

Series: **The Courageous Life** – week 4

CDOBC – beginning on 9/13/15

Today's Title: **"Courage When You Feel Alone"**

*October 4, 2015 ~ 1 Kings 18-19*

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**OBJECTIVE:** To help believers have confidence that we are never alone.

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Elinor MacDonald is moving to Seattle, WA. Today is her last Sunday with us.

Opening prayer

Do you know what makes sports such an enjoyable activity for me?

The competition...the competitive spirit of players and coaches.

The emotions of winning and losing...

I enjoy the tremendous strength, speed, flexibility, strategy and skill of college and pro sports – but what makes it great for me is the competitive spirit of the coaches and players – and the emotional roller coaster of winning and losing.

Sports is ***"Soap operas for Men"***

Last year's Super-bowl – The Seattle Seahawks had a 10 point lead in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half – only to lose that lead – and the Patriots were leading 28-24.

**(Video 1)** With just over 1:00 left in the game, Seattle wide receiver Jermaine Kearse makes an unbelievable catch around the 4-yard line. Seattle now looks like they might win the game – if only they can score a touchdown.

The Patriots were jubilant a moment ago – now it looks like they will lose due to a crazy – amazing catch on the 4-yard line.

Everyone watching the game believes the Seahawks – with their running back Marshawn Lynch – will make a miraculous comeback and win the game.

**(Video 2)** However, another huge swing of emotion surprises everyone as Seattle makes the decision to pass the ball instead of handing the ball off to Marshawn Lynch – the pass is intercepted – and this play seals the Patriot’s win.

Competition – emotions – highs and lows – joy and tears.

The same can be said about our everyday life.

We can go from moments of joy – having a great day – and then the phone rings – or a text message pops up on our phone – and we receive news that brings great distress and fear into our life.

The perfect day has quickly turned into the nightmare we have always feared.

This morning is week #4 in our series: The Courageous Life – and today we will look at the life/ministry of Elijah in **1 Kings 18-19**.

Elijah was one of the great prophets in Israel’s history – a great hero of the faith – and he was on top of the world!

Elijah served during a very difficult time in Israel's history – a time where the nation's leadership was actively pursuing things that were blatantly against God's Word. In fact, in a long line of wicked kings, Ahab was the worst of the lot!

**1 Kings 16:29-30, 33**

“In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years.

**30** Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him.”

“Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.”

Not only did Ahab and his wife Jezebel reject God and worship false gods, they led the people away from God and brought the worship of idols and child sacrifice into the culture of Israel. (see 1 Kings 16:32-34)

This was the spiritual and moral climate in which God called Elijah to minister in.

Elijah's primary job was to combat Baal worship in Israel – and call the people / the nation back to the worship of the one, true God.

The spiritual and cultural climate of Elijah's ministry has some similarities to our time in history – but his time was much worse. He lived and ministered in the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. – and not only was the nation worshiping other gods, but they were sacrificing their children to these other gods.

As you can imagine, it wasn't a popular thing – especially with those in power – if you were a prophet of the one true God – speaking against the King and Queen and their spiritual and moral depravity – speaking against the worship of their chosen deities – and working to bring restoration and change to the country.

In fact, we read in 1 Kings 18 that Jezebel – Ahab's wife/queen – it seems that her job was to hunt down and kill the prophets of God – so she could bring in and promote her prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:3, 13, 19). To be a prophet of the one, true, living God in Israel in the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. was a job that required you to literally put your life on the line each and every day!

**Illus.** - This past Thursday – at an Oregon community college, a gunman killed 9 and wounded many others. Reports from the eyewitnesses say he was targeting Christians.

*“The shooter was lining people up and asking if they were Christian. If they said yes, then they were shot in the head. If they said no, or didn't answer, they were shot in the legs.”*

(Source: <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2015/10/02/witnesses-say-oregon-gunman-targeted-christians-in-community-college-shooting/?intcmp=hpbt1#>)

If you are a Christian – living the Christian life in 2015 and beyond, it will require increasing amounts of courage!

We read in 1 Kings 18, that one day – God directed Elijah to go to King Ahab – in vs. 17 it says:

“Ahab went to meet Elijah. When he saw Elijah, he said to him, ‘Is that you, you troubler of Israel?’”

**When Christ is rejected, His followers are the enemy.** *1 Kings*

*18:17*

Ahab was the King – he was leading Israel away from God – he was committing the sin – he was the one doing harm to the culture and to the spiritual health of the people. Yet...when Elijah – the prophet of God shows up – Ahab blames Elijah for the problems in the nation.

“Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”

Amazing isn't it...yet we see it in our own culture where those of us who are Christians and have a biblical view of life, marriage, sexuality, family, entertainment, work, money, and relationships – we are called “Haters” – “Homophobic” – “War against women” – “Misogynistic” – “Old Fashioned” – “Unenlightened” – “Bible Thumper” – “Prudes” – “Ignorant” – “Neophobic” (hate change)

We're told we are holding back society from moving forward – from advancing – from evolving into something better.

These are lies.

These are nothing but adolescent attitudes in a grown-up world where morals and truth are actually identified as hateful and unfair limits on human will.

But the truth of God is the greatest love for humanity. The moral standards of God are a great source of joy, pleasure and safety for humanity.

Saying “no” can be wise and loving.

Of course, we must learn how to interact better with the unbelieving and lawless/antinomian part of our culture – we must learn how to improve our presentation / proclamation of the truth and grace of Christ.

But the truth and grace of Christ – the Gospel and all it contains for life – is not the problem in modern-day culture – it’s the solution for the modern day culture!

Elijah was not Ahab’s problem – Ahab’s sin was the problem. Ahab’s rejection of God was the problem.

Elijah happened to be the person who most represented God and the commands of God – which made Ahab’s sin more obvious.

Elijah’s response to Ahab is instructive for us today:

“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.” (vs. 18)

A few things we can learn from Elijah’s reply:

Communicate the truth with clarity.

Elijah was clear and succinct – no big speech – just clear and direct language. How appropriate for our ‘sound-bite culture’. We need to know how to share the truth – how to share the Gospel – with clarity and brevity.

**A**dmit your sins

**B**elieve in Jesus as your Savior

**C**ommit each day to Christ

Be *bold* when sharing the *truth*.

Elijah spoke truth to power.

He didn’t shy away from the opportunity God gave him to speak directly to Ahab.

He knew the truth – and spoke with clarity and brevity – but it took boldness to do so! Elijah’s picture was posted in every post office in Israel – he was the #1 on the list of the 10 Most Wanted – yet he was bold when God gave him the chance to speak to King Ahab.

So Elijah is face-to-face with King Ahab – and he presents Ahab with a challenge – a ‘competition’ if you will – a spiritual Super-bowl between Elijah and the prophets of Baal – and he tells Ahab to invite all the people of Israel. (vs. 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.”

As the chapter unfolds, this is exactly what happens. Elijah is there on Mt. Carmel by himself – on this day he is the lone prophet of God against 450 prophets of Baal.

A large group of people are there also – to watch this competition.

Elijah is full of courage – he is bold – he has spoken truth to power – and now he speaks truth to the masses assembled to watch this spiritual Super-bowl.

Another lesson we can learn from Elijah is:

**Focus on the big picture – the Gospel.** *1 Kings 18:21*

Elijah didn't mess around – he didn't talk about minor details – he didn't get sidetracked with important details or nuances about life in Israel under Ahab's leadership. He simply called people back to God.

He told them to make a decision!

**1 Kings 18:21**

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.”

He put a clear choice before them.

This is something we often forget.

People are often confused, frustrated and fearful with their life.



To be certain, parts of their life bring them pleasure – sin is fun – but it also brings increased pain into life – and they have a sense in their spirit that something is wrong – that there is something better.

*(At least this applies for those God has already begun to work on their spirit and draw them to Himself.)*

We sometimes fall into the trap of thinking we must convince people into the kingdom of God – that we must out-argue them to the Gospel. We often don't share the Gospel when we have opportunity – because we don't think we know it well enough or we worry about questions someone might have and we're not confident we can answer their questions – so the result is we never open our mouth to share the Gospel!

Now hear me clearly: we need to know what we believe – but also why we believe it. We need to understand the truth and grace of Christ – not just recite it.

But we can easily put too much stock into these things – forgetting it's God who changes people's hearts...

It's God who opens the ears so the lost can hear the Gospel...

It's God who open the eyes of the lost so they can see Christ.

It's the Spirit of God who will guide us and coat our words so they will be heard.

Quit thinking of reasons not to share the Gospel – and start sowing the seed of the Gospel!

God did a miraculous thing that day on Mt. Carmel – proving that Baal is nothing but a figment of human imagination – and that He alone is God over all things. We read in **vs. 39**

When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The LORD -- He is God! The LORD -- He is God!”

Elijah told them, *‘Make a choice’*, *‘Make a decision’*! They made the right decision.

Elijah couldn't have hoped for a better result.

The competition on Mt. Carmel was a rout – God won – Baal lost – and it was such a lopsided victory that if it was televised, most would have tuned out by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter.

On the heels of this victory you would think Elijah's confidence would grow – that he would have greater courage and greater strength.

But he didn't.

Look with me at **19:2**

So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”

Jezebel didn't go to the game on Mt. Carmel – and when Ahab got home and told her – she was furious!

