“A Prophet Legitimized” (1Kings 17:17-24) Memory Verse: 1 Kings 17:22a

October 12th, 2025 Scripture Reading: James 4:1-10

**[SLIDE 1]**

 Have you ever heard of Temu? Temu is an online retailer, much like Amazon, except that all of its products are deeply discounted. Their motto is “shop like a billionaire.” That’s right: they skip right over the millionaire mark and give you the impression that because their prices are so low, you will feel like a billion bucks with all the great deals you will find. They sell everything from beds to grills to clothing to pedicure tools. Nearly all of their products are sourced in China. You will not find name brands on this website. Everything is a knock-off; a cheap imitation. That price might seem right, but it is also wise to consider that old adage, “You get what you pay for.” It’s always fun to find a great deal, but when that package arrives and the product breaks right away, the feeling of being duped usually outweighs the thrill of finding a great price. Usually when we are shopping for a certain item, we want a legitimate product. We want a reasonable price, but more than that, we want that thing we purchase to stand up under some wear and tear. We want that product to last. That is the value of branding. People seek out a tried-and-true company because they want the genuine article and not a cheap imitation. Our boys recently went through a **[SLIDE 2]** Star Wars phase, and they begged their mom to buy them some lightsabers because apparently all the other swords we have in the house would not cut it. But not wanting to spend too much, my wife purchased some off-brand cheap lightsabers which were delivered to our home. The boys excitedly opened the packages and scrounged around for batteries as they could taste the thrill of clashing light and Jedi skill. Well, I am telling you, those so-called sabers lasted less than five minutes. The thin plastic just folded in on itself, the janky electronics shorted out, and the fun factor was zilch. When it comes to cars and appliances and tools, and toys for that matter, we don’t want to settle for knock-off imitations. We want the real thing, the genuine product.

That battle between what is real and what is fake is much of what we find in Elijah’s story. **[SLIDE 3]** The question overriding this narrative is: Which God is the genuine God? Yahweh or Baal? Which God is legitimate? Long-lasting? Tried and true? Which God will not break? Which God is the real God? And, related to that, who are his real and true servants?

Last week, we were abruptly introduced to Elijah. He comes out of nowhere as a bold voice declaring his faith in Isreal’s God and he proclaims a drought upon the land. Keep in mind, such a decree flies in the face of Baal, the storm god. He is supposedly the one that causes vegetation to grow and blesses the land with bountiful crops. So, we are going to see that most of the Elijah story is framed as a contest between Baal and Yahweh. Who has the power? Who is legitimate? After declaring the drought, Elijah runs away and hides out in a brook where God brings about some very strange provisions. At the brook, Elijah is fed by ravens. They flutter by and drop off pieces of bread and meat for him to eat. Later, in the town of Zarephath, Baal territory, God uses a widow to provide Elijah with sustenance. He makes it so that her flour and oil never run out. Look at the strange way God provides: wild birds and a widow without two pennies to rub together. With these means, God provides for Elijah. God provides when desperation is high and hope is gone.

 **[SLIDE 4]** Well, things seem to be going along swimmingly. Even during a devastating drought, Elijah and this unnamed widow are getting by thanks to God’s miraculous intervention. But eventually something goes wrong. **[SLIDE 5]** (READ 1 Kings 17:17-18)

 We are not exactly sure what happened here, but the widow’s son comes to die. And interestingly, this mother’s first thought goes where? To her sin! She is mindful of the fact that she is a sinner. She is mindful of the fact that sin must be punished, that sin leads to death. And this stands out in the narrative of 1 Kings, because when we look at the overall context of this story, we find that Israel, God’s own chosen people, they live and act and worship without any thought about their own sinfulness. This gentile woman, this product of a Baal culture, she gives more consideration to her own sin than God’s people do. A tragic death has occurred, and she immediately suspects that her own sin is at fault, that somehow she is being punished. We read on: (READ 1 Kings 17:19-21)

 Elijah is not about to let this horrible thing happen without trying to intervene somehow. Elijah knows the only reason he is alive is because this widow was kind enough to offer him food and water. If you recall from last week, this widow stepped out in faith. She chose to trust in Elijah’s God. She gave Elijah her very last morsal of bread instead of eating it herself, trusting that God would provide for her and her son. And he did! Her step of faith was realized and now all three of them were continually provided for. This turn of events seems very out of place.

