

-{1}. **James 5:16-18** **Elijah, Prophet of Powerful Prayer** -{2}.

A. Elijah, the Man

1. His History

- a. like the summer storm this past Monday that swept suddenly into the GTA – coming so quickly that the water was already flooding the Don Valley Parkway for half an hour before the weather bureau sent out a warning – leaving behind ditches and roads overflowing with water
- b. so with the words we read earlier from 1 Kings 17, Elijah swept onto the pages of Hebrew history, not with a flood of waters, but rather with a dearth of waters, leaving behind drought and famine
- c. after storming across history in the next several chapters of God’s word – it might take about half an hour to read all it says about him – then in like fashion as he entered the picture, so also Elijah leaves the scene, taken up into heaven in a windstorm
- d. we are told nothing about Elijah’s family; even his tribe is uncertain

2. His Importance

- a. yet Elijah has a very important role in Scripture
- b. the Jews deemed him so for a number of reasons
 - (A) he was the first of the great, national prophets – there had been prophets before Elijah
 - (1) Moses was a prophet, but celebrated more as the Law-giver
 - (2) David was a prophet, but celebrated as the king and warrior
 - (3) Nathan, Gad and others were prophets, but of limited scope
 - (4) but Elijah dealt with both his own and other nations
 - (B) he was a worker of great miracles from start to finish
 - (C) it was Elijah who should appear as harbinger of the Messiah, according to Malachi 4:5 – which John the Baptist fulfilled
- c. this then is the man whom James takes to be ...

B. Elijah, the Example

1. A Righteous Man

- a. first: he is an example of a man righteous before God – **The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.**” (James 5:16) – and on this aspect we shall spend some time right now
 - (A) by description, if not by name, Elijah is included in the list of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11
 - (1) verse 33 – **‘performed acts of righteousness’**
 - (2) verse 35 – **‘women received back their dead by resurrection’**
 - (3) verse 37 – **‘they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins**
 - (B) so we can quite properly consider him as having the righteousness that comes by faith – the righteousness of Christ in which the believer is clothed and that brings salvation
- b. but Elijah also manifest the practical righteousness that comes from faith showing itself in actions
 - (A) the Bible says this is necessary for effectual prayer
 - (B) the message of 1 John 1, is that there cannot be fellowship with the heavenly Father if there is unconfessed , and thus unforgiven, sin in the life of one of His children
 - (C) David said **“If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;”** (Psalms 66:18)
 - (D) Proverbs 15:8 says, **‘The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.’**
 - (E) **“The Lord is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.”** (Proverbs 15:29)
 - (F) **“He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be answered.”** (Proverbs 21:13)
 - (G) and God says, **‘So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.’** (Isaiah 1:15)
 - (H) so powerful prayer has practical righteousness as a necessary prelude: **‘For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; The upright will behold His face.’** (Psalms 11:7)
- c. with which we will turn from this challenging and daunting aspect to a more consoling part of Elijah’s example

2. An Ordinary Man

- a. second, Elijah was frail human being like ourselves: 'Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, ...' (James 5:17), or, as the AV expresses it, he '... was a man subject to like passions as we are ...'
- b. to this we shall return in a few moments, but I want to look at Elijah the example in the historical order and priority order: he was ...

C. Elijah, the Praying Man

1. Praying with Results

- a. '... and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.' (James 5:17b-18)
- b. not simply prayer as a demonstration for sake of show
- c. but prayer that addressed real needs
 - (A) the need for repentance by back slidden Israel
 - (B) the need for food after three and one-half years of famine
- d. powerful prayer is prayer that God answers

2. Purposeful Prayer

- a. in 1 Kings 17:1 (NAS): Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."
- b. this is the prayer to which James refers
- c. Elijah calls upon the God of Israel by His covenant Name, Yahweh (rendered in our Bibles in Lord, capital letters)
- d. with a prayer of faith – both calling on God to cause the drought to come and expressing it prophetically that the drought shall come
- e. done aloud and in person before King Ahab that there should be no doubt that
 - (A) Yahweh, not the Ba'als, was the one true God
 - (B) only Elijah's prayer could reverse this chastisement

3. Reason for Drastic Action

- a. some verses: explain why this chastisement was needed
- b. 1 Kings 16:30–31 (NAS): [And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him. And it came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshipped him.](#)
- c. 1 Kings 21:25 (NAS): [“Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife incited him.”](#)

4. Aftermath of Prayer

- a. after telling Ahab of God’s immediate punishment
- b. Elijah went and dwelt by the brook Cherith where he was fed by raven who brought him food and meat each day
- c. when the brook Cherith dried up, then Elijah went north to Zeraphath – that’s near Sidon, Jezebel’s home country – and through the miracle of the flour and oil that did not become exhausted, he is sustained by a widow woman for the remainder of the years of drought — this is the same widow woman whose young son Elijah raises from the dead – further examples of Elijah’s power in prayer
- d. So Ahab and his godly servant Obadiah go out searching the land for water to preserve a few of their herds — and Elijah meets Obadiah and tells him to fetch Ahab
- e. You probably all know the next part of the story, for when they meet Elijah proposes a contest to show who is God: the 450 prophets of Ba’al versus Elijah;
 - (A) who will answer by fire: Ba’al or the Lord God?
 - (B) the prophets of Ba’al take all day, praying & dancing before Ba’al so he would light a fire under the sacrifice
 - (C) 1 Kings 18:27 (NAS): [And it came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened.”](#)
 - (D) the prophets of Ba’al became more and more frantic, cutting themselves and raving; but not even

a spark

- (E) as evening came on, it was Elijah's turn
- (F) just to make it fair, he put a trench around his altar and had them pour water over the sacrifice until it was soaked and the trench full of water
- (G) then Elijah's simple prayer, 1 Kings 18:36-38a (NAS): Then it came about at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that Thou, O Lord, art God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again." Then the fire of the Lord fell, ...
- (H) so the 450 prophets of Ba'al were slain

