

Sunday, August 13, 2023

First Lesson: 1 Kings 17:1

Second Lesson: Acts 10: 9-33

Sermon Series: Revivals that Move Mountains: Elijah and Peter Week 6

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- We are continuing with week 6 of our 8-week sermon series called “Revivals that Move Mountains.” This is a sermon series that is designed to get our minds, hearts and bodies refueled, renewed, re-energized and refocused on the work of the ministry that is always before us;
- Therefore in unpacking the role in which revivals have played in the scriptures, I would like to use author Geoff Waugh’s book Revival Fire, that I mentioned last week; in which we now have a slide for just in case you would like to take some notes, that reveals 9 commonalities that these revivals shared;
 1. They occurred in times of moral darkness and national depression.

2. Each began in the heart of a consecrated servant of God who became the energizing power behind it [only 1 spark].
3. Each revival rested on the Word of God, and most were the result of proclaiming God's Word with power.
4. All resulted in a return to the worship of God.
5. Each witnessed the destruction of idols where they existed.
6. In each revival, there was a recorded separation from sin.
7. In every revival the people returned to obeying God's laws.
8. There was a restoration of great joy and gladness.
9. Each revival was followed by a period of national prosperity.

- Therefore, today's goal will be to look at the revivals that are occurring in both of our lessons today; see how these commonalities might reveal itself to us, with the hope that they make speak to our situation today.

- Therefore in looking at our first lesson of scripture this morning, we see # 2 on our list come into fruition—for the person who would be the spark for the revival would be Elijah.

- So who is Elijah?

- Well last week, I already preached a part of Elijah's story when he was in the cave, seeking solace from his enemies and in doing so, he was able to hear audibly from the Lord Gods-self;

- However, to tell a little bit more about who Elijah was and why our first lesson is so important for us to learn from as it pertains to revivals; biblical scholarship reveals to us that Elijah was a mighty prophet during a turbulent time in Israel's history.

- For the nation had turned away from the Lord to worship Baal, and King Ahab had formed an alliance with Sidon by marrying their princess, Jezebel.

- Elijah was sent to show Israel the evil of their ways and encourage them to return to the Lord.

- Therefore, it is in our first lesson, we are invited to witness a crucial time in the history of Judah and Israel, where the Prophet Elijah suddenly appears on the scene.

- For Elijah would become the dominant spiritual force in Israel during the dark days of Ahab's apostasy.

- For King Ahab rejected God and all of God's ways.

- Meanwhile, Elijah, whose name meaning Yahweh is my God; sets the tone for what the reader can anticipate between these two men—conflict....and lots of it!

- For Ahab's government officially supported the worship of Baal and other gods;

- **Thereby revealing to us why this would be such a crucial time in the history of Israel, for it looked as if the worship of the true God might be completely eliminated in the northern kingdom altogether.**

- One biblical scholar I researched was quoted as saying; "The land swarmed with the priests of Baal and

of the groves – proud of Court favour; **glorying in their sudden rise to power**; insolent, greedy, licentious, and debased. The fires of persecution were lit, and began to burn with fury.”

- For out of this citing, I am drawn to the phrase, **“glorying in their sudden rise to power;”**
- For the justice part of my conscience can’t help but think about all of these broken systems of our day, right here in our own community; “glorying in their sudden rise to power,”
- For it is difficult for me to wrap my head around how one can **glory in the midst of people’s suffering!**
- For instance, why dozens of us from Justice in Action came together at the latest Lancaster County Board of Commissioners meeting, to voice our concern over the recent million dollar proposal to support boarding contracts in our local jail is because as I quote myself in a recent interview that I had with Channel 8; “A lot of those in jail right now, they’re pre-

trial. In our country, you're innocent until proven guilty, but when you're housed in this manner, it's almost like your sentence has already happened for them. A lot of those that are housed are losing jobs, they don't have the support system of their family, and that's all just devastating."

- Furthermore, why we as a justice coalition are continuing to fight for the prioritization of funds to be focused instead on eliminating fees and increasing staffing, is so that it would give more people access to successful diversion programs.
- **For Church family, this is how the work of justice responds to power that is not distributed fairly and equitably;**
- It is through holding our governmental officials accountable to this idea that with the power they do hold, **they can ,choose to** embody Matthew 25: 37-40;
- **For they can choose to** see the hungry,
- **They can choose to** see the thirsty,
- **They can choose to** see the stranger,

- **They can choose to** see the naked,
- **They can choose to** see the imprisoned;
- **They can choose to** invest this power in a way that would replenish the Earth and all who inhabit it;
- However, as I return back to our text, we learn that unfortunately King Ahab does not choose to commit to the God whose vision includes everyone and their well being.
- Furthermore, the Lord's response is thereby revealed in Elijah's prophetic voice that we see in our single verse of scripture that I will paraphrase just a bit; For Elijah says essentially, 'Fine....As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.'
- In laypersons terms, the response of the Lord to King Ahab's choice, **was to bring forth a drought.**
- And at this revelation, my first initial question becomes, "How in the world is a revival supposed to come forth through a drought?"

