

Elijah and Elisha #3

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We are in a series on Elijah and Elisha from the Old Testament (OT: the first half of the Bible) which is the story of creation and the people of God. Then, in the New Testament we meet Jesus and the church. Today, we are simply talking about the two OT prophets, Elijah and Elisha, whose stories are the book of Kings. We will hear Elisha mentioned this week but this is primarily about Elijah. Last week, there was no rain and Elijah challenged Baal's prophets to light on fire sacrifices on the altars.

What table are you sitting at?

- Wisdom or Folly
- The Lord or Baal
- Covenant or compromise

We asked “What table are you sitting at?” (This means who defines our identity and our goals and power?) Elijah wanted to ask the people this as they went to war. I want you to continue thinking about which table you are sitting at: God’s table or the gods of this age. What is influencing your identity and your power? Are you in constant compromise?

Ahab and Jezebel are the most evil characters in the OT. Ahab ruled for 20 yrs with no assassination attempts; he was smart and married Jezebel who opened up the ports which ignited a good economy. The culture thought they were in good place.

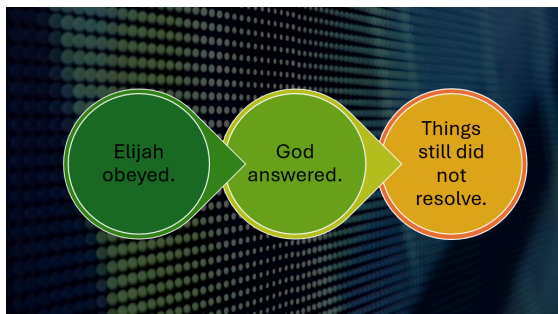


1 Now **Ahab** told **Jezebel** everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”

This was Jezebel’s warning to Elijah: she wanted him dead in 24 hrs. If you read the OT, you will notice how often biblical characters say stupid things. Elijah’s response is an example of that.

3 **Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.** When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, 4 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.**” 5 Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

Elijah has a tendency to be overdramatic: when things don’t go his way, he exaggerates the story. Regardless, Jezebel did say she wanted him dead and so he ran to the desert and wanted to die. Commentators point out that the reason he was afraid is that things weren’t going the way he wanted them to go. God did answer in powerful ways before and Elijah thought that God would either banish them or convert them. Instead, rain comes back, fire comes on the altar, yet **things are still not resolved.**



Followers of Jesus also sit at the table of wisdom as disciples and think, "I've done what I'm supposed to do and things haven't turned out."



The Table of Wisdom

If I obey, things should improve.

If I pray, clarity should come quickly.

If God truly shows up, the threat should go away.

If I do the faithful thing, the path should now be clear.

For example, I was kind to my children and yet my children don't recognize me as a good parent. I'm complementing you and you're not receiving it. I've prayed and I still don't have clarity. God is not fixing my things.

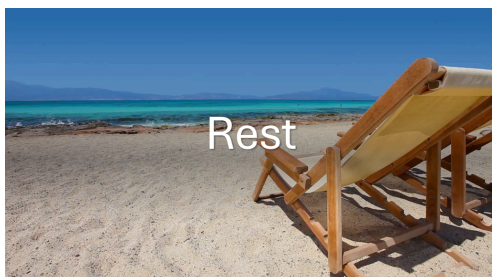
Elijah is in this same place.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "**Get up and eat.**" 6 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.**

This is evidence of a discouraged person: an angel cooks food for him and he goes back to bed. He is so distraught because things haven't changed. People haven't turned to God.

7 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.**" 8 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. 9 There he went into a cave and spent the night.

Horeb is the mountain where God gave the Law to Moses! Elijah is still depressed and running away, deeper into God and away from everything else.



This brings us to the topic of REST. Our culture values **leisure**: we feel we need vacations and space and time which are not bad things. Yet these things will not actually provide full rest if not done in the context of what God is doing in your life.

MARK 6:30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, **“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”** 32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

Let’s look at how Jesus handles the need for rest: This passage follows Jesus’s hometown rejecting him and the news that John the Baptist, his cousin, had been beheaded.

If you sit at Jesus’s feet, you will experience two things with intensity:

1. You will see God work in powerful ways.
2. You will feel the full weight of a broken world.

God demonstrates his power and you see the brokenness: it’s a difficult place to be. War is happening, people are not changing...Jesus faced these things and his response is that he hasn’t had time to eat and needs to get some rest in a quiet place. If our leisure doesn’t provide this, we must go away with Jesus to a quiet place and receive rest that only comes from Him.

9b And the word of the Lord came to him: **“What are you doing here, Elijah?”**

*10 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.”*

Elijah runs into the desert towards God: he just wants to be done. He gets to the mountain and get a word from God and Elijah responds by telling God he is very zealous.

11 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. 12 After the earthquake came a **fire**, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a **gentle whisper**. 13 **When Elijah heard it**, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

We know a little about Elijah: we have seen him raising someone from the dead and he witnessed God burn things in an impossible way. Here, he learns that the big things do not sustain us.

The things I crave as a pastor are **not** the little things. I want BIG things: people healed, fire from heaven. But the big things don’t sustain me. The thing that sustains me is a quiet gentle whisper of God.

13b Then a voice said to him, **“What are you doing here, Elijah?”**

14 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.”

Again, God speaks to Elijah and he responds with his zealotry for God: he still has a myopic view of his story.

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

Matthew 11

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

The Lord replies with instructions to go back. His quiet still voice was a **re-orienting voice**: this is what rest looks like.

If you listen to God, this is also how you will experience rest.

When Jesus looks at the burdened people, he says this:

In order for you and I to handle God doing big things and yet live with the burden of this world, the only way we can be healthy is to come to Jesus and rest.

Let’s look at what God offered Elijah and how he offers it to us. We went

Rest

- **Elijah names his burden.**
- **Elijah tells the story as he sees it.**
- **God reveals himself in an unexpected way.**
- **God asks again.**
- **God sends Elijah back.**
- **God tells a different story.**



(This is a photo of the place where Sue and I went in March to celebrate our 30th anniversary.)

1. Elijah **names his burden**: Nothing is working and I want to die. It’s ok to be brutally honest. You can say what you really think!
2. God **doesn’t interrupt** Elijah’s view of the story. God tolerates and invites us to say things from **our point of view**.
3. God shows up in **unexpected ways**. My suggestion is that if you are really in that space,

you find time to speak to God about how you really feel: **the way life really is, not what you think God wants us to say**. When you do this, listen to what your community is saying about God. God uses your community to link Scripture to what God wants to tell us.

4. God **asks the same questions back** to Elijah. He really wants us to speak out loud the way we are experiencing life.
5. **Listen** to what God says: where does he want us to go (where is he sending us) and what does he want us to do? God has specific things for Elijah to do.

6. God tells him there are 7000 prophets and leaders who haven't bowed to Baal: he **shows us hope**. He has a plan in this reality. He gives him a mission and tells Elijah he is not alone.

As you rest, listen to what God tells you to do and **that you are not alone**. This is what rest is. Then you can go back out and do what you're supposed to do.

What are you doing with the angst in your life that says things are not going the way you thought they would go or expected them to go?