

What Are You Doing?

by Chuck Smith

In this sermon, Chuck Smith explores the themes of faith, trials, and God's sustaining presence through the story of Elijah and the teachings of James.

Duration: 37:23

Scripture: James 1:2

Topics: "Choosing"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor Brian focuses on the book of James, specifically chapter 1. He encourages the congregation to find joy in the midst of various trials, as these trials can strengthen their faith and produce patience. He emphasizes the importance of seeking wisdom from God and having unwavering faith when asking for it. Pastor Brian also references the story of Elijah hiding in a cave and highlights the need to listen to God's voice and come out of despair to serve the Lord. The sermon concludes with an invitation for those who feel called to commit their lives to Jesus Christ.

Transcript

Let's turn now in our Bibles to James chapter 1. I'll read the first, the odd-numbered verses. Pastor Brian will lead the congregation in the even-numbered verses through verse 25. Shall we stand as we read the Word of God? James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. And if any of you lack in wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted. But the rich in that he is made low, because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with burning heat, but it withereth as the grass, and the flower thereof falleth.

And the grace of the fashion of it perishes, so shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, because God cannot be tempted with evil, and neither tempteth he any man.

But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. And then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath.

For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is likened to a man beholding his natural face in a mirror. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the Christian walk, the Christian experience, and the testings, Lord, that you put us through, whereby we might see and understand the truth about ourselves. Lord, we thank you that you are with us on the mountain peaks, and that you are with us in the dark valleys, that you have promised, Lord, that you would never leave us or forsake us.

And so we learn, Lord, to look to you, and look for you in those dark hours, that you, Lord, might minister to us in our weakness, that we might, Lord, experience your strength, your encouragement, your love. Bless the study of the word this morning in Jesus' name, amen. You may be seated.

As was announced earlier by Roger, we will be studying tonight 1 Kings 19 through 22, finishing the book of 1 Kings this evening. Some very interesting, exciting stories here in 1 Kings. We encourage you, read it over, read through the Bible with us, journey with us as we go through the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

This morning we'd like to draw your attention to 1 Kings chapter 19 and verse 9. We find that Elijah is in a cave down on Mount Horeb, and the Lord came to Elijah there, and the word of the Lord came to him and said, What are you doing here, Elijah? Elijah had just experienced a tremendous victory. He had challenged the prophets of Baal, 450 of them. They were there on Mount Carmel.

Israel was gathered together for this contest, and both Elijah and the false prophets were to build altars to their gods. They weren't to put any fire on the altar, but they were to pray to their gods to answer by fire. It was agreed that the God that would answer by fire would be acknowledged as the true God.

And so the prophets of Baal had built their altar, and they had prayed all day that Baal might send fire and consume the sacrifice, but of course no fire came. At the time of the evening sacrifice and prayer, Elijah then called upon Jehovah, and the fire came from heaven, consumed the sacrifice, the altar, and the

people fell on their faces and said, Jehovah is God, Jehovah is God. Seizing the moment, Elijah took the 450 prophets of Baal down to the Kishon Brook, and there he killed the 450 prophets of Baal.

Now Jezebel, who was the queen and a very wicked queen, when she heard that Elijah had killed the 450 prophets of Baal, she took an oath. She said, God do the same for me if by tomorrow evening at this time I do not have the head of Elijah. And so when Elijah heard the threat upon his life, he began to flee from Jezebel.

The experiences of Elijah really mirror often the experiences of our lives. He goes from an extremely high experience, you might say a mountaintop experience with God on the top of Mount Carmel, where God answered by fire and the prophets of Baal were defeated. And from this very pinnacle of excitement and the presence of God being manifested in the fire, he now goes into deep depression.

He hears that Jezebel has vowed to kill him, and so he is on the run, fleeing from Jezebel. Now could not Elijah, this mighty man of faith, have just called down fire from heaven to consume her? Why would he be running from her? As we read on in our passages this week, in fact down in the same chapter, when Ahab sends a captain with 50 men to arrest Elijah, who is sitting there on the hillside, when the captain came with his 50 men and said, O thou man of God, come down, the king has ordered you to come to him. And Elijah said, if I'm a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 men.

And fire came down from heaven and consumed the captain with his 50. And so Ahab sent out another captain with another 50 men and he said, O thou man of God, come down, I'm here to arrest you. And he said, I'm a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your 50 men.

Fire came down from heaven, consumed him and his 50 men. The third captain was a little wiser, he said, O sir, please, I'm a family man, I have a wife and children, they need me at home. But the king does want you to come on down and would you mind, would you please? And but if he could call down fire from heaven to consume the captains with their 50s, could he not have just called down fire from heaven to consume this wicked woman, Jezebel? Was it necessary for him to flee? God has sustained him through the miraculous drought, but he did not have enough faith to believe that God would sustain him from the threats of this wicked Jezebel.

