

What are you doing here, Elijah?

By Rene Palacios

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Bible Text: 1 Kings 19:9-18
Preached on: Sunday, July 1, 2007

Providence Presbyterian Church PCA
13801 Encantado Road NE
Albuquerque, NM 87123

Website: www.PPCPCA.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/ppcpca

If you could please stand, we're going to read from 1 Kings. Chapter 19, that is 1 Kings chapter 19, verses 9 through 18.

9 There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 10 He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." 11 And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. 13 And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 14 He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." 15 And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. 16 And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. 17 And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. 18 Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Let's pray.

Father, what an honor and privilege it is that you would consider us friends and, Lord, this morning we desperately need to hear from you. We need to hear from your word. We need for you to speak to us and grant us understanding. Your word is life to us, Father. So come by the power of the presence of your Spirit into this service and speak to us, Father. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear. Grant us hearts that understand and believe and we will promise to give you all glory, all honor and praise because you alone are worthy. In Jesus' name, amen.

You may be seated.

With so many of our congregation that are expecting children, I was just thinking a couple of weeks ago about when Bridget and I, when we were expecting our first son. We were in college at the time and it was getting to be the time where all my papers were due and when studying for final exams and that type of thing, and the problem was, is that our first son, he's always been like this, is he always likes to be late. Now, I think some of you think late, one, two days, three days, a week maybe. Our son chose to be five weeks late and one of the, I shouldn't say problems, but one of the things about that is that my mother-in-law came to visit us a week before Adrian was due and so I was honored with her presence for six weeks, and it finally got so bad that for entertainment where we lived, the cable usually didn't work, we did have a phone, and we would just sit and drink coffee and stare at Bridget. Now finally at 9:15, right before we were ready to go to church and Sunday school and Bridget went into labor. Now the hospital from where we lived was 30 minutes away and Adrian, it actually was 9 o'clock and Adrian was born at 9:45. And so my mother-in-law got to see Adrian for half a day and the next day I had to take her to the airport and fly her home. But she really hadn't gotten to see her grandson and she wanted to see him badly so she called and she said, "Well, I think maybe I'll come visit or I can fly Bridget up to visit us." Now I didn't want my wife and new baby to fly away and be away for a few weeks after I'd waited so long, but it was either that or my mother-in-law come back and visit. So I put them on the airline and they flew up to visit with her parents and her brothers and they were gone for a few weeks. And I had their picture, you know, by the bedside of the table and I'd cry every night and look at their pictures and I knew exactly what they looked like but I went and I was excited, I went to Tucson to pick them up at the airport and I stood there and I waited and waited and the plane, you know, people disembarked from the plane and I waited and waited and I could not see Bridget or Adrian. There was just this lady in front of me that was standing there crying. Now, my mother-in-law decided that she's going to give, she had, she paid for someone to cut Bridget's hair and she thought that, "Well, let's also do something with the color of your hair." But sometimes I think that when you're pregnant that maybe the chemicals in your body don't work properly or something. and the color that it was supposed to be, it wasn't, and it was kind of an unnatural color. And so I stood looking at this lady standing in front of me crying, and this baby that didn't look at all like Adrian, because I didn't understand at that time how quickly babies can grow, and I realized that that was Bridget. And you would think that I would recognize my wife. We'd been married for three years, and you'd think that I would recognize my wife, but I didn't.

Now, as we look at this Scripture here, we see a prophet that knew God, that knew the voice of the Lord, that had ministered and served the Lord for many years. He wasn't a novice, but it seems like he got to the point that he did not recognize the presence of the Lord anymore. Now, as we look at this passage of Scripture, we do probably need to go back a little bit and give it some context, some background information. If we went all the way back to chapters 17 and 18 of the 1 Kings, you know, first of all, we would see that there was a king named Ahab. He was the seventh king of Israel and he had married someone named Jezebel. And because he was a good, obedient husband, he built a temple to Baal and a grove to Astarte. He took in her gods. He kept serving his God, he thought, but he took in these other gods because his wife wanted him to. In 1 Kings 17:1, it says, "Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.'" And of course, then for three years, there was not any rain there. And then we get into chapter 18 and we see that in verses 17 and 19, it says, "When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, 'Is it you, you troubler of Israel?' And he answered, 'I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.'" So even after this time of drought, it seems like things had not changed, things were continuing on, people were continuing to worship the Lord and Asarte and Baal.

