

Speaking Truth to Power:  
The Prophet Elijah, #3

## “Elijah—A Disillusioned Prophet”

1 Kings 19

--CEFC 1/26/20

(Read 1 Kings 18:41-19:21)

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In the Gospel of Luke

we read of two men walking down the road from Jerusalem  
to the small village of Emmaus  
on that Sunday afternoon.

Only a few days had passed since Cleopas and his companion  
had joined the throngs of pilgrims going up to the capital  
for the Passover Festival.<sup>1</sup>

Never had they gone with such enthusiasm and excitement--  
it was rumored that Jesus would be there.

Jesus of Nazareth--a prophet, powerful in word and deed  
before God and all the people.

<sup>1</sup>On the disappointment of the disciples, I am indebted to James S. Stewart, "The Christ of the Emmaus Road," in *King Forever* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), pp. 50-52. And for this incident as an introduction to this passage from 1 Kings, I am indebted to John Woodhouse, *1-2 Kings*, p. 535. Woodhouse was very helpful in understanding this text.

Perhaps this was the time that he would assert himself,  
and bring about the mighty deliverance of Israel --  
a deliverance for which they had so long prayed.

Perhaps at long last  
Jesus would lead an uprising against the oppressive tyranny of the Romans,  
and bring peace and justice to our land, they thought.

If anyone could do it--he was the one.

Just a few days ago. . . .  
now it seems as if an eternity had passed!

**“We had hoped that Jesus was the one who was going to redeem Israel,”**  
they said.

But now this disaster--this total wreck of hope,  
this awful disappointment.

These two could very well have been eyewitnesses  
of that procession of death moving out from the city  
to that hill called Calvary.

They had seen the crown of thorns, the jeering and hooting of the crowds--  
the nails in his hands and feet.

They had seen him crucified,  
and all their hopes and dreams were crucified with him--  
dead, buried and hidden in a tomb forever.

It was all over--it would never happen now.

A dark cloud of disappointment seemed to envelope them. //

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Of all the disappointments of life, one has to be the most shattering--  
to be disappointed with God.

To feel that perhaps God himself can't be counted on to make sense of life,  
to make things right,

How disillusioning it is

"to see the Kingdom of heaven sabotaged by the strategies of Satan."<sup>2</sup>

We hear much about the barriers to faith that permeate our world--

the scientific materialism,

the prideful humanism,

the crass consumerism,

the grip of modernist and now postmodern thinking.

But I'm convinced that much skepticism and unbelief today

has its root in simple disillusionment--

shattered hopes and unanswered prayers.

A tragedy strikes--

maybe a car accident,

the death of a loved one,

the birth of an unhealthy child,

we cry out, "God, how could you let this happen to me!"

You pray and pray and nothing changes;

Your marriage problem won't go away;

or a marriage partner never appears--

<sup>2</sup>Stewart, p.51.

"God, aren't you there?

God, don't you care?"

And in the ministry of the church, we try to spread the gospel,

but little seems to happen.

Where is the power?

Where is the victory?—

the pagan forces of the world seem overwhelming.

The Bible assures us of the sovereign control of God

over all the affairs of our lives--

He arranges, he orders, all things according to his will.

"In his heart ,a man plans his course,

but the Lord determines his steps," we read in the Book of Proverbs.

Or as Thomas A'Kempis paraphrased that truth--

"Man proposes, but God disposes."

But for many, the version given by Cervantes in his story of Don Quixote

seems more to the point:

"Man appoints, but God disappoints."

Simon de Beauvoir's observation seems too true to many--

"If you live long enough,

you'll see that every victory turns into a defeat."<sup>3</sup>

For in the end, don't we all die?

<sup>3</sup>*Macmillan Dict. of Quotations*, p. 161.

So it seemed for those two men  
walking along the road to Emmaus.

**“We had hoped that Jesus was the one who was going to redeem Israel,”**  
but now he had been crucified.

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And so it was for Elijah in our passage this morning.

