

"Committed To Christ" 1 Kings 19:14-21 Trinity 5 2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Have you ever had one of those weeks where things seem to go wrong? You're trying to do the right thing, make the right decisions, but it just doesn't work out the way you thought it would. You set aside time for a family dinner, only to have it turn into sibling arguments, someone stomping away and complaints about the food. You make a big sale at work or finish a project that you're sure is going to result in a promotion, only to see your co-worker get all the credit for your hard work. You forgive that person who hurt you with the comments they made behind your back only to discover that they did the same thing again. Life doesn't always seem so glorious, does it?

If you've ever felt that way, then you know exactly how the prophet Elijah must have felt. Elijah was the first prophet that we heard about in 1 Kings 19. Elijah was a prophet who lived about 700 years before Jesus was born. Elijah was called by God to be God's spokesman to the nation of Israel. You see, Israel had a new king by the name of King Ahab. King Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel looked to replace worship of the true God with worship of false gods like Baal and Asherah. Ahab and Jezebel worked persistently to persecute, imprison and execute anyone who was a follower of the true God of Israel.

Elijah's job was to go to Ahab and tell him that because of his and his people's unbelief, it was not going to rain for a very long time. Well, you can probably imagine how well Ahab received that news. Ahab was literally ready to kill Elijah. Ahab put together a national man hunt to track down Elijah and kill him. But the Lord warned Elijah and protected him and provided for him as he fled for his life.

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After three years of drought, the Lord told Elijah to go back to King Ahab and announce that the Lord was going to end the drought and send rain. You might expect that Elijah would respond to God, "You want me to do what? God, you do realize what Ahab has been trying to do to me for the last three years, right?" But Elijah did not question the Lord, but boldly went to King Ahab to deliver the good news. Now you might expect that Ahab would welcome the news of Elijah. But Ahab didn't believe Elijah. He blamed Elijah for the drought. And that's when you have the showdown at Mt. Carmel. You remember that account?

Elijah was lined up against the priests of Baal. Each built an altar to their God and then called on their God to rain down fire and burn up the sacrifice. After the bloodied priests of Baal were unsuccessful, Elijah prays to the Lord and fire rains down from the sky and burns up not only the sacrifice, but the entire altar. The people saw what had happened and repented of their unbelief. They turned to the Lord for forgiveness and got rid of their false gods and their priests. And then it started to rain. The drought was over. Great day for Elijah, right? Finally, he would be able to live in safety, people would listen to him and he would be appreciated, right? Not exactly. When King Ahab reported to Jezebel what had happened with Elijah, she responded with a simple, "Kill Elijah."

Talk about bad days! Every time Elijah did the right thing, something bad seemed to happen to him. Do you think it ever crossed his mind, "This just isn't worth it! My commitment to the Lord has only resulted in difficulty!" You don't have to wonder if that thought ever went through Elijah's mind because the Bible tells us it did. There was a point when Elijah was about ready to give up. He had had it. His life was miserable. The King wanted to kill him. The people he was trying to help seemed to go running after every new

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religion and pagan god that came along. Elijah even wondered out loud to the Lord, "I am the only one left" (1 Kings 19:14).

Elijah's life and ministry was not exactly what you might call glorious. Sometimes be a follower of the Lord is hard, sometimes it's even sad when you see the way that God's people react to his Word, to his love, to his repeated pleas to repent of their sin. But the Lord lifted Elijah's heart with his mercy and faithfulness in three specific ways that you find in verse 15-18. (1) God told Elijah to anoint the next king of Israel which showed that God had not given up on his people but would continue to patiently and persistently call them to repentance. (2) God told Elijah that he was not the only one left. There were still 7000 in the nation of Israel that remained faithful to the Lord. (3) God told Elijah to start training his replacement because the proclamation of God's Word would not stop when Elijah was gone. No! God's Word would continue to be proclaimed to future generations that they might know the Lord.

Who was going to take Elijah's place? That's the second prophet that we meet in this account, a man by the name of Elisha. We don't know a whole lot about Elisha besides what we can gather from these verses. We're told, "So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him" (1 Kings 19:19). Twelve yoke of oxen seems to indicate that Elisha was pretty successful farmer and wealthy individual. Most people were lucky to have a single pair of oxen. Elisha had 12. It also seems that Elisha had previously met Elijah since Elisha immediately knew what it meant when Elijah placed his cloak on him. This was the sign that Elisha was to be Elijah's replacement, the next prophet to God's people.

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And did you notice Elisha's reaction? "Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah" (1 Kings 19:20). Elisha did not hesitate. He kissed his father and mother good-bye. He made it clear that he was fully invested in what the Lord was calling him to do. He burned up his plows and cooked his oxen and held a neighborhood barbecue, and followed Elijah to begin his training.

Stop and think about that for a moment. Remember what Elijah – the man who Elisha was supposed to replace – remember what Elijah's life was like! Death threats, danger and difficulty! Not so glorious! Why would Elisha be willing to leave a comfortable life and follow the Lord in this way? Elisha followed the Lord because he saw the glory of the Lord who called him. Elisha knew that by nature he was no different than any of the other people in the world. It was only because of the glorious grace and mercy of God that Elisha knew the true God, the God of his salvation, the God who continued to repeatedly reach out to his rebellious people. The glory of being a follower of the Lord was not in outward success, comfy surroundings or popularity. The glory was found in the God Elisha served, the God who loved him, who forgave him, who remained faithful to his promise to send a Savior who would rescue him and all people from the guilt of sin, and the power of the devil. That's why Elisha went.

And dear friends, that God is your God. This is the God who has not only called us through faith to be his own, but has also called us to serve him throughout our lives in many different ways: children, parents, employees, employers, pastors, teachers, construction workers, truck drivers, secretaries, nurses, factory workers, students, whatever it might be. But how often do we look for our glory from the people around us instead of the God we serve throughout our lives? We don't want to be labelled the "strict" or "no fun" parent so we

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allow our kids to do or watch things that are not spiritually healthy. We want so badly to fit in so we join in the underage drinking. We don't want to be called "the crazy Christian" so when the crude language and dirty jokes start flying we stand by and contribute a few of our own.

That's exactly what makes our God so glorious. God took our excuses and lack of commitment and God nailed it to the cross along with his Son Jesus. At the cross Jesus sacrificed his perfect life, a life that was completely committed to following God, and he sacrificed that life as the payment for every one of our sins. With the empty tomb of Easter, Jesus gave us every reason to follow him, to be inconvenienced, to take on the labels and hardships that the world gives us. Why? Not to gain something for ourselves. No, because of the God who has given us everything we need. A God who has placed the label of forgiven, loved, child of God on us through his Son Jesus.

You see, that's what made Elijah and Elisha and what makes you and me the perfect people to declare the glory of God our Savior. Maybe you can think of it like this. Who would you rather listen to describe Mt. Everest? Someone who has seen pictures and read about it, OR someone who climbed the mountain, stood at the summit and describes its magnificence from personal experience? I'd take the guy who actually climbed the mountain, wouldn't you?

That's what makes you the perfect person to declare the glory of God. You're speaking about something that you have personally experienced. Forgiveness, mercy, love, compassion, faithfulness are not just something that you've heard that other people need or have experienced. Those are things that your God has shown to you, and you experience daily from your Savior Jesus.

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That is the saving glory of our God that leads us to commit ourselves daily to follow Jesus, that drives us to do the unpopular and be inconvenienced, to keep on reaching out in love to those who have disappointed us in the past. For we have seen the glory of God in Christ Jesus, the glory of a God who has called us to be his own, to serve him throughout our lives, to share with us the glory of his heavenly home. Amen.