

“When It’s God’s Move”

Today we are going to talk about a subject that none of us like. We’re going to talk about...waiting. Am I right? We hate having to wait on anything. I know that I do. I think all of us probably detest waiting in lines. At Walmart or the grocery store, when it’s time to check out, what are we looking for? We’re looking for the shortest and fastest line. Am I the only one who always picks the wrong lane? Michele and I will be at Walmart and she’ll tell me to go ahead and get in line while she goes and gets one last item. So, I look at all of my lane options and try to pick the shortest, fastest moving line. And of course, I always pick the slowest one. There’s some issue with whoever is in the front of the line (price check) or I get behind the one person who still uses a check to pay. Then Michele comes and fusses at me for getting in the slowest lane.

But it’s not just waiting in lines that we hate. We hate waiting at the doctor’s office or waiting for the doctor’s office to call with our test results. We hate waiting in traffic. We hate waiting for people to call, text, or email us back. We hate waiting for our vacations to get here. Sometimes, we just hate waiting for life to get better. But, did you know that sometimes God has us wait for a reason?

And so, to help us better understand “waiting” I want us to look at one of the craziest and weirdest stories in the Bible. So, if you would please turn in your Bibles or on your phones or tablets to 1 Kings 18. Now, if you’ve grown up in church, you’ll know this story well. It’s the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. If you don’t know this story, then let me set it up a little bit. King Ahab was king over Israel and he was a bad guy. He worshiped the false god Baal and the Bible says that he did what was evil in the Lord’s sight. It even says that he did more evil than any of the kings before him. So, God raised up the Prophet Elijah to confront King Ahab. And Elijah told him there would be no dew or rain during the next few years unless he (Elijah) gave the word. Immediately after that, God sent Elijah into hiding and now here we are 3 ½ years later. There has been no dew or rain for 3 ½ years. Needless, to say the king and people of Israel are not tremendously happy with Elijah or with God. But now, Elijah has finally come out of hiding and is ready to confront and challenge King Ahab, the people of Israel, and the prophets of Baal.

1 Kings 18:20-40 (NLT)

²⁰ So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel. ²¹ Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, “How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!” But the people were completely silent.

²² Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only prophet of the LORD who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets. ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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.

²⁵ 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.”

²⁶ So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning until noontime, shouting, “O Baal, answer us!” But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced, hobbling around the altar they had made.

²⁷ About noontime Elijah began mocking them. “You’ll have to shout louder,” he scoffed, “for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is daydreaming, or is relieving himself.^[b] Or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened!”

²⁸ So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out. ²⁹ They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, but still there was no sound, no reply, no response.

³⁰ 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. ³¹ He took twelve stones, one to represent each of the

tribes of Israel,^[c] ³² and he used the stones to rebuild the altar in the name of the LORD. Then he dug a trench around the altar large enough to hold about three gallons.^[d] ³³ He piled wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood.^[e]

Then he said, “Fill four large jars with water, and pour the water over the offering and the wood.”

³⁴ 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, ³⁵ and the water ran around the altar and even filled the trench.

³⁶ At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,^[f] prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. ³⁷ 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.”

³⁸ 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 trench! ³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, “The LORD—he is God! Yes, the LORD is God!”

⁴⁰ Then Elijah commanded, “Seize all the prophets of Baal. Don’t let a single one escape!” So the people seized them all, and Elijah took them down to the Kishon Valley and killed them there.

This is literally one of my favorite stories in the Bible. It’s good versus evil. It’s the prophets of Baal versus Elijah. It’s Baal versus God. And all of Israel has shown up to watch. This is like the most exciting worship service ever! The prophets of Baal are dancing around, cutting themselves, and yelling for Baal to show up and consume the sacrifice. That is a crazy scene! On top of it, Elijah is there mocking them. “Shout louder. Maybe your god can’t hear you. Maybe he is asleep. Or maybe he is on a trip. Or even maybe, he’s in restroom and he’s busy using the

facilities.” Wow! Elijah is gutsy. He’s all by himself and there are 450 prophets of Baal.

Well, Baal never shows up and now it’s Elijah’s turn. He builds an altar with a trench around it and puts the sacrifice on it. And to further mock the prophets of Baal he had water poured all over the altar and the sacrifice 3 times. Water was literally overflowing from the trench he had built. Then he calmly prayed for God to consume the sacrifice and immediately fire from heaven consumed everything. And I mean everything. It burned the sacrifice, the wood, the stones used in making the altar, the water that was in the trenches, and even all the dust.

When the people saw what happened they fell on their faces and cried out “The Lord is God!”. Then they seized all of the prophets of Baal, took them down to the valley, and Elijah killed them all.

What a crazy story! But you know what? This is a good day for the Prophet Elijah. You have to remember that prophets were generally not well liked. Why? Because they only showed up when God was not happy with how the Jewish people were doing things. And yet, here’s Elijah having the best day of ministry ever. If this happened now, in modern times, he would probably be “trending” online. His social media would probably blow up. If you don’t know what that means, don’t worry about it. I know what it means, but I don’t care.

So, it’s a great day and we cheer for Elijah. But what we don’t see is what he went through to get to this point. God sent him into hiding for 3 ½ years. He had to wait for 3 ½ years. And so, to see a little bit of what he went through, we have to go back to 1 Kings 17. We’ll start in verse 2. This takes place right after Elijah told King Ahab that it wasn’t going to rain until he (Elijah) gave the say so.

² Then the LORD said to Elijah, ³ “Go to the east and hide by Kerith Brook, near where it enters the Jordan River. ⁴ Drink from the brook and eat what the ravens bring you, for I have commanded them to bring you food.”