The story begins triumphantly—  
with a spectacular answer to a persistent prayer of faith.  
But that victory quickly turns into a crushing defeat,  
and Elijah faces imminent danger  
and has to flee for his life.  
Our prophet feels that defeat deeply,  
and he is cast into a dark despair.

Like last week, we will see some spectacular fireworks,  
but this time such displays are not the answer to Elijah’s need—  
it is something else—  
something quiet and unexpected—  
and Elijah is put back on the path of faith./

We all need what this word from God has to teach us,  
for we will all experience something of the ups and downs of faith  
as we journey through life.

For as James in the New Testament tells us,  
Elijah was a man just like us.

Sometimes the Lord will answer our prayers in magnificent fashion,

But sometimes he won't.

It is then, when all seems lost,

that we will need to learn what Elijah learned—

that God's good plan may take many twists and turns,

and it may appear that the devil has won.

But the Lord will bring his good plan to fulfillment,

and until he does, we must carry on in faith.

We must be still and know that he is God.

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Turn with me again to the book of 1 Kings,

as we begin with **the triumph of answered prayer.**

1 Kings 18:41—

We pick up the story right after the slaughter of the 400 prophets of Baal

in the Kishon Valley.

**"Elijah said to Ahab, "Go [up], eat and drink,**

**for there is the sound of a heavy rain."**

**So Ahab went off to eat and drink,"**

King Ahab had not been mentioned in this story

since he had summoned his prophets

to meet Elijah on Mount Carmel.

We assume he was a spectator of all that happened there,

but we don't know his reaction to that powerful display of the Lord's power.

But we get clues that the king had been impressed by what he saw,  
and may have even given his assent to the slaughter of the prophets  
down in the valley,

First, Elijah tells him to “**go up**”<sup>4</sup> to eat and drink,  
that is, to go back up the mountain.

And then the king is invited to eat and drink—  
to join in the celebration  
of the great thing the Lord had done.

It appears that the revival that Elijah had hoped for had come about—  
Israel was turning back to the Lord.

As a result, Elijah is so certain that the Lord’s punishment in the form of a drought  
would now be over,  
and that the Lord would now forgive his people,  
that he can speak to Ahab of “**the sound of a heavy rain**”  
even before there was a cloud in the sky.

Back in 18:1, the Lord had promised Elijah that, after his encounter with Ahab,  
he would send rain,

but notice what Elijah does—

“Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel,  
bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.”

He assumes a posture of intense prayer—

<sup>4</sup> h<sup>TM</sup>EISo

and he is praying for rain.<sup>5</sup>

It may seem strange that Elijah feels compelled to pray for what God had promised,  
but that's a common pattern in the Bible.

Didn't Daniel do just that when he learned from the prophecy of Jeremiah  
that the exile in Babylon would last seventy years.

He turned to the Lord in prayer for God's deliverance (Dn. 9).  
He was praying for what God had promised.

You may wonder, why should we pray for something that God intends to do anyway?

But I might well ask,

Why, if God intends to supply you with food today,  
why should you go to the store to buy it?

Or if God intends to keep you dry,  
why should you carry an umbrella?<sup>6</sup>

You see, God not only establishes the ends—

that is, what he want to do in the world;

he also uses means,

God has made us agents in his creations--

agents through which he accomplishes his purposes.

And prayer is one of the ways we exercise our agency in the world—

our prayer is one of the instruments God uses,

one of his means

<sup>5</sup> and in the process, praying for God's forgiveness of his wayward people.

<sup>6</sup> This line of argument comes from C. S. Lewis.

to accomplish his desired ends.

When we pray, we are doing something—

we are acting in the world.

Our prayer is a God-appointed means by which God accomplishes things.

So we should pray for our daily bread,

just as much as we should go to the store to buy food.

Both are means by which God's good purpose for us is fulfilled.

So Elijah prays for what God had promised,

and so should we. /

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At first, nothing happens.

v. 43—**“Go and look toward the sea,” he told his servant.**

**And he went up and looked.**

**“There is nothing there,” he said.**

But that doesn't deter Elijah—

he keeps praying—

and he keeps looking for the answer.

