

1 Kings 17:1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”

Three years pass...

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.” ² So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria,

¹⁶ So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. ¹⁷ When he saw Elijah, he said to him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”

¹⁸ “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. ¹⁹ 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.”

²⁰ So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. 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.”

But the people said nothing.

²² Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only one of the LORD’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. ²³ Get two bulls for us. Let Baal’s prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. ²⁴ Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire—he is God.”

Then all the people said, “What you say is good.”

²⁵ Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire.” ²⁶ So they took the bull given them and prepared it.

Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

²⁷ At noon Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” ²⁸ So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. ²⁹ Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which had been torn down. ³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, “Your name shall be Israel.” ³² With the stones he built

an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. ³³ He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, “Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.”

³⁴ “Do it again,” he said, and they did it again.

“Do it a third time,” he ordered, and they did it the third time. ³⁵ The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

³⁶ 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. ³⁷ Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”

³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!”

⁴⁰ Then Elijah commanded them, “Seize the prophets of Baal. Don’t let anyone get away!” They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.

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

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.”

⁴⁴ 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.’”

⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. ⁴⁶ The power of the LORD came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear friends in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Those of you who are into US football know that it's Super Bowl Sunday. This is a day when certain advertisers will pay big dollars to get airtime during this hugely popular, televised game. They are saying it'll cost 7 million dollars for a 30 second commercial. The list of commercials always includes alcohol sellers and there's often a competition between Pepsi and Coke. But if you really stop and think about it, there's no drink more important for us as human beings than water. Good, clean water is very important for life. We don't often think about how important it is because we take it for granted. We turn on our taps and there's clean water. It's always there. But think of many indigenous Canadians who live on reserves where they have a boil water advisory. The water coming out of their taps is not safe to drink. So often we take water for granted and even prefer other drinks to simple water, though every other drink is mostly water. Just one day without any water or anything else to drink and you'll realize how much you need it. Without water, we die.

A Drought Because of Idolatry

The problem in our Bible story today is related to water. There's a drought in Samaria—the place where Ahab is king. The drought comes due to the word of Elijah. And Elijah, no doubt, speaks on the Lord's behalf, after all he is the prophet of the Lord. Elijah pronounces God's covenant curse on Samaria because of the wickedness of King Ahab detailed in this book.

Look in your Bibles at 1 Kings 16:30-33 where it says that Ahab was worse than any of the kings before him—doing more evil in the eyes of the Lord than those before him did. He is worse than King Jereboam who is noteworthy for splitting the kingdom of Israel and setting up idol worship in his part of the kingdom.

Just to clarify, up to that point Israel included all 12 tribes. But after this time, Jereboam ruled over 10 tribes which were called Israel or Samaria or the northern tribes. Meanwhile, Rehoboam ruled over 2 tribes, generally called Judah, with the capital city of Jerusalem. This smaller part of the nation maintained the religious centre of God's people.

Jeroboam is no dummy. He makes Samaria his capital city for Israel. But he knows that Jerusalem, the religious centre of God's people—the 12 tribes—will always be a pull in the hearts of the people in the 10 tribes he rules. So he institutes a state religion to keep the people close to home and under his control. He builds two shrines or temples, one in Bethel, in the south of his kingdom, the other in Dan, near its northern border. He tells his people that they can worship the Lord at these places rather than go to Jerusalem. He operates those temples with priests of his own choosing, rather than Levites who were God's appointed servants for the temple. And then he moves the fall holy day season from the

seventh month to the eighth. All this became a sin for Israel, according to 1 Kings 12:30. But it secures Jereboam's thirst for power.

A few chapters later we read about the reign of Ahab, the king in our story today. Ahab's sin as king made Jereboam's sins look like child's play or small potatoes. His biggest failure in God's eyes comes through his marriage to Jezebel, a foreign woman who brought her foreign gods with her among Israel. Consequently, Ahab joins Jezebel in worshiping Baal and promoting Baal worship with all its dependence on Baal for rain and fertility. In addition, Baal worship included a whole host of sexually immoral practices, including child sacrifices in its worst form.

