

# Portraits of a Prophet

7.30.23

Elijah Sermon Series Message 1

Elijah's life is a great example of how God uses ordinary people and equips them, empowers them, and provides for them.

Introduction: [Divine Peace](#), [Divine Provision](#), and [Divine Presence](#).

A. Dependence upon God is not a bad thing.

1. In fact, God designed us to want Him and need Him.
2. For my life, there are three distinct things I'm praying for:
  - a. Divine peace/rest.
  - b. Divine provision.
  - c. Divine presence.

B. This was particularly evident a few months back when I found myself in a low place.

1. While in that place, I asked the Lord to show me something from His Word.
2. That place was the familiar story of Elijah and 1 Kings 18.
3. The more time I spent with Elijah, the more I saw these patterns in his life and ministry.
4. God consistently dealt with him in these three areas: Divine peace, Divine provision, and Divine presence.

C. As I look around me and inside me, I see that this is what we need again.

1. Our day and time is similar to Elijah's.
  - a. People are not faithful.
  - b. People are terribly lost and sinful.

c. It can seem like there is little hope.

2. I am reminded of something John Wesley wrote in his journal when he observed the evil and wickedness in Newcastle, England: "Never in my life have I heard such language, such swearing and have seen such wickedness. Ripe for revival."<sup>1</sup>

D. Elijah was God's chosen man for the hour.

1. But in this life, we see not only Elijah at his best but also at his lowest.

2. I'm thankful for this full portrait:

a. Too often, we compare ourselves to these biblical giants and think:

b. God could never use me, because...

3. Steven Furtick said, "The reason we struggle with insecurity is because we compare our behind-the-scenes with everyone else's highlight reel."

1. Elijah had an incredible "highlight" reel.

A. He was one of a few early prophets, like Samuel.

1. By the end of Elijah's life, his achievements were legendary.

2. When he walked into a community, everything stopped.

3. When the Lord spoke through him, rains stopped, false-prophets were executed and kingdoms were toppled.

4. Elijah carried the Word of the Lord, the sword of the Lord, and the mantle of the Lord.

B. Yet, Scripture records not only his highlights but his lower moments.

1. The Bible is extremely fair in its descriptions of people.

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<sup>1</sup>Kendall, R. T., and J. Jackson. 2013. [\*These Are the Days of Elijah: How God Uses Ordinary People to Do Extraordinary Things\*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Logos Ed.

2. Regularly we see people at their best and their worst.
  - a. Moments of brilliance and moments of abject failure.
  - b. Moments of great power and moments of weakness.

C. As we invest the next three weeks in looking at a few of Elijah's stories, I want to remind us that we are never encouraged to be like Elijah.

1. Elijah is not the hero of this story, God is.
2. In fact, no biblical character is EVER the hero.
  - a. They are always merely men and women that God uses for His ultimate glory.
  - b. Our purpose is not to be like Elijah, or Daniel, or Peter, or Paul but to be like Jesus.
  - c. Our goal is not to be like Elijah but to learn from these examples of how God used normal, ordinary people like Elijah.
3. You are not the hero of your own story.
  - a. **If I'm the hero of my own story, then the outcome is totally dependent upon my strength, my creativity, my luck.**
  - b. But because Jesus is the hero of my story, I can confidently enter into situations knowing the outcome is in the hands of someone better than me.

TEXT: 1 Kings 17:1-7 (CSB)

**17** Now Elijah the Tishbite, from the Gilead settlers,<sup>1</sup> said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, in whose presence I stand, there will be no dew or rain during these years except by my command!"

<sup>2</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to him: <sup>3</sup>"Leave here, turn eastward, and hide at the Wadi Cherith where it enters the Jordan. <sup>4</sup>You are to drink from the wadi. I have commanded the ravens to provide for you there."

<sup>5</sup>So he proceeded to do what the LORD commanded. Elijah left and lived at the Wadi Cherith where it enters the Jordan. <sup>6</sup>The ravens kept bringing him bread and meat in the morning and in the evening, and he would drink from the wadi. <sup>7</sup>After a while, the wadi dried up because there had been no rain in the land.

## 2. Before we meet Elijah, we need to meet Ahab.

1 Kings 16:29–33 (CSB)

### ISRAEL'S KING AHAB

<sup>29</sup>Ahab son of Omri became king over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of Judah's King Asa; Ahab son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. <sup>30</sup>But Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the LORD's sight more than all who were before him. <sup>31</sup>Then, as if following the sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat were not enough, he married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and then proceeded to serve Baal and bow in worship to him. <sup>32</sup>He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he had built in Samaria. <sup>33</sup>Ahab also made an Asherah pole. Ahab did more to anger the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

A. Ahab and Jezebel are infamous people.

1. They were the essence of evil leaders.
2. They murdered and stole from their people and led them to spiritual ruin.
3. Even today, we still use the name Jezebel to refer to a woman who is evil, deceiving, and deceptive.