**“Seven times Elijah said, ‘Go back.’”**

Seven times!

Three, maybe four, is usually my limit—

But Elijah kept praying.

And how often are we urged to show that same persistence in our praying.

Luke tells us that Jesus told his disciples a parable

to show them that they should always pray and not give up—  
He used the example of a widow who kept pestering a judge for justice.

She was so persistent that out of pure exasperation,  
he granted her request (Lk 18:1-8).

Elijah was like that with God.

Seven times Elijah send his servant to look to the sea for a sign of rain.

v. 44—"The seventh time the servant reported,

**"A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea."**

The Lord was at work!

Sometimes it only seems a small thing,  
but it is evidence of more to come.

The rain he had promised was about to pour down on the parched ground.

Elijah urged the king to hurry back to the palace in Jezreel<sup>7</sup>

before his chariot got stuck in the mud.

And with the hand of the Lord upon him,

Elijah raced ahead of Ahab—  
almost like a royal attendant,  
with prophet and king presenting a united front.<sup>8</sup>

With great anticipation and expectation,

Elijah would soon see what the reaction in the palace would be.

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<sup>7</sup> cf. 21:1.

<sup>8</sup> cf. Davis, p. 250.

19:1—"Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done

and all about how he had killed all the prophets with the sword."

Ahab told the queen everything—the word "all" occurs three times in this verse.

How could she hear of the futility of the prophets of Baal

and then the prayer of Elijah that brought fire from heaven

that consumed the water-drenched altar and everything on it--

how could she hear all of that and not respond just like all the people—

**"The LORD—he is God!**

**The LORD—he is God!"**

Surely, Jezebel would join Ahab in bringing the nation back to their God.

But no,

the human mind doesn't work like that.

Even spectacular miracles don't elicit faith.

For the human heart is corrupt.

We will not believe what we don't want to believe—

and we will not believe if we are not willing to submit—

and Jezebel would not submit to the LORD.

It was not the revelation of the power of God that she thought about,

but the slaughter of the prophets of Baal.

v. 2—"So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say,

**"May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely,**

**if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."**

So much for the great revival in Israel.

He had thought that this would bring revival to the nation.

Suddenly, all that Elijah had done seemed to be in vain—

it's as if it hadn't happened.

Things were just where they were before.

Jezebel, not Ahab, was calling the shots.

Baal worship remained the law of the land,

and this prophet of the LORD

was now public enemy number one.

And what we see next is one of the most depressing scenes in the whole Bible—

On hearing this news, we read in v. 3—

**"Elijah was afraid**

[or perhaps the original is "**Elijah saw**" (as in the NIV footnote)—

that is, he understood what the situation was]

**and [he] ran for his life."**

Going south, he crossed the boundaries of Israel,

and went over 100 miles to the southernmost city

of the southern kingdom of Judah.

But that was not enough—

he went alone another day's journey into the wilderness.

There, **"He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die.**

**"I have had enough, LORD," he said.**

**"Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."**

**Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.**

Wow!

This is the same Elijah who had confronted the king;

    this is the same Elijah who had stood toe-to-toe in a battle of the gods

        with the 450 prophets of Baal;

    this is the same Elijah who had seen fire from heaven

        consume a water-drenched altar,

        making a bull into an atoning burnt offering.

He had heard the people declare that the LORD is God!

        The LORD is God!

        and they were moved to slaughter the false prophets.

His prayer had been answered as the Lord fulfilled his promise

        and poured out his blessing on the nation in the form of rain.

        What power!

        What victory!

But now look at him.

    He had thought that revival had finally come to Israel—

        that they had recognized the evil folly of their false gods.

    He had thought that finally the Lord would receive the honor he was due

        and be given the exclusive devotion he deserved.

But now, all seemed lost.

    he was discouraged, depressed, disillusioned.

        Elijah was a broken man.

