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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

I am preaching through a series on Sunday nights I call, "Big Events of the Old Testament." We spent several messages on David, and the last message on Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived—but he did not follow his own advice. What happened after Solomon died? He left the kingdom to his son, Rehoboam. Some people came to Rehoboam and said, "Listen, Rehoboam, we didn't really like the way your dad, Solomon, did things so we need you to cut us some slack. We need you to make things a little bit easier on us." Rehoboam did a very foolish thing. He said, "You think my dad was bad? You ain't seen nothin' yet! I'm going to be worse than he was and you had better fall in line." That kind of attitude led to the division of the nation. In 922 B.C. Israel as we knew it divided into two different nations. The northern nation kept the name Israel and the southern nation kept the name Judah. Much of the Old Testament is about what happened in those two nations. The northern kingdom of Israel in 722 had only been in existence for two hundred years and was basically overrun and destroyed by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom of Judah hung on a little bit longer, but in 587 B.C. they were overrun by the Babylonians and destroyed. So what we have in the section of 1 Kings and the other books of the Bible are some of these incidents that took place.

In the northern kingdom they had a succession of bad kings but when a man named Ahab came to the throne, they had the worst of the worst! What made Ahab so bad was his marriage to a woman named Jezebel, who was one of the most evil women in the Bible. Two weeks from now I'm going to be talking more about Elijah and Jezebel and how they didn't get along. Jezebel was a terribly evil woman. I once made the statement: That's why today women don't name their daughters, Jezebel, anymore! Because it is such a wicked name. After that service, a lady came up to me and said, "I want you to meet my daughter, Jezebel." But not *many* people name their daughters Jezebel. In the midst of Ahab's wicked reign a prophet came on the scene and his name was Elijah. Sometimes we think of these men as "super saints" or "super prophets" and we think they are way up there and there is no way we could ever do the things they did, but we're going to see tonight in the book of James that the Bible says, "Elijah was a man just like us."

Elijah was one of the most notable characters in the Bible. Not only do we see his miraculous ministry that we're going to talk about tonight, but also the Bible tells us in the Old Testament book of Malachi that before the Messiah comes, Elijah is going to return. We know that John the Baptist filled that role of Elijah. But when Jesus and his disciples were standing on the Mount of Transfiguration and God chose two people to send down and appear before Jesus and the disciples who were they? Moses and Elijah. In Matthew 16, when the disciples were talking about Jesus when he said, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" They say, "Some people say that you are Jeremiah, John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets. In the book of Revelation in the future during the time of Tribulation there are going to be two witnesses sent from heaven to the planet earth and they are not named, but when you read it you'll probably agree or at least suspect strongly that one of them is Elijah. What a powerful character he is in the Bible! Tonight I want us to talk about his ministry in two perspectives.

I. ELIJAH'S PRIVATE MINISTRY OF PREPARATION

The first thing I want to talk about is his private ministry of preparation. Before God ever used

Elijah to do big public things, he had to train and prepare him. Basically, God is going to give him three tests, three miracles, three events of preparation. There are three challenges Elijah faced. Sometimes we face these same challenges. Let's look at test number one. Can you trust God when your source of producing dries up?

1 Kings 17:2-6. "Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: 'Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.' So he did what the Lord had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook."

Now I know there are a lot of people in this room who feed the birds but have you ever had the birds feed you? They did not have a lot of fast food restaurants or grocery stores back then. Elijah had to exercise a great deal of trust in God, because he went out into the absolute wilderness where there was absolutely no source of food and he said, "Okay, God. I'm going to go where you tell me to go into this deep ravine and I'm just going to trust you!" And God did provide for him. God took care of him. The brook provided water. Isn't it amazing to think about how the ravens brought him food in the morning and at night? We have to understand that God is the Creator and the controller of this universe. Even the animals follow his beck and call.

1 Kings 17:7. "Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him..."

1. What are you going to do when your brook dries up?

Well the question I want to ask you is, "What are you going to do in your life when your brook seems to dry up?" It could be your source of income is cut off, you lose a job or maybe you're demoted or maybe you face some kind of financial reversal when suddenly you think, "How am I going to take care of myself?" I want to reassure you and we're going to see in just a moment that God has promised he is going to take care of your needs. God will see that you will have all you need. David writes in Psalm 37:25. "I once was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." You need to do the same thing Elijah did: Just trust God. Even when you are out there in the middle of nowhere and the brook dries up and the ravens stop coming you have to say, "God, I'm going to trust you!" If any of you have ever taken, "Experiencing God" the whole point of the Bible study is "Look around you. See what God is doing and when you see what God is doing, you get in on it." The problem is most of us just don't see what God is doing.