- Which then led me to research a little bit more about droughts.
- For the first question I researched was why are droughts important?
- For in defining what a drought is first, it is a prolonged dry period, in the natural climate cycle that can occur anywhere in the world.
- It is a slow-onset disaster characterized by the lack of precipitation, resulting in a water shortage.
- Furthermore, droughts can have a serious impact on health, agriculture, economies, energy and the environment.
- Therefore, after learning all of this, I don't know about you, but I'm even more skeptical for how a revival can begin with a drought!
- Which then led me to research what the positive effects of droughts can be; for the theologian in me knows that there is a reason why there is an emphasis of a drought in our lesson today.

- So I learned that the plus side of a drought is **that it can balance the health of the wetlands.**

- For wetlands are areas where water covers the soils or is present either at or near the surface of the soil all year for varying periods of time during the year, including during the growing season.

- Therefore, various plants grow in wetlands that allows a plethora of creatures and animals to thrive in it.

- **Secondly** I learned that droughts also allow certain species to grow, in which I am beginning to gain a lot of preaching energy and inspiration in learning this.

- For I have learned in my research, that long periods of droughts, allow certain plants and animals to survive.

- This is because certain species have special characteristics to withstand long, dry periods.

Kangaroos for example live in burrows that are neither too hot nor cold during the day.

- Therefore, where droughts persist for long periods of time, some plant and animal species can colonize the dry regions and grow.
- **Finally, I learned that** droughts over all raises awareness on the importance of water saving as a whole.
- For if one were never to have to deal with a drought, we may not be as concerned with how much water we are really consuming and even wasting.
- However, droughts often teach us how to conserve water and even recycle it, simply because we do not take for granted that it is accessible.
- **Therefore, this is the physical possibilities that come with droughts, that I am seeing is related to the spiritual happenings in our story today.**
- For the Elijah narrative does not follow the national scene and portray the increasing difficulties occasioned by the prolonged drought.
- Instead, it follows the activities of Elijah during this period; particularly how Elijah found seclusion by the

brook Cherith, while the power of the living God stopped the normal process of rainfall.

- **In simpler terms, Elijah found his strength in the Lord, in the midst of the drought.**

- In reflecting on last week's sermon that emphasized the need for us to find our quiet, so that we can really hear the piece of the vision that God has instilled in each one of us;

- I stopped by to suggest that **it was in the season of this drought**, that Elijah began to find his true quiet;

- **It was in the season of this drought**, that Elijah was beginning to even find his own sense of balance and direction for how he would confront King Ahab.

- For as the period of drought lengthened, there was no doubt that the worshipers of Baal increased their activities greatly in an attempt to encourage Baal to send rain.

- However, as the weeks, months and even years passed, Baal gave no relief to the drought-stricken area.

- Thereby leaving us all with this imagery of Elijah remained in seclusion, while the word of God revealed its superiority to the work of Baal.
- For the conclusion of Elijah's story in this instance, that I invite you to read further on your own time, **is that basically it was Elijah's learnings from the drought**, that guided Elijah to pray to the Lord, to show the people the true power of God.
- For ultimately the people knew that Elijah's God was the true God, for it was Elijah's Lord that sent the rain....not Baal.
- However, the biggest revelation as I pull in our story of Acts into this conversation, in which the spark of a revival is initiated now through Peter, **is that sometimes it takes us to go through our own droughts, for us to be able to move into a place of what it means to be truly open to God.**
- It is this idea that some of us can't really appreciate the beauty of the sunset at the mountain top, if we have never spent some time in the valley.

- For I love a good sunset don't you?
- However, **if I am honest**, if I were to be gifted with a picturesque sunset every evening, I'm not sure if I would notice it all of the time.
- **If I'm honest** with you, knowing myself the way that I do, I would imagine that if I were blessed to have a perfect sunset every day, I would eventually become so consumed with the comings and goings of my life, that there would be days, even sometimes weeks, where I would barely take the moment to look up and notice her beauty.
- So this is a long way of my suggesting that **sometimes we need a metaphorical drought in our lives, to be able to truly appreciate a sunset.**
- And I submit we are witnessing a similar truth unfolding in our Acts text with Peter.
- For if you remember, last week, we looked at the story of Cornelius, who became the revival for Peter, mainly because where Peter's temptation was to say

“no,” or “not so” to God, Cornelius response was to essentially say “yes,” or “what is it,” to God.