B. For twenty-plus years they would lead the northern Kingdom of God's people, Israel.

1. Instead of leading the people to serve and worship God, they instead led them to worship Baal and Asherah.
2. "Baal means lord, master, owner, possessor."
  - a. He was the Canaanite storm god and bringer of rain. Chief of the Canaanite pantheon.

b. As the storm god and bringer of rain, Baal was recognized as sustaining the fertility of crops, animals, and people. His followers often believed that sexual acts performed in his temple would boost Baal's sexual prowess, and thus contribute to his work in increasing fertility.<sup>2</sup>

3. Asherah is probably a fertility goddess that was often represented either in wood carving form or a terracotta statue.

1. Since the 1920s, between more than 850 terracotta female figurines have been found throughout Israel and Judah—common to the eighth/seventh century bc.<sup>3</sup>

2. This corresponds to the time that Elijah would have been ministering.

C. The times in which Elijah flourished were characterized by an atmosphere of spiritual degeneration.<sup>4</sup>

1. The ministry of God through Elijah took place in a wicked, twisted world.

2. It was Elijah that God used to enact God's Covenant and to proclaim judgment.

3. So, where did God find a prophet like Elijah?

3. Elijah is an unknown, small-town kind of guy.

A. Long before "Journey" sang about a small-town girl or Jason Aldean sang about small towns, God used out-of-the-way places to prepare people.

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<sup>2</sup> Corduan, Winfried. 2016. "[Baal.](#)" In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, edited by John D. Barry,. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>3</sup> Tully, Eric. 2016. "[Asherah.](#)" In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, edited by John D. Barry,. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>4</sup> Kendall, R. T., and J. Jackson. 2013. [These Are the Days of Elijah: How God Uses Ordinary People to Do Extraordinary Things](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen.

1. Elijah was from a rural area east of Israel, in Gilead (MAP).
2. We know almost nothing of his earlier life or how old he was.

B. His preparation is hidden from history.

1. Yet there is no question in my mind that God had been preparing Elijah in the hidden place.
2. While the kings and leaders of Israel found new ways of sinning, God was preparing Elijah.
  - a. God was teaching him his Word and his covenants.
  - b. God was creating ravens to be ready to tend to him.
  - c. God was crafting a mantle that would symbolize the anointing of God upon Elijah's ministry.
  - d. Long before moments of crisis arrive, God prepares people for the crisis to come.

3. All of this is happening in the background.

- a. Public ministry requires private preparation.
- b. We will see in Elijah's life that wilderness places were crucial for his formation.
  1. Just as Jesus went from place of prayer to place of prayer,
  2. Elijah moved from private to public and back to private places.

4. We cannot disparage the place of preparation God has for us.

- a. And that preparing place is not a place we ever fully graduate from.
- b. Elijah would find himself in a similar place again.
- c. We never graduate from dependence upon God.
- d. Dear saints, do despise your need for the Holy Spirit.

e. It is not a sign of immaturity to cry out to God, wanting and needing His presence, His provision, and His peace.

#### 4. Elijah's terrible calling.

A. As God brings Elijah to this great platform, the calling must have been terrible.

1. Elijah likely walks from his homeland of Gilead toward the king in Samaria.
2. As he obeys God's leading, he has a message that would bring terror, pain, and death to many of God's people in Israel.
3. No rain until God says so.

B. This was not the whim of a rogue prophet.

1. This was the promise of God dating back to the Covenant in the Wilderness.

##### a. **Deuteronomy 11:16–17 (CSB)**

<sup>16</sup>Be careful that you are not enticed to turn aside, serve, and bow in worship to other gods. <sup>17</sup>Then the LORD's anger will burn against you. He will shut the sky, and there will be no rain; the land will not yield its produce, and you will perish quickly from the good land the LORD is giving you.

b. God had been merciful, slow to anger, and patient with His people.

2. But the open, deliberate, and constant sin of Israel and her leaders necessitated the enactment of the other promises.

a. God had promised blessings but also curses.

b. **You cannot live in open sin and expect God's blessing.**

c. This principle applies to us today:

1. All sin must be judged.

2. Either through the Blood of Jesus or through our own death.

3. But we cannot live in sin and expect to be blessed by God.

C. Who did God call for this terrible mission?

1. God called Elijah, a man he had been preparing in the Wilderness. (Just like John the Baptist)
2. God called a man with enough distance from Ahab to serve as a terrible distinction.
3. God called a man who would need repeated encouragement and strength from God but was obedient.

D. Old Testament prophets were people of God's covenant.

1. They had few friends.
2. They spoke unpopular words and received the wrath and anger of men and kings.
3. Many were tortured and killed.
4. Yet, they boldly declared "thus says the Lord" not on the basis of opinion but on the Word of God.
5. Elijah's mission: to call Israel to choose between Baal and the God of Israel.