Ahab is self-absorbed and power hungry. He mixes religion and politics by marrying anyone—even Jezebel—if it gives him some good political advantage. He desecrates the holiness of marriage by using it as a tool to make political alliances with strong neighbouring countries. And along with this comes the gods of those brides. So Ahab bows before any god that helps secure his reign on power.

Do we ever do that? Do we bow before other gods in order to get what we want? Do we ever bow before the god of money—look the other way when something shady is going down because it'll put money in our pocket? Do we bow to the gods of social media, sacrificing God's values of love for our neighbour in order to get some likes on our pages? We might bow to the god of sex in our culture because we like what it offers us even though we know the porn we watch comes at the expense of young people who are often victims of sex trafficking being held as slaves so that someone else can get rich. I'm pretty sure we all have areas where we either consciously or unconsciously are bowing to another god.

Ahab has made a choice to bow before Baal if it helps him maintain his power. And his thirst for power is seen in the way he kills anyone who gets in his way. His righthand man in the palace is Obadiah. This is not the same Obadiah who is a prophet and has a Bible book named after him. This Obadiah works for King Ahab but the text makes it clear that he's not onside with all of Ahab's idolatry. Look at 1 Kings 18:3&4. It includes the bracketed commentary:

^{1 Ki 18:3b} "(Obadiah was a devout believer in the Lord. 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.)"

Obadiah has been around Ahab long enough to know that this man will kill him without thinking twice if he gets angry at him for some reason.

Ahab is on the hunt for water but he's also out to get Elijah the prophet of God who **pronounced** the drought. So far though, Ahab hasn't been able to get his hands on Elijah. Then suddenly Elijah appears to Obadiah and tells Obadiah to let Ahab know that he's in town.

But Obadiah wasn't born yesterday. He thinks for a moment and says what amounts to: "Wait a minute, Elijah. You have a habit of disappearing. If I tell Ahab you're here and then he comes here but you've disappeared again, he's going to

be angry with me and he'll slip a sword into me without blinking an eye. Please understand, I'm on God's side, like you. But I'd like to live. I don't want to die just because you aren't here when I get back with the king." And it's true. Obadiah isn't just saying he's on the Lord's side. He had protected those 100 prophets of the Lord from Jezebel, giving them food and water at a time when food and water are becoming scarce. So it's not that Obadiah isn't willing to risk his life for serving the Lord. But neither is he willing to just throw his life away. And Elijah gets that. We read,

1 Ki 18:15 *Elijah said, "As the Lord Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today."*

So Obadiah believes Elijah and gets the king.

The king arrives and immediately starts accusing Elijah of being a troublemaker. Look at v.17:

1 Ki 18:17 *When Ahab saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"*

By calling Elijah a troubler, Ahab is assuming that Elijah has **ticked off** Baal and that Baal has therefore withheld the rain, since he is the rain god. But Elijah is no pushover. He puts his life in his hands when he throws the accusation right back at the king:

1 Ki 18:18 *"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.*

"Your rejection of our covenant God has made this trouble, Ahab! Your idolatry has blinded you from seeing how you have disregarded the commands of God to worship him alone. You have added the worship of Baal in Israel and the Lord does not approve."

This was a tough exchange.

Friends, Ahab refuses to see the connection between the drought and his actions. Instead, he goes after the prophet who—in his mind—started the drought. But in reality he is the one who brought God's judgment on the nation because he turned away from the Lord. The drought is God's way of getting Ahab's attention. Ahab is concerned about water for his animals and the crops of Israel, and ultimately for himself.

But God's concern is different. God's concern is the spiritual drink that Israel is consuming. He sent a drought because Ahab and Jezebel are leading his people astray to drink—if you will—the water of Baal. They are looking to the rain god, the Canaanite god of fertility, rather than the Lord God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the one who has covenanted to be faithful to them and from whom all blessings flow.

Are we ever like Ahab? Do we get blinded to the spiritual realities in our life by our pursuit of physical comforts or power, which are really forms of idolatry? Can we lose sight of God's desires for us because we're so busy chasing after other things that we think will make us happy? Or things that we think will make our children happy? Or the things other people tell us will fill our hearts with joy? Are

we chasing wrong gods without even realizing what negative effect it is having on ourselves and our families or even our church?

