

7-28-24

The Miracle that Almost Wasn't

1 Kings 19: 9 – 14

As most of you know, the Summer Olympics are under way in Paris. From my understanding – and I didn't tune in to watch – the opening ceremony was quite a blasphemous event which is sad because I've always enjoyed watching the Olympic Games, summer or winter.

As a matter of fact, I spoke about the Olympics 40 years ago at my high school graduation ceremony. That was the year the U. S. boycotted because of USSR's invasion of Afghanistan.

It's actually quite timely that I mention the Olympics in light of our Biblical text today because one of the most famous athletes to ever compete in the Olympics was Jamaica's Usain Bolt. Don't you just love his life name, especially for one who is a track star? Maybe he changed his name based on his career choice.

Anyway, I think he is considered at one time the fastest human alive because he ran the 100 meter sprint in 9.58 seconds back in 2009.

But maybe there was someone faster than Usain, and think it was Elijah. We often don't see our Biblical characters as super athletes. We view many of them as courageous and faithful and highly intellectual, but typically not athletic. David and Sampson would be the exceptions. But think about Elijah!

Energized by God, Elijah He ran ahead of Ahab's chariot for nearly 30 miles! We read about in 1 Kings 18: 45 – 46: *"The sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, the heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. The power of the Lord came upon Elijah and tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel."*

What a sight that must have been!

Remember this account the next time our society heaps accolades and praises on our contemporary athletes. The original speedster and marathoner is in the Bible!

More on running later.

Have you ever had a situation come up in your life when you thought to yourself and even prayed to God ... God, this would be the perfect time for a miracle?

I think we've all been in that situation a time or two in our lives. I sure have been.

Maybe it was when you heard of a loved one getting a bad report from the doctor.

Maybe someone you know was in a tragic accident and you prayed and hoped to God that the situation wouldn't be nearly as bad as reported.

Perhaps you were out of work for a long time, and as much as you tried to find a new job, there were few if any prospects on the horizon.

Maybe you had a cherished relationship take a turn for the worse, and you hoped beyond hope that somehow fences could be mended.

Maybe someone you know appeared to be very close to making a personal decision to follow Christ, but at the last moment got cold feet and decided against it.

Sometimes we desperately wish for and pray hard for a miracle, but none comes, and we're left disappointed, disturbed, and maybe even angry.

You thought to yourself, It was the perfect scenario for a divine miracle, but it didn't happen.

This morning, I want to talk to you about a time that is recorded in scripture where I think a miracle should have happened but didn't.

From my perspective, the environment seemed perfect for a miracle to take place, almost like a seed being planted in the ground ready to germinate under the ideal soil conditions of temperature and moisture and depth.

What I'm referring to is the time Elijah found himself on the mountain at the entrance of a cave.

In this moment, God revealed Himself to Elijah and spoke to him. And after Elijah responded to the Lord's initial questioning, God displayed before Elijah His awesome power through a mighty wind, an earthquake, and fire.

And after this great demonstration of divine power, God repeated his question.

It's almost as if God was not happy with Elijah's initial answer and decided to give him a second chance – a do over if you will – a mulligan, to use a golfing term - a chance to revise his previous statement like a judge might ask a witness to do on the stand.

My point here, is that you would think that after witnessing what Elijah did – a wind so strong that mountains were torn apart, and the geography of the land rearranged by raging fire and the shifting of tectonic plates – that something in Elijah would have changed – that there would have been a shift in Elijah’s spirit – may be more humility, an awe-struckness before the presence of God, a moment of reflection and praise and even a new perspective on life.

But none of this seemed to have happened!

This is why I call this message the miracle that almost wasn’t, because it seems as though Elijah didn’t change!

And what I’m using for evidence to state my case, is Elijah’s second response to God’s repeated question:

“What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Elijah repeated exactly what he had said the first time: *“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 a sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me to.”*

Is this the typical human response when we witness the power of God?

Is this the typical response of a person who has interacted with the divine?

Remember Job’s response after God spoke to him? He said, *“Surely I have spoken of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for*

me to know. My ears have heard you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

Job knew he was out of line when it came to questioning and complaining about God’s methods.

How many times have we read in the scriptures, especially in the New Testament the responses of those who witnessed the power of God, the miracles of God, and how they changed to become followers of God?

Whether it was the healing of the demon-possessed man in Mark 5, the miraculous catch of fish using Peter’s boat, or the raising of the widow’s son in Luke 7. And how can we forget the dramatic change that Saul went through when he heard the resurrected Lord’s voice on his way to Damascus?

Wait a minute... upon further review, there are actually very few instances where the people did actually follow God after experiencing a miracle of God!

In most cases, it’s just not reported!

I think our tendency is to read into the Scriptures and add our own happy ending like we see at the end of many movies. Take for example the woman who was plagued by an illness for many years. She touched Jesus’ cloak and was healed.

