

Sermon Series: “God’s Humble Hero: Elijah”–Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—8/12/07

Title: “The God Who Answers by Fire”

Text: 1 Kings 18: 1-40

Intro.: Ills.: No Excuses for Doing Nothing

Theme: When God is ready to demonstrate his miraculous power to the world, we are called to be humble enough and courageous enough to let him use us for his glory.

Why doesn’t God answer by fire all the time?

- God trains to prepare us for his appointed moment to act
 1. “*After a long time, three years to be exact. . .*” (**Print and read vs. 1-2**) – God had a lot to accomplish
 2. Our impatience with a stubborn spouse, a wayward child, a wicked boss, a defiant culture, & ultimately God
 - a. **Ills.: When patience is absent**
- To prepare Elijah to die to personal pride and self-trust so that God’s miracle could work through him
 1. To prepare him for weak-kneed believers (**Print and read vss. 3-15**)
 2. To steal him against persecution and terror (**Print and read vss. 16-18**)
- What does God need to change in us which requires his preparatory periods in our life?
 1. A spirit which wants revenge not salvation
 - a. *If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Rom12:17-19*
 2. A wavering opinion of who really is God in your life (**Print and read 19-21**)
 - a. *I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Revelation 3: 16*

Getting ready for God to act in us and through us

- Don’t be in a rush for God to act (**Print and read vss. 22-26**)
 1. Elijah trusted God so much that he could let Baal’s prophets go first and last half the day
 - a. Even when he was all alone (22)
 2. History is about how patient God has been and still is to accomplish his sovereign salvation plan in Jesus
 - a. **Ills. The lesson that fishing teaches — patience**
 - b. *The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9*
 - c. Taking on God’s perspective of time – God has all the time in the world to get his saving work for eternity done
- Be ready to stand up boldly for God’s honor (**Print and read vss. 27-29**)
 1. Elijah pointed out the ineptness of self-made gods
 - a. Can’t hear (27), Self destructive (28), “But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.”²⁹
 - b. Aggressively rooting out the “*false gods*” which we have allow alongside of God in our lives
 2. What if God had not answered with fire from heaven? Would it still be worth it for Elijah?
 - a. *Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence. 1 Peter 3: 13-15*
 3. There is a time and place for us to stand up for the name and honor of God in a world that is godless
 - a. In issues of morality within your own family and household
 - b. In matters of ethics within your work place or career
 - c. In areas of values taught in schools and universities and public venues
 - d. In matters of mission and vision and purpose within your own church body
 - e. *“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your*

Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:16

· Confidently act upon God's power and promise

1. "You will not leave in a hurry, running for your lives. For the Lord will go ahead of you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard." *Isaiah 52: 12*
2. Elijah took some incredibly gutsy steps of faith not because he was strong but God was and he knew it
a. **Print and read vss. 30-40**
3. Where does God want you to stand in faith on his power because of his glory?

No Excuses for Doing Nothing

In response to those who make excuses why they cannot serve the Lord, Rick Warren writes: Abraham was old, Jacob was insecure, Leah was unattractive, Joseph was abused, Moses stuttered, Gideon was poor, Samson was codependent, Rahab was immoral, David had an affair and all kinds of family problems, Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed, Jonah was reluctant, Naomi was a widow, John the Baptist was eccentric to say the least, Peter was impulsive and hot-tempered, Martha worried a lot, the Samaritan woman had several failed marriages, Zacchaeus was unpopular, Thomas had doubts, Paul had poor health, and Timothy was timid. That is quite a variety of misfits, but God used each of them in his service. He will use you too if you stop making excuses. **Rick Warren, "The Purpose Driven Life," Zondervan (October 2002), p. 233**

When Patience is absent

A priest, a doctor, and an engineer were waiting one morning for a particularly slow group of golfers. The engineer asked, "What's with these guys? We must have been waiting for 15 minutes." The doctor agreed: "I've never seen such slow golfers." The pastor noted, "Hey, here comes the groundskeeper. Let's have a word with him." The pastor called out to the groundskeeper, "Say, George, what's with the group ahead of us?" George said, "That's a group of blind firefighters. They lost their sight saving our clubhouse from a fire last year, so we always let them play for free anytime." The group was silent for a moment. The pastor sympathized, "That's so sad. I think I'll say a special prayer for them tonight." The doctor added, "That's a good idea. In fact, I'm going to contact my ophthalmologist buddy and see if we can do anything for these guys." Then the engineer spoke up: "Well that's great, but in the meantime, why can't these guys play at night?" **Bonne Steffen, editor, Wheaton, Illinois; source: Charles Lowery, "Laugh Lines Heart or Head?" Home Life (April 2000), p.65**

1 Kings 18:1-40

¹After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land." ²So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria,

³and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of his palace. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD. ⁴While Jezebel was killing off the LORD'S prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.) ⁵Ahab had said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals." ⁶So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another.

⁷As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, "Is it really you, my lord Elijah?" ⁸"Yes," he replied. "Go tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'" ⁹"What have I done wrong," asked Obadiah, "that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death?" ¹⁰As surely as the LORD your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you. ¹¹But now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' ¹²I don't know where the Spirit of the LORD may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, he will kill me. Yet I your servant have worshiped the LORD since my youth. ¹³Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the LORD? I hid a hundred of the LORD'S prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and

supplied them with food and water. ¹⁴And now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' He will kill me!" ¹⁵Elijah said, "As the LORD Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today."

¹⁶So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. ¹⁷When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" ¹⁸"I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the LORD'S commands and have followed the Baals.

¹⁹Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." ²⁰So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. ²¹Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing.

²²Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the LORD'S prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. ²³Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. ²⁴Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire--he is God." Then all the people said, "What you say is good." ²⁵Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire." ²⁶So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "O Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

²⁷At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." ²⁸So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. ²⁹Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

³⁰Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which was in ruins. ³¹Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel." ³²With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. ³³He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood." ³⁴"Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. ³⁵The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. ³⁶At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. ³⁷Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." ³⁸Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. ³⁹When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD--he is God! The LORD--he is God!" ⁴⁰Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there. [NIV]