## 5. Who is the God of Israel?

A. The next stories of Elijah all include a water element.

1. This makes sense when we understand the spiritual battle taking place.
2. Israel has accepted Baal, the god of storm and rain.
  - a. They worshipped Baal as the one who would give life.
  - b. They celebrated Baal as the sustainer of the crops and harvest.

B. When Elijah stands and declares no rain or dew, he is declaring Yahweh God's power.



1. If it rains without the Word of the Lord, then Baal is God.
2. If there is dew on the ground, then Baal is the bringer of life.
3. But if there is no moisture in Israel until the prophet says, then God wins.
4. And all of Israel would now experience the terrible results.

C. When we claim allegiance to other gods, we walk out from under God's blessings and into His curse.

1. And now, for three years, Israel suffers.
  - a. The mouths of wildlife find no drink.
  - b. All the grass and flowers die.
  - c. Streams and rivers expose their foundations.
  - d. Mothers are unable to quench their baby's thirst.
  - e. Fathers have no relief for their children.
  - f. The skin of the elderly withers.

2 And Elijah becomes the most hated man in Israel.

- a. Ahab spends three years hunting Elijah down, we read later on.
- b. Elijah is blamed for the suffering and called the tormentor of Israel.

D. The same word that caused Elijah to stand before King Ahab led him to leave and hide in the Wadi.

1. What happens next is by God's direction.
2. Sometimes God plants on platforms, and other times He hides us away.

6. In the midst of the terrible, God miraculously provides.

A. God purposefully hid Elijah away. (Picture)

1. This hiding had multiple purposes.
  - a. This ensured that King Ahab could not kill him.
  - b. This ensured Elijah would not pray for rain before God's timing dictated.
  - c. The hiding reinforced to Elijah that God knew how to provide Divine Rest, Divine Provision, and Divine Presence.
2. Perhaps you feel there is no reason why God has you in a place that feels more like riding a bench than on the playing field.
  - a. Perhaps you feel that God has laid you aside and has forgotten about His promises, His calling, and His plans for you.
  - b. Maybe you feel that God has put you in some forgotten place, and the provision is running dry.
  - c. Maybe God's Word to you feels unfair as you obey what the Lord commanded.
    1. When you said YES to Jesus, you were hoping to stand before kings.
    2. But instead, you are being ministered to by ravens.
    3. Verse 5 says that Elijah obeyed what the Lord commanded, even if that meant hiding in the Wadi.

B. **Because God led him there, God provided for him there.**

1. Ravens are unlikely sources of provision.
  - a. Ravens are unclean animals.
  - b. Israelites could not eat them because they ate on dead animals.
  - c. Yet God used unlikely animals to provide BREAD and Meat.

2. As these birds flew into the wadi where Elijah was, no one would have suspected God's provision.

a. These were birds of death, not life.

b. But the God who created them to be scavengers now changed their nature so that they were carrying life.

c. Plenty of meat would have been available as animals died from thirst.

d. But where did the bread come from?

1. Was this to remind Elijah of the Manna that Israel ate in the wilderness?

2. Did they steal it from window sills?

e. Morning and evening, God's unlikely providers brought Elijah what he needed.

3. If God can radically alter the nature of a dirty bird to bring Elijah what he needed, don't you think that God can sustain you where He has planted you?

a. If you are where God has called you to be, then don't leave till He tells you!

b. God knows where He has put you and can send miraculous provision even to the most desolate places.

Close: It is an almost universal law that when earthly doors are barred to us, the gates of heaven will swing open.<sup>5</sup>

A. Do you believe that God does provide His presence, His Peace, and His provision to His people?

1. I believe that God supplies all of our needs.

2. When all the culture around us seems to be godless and full of sin, God still calls faithful people to stand boldly for Him.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ruachministries.org/ravensandtheprophet/3bythebrookcherith.htm>

3. God still sends miraculous provisions, even when it seems that no one knows where you are.

4. But I can assure you that God never forgets where He plants His people.

B. Three areas of prayer:

1. Do you need God's peace in your life?

a. If so, in a moment, we are going to invest time in the altar, receiving God's peace in our life.

b. Peace is not the absence of conflict but the sure confidence that God is with us through it all.

2. Do you need God's provision in your life?

a. I've been around long enough to know that there are times when there seems to be more month than you can afford.

b. But I also know that God is not limited to our constraints and that He provides, through ravens, widows, ordinary jars, and any other method He desires.

c. In a moment, if you are praying for provision, we want to pray together for God's supply.

3. Lastly, do you want God's presence?

a. You want to hear His voice.

b. You want to be guided along by Holy Spirit.

c. You desire to love Him more than ever before.

Let's pray.

