

Year 3: Session 2 – Getting to Know Elijah the Prophet

Class 5: 1 Kings 19:1-16 – God is not in the storms

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Exciting, top-of-the-mountain spiritual experiences (like Elijah’s “win” against the Baal prophets) are often followed by “valley” moments where everything seems to go wrong and a person becomes easily and strongly discouraged (like Elijah does in this lesson’s scripture story)
- It is difficult to see or hear God in the storms of life, which is why we have to practice listening for God in the still, calm moments (and have to cultivate/make room for this time)
- God’s response to our discouragement may not be what we’d expect. Which is why we have to listen instead of guess.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Some way to play and show the two video clips on rfour.org site for this lesson (from *Ironman 2* and a youtube video about seeing or not seeing a gorilla)

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- Here’s the opening question for today’s class. One of the teachers will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, the teacher will answer first.
- Once the teacher answers the question, we’ll go around the circle.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability. Here’s this week’s question: *Can you think of a time when you either wanted to quit something or did quit something? What was it and why did you want to quit?*

TRANSITION to Video Clip

- One reason we may want to quit something is because we thought we were doing really well just to find out that we were actually doing very badly.
- This experience of feeling on top of the world and then falling down happens quite a lot in the scripture stories -- it’s often portrayed as someone who is physically on a mountain top (when things are going well) and then goes down the mountain into the valley and experiences difficulty.
- These “mountain top experiences” being followed by “bottom of the valley experiences” happen in regular life as well.

- In today's video we're going to see an example of this.
- The clip is from IronMan 3. In it, the main character, Tony Stark, has just injected some remote GPS-like transponders into his body that will then cause his Iron Man suit to attach to him automatically.
- We're going to watch his first attempt at trying this new technology out.
- Let's see what happens.

WATCH Video Clip

ASK / TELL

- So at first, did the suit fit to Tony Stark very well? (Sort of. It was a little bit of a bumpy process)
- But once he slowed down the flying parts, the suit really started to attach itself to Tony pretty well, didn't it? (yep)
- Right after he successfully "catches" the face mask, what does Tony Stark say? (I'm the best!)
- Then what happens? (the back-side piece that missed him at the beginning of the scene comes flying in from behind and knocks Tony down and knocks the whole suit off of him)
- This clip is a perfect example of what having a mountain top experience followed by a bottom of the valley experience looks like. It can be quite devastating.

TRANSITION to scripture reading

- Today, we start our second story about the prophet Elijah.
- Remember, Elijah lived about 200 years after the prophet Samuel and King David (and about 800 years before Jesus did).
- The Israelite king that Elijah had to deal with was King Ahab. He was one of the worst kings that the Israelites ever had.
- One thing that Ahab and Queen Jezebel did was introduce a neighboring country's religion of Baal to the Israelites, for instance. This religion included child sacrifice. So if you're a first born...the Baal religion would've had your parents kill you as a sacrifice to their gods. Nice, eh?
- In our previous lesson, with God's help, Elijah had experienced a very successful day against the Baal prophets.
- He started and then won a competition against them and then had the Baal prophets removed (ok, *killed*) and the Israelites looked to be returning to their ways of paying attention to God.
- On top of that the drought was about to end
- In other words, Elijah was on a roll – he was making good things happen!
- But, despite these successes, as we'll see in today's story, Elijah is about to experience a set-back, just like Tony Stark did, only on a more serious note.

READ Scripture: 1 Kings 19:1-16 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." 3Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. 4But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."

5Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." 6He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. 7The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." 8He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

9At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 10He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." 11He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; 12and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

13When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 14He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." 15Then the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. 16Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place.

ASK (answers are in parenthesis)

