

Find true life from the one true God

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Date: 20 July 2025

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[0 : 00] So, as I said, we're going to spend probably up until September exploring episodes from the life of Elijah together, and his is a remarkable life.

He'll witness great encounters with God, great expressions of God's power, and he will hear God speak in a whisper.

And he, of course, returns to heaven in a fiery chariot. He's a big figure in the Old Testament. He's a big figure in the New Testament.

As the storyline of the Old Testament continues, there is this anticipation that before the Lord comes in power, there will be another prophet like Elijah who will prepare the way.

And then we come into the New Testament, and we even hear it from Jesus himself. That ministry, that second Elijah, that's John the Baptist. And then we turn to a book like the book of James, and we're presented with Elijah as an example from this story of a prayer of faith, a man who prays, believing, and God hears, and God answers.

[1 : 30] There's a remarkable life written large across the pages of the Bible. And he arrives on the scene at a low point, one of the many low points in Israel's spiritual life.

And they have turned from faith to idolatry. No longer trusting wholeheartedly in the God of the covenant, now they have turned to the gods of Canaan.

And they've been led into that in large measure by King Ahab and his wife, Queen Jezebel. And so part of the feature of Elijah's life, Elijah the prophet, is as a servant of the Lord, he's going to suffer. And we'll see this as the weeks go by. Ahab gives him a nickname, the Troubler of Israel. He has a very low reputation of low impression of Elijah.

Now Jezebel will put a price on his head. And Elijah the prophet, who looks to stay faithful to his God, will have to live with the pain of seeing the people of Israel's divided hearts.

[2 : 43] Can't quite decide who they should worship. Of course, when we come to a story like Elijah's, we're separated from him by long ages of history and culture.

And so he can come across as a very different figure. The time and place can seem very different to ours, which of course it is. But we'll see similarities and parallels as well.

We discover timeless truths in the story of Elijah. That at different points, as God's church, I think will challenge us. At other points, will encourage us.

So we're going to see over and over again, there is an unchanging God. A God of absolute holiness. A God who tolerates no rivals for worship.

And yet, even when his people have walked so far away, here is another example of God extending compassion and grace. Sending Elijah, seeking to draw rebels back to true worship and into relationship.

[3 : 44] We'll see, I think, a number of times the unchanging temptation that runs not just from Elijah's day to ours, but from the beginnings of the fall into sin.

The temptation to look to find our security and life in someone or something other than the true God. For them, it was Baal.

For us, as Calvin says, we have hearts that are idol factories. And we're always being tempted to place our hope for security and life in something other than the true God.

And I think a story like Elijah reminds us that as a church, as the people of God, we have an unchanging call. What is it that God wants of his people?

Well, he wants us to stand firm in faith. He wants us to represent him in the way that we live lives of faith and obedience.

[4 : 44] And we will see Elijah on different occasions standing up for God, being willing to be a man apart. And we will hear him speak up for God.

A man expressing his loyalty and his faith, even as everyone else's hearts seem to be wavering. That just like Elijah, we are invited as the people of God, as those who have known grace, to call people out of a drought and famine, spiritually speaking, to the feast that Jesus himself offers. But today in our little story here, I think the lesson that we can draw, in the one hand, is negative that we will never find life-giving joy and satisfaction from anything else that we place our hopes in. But positively, as we see it in the story of Elijah, we will find life and satisfaction as we turn to trust in the Lord our God. I think that's the underlying message behind the confrontation with Ahab. It's certainly the message that we get from Elijah's life in contrast to what everyone else is experiencing. God is looking after him. He's being provided for.

[5 : 57] He's enjoying blessing while everyone else is experiencing drought and famine. And ultimately, it's the message of the Lord Jesus. It's what he gives to us in the gospel.

It's what he gave to the women of Samaria. It's what he gave to the crowds in John chapter 6. So, our sermon this evening, very simple. One statement divided into two sections.

The first, from verse 1, the God who is alive. Elijah said to Ahab, as the Lord, the God of Israel lives, whom I serve, there will be neither June or rain in the next few years except at my word.