Are there times when pursuing a bigger paycheck blinds us from seeing what God is calling us to do? It could be he's saying you need to spend more time with your family. Or maybe more time with him. Or that you simply need to get out of what you're doing now in order to pursue something he knows will give you much more fulfilment. Are we like Ahab, so focused on achieving or maintaining power by our own means that we don't even recognize how we've bowed the knee to other gods instead of trusting our covenant God to care for us, to lead us and to give us what we need?

Is anything coming to your mind right now as something that gets in the way of you having a better relationship with God? Is there something God has been laying on your heart? God wants you to heed his voice and follow his leading. Is he calling us to stop certain sinful activities because they are harming you, or your family, or something else?

When the Bible calls God a jealous God it's not because he's selfish. It's because he cares deeply about his people. He knows that bowing before other gods—no matter what the reason—will never do us any favours. It's not good for us because it ends up hurting us and others. And so to make the point that all other gods are harmful for us and ultimately useless, Elijah challenges the Baal prophets to a duo.

Falling Fire

Many of you know this part of the story well. It's a great story. Elijah is at his finest as he shows us that this is not a battle between him and Ahab but between the Lord his God and Baal the god of the Canaanites who Jezebel has brought into Israel. In fact, we read in v.19 that the prophets of Baal and Asherah eat at Jezebel's table, which means that money from the royal treasury is going to support this religion. They are deeply intermingled.

For some reason (I'd say it's the Lord's hand), Ahab does not kill Elijah on the spot when Obadiah gets them together. Instead, Ahab listens to Elijah and calls the Baal and Asherah prophets to Mt. Carmel for the duo and calls all the people to come and watch. Then Elijah makes a very simple proposal. The Baal prophets can call on Baal to bring fire on their sacrifice and Elijah will do the same to the Lord. And the God who answers with fire is God alone.

Elijah gives the Baal prophets first choice of everything: the bull, the altar, the wood and the prayer time. There's no coming back later to say that he had an unfair advantage of some kind. So they go at it. And Elijah seems to be having fun. He's so confident in the Lord. After Baal's prophets pray and dance, Elijah does something very uncommon in his day. He ridicules Baal. Normally, the attitude in that day—from what I'm told—was to never deny the status of another god. But Elijah refuses to grant that Baal is a god at all. Instead, he likens Baal to a human being with many limitations. He even suggests that perhaps he is busy, meaning

he's gone to the toilet! In the end, after about 6 hours of their prayers, shouting, and even slashing themselves, the Baal prophets are rendered useless and Baal inept. The conclusion is this:

^{1 Ki 18:29b} Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

Now it was Elijah's turn. He starts with rebuilding a broken altar of God. When you visit places like Israel, you discover that most often when a city was captured by an enemy, it was leveled and then rebuilt on top of the ruins. Here then we read about a demolished altar of God, indicating in one more way that Baal was the god of Israel. But Elijah takes 12 stones—one for each tribe of the united nation of Israel—and builds a new altar for the Lord. Then he did everything humanly possible to make a fire impossible to burn, including dousing the wood with water. All of this seems to have happened while the Baal prophets were still doing their thing.

The story indicates that they were done at 3:00—the time of the evening sacrifice. And v.36 says:

^{1 Ki 18:36} At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed [no fanfare like the Baal prophets; just a humble prayer]: "O LORD, 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. ³⁷ Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

^{1 Ki 18:38} Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

^{1 Ki 18:39} When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!"

I wish I could have been there to see the faces of the people and also the faces of the Baal prophets. What an indisputable victory for the Lord! Yes, Elijah was his faithful servant, but it was the Lord who answered the prayer with fire from heaven and declared—for all the people to see—that he alone is God.

The people responded as we all should by professing their faith and at the same time confessing their sin of idolatry. No longer wavering between two opinions. No longer sitting on the fence. No longer half-hearted about the Lord. Now they declared like a choir in unison, "*The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!*"

Then Elijah orders the death of all the false prophets, in keeping with the commandment of God in Deuteronomy 13. Those prophets should never have been welcome among the people of God in the first place. No more ambassadors of idols are welcome in the land where the Lord alone is God! This is God's care for his people.

