

1 Kings 19:1-18

Can't help but bring up certain football game. Many of you know I'm a Michigan grad. Honestly, talking about this brings me no satisfaction, doesn't take away a single thing from that game in 2007. This time around Michigan won a game in which they were favored by 35 points. Way to go. That's like congratulating me, your pastor, for coming to church today. That's what's supposed to happen. This is what I've been trained for, and it's what you pay me to do. No big deal. A few days from now nobody's gonna remember yesterday's score. But nobody will ever forget 34-32. That's all I'm gonna say about that.

Just bought house near football stadium. ASU band practicing Superman music. Had soundtrack running for past two weeks. Feel like I've been preparing for something incredible all week.

Series on God's faithfulness

- Surprising, sometimes unexpected.
- Topic: God's faithfulness in want – times of emptiness, loneliness, sadness, desperation
 - o God's provision, God's faithfulness doesn't always look like what we might expect. God's faithfulness is bigger than we might have imagined.

Background (1 Kings 17-18)

Ahab is king of Israel, still worships God. But married Jezebel who worships Baal. Kingdom divided. Ahab tries to worship both (hadn't read 10C's lately!) but prophet Elijah is sent to show Ahab and Israel who the true God is. Spoiler alert: Elijah means "Yahweh is God."

Ahab and Elijah create Burning Altar Challenge

- Like Ice Bucket Challenge but instead raise awareness for favorite all-powerful deity
- 450 Baal prophets assembled, set up altar, call to their god to consume the offering
- Elijah taunts them – maybe your god wandered away, is out, is sleeping, call louder! Nothing.
- Elijah assembles altar they'd torn down, 12 stones for tribes, digs trench around, pours water over whole thing 3 times!, fills trench with water. Then asks God to show up.
 - o Fire from heaven consumes the whole thing – bull, stones, trench and all

Elijah overwhelmingly wins the Burning Altar Challenge (well God wins).

Israel sees it and says The Lord indeed is God!

Just for good measure, Elijah kills all 450 prophets of Baal.

READ 1 Kings 19:1-18

Through the lens of Faithfulness

Elijah's surprising lack of faith

- Been fed by ravens twice/day when no food
- Had raised widow's son from death in 1Kg 17
- Undisputed heavyweight prophet of the world – God over Baal
- Killed 450 false prophets
- Would be what most would say a successful prophetic career
 - o Yet he doesn't think so, hears Jezebel is after him, runs away afraid
 - o **READ v4** – take my life, no better than my ancestors

- How does Elijah go from all that success to feeling like he just wants to throw in the towel?
- He kills 450 prophets in front of the king but when the queen comes after him he's afraid?
- How could he go so quickly from such a high – seeing God act so decisively and miraculously, to such a low – asking God to take his life? Especially that quickly?
 - o How can his faith be so fickle?
 - o Easy to ask about him but don't we do the same in our way?
 - Yes God, I trust you in this, I see your hand here, you and me, I'm all in
 - Next morning, God are you even here? What's going on? Where'd you go?
- Maybe fickle faith is just part of human experience?
 - o Mark 9:24 – Lord, I believe; Help my unbelief!
- Not sure exactly what caused Elijah's wavering
- Elijah sat under a tree and said It's enough. Take my life, Lord.

God's faithfulness – first sign shows up when Eli can't go on

- God provides meals, rest
- An angel attends to him, twice, food for the journey
 - o He'd already been running and hiding in wilderness
 - o Now continues further into wilderness
 - Sometimes we have to go deeper into wilderness before we come back out
 - 40 days / nights to Mt Horeb ("Mountain of God")
 - where Moses met God for 10Cs – special place
 - Eli ends up in a cave there

READ v9-10

What are you doing here Elijah?

- First hint of why Elijah might be so forlorn
 - o I have been zealous for the Lord...
 - Your people have turned their backs, but I've been doing your work
 - I'm the only one left!
 - And for what? They're still doing all that, and now they want to kill me!
- Have you ever felt like what you were doing didn't make any difference?
- Have you ever felt like a failure?
- Like you're the only one out there? Like you're all alone?
- Like you can't go on? Like you just want to give up?

Timing of this message perfect – start of new school year, coming off week of renewal, Promotion Sunday where we blessed all SS teachers, echo same prayer for all teachers in our community.

- Grew up in home of educators, good chance sometime this year you just might feel like Elijah

God's response

- Listen to what God says to Elijah, and what might be saying to you

God shows up – sign of God's faithfulness

- God meets us in our moments of greatest despair
- Not how might expect though
- **READ v11-12**

- Great wind, earthquake, fire – God not in these, though Elijah used to seeing God in spectacular
- Hebrew – sound of sheer silence (NRSV), still small voice (KJV), gentle whisper (NIV)
- When Elijah heard, knew he was in God’s presence
- God meets us in our most vulnerable moments, but sometimes we need to journey through the wilderness, burrow into a dark solitary cave, quiet ourselves enough to be still and know he is God.

God asks again – What are you doing here Elijah?

