

1 Kings 19:3-18

3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, **4** while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." **5** Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." **6** He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

7 The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." **8** So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. **9** There he went into a cave and spent the night.

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

10 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."

11 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. **12** After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. **13** 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?"

14 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."

15 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. **16** Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. **17** 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. **18** Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."

Before we discuss this passage of scripture we need to consider what had happened before it. Elijah was a prophet during the reign of Ahab a king of the Northern Kingdom, Israel. About 7 kings before Ahab Israel had been one nation but under the unfaithfulness of Solomon's son, Rehoboam the kingdom of Israel separated into two nations, the Southern Kingdom, known as Judah, and the Northern Kingdom, known as Israel or Samaria. Both slowly fall away from God and begin to follow the fertility gods of Baal and Ashtoreth but Israel was the faster of the two in doing so. Ahab. Elijah, whose name means "Yahweh is my God" was God's prophet during the reign of Ahab, a king whose reign was particularly ungodly. In fact, Ahab's wife is a person you may have heard of before. Jezebel Elijah's job as God's prophet was to speak truth to power.

Let's talk about what a prophet's role is. We often tend to think of a prophet as a fortune teller, someone who peers into the future and brings back messages. But prophet's are generally forth-tellers rather than fore-tellers. They tell God's people, or those to whom God is speaking this is what God has said to you in the past and as a result, this is what God is saying to you now. Think of it like this, the prophet's main job is to say "thus saith the Lord." This is a very difficult thing to do because people, especially people in power, typically want to hear only good news. Thus the many references in scripture to many false prophets saying that there was peace and everything was fine when instead God was telling His people that nothing was fine at the moment. To quote Jeremiah;

13 "From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. **14** They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, (Jeremiah 6:13-14)

You may have never experienced this before but some people are not good at being corrected or receiving news that they are doing what should be done. Elijah's introduction is that he has to tell Ahab that because of his actions Israel will be in a drought for the next few years,

and then God directs him to flee and hide. So Elijah goes and hides in a ravine known as Kerith Ravine in the middle of a drought. Yet Elijah is not without water because God has provided for him. There was a brook where God had told him to hide and God caused ravens to bring food for Elijah to eat.

Remember the meaning of the Ebenezers we have been talking about in the last few weeks. The original one was a stone that Samuel lifted up as a reminder that “thus far God has helped us”. It was a reminder of God’s faithfulness in the past so that we would be able to trust in God’s faithfulness in the future. So our introduction to Elijah is that God told him to do something and then God was faithful to take care of him.

“Elijah, remember the brook and the ravens? Thus far God helped you and He will in the future too.”

Eventually, the brook dried up and the Lord instructed Elijah to go to Zarephath where there would be a widow who would supply him with food. He met the widow but the widow doubted that God could supply food. Day after day her little supply of flour and oil continued to last as she made food for herself, her son, and Elijah.

“Elijah, remember when you needed food and the handful of flour and small amount of olive oil never seemed to get smaller? Thus far God helped you and He will in the future too.”

Then Elijah’s host’s son became ill and stopped breathing. Elijah had seen God work in the past and therefore he expected God to work now. “Lord my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?” “Lord my God, let this boy’s life return to him!”

“The Lord heard Elijah’s cry and answered him. The boy’s life returned to him.

“Elijah, remember how God answered your prayer concerning the boy? Thus far God helped you and He will in the future too.”

So the Lord tells Elijah to go back to Ahab and tell him that there will be rain. Elijah goes and confronts Ahab, the troubler of Israel, then declares a challenge to the false gods that Ahab has lead the people to sacrifice to. Ahab has lead Israel to work the Baal's and Asthoreth's, fertility gods. Gods that you bribe and appease rather than gods who you communion with . Gods or power whose image is only born by the kings, rather than the God Who demonstrates His power in place His image on all of humanity, from highest to lowest. SO Elijah challenges Ahab's gods of power on Mt. Carmel where the 850 priests of Baal and Ashtoreth go through all sorts of elaborate designs only for the power of God to be demonstrated at the behest of Elijah's simple prayer. “Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. 37 Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”

“Elijah, remember when you stood on God's behalf as He battled the false gods of Baal and Ashtoreth? Remember taunting the priests of Baal and Ashtoreth by asking if their gods were sleeping or perhaps on a long journey and therefore they should shout louder? Remember God answering your simple prayer with fire? Thus far God helped you and He will in the future too.”

Elijah had every reason to trust God because of how we knew God had helped him in the past. Sometimes in large dramatic moments such as fire coming from the heavens to consume a sacrifice and altar in front of all the people. Other times in small, minimalistic moments such as a handful of flour and a little bit of olive oil that lasted so much longer than it should have. God was there for Elijah. Over and over he was reminded that God had helped him thus far. He had helped him escape death in a multitude of manners.

