

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: 1 Kings 19:1-18
Sermon Title: "A More Humble and Gentler God Rocking Lives"

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{SLIDE 1} Have you ever experienced a great victory? Have you ever won something that was difficult to win and yet you won it?

Maybe it wasn't a trophy for winning a game. Maybe it was getting the best grade you could on a test. Or maybe it was winning the Employee of the Month at the place you work. Maybe it was a bonus won. Maybe it was some recognition from the boss and staff that made you feel proud. We have won something in our lives, either as children or as adults, that made us celebrate. It felt like we were on Cloud Nine. The state of euphoria (jubilation and joy) we experienced was without comparison.

{SLIDE 2} The prophet Elijah experienced such euphoria in his life. It was a great thing to be called a prophet of God, but to do the things that he did were truly amazing. The joy must have welled up and exploded out of him when it was all finished.

You see, he confronted the evil King Ahab and evil

Queen Jezebel, telling them there would be no rain for several years, and there was no rain.¹ He visited a widow who had no food and there was food as long as he stayed with her. The same widow's son died, and Elijah raised the child from the dead. And then, if that wasn't enough, he challenged the evil queen and her false prophets to prove if their god was the true God, and they lost. **{SLIDE 3}** This might be one of the greatest miracles of all: Elijah told the 450 false prophet of Baal to pour four large jars of water over an altar that he was going to use to sacrifice an animal to God.² The altar would be set on fire at some time and Elijah, strangely enough, tells the false prophets to pour water over it. Water should put out any fire Elijah may set, but okay. The false prophets pour out the water. Elijah says, "Do it again," and then he says, "Do it a third time." His sacrifice to God is drenched in water. No fire should be able to touch it.

Yet Elijah calls out to God, and "the fire of the Lord" shot down from heaven and "consumed" the sacrifice. The fire was so hot that all that water was licked up, turned into a vapor instantly.³

Such a triumph should swell anybody's head. A

¹ The following can be found in 1 Kings 17:1-18:40.

² 1 Kings 18:33-35.

³ 1 Kings 18:38.

person who experiences such a miracle should feel like he or she can do great things all the time. Elijah must have felt elated about what happened, but he might also have felt arrogant, prideful. God is the One who does great things, and Elijah is his prophet. Elijah can confront the king and queen and tell them off. He can seize all the false prophets and gods on the nation and destroy them all at once. Elijah has been a part of many excellent and magnificent things, and such victories might have caused Elijah to think he could do anything. He could strut around and make things happen, and nobody could touch him.

{SLIDE 4} But who is God? What does our God represent? And what does our God want us to become?

Is God the God of arrogance? Is God the God of the swelled head, of the chest thrown out in pride? Does God expect us to strut about, look all-important, command attention from everybody? God is mighty, “eternal, infinite, immeasurable,” all-knowing, ever-present, and yet the paradox (the opposite thing about God) is God is not flashy.⁴ God is not a reality-TV personality begging for people’s attention. God is not

⁴ *The Book of Confessions (PCUSA)*, “The Scot’s Confession,” 3.01.

the Supreme Being who calls out, “Look at me, look at me,” like a player who just made the tackle or scored the point. For all God’s power, God is personable. For all God’s might, God is approachable. God expects us to be the same. We might be able to do great things as God uses us to do great things, but our heads do not swell. Our hearts do not fill with pride. In fact, God calls us to be humble just as Christ was humble in all he did. God expects us to be servants who think more of others, and to do our work without much fanfare, just as Christ served while on earth.

{SLIDE 5} After Elijah wins a great victory over 450 false prophets of Baal and over the evil Queen Jezebel herself, we would think that Elijah could celebrate for a long time and then live happily ever after. This is not the case. In the next chapter, 19, Elijah is running for his life. The evil Queen Jezebel is greatly displeased with what happened to her prophets, so she calls for Elijah’s head. “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life as one of [my dead prophets] this time tomorrow!”⁵

Elijah is running for his life. He ran to the wilderness, where an angel tells him to eat cake.⁶

⁵ 1 Kings 19:2.

⁶ Cf. 1 Kings 19:5-7.

Actually, Elijah sees a cake baking on coals and a jar of water, so he eats. For 40 days he travels through the wilderness toward the mountain of God called Horeb or Sinai. This is the same place where Moses received the Ten Commandments. Surely great things will happen to Elijah in that place.

Now, what is Elijah's emotional state at this time? Here is a man who stood up to the king and queen and oversaw a couple cool miracles. He was on Cloud Nine. He could do nothing wrong. Now he is an outcast. He is a wanted criminal. He walks through the wilderness not only because he has to walk through it, but also because this is his emotional and spiritual state. The wilderness represents struggle. It represents misfortune and pain and anguish. People who find themselves in the wilderness find themselves in a terrible situation that not might end soon. People who find themselves in the wilderness may find themselves separated from God.