- Elijah has same response, maybe too exhausted to say anything else
- God: Go back the way you came. One step at a time, through the wilderness.
 - I’m not finished with you yet.

At this point, wonder what Elijah is thinking.

- Go back? Keep going? I’m ready to die and you give me, “Atta boy, keep it up!”

New House Ceiling

- Show picture 1 – small section peels off
- Pic 2 – whole room, looks good except one small area
- Pic 3 – started scraping
- Pic 4 – today, a month later
- Exhausted at night after dinner/bedtime routine with kids, don’t even want to look at it
 - Carrie: just do a little more

God says Ok, you’ve rested. You’ve eaten. Now go back the way you came. Retrace your steps and finish the work I’ve given you. Do just a little more. I’m with you.

- Anoint these two kings and a new prophet
 - These guys will continue the work you started
 - You don’t have to go it alone. It’s not just up to you.
- You’re not alone anyway – 7000 more in Israel who are my people
 - 7 – perfect number in bible X 1000 – big number, lots of help to accomplish my plans
 - My plans will be accomplished, with or without you!

God is faithful – not surprising

- What’s surprising is how – wants us to participate!
- We have a part to play in God’s faithfulness!
 - Surprising. Unexpected. God’s faithfulness isn’t just about God. It’s about God’s people

God has always invited humanity to participate in God’s faithfulness

- Creation – be fruitful and multiply, take care of the earth
- Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist to deliver God’s people and proclaim God’s salvation
- Jesus – ultimate expression of human participation
 - God became human to demonstrate the depth of God’s great faithfulness toward us
 - But talk about unexpected!
 - God became human – who does that? Give up power, glory, etc?
 - Died, rose again – and promised that all who believe in him will do the same
- Church – God leaves it up to us

- Maybe most unexpected and surprising plan yet
- God has faith in us! To proclaim salvation, to proclaim God's faithfulness.

One of primary ways we witness God's faithfulness is through the faithfulness of God's church.

- Think of times you've felt blessed lately. Think of times God has come through for you, provided for you. Given you new life when you couldn't go further.
- Some of them may have been incidents where just God showed up miraculously
 - Earthquake, wind, fire, still small voice
 - Some of you've shared with me these kind of stories
- But I'd guess most of you realize God's blessings in context of God's people, the church
 - Cooking meals
 - People sending cards of encouragement
 - Visiting people in hospitals, nursing homes – I hear gratitude all the time
 - John Cook – feels like he has "Ask me about SM" on his forehead
 - Ministering even at end of day, when might not feel like it. But whenever someone is hurting John is available.
 - They're hurting, what else am I supposed to do?
- Being the church means participating in God's faithfulness for others
 - God's faithfulness isn't just about God, it's also about God's faithful people

Officiating a funeral this afternoon at ABE

One of things I like best – singing at funerals

- One of most beautiful sounds in world. Boldest witnesses to Christ's resurrection.
 - Look death in the face and sing at it.
 - Death doesn't win. JMM – the man Jesus Christ laid death in his grave
- But sometimes those who hurt most at funerals simply don't have the strength to sing. Can't bring their spirit to do it. Understandable. But makes the singing even more beautiful.
 - Church sings for us when we can't sing
 - Church carries us when we can't walk
 - Church is God's presence when we can't feel it
 - Church demonstrates God's faithfulness when we can't see it

We are the church, and if we're going to continue to be faithful we'll always have work to do

- As our value says – Be ready to do something

[8:45] As I close, want to invite the worship team forward.

Want to make one thing clear as I close. Said it earlier in reference to Elijah but it bears repeating. God doesn't need our help accomplishing his mission. Jesus will return with or without our contribution. God's will will be done. But God invites us to participate in his faithfulness in order that we might discover full and abundant life. Not just for our own benefit but for the sake of the world God loves.

God asks: *What are you doing here Elijah?*

- I wonder how you hear that question – ***What are you doing here?***

Feeling worn out? Ready to give up?

Be encouraged that you're not alone. Like Elijah, there's more going on than you can see. You're a part of something bigger. Rest in God's faithfulness, knowing that God can make beautiful things come from even the ugliest circumstances. Then keep going. Take the next step. Trust that the God who breaks apart mountains, God who is a consuming fire, God who defeated death through Christ... is at work in you. You're not a failure. You're not alone.

Maybe you're not worn out. In a season of plenty. Or in between – season of blah, status quo.

- Even more important to listen for what God might be saying to you.
- ***What are you doing here?***
- How is God whispering to you to be the church this week?
- Where is God asking you to sing, or feed someone, or help someone walk, or be present?
- You might be the only tangible sign of God's faithfulness that someone sees this week.
- Where is God asking you to be faithful so that someone might realize God's faithfulness?
- How will you be faithful this week?

Regardless of where you fall on the "worn out" spectrum ask yourself, *What are you doing here?*

[8:45 Introduce Worn]

No matter how you answer that question, may you be found in the midst of God's faithfulness. Amen.

Benediction: Phil 1:3-6

3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.