Think of the ways that God has helped you in the past. They may have been dramatic. God may have moved the mountains and made the impossible happen for you. Perhaps the thing that was never supposed to happen actually happened and you knew it wasn't just circumstance, it was God helping you in the moment. He was there for you. He helped you thus far. These miraculous moments happen. I believe it.

There are probably more moments that weren't dramatic that when you think about you realize were gifts from God. Most of the story of Elijah is God providing him with food and water. Such small things, until you desperately need them.

- Perhaps you felt that you were completely alone and at just the right moment God sent someone your way to remind you that you are not alone.
- Perhaps you were sure that you couldn't bear up under the weight of your pain for another moment, and yet somehow God provided you with just enough strength to stand up and take one more step, and then He did it again for another step.
- Perhaps you found just enough change in between the couch cushions, you just barely missed the other vehicle, you suddenly were awake when your head had been nodding, etc., etc., etc.

There are so many small gifts from God that save us day after day. Moments that did not come from our skills or abilities, but were gifts. We merely received them. Moments that are just enough to help us push forward. I can't say why but it often seems that God prefers to provide just enough rather than overwhelming force.

Such moments are small ebenezers that remind us, when we acknowledge them, that thus far God has helped us. He has provided just enough in the past, He will provide just enough in the future.

Elijah knew this and stood strong with God ... until Jezebel declared that she was going to kill him. She said:

“May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.” (1 Kings 19:2)

And at that the prophet who stood so strongly in the hope that God would help him because he knew that God had helped him in the past, gave up. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” (1 Kings 19:4). And at that point, he ran for his life.

‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ (1 Kings 19:9)

That is the question that the Lord asked Elijah. ‘What are you doing here?’ After all that Elijah had trusted the Lord through why was he here hiding now. What was it about this circumstance that pushed him over the edge. It wasn’t like he had faced life-threatening situations before. He was the Lord’s prophet and his entire story is one of him speaking truth to power.

Ahab you have sinned. You are not following the Lord, therefore God is going to do this.

But there was something about this circumstance that was too much for Elijah and so he complained to the Lord.

“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)

I have followed you Lord but now I am alone. I’m on my own and I can’t do it. I understand this temptation. The fear that you are completely on your own. That is all left up to you and you know that you aren’t able to manage this. How do we face the chaos on our own. How do we stand up against forces that are far too strong for us. The waves are too high, the

winds are too strong. We are weak and feeble and yet it feels like survival is in our hands alone, and we know exactly how weak we are. We may hide it with bravado, but inwardly we know that all our skills, abilities, and resources are really able to handle as small things and we can't handle this circumstance.

Yet God speaks to Elijah. He doesn't speak in the earthquake though it dramatically tears the ground apart and thunders around us. God is not in the earthquake. He doesn't speak in the fire though it roars and consumes all we see. God is not in the fire.

He is in the gentle whisper and He speaks soft words that are full of His strength.

“Go back” & “You are not alone”

He tells Elijah to “go back the way” he had come (1 Kings 19:15). In Elijah's case God is specifically giving him geographic directions but I believe God is also saying to Elijah, and to us, to return to the areas of trust.

“Remember what I have done in the past. I know the present circumstances seem too much, but consider what I have done in the past and what I have brought you through. Return to that.”

Take a moment and think through what God has delivered you from in the past and what He has delivered others from. He is in the business of helping people cross their “Red Sea”s. He parts the waters that hem us into danger and delivers us through them. He has done it before and will do it again. It is who He is. Return to that.

God also tells Elijah that even though he believes he is the only one left (1 Kings 19:14) he is in fact not the only one left.

“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 19:18).

“You are not actually alone Elijah. It may feel that way but there are others, and I also have always been with you. You are not the only one doing this, there are brothers and sisters around you doing the same thing.”

I think these are good words for us when we are in the chaos and fear. “Come back.” “You are not alone.” This isn’t just true for the present COVID-19 crisis but for the other circumstances, we face in our lives. The reality is that we don’t know what will happen with what we are presently going through. It could get really bad, or it could seem like nothing happened after everything we did to prepare for it and keep it safe. This is not the first time that we have not been able to meet together face to face because of the circumstances of our world. It won’t be the last time. There are always storms happening around us. There are always moments that are obviously way beyond our control. Times where we are tempted to trust in ourselves rather than the Lord, where we are tempted to give up. I believe God still says to us at such times, “Come back” “you are not alone”.