5. More Earnest Prayer

- a. James 5:18; (NAS): And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.
- b. look at this prayer: '... Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he crouched down on the earth and put his face between his knees.' (1 Kings 18:42) – it was not simply this abject, prostrate position that evidenced the earnestness of Elijah's prayer, for the passage continues
- c. 'He said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." So he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go back" seven times.' (1 Kings 18:43) – it was earnest prayer because it was persistent prayer – seven times without any seeming answer
- d. finally it was perceptive prayer – perceiving God's answer: 'It came about at the seventh time, that he said, "Behold, a cloud as small as a man's hand is coming up from the sea." And he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, so that the heavy shower does not stop you.''" (1 Kings 18:44) – Get going Ahab, or you will be like that GO train stuck in the Don Valley by the floodwaters!
- e. so, the false prophets defeated; the true God vindicated; Elijah should be on top of the world as well as on top of Carmel right? ... wrong!

D. Elijah in the Desert

1. Jezebel Rants, Elijah Runs

- a. 'Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.' And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.'" (1 Kings 19:1-4 NAS95) – keep this chapter open
- b. this is an Elijah with whom we can identify; Elijah at his weakest; Elijah in fear; Elijah complaining; Elijah feeling sorry for Elijah — Elijah: Prophet of Powerful Prayer? ... it doesn't seem so
- c. yet it is the example of saints when they are their weakest that can be most instructive to us
- d. here are some thoughts from a devotional I discovered: ^{3}.
 - (A) Webster's Dictionary defines "desert" in the following ways:
 - (1) an arid, barren land,
 - (2) a wild uninhabited and uncultivated tract, or
 - (3) a desolate or forbidding area.
 - (B) to which the author adds a fourth: A period of time in an individual's life when God seems distant, yet faith is forged.
 - (C) Every Christian goes through the desert. We don't want to, but we need to. For it is in the desert that real faith is formed. ... it is in the desert that we are stripped of the things that keep us from achieving our highest ... Desert time is necessary – for it is in the desert that we really learn how to trust God.
- e. in 1 Kings 19, we encounter Elijah in the desert, both literally and figuratively and there are some powerful lessons here for us; we'll touch on some of them today – consider Elijah's desert life symptoms

2. Elijah Was Not Rational

- a. when you read this through it is almost humorous
- b. in 19:3, after Jezebel sent a threatening letter, he up and runs for his life; this is funny in itself you he

had no fear that God could not deal with the 450 prophets of Ba'al, but this one wicked woman is a different matter

- c. but wait; so he is afraid for his life ... what does he pray for in verse 4? "O Lord, take my life" ... now that really makes sense doesn't it! ... is that rational? ... not!
- d. and his complaint to God in verses 10 and 14 is? ... "they seek my life, to take it away"
- e. well, Elijah, make up your mind! ... be rational!
- f. and that is one of the problems when we are in a period of desert life; we don't think clearly; we just don't consider who God is and how great He is and how loving and kind

3. Elijah Felt Unappreciated

- a. "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts"
- b. well, look what I have done for you, Lord, and look at what the rest of the people in the land are doing
- c. "the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword"
- d. and, Lord, look at them! ... compare me to them, Lord; why am I being persecuted? ... and they prosper
- e. Don't you appreciate me, Lord? How easy it is when we are in the desert life to frame those words, if not in our mouths, at least in our thoughts and attitudes

4. Elijah Felt Alone

- a. the prophets of God they have killed
- b. twice he says, "and I alone am left"
- c. well, there he was alone before the 450 prophets of Ba'al (as well as the 400 prophets of Astoreth) and God was able to deal with that; but his cry is "and I alone am left"
- d. when we are in the desert life, it is so very easy to feel that we are alone; that there is no one to comfort, to cheer, to help, and to appreciate us

5. It is instructive to look at the rest of 1 Kings 19 to see how God dealt with Elijah so that he might benefit from this desert experience

- a. we shall not do so today

- b. rather, let us see that this is an Elijah with which we can sympathise
- c. so if we can identify with his weakness
- d. let us also be assured that we can identify with him in his strength – that Elijah can indeed be our model for power in prayer

E. Conclusion

1. 'Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.' (James 5:16 NAS9)
 - a. the first righteousness needed is that of which Pastor Carlos spoke a couple of weeks ago: that comes through putting on Christ as Saviour
 - b. the second righteousness is by the believer keeping short accounts with God – seeking forgiveness and cleansing of our sins from God – addressing and making right any wrongs against one another.

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of my commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- BM – Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
- EBC – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan – Volume 12, James, by Donald W. Burdick, Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary, ISBN 0-310-36540-6
- EGT – The Expositor’s Greek Testament, *James*, by W. E. Oesterley, Hodder & Stoughton, 1910 (Liberal, but generally helpful on Greek idiom.)
- Lange – Commentary on the Holy Scriptures by John Peter Lange, translated by Philip Schaff, Volume 9 of the New Testament; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915 (His interpretations sometimes take strange twists.)
- NICNT – The New International Commentary on the New Testament, *Commentary on the Epistles of James and John* by Alexander Ross, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954 – ISBN 0-8028-2192-8
- TYN – Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, *The General Epistle of James*, by Professor R. V. G. Tasker, The Tyndale Press, 1956
- Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.

2. This was our VBS week, so much of this message is directly from my message of 2005-04-17, *Elijah, Prophet of Power* – Kerux Sermons #21335
3. “Desert Faith” from Seneca Creek Community Church, Germantown, Maryland, Kerux illustrations #16760