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Sermon Series: *Looking Up*, No.3

Divine Door Dash

January 30, 2022

**1 Kings 17:2-16 (NIV)**

*Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: <sup>3</sup> "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. <sup>4</sup> You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there."*

*<sup>5</sup> So he did what the Lord had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. <sup>6</sup> The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.*

*<sup>7</sup> Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. <sup>8</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to him: <sup>9</sup> "Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food." <sup>10</sup> So he went to Zarephath. 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?" <sup>11</sup> As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."*

*<sup>12</sup> "As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread – only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it – and die."*

*<sup>13</sup> Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. <sup>14</sup> 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 sends rain on the land.'"*

*<sup>15</sup> 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.*

*<sup>16</sup> For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.*

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**Living life looking up:** that's been our theme these past few Sundays.

In spite of a world full of hard things and bad news, and in spite of living among a majority of people who live life looking down, especially in these days, God calls His people to be different. He calls His own to look up in hope and expectation and confidence, because He is here. God is here and alive and at work in our world.

Now, apart from Him, of course, people have very good reason to look down and to wonder if life, here, is worth living.

But part of our witness for Jesus is to show to the world around that with Him – with God – anything, even the impossible, is possible!

With Him, even death ends in life, you see, so as long as we are with Him, we have all the reason in the world to have hope and confidence and peace – to live life looking up.

These past weeks, we've seen this choice to live this way in this man, Caleb – in his good report about Israel's Promised Land. Even though he was, tragically, outvoted, his assessment was right because he knew God was with Him.

We also saw a life looking up in Joshua – and frankly in all of Israel as, after 40 years of "wilderness training," they believed God for a miraculous military victory.

We also saw this choice in this woman, Rahab, a non-Jew and even a Canaanite, who was able to see Israel's God such that she was willing to lay her life on the line for Him and for His purposes.

And today we see a looking-up life in the prophet Elijah, in that 1 Kings 17 text that was just read for us. I'd encourage you to turn back there and follow along in a Bible.

Elijah came on the scene about 900 BC, centuries after the fall of Jericho (that we talked about last week), after the period of Israel's Judges, after the kingships of Saul and then David and then Solomon, and after the division of the nation of Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah in 930 BC.

Elijah appears in the northern kingdom – a kingdom that was maybe as divided as our nation is today about its future – about who it would be.

Some there in Israel wanted a return to the ways of God. The majority, however, wanted a more, let's say, "progressive faith environment," and the poster-child of that movement became King Ahab's wife, Jezebel, a foreign princess who worshipped Baal. Girls even today are not named after Jezebel!

Ahab was king of Israel for 22 years and, well, look there at what 1 Kings 16 says about him, starting in verse 30:

"Ahab...did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those (kings) before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam (a former evil king), but he also married Jezebel and began to serve her god."

Down to verse 33 there, "Ahab did more to provoke the Lord...to anger than did all of Israel's kings before him."

That's quite an assessment, isn't it?

It's also interesting, for our purposes, that verse 34 there tells us that it was under Ahab's rule that Jericho was rebuilt. There is a symbol of Ahab's values, right there.

Remarkably, Ahab, personally, apparently still worshipped the God of Israel, since he gave all his children Hebrew names. But just like Solomon before him, Ahab was led astray by his wife – his spouse.

There's a big lesson right there in being unequally yoked in marriage. Be careful whom you choose as friends and confidants and certainly whom you choose as your spouse. The very best of our intentions can be totally upended by the decisions we make concerning those things.

Anyway, this is the environment into which God raised up this man, Elijah – really the first of what we call the "major" prophets.

Elijah was from Gilead, which was east of the Jordan river, or the "Transjordan," as it's sometimes called. Remember those tribes of Israel that, in the conquest of Canaan, asked if they could stay on that eastern side of the river - where they'd already established homes and farms and all that? That's Elijah's heritage.

Those people were country people, who (and this is true even today) generally tend to be more conservative and grounded than city people. City people, because they're surrounded by man-made things, tend to lose their spiritual groundings—and especially capital city people who live in those places where human power is particularly concentrated.

Just as we might say today, "What on earth is going on in Washington, D.C., or in Frankfort? It's like they've lost their minds!", so would Elijah and his people say about Samaria, the northern kingdom's capitol. The luxuries, injustices and religious indifference that went on there were more than just offensive to Elijah, they were intolerable, and so he gave his life to battle against them—largely single-handedly.

