

Finding Courage to Take a Stand
1 Kings 17-19
May 24th, 2020

Sermon Summary

This message begins our new series based on our Foundations 260 reading plan. The main text for this sermon comes from 1 Kings 17-19. I spent a good portion of time laying a foundation for our courage series by showing the connection with the previous series on Finding Victory and the reason finding courage had now become such a need for God's people. The people had come to a dark place spiritually in their lives and culture and someone needed to take a stand for truth and call the people back to God. Elijah was the man of the hour. Nine brief observations are made about finding courage to make a stand by utilizing the circumstances surrounding Elijah's confrontation with King Ahab, Ahab's wife Jezebel, and the prophets of Baal. Numerous quotes by Dennis Ritchie, who has written extensively on the subjects of courage and encouragement, are utilized along with supporting Scriptures.

Introduction and Prayer

When you lay down your life in surrender and submission to God and His goodness for your life you will find the amazing courage to take a stand for goodness in this life! It's so good to see you again. And for those of you who are joining us online, we are glad you're with us in Spirit, and look forward to the day we can all be together again in person! There are a lot of people who've had to find special courage just to do their jobs during this pandemic. I want us to continue to remember the people who have done so much to help others during this time and to continue to pray for those still struggling and fighting for their lives. A lot of folks are trying to figure out how we got here with this pandemic, but the fact is we're here and we need God's wisdom to know how to best move forward and be God's representatives in a good way during this time. Finding courage to take a stand doesn't mean we do so in an un-Christlike way! Amen! So whether we're talking about personal courage during a pandemic or moral courage to stand for what is right in our daily lives, let's pray and ask God to teach us how to find the courage we need and to use that courage in a God honoring way! Pray!

Last week we talked about gaining victory through the wisdom of God! Solomon had been used by God to bring us some truly wonderful and inspired wisdom writings. Especially in the book of Proverbs. However, because of Solomon's wickedness in establishing places of worship for the pagan gods of his many foreign wives and concubines, God was displeased with Solomon and his otherwise glorious kingdom was taken away and divided. In other words, even with all of Solomon's wisdom, he didn't keep his eyes on The Lord and made some terrible and unwise decisions. Not only did he pursue pleasure to the max, he also oppressed his people with forced labor and extreme taxation. This behavior and terrible example would be remembered for centuries and would impact the leadership decisions of his son Rehoboam in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, as well as the Kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Most people don't think of the consequences of their sins on future generations. John Wesley, an evangelist and theologian who led a revival in England back in the 1700's, famously said, "What one generation tolerates the next generation embraces!" This is so true when it comes to wickedness! And what happens to those who dare to take a stand against sin when all manner of sin is accepted in the name of tolerance? People who take a stand are looked upon as out of date, old fashioned, ignorant, and intolerant. But at some point, some one has to find the courage to take a stand for truth! Peter Kreeft, the 80 year old Catholic Professor of Philosophy at Boston College tells this story...And by the way, it's great to have the children in worship with us today, and you're going to like this story. Professor Kreeft says...

"I remember once driving a station wagon full of morally wise pre-schoolers and a...teacher to a museum. The teacher was a bright, nice, modern girl with all the right psychological moves, but she couldn't control one kid who was terrorizing all the others. She kept telling the little bully that her behavior was 'inappropriate.' Finally, one of the other kids said to the teacher, loudly, 'Why don't you tell her?' 'Tell her what?' asked the teacher. 'Don't tell her she's in-propriate.' Tell her she's wrong!' I felt like clapping."

Sometimes you've just got to speak truth. We should always speak things in love, but sometimes the most loving thing you can do is take a stand for the truth. Now I know that's easier said than done! I love the way Paul the Apostle said it to his young apprentice Timothy...

2 Tim 2:24 And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.

2 Tim 2:25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,

2 Tim 2:26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

We shouldn't speak in a judgmental spirit, but you need to understand in the world we live in, just to disagree with someone's behavior is now considered judgemental regardless of how gently you've spoken or how much you love a person. We need the courage to take a stand anyway.

Let's just look quickly at the definition of courage. According to Webster...

"Courage is mental or moral strength to [venture](#), persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty!"

Dictionary.com gives this definition...

"the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, etc., without fear; bravery."