 **[SLIDE 6]** So, Elijah takes the dead boy up to his room and lays him upon the bed. This is significant because Elijah knows that he is not supposed to touch a dead body. He knows that this will result in him being unclean. It was against God’s law to touch a dead body. Yet, Elijah takes the body and heads upstairs. He is not sure what to do, he has no handbook procedure for such a situation. Elijah is desperate. He knows that this widow does not deserve this outcome. The boy himself doesn’t deserve this outcome! Elijah cries out to God, “Yahweh, my God, why is it that you have brought such evil upon this widow by killing her son?” Notice here that, in Elijah’s mind, death is evil. He is not trying to find some sort of silver lining. For Elijah, what has happened to this family is nothing short of evil. And more than that, he blames God for what has happened. He says that God has brough this evil upon this family. And Elijah calls it all out in his prayer. And so far here, there is no request. There is technically a question, but it is really more of an accusation against God. “God, what are you doing bringing about evil? This is not supposed to happen this way. You are a God of life and blessing! You are not a perpetrator of evil. God, what are you doing? How could this have happened under your watch?”

 Right here is an example of the unfiltered honesty that I love so much about scripture. Elijah blames God for this, he questions God, He is fully confident that God is in control and that God could have prevented this. Elijah is honest with God about all of that, and I believe this stands as an invitation for all of us to wrestle with God as well. Elijah is trying to understand how evil could occur when a good God is in charge. We have all certainly been there before, lately, more often than not. Elijah shows us how to honestly engage with great faith. He holds tight to the fact that God is good, but he also does not deny for a second that evil has occurred. Elijah does not pretend to understand it, and neither should we. But he does express his frustration and the disconnect he sees with this deceased boy lying before him on the bed.

 Then in verse 21 Elijah gets to the request part of his prayer. **[SLIDE 7]** “Then he stretched himself over the boy three times and cried out to the LORD, ‘LORD my God, please give this boy’s life back to him.’” Very simple, very straightforward. Elijah has no preamble here or introductory remarks. In his desperation, he simply says, “Please…please give this boy back his life.” That is all that can be said. Elijah is specific and concise. He has a need that he is looking to God to fulfill. Elijah also prays with his body. He covers the boy three times. We are not quite sure what Elijah is doing here. As far as we know, this was not some kind of ritual or incantation. It could be something Elijah did purely because he had no better ideas. This could be read as a sort of nervous response done in panic. Or maybe he was calm and collected as he stretched himself over the boy. I think the detail here that is important is the number three. Three is often used in the bible as a way of communicating completion or perfection. It seems as though Elijah is wanting his prayer to be complete and not lacking anything.

 **[SLIDE 8]** (READ 17:22-24) ((There is a bit of a reversal here. The normal patten is that the leader or the prophet listens to the voice of God, but here, the text says, God listens to Elijah’s voice. God not only hears the request, but he acts in order to make the request happen. That’s the power of prayer! We make our requests and God acts! Can God act without our requests? Well, I suppose so – he is God after all. But, Isaiah, another later prophet of God tells us in chapter 65 of his book, **[SLIDE 9]** “The LORD says, ‘I was ready to answer my people’s prayers, but they did not pray. I was ready for them to find me, but they did not even try.’” God is ready to hear from us! He is ready to answer! As we see in the New Testament, James 4:2 is clear, “You do not have because you do not ask.” The power of prayer is in the request! **[SLIDE 10]** God desires that we make our wants and needs known to him, that we come to him, that we would be desperate for him. Just like Elijah, God listens to our voice. Can you imagine that?…He hears you when you pray to him. That is good news isn’t it? Hallelujah!))

