

## **Introduction**

If you're new, we are honored that you're here. I'm new here too, but I've gotten to spend a lot of hours with the leaders of this church, and in a world where sometimes people aren't who they appear to be, I want you to know: This is a good church. These are leaders you can trust.

We're in the middle of this series called *Revival*, remembering what God has done in great movements of transformation throughout Christian history. This isn't only a history lesson. We're making room for God to move again. Dan set the tone for this series with the core truth that all this flows from: God comes where he's wanted. We're using the prayer of Habakkuk 3:2 as a launchpad. Would you pray this out loud with me? "LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known...." *In Jesus' name, all God's people said....*

God can make his awesome deeds known in our time, as we heard from David Thomas last week the amazing things God did at the Asbury Revival. In week one, Dan reminded us God can make dry bones live. Dan kicked off this series talking about the story of the Moravians, this little group of Jesus followers in Germany 300 years ago who started a prayer meeting that lasted for 100 years. From that prayer meeting, the modern missions movement was born, through which John Wesley was converted, through whom the Methodist movement was launched and the Great Awakening, the greatest revival this continent has ever seen, swept across the world. A few decades later, on the college campuses of the freshly formed United States, little groups of Methodists started to pray, revival broke out, and the Second Great Awakening was born.

Perhaps the greatest event of the Second Great Awakening was the Cane Ridge Revival in 1801, down near the Kentucky-Tennessee border. People from different churches came together to take communion, pray, and seek the Lord. Revival broke out. Twenty thousand people came. Services were held around the clock. I've been to Cane Ridge. I've stood in the pulpit where it happened. From that revival was born a little group of frontier churches from different denominations who wanted to get back to God's Word, to unity, to seeking the Lord together. They called themselves the Restoration Movement.

As the revival DNA of those Restoration Movement believers carried on, some of them settled in Indianapolis. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a group of them decided that people in Indy all needed to have access to a church close to their house. They had a dream to plant sixty churches in Indianapolis, and they did. One of those churches was this church. Gary Johnson came to serve as pastor here for 29 years, and now Dan is here, and the blessing of God has been poured out all over this church. Listen: wanting God, begging God for revival, is a core strand in your spiritual DNA. Don't you want to see it again? I do.

So, how do you and I become the kind of people through which revival can happen? For the answer to that, today we're going to walk through one of the great stories of God's power in Scripture. Open your Bibles to 1 Kings 17-18. If revival is going to happen in us, first God wants to meet us in three places, the three places where he met the prophet Elijah.

## **Go to the Wilderness**

In 1 Kings 17, we're in the Old Testament with ancient Israel and things are not good. Israel has had nineteen evil kings in a row, and the one they have now is Ahab, the worst one of all. The people are worshipping idols, and after decades of this depravity, notice what God does. He doesn't send an army or angels or plagues. He raises up one man, Elijah.

"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'" (1 Kings 17:1). So, here we go: Elijah bursts onto the scene out of nowhere with a message from God for the wicked king—because of your sin, a drought is coming. In an agrarian society, that doesn't just mean inflation or economic recession. It means starvation, famine, catastrophic loss. King Ahab wasn't happy about that, so God tells Elijah to run and hide.

Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there." So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. (1 Kings 17:2-6)

Can you imagine? Elijah's running for his life with no idea if or when he'll ever get to go home again. He's utterly alone. Before revival can happen, God might just have to send you to the wilderness. If you aren't there now, you've been there before. And if you haven't yet, you will be. Ask Elijah: the wilderness is the place of complete isolation, the place when you have nothing, where everything is stripped away. I don't know where you are today. Maybe you're in the wilderness waiting on test results, praying for that wayward child, lonely when you see that empty chair where your spouse used to sit.