- Is there anything you find interesting or weird about this story? [*to teachers: You don't necessarily need to answer what they notice or have questions about – sometimes just agree with a, "yep, that's interesting" or a, "Yeah, I find that to be weird too" works]*]
- Verse 2 -- What does Jezebel do after she hears the news about Elijah winning the competition against the Baal prophets? (sends a message to Elijah telling him that she is going to kill him)
- Verse 3 & 4 -- What is Elijah's response to this Jezebel's message? (He is afraid and runs away. Then, he wants to die)
- Does Elijah's response surprise you? Why? (Note: Though I understand what's happening, it still surprises me. He just took on 450 Baal prophets and won in front of the king in a life or death competition – but now that one person is threatening him from a distance, he's scared? Why!? What happened!?)
- Verse 4 – Who is Elijah telling his disappointment to? (To God – even in his fear and disappointment, he's staying in contact with God)
- Verse 5-7: What does God's response seem to be to Elijah? (To care for him)
- In verse 10, who is Elijah talking to? (To God, again)
- Still in verse 10, why does Elijah say he wants to die? (because even though Elijah has done his job as a prophet, the Israelites do not pay attention to God and want to kill those who talk about God. Also, Elijah understands himself to be the last prophet, and is now a wanted man – the odds are against him and they are too great)
- In verse 11 and 12, what things pass by Elijah that God is not in? (a great wind that split mountains and broke rocks; an earthquake; a great fire)
- Verse 13 -- When is Elijah actually able to hear God? (once there is a "sheer silence.")
- Verse 14 – What does Elijah say once again? (why he's afraid/sad/disappointed/defeated)
- Verse 15-16 – What is God's response to Elijah's concern? (gives him a command to anoint two new kings and to find a student who will become a prophet like Elijah)
- Do God's instructions to Elijah surprise you? Why/why not?

TELL

- When we experience a setback right after a success, we can often be caught off-guard and the setback might feel even worse than if we were just having a "bad" day.
- That's certainly what seems to be happening to Elijah in today's story.
- He had just had this powerful experience of winning against the Baal prophets, and was probably feeling really good about it.

- But then, once Queen Jezebel says she is going to kill him, his feelings are brought down really low probably because he's realizing that he hadn't *really* won. Important leaders in Israel had not changed their mind about Baal despite Elijah's great victory.
- Elijah is feeling so defeated and lonely due to this news that he wants to die.
- So the good choice that Elijah makes is that he keeps telling God about his disappointment. Three times he does this. Pretty much with the same words, even.
- And each time, God responds. But, God responds differently each time.
- In the first response, God sends someone (angel simply means "messenger") to care for Elijah.
- In the second response, God gives Elijah both a show of power and a lesson (which we'll talk about in just a minute)
- In the third response, God gives Elijah some hopeful tasks to complete (install new leadership! Get a student so you won't be the only prophet!)
- So let's talk about the lesson that God seems to be teaching Elijah during the "storms" in verse 11 and 12 of wind, earthquakes and fire.
- First, I think those storms can be a "show of force" by God.
- God might be reminding Elijah of how big and powerful God is compared to what humans can do.
- But there's this line that I want us to think about – this line that says "And God was not in the fire, the wind, etc."
- I think that line is trying to tell us that no matter how big the situation (or disaster) might seem, the presence of God should not be confused with the events we experience.
- In other words, we are not to respond to the events. We are to respond to God.
- And the way we respond to God is by listening in the silence. By listening for God's still, small voice.
- This is why, I think, we are told that God is not in the storms.
- And, I think it is why it is after the distraction of the storms that Elijah is then able to hear God's direction and instructions.
- Once Elijah is able to see past the loudness and fury and threat of the storms, Elijah is then able to hear and know what the next thing is for him to do.
- And what he is to act on is to make sure that King Ahab won't always be king. And that Elijah won't always be the only prophet.

TRANSITION to Activity

- We will all have big storms in our life – if we haven't already
- Those storms will take different forms for each of us.
- But regardless, when they happen, those big storms will distract us. They will scare us and try to keep us from hearing and knowing God's presence and direction.
- For an example of what this might look like, let's do the following activity.

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- We're going to watch another video
- And we're going to do exactly what the video says: We're going to very carefully count the number of passes that take place between the players with white shirts.
- While we are watching the video, do not yell out the answer or say anything to distract your fellow students
- After the video, we'll compare answers and see who counted correctly.

DO ACTIVITY – view second video (from rfour.org site)

ASK

- So who counted 10 or more passes?
- How about 11 or more? 12 or more? 13 or more? 14 or more? 15 or more? 16 or more?
- Okay. Good. Now...who here saw the gorilla?
- And who noticed the curtain change color? Who noticed one of players wearing a black shirt leave the scene?
 - I sure didn't notice those things!!!

TELL

- Just like some of us were so focused on the counting of the passes that we couldn't what else was happening, so too can we get so focused on the storms that we can't see or hear God.
- This is why it is good to give ourselves times of silence, where there are no distractions, so that we can refocus on God and be better able to hear what God is saying us to help us out.
- And, if we get really good at focusing on God during the silence, that will help us get better at focusing on God during the storms so that we're not so discouraged afterwards.
- But that is really difficult. Because, as we saw, even Elijah got discouraged, right?
- In the next lesson, we will learn about Elijah's new student, Elisha.

CLOSING PRAYER