

A Chronicle of Courage 1 Kings 18:1-39

Slide 1

When last we encountered our hero, Elijah, he was performing miracles for a widow and her son in Zarephath. Today we'll see another miracle that Elijah performs.

Now, here's an interesting note I need to make as we begin. There are basically three clusters of miracles in the bible.

The first is with Moses in Exodus as he leads the people out of bondage and into the promise land. The last is the cluster of miracles in the Gospels surrounding the life of Jesus.

The second cluster is found here. It is associated with the life of Elijah and his young protégé, Elisha.

That fact, in and of itself, reveals the significance of this prophet, and is an indication there's much we can and should learn from his life.

Last week we learned that he was a person of faith, and as we resume the Elijah Chronicles today, we discover his Chronicle of Courage.

Slide 2

After three years of drought, God tells Elijah to get up, get moving, and find King Ahab.

1 Kings 18:1, *“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. So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab.”*

Once again, we see that when God told Elijah to go, Elijah acted and demonstrated the courage to be obedient.

Now, Elijah's life is a series of obedient acts, one after another. God says, *"Go to the Brook Cherith,"* and Elijah goes.

God says, *"Go to Zarephath,"* and Elijah goes. God says, *"Go find Ahab,"* and Elijah goes. Again and again, Elijah demonstrates obedience to the call of God.

But, listen! God doesn't always call us to the easy place or tell us to take the easy road. Elijah was the most wanted person in all Israel.

In fact, not only was Ahab was looking for Elijah, he was looking for all the prophets of the Lord.

The first part of chapter 18 reveals that when Jezebel started killing the Lord's prophets, Obadiah, Ahab's chief of staff, had hidden a hundred of them.

1 Kings 18:4, *"While 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."*

Therefore, this was not an easy road Elijah was being asked to walk, yet he had the courage and the faith, to go where God was calling.

Elijah faced certain death, but perhaps Elijah knew that the will of God wouldn't take him where the grace of God couldn't keep him.

Nothing makes us more uncertain and insecure than not being sure if we're in the will of God, and nothing is more encouraging than knowing that we are.

The difficult part is being able to discern the call of God in our lives because most of the time we question where and what God might be calling us to.

And, even when we're certain, we second guess because we're not sure we want to go where God's calling.

Like the old woman who would go from house to house selling thread, buttons, and shoestrings. When she came to a crossroad, she would toss a stick into the air and go in the direction the stick pointed when it landed.

One day, however, she was seen tossing the stick up several times. *"Why do you toss the stick more than once?"* someone asked. *"Because,"* replied the woman, *"it keeps pointing to the left, and I want to go to the right."*

So, let's be honest. Our problem is rarely that we don't hear the voice of God, it's that we lack the courage to follow the voice of God.

His voice calls us to confront the injustice in the world, the sin in the world, and even the sin in our own lives.

And, it's not that we don't have the power to respond in faith, or even to overcome the sin in our lives, it's courage we lack.

I love what Paul tells us in Romans 6:6-11, *"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."*

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The sin Elijah had to confront this day was the sin of idolatry. Ahab had led the nation of Israel into idol worship.

After his marriage to Jezebel, he set up temples to Baal in Samaria, and allowed the erection of Asherah poles throughout the region.

Remember, Baal was the male deity of rain and fertility, and Asherah was the female counterpart.

Elijah was called to confront this sin, and he demonstrated the courage to do so by having Ahab summon all the prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel.

1 Kings 18:19-20, “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.”

This was to be the “Showdown at the O. K. Corral.” Why Mount Carmel? This mountain sat at the northwestern continuation of the hills of Samaria. It rises to the height of 1,650 feet, and the River Kishon flows at its foot.

This mountain had been the site of an altar to Baal from ancient times, but during the early monarchy period, when the whole country was united, an altar to Yahweh had been built there.

That altar had been abandoned and lay in ruins—symbolic of the religious situation in Israel.

So, this is not a challenge that just popped into Elijah’s head, it was a well thought out, well-prepared challenge.

He knew they weren’t going to say no, because he was not only challenging what Baal did best, he was also in Baal’s territory.

He didn't want to just confront their god, he wanted to completely humiliate Baal in front of everyone by proving he wasn't real. He was trying to turn the hearts of the people back to God.

Now, it's not that the people had turned their backs completely on Yahweh. It's that they were hedging their bets.

1 Kings 18:21, *"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."*

In essence, they were saying, *"Hey, if Yahweh doesn't come through (and it's not likely he will—see the altar over there?), we'll offer sacrifices to Baal just in case."*

We do the same thing. We erect our own idols. It's not so much to hedge our bets as it is to simply distract ourselves from the God who calls us.

We need to look no further than Wall Street to realize that money can quickly become an idol. *"Oh, I trust God to provide, but just in case, I need to have a big bank account."*

And, before we know it, we're bowing down at that idol more and more, depending more on it than on the One Who gives us life itself. We can make entertainment an idol. We can make sports an idol.

A recent example. Remember when Baylor University, a private CHRISTIAN university, fired its football coach and its president, and the athletics director stepped down in the shadow of a cover-up of sexual assaults, many by members of the university's football team.

I don't mean to condemn, and certainly don't condone their actions, but it demonstrates how easily money and success can distract us from matters of faith. It takes courage to face down the idols around us, and their many prophets.

That's why Elijah told the people to get off the fence of indecision. You're either for God, or you're against Him. It's time to decide.

Slide 4

Conclusion

Finally, we learn that Elijah had the courage to pray. The only tool Elijah had... the only tool he needed... was prayer!

It was a simple, straight-forward prayer. Unlike the prayers of the prophets of Baal. No flowery words. No long intercessions. No special routines and rituals.

1 Kings 18:36-37, "At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "LORD, the 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. Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

Simple. Direct. *"Lord, prove Yourself."* The fire fell and the nation was changed.

An individual posted this on Facebook, *"Watch out! It's dangerous to pray. In prayer God meets us where we are but doesn't leave us as we are."*

Prayer changes things, and prayer changes us. Here's a simple question: Do you pray? Not for ten hours, or even for ten minutes, but do you pray this simple prayer, *"Lord, prove Yourself."*

And, not as a last resort, but as a first resort. The most effective weapon we have is prayer. But, do you have the courage to use it?

We know that Elijah was a type of Christ. His showdown on Mt. Carmel with the prophets of Baal foreshadowed the greatest showdown of all on a hillside outside Jerusalem at the cross where the enemy of God was defeated by the sacrifice of God's own Son.

Why? Because Jesus had one life with the courage to be obedient, the courage to confront the idolatry of the ages and the courage to pray, *"Father, not my will, but Thine be done."*

Courage changed the world, and it can change us.