

No God In Israel

2 Kings 1

Introduction

- Has there ever been a time that you tried to find something that you haven't used for a long time?
 - You try to recall the last time you used what you are looking for and where exactly you placed it.
 - It's obvious that this particular thing is only important when there is a specific need.
 - Any other time it is absent from your mind.
- Unfortunately this is a fairly accurate example of Israel's faith during the time of Elijah's ministry
 - King Ahab chose to worship Baal rather than God, leading the people on a path in direct conflict with the law and covenant they were under as God's people.
 - Elijah was called to be God's messenger during this uncertain time in Israel's history.
 - Whether the people chose to acknowledge Him or not, God used Elijah to reveal that God was the One True God.
 - After King Ahab died a new king sat on the throne by the name of Ahaziah
 - Ahaziah had an unfortunate fall that threaten his life
 - Fearing for his life, King Ahaziah looked for divine action.
 - Israel's God was so far removed from his memory that instead of turning to the God of Israel, he once again turned to the gods of Baal.
 - When you haven't used something for awhile, it's hard to find it.
 - The same could be said of our faith
 - I read an article this past week from *Christianity Today*¹ that seemed to suggest this very thing
 - A recent study of 5,000 people by the Barna Group and the American Bible Society showed that in the last year the number of people reading the Bible has dropped from 13.7% to 8.5%.
 - The number of those reading the Bible is pretty low to begin with, but the fact that a pandemic has not increased Bible reading should really concern us.
 - While many churches have reported that online viewership has increased their reach, some even expanding beyond the total average of regularly attended worship services, it does not seem to have translated in people reading the Bible more.
 - People have become curious about Christianity, but not engaged.

¹ Christianity Today. *Bible Reading Drops During Social Distancing*. David Roach. www.christianitytoday.com July 22, 2020. Accessed July 23, 2020.

- Elijah is sent to intercept King Ahaziah's men who are seeking the gods of Baal
 - Elijah asks the men an important question that really puts things into perspective.
 - "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are seeking another god?" (2 Kings 1:3)
- This same question could be asked of our country, but also of many people who call themselves Christians.
 - It is not that God is absent from our lives, but instead that we have forgotten how to engage God in our daily life
 - Two things to consider today
 - Are we fully engage in our relationship with God or have we forgotten how to engage God?
 - If God has called us to be His messengers during these uncertain times, how can we have influence especially if we aren't engage in our faith?

What is Your Spiritual State?

- 2 Kings 1:1-4
 - An angel sent Elijah to intercept the King's messengers
 - Despite the king's memory loss, or lack of awareness, God will not allow his presence to be forgotten.
 - The problem was not that God was absent, the problem was that the worship of God had been absent and therefore God's relevance became less significant.
 - God's grace through revelation
 - Kingship- last week's discussion
 - Prophets- Elijah and Elisha; sent as messengers
 - Mt. Carmel- revelation
 - What we do with God's revelation is up to us
 - Elijah, the prophet, at one point questioned God's sovereignty
 - Lost his purpose
 - Ran into the wilderness
 - It happens to people of faith when God doesn't show up in the ways we expect
 - It was suggested some of the possible reasons for why people are not reading the Bible²
 - Lack of connection with church
 - Stress of pandemic
 - Regular routine disrupted
 - These are the moments when we need to exercise our faith more than ever!

² Roach, *Bible Reading Drops During Social Distancing*.

- Three critical parts of Elijah's wilderness experience- with practice of prayer
 - Hand of God on Elijah
 - Low whisper of God
 - God's provisions
- Elijah's renewed spiritual state
 - New king; same problems
 - Elijah intercepts the king's messengers to communicate God's message
 - Bearing witness to God's presence as Elijah is trusting in God's promises
 - Renewed purpose and confidence
- How would you describe your spiritual state right now?
 - Curious or engaged?
 - Engaged in spiritual practices in which God is drawing you to a closer relationship with Him
 - Just getting by- optimistic that things will change, but yet trapped in the present reality.
 - Failure to Thrive
 - Recognize God's presence
 - Hand of God
 - Low Whisper
 - God's Provisions
 - All three absent from King Ahaziah's life! "Is there no God in Israel?"