She sends Elijah a death threat – and after what just happened on Mt. Carmel, you would expect Elijah to laugh at this threat and walk straight up to the palace and call Jezebel to repent.

But he doesn't. vs. 3

“Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.”

What? What happened in less than 24 hours to change this bold, courageous, strong prophet of God into a cowering, fearful man who runs for his life?

Scholars and theologians have tried to answer this question over the centuries.

Some believe he was exhausted and this led to him losing courage and becoming fearful. The following verses make it clear he was exhausted...but exhaustion does not automatically lead to a total change of attitude and action.

Some believe he was suffering with some sort of depression. In the next verse – in vs. 4 – he pleads to God:

“I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”

The day before – Elijah has a great victory where he not only mocks, ridicules and defeats the prophets of Baal who had been misleading Israel, but he also speaks with great power and directness to the people of Israel. He

must have been filled with great joy and excitement over what God had done.

Elijah was bold – he was direct – he was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit – and that day on Mt. Carmel was a great spiritual victory for the Lord against the prophets of Baal.

Within 24 hours, his emotions were completely opposite – he is filled with fear, he is discouraged, and he feels alone.

**Christians are never alone 19:18**

Elijah tells God in 19:10 (see also 18:22)

“I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

It seems that Elijah was discouraged and he felt all alone because nothing seemed to have changed even though he had been working very hard (“zealous”) and many of the Israelites had repented and many prophets of Baal were now dead – but all of these things didn’t seem to make a difference.

Ahab was still king...Jezebel was still queen...they were still trying to kill him...and he mistakenly believed he was the only prophet of God left.

But Elijah was wrong – his facts were not factual – he was living on feelings / emotions.

Do you ever feel that way – like the future is hopeless?  
Do you ever feel like no matter how much good we can do – it’s not enough and the tidal wave of sin and wickedness is too large?

Do you ever feel like your vote has no impact – your voice is too quiet – your service too insignificant?

If you feel this way, it’s because you’re forgetting God’s work in the process.

- You’re forgetting what God does with small offerings.
- You’re forgetting that He feeds thousands with a few fish and some pieces of bread.
- You’re forgetting that he cut Gideon’s army to 300 men so the enemy of 35,000 could be defeated.
- You’re forgetting that God’s strength is made perfect in your weakness. (2 Cor. 12:9)
- You’re forgetting that we fight a spiritual battle – not a physical battle.
- You’re forgetting that you + God = a majority!

**1 Kings 19:18**

“Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel -- all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.”

But...we are human...we are sinful...we can fall into the false thinking that we are alone – that the future is bleak – maybe even hopeless.

But let me remind you of some truth that should correct those thoughts:

1. God is always with you.

He has promised to never leave us or forsake us.

2. You are part of the local church

Other believers are with you in spirit, in action, and in prayer.

S.S. – small groups – ministry teams – all of these are ways to have fellowship with other Christians – and to walk through life’s victories and defeats with you.

3. You are part of the Universal Church

There are millions upon millions of other people around the world who are followers of Jesus Christ. It’s so easy for us to view the Christian world through the lens of CDOBC – but we are only 1 church among millions of churches.

The Universal Church includes every person living who has put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Elijah believed he was the only one left in the country – but he wasn’t.

There were thousands in Israel who were still faithful to the Lord – who had not worshiped Baal.

Not only do you have hundreds of others in this church walking with you – but there are millions of others throughout the world!

This is what I love about attending a conference – or a large Christian event.

To be in a large auditorium or large stadium with hundreds or thousands of others – singing songs of praise – hearing pastors proclaim God’s truth to a large gathering of like-minded people – is a great source of encouragement.

### **Apply it...**

Jesus was alone – so we don’t have to be alone.

Bottom line – remember Jesus actually experienced being alone.

Jesus was deserted by all His followers.

Jesus was alone as He was accused...tortured...crucified.

**Mark 14:50**

“Then everyone deserted Him and fled.”

Jesus is our example – even though He was actually and truly alone (Even the Father turned His back on the Son – Matt.

27:46), He was faithful to the mission – He was obedient to death...even death on the cross.

**1 Peter 2:24**

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed.”

If you have never put your faith in Christ – then let me speak clearly and directly as Elijah did – make a decision – choose Jesus as your Savior!

**A**dmit your sins

**B**elieve in Jesus as your Savior

**C**ommit each day to Christ

Christian...know this for sure...

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE...YOU ARE NEVER ALONE**

Jesus is always with you...

If you have put your faith in Christ, then you have other believers in the local church...

You have millions of fellow-believers in the Universal Church!

Put your faith in Christ...

Be strong and of good courage...

**YOU ARE NEVER ALONE!**

Close in prayer – transition to communion