{SLIDE 6} Where is God for Elijah? Is God close or far away? God seemed to be so close to him, while he told off the evil king and queen. God seemed to be so close when he boldly told the false priests to drench his altar with water. God seemed so close when he won the challenge and seized all the false priests for

execution. Now where is God? Is God only around when the going is good? Is God only around when we have the upper hand, when we have command over the situation? Where is God when bad things happen? Does God skip out and leave us alone?

We may feel this at time, when things aren't going well for us. A bad health report, an unexpected bill in the mail, a serious call from the school about our kids, a serious call from our boss at work: anything can turn our sunny, happy days into gloomy, sad days. Things can turn on a dime, and we are now stuck in the middle, alone, miserable. We enter a kind of wilderness, and we feel our emotions draining from us. We feel our spirituality slowly slipping away. Where is God? Has God left us in our little wildernesses?

{SLIDE 7} A question popped in my head when I reached this point on my message: Where did God flee while Elijah fled to the wilderness? Did God flee away from Elijah, leaving him alone? Or, did God flee to the wilderness with him? God fled to the wilderness, and fled before Elijah even got there. After Elijah falls down on the ground in front of a solitary broom tree, an angel wakes him up and tells him to eat.⁷ God

⁷ Cf. 1 Kings 19:4-5.

gives Elijah the chance to rest under the shade of a tree and then gives him breakfast at the right time. Elijah's energy is renewed but not for long. He is still in the wilderness, which can zap his energy. So God continues to give him shade under the same tree and then gives him breakfast. As Elijah travels through the wilderness, he travels with the strength of the food given to him earlier. God allows the food to provide super-extra energy, so that Elijah can make it to Mount Horeb or Sinai and find a cave to live in.

{SLIDE 8} And then when God finally reveals himself to Elijah, it isn't through these spectacular signs and wonders. God doesn't overwhelm Elijah with flair and pizzazz. A mighty wind hits the mountain, splitting rocks and breaking boulders, but God is not in the wind. An earthquake hits and threatens to pulverize the mountain but God is not in it. A fire flares up and scorches the landscape, but God is not in it.⁸ Great and wondrous things appear before Elijah's eyes. These are just like the great and wondrous miracles he performed, having a mother eat food without going out to buy any, a dead child come back to life, and a water-drenched altar catch on fire. Powerful marvels occurred, and Elijah may not have

⁸ Cf. 1 Kings 19:11-12.

been able to breath because of it all. He may have shielded his eyes and hoped he might survive it all. Yet, God is not in those great and wondrous things. God is in the whisper that follows the wind and earthquake and fire. A small, still voice barely touches Elijah's ears, but he hears it. He hears God speaking to him. He hears God comforting him. He hears God directing him. He hears God tell him that all will be okay, as long as Elijah follows God.

{SLIDE 9} Once again, God proves to Elijah who God is. God is not the God of arrogance. God does get a swelled head and throw out his chest and strut around. God can do great and mighty things, but God doesn't do them to increase his popularity and fame. God does what God does so that people may see the mighty God who is also the loving God. They may see the God who has infinite possibilities, and one of those possibilities is to save us from suffering, save us from pain and grief. For all God's power, Elijah understands that God is personable. For all God's might, God is approachable.

An arrogant God doesn't follow people into the wilderness. An arrogant God would stand at the edge of the wilderness and mock us for being so weak. An

arrogant God would tell us to lift ourselves from our bootstraps and make something of ourselves. There are times that we find ourselves in a wilderness. Nothing is going right. Our energy, our emotions, are shot. We need Someone to accompany us. We need Someone to flee to the wilderness with us and give us the words we need to hear.

We don't need a lot of banging and flashing. We need a still, small voice telling us that everything will turn out well. We need a whisper to say that we can trust God with our lives, and God will walk with us through whatever we have to endure. We need a breath and a gentle wind saying that we are loved, that God is going to be faithful to us, that God will always be present no matter what.

{SLIDE 10} On Mount Horeb or Sinai, Elijah discovers who God truly is. Elijah reconnects with God and understands that God can set fire to altars and crush mountains and turn the world upside down. Yet, God is going to work in the world most of the time through humble, faithful servants. God is going to get his work done with still, small voices and simple actions. God will set the world on fire for him, as the message about God goes from one person to another,

and cause euphoria within. Lives will be changed through this simple work. King and queens will know true leadership. Prophets and disciples will rise up. People will bow and their tongues will confess; and all of us will win eternity as our reward.

Assurance of Pardon

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” Friends, believe the good news: In Christ you and I are forgiven. Thanks be to God.