

Bird Food

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[0 : 0 0] You'll notice from the image on the front of your service sheet that we're in a bit of a different season and series here for the next six weeks. And the title of this sermon series now is The Days of Elijah.

So there is going to be some focus on Elijah. And hopefully it won't be entirely on him, but mostly how the Lord actually uses Elijah's faithfulness to the living God.

And so we're going to have a look at Elijah starting in 1 Kings 17 today. So you want to open up your Bible and turn to that portion. And not just referring to that, but deferring to that and the Lord and what he has to say to us through this man's life and faithfulness to him.

Now, let me give some context to this as we just kind of parachute into the into the text and the life of Elijah. So now it's been around 100 years since King David's rule united Israel when we come upon Elijah and Ahab.

And the kingdom, though, is divided between the north and the south. Of course, it's Israel in the north, Judah in the south. And just a few words about Ahab, and then we'll get into Elijah.

[1 : 1 4] So Ahab is Israel's king. He's turned away from the Lord. And he's done more evil than his father, Omri, which is saying a lot because it was said of him that he had done more evil than all before him.

Just one small example of the evil that Ahab had committed. And that was that he decided that he would rebuild Jericho, even though it was strictly forbidden by the Lord in Genesis.

Now, Elijah, he's a prophet. He's faithful to Yahweh. And he's a really famous figure. We know this, don't we? Now, we know this because Zechariah, that is the father of John the Baptist, when he sings, prophesies, he mentions Elijah in that.

Of course, John the Baptist mentions Elijah as well. And, of course, Jesus is really mindful and aware of him, too. And that's in part why I read this prayer from the feast of the transfiguration of Jesus.

Because when Jesus is transfigured, of course, Moses and Elijah are there, along with John and Peter and James. So, Elijah figures largely into the life of the Jewish people, the Israelites, the Hebrews.

[2 : 3 3] So, we have this sermon title, though, today, which is the days of Elijah, because it's the period of him, and it's the person as well. But I think also a good subtitle of this would be to bring our attention, to focus our attention on our Lord.

And one of the big themes that we'll see come through this is just the living Lord, or the Lord lives eternally. This whole life that actually the Lord brings to bear on our life, the whole reason that we have life is because of him.

So, we're seeing this through the eyes of this prophet, and I just want to look at two things this morning. There are two kind of major scenes here. You notice when that was read by Bill. And that is, there's this prophet who comes to warn, but also he generates this sense of wonder in who God is and what it is that he's done.

And so, it's the word of the Lord brought through the prophet to warn us, but also the works of the Lord that make us wonder and worship him. Okay? So, let's look at this.

First, the living God warns us through this command. So, Elijah, as I've said, is a prophet. There were other prophets as well. I don't know when you think about prophets who you think of, but the first prophet in the Bible was actually Abraham.

[3 : 36] Moses, we think of, maybe as the first prophet, and the big prophet of the Old Testament. And, of course, he was, but so too did Samuel prophesy. You might be surprised that so too did Saul, as well as David.

And that confirmation of David being a prophet actually comes on the day of Pentecost, when Peter's preaching and he mentions that David had prophesied. So, those are some of the collection of prophets kind of coming up to this point of Elijah.

But, in Genesis, we read at one point that God says, I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

And we get a sense of what it means to actually be a prophet there. God's words in man's mouth. Words that God actually commands that prophet, that person, to speak according to the Lord.

And in the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, there are three offices. That of a priest, a king, and also a prophet. And there were great temptations to speak contrary to the word of the Lord.

[4 : 40] That temptation was great. But Elijah didn't follow temptation to that temptation. He was a true prophet. We'll see in comparison to him or contrast some of the false prophets in this book.

But the Lord warns his people through his prophet Elijah by word first and then showing the works of the Lord. Just kind of a bit of a background. Now, something more about Elijah.

I happen to know this because I have a son named Elijah. Those who you know me might be saying, wait a minute, you don't have a son named Elijah. Your son is Elliot. But Elliot is the English version of Elijah, which is the Hebrew version of Elliot.