**“I have had enough, LORD,” he said.**

**“Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” //**

Elijah is not the only character in the Bible to feel this way—

We all know of **Job**,

who in his misery

pronounced a curse on the day he was born (Job 3:1).

**Jeremiah**, when his message to the nation is rejected,

he does the same thing (Jer. 20:14).

**“Why did I ever come out of the womb**

**to see trouble and sorrow**

**and to end my days in shame?”** he laments (Jer. 20:18).

And then, there’s **Moses**—

As he faced the rebellion of the people,

Moses says to the Lord,

**“If this is how you are going to treat me,**

**please go ahead and kill me”** (Num. 11:15; cf. also Ex. 32:32).

Let me be clear—

None of these men even contemplates committing suicide—

suicide is a sin against our divinely bestowed dignity.

All of them voice their complaint to the Lord—

In their desperation, they cry out to him to end their life.

But you see, their protest was, in fact, a form of faith—

for it was only their faith in the goodness of God

that caused them so much inner turmoil

when what they were experiencing

seemed so contrary to that goodness.

That protesting faith –

that questioning of God is something we will all voice

at some point in our lives, I'm sure.

Maybe some of you are there right now. /

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Elijah was running away from Jezebel,

but where was he going?

Surely, he didn't need to go as far as Beersheba

to escape her clutches.

But he went farther still—"into the **wilderness**," we're told.

But what does he do there—in his disillusionment and despair?

He prays—

**"I have had enough, LORD," he said.**

**"Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."**

He goes into the wilderness to meet with God.

And the wonder of this story is that Elijah finds him there—

or better, the Lord finds Elijah there.

A messenger from Jezebel had sent him a threatening word,

now another messenger brings him a word of grace.

v. 5--"All at once an angel touched him and said, **"Get up and eat."**

He looked around,  
and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals,  
and a jar of water.”

The Lord, who had once provided for him through ravens  
and through the widow of Zarephath,  
now provided bread and water through an angelic messenger.

This is a reminder that we are bodily creatures—  
and our emotional and spiritual state  
can be influenced by our bodily state. Elijah was broken—  
In his exhausted condition,  
Elijah’s first need was food and rest—  
and that’s what the angel gives him.  
Two times he eats and then sleeps.

Then the angel of the Lord prepares Elijah for a journey—  
v. 8—**“Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights  
until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.”**

Mount Horeb, the mountain of God—  
that’s another name of Mount Sinai—  
the mountain where Moses met with God  
and received the Ten Commandments.

Mount Horeb—  
that’s where the people of Israel were constituted as a holy nation,  
as God’s own people (Ex 19:4-6).

And **“forty days and forty nights”**—what does this bring to mind?

Surely, the experience of Moses who spent forty days and forty nights  
on that mountain.<sup>9</sup>

“There [Elijah] went into a cave and spent the night.”

Could “the” cave<sup>10</sup> he entered,  
be an echo of that “cleft of the rock” that once hid Moses  
when the Lord revealed himself?

v. 9--And the word of the LORD came to him:

“What are you doing here, Elijah?”

The question is, in one commentator’s language, “tantalizingly ambiguous.”<sup>11</sup>

It could be understood as a rebuke—  
in the sense of “What are you doing here—  
shouldn’t you be back in Israel?”

But that seems unlikely,  
wasn’t it the angel of the Lord who led him to this mountain?

It could be understood in another sense—  
as a probing inquiry--  
“Why are you here? What’s the purpose of this visit?”

Certainly, we as readers are asking that question.

And I can imagine Elijah thinking,  
“Lord, I was going to ask you the same question.”

<sup>9</sup> cf. Ex 24:18; 34:28; Dt 9:9,11,18,25; 10:10

<sup>10</sup> The noun has the article here--häd̄rDoV;mAh

<sup>11</sup> Woodhouse.

But that question simply allows the prophet to pour out his heart to the Lord:

v. 10—"He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty.

The Israelites have rejected your covenant,

torn down your altars,

and put your prophets to death with the sword.

