

6/9/24

Elijah on the Mountain**1 Kings 19****Pastor Joe Greemore, Brewster Baptist Church**

Key Verse: *The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." 1 Kings 19:11a (NIV)*

Elijah sat on the ground, half-bewildered. Had an angel really just appeared to him?

He had thought, for the briefest of moments, that God had forgotten him, that his cause was hopeless, that the three-year drought was as much a reflection of his own spiritual condition as it was a judgment on Israel's leadership.

But now, beyond any measure of doubt, his fears were relieved; an angel awakening him in his travel-weariness-induced slumber, telling him not once, but twice, to eat, for the journey ahead would be arduous. Forty days and forty nights it would be.

"Sometimes, we just need a good nap and a good meal to set things right in the world."

Now, here he stood at the mouth of the cave, waiting to hear from the God of his ancestors. If ever his qualifications and credentials as a prophet of the Lord were validated, it was now; only, would he live to tell the story? For who could see God and live?

So, it was with this mixture of fear, awe, wonder, and gratitude that Elijah braced himself for the coming storm. Only it wasn't the kind of storm he, or anyone for that matter, would have imagined, birthed only in the mind of God.

The Lord Appears to Elijah (1 Kings 19:9b-18)

And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

The Lord said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”

And the word of the Lord came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

The first thing God asks Elijah on this mountain top experience is, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Not “How did you get here?” or “What are you fleeing?” or “Where are you going?”, but in this moment, “What are you doing here?” God asks this more for the prophet’s benefit since God already knows the answer.

This is the same Lord who told Elijah to “get away from here and go hide yourself” by the Brook Cherith so ravens could feed him (in Kansas, we would call this a creek, or a “crick”). Then, when the water dried up, it was a distance of 80 miles from Cherith to Zarephath, the home of the widow; another 100 miles from Zarephath to Beersheba with a side route to Mount Carmel; and then another forty days and forty nights into the wilderness.

**One could say that Elijah was a man on the move,
a prophet with a purpose,
a reformer on the run!**

God’s abundance is contrasted against the backset of water scarcity. Israel was an agrarian culture, which meant that rain in its season and a good crop was the bedrock of the economy. The absence of rain forced the entire nation, and prophet Elijah, too, to trust in God for their daily provision.

On his journey to this climactic moment, Elijah had been fed both by ravens and by angels as signs of God’s supernatural provision. Miracle upon miracle! One, a bird that, to the ancient Israelites, was considered unclean (*Leviticus 11:15*); another, a messenger of fire sent to deliver God’s direction (*Hebrews 1:7*).

Elijah's life is a lesson in trusting God from A to Z: from the highest in the land to the lowest in a foreign land, from Ahab to Zarephath, Elijah's faith is an example for us.

W.J. Peterson writes, "Sometimes we don't understand God's dealings. We don't know why we were sent to Cherith in the first place; we don't appreciate the fact that God uses dirty ravens to feed us; and we certainly don't understand why the brook has to dry up. The fact that we don't understand is simply a sign that God's educational process isn't complete yet. He is still teaching us and we're still learning" (Meet Me on the Mountain, p. 44).

So, in response to God's question, Elijah replied the best way he knew how – with honesty, authenticity, vulnerability and by telling the truth.

He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too" (1 Kings 19:10).

Who was this Elijah? He had appeared out of the blue (1 Kings 17:1) – no lineage, no family, no priestly credentials – yet God chose this anonymous Tishbite (from Tishbe in Gilead; also meaning, "a wanderer") to deliver a hammer to the people of Israel.

Israel, who had suffered one bad king after another until Ahab outdid them all; idol worship; temples, gifts, and sacrifices to false gods; publicly funding false prophets; the days were dark and getting darker. The people's inner landscape began to mirror their outward situation, and they needed a wake-up call, and fast.