Now it's not like they would just send checks in the mail to Baal or anything like that. They worshiped him and it was in many ways a horrific type of worship. And so it seems that the Lord spoke to Elijah and it came the time that Baal had to be confronted, the prophets of Baal and all those that followed him. So we get to 1 Kings chapter 18 and verses 20 through 24 and it says, "So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Elijah came near to all the people and said, 'How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.' And the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, 'I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God.' And all the people answered, 'It is well,'" it sounds good to us. Let's get this settled once and for all, who is God.

And so it comes down and at noon Elijah is mocking these people and saying, "You better cry louder, for he's a god because either he's musing or he's relieving himself or maybe he went on a trip or maybe he's asleep and has to be awakened." And he was making a dig at them because Baal, he would die every year and then he would awaken, and the way that they'd awaken him is that they would have these terrible ceremonies. And so the prophets of Baal, they cried aloud and they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood was gushing out of them, and then finally it says at midday, as

midday passed, they raved on until the offer of the oblation, but there wasn't any voice and then it says no one answered. It says no one paid attention to their cries.

So here you have these 450 prophets in a frenzy, cutting themselves until the blood gushes out and nothing happens and so it is Elijah's turn and he says, "Put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces and lay it on the wood," and he says, "but I want you to fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering on the wood," and then he tells them, do it a second time, and he said, do it a third time, and they did a third time. So they soaked the offering and then he says, "'Answer me, LORD, answer me that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God. and that you've turned their hearts back.' Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, 'The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.' And Elijah said to them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.' And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there." And then after that, Elijah prays for the rain to return and he tells Ahab, "Go up and eat and drink for there's a sound of rushing rain."

So Ahab, because nobody, it was to the point that they were not eating and drinking. You know, here, at least Ahab believed Elijah and he told him to go eat and drink and he did. But it says that Elijah went up to Mount Carmel and he bowed himself down to the earth and he put his face between his knees and he prayed and so the drought was over, the confrontation was over and you'd think that this would have been the end of it. God had moved in a miraculous and a spectacular way and then we get down to chapter 18 verse 46. It says, "the hand of the LORD was on Elijah, and he gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel." From Carmel to Jezreel is about 20 miles and it's not real clear exactly why he was running, but it almost seemed like he was running to see as Ahab told Jezebel, "It's over. Elijah, you should have seen this miraculous thing that Elijah did. God answered his prayers. It's starting to rain. He confronted your prophets and they're all dead." And it looks as if he's running with Ahab to hear him and to see Jezebel faced with the truth.

But that was not counting on the kind of person that Jezebel was. An interesting thing about Jezebel is her name actually means chaste. If a name did not fit a woman, that was a name that did not fit someone. In fact, it says about Ahab in chapter 16, it says, "And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, he also took for his wife Jezebel, and went and served Baal and worshiped him." This is God saying, "As bad as all of that was, he compounded his sin by marrying this Jezebel." And the curse that Elijah placed upon Jezebel was literally fulfilled. He told her that you're going to be tossed off the wall and that the dogs were going to eat of your flesh and they weren't going to find you, which is exactly what happened to her. But at this time, all of this has not had an effect on Jezebel. The fact that God had consumed this sacrifice, the fact that 450 of her prophets were slaughtered, it had not affected her.