I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

Some people criticize Elijah for this response—

to them it seems too self-centered, exaggerated, only half true,

and almost whining.

I don't see it that way.

I see a man consumed by the glory of God—

he was very zealous to see God honored in Israel

Here was a man who had given himself to a divine mission

to call his people back to their God.

But things had not gone well—

The encounter on Mount Carmel, which seemed so victorious,

had turned out to be a failure.

Sure, there may have been a hundred prophets of the Lord

hiding in caves somewhere,

but he was the only one who had stuck his neck out publicly

to confront the powers that be.

And look what that got him—

nothing but death threats.

God's good purpose for Israel seemed to hanging by a thread.

All seemed lost.

This was Elijah's view of things—

and it was dark,  
and we can understand how he would feel this way. /

And maybe you have felt something similar—

You are confused—What in the world are you doing, Lord?  
Why is this happening?

I have prayed, but I don't get an answer.

The wicked prosper, and the righteous suffer.

They call good evil, and evil good.

Lord, your name is blasphemed,  
and your people are mocked.

I don't get it!

and I don't like it!

Why, Lord? Why?

I thought things would be different.

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And doesn't the situation here bring to mind

the experience of Moses in this same place—

As we said earlier, while he was upon the mountain receiving the law of God

the people down below were constructing a golden calf  
as an object of worship.

When Moses came down it looked as though the whole nation

had rejected God's covenant  
and were worshipping other gods.

What a total mess!

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We come now to the climax of the passage—

v. 11--The LORD said [to Elijah],

**“Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD,  
for the LORD is about to pass by.”**

We are once again reminded of the experience of Moses.

When Moses asked to see God’s glory,

**the LORD said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you,  
and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence” (Ex. 33:19).**

**“When my glory passes by,**

**I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand  
until I have passed by” (Ex. 33:22).**

Somehow the Lord was going to make his presence known to Elijah,

he was going to **“pass by,”**  
just as he had done to Moses.

Perhaps he would be giving some new revelation,

with a new plan for his people;

or perhaps he would reject Israel altogether and start again,

as he threatened to do in Moses’ day.

We’ll see.

v. 11—**“Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart**

and shattered the rocks before the LORD,

but the LORD was not in the wind.

After the wind there was an earthquake,

but the LORD was not in the earthquake.

12 After the earthquake came a fire,

but the LORD was not in the fire.

Again, we are reminded of Moses' experience on Mount Sinai--

On the day Moses was to receive the law of God,

we're told that "Mount Sinai was covered with smoke,

because the LORD descended on it in fire.

The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace,

and the whole mountain trembled violently" (Ex. 19:18).

We expect that Elijah is about to receive some great proclamation from the Lord

about his dealings with his people Israel. /

But that's not what happened—

The Lord was not in the wind;

the Lord was not in the earthquake;

and the Lord was not in the fire.

Instead there was—*what?*

The NIV translation has "a gentle whisper."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> háð;qåd h¶DmDmv;d lwëøq

The older and more familiar King James Version

has “**a still small voice.**”

Both of these suggest that God said something to Elijah—

and that if we just listen hard enough, he will speak to us, too—

not with a loud voice—

a voice of wind, earthquake, or fire—

but a still, small voice.

In our own minds, we will be able to hear God’s voice as a gentle whisper. /

Surely, we all want to hear God’s voice—at least, we think we do;

but there are two problems with this view of what was going on here—

First, the text gives us no indication that the Lord imparted any content

in whatever Elijah may have heard.

It doesn’t tell us that the Lord actually said anything.

And second, the emphasis of the Hebrew is not on a voice that is heard,

or even on a sound—

it is on the silence of it.

The two other places the word used here is found in the Bible,<sup>13</sup>

they both refer to a silence,

a hushed calm,

something as quiet as a breath of air.

That’s why the New American Standard translates this as “**a sound of gentle blowing**”

and the New RSV as “**a sound of sheer silence.**”

<sup>13</sup> Job 4:12; Ps. 107:29

Paradoxically, this silent breath is what Elijah “**heard.**” /

What should we make of this?