Right? So here's what actually Elijah means. It means, my God is Yahweh. That's what it means simply. And now you know how some people wear their religion around their necks or maybe on their bumper.

Well, Israel did it by name. And Elijah tells us what the prophet thought about his God. My God is Yahweh. That's what Elijah was bringing to point.

[5 : 41] By question, though, who is your God? Or by implication, yours is not Yahweh like mine. Every day he was a reminder by name what he was about, what he was trying to bring to bear in the life of Israel.

Yahweh. We know that, right? Who that is. Revealed to Moses at the burning bush. I am who I am is what Yahweh means by revelation to Moses and to all of us who know him by name.

That's how the Lord addressed Moses' need, but not only his need, but the need of God's people. He was saying by way of his name, I am all that you need.

You have great needs, my people, and I will address them. Trust me. I'm trustworthy. I am who I am. Now, Ahab was not like Elijah.

Now, don't confuse Ahab with the character of Moby Dick, right? The captain of that ship. Ahab's God was another God, and his God was not Yahweh.

[6 : 49] Ahab's name didn't actually mean what Elijah's did. His name actually meant brother, father, but he was neither this and his God, let's be clear, was not Yahweh. We'll find that out.

And Ahab and Elijah were as different as they come. How different were they? Well, Ahab worshipped Baal. Elijah worshipped Yahweh. Baal was a nature deity who caused the rains to fall.

Yahweh, by contrast, was the creator of all. And yes, too, he's the one who really did cause the rains to fall. We'll see later. Elijah's prophecy, and in this case, his foretelling, then, is about Baal's utter failure.

Now, imagine Elijah telling Ahab this. This is straight from the text then. Having that by way of background. As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, that is, not Baal who is dead, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.

Now, you would think that it might actually come the other way around, given that Ahab worshipped Baal, and he's the one who brought rain, right? You would think that Ahab would tell Elijah about the rainfall or the climate change.

[8 : 05] Ahab apparently didn't know his God as well as Elijah, though, knew his. This drought was about to come. And what a contrast and confrontation this represents.

Ahab probably thought, in contempt, how dare you, Elijah? Maybe Elijah didn't even like giving this message. We may think sometimes like this, too.

But biblical faith is a great contrast to the way of the world and the culture in which we live. Now, it's easy to say, well, that kind of describes the situation between us and them, right?

We commonly compare ourselves to the world, other religions, maybe even differing Christians. But what if someone within our tradition were going to come to us, and I'm helping you kind of imagine what this was like for Elijah to come to Ahab, and say, no, this message is for us, not them.

Elijah is bringing this message to Ahab and to the people of God. And we sometimes loathe and complain about the condition of others, the world, our country, maybe.

[9 : 13] And it's convenient to see ourselves on the side of Elijah, right? And not Ahab. But how many of us can really say, yeah, I'm really like that Elijah guy.

I would never worship another god like Ahab and the people of God then. Well, all Elijah has done is deliver this message by the word of the Lord that saying, your source of life is about to dry up Ahab and the people of God.

You may trust in this God who brings rain and the livelihood, but you're about to experience some really dire straits. Your cause for success is about to fail you.

In the meantime, Elijah will go off to a little kind of no-name brook and see the Lord's word will actually come true. The living Lord will protect and provide for Elijah in a place called Cherith.

And he will be fed meat and bread by ravens. Isn't the Lord's sense of humor great? But all can't even bring the rain, let alone feed people.

[10 : 25] The Lord can look. Sorry, the Lord is the one who actually commands the ravens to feed Elijah in meat. And we can see then why Jesus later picks up and says, therefore, don't be anxious about what you will eat or drink.

It raises this question for us. Who provides for us? Who protects us? Who is it really that does that? When every day we have what we need to eat, drink for our livelihood.

Well, it's the Lord who sees to it that the needs of Elijah are provided for day in and day out.

