

New Life
Series: Days of Elijah
1 Kings 17:1-24
May 29, 2016

Welcome again to worship. So glad to be together today.

I want you to think back for a few moments to when you were younger: a child, maybe a teenager, maybe even... an hour ago.

Who were your heroes?

Examples: Amelia Earhart, Johnny Bench, Neil Armstrong, a President, Superman, etc.

We like our heroes. We had them as children. They might have been superheroes, sports heroes, or entertainment heroes. Their posters or magazines or CDs were in our room. Your hero might have been a mom or a dad, even a big brother or sister.

As we grow older, we are less enamored by our childhood heroes, but it doesn't mean we still don't have them. Maybe they are the same ones; maybe some new ones. We go to their concerts, wear their jerseys, read their books, follow them on Twitter, watch every show or movie they are in.

Have you ever wondered who Jesus' hero was? Who did Jesus pretend to be when he was a little boy, or imagine himself to be like when he was a young teenager? Who might have been a pattern for him to follow in preparation for his ministry?

One of his heroes might have been Elijah? It certainly seems to have been the case for his cousin John later called the Baptist. Elijah was a powerful prophet, calling the people and the nation to repentance. Yet Elijah had his struggles, his doubts. He was just like us... except for his faith in God. Even in the dark and godless times during his life, Elijah declared the word of the Lord.

For the next few weeks, we are going to study some of the stories of the life of Elijah and learn how we can be voices in the desert crying, "Prepare the way of the Lord!"

I'm going to invite you to turn to 1 Kings 17. That's in the Old Testament, before the book of Psalms. If you open your Bible and find yourself in a book that is a 1st or a 2nd something, well the order is 1 & 2 Samuel, then 1 & 2 Kings, followed by 1 & 2 Chronicles. We want to look at 1 Kings 17.

As you turn to that, let me tell you a little bit about Elijah and his times.

1 Kings 16:29 introduces us to the political climate his day.

READ 1 KINGS 16:29-33

The text is telling us that Ahab was an evil king. He led his people into blasphemous idolatry. Baal was the supreme male divinity of the Phœnician and Canaanite nations, as Ashtoreth was their supreme female divinity. Some suppose Baal to correspond to the sun and Ashtoreth to the moon; others that Baal was Jupiter and Ashtoreth Venus.¹ An Asherah pole was a de-limbed tree or pole that stood near Canaanite religious locations to honor the mother-goddess Asherah, a fertility goddess. So Ahab led the nation of Israel away from orthodox faith in the God of Israel.

¹ Smith's Bible Dictionary: Comprising Antiquities, Biography, Geography, Natural History, Archaeology and Literature.

Why is this important for us to study today? Well, folks, I don't know about you, but in my opinion, this world is messed up and following a godless, idolatrous path. Need examples? Just look at our presidential candidates: we have a socialist, a crooked, perpetual liar, and a self-absorbed vulgar bully. It would be hilarious if it wasn't true. You can easily see all kinds of immorality on television or the internet. The truth has been substituted for a lie. Drugs are killing people at such an alarming rate that we here in Montgomery County now record the most overdoses in the United States. And if that isn't enough, to show you how bad things are, the Reds stink.

Our world and the world of Elijah are the same: corrupt, wicked, and against the very nature of God. So God sent a prophet to Israel, and his name was Elijah.

We are introduced to him in 1 King 17:1.

READ 1 KINGS 17:1

Elijah goes to the king with this crazy sounding judgement: it will not rain until I say so, and that won't be for the next few years. Probably sounded like some weirdo doomsday fortuneteller of today. But his pronouncement was a big deal? Why was that?

Those who worshiped Baal believed he was the god who brought the rains and bountiful harvests. So when Elijah walked into the presence of this Baal-worshiping king and told him there would be no rain for several years, he was attacking the very power of Ahab's god.

So God was punishing Israel because of King Ahab's wickedness. He sent Elijah to Ahab with the message. Now we don't know if this is Elijah's first time on the scene. That would be interesting if that was the case. The wild looking dude comes into the throne room and declares, "It ain't gonna rain." They would have looked at him and thought he was wacko. They probably dismissed him as being out of his mind.

Friends, God is a holy God, and He will not tolerate wickedness forever. The Bible declares,

But the LORD reigns forever, executing judgment from his throne.²

God's judgment will come, but here's is the thing about God's judgment, and it is something my Sunday School class has been learning through our study of the Book of Revelation. And that is this: the purpose of God's judgment is to correct us, to turn us back to Him and the way of holy living. Now, you may say, "That's strange. How does God's punishment bring us back to Him and His ways?" Well, let me ask you this: if your child was kicking the cat or stealing from their sibling or saying dirty words, would you worry that if you punished your child, it might push them farther from you? Certainly extreme punishment can eventually do that, but no. We punish our children to try to bring them to or keep them on the right path. They might cry some, but often times, they would come back and need a hug because they felt so bad.