Interestingly, friends, we noted that Elijah prayed at the time for the evening sacrifice which, incidentally, was the time on Good Friday when Jesus declared “It is Finished”, gave up his spirit and died for us. Think of that!! No greater sign of victory was ever given for the world. No greater indication of God’s fierce love for us has ever been demonstrated. This is God showing us just how jealous he is for our well being.

And like Israel shouting, “The Lord—he is God”, at time of Jesus’ death, the Roman centurion declared, “Surely this man was the Son of God!” And what will we do? It is good to shout it out! “The Lord—he is God!” Friends, who is God? “The Lord—he is God!”

That’s a good confession. But the story isn’t quite done.

Here Comes the Rain

The chapter began by saying the Lord told Elijah that rain was going to come. And that’s what happens next. That’s the icing on the cake. Baal, the rain god, is powerless to send fire just as he was powerless to send rain.

Now look at this: The LORD is quick to forgive his rebellious people when they reaffirm their covenant with him. And with amazing grace the prophet of God, Elijah tells King Ahab, “because you’ve repented, the covenant curse of drought is lifted. There’s nothing more to do. But you better get home as soon as possible because God is going to open the sky and send rain on our dry land. Watch for it! Here comes the rain! The rain of God’s grace. The rain of God’s love. The rain to quench the dry ground. So Ahab took off in his chariot while Elijah offered a prayer of thanksgiving. Then with supernatural power Elijah ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Ahab’s home in Jezreel—about 30 km.

I don’t know if they sat together that evening and had a glass of wine. I’d like to think they did. Their time of peacefulness was short. But maybe that night they would have talked about God’s power and grace, including the blessing of rain. I don’t know. We aren’t told.

But we can certainly do that with one another. And we probably need to do it more often in order to encourage each other to walk more closely with the Lord and to set aside our idolatry.

We are so distracted by the rush and pressure of our world that can easily lead us astray from following the Lord. We may feel like our life is a drought too. We thirst for more but we still don’t always go to the source of eternal life. We drink the stuff being sold on commercials during Super Bowl while forgetting to stay hydrated with the Water of Life, our Lord Jesus through whom we will never thirst again.

Sometimes we drive ourselves to a deep thirst for more. Our lives drain us when we pursue the wrong things. We have divided loyalties between the Lord and today’s Baals. Perhaps we get sucked into it slowly like Ahab did through Jezebel.

But today we can say “no” to that. Today we already declared, “The Lord—He is God!” So let’s get with his program. Jesus came to deliver us from sin, including the tyranny of the devil. He died at the time of the evening sacrifice thereby declaring that death was defeated and all that it represents, including our bondage to Baals in our lives. He rose victorious so that we can live fully for the Lord in his strength. Yes, Jesus has given us his Word to guide us and his Spirit to strengthen us so that we can live life for the Lord alone. That’s the place we want to be, friends. In step with Jesus, our thirst satisfied, and our life truly fulfilled as his grace becomes a steady rain nourishing our soul each day.

Amen.

SUNDAY WORSHIP

February 13, 2022 10am

Livestream on Youtube at trinitychurchedmonton
On Channel 716 at Emmanuel Home

GOD CALLS US TO WORSHIP

Welcome

Pastor Hilary

Call to Worship

* God's Greeting

* Gathering Songs: *Here I Am to Worship*
Your Great Name

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS RENEWED

Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Forgiveness

God's Will for Our Lives: Lord's Day 34, Q&A 94

Children's Message

Pastor Hilary

Children's Song: *Lord I Lift Your Name on High*

* Song: *I Stand Amazed (How Marvelous)*

Wee Worship Children dismiss at the start of this song

GOD GIVES US HIS WORD

Prayer for the Word

Pastor Rich

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 17:1, 18:1-2, 16-46

Sermon: ***Elijah – Here Comes the Rain!***

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

* Song: *Build My Life*

Congregational Prayer

Pastor Hilary

Tithes & Offerings

Pastor Rich

1. Trinity Ministries

2. Deacons Fund

GOD SENDS US IN HIS STRENGTH

* God's Parting Blessing

* Sending Song: *Crown Him (Majesty)*