

We have spent the last few weeks looking at the story of Elijah the prophet of God and his story. We have been with him as he obeyed God and received many miracles. We went with him into King Ahab's throne room and watched him scare the king by telling him it would not rain until God said so.

We've walked with him to a widow's house where the food and water never ran out. We were with him when he healed a young boy and brought him back to life. We climbed Mt. Carmel and witnessed the outpouring of the fire of God and we listened to the voices of the nation of Israel call out that the Lord is God. We climbed higher up the Mt. Carmel and watched as Elijah prayed for rain and it began to fall and we ran with him ahead of Ahab's chariot all the way to back to the palace.

And then it happened. Elijah's life was threatened and he took off for Judah fleeing for his life. Sixty miles later he leaves his servant and heads off into the desert to die. He just wants his life to end. God sends an angel to wake him up and feed him and unimpressed he just goes back to sleep. Finally he listens and spends forty days and nights trekking the mountain of God. Mt. Sinai was where Moses received the Ten Commandments.

We go with him into the back of a cave where God again finds him and calls him out. When it is all said and done God convinces Elijah to "get back in the game."

Today I want to find out what happens next in the life of this man of God and find out if there are some life lessons we can take away from his next assignment. Someone said to me after last Sunday, "You didn't leave Elijah in a very good spot." Your right but it wasn't me it was him. I'm just telling you the story.

¹⁵ Then the LORD told him, "Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive there, anoint Hazael to be king of Aram. ¹⁶ Then anoint Jehu grandson of Nimshi^[b] to be king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet. ¹⁷ Anyone who escapes from Hazael will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape Jehu will be killed by Elisha! ¹⁸ Yet I will preserve 7,000 others in Israel who have never bowed down to Baal or kissed him!"

¹⁹ So Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat plowing a field. There were twelve teams of oxen in the field, and Elisha was plowing with the twelfth team. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak across his shoulders and then walked away. ²⁰ Elisha left the oxen standing there, ran after Elijah, and said to him, "First let me go and kiss my father and mother good-bye, and then I will go with you!"

Elijah replied, "Go on back, but think about what I have done to you."

²¹ So Elisha returned to his oxen and slaughtered them. He used the wood from the plow to build a fire to roast their flesh. He passed around the meat to the townspeople, and they all ate. Then he went with Elijah as his assistant. 1 Kings 19:15-21 NLT

Here are some life lessons for us from this part of Elijah's story:

1. Wallowing in self-pity should not last forever

Elijah found himself in a hole. Well it was a cave but through a series of circumstances he began to make everything about himself instead of about God. He was worn out physically, emotionally and even spiritually.

Sometimes the circumstances of our lives will threaten to suck the life out of us. I don't think that Elijah knew what he was feeling until it was too late. He had tried to do what God told him to do but being faithful to God did not insure that he was always comfortable. Were his needs met? Sure but it was not always comfortable or easy. There were hardships. There was fear. There were challenging tasks and risk.

Somehow I think in the back of our minds we sometimes believe that the greatest goal of our lives should be a kind of worry free utopia where we achieve financial freedom and have no worries that our money can't buy our way out of. But joy and peace are not found in money.

Lew Mitchel: One of the saddest calls I received in the last few weeks was the news that my good friend and local philanthropist had decided that life was not worth living. He gave away more money than anyone I have ever known. He was a loving and generous guy with his words and his resources. Just two weeks before he chose to end his life I received a hand written note in the mail along with an article. The article was about a man from Africa he was helping and the note was thanking me for a funeral and message that I had recently conducted and preached for a mutual friend. The point is that just having more will not satisfy the ultimate need that is deep within us.

Some people may allow this to affect their relationships at home or at work
Some folks may allow this self-centered way of thinking to affect their relationship with God.

Elijah did all of that. In the moments when he headed out to the dessert to die he did not believe that God was in his life. When he went to the mountain of God he ignored even God's voice at first and stayed in the back of the cave hunkered along the back wall in darkness.

I wonder if there is someone like that here today that would admit that you have drifted away from God being the center of your life? God told Elijah two things:

- a. You are not through

God obviously had something more for Elijah to do. He was to pick a successor and anoint two Kings. What is it that God wants you to do with your life? Does it even matter? Do you ever ask yourself the question?

- b. You are not alone

Elijah was totally convinced that he was the last follower of God in all of Israel. He knew many prophets that had been killed. Remember following God is not always a good life insurance policy.