- Now in our story today, we are witnessing the second part of our Acts story, where the story tells us that Peter went up upon the housetop to pray ...in which he fell into a trance (vv. 9, 10).
- For as God prepared Cornelius to receive His message through Peter, so God also prepared Peter to deliver that message to Cornelius.
- For at about twelve o'clock noon, the sixth hour, Peter ascended to the flat roof of his host's house (likely by an outside stairway), for prayer and meditation while he awaited the preparation of the mid-day meal.
- These housetops of oriental houses commonly served as places of prayer, meditation, recreation, and even for sleeping purposes (cf. 1 Sam. 9:25, 26; 2 Sam. 11:2; 2 Kings 23:12; Neh. 8:5, 6).
- Overcome with hunger and drowsiness, Peter fell into a trance.

- You see Church for me, **this idea of Peter being overcome with hunger and drowsiness for me, coincides with this concept of drought we have been talking about with Elijah;**
- For Peter was in a place of both physical and spiritual hunger, **where the Lord was about to use Peter's drought circumstances,** to advance the growth of God's kingdom;
- **A kingdom** that was once understood to be just for the Jewish believers,
- **A kingdom** that Peter would soon understand was meant for the Gentiles too.
- Therefore, it was through Peter's physical hunger and thirst... **it was through Peter's drought,** that a powerful vision comes to Peter.
- For it was during this trance experience, God gave Peter an object lesson in the form of a great sheet filled with all manner of animals, both clean and unclean.
- The great sheet-like vessel which was let down by four corners upon the earth may be best understood as

a “sail canvas,” perhaps suggested in part by Peter’s fishing trade and in part by the appearance of sail ships at sea near Simon’s house (see Acts 10:6).

- Likewise Peter’s hunger may account for the revelation having centered about food.
- Either way, this portion of the story generated a lot of conversation in our Wednesday Night Applying the Sermon to Life class simply because everyone understood the challenges that Peter had in this revelation, simply because all that Peter learned in his customs and tradition in regards to the necessity of eating clean foods, was debunked on that day, when God essentially came onto the scene and shook up Peter’s world view, by naming that it essentially didn’t matter.
- Similarly to how we as a Church culture have come to our own reconciling awakening, that states as a Church community; we have identified that our spiritual DNA is to be a community centered, focused and

driven community, seeking to share God's affirming love to everyone.

- We are a Reconciling Congregation whose story reflects a statement of diversity and love for all, that is inclusive to all persons regardless of education, ability, economic status, gender, race, ethnic group, age or sexual orientation.
- For in both drought realities, the hope becomes in these stories, like Peter, that as a church community, we will be able to identify more confidently and courageously, that our differences amongst ourselves...**it doesn't matter;**
- Our different skin colors... **it doesn't matter;**
- Our different socio economic backgrounds...**it doesn't matter;**
- Our education backgrounds...**it doesn't matter....**
- Our gender...**it doesn't matter....**
- That however we have been taught that being different is a problem....**none of it matters.....**

- For as I bring in verse 15 of our Acts lesson; “What God has made clean, we must not call profane.”
- In other words, **God forgives** us all;
- **God created** us all;
- **God extends** God’s grace to all;
- **God loves us all;**
- Thereby revealing a powerful reminder and assertion, **that none of us have any business calling anything impure that God has made clean!**
- In light of this revelation, **what right do we have** to call someone unworthy, when God has deemed them worthy!
- For like Psalms 139 says; For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

16 Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

17 How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!

- So I will stress this again, **what right do we have** to place judgment on anyone, when the most High has deemed all of us to be made with the Highest fabric of God's handiwork?
- This Church family was the vision that Peter was given that day;
- It was a vision that essentially took Peter seven swans-a swimming, six geese a laying, four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree to fully unpack and receive...
- However the good news is that in spite of himself, Peter had learned the lesson of the vision well....and eventually came without protest....**for what right does he have essentially not to?**

- Thereby making it possible for vs 33 of our lesson; to fully be able to come into fruition— So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.”
- Thereby leaving us with a prayer to reflect upon; that we may continue to be open to **what it is** God wants to say to us!
- Amen!