Did you hear the story about the man who was in a flood and the waters kept rising until he climbed up to the roof of his house. He is sitting there on the roof of the house praying, "God, save me, please. Deliver me." These folks came by in a boat and said, "Hey, jump in, we'll rescue you" and he said, "Oh, no. God's going to take care of me." The waters kept rising higher and he climbed up higher on the roof. Another boat comes by and they say, "Jump in, we'll take care of you." He said, "Oh, no. God's going to take care of me." Then the waters keep rising and he climbs to the very peak of the roof and he stands there and before long a helicopter flies over

and they lower a ladder and say, "Climb up, we'll rescue you." He says, "Oh, no. God's going to take care of me." and the helicopter flies off. Before long the water just goes over the top of the roof and he is swept off of that house. He swims for a while and gets tired and he drowns. He goes to heaven and he stands before the Lord and he says, "Lord, I just don't understand it. I just trusted you to save me to take care of me and you failed me." God says, "What do you mean? I sent you two boats and a helicopter."

Sometimes we just don't see what God is doing. Elijah did not have that problem, because he saw when the brook dried up it was time for him to move on. Sometimes when you go through reversals of disappointments and times of discouragement you ought to say, "Hot dog! Praise the Lord. God has got something new for me! I just can't wait to find out what it is."

2. What are you going to do when the barrel is depleted?

Here's the second thing: What do you when the barrel is depleted?

1 Kings 17:9. "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."

We're not going to take time to read the whole text but this is the situation: There was a terrible famine in the land and there was no food anywhere. The brook was not the only thing that dried up. All the rivers dried up; all the crops wilted—there was just no food anywhere. Elijah walked into this town of Zarephath. He had never met this widow before and do you know what this widow is doing? she is collecting a huge dry twig to build a fire to cook the last meal for her and her son. She is a single mom apparently. She says to Elijah, "I'm just gathering sticks to build a fire and when we eat this last meal, that's it—we're just going to die! This is our final meal! That's what I'm doing." But Elijah makes a strange request.

1 Kings 17:13-14. "Elijah said to her, 'Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'"

I'd like for every mother to listen to me right now. If it's you and your only child and a stranger walks up to your front door and says, "I want you to give me the last food that you have," and there's no more food in the house the cupboards are bare. It would be terribly difficult to take the food you are going to give to your child and instead give it to someone else. The key is Elijah said to this widow, "God sent me. God told me to make this request." And if you'll look at verse 13 again, the key word is *first*. Elijah said "FIRST you do what God asked for and then watch and see what happens. I want you to see what she did."

1 Kings 17:15-16. "She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah, and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah."

What's the application? When your resources are depleted when it seems like your finances just dry up and blow away and God still says, "Put me first." That's when the test is really there. You know this is a great lesson to me about the joy of tithing, because when you have a great income coming in, more than you really need it's pretty easy to tithe. "Hey, I don't really need that!" But sometimes when it doesn't look like you have enough money to pay your bills and God says, "You still put me first. By the way, you put me first and I'll see that all your needs are met." That's when it is really tough. That's when it is a real test!

I once had a man come to me who was a deacon in my former church. He had heard a widow in our deacon widow ministry plan was tithing. This woman was on a fixed income. All she had was a little bit of pension and a bit of social security. It seemed like this woman could not afford to tithe. This man said to me—and his heart was good and I know his intention was pure—"You know what, Pastor. Why don't we tell that woman that she doesn't have to tithe? That she should just use the little bit she has to take care of herself." Do you know what I said to him? I said, "Well I'm not going to tell you that you can't do that, but I'm not going to do that because I will never tell any child of God not to put God first in their life. But I knew where he was coming from. This gentleman went to this lady and in a very kind way and a caring attitude he said, "Listen. I know that you are tithing and I know that you hardly have enough money to pay your utilities, pay your rent and buy your groceries. I just want to suggest that you don't tithe for a while." He told me what her reaction was. He said, "First her chin started quivering and then her eyes welled up with tears." and she said, "Don't you dare take away one of the greatest joys I have in my life!" She said, "I may not have much, but I have all I need and I believe God's going to take care of me." And God did!

