the limit of our earthly prosperity and power and to put our hope and trust in God's unbounded mercy and might.** She came away with three realizations, and I hope the same for you: (1) What money can't buy you. (2) What only God can do for you. (3) What peace his power affords you.

What Money Can't Buy You

- ❖ Let's start by considering what money can't buy you. That's one of the lessons learned by the Shunammite woman. **Again, let me emphasize how she's portrayed as a "wealthy woman."** The narrator uses those very words to describe her in v8. And then later, in v13, after she's built the guesthouse and he's taken advantage of it, Elisha reaches out to see how he can repay her for all the trouble. Look at v13, *"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."*
 - So the prophet offers her access to power. To speak to the king or commander on her behalf. "You got any problems that need solving? Any potholes on your street need fixing? Any neighbors giving you trouble? Do you need me to talk to the king for you? I've got connections. How can I help you?"
 - And she essentially says, "I'm good." Thanks but I'm doing well. *"I dwell among my own people."* **In other words, this woman is rooted and respected in her community.** She doesn't have material needs. At least none that can't be resolved through her own people.
- ❖ **We're presented with a woman who has prosperity and power.** With no needs to present before a king. **But that doesn't mean she's altogether free of needs.** She has needs. Just not any that money can solve. Her needs can't be resolved by writing a check or swiping a card.
 - Elisha's servant tells him, in v14, that *"she has no son, and her husband is old."* She's childless. For years, she has carried a heartfelt need to be a mother. **But no amount of wealth can help. Earthly prosperity and power can't provide her a son.**
- ❖ But God can. So Elisha calls her to come to him. Look at v16, *"¹⁶And 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.'" ¹⁷But the woman conceived, and she bore a son about that time the following spring, as Elisha had said to her."*
 - **So just like when Sarah was promised a child in her old age, this woman responds with skepticism to the thought of bearing a child at her age and with her condition.** But according to God's promise, surpassing her expectations, she conceives and, in the following spring, she bears a son.

- ❖ But then, in v18, the story is fast forwarded many years. Her son is now grown. Old enough to work the fields with his father. And we're told that, one day, her son, out in the field, complains of a massive headache. He's brought to his mother, laid in her arms, and dies. **This wholesome story of God kindly providing a son to a kindly, hospitable woman suddenly turns into a tragedy.** It's supposed to shock you as a reader. It comes out of nowhere.
 - But that's the nature of a tragedy. You never expect it. And tragedies are impartial. **They afflict the rich as much as they do the poor.** There's nothing this woman could have done to change the outcome. Her prosperity and power were helpless in preventing the death of her beloved son. And that was her concern from the beginning, from when she was first promised a son.

- ❖ When she said to Elisha, "Don't lie to me," she didn't just mean, "Don't promise me a son when, in reality, it can't happen." **What she was essentially saying is, "Don't promise me a joy that could be taken away as quickly as it's given."** Notice how she says the same thing in v28 when she reaches Elisha to inform him that her "miracle child" is dead. *"Then she said, 'Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me?'"*
 - In other words, for so long I felt a motherly need to hold my own child in my own arms. And it hurt so bad for that need to go unfulfilled. **But what hurts even more – what's even more painful – is to tease me with the joy. To fill that need – to let me hold my own son – only to let him die in my own arms.** She tells the prophet, "I never asked you for a son." Because she knew this could happen. No amount of money or power could purchase her a child. Which meant no amount of money or power could protect that child from all tragedy and harm.

- ❖ Friends, that's the lesson we need to learn. **There are advantages to having wealth and power.** There's no denying that. And anyone given those blessings ought to steward them well. For the greater good and benefit of others and *not* for selfish gain. **But there are very real limits to prosperity and power.** Especially when it comes to matters of life and death.
 - **We human beings, as earthly creatures, cannot create life nor prevent death.** It's a lesson we seemingly refuse to learn. There is so much money and research and technology being invested to pursue both ends. To create life (according to our preferences and design) and to indefinitely extend life (avoiding death altogether). But all such efforts will inevitably fall short. **Because that's the job and prerogative of our Creator alone.** Only God gives and takes away.
 - **And that applies, as well, to the giving of spiritual life to human beings who are spiritually dead in their sins and trespasses** (Eph 2:1). There is nothing we can do to create spiritual life in the hearts of our friends and family who are far away from God. And there's nothing they can do to make it happen for themselves.

