

On Tuesday I went with a group of guys to the Texas Rangers' game. It was the Rangers' home opener. The saying goes, "Hope springs eternal" and if you are a Ranger's fan that means "Hope springs not so much eternal but at least during the first couple of innings! It was a great day at the ball park. Everyone was in that laid back state-of-mind. They had a huge American flag that was unveiled in the outfield before the game and even had a military band playing the National Anthem. Since it was opening day they introduced everyone in the Rangers' organization, and not just the players and coaches. When I say they introduced everyone, they introduced everyone – even the physical therapist and the Japanese translator on staff. Finally, after all the pageantry, we got to the first pitch and then the game started. If you watched the game or saw the highlights you know that it was not a great day for the Rangers. In fact, it was pathetic. The starting pitcher didn't exactly, as they say in baseball, "Have his stuff that day." By the second inning it was clear that he was not exactly blowing the ball past the hitters. After the Orioles went up 4-0 the crowd broke out in a chorus of boos. I thought to myself, "Wow, we are only in the third inning of the home opener and the boo birds are already out!" Thirty minutes earlier the fans were standing on their feet cheering for the team and then suddenly they were ready to run them out of town. It was a classic "What have you done for me lately" kind of thing.

Sports fans are bad about that. I admire people who volunteer to coach little league and other kids sports because they take a lot of criticism from parents and even grandparents. Why didn't you play my son more? Why did you order the lineup that way? Why didn't you practice more on fielding? I was helping coach Benjamin's T-ball team last year when a grandparent in the stands called me over to the fence to give me some "advice". She said, "You need to move the batter up a little closer to the plate." She wasn't exactly nice about it. In fact, her tone was quite rude. I replied, "Okay, whatever you say. If I don't do better why don't you just take it out of my salary!" Looking back that wasn't the nicest or most appropriate response, but it was a lot better than what I wanted to say! If you have ever taken the brunt of criticism, especially unwarranted, negative criticism you know how frustrating it can be.

Moses comes to mind. Moses had given his life to bringing the people out of Egypt. He had witnessed the great plagues that God brought down on the people. He was there when God parted the Red Sea for the Israelites to cross over into safe territory. He was the one who walked down Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments directly from God. Yet, when the

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people got out into the wilderness and things got a little tough, Moses had to hear this: “Why did you bring us out here in the wilderness to die? You should have just left us in Egypt. We were slaves in Egypt but at least we had a roof over our heads and three square meals a day!” Moses had to be thinking to himself, “What an ungrateful bunch of people! I know they are thirsty and hot and tired, but what a short memory they have!”

Elijah was put in a similar situation. If you remember from last week, God instructed Elijah to tell the king of Israel, Ahab, that there was going to be a three year drought. There would be no rain or even dew on the ground. Elijah then went to live by the Brook Cherith where God provided for him by sending ravens with food. The ravens literally fed Elijah. When the brook dried up, God sent Elijah to a widow and her son. This widow offered up her last meal to Elijah and lo and behold, God took what little she had and multiplied it so they could all eat for days and survive. Elijah had definitely brought good fortune to this woman.

Some time had passed and unexpectedly, the widow’s son became ill and died. The text says, “There was no breath left in him.” The boy’s mother said to Elijah, “What have you against me, O Man of God? You have come to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!” Suddenly, Elijah had been singled out as the cause of her son’s death! Talk about an unfair comment! And I thought a little snide comment at a T-ball game was out of line! How would you like to have someone accuse you of the death of his or her child when you clearly had nothing at all to do with it?

When I was pastor in Dawson I was shaking hands with people in the congregation before the worship service one Sunday. We didn’t have but about 50 to 60 in the worship service so it was fairly easy to get around to everyone to say hello before the service. I came up to one lady sitting towards the back. She shook my hand and whispered to me, “Preacher, when you came here I tried not to like you. I liked our last pastor and I decided when he left that I just wasn’t going to like who they sent here next. But now I think I like you.” She was a sweet lady and we ended up having a great relationship. A couple of years later I officiated her funeral service and told that story about how she had made up her mind not to like me before she even met me. Sometimes we have relationship problems not because of anything with any substance to it, but because of preconceived ideas or being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Elijah was definitely in the wrong place at the wrong time. This woman’s son had died and Elijah was the only one there that she could talk to. Her anger that was directed

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towards Elijah was probably anger directed towards God. Elijah just happened to be there physically so it was easier to blame him.