The name for the Kerith Ravine literally means "cutting." The wilderness is where you're cut off from everything else you've depended on so that you can learn to depend on God. Before revival can happen around us, it has to happen in us. Dan walked us through the stages of revival in week one, from regeneration to restoration to reformation to renewal to revival to reawakening. Before we can see a generation awaken to King Jesus, before it happens in us, it has to happen in you, in me. So if it feels like you're in the wilderness right now, if you're scared, you're lonely, you don't know how you're going to make it, maybe God's got you in the wilderness drinking from the brook, trusting that the ravens are going to show up again. Teaching you to trust him.

Listen, the world has plenty of prodigies and geniuses with big brains, good looks, and charming personalities. We don't need any more of those. We need people who will wait in the wilderness and trust God to provide, people who are going to be sold out for Jesus, who will say, "Yes, Lord, I want you. I don't have much, but everything I have is yours. Whatever you tell me to say, I'll say. Whatever you tell me to do, I'll do. Wherever you tell me to go, I'll go, even to the wilderness. As long as you'll be with me."

## **Go to the Mountaintop**

That's the first place. If you want to see revival, first you have to go to the wilderness. Then, once God has done revival in you, he can bring revival through you. So after the wilderness, go to the mountaintop.

Three years pass for the Israelites and the whole country is in a drought. “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 Kings 18:1).

It’s go time. Elijah meets up with King Ahab and challenges him to bring all the prophets for his pagan gods—450 prophets of the god Baal and 400 prophets of the god Asherah—and meet him on top of Mount Carmel for a showdown. “So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. 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’” (1 Kings 18:20-21). These people were giving lip service to the God of Israel, but they also liked the goddess of fertility and the gods of agriculture and finance. The more the merrier, cover your bases.

But Elijah says to them and to you, “How long will you waver?” You can’t have it both ways. Either God is God alone, or he is not God at all. If you’re here this morning, and you’re only halfway in on Jesus, can I be honest with you? If church is a hobby for you, a weekend thing, this is a terrible hobby to have. You have to get up early when you could sleep in, put on your good clothes, park way out there and walk half a mile in here to have some guy stand up and lecture you for forty minutes and tell you what to do with your life. I can think of better hobbies. If you’re halfway in on Jesus and halfway in on the world, that’s just enough to be miserable in both. Elijah says stop wavering. Pick a side.

You might not be bowing down to a statue in your living room, but there are rival gods competing for your affection. If money is your God, follow it. Do whatever it takes to get it. Lie, cheat, steal, sacrifice your family, do whatever it takes to get that cheddar. If sex is your god, do whatever it takes to satisfy those cravings. Experience the full spectrum of human desire. Don’t let marriage shackle you. If sex is god, then follow it.

But if Jesus is God, follow Him. Revivals in history happen in different ways, but one of the constants is that every time there’s a revival there is repentance of sin. In my life, when God met me in my college years, he drew a line in the sand. It was time to choose. I saw that I had been half-hearted in my faith, and half-heartedness is an inappropriate response to a God who has whole-heartedly loved me. My prayer was Psalm 86:11, “Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.” So, God started peeling back the layers, showing me the idols that I’d been wavering between: lies and lust and greed and pride and unholy ambition. So what are the rival gods competing for your allegiance? “Elijah...said, ‘Stop wavering. If God is God, follow him. If Baal is god, follow him.’ But the people said nothing” (1 Kings 18:21).

So Elijah comes up with a contest. Let’s each set up a sacrifice on an altar, but not light the fire. Then we’ll pray. Whoever’s god lights the fire, that’s the one true God. Elijah lets the 850 pagan prophets go first.