Elijah appears out of nowhere and declares to King Ahab, "God says there will be a drought: no rain, no dew, even for years—until I say differently."

And then he disappears.

Now, I'm sure, at that moment, Ahab thought, "Why do all the crazies wind up at my door?" and had him removed. And then Ahab totally forgot about him.

But Ahab wouldn't forget Elijah for long.

At this point, Elijah hears the Lord say, "Go and hide, back in your own country, east of the Jordan, in the Kerith Ravine," a place that makes Wilmore look like a major metropolitan city.

And at this, I'm sure Elijah thought, "What have I gotten myself into here? That place is absolutely desolate. This plan is for the birds!"

Yet he does what God asks—and this is where the Divine Door Dash comes in.

Now, in case you don't know, Door Dash is a company, along with Grub Hub and Uber Eats, that picks up food you order from restaurants and delivers it to you—to your home or office or church or wherever.

[Usher brings in bag of food and a beverage, calling "Delivery calls for Diddle!" Place objects on pulpit.]

Yes, just like that.

And why I've called this message "Divine Door Dash," is, of course, because God confirmed His directions to Elijah by feeding him there in the wilderness, in that ravine, through God's own personal food delivery service. The plan was, literally, for the birds—to feed Elijah.

You can hardly read about this without thinking of Luke 12, where Jesus says "God feeds the ravens of the air," in order to remind us that if God is that concerned about even birds, then certainly He's far more concerned about people.

So, God feeds these ravens, which, in turn, feed God's prophet.

[Check the bag.]

The ravens, in fact, fed Elijah very well! Verse 6 there says they brought him bread and meat in the morning and in the evening. That's significant, because only the most wealthy people in the Ancient Near East had meat every day.

It's as if God is going out of His way to assure Elijah, "What you're doing is right!" so that he'd keep doing it—so he'd have the courage and confidence to keep speaking for God.

Because let's face it, speaking against the King—and against the persuasion of at least half your nation—is a punishing thing that can hardly be done on rabbit food alone.

The fact is, Elijah didn't know the half of what God would ask him to do in the days to come—which is the way God works with most of us, doesn't He? He unfolds His plan to us piece by piece, because if we knew what all it would involve ahead of time, we probably wouldn't agree to it.

So, God builds faith in us to do the next thing, and as we do that, He builds faith in us for the next, and then the next.

So the ravens keep Elijah fed.

I can't help but wonder about the details of that, you know? I mean, what did that look like? It didn't look like this [pick up bag of food]—cooked, packaged, and bagged.

Although the meat was probably still warm—and wearing its fur coat.

Anyway, in feeding Elijah's body through this divine door dash delivery, God also fed Elijah's faith—so he'd be ready to do the next thing.

And what a next thing it was!

When the stream in the ravine dried up because, of course, there was no rain—because, of course, Elijah said there would be no rain, God announces the next part of the plan and sends him, ironically, to this, "Zaraphath of Sidon," or, said another way, to the very land from which Jezebel came!

God says, "You go from here, Elijah, right into the hometown of your greatest enemy!" which was also suffering the same drought and famine as Israel—thanks to Elijah!

A dangerous mission!

Yet Elijah goes!

Why?

Because he was looking up! With a memory full of the miracles God had already done, Elijah just presumes, "Well, if God has done all this yesterday and today, surely He'll take care of me tomorrow."

So, by faith, he walks right into the enemy's camp.

Does God have style or what?

You see, Baal-Melkart (Jezebel's god—the god of Sidon) was supposed to be the Ruler of the Universe. But here's Israel's God, not only bringing famine to Baal's land, but He's even bringing His own prophet, the one who declared the famine, into Baal's backyard.

And, what God does there through Elijah is powerful!

First to this widow.

Imagine: Elijah, this foreigner and the one, in fact, who, ostensibly, caused the drought and famine, is now asking a sufferer of the famine, “Hey, how about bringing me some water – and while you’re at it, how about a piece of bread?”

And the woman agrees! For two reasons.

First, because, as we learn in verse 9 there, God has already moved her to do this, even though it was probably against her better human judgment.