So, God sent Elijah to show that God had power over the elements (1 Kings 17). Then, God prompted Elijah to confront Ahab a second time – only this time God would show God's power through the elements (1 Kings 18). The fire fell, and the people were left with little doubt about whose God was God. And finally, God showed power in spite of the elements (1 Kings 19) – the wind blew, the fire raged, the earth shook. This was the original ensemble appearance of earth, wind, and fire. God's voice, a gentle whisper, was the clearest of all. 1 Kings 19:11-13:

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came

a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

The mighty wind breaking the rocks before its path reminds us of the many tornadoes raging across the Midwestern United States. The fire reminds us of the wildfires in Canada, Colorado, California, Australia, and around our world, displacing people and endangering life. The earthquake shook the prophet to his foundations; in these days of our lives, many of us are shaken by global and local events. Life, at times, can be full of challenges!

It’s been said that the Hebrew name for God is the same as the sound of breathing: *YHWH* – so it may be inferred that with each breath we take, we take God’s name on our lips. So, when we remember the commandment not to take the Lord’s name in vain (*Exodus 20:7*), it’s a reminder not to take God’s name on our lips in vain, not to draw breath in vain, not to live in vain; instead, to live with a deep sense of purpose inspired by God, to meaningfully and purposefully follow God’s will in, and for, our lives.

With his every breath, Elijah was zealous for the things of God.

He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” (1 Kings 19:14).

When God’s Spirit comes on us, we see more clearly, we understand more fully, we can dare and accomplish great things for God.

If we look at the last verse in *1 Kings 18* (verse 46), we see Elijah running ahead of the king’s chariot for some 20 miles. How did he accomplish such a feat, outrunning the king’s finest horses and chariot? “Then the hand of the Lord came upon Elijah [giving him supernatural strength]. He girded up his loins and outran Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel [nearly twenty miles].” In a Spirit-sanctified moment, Elijah, on foot, outran the Kings chariot... This verse, after the events on Mount Carmel, reminds us of the incredible strength God brought upon Elijah.

God wasn’t done yet.

This great athlete was well aware of the landscapes in Israel – geographic, political, and spiritual. He knew how far the people had fallen from God, how narrow his hope, how desperate his situation. He felt abandoned and powerless in the face of his inevitable defeat. And yet, just as he had been the champion in the marathon footrace, he would prevail once again – not by his own power, but by the grace of God.

God called the people of Israel to be holy, just as God is holy (*Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15*). This was no small charge coming from the God of the universe. How were they to accomplish this? Just as Elijah had – by relying on God’s Spirit, provision, and grace. The people stood no chance of matching God’s holiness through their own deeds.

The only way for us to be holy as God is holy is to receive God’s holiness as a gift freely given through Jesus Christ.

Now, with all the training and preparation, God didn’t ask Elijah to run, but to stand. “Go and stand” at the mouth of the cave and have a conference with the Lord of Hosts. This is the same opportunity that was given to Moses (*Exodus 33:18-20*). It is no wonder then, that both Moses and Elijah, who saw God’s glory on the mountain, would be the ones talking with Jesus when his glory was revealed once again on a mountain (*Matthew 17*).

Sometimes, in our Christian walk, God doesn’t ask anything more of us than to stand, be alert, be available. God told Philip to go stand by the road when the Ethiopian Eunuch passed by (*Acts 8*). Paul told the church at Ephesus to stand firm, with the armor of God firmly fitted (*Ephesians 6*). When we stand amazed in the presence of Almighty God, the whole world shifts. Everything changes. Our lives are transformed.

Elijah manages his own marathon run, a distance like that famed, first marathon runner of old, only by the Spirit of God coming on him in power and moving him mightily. When we are zealous for the things of God, we leave room for God’s Spirit to fill and move us to incredible things.

The Lord said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:15-18).

God provides Elijah his marching orders, which include choosing his successor. It can be hard to see the people who follow us in the work; many of us would prefer to have our retirement celebration, then let the new person do their work. Elijah got to share life with the one who would take over after his dramatic departure; for Elisha would have the tenacity, like Jacob wrestling with the angel by the River Jabbok (*Genesis 32*), to not let go until he received a blessing. Because of his tenacity, he received a double portion of prophet Elijah’s spirit. You can follow up with today’s text by reading for yourself *1 Kings 19:19-21* to see the next steps.

What can we learn from Elijah’s experience on the mountain with God?