I think Webster is closer to the true meaning of Courage because he says that courage is “withstanding fear,” while the newer definition says “without fear.” Courage doesn’t mean we don’t have fear, but we overcome those fears to do what is right and needed! I was just talking to a dear friend of mine the other day, Dennis Ritchie, who writes extensively on the topic of courage and encouragement. I’ll quote him several times today. He’s a studio engineer in Nashville and has recorded people like Johnny Cash and Randy Travis. Why do I consider him an expert on courage and encouragement? It’s because of some of the things he and his wife have faced and overcome in their lives! Multiple cancers, chemo’s, radiation, surgeries and other challenges. He’s written a book about it. He and his wife Suzie have had tremendous courage in times of great fear, because of their faith in Jesus and as a result have a ministry of encouragement to others who are going through rough things! He shared with me that fear is something God has given to us to protect us! Like fear of heights, or fire, deep water, tornados, spiders, and snakes. And speaking of snakes, I used to be an amateur herpetologist in college (that’s the study of reptiles and amphibians). On the screen you’ll see a picture of a little King Snake I found at my house yesterday. Even though I like snakes, if one surprises me when I’m walking down a path in the woods, I can jump backwards with superhuman ability! God put that fear and respect in all of us because a poisonous snake can kill you. Courage doesn’t mean you don’t have any fear, but you have the ability to do what needs to be done in spite of your fears. True courage is not foolishly ignoring fear, but realizing some things are so important we do them in spite of our fears! Today is Memorial Day and we remember our Courageous men and women who have had courage, in spite of their fears, to fight for the freedom we are so blessed to have in this country! Sometimes, even with all the training, preparation, and precautions, ultimate sacrifices happen. Courage is the willingness to take a stand even when all of the dangers cannot be mitigated or taken away. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who put their fears aside and gave their lives for the freedoms we enjoy in this country!

Let me say this: Courage realizes that inaction can sometimes be more costly, not only to oneself, but to family, friends and country!

We’re going to look at someone today who literally put his life at risk to take a stand and to call his nation back to God. What had happened was that the moral and spiritual decline of the Hebrew people under the leadership of their kings had become progressively worse. In fact we see these words spoken about Jeroboam the King of the Northern Kingdom of Israel...

1 Ki 14:9 You have done more evil than all who lived before you.

Similar words were spoken about Jeroboam’s son Abijam once he became king of the Northern Kingdom and Omri, the commander of the Israelite army when he became king of the Northern Kingdom. The same thing with Rehoboam, Samuel’s son, the king of the Southern Kingdom Judah! So you can see that both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms were in desperate need of revival! They needed someone who would have the courage to take a stand against the evil things that were happening. And what were those evil things? I won’t go into details, but it was bad! When you read about the kinds of things that went on in the worship of Baal and with

other pagan religions during this time it's hard to imagine that kind of depravity. Now I know I said that we should be kind and loving when we speak truth, however, things had gotten so bad during this time in the history of Israel and Judah that more drastic measures had to be taken. Would it be a new king who would find the courage to take a stand? Let me set up the background for our story today. Ahab, the son of King Omri becomes King of Israel, and we see this...

1 Ki 16:30 Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him.

1 Ki 16:31 He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him.

1 Ki 16:32 He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria.

1 Ki 16:33 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.

So we know it was not a king who would find the courage to take a stand against the wickedness of the people and it's leaders, and we're about to see it was a prophet of God named Elijah. His story gives us examples and lessons on the topic of courage and especially the courage to take a stand! From this story we find that...

Courage is a Choice

1 Ki 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."

Elijah, a prophet of God goes to King Ahab and pronounces that the judgement of God would come in the form of a three year drought! You know that took courage. Elijah was well aware of the wickedness of King Ahab, but he has courage and is obedient to take a stand! Ahab probably thought Elijah was just a crazy man at first, but that would change once the drought began to take place and famine set in. Ahab would come to consider Elijah a "troublemaker" for Israel! God saw that coming and instructed Elijah to hide in a Ravine, east of the Jordan. He was to drink water from a brook there and God said he would be fed meat and bread by Ravens. It happened as God promised and the Ravens brought him breakfast and dinner. (Don't forget kids that one of your activities is to write down the name of some of the animals I talk about today.) Once the water of the brook dried up, God told Elijah to go to Zarephath of Sidon where he met a widow.

