

August 6 2017

**Reading from the Bible** *I Kings 18:20-40, 19:1-18*

**Sermon** *Elijah, Can You Hear Me Now?*

This morning we are going to turn to a couple of prayers in 1 Kings starting in chapter 18. This is one of those sermons when you might want to keep your Bibles open a little while because we are going to bounce back and forth. There are multiply prayers by Elijah. God was dealing with him in some ways slowly and other times not so slowly.

Where are we on the map of the Israel? We are in the northern kingdom of Israel. After the reign of Solomon, his kingdom was divided into two kingdoms—the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom is Samaria - you will remember the story about Jesus and the Good Samaritan. The northern kingdom was the land of the 10 tribes of Israel. The Southern Kingdom was Judah which had two tribes Judea and Benjamin. The northern Kingdom in about 150 years later was going to be taken away by the Syrians and the tribes of Israel would completely disappear. They would be scattered all over the Syrian kingdom. Judah would go downhill about 140 years later. Neither one did very well after the kingdom was divided. The events in I Kings 18 & 19 are about 850 years before Christ. And that is where we are in the Bible.

In the northern kingdom there was increasing idol worship. There is a man named Ahab, an Israelite, and he was the king. He was known as doing more evil than any king that has come before him. He was even worse than his father. They worshipped the idol Baal and Asharoth. (The followers of Baal believed in sacrificing babies and young children to the idol. The other idol was Asharoth that emphasized sexuality and fertility.) The worship was very wild, sexual and crazy. This made the worship of God seem very boring. King Ahab was one of the leaders of it. While Ahab was bad to start with but then he married Jezebel. She was a real Jezebel, a very evil woman. She was a religious fanatic of Baal worship. She killed God's prophets. The prophets that did escape went into hiding in caves. The marriage was a political alliance but she really ran the place. Worshipped for God was boring so some of the people went to the high places to worship the idols. And that is where we are going to find Elijah. He was called the trouble-maker of Israel because God brought on another draught and famine. When Ahab sees Elijah is the trouble-maker of Israel. In Chapter 18 Elijah says I have not caused trouble the in Israel, you, Ahab has caused the trouble. You have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and followed the idol Baal.

So Elijah has a plan and he is going to organize a very specific plan. I know you have all heard this story before. Elijah wins—oops you probably all ready know

that...Chapter 19 in reads, “Bring all Israel together at Mount Carmel with all 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asharoth that eat at Jezebel’s table. They are sponsored by Jezebel. That is 850 prophets to 1-very great odds. So Ahab said to all the Israelites come and assemble at Mount Carmel. Mount Carmel had been a sacred, holy place for the worship of God, the only One, True and Living God.

And over the years, it had been turned into a place to worship idols.

Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping with two different opinions?” There is a little bit of a joke in there---there was a limping motion that the priests did in some of their rituals. It is a little play on words. How long are you going to go limping along between two different opinions? If the Lord is God follow him. But if Baal is god then follow him. The people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, “I only am left to prophase for the Lord.” He said, “Baal has 450 prophets you must choose. Put the offering on the wood but put no fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it.” He was trying to set up a situation like the OK Corral. So they are going to have a worship session. The offerings are equal. Each got to pick their own bull, set up their own offerings no one could say, the scales were tipped or anyone cheated. So they each prepare their own spots. Then Elijah said, “You call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the Lord and the god who answers by fire is indeed God. And all the people said, “Well Spoken.”

Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal choose a bull but put no fire to it and then call on the name of your god. So they check the bull that was chosen, prepared it and called on the name of the Baal from morning until noon. They cried, “Oh Baal answer our prayers” but you know, it was little bit like a phone that has been disconnected and was no longer in service or a Website that is for sale. There was no voice, no answer or change at the altar. At noon Elijah mocked them saying,” Cry louder, surely if he is a god who can’t hear, or has wandered away or maybe he is on journey or perhaps he is asleep and you must wake up. Then they cried louder and started to cut themselves with swords and lances and blood gushed out all over them. They raved on until evening time. There was no answer, no voice, and no response.

