

God's Story; Challenges Of The Journey

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Outline

- Story telling; the narrative of the journey
- Story-teller; the reality of the journey

The Journey

(the act of travelling from one place to another)

- Is a space of exploration and discovery
- There are no clever methods or practice
- Is not a deadline, it's a lifeline (it's a guideline on how to be and how to become)
- Takes us away from places of power (the roles that were defined for us)
- Is about story-telling, God tells His story which becomes our story.

God's Story-Tellers (Old Testament Prophets)

- Heard and proclaimed God's words
- Engaged in prophetic speech (repentance, punishment, restoration)
- Some examples:
 1. The announcement of a new Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31)
 2. The announcement of the Gospel (Isaiah 61:1-2)
 3. The announcement of the Gift of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28)

God's Story-Tellers (Old Testament Prophets)

- God spoke to His story-tellers in multiple ways:
 1. Visions (Isaiah 1:1, Ezekiel 1:1)
 2. Audibly (1 Samuel 3:10-14)
 3. Actions/Prophetic Signs (Ezekiel 4:1-8, Hosea 1:2)
 4. Parables (2 Samuel 12:1-7)
 5. Miracles (1 Kings 18:16-39)
- Story-tellers embodied God's reality
- Story-tellers did not engage in detached, objective or impersonal communication
- Story-tellers engaged with the God condition (sadness, agony, joy)
- Story-telling was not just what they did, it was who they were

**What are some of the
challenges of the
journey?**

Elijah's Journey (1 Kings 17-19)

1 Kings 17 – 1 Kings 19:1-18 (Context)

- King Ahab married Jezebel who was a Sidonian
 - *King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter— Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. ² They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." – 1 Kings 11:1-2*
- Ahab became a Baal worshipper
 - *"...he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. ³² He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. ³³ Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him." – 1 Kings 16:31-32*

God responded through 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

Characters in the story (Context)

- **Ahab and Jezebel**
 - The Crown
- **Elijah**
 - The lone prophet who struggled against the Baal cult endorsed by The Crown
- **The widow at Zarephath and her son (1 Kings 17:7-24)**
 - A citizen who was impacted by Elijah's prophecy or by the actions of The Crown?
 - A son who died and Elijah was held accountable for his death
- **Obadiah (1 Kings 18:1-15)**
 - An official of The Crown who was secretly hiding prophets and fearful for his own life

Challenge 1: The Prophet Did Not Escape His Prophecy

*Sometime later the brook dried up because there had been no rain
in the land. – 1 Kings 17:7*

The journey; a costly adventure

- Elijah's life was altered after he engaged in God's story
- He went into hiding [what did it cost him?] (1 Kings 17:2)
- He went into isolation (1 Kings 18:22)
- He was directed to a place with water and meals from an unclean source (1 Kings 17:7)
- His resource dried up and he was instructed to change location again (1 Kings 17:9)

Though he was liable to suffer, Yahweh ensured that the one He called was provided for.

Challenge 2: The Prophet Needed Help

When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" "As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread." – 1 Kings 17:10-11

The journey; a place of humility

People who hear from God are the ones who help; they do not need help, right?

- Elijah's needed help to navigate the impact of his prophecy
- We can't pack all that we need for the journey
- Sometimes packing well means unpacking everything
- The journey strengthens our humility, there can be no sense of *'keeping up appearances'*
- Elijah needed the help of a widow who was impacted by his prophecy – should he feel guilty? (1 Kings 17:10–12)

God ensured that the widow's food source was miraculously replenished throughout the drought

Challenge 3: The Prophet Was Blamed

¹⁷ Sometime later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. 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 Kings 17:17-18

The journey; the assurance that God is with me

- Her questioning showed that she considered Elijah to be liable [1 Kings 17:18-22]
- God's protagonist was cast as the villain in her story
- The boy's death heightened the impression of the Elijah's standing with God
- The journey can be filled with contradictions; Elijah was spiritually strong and yet he could not provide for his natural means

Challenge 4: The Death Threat

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." ² So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab.

Now the famine was severe in Samaria, ³ and Ahab had summoned Obadiah, his palace administrator. (Obadiah was a devout believer in the Lord. ⁴ While Jezebel was **kill**ing 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.) ⁵ Ahab had said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals." ⁶ So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another.

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?" ⁸ "Yes," he replied. "Go tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'" ⁹ "What have I done wrong," asked Obadiah, "that you are handing your servant over to Ahab **to be put to death**?" ¹⁰ As surely as the Lord your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you. ¹¹ But now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' ¹² I don't know where the Spirit of the Lord may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, **he will kill me.** – **1 Kings 18:1-12**

The journey; a growing list of safety concerns?

- Elijah reassured Obadiah that he will not be placed in danger (1 Kings 18:15) – at best Obadiah's employment was at risk, at worst his life was in danger.
- Ahab blamed Elijah for his sins (1 Kings 18:17) – in his view, Elijah was the problem – the called is often blamed.
- Elijah resisted The Crown – how can one man take on the government and win?

Resisting The Crown

Israel gathered to witness who is the true God

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."

*²⁰ So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. 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." – **1 Kings 18:19–21***

Resisting The Crown

²³ Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets 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. 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."

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." ²⁶ 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. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

*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." ²⁸ So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. ²⁹ 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 18:23–29***

Resisting The Crown

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 had been torn down. 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.” 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. 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.”

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. ³⁵ The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

³⁶ At the time of sacrifice, the prophet 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. ³⁷ Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”

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.

³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!”

And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.”

– 1 Kings 18:41

Challenge 5: The Prophet's Mental Health Was Impacted

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 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." ³ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, 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." ⁵ Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

– 1 Kings 19:1–5

The Journey

- To journey with God means to live in the tension of two realities; the 'now' and the 'not yet'
- The journey is a retreat:
 - A radical refusal to endorse ideas and practices that are against the will of God
 - It is the bravery to face The Crown
 - An intentional dependency on God
 - To be faced with my humanity