Unlike my immature response at the T-ball game, Elijah responded with grace to this woman's criticism and accusation. Instead of arguing with her or firing back with an accusation of his own, Elijah said four simple words, "Give me your son." He then took her from her arms, carried him up the stairs, and laid him on a bed. Elijah then cried out to God, "O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?" I see a pattern developing – the woman blames Elijah and Elijah blames God. We are playing the blame game with this boy's life.

A couple of years ago I was visiting with a youth in our church that was having some troubles. He was having trouble at home and in school and was acting out to get attention. His father suggested that we meet to talk about things because we had some trouble with the kid at the church. I met with the father and the boy for over an hour and over and over again one thing kept popping up – whatever the issue or problem it was always someone else's fault. Not once did that father or boy take any responsibility for their actions. Not once did one of them say, "You know I messed up and have to deal with the consequences." Instead, there was this "It's us against the world" mentality. I finished the meeting by saying, "Both of you need to stop blaming others for all of your problems and take some responsibility." It obviously went in one ear and out the other because the next day I became the target for their blame game.

The family structure in our society has gone out the window and we have a plethora of irresponsible parents raising irresponsible, disrespectful kids. The sad thing to me is that many of these kids don't have a chance. They have been put behind the 8-ball and will grow to model and live what they see their parents doing or not doing. This is where I see churches stepping in and at least providing a place for these kids to have some positive influence in life. A church, our church, can be that place where kids can come and feel appreciated and loved and dare I say it, be held accountable for their actions. The worst thing we can do for our kids is to continue this cycle of it's always someone else's fault. Well, the ball was in God's court. Elijah had offered up the challenge: "God, why have you killed this woman's son?" There are a lot of different ways God could have responded to Elijah. One way would have been to have reprimanded him right there on the spot. Remember how God responded to Job when Job questioned what was happening in his life. God said to Job, "Were you

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there when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements – surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?” God went on and on with an array of sarcastic statements that put Job back in his place.

But for whatever reason God didn't feel that Elijah deserved that kind of response. Perhaps Elijah's anger at God was not anger so much at God but anger clothed in compassion for this woman and her son. God could see that Elijah was grieving for this woman and her son and truly wanted what was best for them. That is why I believe God responded the way he did. Rather than reprimand Elijah, the author of I Kings wrote, “The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived.”

Next thing you know Elijah is taking the boy back down the stairs and presents the now living boy to his mother. The woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth.” What else could she say? What more could Elijah have done to prove to her that he was a prophet of God and that God cared for her and her son?

The same question can be asked of God and what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. What more could God have done for us? I would like to think that most of us would respond the same way the woman did to Elijah if we were in the same situation. I know if I lost a loved one and then had the opportunity to get that loved one back, I would be eternally grateful to whoever brought him or her back. Through Jesus Christ that is exactly what God has done for all of us. The sad thing is that we forget that. We forget the sacrifice that was made for us on the cross. We get consumed with other things in life and neglect our relationship with Jesus. Sometimes we act as if we don't even care what God did for us. It's as if the cross never happened.

My prayer for us today is not that we will witness a miracle like this Elijah story. Nor is it that God will send us a “sign” so we will believe. My prayer for us today is that we will be grateful to God for our salvation in Christ and give our lives to him. You know we are not told anything else about this woman or her son. We don't know what became of them. It makes me wonder. If the boy died again before his mother, what was her reaction the second time? My guess is that she made it through just fine because she knew from her encounter with Elijah that God loved her, and whether her son lived or died, God would be there for her. The true test of her faith was not in witnessing this miracle. The true test of her faith, like it

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is for us, comes when there is no miracle. The true test of faith is when we pray and pray and pray and God is mysteriously silent, yet in the silence we understand our relationship with God on a totally different level. Maybe that's why Jesus taught us to pray the Lord's Prayer and that part that says, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done..."