So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “Baal, answer us!” they shouted. [*Now, the odds are 850-1. Plus, Baal was the god of the storm and the god of the sun—surely he could light a fire right?*] But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. 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. [*In the Hebrew, that word “busy” literally means “using the bathroom.” Elijah’s saying, “Maybe Baal’s not answering because he’s on the can with the fan on.”*] So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday

passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention. (1 Kings 18:26-29)

Their dancing and hollering burned a lot of calories, but all their frenzy produced no fire. Today, around the world, hundreds of millions of hours of prayer will be offered to fake gods, and those prayers will accomplish nothing. False gods promise what only the true God can provide. The difference between an idol and a real God is only one can deliver. Tim Keller says, "Jesus is the only God that if you find him will satisfy you, and if you fail him will forgive you." Any idol you look to for ultimate meaning and purpose in life will fail you: money or sex or power or a perfect family or the image of success will let you down, even after you dance and cut yourself to try to make it happy. But the good news is that you have something even better than fire from heaven to prove to you who the real God is. You have a bloody cross and an empty tomb to prove to you now and forever that the one true God is the one who was cut for you in another showdown on another hillside, where sin and death were defeated.

So Elijah builds his altar. He kills the bull then soaks it in water, just to let God to show off. Then he prays a short simple prayer to the one true God in verses 36-39.

At the time of the sacrifice, Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "Lord, the 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. Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." 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. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!"

Amazing.

### **Look to the Horizon**

Sometimes God wants to send you to the wilderness to work in you. Then he can send you to the mountaintop to work through you. God sent Elijah to the wilderness, then to the mountaintop, and then, third, to look to the horizon. After the people see that God is the one true God, the drought is almost over.

And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back." The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'" Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. The power of the LORD came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel. (1 Kings 18:41-46)

If I asked you, "How's your prayer life going?" my guess is very few of us would say, "Yep, it's awesome. Killing it." Most of us know we should pray. We want to pray. Or at least we want to want to pray. We admire people who pray. Occasionally we get inspired to pray, so we sit down, aim our thoughts in God's general direction, pray for everything we can think of, and it takes about a minute

and a half. Then we remember something we forgot to do, so we pick up our phone, and go on about our day.

So when you hear stories of revival, of 100-year prayer meeting, of Elijah praying and God sending the rain, maybe you think, “That’s great for spiritual superheroes. I’m just not like that.” In the New Testament, James the brother of Jesus says, “Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops” (James 5:17-18). Elijah didn’t wear a cape. He didn’t have a super-secret hotline to God. He was a normal guy like you and me who prayed, a guy who wanted God. God comes where he’s wanted. Do you believe what the Bible says about prayer? Do you believe Matthew 7:8, “For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened”? Do you believe James 4:8, “Come near to God and he will come near to you”? Because my guess is, if we actually believed that, we would pray. God comes where he’s wanted.

A couple years ago, Dan and I heard a preacher talk about the Atacama Desert in Chile, the driest desert on earth (view online sermon to see photo). When space programs want to practice for what life is like on Mars, they go to the Atacama Desert. It looks dry and dead on the surface, but beneath the surface of the soil, there are millions of seeds underground, waiting to grow. They just don’t have enough water to make them sprout. But back in 2015, there was what’s called a superbloom. The Atacama desert received twelve years’ worth of rain in seven hours. Look what happened (view online sermon to see photo).

This is our time, church. Look to the horizon—I see a cloud. We need twenty years’ worth of prayer in six months so that our grandchildren will be able to play in the flowers, to bask in the glory of God, because God comes where he’s wanted.

## **Conclusion**

If you’re in the wilderness today, God’s trying to do something in you. If you’re on the mountaintop, maybe God’s ready to do something through you. Maybe today you hear the voice of God saying, “Stop wavering. It’s time to choose.” If God is God, follow him. The Porch is going to be open; we’d love to talk with you. There will be leaders around the room who would love to pray with you. Talk to your life group leader, or one of the pastors here. Maybe today, you feel a holy desire welling up in your spirit, to contend in prayer for the next generation, to ask God to send the rain on Indianapolis, to bring revival on the south side, and you’re not going to stop until it happens. What if Elijah had quit praying after four times, five, times, six times? Maybe there’s something you’ve stopped praying for that you need to get back on your knees and ask God for again.