Life returns to the boy and he and Elijah head down the stairs **[SLIDE 11]** to share the good news. Upon seeing her son alive again, the widow says, “Now I know that you really are a man of God, and that God’s word is truly in your mouth.”

 Here the woman speaks to the reader as much as she does to Elijah. We are to understand, if there was any doubt before, that Elijah is a true and bonafide prophet. It was one thing to have flour and oil continually provided. This production of food was meant to stave off death, to keep the widow and her son from starving. But, sure enough, something else claimed the boy’s life, some sort of illness took his breath. It was one thing to provide the means to live, it is quite another to reverse death. This power over death is of course the main way we characterize **[SLIDE 12]** Jesus. In his earthly ministry, Jesus raised people from the dead. But, while it is one thing to raise someone from the dead, it is another to raise oneself from the dead! That is the distinction that Jesus brings. Elijah himself did not have any power over death. Elijah could only pray to the one who has that power. Jesus could say no prayer. He was dead in the grave. But God raised him up and gave him a name that is higher than any other name: Jesus Christ our Lord and King!

 We call Jesus King and we worship him as our savoir because he defeated death, he rose from the grave. In a similar way, this widow hails Elijah as a man of God because he defeated death, at least for her son. As a prophet, Elijah is legitimized. **[SLIDE 13]** So we go into the rest of his story with a new lens…there is no question now. Elijah is a man of God who speaks the word of God.

 Today, the Baal cult is no more. All those who followed that particular god are long gone, but that does not mean that imitators and phonies are not still prevalent. **[SLIDE 14]** There are so many products and organizations that offer us the good life. It’s available for just a certain amount a month in however many easy payments. So, we work hard and break our backs to purchase these things: the nice car that promises a smooth ride, the larger house that promises more comfort, the premium insurance policy that promises peace of mind, the lawn treatment that promises weed-free beauty, the name-brand this or that that promises to make your life better in any number of ways. Baal promises rain and good crops. Jesus Christ promises life and life abundantly. He is the only one whose promises do not fade. He is the only one whose product, life, is guaranteed for all eternity.

 **[SLIDE 15]** To be clear Elijah reversed the affects of death…for the moment. But he really only delayed the inevitable. The widow’s son was brought back to life, he was resituated, he breathed again, but eventually, he would die again as well. This is true of the 12-year-old girl that Jesus raises, it is true of Lazarus. To be resuscitated is an amazing miracle, it surely demonstrates the power and majesty of God, but it still lacks the quality guarantee of the King himself. **[SLIDE 16]** He stands by his product, and his quality control is impeccable. What he offers is not a life-time warranty, but one that lasts for eternity; lifetime and beyond. This life, if you get it direct from the King himself, is a premium product that is guaranteed to last forever. But other imitations are out there. They promise almost the same thing: happiness and healthiness and convenience and comfort, plus these imitations can be found for a comparatively cheap price.

 That’s the thing. Our King does not cut corners. His product only uses genuine materials. You will not find salvation available from a company like**[SLIDE 17]** Temu. That makes the price tag a bit breathtaking. How much does this eternal life cost me? Everything? My heart, and soul, and mind and strength? My all? King Jesus says, **[SLIDE 18]** “if you loose your life, you will find it.” Trust me, he says, this is a good deal. It is worth every breath.

 Well, then we are left with a choice. Do we believe in what he offers? Do we believe him enough to trust that what he offers is genuine? Or is this just another sales pitch? Is this just another thing that we can add to our lives to enhance our experience and make our days a little easier until we pass away? There is no contest! Christ came to save us, to give his life for our own. That is a trade we will never regret. Don’t settle for Baal and other imitators like him. Pursue the genuine article, the true life giver, the One and only Son of God, our savior in whom we find eternal life, Jesus Christ. Amen.