

Elijah - From Hero to Zero

"Elijah was a man just like us"

James 5:17

On the heels of some of the greatest victories we've ever experienced, also comes the greatest sense of defeat. It's like you score a touchdown and say, *"This is amazing - God's amazing - life's amazing"*, and then a hit comes right after that. If you ask any preacher, they'll confirm this - that almost every preacher in America resigns on Monday morning (then they re-up by noon).

There's always a great sense of satisfaction that comes from ministry - from doing some things. We were created to be (as in human be-ings), but we were also created to do. And, when we *do* - when we serve, whether it's on a worship team or in production - as a host - or serving somebody in the community - or a friend - we feel so rejuvenated and alive, but it's also at that very point that we become vulnerable - when we let our guard down - it happens to us.

God takes our messes and turns them into masterpieces.

Whenever we enter the sanctuary at Bridge Church, we need to look over at the invisible sign on the blank wall that says, *"No Perfect People Allowed,"* and say that out loud. God has a way of taking our messes and turning them into masterpieces. He takes our tests and turns them into testimonies. He takes our messes and turns them into messages. People need to hear this, that just because you aren't perfect, it doesn't mean that God won't use *you* for his glory.

We are all Mr. and Mrs. Dumpty. Life has happened, and we've all had a great fall at some point. We've all had to deal with pain, disappointment, tragedy, suffering, loss, and grief. All those things are a part of life. It's difficult - and we, like the Dumpties, were broken up into pieces and shards.

Pastor Robert Morris says that people are "divinely human", that there's a bit of the divine in us - we were created in the image of God - but we're also fully human. We talked before of how we are *part-takers* of the divine. We're not quite there yet, but God's working on something.

James 5:17 NIV

"Elijah was a human being, just like us..."

Remember that, because it will be easy to think, *"My goodness, Elijah is a rock star - he's a cut above - there's something special about him that I don't have."* We tend to look at other people and think they have more on the ball than we do - they've got it all together - they have better *stuff* than we do - always comparing ourselves and feeling like we come up short.

But, know this - God wants to use you - right where you *are* - even in the middle of the mess. Elijah was a prophet of God, called to speak truth - to proclaim and to speak truth out into a situation from God's perspective - oftentimes as a warning. The weak king Ahab had married a pagan king's daughter named Jezebel. She was bad news, but Ahab was complicit in it all - he disobeyed God by marrying outside of the Jewish people. God gave very strict warnings about this, but Ahab did it anyway - for money, protection, and political power.

Jezebel brought all her pagan beliefs into the Jewish culture, and introduced them into the Temple of God - all the idols, rituals and human sacrifices. Terrible darkness came over the land because of Ahab's union with Jezebel. Elijah had to confront Ahab about his sin, saying that there would be judgement pronounced over the nation because of what he had done. *"Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab, 'As surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives-the God I serve-there will be no dew or rain during the next few years until I give the word!'"* (1 Kings 17:1 NLT)

Ahab and Jezebel became angry with Elijah, blamed him, and decreed his death, causing him to flee into the wilderness, where God protected him. But, Jezebel began to hunt down the prophets of God and to slaughter them by the hundreds - exterminating God's presence in the land through his prophets. In the midst of that, one righteous man, Obadiah (Ahab's palace administrator), hid and fed a hundred of God's prophets. Then Elijah came out of hiding and God instructed him to go back and confront King Ahab.

1 Kings 18:1 NIV

"After 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."

1 Kings 18:15-22 NLT

“But Elijah said, ‘I swear by the LORD Almighty, in whose presence I stand, that I will present myself to Ahab this very day.’ So Obadiah went to tell Ahab that Elijah had come, and Ahab went out to meet Elijah. When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, ‘So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?’ ‘I have made no trouble for Israel,’ Elijah replied. ‘You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the LORD and have worshiped the images of Baal instead.

“Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who are supported by Jezebel.’ So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel. Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, ‘How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!’ But the people were completely silent. Then Elijah said to them, ‘I am the only prophet of the LORD who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets.’ ”

We have this idea, that in the middle of doing God’s will, that everything has to go perfectly - that we have to feel good - be prayed-up and mentally unmarked - to have all of our sins confessed - before we do anything for God. But, that’s not true. God can work on our worst day - when we’re mad, tired, and don’t want to be there.

1 Kings 18:23-24 NLT

“ ‘Now bring two bulls. The prophets of Baal may choose whichever one they wish and cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood of their altar, but without setting fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood on the altar, but not set fire to it. Then call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!’ And all the people agreed.”