One more story, then I’m done. I read a story about two men, Doug and Bob. Doug runs a ministry in Washington, DC and Bob was an insurance salesman, a brand-new Christian. One day Bob got excited reading the Bible when Jesus said, “Ask whatever you will in my name, and you shall receive it.” I’ll let the author take it from here:

“Is that really true?” Bob demanded. Doug explained, “Well, it’s not a blank check. You have to take it in context. But yes—it really is true. Jesus really does answer prayer.” “Great!” Bob said. “Then I gotta start praying for something. I think I’ll pray for Africa.” “That’s kind of a broad target. Why don’t you narrow it down to one country?” Doug advised. “All right. I’ll pray for Kenya.” “Do you know anyone in Kenya?” Doug asked. “No.” “Ever been to Kenya?” “No.” Bob just wanted to pray for Kenya.

So Doug made an unusual arrangement. He challenged Bob to pray every day for six months for Kenya. If Bob would do that and nothing extraordinary happened, Doug would pay him five hundred dollars. But if something remarkable did happen, Bob would pay Doug five hundred dollars. And if Bob did not pray every day, the whole deal was off....Bob began to pray, and for a long while nothing happened. Then one night he was at a dinner in Washington. The people around the table explained what they did for a living. One woman said she helped run an orphanage in Kenya—the largest of its kind.

Bob saw five hundred dollars suddenly sprout wings and begin to fly away. But he could not keep quiet. Bob roared to life. He had not said much up to this point, but now he pounded her relentlessly with question after question. “You’re obviously very interested in my country,” the woman said to Bob, overwhelmed by his sudden barrage of questions. “You’ve been to Kenya before?” “No.” “You know someone in Kenya?” “No.” “Then how do you happen to be so curious?” “Well, someone is kind of paying me five hundred dollars to pray....” She asked Bob if he would like to come visit Kenya and tour the orphanage. Bob was so eager to go, he would have left that very night if he could.

When Bob arrived in Kenya, he was appalled by the poverty and the lack of basic health care. Upon returning to Washington, he couldn’t get this place out of his mind. He began to write to large pharmaceutical companies, describing to them the vast need he had seen. He reminded them that every year they would throw away large amounts of medical supplies that went unsold. “Why not send them to this place in Kenya?” he asked. Some of them did. The orphanage received more than a million dollars’ worth of medical supplies.

The woman called Bob up and said, “Bob, this is amazing! We’ve had the most phenomenal gifts because of the letters you wrote. We would like to fly you back over and have a big party.” So Bob flew back to Kenya. While he was there, the president of Kenya came to the celebration, because it was the largest orphanage in the country, and offered to take Bob on a tour of Nairobi, the capital city. On the tour they saw a prison. Bob asked about a group of prisoners there. “They’re political prisoners,” he was told. “That’s a bad idea,” Bob said brightly. “You should let them out.” Bob finished the tour and flew home.

Sometime later, Bob received a call from the State Department of the United States government: “Is this Bob?” “Yes.” “Were you recently in Kenya?” “Yes.” “Did you make any statements to the president about political prisoners?” “Yes.” “What did you say?” “I told him he should let them out.” The State Department official explained that the department had been working for years to get the release of these prisoners, to no avail. Normal diplomatic channels and political maneuverings had led to a dead end. But now the prisoners had been released, and the State Department had been told that it had largely been because of...Bob. So the government was calling to say thanks.

Several months later, the president of Kenya made a phone call to Bob. He was going to rearrange his government and select a new cabinet. Would Bob be willing to fly over and pray for him for three days while he worked on this very important task? So Bob—who was not politically connected at all—boarded a plane and flew to Kenya, where he prayed and ask God to grant wisdom for the leader of a nation as he selected his government.

Church, I’m going to give you the Bob Challenge. Start praying for something. Make it specific. Pray for one place, one person, one neighbor, one family member, whatever God puts on your heart. And if you pray that prayer every day for six months and nothing happens, Dan Hamel will give you

\$500. I'm kidding. He won't, and I won't either. But if something extraordinary does happen, you have to tell me about it. Let's pray.