Spiritual Confidence

- 2 Kings 1:7-8
 - The King's men did not recognize Elijah, but the king recognized Elijah
 - Elijah's work was known, the king was not only reminded of Elijah's ministry, but the authority he had as a messenger of God.
 - 2 groups of 50 men sent to Elijah
- 2 Kings 1:11-12
 - Both groups were consumed by fire
 - Does Elijah refuse the offer because of his past experience with Queen Jezebel?
 - Is this just another attempt to run into the wilderness?
 - Rather, this time Elijah doesn't run, but he stands his ground.
- Elijah has spiritual confidence
 - He will not be pushed around
 - He is sure of his calling
 - The wilderness taught him that God will provide no matter the confrontation

- Elijah is not running around looking for a way out or looking for the right answer
 - It is spiritual confidence, NOT spiritual *arrogance*
 - What is the difference?
 - Spiritual arrogance believes that I know all I need to know
 - Spiritual confidence remains open to grow in the power and knowledge of God
 - Elijah knows who God has called him to be and what he must do to fulfill the call
 - He will not be bullied by the kings of Israel, because he serves the King of Kings!
- Last week we talked about being humbled by the Lord
 - Significant to surrendering ourselves to God, which is what Elijah did in the wilderness
 - Confidence comes when we have surrendered ourselves to God in order that God's full power and will can be exercised in us and through us
 - What we have to do is find our Spiritual Confidence
 - Remember what it felt like when you first trusted God
 - Maybe a little scary, but there was a joy, a peace, you knew what you were doing was right- even if you didn't understand it all
 - We need that same kind of faith, renewed in our spirit to carry on
 - Be aware of your spiritual arrogance
 - The places where you trust yourself
 - The places where you don't give God the attention you need to
 - The places where you have shut off growing and learning
 - Come humbly before the Lord so that you can stand up confidently in the Spirit.
- Identity in Christ- our confidence in the work of Christ (even more so than what Elijah possessed)
 - 2 Corinthians 3:4-6 (ESV), "Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."
 - Colossians 3:1-4 (ESV), "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."
 - Keeping one's identity as a "child of God" or "in Christ" is key to keeping your composure in any situation.
 - My Past is in the past
 - My Present is with God

- My Future is in the hope of God's promises
- Elijah was confident in who God had called him to be due in part to his wilderness experience
 - Hand of God
 - Low Whisper of the Lord
 - God's provision
- Elijah wasn't going to run. Instead, he stood his ground and his enemies were consumed.
- Could this be true in our life as well?

A Table In the Presence of Enemies

- 2 Kings 1:13-16
 - 3rd Captain approaches Elijah differently
 - Humbled by the presence of the Lord
 - Recognizes Elijah's position as prophet
 - God shows mercy
 - The impact of Elijah's spiritual confidence
 - The influence Elijah is now able to have
 - Do not be afraid
 - God once again is leading Elijah to confront conflict
 - Yet, God is not leaving Elijah on his own. The hand of God is with Elijah
 - Elijah has spiritual confidence
 - The odds (again) 150 to 1- key to being a messenger of God
 - Elijah does not hold a position of power
 - All Elijah has is a calling and faith
 - God uses the conflict as an opportunity to reveal the power of His presence
- God's messengers during uncertain times
 - Expect to be outnumbered; a minority
 - God uses conflicts or moments of uncertainty as an opportunity to reveal the power of His presence
 - Personal Example: Number of times that I have not looked forward to doing something that I know God has called me to do
 - Funerals
 - Hospital visits
 - Yet, God has used those situations as opportunities for blessing
- Psalm 23:5 (ESV), "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies"
 - Table becomes an opportunity

- God wants us to quit running from the Table that often times has been set in the presence of our enemies
- God uses those opportunities to reveal His presence and create a blessing
- Elijah and Elisha become responsible for establishing the next generation of faithful followers
- They represent the presence of God- the numerical odds don't matter when your identity is in God
- So we might as well Embrace the conflict/enemies and sit at the Table that God has prepared for us

Conclusion

- Two questions
 - Are we fully engage in our relationship with God or have we forgotten how to engage God?
 - If God has called us to be His messengers during these uncertain times, how can we have Influence especially if we aren't engage in our faith?
- When you haven't used something in awhile it's hard to find it.
- "Is there no God in Israel?"
 - Message is in the state of our spiritual life; whether we are engaged and practicing/living out our faith
 - Spiritual confidence that we live
 - Opportunities we take advantage of in the midst of conflict
- Don't set God back for a more convenient time; right now is the time to take advantage of
 - Move from curiosity to engagement
 - Recognize God's presence in your life
- If you find that you aren't calling on God, could it be that there is no God in your life?