In our minds, we envision that this woman served the Lord wholeheartedly for the rest of her life because of the healing she received, but the scripture is silent on this topic.

And how about the miracle of the feeding of the 5000?

Of the 5,000 that received a meal that day, how many became followers of the Lord? We're left in the dark.

The Acts chapter 2 event that highlighted Pentecost when the people heard the disciples speaking in different languages and 3,000 were added to the church's number that day is the exception to the rule!

Many people may have been amazed and even praised God when they witnessed the power of God and his miracles, but this doesn't automatically translate to a converted life. We'd like to hope so, and in some cases, it happened, but not as much as we think.

Which brings me back to the life and ministry of Elijah. As recorded in 1Kings. He sure had unique, exciting and even intense ministry experiences, didn't he.

For starters, he had to tell the evil King Ahab that the country would experience God's judgment in the form of a severe drought because of the nation's idolatry which the King promoted.

Obviously, Elijah didn't make any friends that day and from that day on, the king sought to kill him, calling him a troublemaker.

Then there was the miracle of the ravens which fed Elijah both bread and meat as commanded by God, and the brook supplied his thirst for a time until the drought finally took its toll.

Divine miracles ratchet up even more for Elijah when a desperate widow, who could not even feed her own son, is commanded by God to feed Elijah.

And just when you think the dust is going to settle for a bit, and life might return to some semblance of normalcy, the widow's son dies. So, God uses Elijah in a mighty way to bring him back to life.

Talk about the ups and downs of ministry!

Pronouncements of judgment.

God's preserving Elijah life using the birds of the sky!

Death, then resurrection!

And we're not done yet!

We haven't even mentioned the confrontation between Elijah and the false prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

What a spectacle that must have been!

So, in a very short span of time, Elijah, attempting to fulfill his calling as a prophet, suffers through a famine and experiences God's provision while being fed by ravens, a widow, and an angel!

He pronounced God's judgment on Israel.

He resurrected a boy from the dead and later commanded and presided over the killing of 450 false prophets of Baal.

He then fled for his life as Queen Jezebel put a bounty on his head.

And after fearing for his life, while at the same time begging God to take his life, he travelled for forty days and nights until he reached Mt. Horeb, where he finally sought refuge in a cave.

Exhausted, depressed, emotionally spent, and unsure if he even wants to live.

Time for a miracle – and there was one - in the sense that God displayed His power before Elijah – and he did it to teach Elijah, but what was the lesson?

And if Elijah could learn the lesson, then this certainly would have been the miracle of which I speak – the miracle that seemingly didn't happen. (Maybe the miracle happened later when Elijah had more time to process what just happened.)

So, here's what I think God was trying to teach Elijah. I'll put it in first person:

Elijah, my power that I just displayed before you in a way, symbolizes your topsy turvy incredible ministry. It is a microcosm of the life and ministry I called you to.

You saw my sovereignty over nature when I held back the rain and caused a drought.

You felt the force of my spirit, just like the wind when I chose you to bring the dead back to life – just as I chose the widow and the ravens to bring you back from the brink of death and preserve your life.

And then my spirit caused you to run without stopping for nearly 30 miles!

You witnessed my holy fire when you called upon my Name, and I consumed your thoroughly-soaked sacrifice at the altar in the presence of your enemies.

I commissioned you to take a message of judgment to my people and I worked mighty miracles through you that honored my Name and for this I say, "Well done good and faithful servant."

But you're all wet and wrong.

Yes, You have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty.

And yes, my people have broken the covenant I have with them.

True, they destroyed the altars that were built as a place of worship for me.

Likewise, my prophets have been put to death for speaking the unvarnished truth concerning the nation's sins.

But no, you're not alone. And you're not without hope.

Even though it seems like it on so many levels, the world is unraveling, you're not the only one who is committed to serving me – who seeks to serve and stand-up for truth and holiness and righteousness.

You're not the only one who is putting his life on the line by speaking and upholding the Word of God so that others may come to know the truth and be saved.

I know you feel completely alone and dejected and you look back and see very little evidence of fruit from your ministry and you're wondering if it was even worth going through.

This is why I met you at this cave today.

I know that you've been doing a lot of running lately.

Sometimes toward me and sometimes away from me.

Sometimes you've run and hid because you've feared for your life.

Other times you've run because you were eager to carry the message I gave you to share.

Sometimes you ran on the strength I gave you.

Other times you relied on your own strength.

But you've never run alone.

And now I want you to stop running and listen to my still small voice – the voice of a whisper that says to you that my presence is with you always and is so much greater than any miracle I could ever perform through you.

You're more than a prophet. You're my creation, my friend – and someone I care about so deeply and love so much that you'll never comprehend the depths of it.

If I never do another miracle through you, it won't matter.

All you need to know is you're not alone in this life and the one to come.

Rest in and enjoy this profound and beautiful truth.

And stop running, unless of course I tell you to. Amen.