So, this is the first time we come across Elijah. He bursts into the national scene without any kind of formalities. He's just here. He's in the court of the king. And he speaks. And as we think about even just this verse, the story is inviting us to do some compare and contrast between some different figures that we will encounter.

And I want us, as we're thinking about this for ourselves, also to think about the first hearers of this story, the people of Israel, as they find themselves deciding which path will I follow when it comes to my worship.

[7 : 13] Am I going to choose Canaan's gods or am I going to choose the covenant god? And how would this opening story challenge, correct, teach them, and what does it do for us?

Think about the time in which we live. We're bombarded in so many different ways by messages that would say, have this, have me, and you will have life.

So, advertising is built on it. Social media influence is driven by it. The battle that goes on in our sinful hearts as well. We're always recognizing, because we're made as worshiping beings, I need something.

That will give me security, that will give me meaning, that will give me hope, that will give me life. And again, that temptation within our hearts is to go in another direction and to wander from the living God.

And so, we have in these verses a compare and contrast to help us to reflect. The first contrast is between Elijah and Ahab, of course.

[8 : 21] King Ahab has just been introduced in 1 Kings 16. If you want to turn a page back in your Bible, we discover the whole of chapter 16 actually is a picture of here are some years of instability within the nation of Israel because they've got a whole chain of kings who are not following God in loyalty.

And so, their reigns don't last long and there's civil unrest and there's fighting over the throne.

There's a whole chain of wicked kings, but when we come to Ahab, he's the lowest of the low.

Chapter 16, verse 30, Ahab, son of Omri, did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than those before him. Verse 33, Ahab did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings before him.

He marries a pagan woman who leads him into idolatry. He sets up all these Asherah poles and these Baals and he turns the nation towards false worship.

He's a powerful figure. Clearly, he's the king. He sits in the palace. He sits on David's throne. But unlike David, he is a false worship leader. Israel's king was to lead the people to worship God.

[9 : 43] He's a false worship leader. So, there's Ahab on the one hand and then there's Elijah. Elijah the Tishbite from Tishbe and Gilead. Bible commentators and scholars can't even decide where this place is, but it's clearly a middle of nowhere kind of a place.

He has no background. He has no credentials. He has no family lineage of being a prophet or anything like that. But what we are invited to see about Ahab is that he is a willing, obedient servant of the Lord.

He is someone who is concerned for the true glory of God. And in the end of the day, that's what matters. Remember what Paul wrote to the folks in Corinth.

God doesn't typically choose those who are wise and those who are strong and those who are powerful. Rather, he chooses the weak to confine the strong, to demonstrate his grace so that he gets the glory.

In a sense, we see Elijah like Jesus, the servant of the Lord. He had no beauty or comeliness that people would desire him.

[10:52] But he came willing, obedient, concerned for the glory of God. Second contrast within our text is between the two gods.

It's not so much a contrast as a God context. Between the Lord God and Baal. And this is where we need just a little bit of background into Canaanite worship.

Because Baal, he was one of their major gods. He was the god of storm and weather and fertility. And so the message in Canaan was, you need to worship Baal.

And if Baal doesn't get worship, then he won't send rain. And if he doesn't send rain, then we don't have crops. Without crops, there's no food. Without food, there's no life. And so for the people of Israel living in Canaan, gradually they came to believe that, well, if that's the message, then we better at least hedge our bets because we don't want to miss out on the rain and the crops and the food and the life.

Fear, the desire for security, the desire for wealth, drove Ahab and drove Israel to join their culture in false worship.

[12:14] And it's probably true for our own hearts that there are those same pools on us. We have that desire for security and wealth, and sometimes there is fear also.

And it can be easy for us to think, well, if I just had money or if I just had success or status or the right job, then I would have that security. And our hearts can be drawn from God.

Well, into that setting, that setting where Baal is being presented as the God of weather and storm and crops and life, the Lord God throws down the gauntlet, doesn't he, in verse one?

There will be neither dew nor rain except at my word. Who gives the dew, who gives the rain, who controls the weather, who's responsible for bringing life or withholding the rains?

