

Discovering How to Live with Courage

August 9, 2009 Pastor Bill Bump

Our subject: Elijah

Lesson: Elijah is going to demonstrate the courage we can have because of our trust in God.

Elijah's story:

I Kings 17:1 Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab, "As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel lives—the God whom I worship and serve—there will be no dew or rain during the next few years unless I give the word!"

I Kings 18:1 After many months passed, in the third year of the drought, the Lord said to Elijah, "Go and present yourself to King Ahab. Tell him that I will soon send rain!"

I Kings 18:16-19 So Obadiah went to tell Ahab that Elijah had come, and Ahab went out to meet him. "So it's you, is it—Israel's troublemaker?" Ahab asked when he saw him. "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 bring all the people of Israel to Mount Carmel, with all 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who are supported by Jezebel."

One of the more dramatic scenes in all of scripture is this contest on Mount Carmel.

I Kings 18:21-24 Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How long are you going to waver 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. 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.

Baal was considered the God of fire.

I Kings 18:25-29 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "You go first, for there are many of you. Choose one of the bulls and prepare it and call on the name of your god. But do not set fire to the wood." So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the

name of Baal all morning, shouting, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced wildly around the altar they had made. About noontime Elijah began mocking them. "You'll have to shout louder," he scoffed, "for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or he is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or he is asleep and needs to be awakened!" So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out. They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, but still there was no reply, no voice, no answer.

The Bible tells us in Psalm 115 that false gods have eyes, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; they have mouths, but they do not speak.

I Kings 18:30-35 Then Elijah called to the people, "Come over here!" They all crowded around him as he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been torn down. He took twelve stones, one to represent each of the tribes of Israel, and he used the stones to rebuild the Lord's altar. Then he dug a trench around the altar large enough to hold about three gallons. He piled wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood. Then he said, "Fill four large jars with water, and pour the water over the offering and the wood." After they had done this, he said, "Do the same thing again!" And when they were finished, he said, "Now do it a third time!" So they did as he said, and the water ran around the altar and even overflowed the trench.

I think we get a good picture in this passage of Elijah's confidence in God.

I Kings 18:36-39 At the customary 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 ditch! And when the people saw it, they fell on their faces and cried out, "The Lord is God! The Lord is God!"

STEPS WE CAN TAKE TO DEVELOP THE COURAGE TO BE USED BY GOD:

1. We must be convinced that one plus God constitutes a distinct majority.
 - A. The key question in life is NOT: What can I do? The key question in life IS: What can God do?
 - B. The size of your God will determine the size of your courage.

2. We must be potential-oriented rather than problem-oriented.
 - A. We are all faced with a series of great opportunities, brilliantly disguised as unsolvable problems.
 - B. If we can learn to see the potential of God working rather than focusing on the impossibility of our problems, we will discover the courage to act.
3. We must focus not on our ability but on our availability to God.