

Righteous Remnant

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[0 : 00] Hello, everyone. Good evening. Great to see you all. Where were you on September 26, 1988? A whole lot of you weren't even born yet.

But those of you who were born, who were alive, I was six years old, where were you? It's one of the most infamous days in Canadian history. Two days earlier, on September 24, 1988, Ben Johnson won the gold medal in the 100-meter sprint in a world-record time of 9.79 seconds. On that day, it was a proud day to be a Canadian. And then two days later, it was announced that Ben Johnson had tested positive for steroids.

He was stripped of his gold medal. And if you were a Canadian, it was an emotional dive bomb. A crash after that high.

Euphoric high to gut-wrenching low in just two days. Well, our text tonight is 1 Kings 19. And if you were with us last Sunday, you'll remember the triumph and the euphoria of Elijah's great victory over the prophets of Baal and the false gods at Mount Carmel.

[1 : 32] But things do change in a hurry, don't they? Just 48 hours, gold medal to disqualification. Here in chapter 19, it seems like Elijah is determined to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

We're expecting nationwide repentance and religious reformed. But instead, in verses 1 and 2, we get Jezebel. Have a look with me at verses 1 and 2.

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. And then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.

It turns out that Queen Jezebel is the one really wearing the crown in this kingdom. And she has no intention of letting power slip away just because Elijah won a men's mountaintop barbecue competition.

She still has 400 prophets of Asherah, plus a whole army. And so Elijah is as good as dead. But even with the odds stacked against him, isn't verse 3 just a little bit surprising?

[2 : 52] It says, Then Elijah was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah. It's all the way in the south now, far away. And he left his servant there.

After all, why is our brave hero running from a good fight? And even more surprising, why doesn't the Lord immediately rebuke Elijah, order him straight back to Ahab and Jezebel's throne room, and equip him to perform another breathtaking miracle right in Jezebel's face, to settle the score once and for all?

He could do it. Why doesn't he do it? Instead, we find a depressed and suicidal Elijah in verse 4. And Elijah asked that he might die, saying, It is enough.

Now, O Lord, take away my life, for I'm no better than my father's. And then in another moment of surprise, the Lord gives food and water to Elijah, not once but twice, and then instructs him to travel again in the opposite direction of Ahab and Jezebel, another 40 days and 40 nights, to Mount Horeb, which is Mount Sinai, the holy mountain of God where Moses received the Ten Commandments.

And this is where the story gets really interesting. Because Elijah is surely thinking, Now, at last, the Lord God's led me to his mountain, the mountain where he reveals himself, the place where I'm going to get all the answers to my questions.

[4 : 25] I'll speak face-to-face with God, just like Moses did. And he'll give me fresh ammo for my fight against Jezebel. He'll send me back to that throne room, maybe with fireballs coming out of my hands, something cool like that anyway.

And then the living God does the exact opposite. He reminds Elijah of how he reveals his great power and presence to the world.

Let me say that again. He reminds Elijah of how he reveals his great power and presence to the world. If you look at verses 11 and 12, three times the Lord passes by Elijah, earth, wind, and fire. And three times the text tells us that the Lord's presence is not in those dramatic displays. Instead, at the end of verse 12, and after the fire, the sound of a low whisper.

And the Hebrew here can be translated a thin silence or a soft voice. The Holy God reveals his awesome power and presence in his word.

[5 : 39] In that quiet word. And then the Lord reveals more of himself to Elijah in verses 15 to 18. And it's verse 18 that I want to focus in on.

Yet, I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.

I wonder, have you ever been in a crowd and yet had the overwhelming feeling that you're the only Christian left? I had a friend who was in New York City.

It was a cold winter afternoon in the season of Lent. She was feeling discouraged. And it happened to be Ash Wednesday. And so she ducked into a church that was having an Ash Wednesday service.

And she received the imposition of ashes and the sign of the cross at the end of that service and then went back out and walked the streets of New York. And suddenly, everywhere she went, she began to see men and women with ashen crosses on their forehead.

[6 : 54] And she began to see things completely differently. What had previously been invisible to her eyes, that there were indeed a righteous remnant, 7,000 who had not bowed their knees to Baal, were suddenly, as if by a miracle, visible to her for the very first time on the subway, in Times Square, at every street corner.

And she says to me, that was such a tremendous gift that day for me. Well, this climactic verse, verse 18, has a defiant certainty to it that defies all of Jezebel's darkest threats against the people of God.

Grace will have a remnant, the Lord says. The living God of grace, in His sovereignty, is at work even now in ways that we don't always see or understand.