It's not Baal, but God. That's the message Elijah delivers. And we need to hear this as well, I think, in the context of God's covenant that he's made with his people.

[13:25] He's the Lord God. That's his covenant name. And God must always be faithful to his covenant word. And in the book of Deuteronomy, in the book of Leviticus, we discover that within the covenant, there are these terms.

You know, Israel is to live with the true God as their God. And if they will do that, then they can experience and look for and expect blessing. But if they turn away from God in disobedience, they can expect to experience curse.

It's spelled out really clearly in, for example, Leviticus chapter 26. Again, if you're using a church Bible, it's there on page 130.

Now, but let me just read a couple of verses. Chapter 26 begins this way. Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves.

And do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the Lord your God. Really clear command. Don't make any other idols. Don't direct your worship anywhere other than to the true God.

[14:33] Then in verse 3, if you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit.

The God who truly does control the weather, who controls the rains that give the crops, that give the life, promises blessing upon obedience. But then, verse 18, and this is part of the punishments for disobedience.

If after all of this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze.

Your strength will be spent in vain because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of your land yield their fruit. It's really, really clear that they have been acting in disobedience.

And this message, no June or rain, is the covenant God bringing judgment because of disobedience. One more compare and contrast that's in the background in this section is Elijah and his fellow Israelites.

[15 : 51] So, one of the striking features, I think, of Elijah's story is how often we see him standing by himself. He stands alone, the man of God committed to God's word and faithfulness to the Lord God against a backdrop of wickedness and false worship and a message from the palace that says, stop talking or we'll kill you.

Where Israel fails, Elijah doesn't. Israel did not stay devoted to God.

Israel clearly does not trust that the God of the Bible will provide for their needs. They don't believe that life with him is the key to true life, and so they turn to place their hopes elsewhere.

But Elijah doesn't do that. And as Elijah stands, the man of faith and obedience in this setting, he prepares us in a greater way for Jesus' ministry.

And this is where we understand that is good news. Because where we fail, because all too often as we think about our stories, our hearts are divided in terms of where our worship and our loyalty goes.

[17 : 15] We are guilty of disloyalty and disobedience. We don't always keep God's law. We don't always practice love for him and for our neighbor.

But where we fail and where we deserve curse, Jesus perfectly succeeds. And then on the cross, he takes our curse, as he takes our sin, so that he might give us his blessing.

And the wonderful message of the gospel is that Jesus calls us back to himself, calling us back to the source of true life, to the God who is alive.

So before we move on to the next point, just two things to underline. Very basic. One, the God of the Bible is the only true and living God. I don't know how many people here are interested in golf. Maybe not that many, but that's not too important. But the number one golfer right now is Scotty Scheffler. And he got people talking this week, preparing for the British Open, he was getting interviewed at a press conference.

[18 : 24] And he basically talked about the golfer's life as, his life, as being not a fulfilling life. He said, we're encouraged to give everything to win these tournaments.

We give everything for two minutes of joy. He came out and said, what's the point of being the best player in the world? Well, it's really interesting, because I think he understands there, and we can learn from his story, the truth about counterfeit gods.

There is that message, here are these things to aspire to. They promise much, but they fail to deliver. What the world offers can't bear the weight of our expectations, and is no help to us eternally.

Only the true and the living God won't disappoint, won't fail us. Only Jesus, the Son of God, who died for our sin, who rose for our salvation, He is the only one who never fails.

He establishes the new covenant in His broken body, in His shed blood, and you and I, we can trust His word of promise from here to eternity.

[19 : 48] Our God will go before us. He has gone before us. The God of the Bible is the only true living God. And secondly, I think from Elijah, we have that reminder that God's people are called to stand up and speak up.

And it requires courage, and it requires conviction. In a sense, the church is a bit like Elijah. Our pedigree is not that high. Our CV is not that impressive.

Our place in society as a church is not much. But Jesus, from heaven, He sends the Spirit. And the God of the Bible, who plans all things, plans that His church be His representative witnesses in this world.