And also it's the Lord Jesus Christ. who, when he was tempted, actually to do a little razzle-dazzle, a little magic for his basic needs.

That is, to turn some rocks into bread when he was tempted by Satan. It says these great words of that man does not live by bread alone, but only by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

[11 : 33] We see this actually brought to bear in the life of Elijah as all his needs are actually provided for in the midst of this dire strait of a drought. This is the Lord who's sending this message of warning through Elijah to the people of God and to Ahab.

Let's turn now then to the second scene. The second scene, which this generates this sense of wondering who God is by his works. Elijah witnessed what the Lord warned the Israelites publicly, but he also promised something to Elijah personally.

The warning and promise of the Lord came to pass, and no one knew that more than Elijah. Elijah's source of water dried up, as we see in verse 7. And there was no kind of piping water into Elijah from some other place, like California gets its water piped in from somewhere else.

So the water supply was quenched, but the Spirit of the Lord was not. The Spirit of God, by the word of the Lord, came to Elijah again, as we see in verse 8. And the word came to Elijah with a command, but also to a widow by the same command.

And the Lord commanded Elijah to move from the east where he was, now to the west. He's east of the Jordan, and now he has to go to the coast of the Mediterranean, Zarephath, which is a part of the Sidonians.

[13 : 00] And this is no small move, but Elijah didn't have many possessions to worry about. This move wasn't like some of ours, you know, from the east to the west coast.

Our distance was greater, but our concerns much, much different. Our motivation probably wasn't the same as Elijah's. And some of us move, don't we?

We move for school, or work, or maybe quality of life. But more importantly is the meaning of Elijah's move. The Lord is moving Elijah from one place to another, not for quality of life, but just sheer existence and the extension of his life to bring his word to bear for his people.

And if Elijah doesn't move, he's just a dead man. And Elijah may have thought actually otherwise, though. He could have thought, if I do leave this place, I'll die.

After all, how would he actually survive the travel from the east all the way to the west? And not to mention the fact that he actually was moved away from Ahab in those confronting words, but now he's actually moving closer to Ahab.

[14 : 13] And if Elijah's afraid, then the Lord's address and addresses the prophet's fear. The Lord continues to protect and provide for Elijah.

And this time, it's not through a bird, it's through a widow. Imagine a poor widow who, by her own admission, is, well, not in these exact words, but on her last penny.

Doesn't even have two pennies to rub together. Now, this widow is about to prepare her last supper. Look down with me at verse 12 and what she says.

And now I'm gathering a couple of sticks, just a couple of sticks, that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat and die.

Now, the Lord isn't hanging the widow and Elijah out to dry. He's actually showing the prophet and woman that they have not gone unnoticed. The Lord's attending, not just to details, but to life and to death.

[15 : 19] Some of us think it's the devil that's into details, but Christianity is in contrast to that idea. It is the Lord who is omniscient and knows all things.

From the highest to the lowest born, the Lord comprehends all. The Lord misses nothing in our lives, including the direction of our life, as much as the details of our life.

And he shows that with Elijah and this widow. But the widow is as sure of her death as Elijah's God lives.

The widow uses the same phrase with Elijah that Elijah actually used with Ahab. It's important to take notice of this. Look down with me again at verse 12. Just before the one I read before, there's this phrase, this small phrase.

It says, As the Lord your God lives. This is a major theme in the mind and message of Elijah. Let me say this again. As the Lord God lives.

[16 : 25] Friends, this is the basis of our assurance of faith. This is how we know that we are saved by grace. Our certainty in both life or death is this one thing.

That the Lord God of Israel, the people of God in all creation, has its life because of the life of the Lord. Our life is in him.

Elijah, the widow and son, as well as you and I, have life for this reason alone. That the Lord is living. Elijah will know that through the experience of the word and work of the Lord, the Lord will supply the widow with the resources for her daily bread.

Without even praying the Lord's prayer, you know, give them this day their daily bread. The widow knows that she was as good as dead, if not for the Lord's good work according to his word.