The key is F-I-R-S-T. You put God first and He'll take care of you. As I have said before that's why some of you have trouble with tithing, because you pay all of your bills and then you look at what's left over at the end E-N-D, at what's left over and you are giving God the L-A-S-T. No. Put God F-I-R-S-T and you watch and see what God does. I have had testimony people tell me, "You know what, Pastor. The tires on my car just seem to keep on working long past the time when I thought they should. It just seemed like the things I had in my life lasted longer because I was putting God first." That's the great principle. Put God first and he will take care of you.

Here's the third test. What are you going to do? Can you really trust God when the son is dead? Because this widow had another tragedy.

1 Kings 17:17-18. "Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, 'What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?'"

Sometimes when people are hurting, they blame God. God gets a lot of blame for things He's not responsible for. This woman in her anger and in her grief turns to Elijah and says, "You must hate me, man of God. Why did God kill my son? Why did God do this?" And that's easy to ask. Many of you know what happened. Elijah took this little boy in his arms and went to the upper room. The Bible says he laid his body across the little boy and prayed to God three times and the

Bible says life was restored to this little boy. Was it a resurrection? No. Get your terminology straight. The only resurrection ever to have taken place in history is that of the Lord Jesus Christ who died and he's alive—never to die again. We're all going to be resurrected one day but this boy and the others that were brought back to life after they were dead later died. It is true Elijah learned that when your brook dries up and when your barrel is depleted and even when somebody dies you can trust God.

II. ELIJAH'S PUBLIC MINISTRY OF POWER

All of these instances are getting him ready, because the second chapter of his ministry of miracles was his public ministry of power. Elijah is basically obscure and unknown while he is doing all of these things but we see in chapter 18 the power of God released in his life. Without anything else, you can say Elijah was a man of prayer. Do you know why that child was brought back to life? Not because Elijah was a great guy, but because he prayed to a great God and it was his prayer. We're going to see that because of praying in faith a couple of things happen.

1. Because of praying in faith, the fire of God fell

Number one because of praying in faith the fire of God fell.

1 Kings 18:16-21. "So Obadiah [not the prophet Obadiah] went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. When he saw Elijah, he said to him, 'Is that you, you troubler of Israel?' '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. Now 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.' So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah 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."

That's a great lesson. Sometimes we waver between two opinions. Sometimes it is easy to say, "Okay. I'm going to live for God but no, I'm going to live in the world." To waver between two opinions. If God is truly God—and he is—he deserves to be served and obeyed one hundred per cent. Did you notice what the people did? They said nothing. You know in just a moment I'm going to ask people if they would like to come and receive Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Some of you are going to do nothing. To say nothing to God is to say, "No" to God. A no answer is an answer of no.

Elijah said, "Here we are on Mount Carmel We're going to have a God contest." I have stood on that very spot on Mount Carmel several times and you can look out across the Jezreel Valley, which is also a valley of Armageddon, and you can see where thousands of people could gather there very easily. Elijah said to the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, "We're going to have a contest and whichever God sends down fire from heaven that's the true God! And I'm going to let you guys go first." So they set up an altar there. He said, "Okay, sacrifice your animal. Now ask your god Baal to send down fire." Well they did. They began to

pray, "Baal, please send down fire!" They prayed and they danced around all day long. Noon passed and they were still praying and dancing around. If you take time to read the scripture, they even cut themselves and let their blood flow out on the sacrifice. "Please, Baal. Send down fire! *Pleeease!*" I can imagine toward the end of the day they were running out of energy and these prophets of Baal who had not been dancing around very energetically by this time are huffing and puffing. About that time Elijah starts to mock them. He starts to make fun of them. He says, "Well. Where is your god? Is your god deaf? Is he on a picnic?" He even says in the Hebrew, "Is your god in the outhouse and he can't hear what you are saying?" He makes fun of them. Then, finally he says, "Okay, you have had your turn!" And toward the time for the evening sacrifice about the time it was sundown, he said, "I want to show you something."

