

- * How will I live differently and be different today because of what I just read?
- *What are the things in my life that need to change in light of this truth?

PRAY

Pray through the passage and your application, asking God to change your heart and to change your life, based on the time you've spent in God's Word.

Community groups and discipleship groups series guide for



A series looking at the life of Elijah

Introduction

How close to the edge do you live? While some people spend their whole lives on the edge pursuing dangerous pastimes, most of us while enjoying the occasional thrill prefer to live our lives away from the edge in relative safety. How does God call us to live our lives? In this series looking at the life of Elijah we will discover that God calls us away from our illusion of relative safety, but much closer to the edge than most of us are comfortable with, not so we can get cheap thrills but so we can know Him. Are you “Living on the edge?”

What does the name Elijah bring to mind? A kind of a wild man, living on the fringes of society, popping up every now and again to condemn the leaders of Israel and the religious institutions they had bought into the country. He is a man far removed from us in time and space, and if he was to appear today most of us would probably stay well clear of him; he’s far too radical for us living on the edge.

In this series we are going to take a closer look at the prophet Elijah and what we will see is a call on our lives to live more on the edge than most of us do. Too often we think of following God as a mainstream activity, nothing very radical about doing that, it was up until recently the culturally acceptable thing to do. But if we read the Bible honestly we have to come away with the conclusion that following God is not mainstream, being a disciple of Jesus Christ means for us to live on the edge, and the Prophet Elijah gives us pointers about how to “Live on the edge.”

¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things were created through him and for him.

¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,

²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

(Colossians. 1:13-27 ESV)

REAP Method of studying Scripture

READ

Find the passages for today’s reading in the Bible Reading Plan. Read the passages with an open heart, asking the Holy Spirit to give you words of encouragement, direction, and correction (2 Timothy 3:16). Underline the verses that seem important and that God is using to speak to you.

EXAMINE

Spend some time reflecting and writing about what you’ve read. Write down one or two of the key verses that stuck out to you. Ask yourself these questions and write down your thoughts:

* What is going on in the passage?

* Who is writing and whom is he writing to?

* When was the author writing?

* What are the circumstances that the author is addressing?

* Does the writer mention any- thing that might indicate his purpose or intent?

* how do you think the author wants his audience to respond?

APPLY

After examining the passage, apply the text to your own life. Ask your- self these questions:

* What is God’s word for me from this passage?

In the message Bryan referred to an article from Christianity Today talking about the difference between court prophets and wilderness prophets, i.e. Prophets who curry favour with the establishment and are indistinguishable from them and prophets who stand outside on the edge. Where you think today's prophets stand?

Do you know anyone facing adversity today? How could you use this opportunity to show them God's love for them?

Individual study

Using the REAP method (see back page) read the following passage and consider the riches you have in Christ and how this compares to any possible riches we can get from the world.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,
⁴ *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love*
⁵ *he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,*
⁶ *to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*
⁷ *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,*
⁸ *which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight*
⁹ *making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ*
¹⁰ *as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*
¹¹ *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,*
¹² *so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.*
¹³ *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,*
¹⁴ *who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*
(Ephesians. 1:3-14 ESV)

Again using the REAP method read the following passage and think about how Jesus gives you peace.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,
¹⁴ *in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*
¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*

Background

Israel's history

After Solomon's reign which ended in 922 BC, the people of Israel were exhausted and fed up with the years of his expansionism and building projects. While it had bought Solomon a lot of glory, it had bought most of the people back breaking work and extra taxes. What the Lord had warned the people about way back in Samuel had come true.

He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots.

¹² *And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots.*

¹³ *He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.*

¹⁴ *He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants.*

¹⁵ *He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants.*

¹⁶ *He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work.*

¹⁷ *He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves.*

¹⁸ *And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day."*

(1 Samuel. 8:11-18 ESV)

A delegation of the people led by Jeroboam (who had been in charge of all of Solomon's forced labour) came before the new king Rehoboam to ask the king if he would lighten their load. Rehoboam asked for three days to think about, and consulted his father's advisers who told him to do what the people had asked and the people would serve him, and then he asked his friends who were his contemporaries and they told him to

And the young men who had grown up with him said to him, "Thus shall you speak to this people who said to you, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you lighten it for us,' thus shall you say to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs.

¹¹ *And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions."*

(1 Kings 12:10-11 ESV)

In other words, if you think my dad's workload was bad, you haven't seen anything yet! Rehoboam foolishly took his mates advice, and that is what he told the delegation when they came back to hear his response.



Group study possible questions (choose some to discuss)

What are your first impressions of Elijah? If you saw him on the street would you go up to chat with him or go off smartly in the other direction?

Do you think being a disciple of Jesus Christ is living on the edge or mainstream?

How do you view prophets who predict adversity?

If God asked you, "how do I get people's attention today," what ideas would you give Him?

What are the 'gods' today which need to be shown to be impotent?

Does increasing peace and prosperity lead people to God?

How does the peace and prosperity we seek from stuff in this world compare to peace and prosperity Christ offers us?

Are economic prosperity and political stability good indicators of spiritual health?

If there was a three-year drought, how would it affect us? What would be the first things we would start to notice? Who or what would be considered responsible for the drought and who would people look to change it? Would this change over time?

Would it get people's attention?

What would the cause of the drought be put down to?

Where would the solution to the drought be found?

What would God need to do to get the church's attention? What are the "gods" which have been bought into the church in America? What are we afraid of?

Why are the fastest growing churches in countries which face the most adversity?

When you pray, how do you ask God to reveal Himself? Do you ever ask Him to bring adverse conditions into your or someone else's life so they can see their need for God?