Why don't you go to chapter 19, verses 1 through 8. It reads, "Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 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.' Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.' And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, 'Arise and eat.' And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, 'Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.' And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God." So Elijah had gone from Carmel to Jezreel, which is about 20 miles, and he went from Jezreel to Beersheba, which is about 100 miles, and then he went from Beersheba to Horeb, which is about 200 miles. And I think at times we could look at this and think of this mighty prophet that heard the word of the Lord that was able to do such miraculous things, it would be easy for us to say, "Well, what is wrong with that man that after he did all of those things that he's scared of this one woman?" But what had Elijah actually been through? As far as he was concerned, he was the last one that actually trusted in God. Even the fact of these prophets being slaughtered, I don't think we even are able to comprehend what that was like. They didn't all just lie down in hospital beds and pass away. He was in a true confrontation with evil. This was an established idol worship. These were horrible people and he had faced them alone, at least he thought. And so instead of this Jezebel, maybe he was actually hoping that this woman would repent, that Ahab would repent and fall on their faces before God and begin to understand. Instead, what happened? Their hearts were seared and hardened all the more. And even after all of that, they were rebellious against God and they took out their wrath on Elijah.

It seems like it was a hard day for homeless people on Friday. In the morning, I opened the door and there was this young man, very frail, and he was probably 19 years old, and he was just weeping his eyes out. He was scared to death. He'd been kicked out of another rehab in town. He was from Texas, and he'd never actually been homeless before. He had a drug problem, but he'd never been homeless. And as he talked with me, he was just scared to death of spending the nights on the streets in Albuquerque. And then around lunchtime, there came a lady in with her little boy, and she was just weeping her eyes out and crying and her little boy had asthma. She'd had him to the emergency room. He also had a deformity in his hip that he couldn't walk properly; you're going to have to put a special kind of a contraption on him is the best way to describe it. And then the doctor had called her while she was driving and she reached for her cell phone, she pulled out the road and she's trying to reach for a pen, and as she was in a parking lot, somehow the door slammed on her hand and she damaged her hand very badly and she had to go back to the emergency room. She didn't have gas for her car. She had a job. She couldn't pay for her utilities. It was all she could handle and she hadn't fed her little boy anything that day. And then just shortly before I left on Friday, I walked out of my office and there was, at the rescue mission, there's one area there where we have four hallways that meet, and one hallway goes out to our courtyard and our lobby, another hallway leads down to

the women's day room, and I walked out of my office and there was a lady just standing there in the middle of that intersection just crying her eyes out. And I thought she had maybe fallen down because there was a trash can on the floor and there was three cases of luggage just scattered on the ground. And I asked her if she had hurt herself. She couldn't even answer me. She just kept crying and crying and crying. And finally she was able to say, "I'm just trying to get to the women's day room." Now what happened to her? She'd been lugging around everything that she owned in three pieces of luggage all day long. It was 100 degrees. She was tired. She was weary. It was all that she could take. And here she was thinking that I can't even find my way 50 feet down this hallway to get to the right place. It was all that she could handle.

And for Elijah, even though God had used him greatly and he was a great man of God, it was all that he could do and he reached the point where from grief or depression or just being exhausted, he fell down and could not go any farther. But the angel gave him something to sustain him, to help him to complete his journey. Now, where was he going? And then finally we get down to where our text is in 1 Kings chapter 9. It says, "There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" Now, what did Elijah answer? The voice is saying to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And what did he answer? "I've been very jealous for Yahweh. I've been very jealous for the LORD. These people, they've forsaken your covenant, they've broken your covenant. They threw down your altars. They killed all your prophets and now they're seeking to my life to take it away." Did he answer the question? What could he have answered that he would have answered the question? He might have been able to say, "Well, I'm tired. I'm exhausted. I am scared to death of this woman that is so insane and so evil that fire coming down from heaven doesn't give for any fear." He maybe could have said, "I'm lonely, I'm the only one left." Or he might have answered, "I've been wondering where you are." Now, where was he at this time? He'd gone from Beersheba to Horeb, which is also known as the Mount of the Lord, which is also known as Mount Sinai. What kind of things had God done on Mount Sinai before? Well, for one thing, he spoke to Moses on this mountain and where was Moses when God spoke to him? Well, he was in a cave. So which cave was Elijah in? He was in the cave where God spoke to his forefathers. He was drawn back as close as he could get to home. I don't know that he really understood where he was going but for some reason, he was drawn back home to receive the help and the strength that he needed.