He repaired the altar of the Lord. If you ever want the fire of God to fall in your life you had better repair your private altar of worship. He put a sacrifice up there. Then he said, "Oh I think probably you guys won't believe this so I'm going to kind of handicap myself a little bit." He sent four guys down there and each one of them had a barrel. He said I want you to dip that barrel in the creek and bring the water here and pour it on the sacrifice. They did that three times. Twelve barrels of water were poured on that wooden altar until the wood was soaked. Have you ever tried to get wet wood to burn? I can just see it. At this time the prophets of Baal are saying, "That idiot, Elijah. Even if he did have fire, it's not going to burn now because the wood's wet!" Elijah did not dance around. He did not cut himself. He just said, "God, send down fire." The faithful prayer of a righteous man avails much! **KAPOW!!!** The fire from heaven fell and consumed the sacrifice and the people of Israel fell down and said, "God! We're going to serve you!" but it was only a temporary time of repentance. Those prophets of Baal turned and ran. Elijah picked up a sword and chased them and he caught them and he expressed God's righteous indignation upon those four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal until he was standing in that creek made red by the blood of these false prophets. You see it is a prayer of faith that can let the fire of God fall. But that's not all.

2. Because of praying in faith, the rain came

His public ministry involved something else too. Because of praying in faith the rain came. Because of Israel's unrighteousness and because of Ahab and Jezebel's blasphemy, Elijah has said, "It's not going to rain until I say so!" So for three and a half years it did not rain. You think we have had some droughts here!

1 Kings, 18:41-42. "And Elijah said to Ahab, 'Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.' So, Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees."

a. His posture

Standing on Mt. Carmel on a very clear day you can see the Jezreel valley spread out before you. That's where all the people were assembled and on a clear day you can turn and look to the west and you can see the shimmering, blue Mediterranean Sea about 30 or 40 miles away. Elijah had so much faith in God—not faith in faith and not faith in prayer—but faith in God that he said, "Ahab, I promise you. Now that this nation has acknowledged God, it's going to rain! You had

better hurry back and get to your palace because pretty soon the roads are going to get so muddy you can't even make it back to your palace. When he was saying all of this, there was not a cloud in the sky. So, Elijah goes and prays. I want you to notice the posture of his prayer. It says he gets down on his knees and puts his head between his knees. He prostrates himself before God in a posture of humility and he is praying for God to send rain.

1 Kings 18:43. ““Go and look toward the sea,’ he told his servant. And he went up and looked. ‘There is nothing there,’ he said. Seven times Elijah said, ‘Go back.’”

b. His persistence

There's something we miss in prayer, not only the posture of his prayer but also the persistence of his prayer. Our mistake is we only pray for something one time and if we don't get it we say, “Well, oops, it must not be God's will!” We pray again “Oops, it must not be God's will!” Seven times he prayed. Then the seventh time the servant comes back and he says, “Elijah, I know it is insignificant but off there on the horizon in the western sky I can see a cloud, one single cloud and it is about the size of my hand.” Have you ever held up your hand and looked at a cloud from behind your hand. He said, “That's all it is. Insignificant.” Elijah said, “It's enough! It's about to rain!”

1 Kings 18:44-46. “The seventh time the servant reported, ‘A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea.’ So Elijah said, ‘Go and tell Ahab, ‘Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.’ Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. The power of the Lord came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.”

I can just see it! He's already had a long day. He's had to bring down fire from heaven, kill four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and pray seven times. Here is Ahab heading toward the palace in his chariot, which is probably drawn by four or six beautiful stallions and he is going as fast as it's possible to travel at that time and the spirit of the Lord comes on Elijah. He pulls up his cloak, sticks it under his belt and takes off running. Now I'll grant you, it's downhill most of the way. But this is an amazing physical feat for him to run with endurance and to run with speed. Can't you just see old Ahab riding along in his chariot and all of a sudden they see this whooshing blur? What was that?! That was Elijah. He's fast! More than being fast he is faithful.

CONCLUSION

When you hear those stories about Elijah and all those miracles, do you think it is beyond your grasp as a Christian? Please read the verse from James 5:17-18 I have printed for you at the bottom of the outline. James is writing about prayer and he says, “Elijah was a man just like us.” He wasn't some super saint. He was just like us! “He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.” I'd love to see the fire fall again, wouldn't you? I'd love to see the showers of revival come again, wouldn't you? Sometimes people ask, “Where is the God of Elijah?” That's the wrong question. The right question is, “Where are the Elijahs of God?”

OUTLINE

I. ELIJAH'S PRIVATE MINISTRY OF PREPARATION

What are you going to do when...

1. Your brook dries up?
2. Your barrel is depleted?

II. ELIJAH'S PUBLIC MINISTRY OF POWER

Because of praying in faith...

1. The fire of God fell
2. The rain came
 - a. His posture
 - b. His persistence

"Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."
James 5:17-18