And every now and then, we get a glimpse, as my friend did in New York. And every now and then, we need to be reminded of that glimpse, as Elijah did in this passage.

We need to be reminded of the upside-down nature of the gospel. That in Shanghai today, in Moscow, in Vancouver, there are men and women, boys and girls, who are hearing God's word and receiving new life in Jesus' name for the very first time.

[8 : 17] It's happening all over the world. The kingdom of God, Jesus said, is like a mustard seed. It's the very smallest of seeds, the humblest of seeds. And yet, it grows bigger than anything else, and it becomes an eternal home for people from every nation and language all over the world.

Yeah, okay, Jeremy, I get it. God's word has power. But I still think a few more fireballs from heaven would probably help the gospel get some new attention.

Maybe that's what you're thinking. In the summer of 2017, Coca-Cola ran a viral marketing campaign, one of the most brilliant viral marketing campaigns ever devised.

It was called the Summer of Sharing. Coke put the 250 most popular first names among American teens and millennials onto their cans for a personalized brand experience.

It became a worldwide phenomenon. I'll bet a lot of you participated in this. You've got to find that Coke can with your name on it. It appeals to our narcissism and our thirst all at the same time.

[9 : 33] Brilliant. Coke made a ton of money and got a ton of free publicity on social media. Well, in our public relations-saturated world, where nothing gets more attention than new ideas and innovation, we are tempted to think that the gospel of Jesus Christ probably could use some freshening up.

The Holy Trinity needs a brilliant PR campaign. We're tempted to demand fresh revelation from the Lord God. Just one public display of your power in Tiananmen Square or Times Square, and the whole world would turn to Christ.

Jesus, won't you please confirm your church with signs and wonders so we don't feel so small and insignificant? Jesus, won't you confirm my spiritual experience so I at least know I'm on the right track towards personal fulfillment?

Why doesn't Jesus just give us a Mount Carmel experience every Sunday evening at St. John's? When we think this way, we've actually swallowed a big lie.

It goes something like this. Give people the right information or show them empirical proof and they will change.

[10:53] But I can tell you that there are still almost 5 million smokers in Canada and vaping stats are growing exponentially. So clearly, good information and empirical proof does not lead to change.

In other words, despite what we may be tempted to think, signs and wonders alone do not transform people's hearts and minds. Consider Jesus' ministry for a moment.

His fiercest enemies, they never denied that he did miracles. Miracles before their very eyes that they witnessed.

And yet they stubbornly rejected his powerful signs and his authoritative teaching. And they conspired against an innocent man and organized his murder to protect the status quo.

And Jesus said about them, this is the judgment. The light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. We love the darkness more than the light because the light exposes us.

[12:06] And when we're exposed, we see that we need change. And real transforming change only comes through the creative power of God's life-giving word. The same word that shouted, let light shine out of darkness when creation began, speaks aloud in our hearts through the scriptures and shows us the glory of Jesus Christ.

All of scripture's pattern points in this direction from the very beginning of creation to the call of Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, all climaxing in the word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

That most silent and humble whisper of all born in that manger. And I think that when Elijah arrived at Mount Sinai, he was convinced that he would get that fresh revelation.

And he remembered back to the time of Exodus when Moses went up on the mountain and the Lord passed before him in that dramatic way just like we see in the passage tonight.

And when the Lord had finished passing before him, in Exodus 34, he revealed himself. And he revealed himself in these famous words.

[13:30] And I want you to turn with me now to Exodus 34. Exodus 34 on page 74. I want to remind you of them by reading from verse 6 onwards.

And I think that Elijah was convinced that he was going to get something brand new. But when the Lord spoke to him in that low whisper, it was as if he was saying, Elijah, everything that you need to know about who I am and what I am doing, I have already revealed.

Elijah, don't you remember how I revealed myself to Moses on Mount Sinai?

Don't you remember how I revealed myself in verse 6, he says, as the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation.

And Moses quickly bowed his head towards the earth and worshipped. Elijah, that's who I am.

[15:08] That's who I'll always be. My judgment is limited to the third and fourth generation, but Elijah, my grace is infinite to a thousand generations.

That is who I am for you. That is who I am for my people in the midst of their apostasy. And that, friends, is who our God is yesterday, today, and forever.

There is tremendous assurance in this passage. Whether you're feeling weak in your faith, doubting the power of God's word, perhaps broken and discouraged by whatever pressures you're facing, what a God we worship.

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His loving character is unchanging. His word remains his gracious gift to his church. The word which was made flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

The word living and active as the presence and power of the triune God in our midst. Praise God for that. Amen. Amen. And now, our God continues to go and give us encouragement to our lostmon■■ and the love Nós and we continue to go on.

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