- ❖ That's the message of the gospel. That all of us are spiritually bankrupt. Spiritually impoverished. **And no amount of earthly prosperity or power will advantage you when you're dealing with the salvation of your soul.**

- ❖ But according to the gospel, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:3). **It's good news to hear that spiritual life is *not* in your hands – it's *not* in your control.** It's ultimately in the hands of our good and gracious God. Which means the most important thing we can do is to fold our hands in prayer. **To go to God in desperate prayer for those in our lives who are in deep need of spiritual life.** Of an awakening in their spiritually dead hearts. That's what this season of prayer and fasting is all about.
 - **I think we often forget that the most powerful and effective means to bring about a spiritual awakening in the lives of the lost is faith-filled prayer.** It's not the warm up to the main event. Prayer *is* the main event. Because when we pray, we're accessing power infinitely greater than anything we can do or accomplish on our own.

What Only God Can Do For You

- ❖ That's a lesson the Shunammite woman apparently learned. **That's why she made a beeline to the prophet Elisha – who represented God and spoke for God in those days.** If you think about it, it's rather strange how she reacted when her son died in her arms. She didn't mourn. She didn't tear her clothes and put ashes on her head. That's what you'd expect a grieving mother to do in those days. But look at v21, *“And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God and shut the door behind him and went out.”* We're told she asked her husband for a donkey and a servant to assist her in traveling to Mount Carmel to visit Elisha.
 - This woman came to the realization of her own limits – of the limits of what her money can buy. **And now she's going to depend on what only God can do for you.** That's the second realization for all of us to consider.
- ❖ If we continue on in the story, she arrives at Mount Carmel in v25. Now at this point, Elisha is in the dark regarding her son. The LORD has hidden it from him. So he sends his servant to find out why she's here and what she needs. But just as quickly as she brushed off her husband, she brushes off Elisha's servant and goes straight for him. Look at v27, *“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.””*
 - **Now when he learns of her son's death, Elisha's first reaction is to send off his servant, in all haste to Shunem, to lay his staff on the child's face.** It's not clear as to why he suggested that or what Elisha expected to happen. Maybe he was thinking of Moses and how the LORD used his staff to perform miracles in the past. But we're told in v31 that the staff had no effect. *“There was no sound or sign of life.”* Elisha's servant returns and says, *“The child has not awakened.”*
- ❖ Now this whole time, we're told the Shunammite woman has yet to leave Elisha's side. Apparently, she wasn't impressed by the prophet's staff. She says in v30, *“As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.”* **She didn't come all this way for a magical staff. She came for the prophet because he's “the man of God.”** He represents God. A staff doesn't. **So really she's here for God and his power.**

- ❖ So Elisha goes with her back to Shunem. When he arrives at the rooftop guesthouse, he finds the child lying dead on his bed. Look at v33, “*33So he went in and shut the door behind the two of them and prayed to the LORD. 34Then 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.*”
 - Elisha got up, walked back and forth in the house (I assume praying), and went up and stretched himself on the child a second time. And we’re told in v35, “*The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.*” Then the woman came, falling at Elisha’s feet, and she picked up her son and went out.

- ❖ This whole episode is strange. Why are you lying on the dead corpse of this child, mouth to mouth? That’s just weird. It seems so random. **But if you were here last week and you heard Pastor Henry preach on 1 Kings 17 – and how God used the prophet Elijah to raise the widow of Zarephath’s son – then you’re starting to see a pattern.** There we encountered another woman who suddenly lost her beloved son. Who also appeals to the man of God. There we saw Elijah lay the dead child on his own bed in the upper chamber. And we saw the prophet stretch out on the dead corpse of the child. Now, in that instance, it took three attempts, but the widow’s son eventually came back to life.
 - Now why are there two almost identical stories in 1 and 2 Kings – originally contained all in one scroll – why are there two stories of a prophet, a mother, and a dead son raised back to life? **Because the narrator is trying to show how Elijah’s prophetic ministry is seamlessly carried forth and continued through the ministry of Elisha, his disciple.**