1. God has a plan and a purpose for your life. God will richly provide for your needs. Persevere, don't give up, in God's plan, purpose, and provision, and your life will surely bless others around you.
2. Sometimes God has to take things out of our hands so we can learn to trust God more – Elijah, the widow, and an upper room.
3. We need to invest our lives in pouring into others.
4. Love – confronting the king and the people to return to God; Grow – Elijah learned, and was reminded, that he really wasn't alone; Share – Elijah shared with the widow, life restored to her son in an upper room, shared ministry with Elisha; his prophetic call had a participatory element in which others around him shared in the miraculous things God was doing.

Elijah's journey is one from despair to deliverance. His arsenal, his superpower, is prayer. All five of his prayers were answered.

1. The rain stopped
2. A son was restored to life
3. Fire fell from heaven
4. The rain returned
5. God took his life (in the chariot of fire, *2 Kings 2*)

Notice what Elijah does when God asks him what he's doing on the mountain.

He pours out his heartfelt lament about his lamentable situation. He declares his feelings of isolation. He's genuine, authentic, and honest with God about his situation.

Some of us can find encouragement in Elijah's experience. When we pour out our heartfelt lament before God, God listens. God hears. God answers. Elijah wasn't wrong for feeling what he was feeling, although Obadiah had told him about at least a hundred other prophets who had been preserved. Now, God revealed the news that seven thousand had been preserved who had not bowed the knee to the Baals.

Elijah knew in his head that he wasn't alone, but he needed to understand it in his heart. When God spoke to him through the silence following the storm, Elijah was now in a place where he could really hear what God was saying: I'm with you; you're not alone; help is on the way; I have a plan, and you're part of that plan.

How refreshing it is to know that God has plans for our lives, plans that we might otherwise miss out on, or be less effective with, if we didn't take the time to pause and listen for God's still, small voice. God met Elijah on that mountain after a time of triumph, trial, isolation, and intense fasting to share news about the future. God wasn't done yet with Elijah, and God isn't done with us.

Friends, I challenge you to do the hard work of sharing what is in your heart; witnessing the calamities that happen around us on a daily basis, but refusing to give way to fear in

the face of them; taking comfort in the assurance that God is with you, on the mountain of the Lord, in the valley of the shadow of death, and wherever you may go. Amen.

Prayer: God, meet us in the mountains of our lives at the high points, the valleys of uncertainty when we are at our lowest, and wherever we may go. Refresh our spirit, we pray through Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: "Journeying with Elijah: Elijah on the Mountain"

1. In a word or phrase for each chapter, summarize *1 Kings 17-19*. What has been helpful for you to encounter in this series?
2. What similarities do you see between the character of prophet Elijah and Jesus Christ? Do you notice any differences?
3. What is your favorite pass-time activity? Can you relate to any of the events in Elijah's personal experience? Why or why not?
4. Where do you go to retreat, for renewal, and the ability to listen to God more clearly?
5. Warren Weirsbe said, "Meekness is not weakness. It is power under control." Geoffery B. Wilson said, "Meekness is the mark of a [person] who has been mastered by God." How does Elijah's life exhibit true meekness?
6. Jean Guyon said, "Outward silence is indispensable for the cultivation and improvement of inner silence." Why do you think it was necessary for Elijah to go to Mt. Horeb to hear from God, as opposed to going back to the Brook Cherith, the widow's home in Zarephath, or the home of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel in Israel?
7. Check out our scripture for further reading, *1 Kings 19:19b-21*. Then re-read *1 Kings 19:16*. In three words, what does successful succession look like?

Scriptures and Themes for Further Exploration:

- *Psalm 46:10; Be still; still, small voice*
- Running in the Old Days/Biblical Times/Aegean and Mediterranean
- Marathon (story, and Olympics)
- *2 Kings 9:20, Jehu*, the original reckless driver
- Elijah and great distances; "The power of the Lord was on Elijah..."
- Chariots – *Exodus 14:6*, pharaoh and his chariot
2 Kings 9:20, Jehu, the original reckless driver
2 Kings 5:9, Namaan the Syrian Captain
2 Kings 2:2, Elijah, Elisha and the chariot of fire
- BBC Bicentennial Movie Night in June, "Chariots of Fire" – Thursday, June 20, 6:00 pm. Join us in Fellowship Hall!