

A Study of the Life of Elijah;

A Man Like Us.

Sermon # 1

Introduction

“When You Must Stand Alone!”

1 Kings 17:1

Tonight we begin a new study on the life of Elijah. The first question that might come to your mind may be; “Why study Elijah? What does that have to do with me?” Elijah is uniquely important among God’s servants. Scripture indicates this in that more is written about him than any other prophet except Moses. Elijah holds a special place in history in that he is one of only two humans who did not pass through the portals of death (Enoch was the other). And finally Elijah was one of two Old Testament saints who was present on the Mount of Transfiguration (Moses was the other).

When we read about someone like Elijah, we want so very much to believe such people are inherently different because it makes us feel better about ourselves and gives us an excuse for being mediocre or run-of-the-mill Christians. We think it excuses us from tackling tough things for God. However, James 5:16b-17 blows that theory wide open when he says, “...*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (17) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months*”

First, James calls our attention to the fact that the faithful prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much and be used dramatically for God (vs. 16b). But even more importantly he reminds us that Elijah was a man with a nature just like ours! The King James Version says he was a man of “like passions.” He was like you and like me. As we deal with his story you will see for yourself. Elijah had his ups and his downs.

He was not some kind of super saint, he faced the same feelings of “I can’t do it,” and “I don’t feel like it” syndrome just like everyone else. He was little rough around the edges and not at all polished or refined.

In fact, his humanness will be glaringly obvious later in the record of his life and ministry in chapter 19. Being called by God to a unique ministry did not exempt him from, incredible stress, crippling fear, and even being immobilized by depression. But, I find it immensely encouraging that Elijah could rise above his weaknesses through dependence on the resources he found in his relationship with God. The *same resources* available to Elijah are available to us in the Lord’s work in even more abundant ways in New Testament times through the ministry

of the Holy Spirit. One cannot read about Elijah honestly and come away without being challenged to new heights of living for God.

“And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”

This evening I want you to see with me five important things about Elijah.

First, The Time In Which Elijah Lived Saul was Israel’s first king. Then David became king and greatly expanded its boundaries. He was followed by his son, Solomon who built the great temple in Jerusalem. And then at the end of Solomon’s life a civil war broke the nation into separate kingdoms; a northern kingdom, known as Israel and a southern kingdom, called Judah.

The northern kingdom had nineteen kings and all of them were wicked. The northern kingdom ended with the Assyrian invasion in 722 B.C.

The southern kingdom had seventeen kings, eight of these kings “followed the Lord” and but nine of them were wicked and did not follow the Lord as their God. The southern kingdom ultimately ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and the seventy year Babylonian captivity.

When Elijah appeared on the scene there had been six uninterrupted decades, sixty years, of bloodshed, intrigue, immorality and idolatry in the nation of Israel. When Ahab came to the throne Scripture says that he was worse than the kings who came before him and that included his father who had been worse than any of the previous kings.

How bad were things? The altars of Jehovah had been dismantled. His prophets were in hiding. His worshippers were a mere handful, scattered and intimidated into silence by the scope of the evil all around them. They had been so silenced that their existence was known only to God. And behind all of this evil was a diabolical duo – Ahab and his queen, Jezebel. Jezebel was the daughter of a pagan king named Ethbaal, who had assassinated his own brothers to gain the throne of Sidon.

The worship of Baal was the most degraded religious system ever devised and the Phoenician version of Baal worship was the worst of the lot. The Phoenician version of Baal worship was deemed evil even by other pagans.

How does all of this apply to us today? In America today we are living in what has been described as a post-Christian era. It is post-Christian not because there are no longer any Christians living in this country, there are probably more Christians than there ever has been, but *Post-Christian in the sense that the Christian faith no longer plays a major role in shaping public opinion and policy!*

The reality of this forces us to face some tough questions such as: Who and what is my God? Do we claim faith in the God of the Bible, but then live our lives like practicing atheist? Is God really or God from the standpoint of where our treasure is, what our attitudes and priorities are and what determines our behavior? What is really important to me? How committed am I to my relationship with God?

I want you to see this evening not only the time in which Elijah but...

Secondly, The Man That Elijah Was.

Names in the Old Testament are always significant insight into the character of the person. The name Elijah is made up of two words "El" meaning "god" (as in Elohim) and "jah" which refers to "Jehovah" the personal name of God given to Israel. This combination of names makes Elijah's name mean "Jehovah is God." The name Elijah was a most significant name for the time in which Elijah was called to minister. The greatest conflict of the day was whether Jehovah was God or Baal was God. The issue in Israel in Elijah's time is same issue we face today. The issue is, "Who is your God?" "Who is going to rule your life?" It was a testimony by Elijah's parents every time they called him in for a meal. With Baal worship so popular and so intolerant of the worship of Jehovah it would take great courage to name one's child, "Jehovah is my God!"

We know almost nothing of the origins of Elijah we are simply told in verse one that he was a *"Tishbite of the land of Gilead."* Simply stated Elijah was from a place called Tishbeh, which is so obscure that to this day we do not know exactly where that was except that it was in the land of Gilead. Gilead was a wild and desolate place.