Elijah is having some human moments as well, while being inspired by God in that moment where he is truly walking in the divine. Some of us have felt disqualified by our humanness, but sometimes what appears to be the thing that disqualifies us is actually the very thing that God will use to use us in other people’s lives. Don’t discount the bad things that have happened - the mess-ups, mis-steps, and mishaps. What it means is that you’ve experienced things that others have and are experiencing - and they need to hear from you - that God is Good all the time, and all the time God is Good - even on your worst day.

1 Kings 18:36-39 NLT

"At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, 'O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. O LORD, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself.' Immediately the fire of the LORD flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench! And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, 'The LORD-he is God! Yes, the LORD is God!' "

Elijah taunted and mocked them so he had to know that God was going to show up, because if he didn't, he would be killed right there. Elijah was confident in God and all eyes were on him at that moment. When he prayed, immediately the fire of the Lord came down, consuming the sacrifice, the wood, stones, dust and all the water.

1 Kings 19:1-3 NLT

"When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: 'May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them.' Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there."

After Elijah takes part in one of the single greatest acts of power that the earth had ever witnessed - where an entire nation of people fell down on their faces and worshipped God. *What?!* Why should he then be afraid of Jezebel? He's Elijah the prophet! He was divinely human - *no perfect people allowed!* There are moments where we act in cooperation with God - in tandem with him. There's something divine in us and through us - lives are touched - people are changed - the Kingdom is advanced. But, there are also moments where we can - in a nano-second - flip, and become extremely fully human.

God knew that Elijah was going to flip and panic. He was fully aware of Elijah's humanity, but he used him anyway. Some of us have been reticent to do anything - even worshipping, because our humanity - our flesh - things about ourselves we don't like - hold us back from worshipping God - because we don't feel worthy.

Here's the Good News - that in Christ Jesus we've been made the righteousness of God. He makes us righteous on our worst day, in our worst moment, because it was never about our behavior - it was never about our performance - Jesus took care of that on the cross. The Bible says he died once for all sin. That means not only our past sin - what happened "back then" but also what we commit today - our mistakes today.

We are the most vulnerable on the heels of our greatest victories

1 Kings 19:4 NLT

"Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, LORD,' he said. 'Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.' "

Grace doesn't just work in retrospect. Grace works every day in our lives - every moment - even on our worst day. And, here's Elijah, who was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba into a cave to lick his wounds. This is the power that the enemy leverages after a great victory - he knows we're vulnerable - we drop our guard. We want to celebrate a win, but it's also the moment, if we're not careful, where we drop our guard. The enemy is an opportunist. The devil looks for a moment - he's very patient for when we drop our guard, and... Boom! - there he is.

1 Kings 19:13 NLT

"When Elijah heard [the gentle whisper], he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And a voice said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' "

Sometimes God asks us the same question when we're licking our wounds - complaining to our spouse or a friend - or whining to God. He cared about Elijah - not so much where he was physically, but where he was in his heart, soul and mind - his thinking. We also tend to think that God will come to us in an epic moment but, more often than not, it's in a very gentle whisper - a still small voice - and while we're looking for the epic, we miss the moment that God has for us.

We should stop chasing the epic and begin to get to know God in the quiet - in the stillness - he wasn't in the earthquake, the wind or the fire - he was in a gentle whisper - God came and spoke Life to him - "*Shalom.*" The Lord was speaking to Elijah and touching him in the middle of his humanity. In the middle of his humanness, he was saying, "*Listen. What are you doing here?*"

Even on Elijah's worst day when he flees, God commissioned him to anoint his predecessor, Elisha. Some of us have felt unworthy to be used by God, because we don't have it all together. But, the truth is, none of us have it all together. Let's stop comparing ourselves to everybody else. God has given each one of us a "lane" to run in. We can't turn our eyes to what somebody's doing in the lane next to us or we'll lose our own focus, pace, and rhythm - then we're done, and we can't catch back up.

We can't worry about what others are doing in their lane. God gave us our own lane assignment, and gave us responsibility for that lane. In life, it's a sphere of influence. God has put people around us, and that is our sphere of influence. We have a wonderful responsibility, joy, and privilege of serving those who come into our lane. Don't worry about other people's lanes - we have to run our race... *and God will use us on our worst day.*

Prayer

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for this amazing event - not a fairy tale - but a real person, whose life was not perfect, and yet, he was an anointed prophet of God. Father, on the days when we take our eyes off of our assignments and begin to look at and judge other people's assignments, Lord, those are the days when we're operating in the flesh - fully human - and we miss the moment. Then we feel unworthy - like we can't do anything - like we're not good enough - we messed up again, and yet You come and tell us to come as we are - not as we could be.

Lord Jesus, we commit all this to You, and we choose to walk out of here determined, even in our humanity, to co-operate with You, and by Your grace, be used for Your glory. We love You and we honor You. In Jesus' name. Amen