

Sermon Outline

“Elijah: God’s Plan is Better” – Never Give Up, Part 2 – 1 Kings 19:1-18

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Introduction

Presently, we are walking through a three-part series called *Never Give Up*. It is a study of the low points in the lives of three of God’s most well known servants. In these accounts we see three portraits of how God’s power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Elijah was a prophet who lived about 60 years after King Solomon’s reign ended. He prophesied to the Northern Tribes during the spiritually dark reign of King Ahab. Elijah participated in many mighty works of God including the great vindication of the Lord over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). Yet despite all this man saw, he still plummeted into the depths of discouragement in 1 Kings 19.

How did Elijah go from victory to despair in almost one verse? Elijah thought the restoration of Israel was certain. He fully anticipated national repentance. It seemed as though all he had hoped and prayed for was finally coming to pass. And yet when he arrived in Jezreel, Ahab and Jezebel remained in power and showed no signs of repentance. The prophet’s dreams were crumbling around him.

It’s at this point that Elijah sinks into despair. He sends away his servant, sits under a broom tree, and prays for death....

1.) God is patient with our weakness

At this point of greatest discouragement God comes to Elijah in gentleness and patience. He doesn’t lecture his prophet; instead, he provides him with a warm meal and allows him to rest. The point is not that God is never stern in rebuking sin—many times he is; this account shows that God knows what each one of us needs. He is a good Father who cares for his children.

God knows we are dust (Psalm 103:14). He doesn’t crush us in our infirmities; instead, he administers grace to us in our weakness. The ultimate expression of this is Jesus, Immanuel. As Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect was tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

God is not surprised by our weakness. He shows us grace in our weakness.

2.) God’s still working—even when it’s not how we planned.

Elijah gets up and travels to Mount Horeb (Sinai), the Mountain of God. He is past his deepest despondency but he’s still confused. He needs to meet with God. He needs to understand

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why things didn't go according to plan.

And God comes with a question: "What are you doing here Elijah?" Elijah's response is basically, "I've done all I've known to do and it didn't work? Why aren't you working?"

The Lord doesn't give Elijah a detailed explanation of what will happen. Instead, he sends wind, earthquake, and fire. But the Lord was not in any of these. Then the Lord comes in a "still small voice" (KJV). God is telling Elijah (and us) that he works in a variety of ways. Our expectations and God's plans don't necessarily coincide.

Tim Keller makes the point well: "Often our greatest discouragements come when we make our plan God." And then when our plan fails, we feel as though God has failed us. God hasn't failed us—our plan failed us.

3.) God's purpose is better than ours.

Even after the lesson of the wind, earthquake and fire, Elijah is still discouraged. He answers God the same way as before: "I'm alone. The plan failed. They want to kill me."

Elijah makes the mistake so many of us make: he thinks that he sees everything. He assumes that his knowledge is a sound basis for evaluating the goodness of God's purpose. But we don't see all that God is doing. Just as Elijah couldn't see all that God was doing.

God gives Elijah instructions in 19:15. He sends him to anoint the next king of Syria, the next king of Israel and the next prophet. God is sovereign. His purposes for the nations and his church cannot be thwarted.

This applies to our current church situation. This isn't the plan we made for ourselves. God, however, is working in bigger ways than any of us can see. He has his own plan. And his plan is better. He's working in more ways than we can imagine. And he has good for everyone involved. So, NEVER GIVE UP. Trust his purpose.

Conclusion

Elijah never saw the national revival that he dreamed of and prayed for Israel. But God had a better purpose. 900 years after Elijah lived God sent the ultimate prophet, priest and King—Jesus Christ. In Luke 9, on the Mount of Transfiguration, God allowed Elijah to see Jesus, the one who would overthrow sin and death itself.

The reason we can hold on to faith even when our plans come crashing down around us, is because one day we too will see Jesus. Justice is coming. His Kingdom is coming. We will see the glory of God in the face of Christ.

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Discussion Questions

1. Take time as a Care Group to read 1 Kings 19:1-18.
2. Have you ever wanted to give up? Have you ever said in your heart, "it is enough now, O LORD..." (1 Kings 19:4)?
3. Do you picture God as exasperated by your weakness? How can God's response to Elijah's weakness in 1 Kings 19:5-8 adjust your perspective of God's patient disposition toward your weakness?
4. Tim Keller said, "Often our greatest discouragement comes when we make our plan god." In what ways have you done this?
5. Why is God's plan always better than your plan? Why is it important to trust and believe even when you don't see all that God is doing?
6. What practical ways can you grow in faith and trust that God always has a better plan?