

God's Message in Numbers *1 Kings 18:1-19*

Introduction

- It takes a special person, in my opinion, to study statistics
 - I'm sure to the embarrassment of my mother who was a Math teacher, Math was not one of my strong subjects
 - I've learned over time how to adapt and become better at Math, but it still makes me feel inferior
- Statistics involves digging deep and analyzing data
 - For those of us who aren't Mathematically inclined or who don't want to take the time involved in searching through data, what we want from the statisticians is the bottomline.
 - Just tells us what the numbers mean!
- An example of this is provided for us regarding the Coronavirus
 - Caseloads which then project the movement of the curve
 - The bottomline is:
 - Is the Coronavirus dying or is it still a threat?
 - When can we go back to "normal?"
 - Based on the data, states develop "Reopening Phases"
- For the most part, in the Mid-Ohio Valley area we have experienced a light case load.
 - The Coronavirus has been present, but not to the extent that has been experienced throughout the rest of our state or the country
 - Trending similar to WV
 - Even though the virus has posed a threat, we may not feel the same impact as other places or states
- All that information is good and maybe reassures us until there is an unexpected outbreak
 - 5 churches throughout the state of WV where the virus has spread
 - Reminder of just how significant it is that we take the precautions that we do
 - Letter from Gov. DeWine with recommendations for churches: social distancing and masks
 - If the virus is present it can spread rapidly in a close setting like a church
- Sermon Series, "God's Messenger: How Elijah Communicated During Uncertain Times"
 - Elijah ministered during a crisis; similar to the impact of the Coronavirus, Elijah ministered during a drought
 - The drought was a result of King Ahab serving foreign gods; Baal
 - To remain safe from the King and Queen, Elijah was forced to scatter and be isolated- sound familiar?
 - What happens when we are scattered and isolated?

- We often feel alone
- Imagine the burden that Elijah carried as a messenger of God who tried to remain faithful to his calling and at the same time protect his life.
- Often times his calling and the protection of his life put Elijah in direct contact with other people who Elijah had to depend upon for provision. So not only was Elijah carrying a personal burden, but also the guilt of putting others in danger.
- Purpose of this sermon series is to gain a clearer understanding of how we can communicate God's message of hope during times when our normal routines have been disrupted.
- Let me use the example of the statistics of the Coronavirus to make a point for what we will learn today
 - Think of the spread of the Coronavirus in relation to the spread of God's message
 - It may appear as though the virus is trending down, just as the spread of God's message may appear as though it is trending down
 - HOWEVER, there are always hotspots, places where God is moving within His people in ways that we may not be able to see on the surface that God is continuing to move to accomplish His purposes through us.
 - Elijah becomes aware of a "hotspot" that otherwise he may not have been aware of due to the result of his isolation.
 - One overarching message that we need to understand in Elijah's ministry and is also true of our current circumstances: Everything that is happening is leading toward the point of God revealing Himself as the One True God.
 - Applied to what we have discussed the last couple of weeks: God has a message that he wants to not only communicate to us, but through us.
 - As communicators of God's message, we need to find faith and strength in the stories of God's work beyond just ourselves and realize that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves, our church, or even our context.

Does God Have Your Attention?

- 1 Kings 18:1-2
 - After many days, the Word of the Lord came to Elijah
 - Patience
 - Trusting God's perfect timing
 - What we know about Elijah is that God has Elijah's attention
 - Confront Ahab
 - Probably not what Elijah wanted to do
 - King Ahab not only opposed Elijah's message, but the king wanted to kill Elijah!
 - What we know about Elijah is that God has Elijah's attention
 - God is going to send rain
 - Drought has lasted for an extended period of time

- Caused the brook to dry up and made a hardship for the widow
- King Ahab is going to be searching for how to keep the livestock alive
- God isn't going to send rain necessarily to relieve the distress.
 - God's purpose for the rain will be to reveal Himself as the One True God.
 - Everything that is happening is leading up to this point
- Elijah has a part in God's plan
 - Confront the King
 - Deliver the message
 - What we know about Elijah is that God has Elijah's attention
- So, I've now repeated this same point about Elijah 3 times, Do I have your attention?
 - Some have suggested that the current crisis that we are experiencing is a direct result of God's judgement
 - Some have suggested that what we are experiencing is part of the dispensation of "The End Times"
 - It's possible that those things are true, however I believe that through whatever we may be experiencing that God desires to reveal himself as the One True God
 - The Question for us: Does God have your attention?
 - Elijah was "locked in"
 - Elijah understood that he was a messenger of God and if he was going to deliver a message he would have to wait on God and give God his full attention in order to receive God's message
 - When chaos and uncertainty swirl around us, we have the tendency to get distracted away from our purpose and caught up in what is going on around us.
 - God needs our full attention right now in order for us to receive His message and to be deliverers of his message.
 - Consider all the numbers, statistics, positions and opinions, but if you want the bottom line: God needs your full attention!

