

## Rise Up: From Fear to Hope

1 Kings 18:1-2, 17-26, 36-39  
September 17, 2023

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The story is told of a rabbi in a European village who one day summoned the townspeople to the village square. He said he had an important announcement.

The people gathered, but not without grumbling at the inconvenience. The merchants resented having to leave their businesses. Wives complained because they had so many errands to run. But out of respect, they went begrudgingly to the town square.

When all were present, the rabbi said, "I wish to announce there is a God in the world." That was all he said. But the people understood. They knew they had been acting as if God did not exist, was not important.

In our Old Testament lesson for today, the people of Elijah's time were acting as if God did not exist, at least not the One True God, the God who claimed as his own the people of Israel, our spiritual ancestors.

Rather than loving and respecting God, the Israelites followed a sinful and misguided leader named King Ahab, who for political reasons married the wicked Jezebel.

As the king's wife, Jezebel led Ahab and the Israelites to worship false gods. Under her influence, Ahab disregarded the rights and basic needs of the common people and defied the prophets of God, including Elijah who alone was left alive after Jezebel had all true prophets executed in her quest for power and influence.<sup>1</sup> All of this – and most importantly the worship of false gods – resulted in a severe drought throughout the land.

After years of drought with little-to-no food and water, 1 Kings tells us that "the Lord came to Elijah" saying, "Go, present yourself to Ahab; I will send rain on the earth."

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jezebel-queen-of-Israel>

When Ahab saw Elijah, he said to him, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?” Elijah answered, “I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father’s house, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals, the false gods.

Of course, following false gods back then was just as foolhardy and dangerous as following false gods today – whatever it is that has you take your eye off God, whatever leads you to self-destructive behaviors, whatever you’ve convinced yourself you can’t live without, only to find that it brings you no joy, only struggle, fear and hopelessness.

With so much of our lives, our world geared toward that which is not God, it’s no wonder our families, friends and communities are struggling. And yet we continue to do the same things expecting different results. Where is the hope in that? There isn’t any.

True hope comes from bold action – bold action like that of the Prophet Elijah who calls out the king for being nothing but a trouble-maker. That’s very risky for Elijah. He’s the only true prophet of God left. The false prophets working against him number 850 if you count both Ahab’s and Jezebel’s followers.

But as a true prophet of God, Elijah – though there’s only one of him – Elijah has reason for hope, the certain, unfailing hope that comes from following the One True God, over and above the ways of the world.

“Have all Israel assemble for me at Mount Carmel,” he says to Ahab, along “with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.” Elijah is counting on God to show the people the error of their ways, to turn their hearts back to him.

After “Ahab sent (for) the Israelites and assembled the prophets at Mount Carmel,” Elijah came to the people and said, “How long will you go limping with two different opinions” – how long will you try having it both ways.

Boy, can we relate to that. You don’t have to look too far to see people who want all the blessings of God with little-if-any of the selfless service and devotion that Jesus calls us to.

You can’t have it both ways! You can try, and then see what that brings you. After all, that’s what we’ve been doing for years now as a society, with more and more people finding reason to let worship and service get crowded out by busy schedules, busy schedules that leave us exhausted rather than rejuvenated in the Lord, overextended rather than prayerfully and joyfully committed, committed to something greater than ourselves, greater than our frivolous pleasures, our schedules, our plans.

People just don’t see that it is in faithfully and sacrificially putting God first in our lives that the true and fruitful blessing of the Lord are found. Those who don’t see that, who have forgotten that, those who’ve never learned that, they go limping through life, with little energy and even less sure hope and true direction.

When Elijah said to the people, “If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, follow him, the people did not answer him a word.” Not one word to say. They can’t even bring themselves to simply affirm their faith in God and their place as God’s chosen ones. Now that’s a people of fear; that’s a people with no hope.

What can God do with such a people as that? Well, we’re about to find out.

Elijah does not give up on the people of God because Elijah will never give up on the One True God. In taking his stand for his people, in showing them who the true god is

Elijah calls for two burnt offerings to be prepared – one by the prophets of the false god Baal and one that he will prepare as a follower of the One True God. And Elijah declares to all the people that whichever god answers with fire is indeed God. And this time, all the people answer, saying, “Well spoken!”

In saying that, the people have taken an important step. Limp as they may through life, here they’ve shown themselves to at least be open to knowing God again. Those who are open to knowing and experiencing God in their lives truly need someone like Elijah, someone who will never give up on God or God’s people, someone like you who can take a stand for those left wandering through life.

Who in your life needs someone to take stand for them? Who needs to be reminded what a life of faith look likes? Who needs to have their relationship with God rekindled, their connection to the church reestablished?

Think about that, because someone has to take a stand for them. And if not you, then who?

God is just waiting for the opportunity to be in relationship with his people, waiting for someone like you to show them that prioritizing God can be done and is important, when it comes to living a joyous, faithful life.

When Elijah called out to the Lord on behalf of the people, God sent fire down from heaven and he took up the burnt-offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and even the water that was in the trench around the offering.

“When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, ‘The Lord indeed is God; the Lord indeed is God.’”

If we’re going to have more people declaring, “The Lord indeed is God; the Lord indeed is God” – through their words and actions and choices – then we, like Elijah, need to be declaring it through our words and actions and choices. That’s how we and all people will finally Rise Up: From Fear to Hope, the hope that is found amid the faithful actions of those like us who still serve and call on the One True God. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Loving God, we do not spend as much time in prayer as we should. Although you have extended an open invitation to seek your face, to call upon you in our hour of need, we sit in turmoil instead, filled with questions and in a quandary about which direction our lives should take. We go around and around and get lost. We spin in circles and don't know which way to turn.

Help us to stop and remember that when there is seemingly no way out, prayer provides the pathway.

We pray for those with struggles and concerns in this congregation. We offer our thanks, O God, for you and for our family of faith, and for the strength of our church that reaches beyond its walls.

Slow us down to listen. Slow us down so that we can hear where you would have us go and what you would have us do. Slow us down so that we can act according to what we believe.

Nurture in us our sense of wonder. Strengthen our bonds of family at home and at church. Let our lives be a prayer, manifesting the love of God that we might be true disciples of Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**