

## “The Flight of Elijah”

### *Security, Peace and Fear – part #3*

1 Kings 18:41-46, and 1 Kings 19:1-18 read as part of the message

**[title slide]** *Welcome and prayer.*

This is the third message of our series on Security, Peace, and Fear. The past two weeks we have been following the story of the great prophet Elijah. He prophesied against the evil King Ahab and queen Jezebel, miraculously provided for a widow and her family, and called down fire from heaven in order to defeat 450 false prophets of the pagan God, Baal. Sounds like a great resume, doesn't it? No wonder this prophet is so famous!

**[Happily ever after?]** Elijah's story to this point is very full. It has adventure, excitement, battles, and miracles. At the end of chapter 18, Elijah is leading the way, running in front of the king's chariot, waiting for the rain to fall, ending the drought, and everything seems to be going right. They ride off into the sunset. Cue the music and the closing credits, right?

**[exhausted]** Not quite. Have you ever had a “mountain top experience,” and then woken up the next day feeling rather “blah”? It's like all the energy got sapped out of you, and the euphoria made you even more vulnerable than before. When I was in college, our band got the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to play in the Rose Bowl. This is how January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1996, went for me: woke up at 5 AM, left the hotel in full uniform, marched 6 miles in the Parade of Roses. Took the bus back to the stadium, ate a quick lunch, and played for 4 hours at the football game. After the game, ate dinner, showered, and took a red-eye flight back to Chicago. Landed at 9 AM local time, slept all day, and then, at 8 AM the next morning, went to a physics lecture. I literally have no memory of January 2<sup>nd</sup> other than sleeping, and that week, I got a nasty cold. What a roller coaster!

We all have moments in life like Elijah, where we go from a victory to defeat in a matter of days, even moments. Maybe you got a new job, but had to move to a new town and it was overwhelming. Maybe you had a great day with your family, and then your grandfather passed away the next day. Maybe you just finished an important health goal, like losing weight or running a 5k, and you were diagnosed with a long-term illness. Whatever it is, there is always

something that threatens to rock our security when everything just seemed to be working out.

If you’ve had a bad day recently, 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19 is a good place to find someone to commiserate with you. Let’s read the first part of this chapter.

**[1 Kings 19:1-5a]**

*Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>3</sup> Elijah was afraid[a] and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, <sup>4</sup> while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. 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.” <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.*

**[Elijah under a tree]** What a contrast! Elijah went from a mountaintop victory to having a murderous queen after him. No wonder he ran away. I would, too! What is most interesting about this passage, is Elijah’s last two sentences: “I’m no better than my ancestors. I wish I were dead.” The powerful Elijah, who just witnessed firsthand the power of the Almighty God, had a serious moment of crisis. Given the opportunity, I would have said to him, “This is ridiculous! Elijah, how can you sulk, when God just delivered you from an angry king and 450 prophets? You can’t be serious!”

Elijah was serious. This passage illuminates the fact that we are most vulnerable right after a significant, spiritual victory. No matter what kind of day you are having, if the devil can get your focus off of the Lord Almighty, he will. The world will throw everything it can at you, because it is so easy to let our guard down and forget. God never left Elijah. It was Elijah who turned away and gave into his fear.

Fortunately for Elijah and for us, God had a plan. Let’s read on.

**[1 Kings 19:5b-9a]**

*All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."<sup>6</sup> He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.*

*<sup>7</sup> The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you."<sup>8</sup> So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.<sup>9</sup> There he went into a cave and spent the night.*

**[Elijah and angel]** God sent an angel to revive Elijah's spirits. Do you know what an angel is? A messenger. It's literally the same word as the one for the messenger of Jezebel who threatened Elijah. The contrast could not be any more stark. A messenger of the queen brought the threat of death. A messenger of the Lord brought rejuvenation. God knew what lay ahead for Elijah. And God provided.

This is one truth we often forget. When we are depressed, scared, and anxious, we think, "I'm all alone. No one cares. No one is there for me." Yet God never leaves us, always sending someone at the right time. The question is, will we receive the help they offer us? Elijah could have ignored the angel, rolled back over and went to sleep. But he didn't. We also must open our eyes when God sends angel-messengers to us to pray with us, to take us out for coffee, to go for a walk together. We need to receive those messengers, and frankly, we need to be those angels to people in need, as well.