I’m not sure Elijah knew what to make of it.

We read that **“When Elijah heard it,  
he pulled his cloak over his face and went out  
and stood at the mouth of the cave.”**

I think we could say that in that moment,

Elijah experienced what the Lord speaks of  
when he says in Psalm 46,

**“Be still and know that I am God”** (Psa. 46:10).

Surely, he felt himself in the presence of God,

as evidenced by his need to cover his face,  
just as Moses was hid in the cleft of the rock.

It is a frightful thing to be in the presence of a holy God.

But then the Lord asks him the same question he had asked before—

**“What are you doing here, Elijah?”—**

as if perhaps now he may have a way to answer that question.

But Elijah gives the same answer as before:

**“I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty.**

**The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars,  
and put your prophets to death with the sword.**

**I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”**

Elijah's response is understandable,  
for God hadn't said anything.  
Elijah had been given no new revelation,  
no new way of understanding himself  
or God's dealing with the people of God.

But perhaps that is the very point.

As one commentator puts it:

"The silence was profound.

There was not going to be a new beginning, a fresh revelation.

[There was to be no] Plan B

to supersede the word of the Lord given in the days of Moses."<sup>14</sup>

God's good purpose for Elijah, and for Israel, still stands—

Yes, **the Israelites have rejected his covenant,**

**torn down his altars,**

**and put his prophets to death with the sword,"**

but he was not finished with them yet.

The Lord was still silently sovereign in all the events that had taken place;

he was not taken by surprise,

he was not shaken by these events.

Nor had he given up on his people.

God was still at work in these people—

therefore, Elijah still has work to do, too.

<sup>14</sup> Woodhouse.

v. 15--The LORD said to him,

“Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus.

When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram.

16 Also, anoint Jehu . . . king over Israel,

and anoint Elisha . . . to succeed you as prophet.

17 Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael,

and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.”

In other words, the Lord says to Elijah,

“Go *back* to the conflict,

go *back* to the trouble,

go *back* to the risk.”<sup>15</sup>

Go back, and continue to be my instrument to accomplish my purpose.

In this general prophetic picture of the future,<sup>16</sup>

the Lord declares that Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha

will all have critical roles to play

in bringing God’s judgment to Israel for their sin.

God is still at work in Israel.

But there’s more—

The Lord also gives Elijah a word of hope and of promise—

v. 18—The Lord says, “Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—

**all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal**

**and whose mouths have not kissed him.”**

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, citing Brueggemann, *Kings*, p. 237.

<sup>16</sup> which is not fulfilled in literal terms.

There will always be a remnant, Elijah—  
you are not alone—

It may feel that way, but you're not.

I will preserve a faithful people—a remnant—who will worship me.

I will be their God,

and they will be my people.

And isn't that exactly the point the Apostle Paul makes when he quotes this passage—

God has not rejected his people—

He will always preserve “**a remnant chosen by grace**” (Rom. 11:1-6).

And it must be “**by grace**,”

for these people will never deserve the mercy they will receive from the Lord. /

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It appears that this word of God is enough—

for we see Elijah beginning to obey this command—

as he calls Elisha to come alongside him.

And through Elisha,

this prophetic voice to Israel will not be silenced. //

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So what are we to make of this gripping story?

Two things strike me, as we close--

First, as James puts it--**Elijah was a man just like us.**

There will be times when we will pray and see God answer,

and there will be times when we will pray and he doesn't answer.

We will look at the world around us and our own circumstances

and we will wonder what God is up to.

We will question,

we will doubt,

and we may face our own times of discouragement

and even disillusionment.

We may want some new revelation—

“Speak, Lord,” we say.

We may want God to reveal himself to us in some spectacular way—

in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire.

But instead, he may pass by in a gentle whisper, a silent breath.

His only message is **“Be still and know that I am God.”**

For what more can he say than he has already said.

Hasn't he sent his Son into the world—

hasn't he battled the forces of sin and death and won the victory—

when Jesus Christ died as a perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice

and rose from the grave victorious over death.