Elijah said to all the people to come closer and they did. And he prepared the altar of the Lord. He took 12 stones for the 12 tribes and reminded them that Israel would be their name. With the stones he built the altar in the name of the Lord. Then he made a trench around the altar. He put the wood in order and he filled jars of water and pours it all over the burnt offering and filled the trench. He did it a second and third time and water ran around the altar and into the trench.

Meanwhile the Baal worshippers were watching. And Elijah said the prayer. “Oh Lord, God of Abraham and Isaac and Israel let us know this day that you that you are our God in Israel.” “I am your servant and doing all these things at your

bidding” “Answer me, O Lord that the people will know that you are Lord and you have turned their hearts back” He is claiming who God is and he has already turned the people’s hearts back.” OO awesome!!! A great ball of fire appears and the fire devours the wood, consumes the burnt offering, burnt the stones, and licks up the water that was in the trench.

When all the people saw what happened they fell on their faces and cried , “The Lord indeed is God” “The Lord indeed is God”. And Elijah invites them to kill all the Baal’s prophets. What a day! You would think the people would remember but we know better than that and sadly they continue to go downhill in idolatry.

However on his day they were very clear as to who was their God.

Elijah should have been exuberant. Instead Jezebel said, “I am going to get you!” I am going to kill you just like you did Baal’s priests I am going to make you life like them-dead this time tomorrow” In Chapter 19 Elijah was afraid and he fled for his life and went a day’s journey into the wilderness and left his servant behind. He sat down under a solitary boom tree and prayed that he might die. Remember he thought he was the only priest left but we know there is a little more story. God is going to do a little fact checking with Elijah. Elijah thinks he knows the truth. And Elijah has this little speech which he says several times. He said to God, “It is enough now- O lord take away my life because I am no better than my ancestors.” He laid down under the broom tree and fell asleep. An angel came and touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” There was bread on a hot stone and a jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again. The angel came the second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat because otherwise the journey will be too much for you.” God is so careful with this man instead of going after him and saying, “Where is your faith, you are not alone.” “You saw what happened on Mt. Carmel. Eat and get some rest.” And on the strength of the food he took a journey of forty days and nights and went to Mount Horeb. He spent the night there. The Lord said to him.” “What are you doing here Elijah?” Elijah says, I have worked hard for Lord of Hosts and for the sake of the covenant. All the prophets have been killed and I alone am left and the king is seeking my life.”

And then we have this wonderful picture that God says “Come out” There is a wind that is breaking everything apart God is not in the wind and then there is an earthquake and the Lord was not in the earthquake. And then there was a sheer silence and in the silence there was God. And the voice came again “What are you doing here?” and Elijah has the same story again—“I am alone. I am the last of the prophets.” The Lord says go on the way through the wilderness to Damascus because I have a job for you to do. And he points out to Elijah there are seven thousand in Israel who not bowed down to Baal. In other words your facts are not quit straight, Elijah, there is a lot more support than what you think. You have a job to do. Go do it.

Now there are these two prayers. I love this story because God showed himself. We all want God to do something amazing. So we can say, "See God is real. See God has not forgotten us ". Some of you have had a physical test and it has come back clear after we were so fearful. My grandma told the story about a woman probably in the 20s and 30s. She was a young mom with kids and she feared she had breast cancer. Back in those days nothing much could be done for breast cancer. There was prayer and the test came back clear. God's footprints are all over the place and fortunately God doesn't always operate like the story of the prophets on Mount Carmel or we would all have heart attacks. But God is here all ready. If God has a job for you to do, then do it. I think this is one of the tenderest pictures in the Bible about God. God sent an angel to Elijah - bread on a hot stone, warm bread and jug of cool water—cool water in the desert. God nourished and was with Elijah for forty days and then God reminded Elijah that there were those who supported him. Things were going to change. Ahab and Jezebel their stories are really boring. God cared so much for Elijah. And Elijah had so much faith in God even at his lowest point. We can take at Jesus and we can see the same love and care. We know Jesus how he acted with people and how he cared for them. Jesus is going to fan and encourage even the faintest flame of faith. God sent Elijah on his way. Elijah would serve him well and we will too. We know who God is and we can show God at work. Jesus said he would be with us until the end of the age. Let us pray- Gracious God we thank you that you are our God during high times and our low times of our lives. We thank you that we can trust you when even all around there are those who fail to trust you, we can trust you. This we pray in your name Jesus.