

**11-1-09 1 Kings 17:17-24 “Living in the Upper Room” (Part 2)**  
**by Richard Boatman**

Elijah has gone from the cutting place of Cherith to the refining place at the village of Zarephath. His coming here saved a widow and her son from starvation. Now they were all living in the miracle of endless oil and flour for bread. But then the woman's son died. The widow assumed the worst—Elijah had exposed her sin and God's wrath had killed her son. Elijah did not attempt to argue theology with the grieving woman. Rather, he *showed* her theology...he took into his arms her symbol of pain and despair—her dead 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 living, and laid him on his bed.**

Last week we discussed how important it is to live in the upper room. (I'm speaking figuratively, so don't feel a need to move your bedrooms upstairs.) As with Jesus serving the Last Supper and the one hundred and twenty awaiting the power of the Holy Spirit, the upper room represents living centered in Christ, centered in the indwelling reality of the Spirit; living experientially as those abiding in Christ. Paul ends his Ephesians 3 prayer with: "[That you may really come] to know...the love of Christ, which far surpasses mere knowledge; that you may be filled...unto all the fullness of God—[that is] may have the richest measure of the divine Presence, and become a body wholly filled and flooded with God Himself!" As emphasized in the last lesson, that sounds like the upper room...*filled and flooded with God Himself!*

Like Elijah, we need to be able to carry tragedy—other's as well as our own—into the spiritual center...a refuge for the soul. In today's teaching, we pick up here in Elijah's "upper room" as he approaches God on behalf of this broken widow:

**<sup>20</sup> Then he cried out, "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, "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 upper room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"**

One of the songs our praise team sings is *Breathe*. The refrain says, *And I, I'm desperate for You; and I, I'm lost without You*. The word *desperate* is defined as

“having a very great desire; extremely dangerous or serious; extreme; drastic [in desperate need of].” There is in the tenor of Elijah’s voice a clear sense of desperation. Nearly a thousand years later, the one hundred and twenty awaited the advent of the Holy Spirit in the upper room. They were surrounded by a hostile Jewish leadership and a complicit and sometimes ruthless Roman army. Jesus had ascended and now these disciples awaited the Holy Spirit, *desperate* for God’s power in order to accomplish the task Christ had given them.

Are we desperate for God? Do we ever cry out in repentance for quenching the Spirit, not allowing Him to be in us what Christ has purposed?

There’s an old hymn entitled *Revive Us Again*. One verse says, *Revive us again/ Fill each heart with Thy love/ May each soul be rekindled/ With fire from above*. One wonders how much church activity goes on in America devoid of this fire. How many programs are conceived or projects begun with no sense of God’s “fire” enlivening them...guiding and fueling them?

Revive Us Again! The word revive implies at one time we’ve been “vived.” Isn’t that right? You can’t be re-vived unless you’ve first been “vived.” You can’t reapply for a job if you haven’t applied at least once already. So that makes us ask, how much is being done in the Church today by folks who have never even been “vived”? It’s like John Wesley writing in his journal that he was going to America to convert the Indians. But then in a sad note completes the thought: “But who will convert me?”

God hears Elijah’s desperate prayer and revives the boy. The one who was dead was now alive, praise the Lord. Years ago down in Alabama, I was riding in the car one evening with a friend and his grandparents. The grandfather was driving and we were all visiting when rather slowly he began drifting into the left lane. There he stayed, driving on the wrong side of the highway. The grandmother, sensing our concern, whispered, “Oh, he has these spells where he sort of goes to sleep with his eyes open.” We said, “Shouldn’t we wake him?” The grandma said, “No, because it startles him.” Is that a picture of a sleeping church, or what? We don’t want to spiritually wake them up because it might startle or upset them or make them feel uncomfortable.

In Revelation 3:15-20 Jesus addresses the Christians at Laodicea, a spiritually sleeping church in desperate need of reviving: “I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth! You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. So I

advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference. Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.”

To the hard working and morally upright church at Ephesus, Jesus said, “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love” (Revelation 2:4) In other words, while working *for* me, you’ve forgotten *me*. Recently my mom told me a joke about two elderly gentlemen visiting around the kitchen table. One said to the other, “The wife and I ate at a wonderful restaurant last night.” “Oh,” the other man responded, “where?” “Hmmm,” the first man paused. “Let me see...it was...hmmm. What’s the name of that flower that has thorns on the stem and a beautiful red bloom?” “A rose?” the second man responded. “Yes,” said the first man gratefully. And then he yelled into the kitchen, “Hey Rose, what was the name of that restaurant we ate at last night?” Perhaps some of us have worked a long time *for* Jesus, but forgotten who he is. “Lord, like Elijah and the widow’s son, revive us again. Help us return to our first love.”

**<sup>24</sup> Then the woman 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."**

It is a powerful thing when *the* word of God becomes *a* word to us. “Now I know,” the woman said. Romans 4 describes this revelation, this ascension of God’s word into Abraham’s heart by saying, “And being fully assured that what God had promised, God was able also to perform” (21). This knowing, this assurance is evidence of the Word prevailing in our hearts. Listen to the description in the book of Acts as to of how the church at Ephesus began under Paul’s ministry: “Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus...were all seized with awe and alarm and terror, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their [magical arts] books together and burned them publicly. When they calculated their value, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas [around \$3 million in today’s currency]. In this way the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing” (19:17-20).

Did you notice the connection between *the* word becoming *a* word and repentance and change? The word prevails when our daily lives are actually altered by the Word of God. But not everyone celebrates such change. Three verses later, Acts 19

reports that “there arose a great disturbance about the Christian Way” (23). Revivals are often accompanied by riots. The conversions to Christ were affecting the economy at Ephesus that was driven by the worship of idols. The burning of all these books of sorcery represented a dramatic shift in economic allegiance. Those in power didn’t like it; this movement was not only hitting them in their wallets but shaking up the status quo as well. It started a riot.

When God’s word prevails in people’s lives, it does that, it shakes the status quo. In a local church, when the Word starts prevailing and people start entering into and responding in new ways to the move of the Holy Spirit, it can make folks uncomfortable. But even that discomfort can be a reminder to the radical nature of the gospel to which we’ve been called.

Consider communion. Have you ever thought of it being radical? If you haven’t, think again. Why did Jesus use bread and wine? Well, certainly they were staple items of the day. We could make a case that every time we sit down to a meal, we are to “remember” Jesus. But there is a deeper connection. Bread goes back to the manna given to the children of Israel in the wilderness. “Give us this day our daily bread” is a direct reference to living in utter dependence upon God. And wine not only represented blood but had a long history of symbolizing the joy of Israel. So in sharing the bread and wine with us, Jesus is inviting us into a radical dependence upon his person and a profound restoration of joy in our lives. This comes from our being completely identified with him—branches of the vine.

When I was four or five, my mom tells me that I said, in speaking of my dear aunt Irene, “She’s charming.” I paused for a few seconds and asked Mom, “What does *charming* mean?” I wonder if we sometimes go through the motions of sacred things without knowing the meaning. Make no mistake, partaking of communion is a radical declaration that God’s word is prevailing in my life. I identify with Christ anew and afresh—daily dependent on him and living in the upper room of restored joy. As we receive communion—common union—with Christ, come to this radical table laying claim to the branch/vine union and declaring, “His word prevails in me! I renew my commitment to live with Christ in the upper room.”