Courage Comes from Faith

Elijah asked the widow for some water and bread and she told him she only had enough for her and her son to have one last meal. She believed her and her son would then starve to death. However, Elijah told her this...

1 Ki 17:13 ... "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.

1 Ki 17:14 For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: "The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land."

1 Ki 17:15 She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.

The woman has the courage to do what Elijah asked her to do and God kept His promise. That had to be a hard thing to take your very last little bit of food and bake something for a perfect stranger when you know your own son is in need. Elijah had told her to first make a small cake of bread for him and then make something for her and her son. That was indeed a test of faith and an act of courage. My friend Dennis shared this with me about faith and courage...

"The opposite of fear is faith - faith gives us courage!"

Faith gives us the courage to overcome our fears and do what is right and what we need to do when we are called to action or to take a stand! This widow exercised faith in Elijah's words and God continued to feed her whole family! I love these verses in Isaiah 43...

Isa 43:1 But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

Isa 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Isa 43:3 For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;

And then in verse 5 we have this promise...

Isa 43:5 Do not be afraid, for I am with you;

So courage comes from our faith that God will keep His promises to us but we must remember...

Courage Faces Challenges

1 Ki 17:17 Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing.

1 Ki 17:18 She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

1 Ki 17:19 "Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed.

1 Ki 17:20 Then he cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?"

1 Ki 17:21 Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!"

1 Ki 17:22 The LORD heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived.

1 Ki 17:23 Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"

1 Ki 17:24 Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth."

When you have the courage to walk by faith, your faith will face challenges. That's a part of life. Our prayers are not always answered the way we would like, and it takes courage to keep trusting in those times. This lady and Elijah were honest with their feelings. "Really God, I do what You ask and this happens? I don't get it!" God didn't get mad at them. However, when we have the courage to keep the faith, God is so gracious and will reward our courage and get us through.

Courage Takes Necessary Chances

1 Ki 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."

1 Ki 18:2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria,

1 Ki 18:3 and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of his palace. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the LORD.

1 Ki 18:4 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.)

Both Elijah and Obadiah had the courage to take chances to do what was right! Obadiah knew if he got caught hiding the prophets of God, the price would be his very life! But he was a devout believer, and took courage in doing the right thing because it was the right thing. Again, this doesn't mean that you don't have fears. Listen to Obadiah's conversation with Elijah when he meets him...

1 Ki 18:7 As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, "Is it really you, my lord Elijah?"

1 Ki 18:8 "Yes," he replied. "Go tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'"

1 Ki 18:9 "What have I done wrong," asked Obadiah, "that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death?"

He goes on to say...

1 Ki 18:13 Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the LORD? I hid a hundred of the Lord's prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water.

1 Ki 18:14 And now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' He will kill me!"

I hope you've noticed that having questions for God is not a deal killer for God? God is big enough to handle our questions and even our doubts.

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

1 Ki 18:16a So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him...

Obadiah courageously steps up and tells Ahab he had seen Elijah and where he was.

Courage Takes a Stand by Speaking Truth

1 Ki 18:16b...and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

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

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.

Wow! Talk about taking a stand. Elijah didn't mince words, he just took a stand with the evil king Ahab and confronted him with his sin! Ahab considered Elijah the trouble maker for Israel, but Elijah knew the real problem was with the sin of Ahab, his wife Jezebel and the people of Israel. If you take a stand on moral truth today you might be labeled a troubler! Once again let me quote my friend Dennis...

"The truth has been deemed dangerous and unfashionable and irrelevant and anyone who brings it up is a menace to society."

Now there's something we have to make sure of when we make a stand, even if we know something to be the truth. Are we making a stand just to make a point or to prove we're right or are we taking a stand because the issue at hand is of great moral, ethical and spiritual importance? Elijah's stand for truth was justified.

1 Ki 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." But the people said nothing.

Elijah confronted the wicked compromises and hypocrisy of the people, and they just looked at him and said nothing. Dennis shared this on his blog:

“The truth has never been popular. It has always been dangerous. And those who speak it have always been in danger of losing everything down to their very lives. All people through all of time have wished to change the truth into something more palatable, or twist it into something more fashionable. But with all of this effort, through all of these years, one thing has become clear. The truth remains. That is the hidden strength of the truth. It’s simple. We don’t have to keep up with version numbers. There are no truth updates. The truth is the bedrock beneath it all, immoveable, unchangeable. Because God is the truth and we have no power at all to change Him.”