So last week I was speaking with a former member of St. John's. And he told me actually how his family crossed back and forth across the country with the Navy. Well, you may think, how do you cross the land with the Navy?

[17 : 36] But you know what I mean. He had to be on the East Coast or the West Coast. But his family had little to no money, and they were acutely aware of how God protected and provided for their family as they moved from one coast to the next, with little to no money at all.

You may know people like that as well. And it is important for us to know how the apostle, that is the apostle Paul wrote these words. And he said, We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

For those who are called according to his purposes. And Elijah was called according to God's purposes. We're called according to God's purposes. He provides for our needs.

And we, like Elijah, have reason to believe our life depends upon this living God. Elijah's ministry points us to our Lord, who we know is the way, the truth, and the life.

We tend to focus on those first two words, way and truth, sometimes forgetting that Jesus equals life. And Elijah and the widow are getting a taste of life through death.

[18 : 41] But we not only taste life, but we have assurance of it through death. Not our own death, but the death of Jesus Christ. And our knowledge of life exceeds that of Elijah and the widow, I think, because our certainty of life comes through the knowledge of our Lord's death and resurrection, which gives us life.

And this is what's at stake in the days of Elijah, and also in the days of the 21st century, in case you're wondering. The threat in the days of Elijah, I think, is the same as today, although obviously a different time and context.

But the temptation is great to turn away from the Lord and to turn towards other means for our life. In Elijah's day, the people of God were led astray to think, Baal ensured life, and we actually think, oh, that's so primitive, why would you represent your God by the way of a bull and think that God actually, you know, is what restores and is your resource for life?

And we just think, oh, well, we'd never do that sort of thing, would we? In our day, the people of God can be led astray, though not to think about Baal in those terms, but some other means that ensures resources gives us our livelihood.

Well, again, back into the text. Comment on this widow. She and her household ate for many days. The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

[20 : 17] According to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah. Whether or not our resources are at risk to be spent or empty, it is the Lord who supplies all of our needs, every one of ours.

It's not our intelligence, our ingenuity, our innovation, our progression, but it's the word of the Lord that gives us life. Christianity is not easy, is it?

It mostly comes down to taking to heart and mind God's word to us. Do you remember jumping into the New Testament? This wasn't read this morning, but do you remember the scene in the Gospel of John, after Jesus has given this really difficult teaching?

This difficult teaching where he equates himself with the bread of life. He teaches these larger crowds of disciples who are following him that he is the bread that's come down from heaven in the wilderness.

And at that point, many all turn away from him, except his 12 disciples only. And our Lord turns to those 12 disciples and he says this.

[21 : 20] He says, this is a hard saying. Who can listen to this? Jesus says in reply to his disciples, do you take offense at this? It is the spirit who gives life.

The flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe. And he continues on and then picks up again.

And then he says to his disciples, do you want to go away as well? And then Simon Peter says this. He says, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. So Elijah's ministry is largely about bringing to bear the word of the Lord, the works of the Lord, so that they know that it is God who has the words of eternal life.

The living God. Well, there are the days of Elijah and there are the days of Jesus. And there are the days of our Lord right now. It wasn't easy religion for Elijah.

[22 : 27] And it's not easy religion for us either. We live in great contrast to the world, the flesh, and the devil. But that's the calling of the church.

We are, as our own vision statement states here at St. John's, a community of contrast. But the church has flourished by contrast to the world in the past.

Read church history and you'll see how the church lived in contrast, knew about the living God. Look at church leaders like Augustine or our Protestant reformers. The church was at risk from within as Elijah knew that the people of God were at risk because of the likes of Ahab.

But the church was also at risk from without. As the kings were by the gods of other nations around Elijah time and us too. But just imagine what the people of God look like when we, like Elijah, depend on the living God.

When we know he supplies our greatest need for salvation and redemption. In fact, from creation all the way through to justification, the Lord knows our needs for life, our greatest needs and our basic ones.

[23 : 44] And he holds nothing back in giving us his son as our eternal life. I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.