And second, the woman agrees because Elijah is confident enough in God to assure her, in verse 13 there, “Don’t be afraid. So long as you do what I tell you, God will make sure there’s enough.”

Now, there is a statement of faith for today: “Don’t be afraid. As long as you do what I tell you, God will make sure there’s enough.”

At this point, we might imagine the woman saying, “Really? How can you be so sure?” and Elijah replying, “Well, let me tell you about how He’s been feeding me for the past few..”

And so, she listens and does as Elijah says, and, of course, it all happens just as he said: God provides for her needs and the needs of her family.

In spite of appearances.

In spite of what would seem logical.

In spite of her own past faith tradition.

In spite of what her friends and neighbors might think.

In spite of what would be understood as better judgment.

She does what God says, and God is faithful. Verse 16 there, “The jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry.

Now, I mentioned this a few weeks ago, but notice here again, the divine/human partnership that brings God’s will to be accomplished. You see, it took God acting and nudging this Sidonian widow, speaking to her about this strange guy who would be visiting her. And, it took both the widow’s and Elijah’s obedience to God in doing as He asked, in order to make all this happen.

To accomplish what He wants to accomplish, you see, God works, but He uses people in the process.

He could just zap things done, but He doesn’t typically do that. God is inefficient like that because He’s interested in people more than production – because it’s people who are the pinnacle of His creation.

Here, God is building faith in this woman, and you see, in doing so He’s letting Elijah know (and us as well) that He’s not just interested in Jews. He’s interested in the whole world, in anyone who will choose to live life looking up to Him.

But you know even more, through all this, God continues to build faith in Elijah. Every morning, when there was, miraculously, still more flour and more oil, God reinforced in Elijah what He’s capable of. All this “living in the ravine and being fed by birds and living in the enemy camp” is exercising, developing and strengthening Elijah’s faith muscle to prepare him for an even bigger event that will happen in the coming days at Mount Carmel. It is there that, instead of all this round

about stuff, Elijah and Jezebel and their gods would face off in person.

There, it would be Elijah against hundreds of Baal prophets and Israel’s king and queen.

It would be, very literally, a life-or-death moment for him.

He didn’t know it was coming yet, but you see, all of this “go here” and experience a miracle, and then “go there” and experience another miracle: it was hard, but it was training for Elijah – strength and faith training – for an event that would be bigger than anything he could imagine.

That is how God strengthens and broadens and deepens His people: He tells us, “Do this.” And, yeah, the “this” might be tough, but when we do it, and we see Him at work in it, we’re encouraged to follow Him again, and again and again: to keep trusting – to keep looking up – so our faithfulness in the small things will make us faithful in the big things.

That’s how ordinary, country people become major prophets for God: they look up, they follow, they see God at work. And so, again, they look up, they follow, and they see God at work.

That’s a life that pleases God, and it’s way simpler than some make it seem.

To please Him, we don’t have to make huge, elaborate plans to do great, dramatic things. God makes the plans. He carries the load. We just have to look up, and follow, and watch Him work.

That’s the kind of life God wants His people to live.

Are we living that kind of life?

In our day, it’s God’s Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Jesus, the Savior – that leads His people. Where has He led you today, or where is He trying to lead you?

To a wilderness ravine?

To a foreign land?

To a hostile place?

A place of poverty?

A place of dependence on someone you’d rather not depend on?

Maybe you think His plan is for the birds!

And maybe it is! And maybe it’s those very birds that will sustain you and strengthen you, so God can lead you on to the next thing – to a greater purpose that can’t be seen just yet.

So, will we look up to Him for today? Will we receive from Him what He wants to bring us today – so that we’ll be ready for tomorrow? I think that’s what He wants to know.

Closing Prayer

Closing Song: *All the Way My Savior Leads Me*

Benediction: You know, the raven, to a Jew, is unclean.<sup>1</sup> Yet here they are delivering Elijah’s food. That probably helped teach Elijah something about the wideness of God.

<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 11:15; Deuteronomy 14:14

Then, he's also taken in and fed by, of all people, a Canaanite woman in Jezebel's hometown, and yet she obviously displays great faith in Israel's God.

God's plans are often surprising, and His ways of providing are not always what we'd expect.

But in the end, when we follow Him, it's hard to question His results.

So, let's look up and follow and watch God work—and be encouraged! God is taking us someplace! God has plans for us!