So what got him out of the cave? What was it that motivated him to move forward? Did God come to him and throw His arms around him and coddle him? Not at all. Sometimes you might wish that God would mother you a little bit and sometimes He does but not all the time. Sometimes He expects us to understand that we can become self-focused and then we wallow in self-pity and it's not always His job to pamper us out of it. He called to Elijah. He knew where He was and He spoke to him directly giving him a job to do.

2. Sometimes you just have to do it because God said to not because you feel it or want to.

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The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. (compromise) — Martin Luther King

Elijah did not want a new disciple but God told him to do it. He did it although I don't believe he was thrilled about it. He had had a servant already and in fact when Jezebel threatened him and he went off to die in the dessert the servant was more than glad to not go. He stayed behind. What good is a servant or a friend if they don't go the journey with you and now God was saying go take on someone else that will travel with you.

This was not about a principle but a commitment to what God said to do. Elijah was burned out and nothing was moving him emotionally. Not even what God said to do but he did it anyway.

There will be times in our lives when we may come up against things/decisions that clearly force us to choose between our will and God's will. Everything in us may want to do or choose to do what feels good, what appeals to us, what makes us happy but I assure you and I assure myself that authentic followers of God and Christ will choose to do what is right even if they don't feel it.

On April 21st, in the year 1519, the Spanish explorer Hernando Cortez sailed into the harbor of Vera Cruz, Mexico. He brought with him only about 600 men, and yet over the next two years his vastly outnumbered forces were able to defeat Montezuma and all the warriors of the Aztec empire, making Cortez the conqueror of all Mexico. How was this incredible feat accomplished, when two prior expeditions had failed even to establish a colony on Mexican soil? Here's the secret. Cortez knew from the very beginning that he and his men faced incredible odds. He knew that the road before them would be dangerous and difficult. He knew that his men would be tempted to abandon their quest and return to Spain. And so, as soon as Cortez and his men had come ashore and unloaded their provisions, he ordered their entire fleet of eleven ships destroyed. His men stood on the shore and watched as their only possibility of retreat burned and

sank. And from that point on, they knew beyond any doubt there was no return, no turning back. Nothing lay behind them but empty ocean. Their only option was to go forward, to conquer or die.

When you decide to follow Christ 100% you will find that there will be times of testing and temptation that may test you to your very core. These times may make you feel as though you are losing your very life but it is always best to choose God's way.

3. We do what we do because we have been touched by God.

No Elijah didn't feel God's arms around him nor did he receive some encouraging card or letter from God telling him he could make it. What he did have was a memory of what God had done in his life. He was touched by God but so was Elisha.

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Elijah replied, "Go on back, but think about what I have done to you."

What you are going to see in the story of Elisha is that he had been touched by God and was received two things:

He was anointed by God: The mantle of Elijah was symbolic of the anointing and presence of God and Elisha who was plowing with 12 teams of oxen. That's pretty impressive. Elisha is the young zealous prophet that wants to follow God and Elijah is the old unimpressed unmoved unemotional prophet. Elisha is blessed and moved and Elijah is just like whatever you think. Elisha request to go say goodbye and you get the impression that Elijah says I don't care what you do. I've done what God told me to do.

When you are touched by God you will be given a sense of His anointing to do what He has called you to do. But you will also receive something else.

He was given a sense of destiny: God has something for everyone of us to do. He calls us and gives us our personalities and strengths because He has specific things for us to do with our lives. There are specific people that we are going to touch and change their lives if we surrender to the will and destiny of God.

Does being anointed by God and given a destiny mean that we will always feel blessed and on top of it all and empowered and happy and filled with emotion? Absolutely not. Following Christ will be the hardest thing you may ever do. Following Christ in obedience will demand all of your heart.

I hesitate to say it but more than once in the last few weeks I have knelt or laid or sat in this room at this altar and sobbed my heart out until I thought I would physically stop trying to surrender my thoughts and my desires and my will to the will of God. Does it always feel great? No. It is a process and a journey and sometimes it feels awful. Elijah felt that. But so have others.

Noah felt it when God said build an ark and no one had ever built an ark and his neighbors laughed at him for 120 years. How many of you know that's a long time to be committed? Moses felt it when God called him and he begged to not have to be the leader. And God said, I am. Which meant so many things including He is the beginning and the end.