And so God speaks to him again, he says, "Go out and stand on a mountain before the LORD." And it says, "And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire." And as I think of Elijah, I think of somebody that was a hard man, somebody that was very strong and forceful and was used to these kind of spectacular demonstrations of God's power. And if you've ever been in an earthquake or you've been in a fire, you know how scary that can be, or in a tornado or with a hurricane, but it says even in that great display of power, God was not in those things.

And then God says to him, "And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave." And there came a voice to him and what was that voice like? Well, earlier it says after the fire was the sound of a low whisper. In fact, another way you could translate it, there was a sound of a murmuring. There was a sound of a muttering. But it says when Elijah heard it, what did he do? He wrapped his face in his cloak just the same way that Moses did and he went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And what happened? The voice came back to him again and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Now, Elijah might have missed something back at Beersheba because who was the angel that sustained him? It wasn't just an ordinary angel, but it says it was the angel of the Lord. It was as if Elijah was in God's presence and he didn't recognize him; because of the turmoil in his soul, he didn't even recognize the angel of the Lord, Christ before the manger. And even now, what is he saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" "Well, I've been very jealous for you. These people, they forsook your covenant. They threw down your altars. They killed your prophets and now they're trying to kill me." What else do you think he was saying there? I think he was saying, "I quit. It's all I can handle. There's nothing more I can say. There's nothing more I can do. I quit." But God does not accept that, does he? He tells him, "You have three things to do, so go on your way."

Now he didn't actually end up anointing Hazael or Jehu, Elisha did, but it's as if God was saying to him, "You've been faithful, my servant. Now you need to anoint this one that is going to take your place. But I do want you to understand that you're not alone because I have 7,000 that I've reserved for myself that have not bowed down to Baal, that have not kissed him. You are not alone. In all of your weariness, you are not alone because I am with you."

Why don't you go in the New Testament over to the Book of Matthew to chapter 11. That's the Book of Matthew, chapter 11 and it says when starting with verse 1, "When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?' And Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.' As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent

take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

So here we have the second Elijah, John the Baptist, and what was his condition at this time? He knew what was waiting for him. He knew that execution was awaiting him. But you would think of all people, he would know who the Christ is, that he would recognize the Christ but because he was also a human, he did not, and it wasn't until Jesus told his disciples, "Go back and tell John what you see, blind are receiving their sight, the lame are walking, lepers are cleansed, the deaf are hearing, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news." He says, "John, remember who I am and understand that you are not alone because there is a Savior, there is a God, and he does have things under control with or without you." And for us, God's work is under control. God knows what he is doing. God has not forgotten about us, but maybe we've forgotten what he looks like. Perhaps we've not recognized his works. So what does he say? He says, "I am here," and it may not be in the way that you expect but he says that, "I am with my people. I have not forsaken them. I have not forgot them." He says to us that he remembers you.

Let's pray.

Father, forgive us for not recognizing you, for not recognizing your works all around us. And sometimes, Father, we do think that we are the last faithful one left and that we are the only one that understands anymore but Lord, your word is always to us that you have a remnant, that you have a people, that you have reserved to yourself 7,000. And so in the midst of our life, Father, in the midst of this world, in the midst of circumstances that try us, Lord, your word, your gospel assures us that you have not forsaken us, that we need only to look for you. So thank you, Father, for your word. Thank you for your strength. Thank you for your correction. Thank you for your comfort and we indeed promise to give you glory and honor and praise. In Jesus' name, amen.