And He gives us strength to live by faith. He gives us courage to speak of His goodness and His love. Enabling us to speak to the people around us.

The people who are anxious. People who have been disappointed. People who are searching. To lovingly point people away from what the world offers.

[21 : 00] To say Jesus is better. To live together in a way that shows Jesus is better. To recognize He is the answer to our spiritual drought.

When we feel our sense of guilt or when we wander away and our hearts grow cold, when we find ourselves searching for that something more, the message of the Bible has come to Jesus.

So if the first part of our statement is the God who is alive, the second part that concludes it, the God who is alive is the God who gives life. That's verses two to six.

So another feature of the Elijah story, which is wonderful, is that God doesn't just talk a good game. He doesn't just talk about His power. He acts.

You know, He makes clear, I am the true and the living God. And He shows it in remarkable ways. And here's the first of these. If part one was compare and contrast, let's think about part two as command and response.

[22 : 08] First of all, the command to Elijah and the response of Elijah. God's command is there in verses two to four. The word of the Lord came to Elijah, leave here, turn east, hide in the Kerith ravine.

You will drink from the brook and I've instructed the ravens to supply you. There's a wonderful message for Elijah. The servant of the Lord is going to be spared from the drought. While others are experiencing judgment, he is going to receive salvation. He's going to receive these tokens of blessing. He will be miraculously provided for both in the food that he will eat and the drink that he will have.

And if we think back to our Bibles, this takes us back, doesn't it, to the story of the Exodus. There are Moses and Israel and they are in the wilderness.

They're in a desert situation. And God miraculously feeds them. The manna and the quail rain down from heaven every day except the Sabbath.

[23 : 13] And then in chapter 17, as they're thirsty, God miraculously provides for a grumbling people, by his grace, water from the rock. And then wonderfully, as Paul thinks about that little image, he says, the rock, the rock was Christ.

So the God who saves is the God who sustains. And here he sustains his profit. Picks up a theme that runs through the whole Bible.

Look to God and his word. Look to God and his promise in order to find life. Wasn't that the case for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?

If they would have trusted God's word, if they would have lived in obedience, they would have lived in paradise with God forever. It was the message for Israel.

As they were heading from slavery towards their promised land, trust in God, live in faith and obedience, and you will live in the promised land and you will experience blessing and God will care for you and provide for you.

[24 : 24] And for us as a church, we are called to trust our God and his word. And we're invited then to enjoy life with God through Jesus today.

As Jesus reminded us this morning, we call God our Father in heaven. And we look forward to life in a perfect kingdom for all eternity.

Well, as Elijah received the command to leave and go, his response, verse 5, so he did what the Lord had told him. He went to the Kerith ravine and he stayed there.

It's simple but really beautiful. When the rest of the nation is so half-hearted and can't decide who they should trust, who they should obey, here is the man of God choosing to live by faith.

And because he does, he enjoys God's wonderful blessing. But there's a second and there's a more striking command and response scene in the Bible reminding us that the God who is alive is the God who gives life, he controls everything.

[25 : 37] It's the Ravens. Now, to help us think about the Ravens, I didn't do this on purpose but last week we went down to Portobello Beach and I don't know if anyone's been down to Portobello recently since they opened up a really nice pizza place to go with the Chippies.

Well, we were there at dinner time and if you've seen Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*, that was the kind of vision as there was like, there must have been like 50 of these seagulls circling the bins and circling the folks eating their dinner.

It was horrendous. They were not being charged with delivering the food, rather their sole purpose for those minutes that we were there finding a safe distance away sitting on the grass away from the beach was to steal any food that they could get.

And if you ever see not just a seagull but any kind of bird, even a tiny bird, if you see a little bird with a tiny scrap of food, you've probably seen those other birds try and get their share.

They're not natural sharers, are they? Even with a little scrap, they want it for themselves. And so the command and the response to and of the ravens is remarkable.

[26 : 59] The ravens, in verse 6, brought Elijah bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening and he drank from the brook.

The God of the Bible, not Baal, is the creator and king over the whole creation, over the life of Elijah, over the life of the birds.