This story, of course, shows to us how that great men of God can get discouraged. That men of God can sometimes experience fear and defeat. We do not always live on the mountaintop experiences.

We must cross the valleys if we're to make it to the next mountain peak. And sometimes we pass through deep water. Sometimes we go through fiery trials.

But we have that promise of God made to Isaiah. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.

And when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned. And neither shall the flame kindle upon you. There are times when we are going through these fiery trials that we think, surely I'm going to be consumed.

Or when we pass through the deep waters, we think, I'm going to drown. But I am here today to testify to you of the faithfulness of God. I've been through many deep waters.

I have passed through many fiery trials. But God has sustained me. I'm here today to bear witness of God's keeping power and of God's sustaining power.

Now if you have done your reading this week, and I trust you have, and if you haven't, then I trust you will by tonight. We get the interesting story of Ben-Hadad, who is the king of Syria. And he has some 32 kings who have gathered with him.

And so they decide to go down and to defeat Israel. And so they come with this mighty army. And Ben-Hadad sends his messengers unto King Ahab.

And he says, all of your treasures are mine, and your wives and your children. So Ahab seeing this huge army capitulates. He said, they are yours.

I will deliver to you all of my wealth and my wives and children. Ben-Hadad sent the second message. And he said, my servants will come to your palace.

And they will go through your palace. And whatever they see and desire, they're going to take. They're going to sack it completely.

At this point Ahab sent to his generals. And he said, this fellow is just really looking for a fight. I had conceded to the first demands, but this is too much.

And so they gathered together to fight against Syria. And the word of the Lord came to them and said that they would be successful in the battle. And indeed they were successful.

They defeated the Syrian army with the 32 joining kings. The following year, they decided to come back again against Israel. This time again with 32 divisions.

And as they had come into Israel, the advisors to Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria said, you know, the mistake that we made last year is that we fought them in the hills. Their God is the God of the hills. If we will fight them in the plain, then surely we will defeat them.

And so a prophet came to Ahab and he said, because they have said that he is the God of the hills and not the God of the plains, you will even have a more decisive victory over them this year. And so Ahab went out to meet them and they thoroughly routed the Syrians because God was going to show to them that he was the God of the valleys as well as the God of the mountaintops. And so it is in our own lives.

We have those glorious mountaintop experiences, spiritual highs in which we feel the presence of God and are excited over the things that God is doing. And we realize He's the God of the mountaintops. But then when we go through the valleys, sometimes we feel like God has forsaken us.

When we go through those fiery trials, it's like God isn't there, but it's good to know that He is the God of the valleys also. And He is there with us in the valley, even that final valley, as David said, yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, the God of the valleys. And God manifested Himself as the God of the valleys.

But Elijah, allowing fear to overcome him, is fleeing from Jezebel. They flee south to Beersheba and there Elijah leaves his servant and continues alone on into the wilderness, the Negev wilderness, south from Beersheba. And he journeyed, another day's journey, came to a juniper tree and he sat down under the juniper tree and said, Lord, kill me.

I don't want to go on any further. I'm through. I'm washed up.

You might as well just kill me, Lord. You know, it's interesting that there are times in life when we figure the only solution is death. And we sort of say, Elijah, move over.

I want to sit beside you. There's no sense of trying to go on any further. It's all over.

Fear gripping his heart, tired from his flight, Elijah fell asleep under that juniper tree. But he was awakened by an angel. And there by him there was a bed of coals with some bread that was baked upon it and a cruise of water.

The angel said, eat the bread, drink the water. And so he ate it, he drank the water and he went back to sleep. Again, the angel woke him up and there was another loaf of bread and water there.

And he said, eat the bread and drink the water, because the trip that you have is too great for you. You're going to need strength. You're going to need supernatural strength to make it through this journey that is in front of you.

And as we look at our journey of life, we realize that it is really more than we can handle ourselves. And we need the help of the Lord. We need the strength of the Lord.

Jesus said, I am the living bread. He who eats of me shall never hunger. And he went for 40 days on the strength of that bread until he came all the way down to Mount Horeb.

That mountain where Moses met God and received from God the Ten Commandments, the prophet Elijah is also going to meet with God. There is a cave. We find him hiding in the cave.

They're in that barren wilderness. And the Lord came to him in his discouragement and he said, Elijah, what are you doing here? Now, here is where the Bible is just words on a page and we can't catch the inflection of the voice. And many times you have to catch the inflection to know what's being said.