Those two discouraged men on the road to Emmaus certainly discovered this to be true,

when they recognized Jesus himself risen from the tomb

walking beside them and eating with them.

What more can he say?

How can our God more powerfully declare his love for us,  
his good purpose for us  
than what he has said in his Son? /

No—regardless of our circumstances,  
God's one redemptive plan,  
his saving purpose still stands—  
through Israel and to all nations.

Christ is building his church  
and not even the gates of death itself can prevail against it.  
He will never give up on his good purpose,  
so we should never give up on him.

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And there's one more thing we need to see--  
something which Elijah himself was only just beginning to understand.

Elijah bemoaned the fact that he was no better than his ancestors.  
And in that assessment, he was exactly right.  
He was no better than his ancestors who had called Israel to repentance.  
And the prophets to come after Elijah would be no better than him.

For as the history of Israel was to show so clearly,  
no prophet could ever save Israel.

What Israel needed was beyond the power of any prophet,  
for what Israel needed was a divine Savior—  
someone who could do *for them* what only God himself could do.

They needed someone who could not only take away their sin  
but who could also change their corrupt hearts.

And what Israel needed is what we all need---

And that is what Jesus Christ has now achieved for us in the gospel—  
that mysterious gospel, that foolish gospel—  
a gospel which requires the apparent defeat of crucifixion  
before the glorious victory of resurrection.

Don't be discouraged--

No one who puts their hope in him will be disappointed.

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Prayer—

Psa. 37:7    **Be still** before the LORD  
and wait patiently for him;  
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,  
when they carry out their wicked schemes.

Psa. 46:10    He says, "**Be still**, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth."

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O Father, you are sovereign!

We see you dimly now,  
but soon before your triumph  
earth's every knee shall bow.  
With this glad hope before us  
our faith springs up anew:  
our sovereign Lord and Savior,  
we trust and worship you!

Closing Song: *O Father, You Are Sovereign*

Benediction:

Rom. 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,  
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Speaking Truth to Power:

The Prophet Elijah, #3

Jan. 26, 2020

## Elijah—A Disillusioned Prophet

### 1 Kings 18:41-19:21

There is no doubt that the life of faith can have its ups and downs. This morning we see both in the life of Elijah. May we be encouraged by the assurance that though the Lord's good purpose may seem thwarted, he will be faithful to see it fulfilled.

#### I. When God Answers Our Prayer (18:41-46)

##### Elijah's Persistent and Triumphant Prayer

#### II. When God Doesn't Answer Our Prayer (19:1-21)—

##### A. Elijah's Disillusionment

*"Take my life;*

*I am no better than my ancestors" (v. 4)*

##### B. The Lord's Reassurance

*"The Lord is about to pass by" (v. 11)*

1. A “Silent Sovereignty”

*“After the fire came a gentle whisper”* (v. 12)

2. A Faithful Purpose—  
in Judgment and Grace

*“Go back the way you came,  
and . . . anoint Hazeel”* (v. 15)

*“Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel”* (v. 18)

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Sermon Response:

## **Elijah—A Disillusioned Prophet”**

### **1 Kings 19**

- Have you ever been disappointed to the point of being disillusioned—tempted to give up on God? What were the circumstances? How can you relate to Elijah’s experience?
- What about God’s apparent “inaction” in the world most discourages you?
- What are things that God has promised us that we ought to pray for? How is our pray a form of “action” and “agency” in the world?
- When should we be persistent in prayer and when should be “give up” praying?
- What do you make of all the parallels between Elijah and Moses in this passage? What significance might this have in the way we understand what is happening here?
- What is the significance of the contrast between the spectacular wind, earthquake, and fire and the “gentle whisper” of “the sound of sheer silence” that comes at the end?
- What do you want to hear from God? How can what he has already said meet your need?

- Take some time praying about the lessons of this passage and praise the God it presents. Pray also for “gospel conversations” with those God puts in your path this week.