They do what he commands to provide life-giving food to his servant. Now think about this as the first hearers of this story.

Imagine them, you know, they place their hopes in Baal and now they're living in a drought condition. They've got this choice, don't they?

Well, right now, we're trusting Baal and there's no rain and we're hungry. He promised life but we're not getting any. And then they hear about Elijah. Elijah trusts God and he's enjoying life.

[28 : 03] God's caring for him just as God said he would. And you wonder, would they make the connection? Would they begin that journey back to God?

Can we make the connection to see that the God who is alive is the God who gives true life? As we leave scene one, and we'll come back to Elijah next week, as we see the true and the living God who provides true life, it's a wonderful story.

A couple of suggestions for our storytelling. One, tell our stories, tell your story of God's clear, detailed kindness and protection.

We don't have stories as dramatic as Elijah's, I don't think. But we have stories stories, where we've come to see the good care of our Father over our lives.

We have stories where we have been in trouble or been in want and we have prayed and God has answered, sometimes dramatically, sometimes through other people.

[29 : 25] We have those stories. We have faith in a God who controls everything. There is no moment outside of His control.

And I think one of the things that's so important for us as the people of God is that we live recognizing this is my Father's world. I like to read old books and the old feel, they got this, they lived and breathed knowing every little moment directed, controlled by God and it gave them such a peace and security and stability.

So I think the story of Elijah is an invitation to you and to me to think about and to talk about the ways that we see and we feel God's ordinary and extraordinary care over our lives to acknowledge as God promises He gives us daily bread, He gives us grace for today and He will give us grace for our tomorrow whatever that looks like.

And the reason why that's so important is because there's lots of people around us where the question that they're asking if they're asking any questions about Christianity is not so much maybe nowadays is your faith true but so much does your faith work.

That seems to be significant to people to us now. And so as we tell our stories of answered prayer of God's goodness to us we get to show people that God is real that faith is real that there is a reason to consider true and I think it's important for us to encourage one another as well.

[31 : 27] You know here is Elijah and he is being spiritually fed in a wilderness kind of experience. I wonder if you can testify to times when life seemed really hard in a time of suffering or trial and God's word came with particular power where God seemed to be particularly close and showing his love even when everything else seemed to be falling apart.

That's a wonderful testimony of God's grace for our own faith and for the faith of one another. our stories will likely not include ravens but there will be moments where we can give God glory because he's been actively involved in looking after us.

But as we tell our stories secondly we want to tell the gospel story of Jesus the Son of God who gives eternal life and we think about spiritual hunger and thirst.

What we think about different versions of that golfer Scotty Scheffler this life that I'm living it's not a fulfilling life to me. What are we to do as the people of God?

We lovingly bring them to Jesus. We heard Jesus speak to a profoundly dissatisfied and troubled woman in John 4 water.

[32 : 56] I can give you living water. I can truly satisfy your thirst. We began with Jesus words spoken to a crowd after the feeding of the 5,000 and they were hungry for another lunch meal and Jesus wanted them to look for more.

I'm the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. stay. In many ways the story of Jesus parallels with the story of Elijah.

But there's an important difference. Elijah the servant of the Lord was spared from suffering on this occasion. But Jesus the servant of the Lord was not spared suffering.

He would know thirst as he hung dying on the cross. He was a servant who was not spared from going under God's judgment, under God's curse.

Not because of anything he had done, not because of any disloyalty on his part, but for our sin, our rebellion, our idolatry. And that Jesus who died for us is now alive.

[34 : 12] And from heaven he sends the Spirit. He lives in us. From heaven he gives us that life that is true life, that is eternal life.

Maybe we find ourselves here even today and our hearts have become a little bit like Ahab or a little bit like Israel. We're looking to find true satisfaction, security, and our hearts have been turning away from God.

maybe you've tried that. You've discovered ultimately the falling in the way of the world doesn't lead to life and satisfaction. Well, let's together let Elijah's story direct us and direct us back and direct us again to the Lord Jesus, that we would eat, that we would drink, and that we would live.

Let's pray together.