⁵ So Elijah did as the LORD told him and camped beside Kerith Brook, east of the Jordan. ⁶ The ravens brought him bread and meat each

morning and evening, and he drank from the brook. ⁷ But after a while the brook dried up, for there was no rainfall anywhere in the land.

Here's another crazy story. God tells Elijah to hide by a brook. There he would have water to drink and that ravens would bring him food. What? This is like Moses and the people of Israel out in the desert type of stuff (with the manna and quail). Verse 6 even says that the ravens would bring him bread and meat. Where were they getting the bread? What kind of meat were they bringing him? I don't know. But, regardless, here was Elijah, being obedient to God and God was providing for him.

Side note: when you say "yes" to God, you get to experience things that other people don't. I can't promise you will always get to have enjoyable experiences (sometimes Ravens bring you food), but they will most likely be unique.

So, Elijah is waiting for God to move and is hiding out by this brook where the ravens are bringing him food. He is doing exactly what God told him to do. I don't say this lightly, he is literally in the center of God's will. God has promised to take care of him. God has big plans for him. He's just waiting for God to tell him what to do next. And then, the brook dries up. The brook is his source of water, his source of life and now it's gone. Have you ever been there? God has led you to a certain job, or town, or church, or relationship, or to a school and you know that God wants you to be there and he's given you a dream and promised to take care of you. And you are just waiting for God to make it all come true. But then all of a sudden, the brook dries up. It's devastating. God has promised you one thing and now you feel like He is breaking that promise. And you are looking around for help. And yet all you see is the dried up brook. And you cry out to God and nothing. Doesn't God know what you are going through? Doesn't He care? Where is He? In those situations, when your brook has dried up and it seems like all is lost, it's easy to wonder if He even hears you.

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Does God hear us? Why doesn't He just give us what we want when we want it? Why make us wait? While we are waiting, why does our brook

have to dry up so often? Why does it seem like God is breaking His promises and letting our dreams die? Let me try to answer those questions:

1. **Why doesn't He just give us what we want when we want it?**

Answer-because character is not formed by getting what you want when you want it. I'll repeat. Character is not formed by getting what you want when you want it. To develop character, you must go through difficult times and truly learn what it means to depend on God. James 1:2-4 says "When trouble comes your way let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So, let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed you will be strong in character and ready for anything". To truly develop character we have to have our faith tested and our endurance has to have a chance to grow. Parents, why don't we give our kids what they want when they want it? Because we want them to develop character. If you never tell your kids "no" they will grow up to be brats and people won't like them. Amen?

2. **Why does the brook have to dry up?** Because it's easy to get enamored by the beauty of the brook. But when the brook dries up, God gets your full attention. God doesn't want you to settle for the brook when he has something better in store for you. What God wants is for you to be desperate. In Mark chapter 5 there is a story of a woman who was bleeding for 12 years.

3. **Why is God breaking His promises?** Here's the thing: He isn't breaking His promises. You just can't see past His process. His promises are still true, but His process for getting you to His promises is harder than you anticipated. Remember, your dream is not gone, or dead, or denied. It's just delayed. God is still faithful and He is still present. He hasn't left you alone. Joshua 1:9 says "Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

4. **Why make us wait?** God makes us wait so that we will be transformed from what we are now to what he wants us to be. And

sometimes I believe God has us wait simply to make us appreciate what we've been waiting for that much more when we finally get it or get there. Isn't that true. When you have to wait for something, it's that much sweeter when you finally get it.

All of this was happening to Elijah. God was building character and obedience in him. And to do it, he made the brook dry up. God knew the brook was going to dry up. It was not a surprise to him. And when the brook dries up in your life, it's not a surprise to God either.

For 3 ½ years, Elijah was waiting. For 3 ½ years, Elijah was in hiding and learning to be completely dependent on God. Because after the brook dried up, God sent Elijah to Zarephath. And once again God provided for him there in miraculous ways.

And through all of this, I believe that God was preparing Elijah for his battle with the prophets of Baal. It took 3 ½ years for Elijah to be transformed into the man who would stare down King Ahab and the prophets of Baal on that mountainside. But when it finally came, I bet it was definitely worth the wait.

A couple of weeks ago Pastor Kevin mentioned that I had just reached my 11 year anniversary here at the church. That's a long time for one person to stay at one church. For those of you who have been a part of the church for a while you probably know that I worked at a church in Raleigh before coming here. It wasn't a good situation and I won't go into the details again. Just know that it was bad. So, many of you probably think that those are the only 2 churches that I've served in. Well, you would be wrong. Mt. Pleasant is the 6th church that I've worked at. That's right, 6. I have been serving in churches since I was 22 years old. I have been leading worship in churches since I was 18 years old. And when I was 19, God put a dream and a desire in my heart to serve him through music. At first, I didn't know what path that would mean for my life. But, eventually I came to realize God wanted me to serve in the local church. And so I started my journey working in churches. And in each one of those 6 churches I believed that God wanted me to be there. And so I would go and do my best. I would see all of the possibilities and potential that the church and the people had. But each time the brook would dry up. And I

would be left waiting and wondering. God had planted a dream and a promise within me and every time it wouldn't work out at one of these churches it felt like He was breaking His promise to me. But that wasn't the case. He was just transforming me into the person I needed to be (not that He's done transforming me). My dream wasn't denied. It was just delayed. And never in a million years would I have guessed that my dream would be fulfilled here at Mt. Pleasant. And yet, it has.

So, thank you for helping fulfill my dream and just know that if God has you waiting, it's for a reason. Just trust Him.

Let's pray.