- ❖ **In fact, Elisha doesn’t just continue his mentor’s ministry. He eclipses it.** Back in 2 Kings 2, right before Elijah was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire, Elisha asked for a “*double portion*” of the Spirit that rest on Elijah to rest on him. And that double portion is granted. Which explains why it only took two attempts for Elisha to revive the child. And why more miracles are performed by Elisha compared to his mentor.
 - **The whole point is that God is good and gracious and willing to continue doing mighty deeds among his people, including raising the dead to life.** Even as his people continue to sin and rebel and chase after idols. God doesn’t decrease his presence. He does the opposite. **He increases the presence and power of his Spirit.** Doubling the portion. Doubling the impact through the prophetic ministry of Elisha.

- ❖ That’s what the similarities between Elijah and Elisha’s miracles are meant to teach us. **But if you keep pulling that thread throughout the pages of Scripture, the next prophet, the next man of God, that performs similar miracles is none other than Jesus himself.**
 - If you think about it, the similarities between Elisha and Jesus are striking. First of all, their names are similar. **Elisha** means “*God saves.*” **Jesus** (Yeshua) means “*The LORD (Yahweh) saves.*”

- ❖ Just as **Elisha** received that double portion of the Spirit by the waters of the Jordan – **Jesus** receives the Spirit as he’s baptized in the Jordan. Earlier in 2 Kings 4, **Elisha** rescues a poor widow from financial debt – while **Jesus** rescues people from the debt of their sin (a worse fate). At the end of chapter 4, **Elisha** miraculously feeds a hundred people with twenty loaves of barley and a sack of grain – while **Jesus** feeds five thousand with five loaves and two fish.
 - In chapter 5, **Elisha** heals one Syrian commander of his leprosy – while **Jesus** heals many lepers, even touching them. Not contracting their illness but transferring his wholeness. In chapter 6, **Elisha** makes an axe head defy the laws of physics and float on water – while **Jesus** himself walks on water!
 - Later in chapter 13, **Elisha** is dead and buried. We’re given this strange story of a funeral interrupted by marauders. The body being buried is hastily thrown into Elisha’s grave. And we read, “*As soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet.*” (2 Kg 13:21) So his bones resurrect the dead, but Elisha and his bones remain in the grave. But **Jesus** himself resurrects from the dead. His body, including his bones, leave that grave.
 - And just as **Elisha** is preceded by the prophet Elijah, **Jesus** is preceded by the prophet John. Whom Jesus even identifies as the new Elijah (Mt 11:14). Which, by extension, would make **Jesus the new Elisha**.
- ❖ The point is this: **Just as Elisha’s ministry continues and even eclipses Elijah’s, Jesus’s ministry continues and definitely eclipses Elisha and his ministry.** Just as God is good and gracious to pour out his Spirit in the days of Elisha, God pours out his Spirit on his Son and through his Son in the Gospels.
 - **Once we see Jesus as the new and better Elisha, it begins to make sense of this strange account of the prophet laying flat out on top of the dead child.** Imagine, in that moment, if God were to look down upon that child, what would he see? He wouldn’t see the boy. He’d only see the prophet perfectly covering him. Mouth over mouth, eyes over eyes, hands over hands. **It’s fair to say that boy was hidden in Elisha.** And that’s when God bared his mighty arm; reached down into the jaws of death; and pulled that boy back into the land of the living.
- ❖ And this is where Jesus, once again, eclipses Elisha. **In taking on our flesh; in identifying with us; in living the life we should’ve lived; and dying the death we should’ve died – Jesus perfectly covers over sinners like us.** When we trust in him as Lord and Savior, we are hidden in Christ. **So that when God looks down upon us, he doesn’t see us in our blatant sin and shame. No, he sees his Son.** He sees us covered in Jesus’s righteousness.
- ❖ **Friends, that’s the only way someone crosses over from death to life.** That’s when God, once more, bares his mighty arm and rescues us from the wages of our sins. Resurrecting our dead hearts with new spiritual life. No amount of earthly prosperity or power can make this happen. **Only the mercy and might of our Savior God can do it.** And all because of Jesus and what he’s done for us.