Elijah was a man from the mountains, one of the folks who came from the hills. Or as we would say today, "Elijah was a hillbilly." But before you laugh too much you should remember two things. First, that is where my family came from. My dad said that when he was a boy, "they lived so far out that you had to go toward town to hunt." Dad took me to visit where he was born and raised one time and we literally left the pavement and went 17 miles down a dirt road to get there.

And the second thing you should remember is that you don't want to make those people mad. If you lose an argument that might not be all that you lose. You don't want to mess with mountain folks because they are a tough breed. The people of that rocky hill country were rough, rugged and perhaps somewhat solemn and stern. Sort of sounds like a Hamby family reunion to me!

The point is that you would never have guessed that Elijah the Tishbite, would amount to anything for God. He was an obscure man from a remote place. But the Apostle Paul would later write in 1 Cor. 1:26-31, *"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. (27) But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world*

to put to shame the things which are mighty; (28) and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, (29) that no flesh should glory in His presence. (30) But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— (31) that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”

You may not have any great expectations for your life. But you need to realize that God created each of us for a purpose. We are uniquely created by God with potential and opportunities limited only by our attitude, our faith and our availability to be used of God.

Next I want you to see not only the man Elijah was but...

Third, The Religion That Elijah Faced.

At first, it would seem as though Ahab and Jezebel were content with religious pluralism. As far as they were concerned Israelites could worship Jehovah or Baal or both. It is the same kind of pluralism we see in America today. The only thing that is intolerable is to make an exclusive claim concerning ones faith or one’s god. Even Oprah will concede that believing your religion is one way to God is fine; but to say your religion is “the” way, the only way to God is intolerable!

The worship of Baal soon replaced and cruelly suppressed the worship of Jehovah. It is interesting to consider that the intolerance of Baal worshippers for Jehovah worshippers so clearly illustrates that those who demand tolerance for themselves are intolerant of those who follow God. Today those who practice deviant lifestyles and alternative forms of worship seek to be accepted on the basis of tolerance, free-dom of expression and etc. but once they get a foothold you can count on them to change their tune. They will then seek supremacy and competitors will be cruelly suppressed and crushed in submission.

I want you to seen not only the religion that Elijah faced but...

Fourth, The Stand That Elijah Took.

- He believed and served the living God

“the Lord God of Israel lives”

There is a challenge seen in the words that Elijah uses he says, “the LORD God of Israel lives” the obvious implication is that Jehovah lives whereas Baal does not.

- He lived in the presence of the living God. “The God ...before whom I stand.”

A servant stands before his master ready to receive orders. When Elijah said that *“he stood before Jehovah”* he was informing Ahab that he was a committed servant of Jehovah.

Sometimes it is not about having all the answers or being able to debate the intellectual unbelievers, it just a matter of taking a stand. *The story is told that in the days that the famous atheist Madeline Murray Ohara was alive and debating Christians that she was once in a college auditorium challenging students that they believed in Jesus Christ – to have the guts to come to the stage and debate her. “Anyone up for the challenge,” she shouted. The tension mounted, as each person looked around to see who would respond. But then to everyone’s surprise a relatively new believer rose to her feet and began to sing, “Jesus Loves Me, this I know for the Bible tells me so.” With her bold profession others stood up and began singing, ultimately nearly the entire auditorium stood to their feet singing, “Jesus Loves Me, this I know.” With that Mrs. Ohara left abruptly.”* Our world is crying out for people who are bold enough to take a stand for Jesus!

Finally I want you to see not only the stand that Elijah took but

Fifth, The Judgment That Elijah Proclaimed.

“...As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”

The judgment of God was to perform three crucial purposes; (1) to encourage repentance, (2) to expose Baal, and (3) exalt Jehovah.

First, the judgment as forecast by Elijah was to cause men to see the consequences of evil of their ways in such a forceful way that it would cause them to want to change their ways. The drought was the result of not heeding the clear warning of God delivered in Deut 11:16-17. *“Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, (17) lest the LORD’s anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.”*

Secondly, the judgment was to expose Baal, as what he was a cruel fake we really possessed no power at all to help. There is a direct challenge to Baal in that Baal was supposed to be the god of rain and good crops. The longer the drought went on the more powerless Baal would be shown to be! This exposure of Baal would climax in a confrontation on Mt. Carmel where Elijah would challenge the prophets of Baal to show what their god could do.

Third, the judgment was to exalt Jehovah and show Him to be all powerful. Baal was honored in the land, not Jehovah and the judgment of the drought was designed to reverse that practice.

What made Elijah the man he was?

He knew who he was!

God's representative

He knew where he was!

In a sinful world that stood opposed to

the purposes of God!

He knew why he was there!

To give out God's message of light to people in darkness.

Conclusion

Although we may be just one of the teeming billions that make up life on this planet, and though you may believe you do not count for much, God says, "You matter and you can make difference!"

It could be that your entire life will find its meaning in just one person that God wants you to touch in some significant way. I do not know what God will do with you, or with me for that matter, I know this when you stand before the Lord one day, we will know then that our lives have not been without meaning and purpose!