Courage is Costly

1 Ki 18:22 Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets.

Elijah will find out later that he is not the only one left, but sometimes when you are standing for the truth in the face of rejection from those you love and care about, as well as the culture around you, you find out that courage to take a stand is costly. You may be ridiculed and rejected. Make sure that it is because you are standing for the truth and not because you were being obnoxious and mean spirited in the way you presented yourself!

Peter said this in the New Testament concerning this...

1 Pet 3:14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear ; do not be frightened."

1 Pet 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

1 Pet 3:16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

1 Pet 3:17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Courage is Confidence

Elijah says...

1 Ki 18:23 Get two bulls for us. Let them 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.

1 Ki 18:24 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."

1 Ki 18:25 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."

1 Ki 18:26 So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "O Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

1 Ki 18:27 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."

Of course, nothing happened even though they continued all day!

1 Ki 18:30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which was in ruins.

1 Ki 18:31 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."

1 Ki 18:32 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.

1 Ki 18:33 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."

1 Ki 18:34 "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time.

1 Ki 18:35 The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

Folks this was not self-confidence but confidence in God! How do I know? Listen to the prayer Elijah prays next...

1 Ki 18:36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "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.

1 Ki 18:37 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!"

Folks, they had a revival! It was powerful. It was truly a mountaintop experience, but here's a truth I've learned down through the years: we can't stay on the mountaintop. We live in the valleys and use the spiritual mountaintop experiences to give us courage to live by faith in the valleys! If you think living for God is one mountaintop experience after the other you will be disappointed! Here's a powerful truth we all must remember...

Courage Must Be Maintained

Elijah had the prophets of Baal eliminated and told Ahab to head home because there was about to be a mighty rainstorm. When Ahab got home he told his wife Jezebel all that had happened. She didn't take the news about the death of the prophets of Baal too well and this took place...

1 Ki 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."

1 Ki 19:3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there,

1 Ki 19:4 while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

1 Ki 19:5 Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.

He wanted to die and was so depressed he just wanted to sleep. Do you know what happened? He took his eyes off the One who could save him and put his eyes on the one who threatened him. He got his eyes off the Lord and on the problem! You probably never do that, but I do and it always surprises me how fast I can go from mountaintop to lowest valley spiritually in a matter of minutes! Courage must be maintained and we're about to discover the secret to maintaining the courage to take a stand!

Courage is Maintained by Listening to God

An angel of the Lord wakes Elijah up and gives him food. He falls back asleep, after all he's probably in a state of clinical depression! The angel awakens him again and gets him to eat. Elijah then travels forty days and nights to Horeb, the mountain of God...

1 Ki 19:9 There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

1 Ki 19:10 He replied, "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."

1 Ki 19:11 The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.

1 Ki 19:12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

1 Ki 19:13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

1 Ki 19:14 He replied, "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."

Notice, Elijah whines the same lines to God! "I'm the only one trying to do right and they're trying to kill me!" What Elijah was doing was letting his fear overcome his faith and cause him to lose his courage in The Lord! God had defeated 400 prophets of Baal for Elijah but this one wicked woman's threats sent him running!

God gives Elijah some instructions and then reminds him of the truth...

1 Ki 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."

Elijah was not alone after all! So finding courage to take a stand all depends on who you are listening to! God's Word, God's Wisdom, God's Whisper, or the loud, obnoxious lies and threats of a world and culture that have abandoned the never changing truth of God! We should always have the courage to boldly stand for God's truth, but we must never forget that sometimes taking a stand happens quietly! In other words, we find the courage to continue loving those who disagree with our message. And one of the greatest ways to do this is, and I quote one last time, my brother in Christ, Dennis...

"The quiet act of standing, the silent stoop to serve, the whisper of encouragement, the hand opening to share, these things go uncelebrated.

Sitting with someone in pain or grief requires the courage to go where there are no answers, and the fortitude to stay there. Praying for someone in private will not win you a medal. Persistence in the face of criticism and ridicule does not garner applause.

But if a sparrow falling to the ground does not escape God's attention, if He sees what is hidden in our hearts, then He unquestionably takes note of silent courage."

So if finding the courage to stand is maintained by listening to God, let's do that!

Galatians 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Let's pray!