Divine Appointments

- **1 Kings 18:3-8**
- Obadiah
 - Oversees King Ahab's household
 - King Ahab has enough confidence in Obadiah to request that Obadiah help him find food for the livestock- impact from the drought
 - What King Ahab didn't realize
 - Obadiah feared the Lord
 - Hid 100 prophets when Queen Jezebel threatened the prophets
- Numbers (Statistics)
 - Elijah seems to be the main character or hero for upholding God's message

- Yet, this detail in verses 3-4 let us know that there is a lot more going on than meets the eye
 - Despite the spread of Baal worship and the judgement of the drought, there still are faithful believers who are standing firm in the faith
 - Elijah isn't the only one risking his life
 - God uses all sorts of people and gifts to spread His message
- Remember last week how we talked about reacting to the emotions of an event is not always a good thing
 - It's easy to get lost in the chaos that we see going on around us
 - It's easy to forget that God is in control
 - It's easy to respond emotionally to what we see
 - BUT, if God has our attention we can be in a position to receive His message
- A Divine Appointment
 - While Obadiah is out searching for food for the livestock, he runs into Elijah
 - Divine Appointment
 - Moments when God sends someone into your path or God sends you into someone's path for specific purpose
 - Maybe its something you need to hear, a word of encouragement, etc.
 - The encounter is more than just "happenstance"
 - God has divinely appointed this moment in your life
 - Both Obadiah and Elijah needed this moment
 - More than just Elijah needing to communicate to King Ahab
 - Both men needed to know that they were not alone in this crisis
 - Everything that is happening is leading up to the point of God revealing himself as the One True God
- When we are isolated and scattered, we may feel as though we are the only one's in the fight
 - We may only be able to see things from our perspective
 - What we need to understand is that God is at work not only in us, but in other people's lives working toward the same purpose
 - Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (ESV), "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him- a three-fold cord is not quickly broken."
 - We need to be reminded again, that we are all in this together. Whether we are gathered in one location or not, if God has our attention we will seek out others to encourage, to lift up and to share God's message of hope.

- Who can you call this week? Who can you encourage? Who can you pray for?
- Seek out Divine Appointments

God Uses Different Gifts

- **1 Kings 18:9-16**
 - Obadiah becomes afraid of Elijah's request
 - Elijah has a bounty on his head
 - King Ahab wants Elijah dead
 - Elijah is the prophet of God, surely he is more important than Obadiah
 - Obadiah has been risking his life by smuggling 100 prophets
 - Instead of running from King Ahab, Obadiah has been working within the parameters of the King's household while smuggling prophets
 - He is in a position of influence
 - God is using both Elijah and Obadiah
 - One is not more important than the other
 - Both are significant to the work of God revealing Himself as the One True God
 - This Divine Appointment is significant for both men to realize that God is accomplishing His purpose in different ways.
- Baseball Example of Situational Practice
 - If the bases are empty and the ball is hit to the short-stop where is the ball supposed to go? First base
 - If there is a man on first and the ball is hit to the short-stop where is the ball supposed to go? Second baseman covers second, tags the base and then tries to turn a double play at first base.
 - Lots of moving parts that involve more than just the ability of one player to ground the ball.
 - Every position becomes important
 - The Body of Christ- **1 Corinthians 12:25 (ESV)**, "that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another."
- How do we do this when we are restricted from fellowship?
 - Continue to Tithe- God always honors faithfulness
 - Continue to follow the guidelines
 - Remain patient
 - Pray
 - Call and Encourage others
- It's going to be awhile before we experience "normal", but know that all of this is leading up to the point of God revealing Himself as the One True God and God wants to use all our unique gifts to share His message of hope.

Exercise Faith as We Confront Sin and Hardships

- **1 Kings 18:17-19**

- Like the widow from last week, Obadiah has to exercise faith in what God is sharing through Elijah
- Elijah must exercise faith as he confronts King Ahab
- Faith is required to confront the sin and the hardships that both Obadiah and Elijah are faced with.
- God will use the faith of both men, just as God did with the widow, to reveal Himself as the One True God.
- Elijah's Reputation
 - Troubler of Israel
 - It is not Elijah who has caused the drought, but King Ahab
 - 1 Kings 16:30-33, "provoked the Lord to anger"
- God will provide for those who remain faithful
 - Obadiah and Elijah could not have predicted how God would use them
 - Felt alone in their efforts, but discovered they were equally important in God's work
- If we exercise faith as we confront sin and hardships, then our faith will become our message
 - Elijah had a reputation, but the truth of his message was not lost in the King's lack of faith
 - God provides for those who remain faithful

Conclusion

- God's message in numbers
 - The bottom line is this: God is far more active than what we often give Him credit for
 - Does God have your attention?
 - Seek Divine Appointments
 - Recognize the gifts that God has given you to communicate his message, but appreciate the unique gifts that God has given others as well
 - Exercise faith and your faith will become your message
- Let's become a "hotspot" for God's message of hope and salvation to spread!