When are the times you have spiritually grown the most in your life?

⁵ So he went and did according to the word of the LORD. He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan.

⁶ And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

⁷ And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.
(1 Kings. 17:1-7 ESV)

Commentary

Elijah suddenly appears out of nowhere into the life of Israel, there is no mention of him in the Bible up to this point. Elijah's name means, "The Lord is my God," and true to his name, the Lord is Elijah's God, he is not sidetracked for a minute by what is going on around him, there is no chance of him getting caught up in the syncretism of the culture. There is some debate about where exactly Elijah came from, and whether Tishbe refers to an actual place, the consensus of scholars is that it doesn't but rather means Elijah was a temporary resident in Gilead.

Needless to say, Elijah is not particularly welcome, no one has invited him to the party, and no one wants to hear what he has to say, life is going just fine thank you very much, and they didn't need a prophet coming along upsetting things.

In this age of prosperity and relative peace, how will Elijah get their attention? By bringing adversity into the lives of the people. Elijah pops up and tells king Ahab that there will be no more rain until he says so.

As an agrarian society Israel is reliant on its crops, and unlike Egypt whose agricultural land is irrigated from the Nile, Israel relies on the seasons of rain to provide the moisture. No rain equals no crops. But how will that turn the people back to God and get their attention?

We must understand the spiritual component in this story, as it is not just about creating a drought, but it is about who has the power to stop the rain. Just as the plagues God unleashed against Egypt demonstrated that their gods did not have the ultimate power over the Nile, various aspects of nature and even death itself, so this drought reveals the same thing to the people of Israel who believed Baal brought the rain. Thus if Elijah is going to demonstrate to Israel the uselessness of worshipping Baal, the people must see the impotence of Baal over God's word. Not only is there going to be no rain, there is going to be no dew, no moisture of any kind, so there will be no mistaking who has the power, and who is the true God.

Elijah tells king Ahab it will not rain again except by his word, but it is not Elijah's word it is God's word which Elijah is passing along.

In verse two the "Word of the Lord" comes to Elijah to direct him to go to the brook Cherith. The word of the Lord is an often used phrase in the Old Testament and relates to God directly communicating a truth or revelation to someone.

As quickly as Elijah appeared on the scene, at God's word he disappears off the scene, out into the wilderness to be sustained through God's provision at this time of drought and to keep him safe.

Needless to say the people were unimpressed and the ten tribes of Israel split from the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Rehoboam tried in vain to get the ten tribes back, but they were a superior force and he was warned not to continue to try, and so the kingdom of Israel divided into north and south as shown below.

The real reason for the division of the kingdom however, lay not so much in the heavy workload Solomon had put on his people but in his own desertion of following God. Solomon had started out so well, building the temple, seeking God's wisdom, but the foreign wives he had married had turned his head to bring other religions into Israel and place them alongside the worship of God.

It was for this reason the kingdom had been split, as the prophet Ahijah had told Jeroboam a number of years beforehand that God was going to do this.

And at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah had dressed himself in a new garment, and the two of them were alone in the open country.

³⁰ Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces.

³¹ And he said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes

³² (but he shall have one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel),

³³ because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did.
(1 Kings 11:29-33 ESV)

So Jeroboam became king of Israel, but he was terrified the people would drift back to Judah because after all that is where the temple was and the centre of worship, so he constructed two centres of worship - one at Bethel the other at Dan, and made two golden calves placing one in each place and told the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough, behold your gods O Israel, who bought you up out of the land of Egypt." (1 Kings 12:28). If you think that sounds familiar, it is because a golden calf is what Aaron made for the people when they thought Moses had died up on Mount Sinai, and it shows our desire for a tangible god, one we can get our minds around, but the problem is when create a god we can get our minds around we create a god in our image. The God of the Bible is not a God we can easily get our minds around, that's the whole point! If He was a God we could make an image of, He wouldn't be much of a god worth worshipping.

Israel at Elijah's time

Elijah comes on the scene around fifty years after the split, about 870 BC. The king at that time was Ahab who was married to Jezebel. Israel was economically and militarily much stronger than Judah, and was going through a time of economic prosperity and political stability. It had strong trade alliances with her neighbours, and one of the prime means of gaining an alliance during the time of kings was for a king to marry a princess of a strategic neighbour, thus hopefully ensuring some favourable economic trading status and military alliance.

This is what Ahab had done, he had married Jezebel of Tyre, a very prosperous and powerful coastal neighbour, and Israel grew economically. However with Jezebel as before when Solomon had married his foreign wives for the same reason came her gods. In Jezebel's case her god was Baal, but there was a difference. Previously these foreign gods had been worshiped in private, or at least they were seen as inferior to the God of Israel, but increasingly they had become more public and indeed now had been integrated into worship with God (syncretism). But that wasn't enough for Jezebel, she wanted Baal to become the number one god worshiped in Israel, and so she and Ahab set out to stamp out the worship of God.

It is in this context Elijah enter scene to hold the leaders accountable for their turning away from God, and also their treatment of the poor and disenfranchised. It was also the case in Israel that the rich were growing richer and the poor were growing poorer, and the safe guards of Sabbath rests and Jubilee were ignored.

Week One



Introduction

What do you typically ask God for? Possibly the things we most ask God for are to bless us, protect us, give us peace, make us successful and prosper us. We ask for these things for ourselves, our family, our church, friends, neighbours and country, and we reason that with these "blessings" God's power will be obvious to everyone. But will it? What if we were to ask God to make Himself apparent through a different means like adversity? How many of us would be bold enough to ask for it? Should we even ask for it?

Text

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."

² *And the word of the LORD came to him:*

³ *"Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.*

⁴ *You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."*