God was punishing the people of Israel, showing them that their supposed god that brought water was no god at all, but only Yahweh was the true God to worship and follow, and to come back to Him.

I wonder if we are seeing this today. Is God punishing us for our wickedness, our compromises with evil, our idolatry and worship of things, even people, over God?

That's why our Faith-based group for the Valley View Drug Free Coalition is claiming Solomon's prayer from 2 Chronicles 7:

² Psalm 9:7 (NLT)

*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*³

If you find yourself in a place where circumstances seem to be crashing in on you, when it seems everything is falling apart, when all you get is bad news, maybe you need to look at your life and ask yourself if there is some part, some attitude, something you are doing that is not godly and for which you need to repent.

My friends, God's judgment is His way of bringing us back into contentment. Let me repeat that: God's judgment is His way of bringing us back into contentment that He is our God and we are His people.

After his declaration of the drought, God sends Elijah away from Ahab's reach, across the Jordan River to the Kerith Brook. Look at verses 2-6:

READ 1 KINGS 17:2-6

Now, I want you to add these pieces of this passage's puzzle together with the previous verse. Elijah prophesies drought. Things are not going to get better. There's not going to be much in the way of food very soon. So where does God send him? To a brook; not a river, but a little brook from which to draw water. And not only that, God tells Elijah that he will be fed by what? That's right. Ravens. Melody's Gertrude and Heathcliff that hang around the church. She feeds them leftover bread, and one of them likes to grab all the bread it can, stash it away, then bring pieces down outside our office windows where there is usually a puddle of water, and he likes to dunk the bread into the water, like an Oreo cookie in milk.

But these ravens are not receiving food; they bring food to Elijah. And not just once. Verse 6 reads:

*The ravens brought him bread and meat each morning and evening, and he drank from the brook.*⁴

How about that Melody? Would you eat food brought to you by a raven? Any of you? No way. Isn't that an easy way to get bird flu? I mean, the bird is bringing the food and sneezes on it. Yew.

God is telling Elijah to trust Him on this. Go to a brook, not a river. Eat your food from ravens, not by getting it yourself. But Elijah is not just trusting on this matter. Let's keep going with the story. Starting with verse 7:

READ ELIJAH 17:7-16

The brook where Elijah was staying dried up. Of course it was going to dry up; there's a drought going on. That makes complete sense, doesn't it?

Then God sends Elijah to a foreign country to a widow, and not just any widow: a starving widow. When the widow met Elijah, she thought she was preparing her last meal.

But a simple act of faith produced a miracle. She trusted Elijah and gave all she had to eat to him. And the result of that supreme act of faith was that her jars of flour and olive oil never ran out. There was always enough for the next meal.

Faith is the step between promise and assurance. Miracles seem so out of reach for our feeble faith. But every miracle, large or small, begins with an act of obedience. We may not see the solution until we take the first step of faith.⁵

³ 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)

⁴ 1 Kings 17:6 (NLT)

Elijah prophesied a drought and then hid from King Ahab by the Kerith Brook, where he was fed by ravens. When the brook dried up, God sent him to Zarephath in Phoenicia, where a widow and her son fed him and gave him lodging.

In a nation that was required by law to care for its prophets, it is ironic that God turned to ravens (unclean birds) and a widow (a foreigner from Ahab's wife Jezebel's home territory) to care for Elijah. God has help where we least expect it. He provides for us in ways that go beyond our narrow definitions or expectations. No matter how bitter our trials or how seemingly hopeless our situation, we should look for God's caring touch. We may find his providence in some strange places!⁶

Many people find themselves in situations of need, of lacking, of struggle. There doesn't seem to be adequate resources (money, strength, patience, endurance) to meet the needs of the day.

God requires us to trust Him, even when the prospects seem inadequate: birds to feed you, a brook to give you drink during a drought, an unknown widow in a foreign land to feed you.

My friends, in the droughts of life, trust God with His never-ending flow of blessings. In the droughts of life, trust God with His never-ending flow of blessings.

That's all the time we have today, but I want you to consider this thought this week:

What do you think life would be like if you were absolutely confident that you could go or do whatever God told you to go or do because He would be there always, especially when it seemed it couldn't get any worse? Do you think you can live each and every day with the assurance that God provides every one of your needs? And if you can believe that, then can you imagine that when you are in that place God has called you, He will use you to change a life, to save a life, to be a blessing?

Here is the truth for today: God knows your need, especially when your need is at its greatest.

⁵ Life Application Study Bible, 1 Kings 17:13-16

⁶ Life Application Study Bible, 1 Kings 17:10ff