So Elijah was nourished and traveled forty days and nights to God's mountain. There he found a cave and hid. Elijah was set up for another amazing, mountaintop spectacle. Or was he? Let's read on.

**[1 Kings 19:9b-13a]**

*And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

*<sup>10</sup> 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."*

*<sup>11</sup> The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."*

*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. <sup>12</sup> After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. <sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

**[Elijah outside his cave]** Remember, Elijah had just seen fire fall from heaven. Yet, in this next part, when God was about to pass by, God was not in any of the loud, amazing, powerful forces: the wind, earthquake or fire. Elijah didn't move until he heard the "gentle whisper." Other bible translations call it the "still small voice," or the "gentle breeze." My personal favorite is "the sound of sheer silence."

Our world is loud. Very loud. Try this experiment some time: go outside for 20 minutes and record all the human-made sounds you hear. Cars. Airplanes. Fans. Doors. Voices. Screaming kids. Some of those noises aren't too bad. But how often do we appreciate silence? It's one of the reasons I love deer hunting. Yet even in the middle of the Huron National forest, deep in the woods, it's not perfectly silent. It's close, but some noise still surrounds me. And that's just outside. Inside, our lives are filled with noise, expectations, and demands from our family, our jobs, and even our church.

**[Psalm 27:14]** I confess, it is hard for me to fast from the noise, to let go of everything that weighs me down and just wait on the Lord. Psalm 27:14 commands us to "Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD." A preacher once told me, waiting is one of the most important parts of prayer. Just sitting still, not talking, but waiting, listening for God. She said, take a notebook with you when you do this. When a thought comes into your mind, write it down quickly, and go back to the silence. When you finish praying, you'll have your to-do list for the day! But most importantly, you'll have resisted the distraction of the noise in your life. That's where God wants us to be.

**[woman meditating]** I believe God can and will appear in amazing, “fire from heaven “ moments. But more often than that, I believe God appears in the quieter moments. In the beauty of nature. A simple touch or hug from a friend. In a single verse from the Bible or from a hymn. A song that comes on the radio at just the right moment. Even in the death of a beloved member of your family. There is quiet. There is reflection. There is peace.

Elijah had many reasons to be afraid. But he had forgotten the most important part. God had work for him to do. Let’s read the last part of the story.

**[1 Kings 19:13b-18]**

*<sup>13</sup> When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

*Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”*

*<sup>14</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”*

**[Elijah leaves]** Notice that Elijah never directly answered God’s question, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Elijah claimed he had been very zealous for the Lord, but his actions were confusing, if not contradictory. Yes, Elijah succeeded on Mount Carmel. But then he ran away, curled up under a tree, and thought about dying. That does not sound to me like a good way to serve the Lord!

So what did God do? He gave Elijah more work to do. “Go anoint these two kings and a prophet to succeed you.” God reminded Elijah, the work is not yet done. “You are not alone, Elijah. I still have people who love me and will help you.”

**[You are never alone]** If you only remember one thing from this scripture today, this is it: you are never alone. We say it all the time: God is everywhere! And God especially is with you, showing you that there is a community of people who love and worship Jesus and want you to be part of them.

Elijah just momentarily lost his focus. He let his fears get the best of him. If that can happen to one of Israel’s greatest prophets, it can happen to us. Elijah wanted to sit and complain. None of us ever do that, right? Oops, guilty as charged. So what if instead of complaining, we got on our knees and prayed? “God, give me something to do. Give me someone to encourage. Give me someone to anoint. To heal. To lead. To love.”

**[title slide]** Yes, we will find God in the fire, the wind, the storm, and the awesome forces of nature. But more importantly, we can expect God to show up in the silence, and furthermore, we can expect God to call us into mission so that others do not have to be silent or alone any more.

Let’s pray.

### **Memory Verse: 1 Kings 19:11-12**

“...but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.”

### Reflection Questions

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how loud is your daily life? What noises are the hardest to escape?
2. Name your last “mountaintop experience.” Name your last “valley.” How close were those two events to each other?

3. Do you think Elijah had the right to complain to God? Why or why not? Have you done something similar? In retrospect, were you justified in your complaint?
4. Why didn't God show up in the wind, earthquake or fire? Why did God send those events ahead of God's arrival?
5. When have you been given the opportunity to be someone's "angel"? Did you act on it? How did you feel afterwards?
6. Whom might God be calling you to anoint with your words, presence, and encouragement this week?