Joshua felt it when he was called to replace Moses. And God said, "As I was with Moses I will be with you. . ."

Esther felt it when she was challenged to fulfill her destiny. She responded to her task and destiny with these words, "If I must die, I must die."

Nehemiah felt it when he heard of the destruction in Jerusalem and he responded and rose to the task at hand.

I could go on and on but the point is what has God called you to do? What has he called you to be? Are you doing it? Have you gotten a little tired and distracted or are you moving forward with a sense that this is what God wants me to do?

4. Purpose moves us forward.

Purpose got Elijah out of the cave and purpose moved him on. He ceased to believe that he was the issue. God became the issue once again. This wasn't about goose bumps and emotion. Elijah wasn't impressed with anything except just doing God's will. He was told to call his successor and to anoint two kings and he had one down and two to go.

It was purpose that made Elisha follow this old prophet that wasn't very nice and had no real people skills.

Do you know what is fascinating to me about the rest of this story? We won't cover it in this series but that why you should be reading the chapters around where we are teaching. For the rest of Elijah's life you read nothing about Elisha and yet we know he was there. He wasn't much of a player. He didn't get name recognition but when Elijah's life was about over there was Elisha still following.

What is your purpose in this life?

What is it that God has called you to do?

Are you doing it?

Have you even responded?

Have you grown weary and tired in the process and maybe given up or been tempted to?

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. ¹⁵ You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in

*the dark of the womb.*¹⁶ *You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.* Psalm 139:13-16 NLT

5. God has something for you and me to do

When Adrian Rogers asked Romanian church leader Joseph Tson about the difference between being a committed Christ follower or a surrendered one, Tson described the difference, “When you make a commitment, you are still in control, no matter how noble the thing you commit to. One can commit to pray, to study the Bible, to give his money, or to commit to automobile payments, or to lose weight. Whatever he chooses to do, he *commits* to. But *surrender* is different. If someone holds a gun and asks you to lift your hands in the air as a token of surrender, you don’t tell that person what you are committed to. You simply surrender and do as you are told. . . . Americans love commitment because they are still in control. But the key word is *surrender*. We are to be slaves to the Lord Jesus Christ.”

A.W. Tozer says that people who are crucified with Christ have three distinct marks:

1. They are facing only one direction,
2. They can never turn back, and
3. They no longer have plans of their own.

“There are two kinds of people: those who say to God ‘Thy will be done’ and those to whom God says, ‘All right, then have it your way.’

Tragically, many people will have to endure eternity without God because they chose to live without him here on earth.” Warren adds “When you fully comprehend that there is more to life than just here and now, and you realize that life is just preparation for eternity, you will begin to live differently. You will start living in light of eternity, and that will color how you handle every relationship, task and circumstance’. (Warren/Lewis)

In *Absolute Surrender*, Andrew Murray wrote, “We find the Christian life so difficult because we seek for God’s blessing while we live in our own will.” Making commitments can be our subtle attempts to get God’s blessings while holding on to our own authority and lifestyle. Many fear that surrender will cost too much or make them miserable.

The surprise of surrender is that by giving control of everything we have and are to God we gain the blessings we desire. That is counterintuitive to our human nature, but Jesus promised, “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it” (Matthew 16:25).

Giving control of my life to God means I am not in control . . . and what a relief that is! It is the secret source of peace. Failure, frustration, and disappointment are the legacy of commitment, because it is always about me and depends entirely on me to achieve some outcome. Surrender takes “me” out of the equation. As I heard a person once say, “When I began to follow Christ, I resigned as General Manager of the Universe.”

When I acknowledge that Jesus is my sovereign and not my peer, He begins to transform me. C.S. Lewis said in *Mere Christianity*, “The more we get what we now call ‘ourselves’ out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become.” When we deny ourselves, we find ourselves.

William H. Hinson tells us why animal trainers carry a stool when they go into a cage of lions. They have their whips, of course, and their pistols are at their sides. But invariably they also carry a stool. Hinson says it is the most important tool of the trainer. He holds the stool by the back and thrusts the legs toward the face of the wild animal. Those who know maintain that the animal tries to focus on all four legs at once. In the attempt to focus on all four, a kind of paralysis overwhelms the animal, and it becomes tame, weak, and disabled because its attention is fragmented.

What’s got your attention away from what matters most?

What do you need to lay on God’s Altar of sacrifice and surrender to Him?