- ❖ **And this, once again, is why we need to prioritize prayer.** Praying for God to do what only he can do – to save the lost. To cause a spiritual awakening. And we need to do this together as the church. Last year, as a ministry staff, we started reading the book, *A Praying Church*. And we were convicted that – though there’s a lot of prayer taking place in our separate groups and in our individual lives – we weren’t sure if we could be described as A Praying Church. Because we haven’t been prioritizing enough regular, corporate prayer.
 - That’s why we’ve decided to pilot an **All Church Prayer Service**. The first one will take place on Palm Sunday, April 13th, from 5-6pm in the chapel. It won’t just be like any other prayer meeting. **It’ll be a worship service but focused on prayer.** Conducted in English but open to all three congregations, meaning everyone can pray in their heart language. We’ll also hold a potluck afterwards for whoever wants to stick around to fellowship over food. The goal is to hold a Prayer Service once a month on second Sundays. We’ll pilot it, evaluate it, and see where it goes.
- ❖ Friends, if you’re feeling the same burden – realizing how powerless we are and how desperate we need to be for the life-giving power of God – then make a point of joining us for our All Church Prayer Service. Let’s be rightly described as A Praying Church.

What Peace His Power Affords You

- ❖ Now let me conclude with a brief consideration of our third realization. **Once you realize and accept what only God can do for you, then you begin to realize and appreciate what peace his power affords you.** I see this peace implicit in the Shunammite woman’s demeanor and response immediately after her son dies.
 - She not going to accept this outcome. She won’t acquiesce to the harsh reality of death. She won’t give up and give in. Yes, her world has been shattered. Her life has been turned upside down. **But she seems to know that this is not how it has to end. That there is hope in the face of death.** That’s why she’s determined to go before God – as represented by the man of God.
- ❖ She doesn’t even know all that we know. She doesn’t understand that Elisha ultimately points us to Christ. That his ministry is ultimately eclipsed by Jesus’s. **So if she can respond to suffering with this kind of peace and carry herself in the face of tragedy with that kind of poise – then so can we.** We can respond the same way. We can be just as determined.
 - Look at how she’s blowing past everyone. No one is getting in her way or slowing her down. Two times she’s questioned. Once by her husband in v23. Another time by Elisha’s servant in v26. Both times, they’re wondering what’s the hurry. Are you okay? And both times she answers, “All is well.”
- ❖ In v26, she’s specifically asked, “*Is all well with the child?*” And she answered, “*All is well.*” In the NASB and KJV, she literally says, “*It is well.*” She couldn’t tell you how it was going to work out. She wasn’t absolutely certain she’d see her son again. **But her faith and hope was in the mercy and might of the LORD. In the power of her good and gracious God. That’s the reason she could say, “It is well.”**

- ❖ In 1873, **Horatio Spafford's wife and four daughters** were on a steamship crossing the Atlantic. In the early hours of the night, while passengers slept, the ship was tragically struck by another boat and sank in 12 minutes. 226 people were killed including Spafford's four daughters, ages 12, 7, 4, and 18-months. His wife was one of the few survivors. Shortly after, as he made the same trek across the Atlantic to be reunited with his grieving wife, he wrote the hymn "**It is Well with My Soul**" as his ship sailed past where his daughters had died.
 - In the face of tragedy, Spafford was inspired by the words of this Shunammite woman. When he lost his children, where did he turn? To the pages of Scripture. To this story of a woman who tragically lost her son. He turned to her for inspiration.

- ❖ They asked her, "Is it well with your child?" And, of course, it's not well for him. My child is dead. But it *is* well. It is well with my soul. **Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come – it is well. Why? Because I have a deep-seated belief that God is good and God is great.** That he is all-loving and all-powerful. That he still sits on his throne. And that there *will* be a resurrection. That the dead shall rise.
 - **That is the kind of peace that God's resurrection power affords.** Do you know it? Have you experienced it? Do you believe it's real and really available to you *if* you believe? I invite you to believe and to receive God's power in your life. **All of us need this – the life-giving, soul-awakening power of God that raises the dead.**