For instance, when Adam and Eve had hid themselves in the garden after their sin and God came into the garden and said, Adam, where art thou? What was the voice? Was it that of an arresting officer? Or was it the voice of a heartbroken father? I hear it as the voice of a heartbroken father. Adam, where are you? What have you done? I hear this not as a voice of, Elijah, what are you doing here? You know, a lot of times we see a person in a place that is sort of, well, I went one day to visit in a jail in Sacramento and I saw a fellow that I knew. And I said, what are you doing here? I mean, in jail, you know, and that's one way to look at it.

There is another, what are you doing here? The emphasis upon the doing. What are you doing? And really, the answer would be, well, I'm hiding. And I'm really doing nothing.

Because he was doing nothing, but just hiding. But instead of answering God's question, Elijah said, I've been very jealous for Jehovah, the God of hosts, and for the children of Israel, for they have forsaken your covenant. They've thrown down your altars.

They've slain your prophets with a sword. And I am the only one left. And they're trying to find me, to kill me.

The Lord commanded him to go out of the cave, to stand on the mount before the Lord, as the Lord passed by. And a strong wind, it said, ripped through the mountain, dislodging rocks. But God was not in the wind.

After the wind, there was an earthquake. God was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake of fire, God was not in the fire.

And then there came a still small voice. And God was in the still small voice. Now, sometimes God is in the wind.

We read on the day of Pentecost, when they were gathered there in the upper room, that suddenly there came a sound from heaven, like unto a mighty rushing wind, filled all of the house where they were seated. God was in the wind, as they were filled with the Holy Spirit. There were times when God was in the fire.

You remember when the three Hebrew children were cast into the burning, fiery furnace. That Nebuchadnezzar said, how many did we throw in there? And they said, three. And he said, how come I see four walking around in the midst of the fire? And the fourth has a face like the Son of God.

There are times when God is in the earthquake. We read that as the disciples were praying for boldness, the place where they were praying was shaken, and God gave them boldness. We remember how Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi.

And there at the midnight hour, as they were praising and worshiping God, there came a great earthquake that opened the doors of the prison. But most generally, God speaks to us in that still, small voice. That still, small voice that in the time of difficulty assures us of His love and of His presence.

That God is still on the throne. You don't have to worry. Just put your trust in Him.

That still, small voice that when I start to go astray, speaks to my heart and says, you don't want to go there. Don't take that path. Walk with the Lord.

The still, small voice. And God spoke to Elijah in that still, small voice. What did he say? The same thing he said the first time.

He's asking the question over again. What are you doing here, Elijah? He repeated the question because Elijah did not answer it the first time. He only voiced his complaints to God.

It was a direct question. It deserved a direct answer. I'm doing nothing but hiding.

But Elijah again repeated his answer. He said, I've been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts because the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant. They've thrown down your altars.

They've slain your prophets with the sword. I am the only one left and they're seeking my life to take it away. No, Elijah, you still don't get it.

I didn't ask what's your problem. You see, the question was, what are you doing here? And Elijah just blurted out his problem. That's a very common thing.

You remember when Jesus came to the pool of Bethesda, there in Jerusalem by the sheep gate. There was a man there who was lame. And there was this tradition that whenever the waters of the pool of Bethesda were troubled by an angel, that the first one that could get in the water would be healed of his infirmity.

And so Jesus saw this man lying there lame by the pool. And he said, would you like to be healed? And the fellow said, well, you see, I have this crippled condition and I have a real problem. When the waters get troubled, I try to make my way into the water.

But because of my infirmity, I can't. And someone always beats me. Jesus didn't say, what's your problem, man? He said, would you like to be healed? And here the guy is just pouring out.

And I think that a lot of times the Lord is coming to us and wanting to help. And he said, would you like to be healed? Oh, Lord, I've got this problem. You know, it is just really bad.

And you start explaining the whole difficulty that you're experiencing. And that isn't what the question is. Would you like victory? Oh, Lord, I would just, you know, I have this weakness.

I'm just so weak. And every time the temptation comes, I just fall. I just determine I'm not going to.

But yet, Lord, I just am so weak. And that's not what he asked. Would you like victory? You bet I would.

You know, that's the answer. Yes, I want victory. And so with Elijah, the Lord is saying, what are you doing here? Oh, Lord, you know, they're after me.

They're the last one. Lord, if you lose this prophet, you're out of business. I mean, it's all over, Lord.

You know, they've gotten all of the rest of the prophets and I'm the only one left. God's answer to the overwrought prophet was, get back to work. I like that.

The Lord said, get on up to Syria and anoint Hazeiel to be the king over Syria. Then come down to Israel and anoint Jehu to be the king over Israel. And then anoint Elisha to be a prophet in your stead.

Get back to work. Satan would often like to discourage us from doing the work of the Lord. From hiding in a cave somewhere.

Where we've been active in ministry for the Lord, he'd like to just strike fear in our hearts or discouragement and have us hide away from serving God. He seeks to discourage us by causing us to think that we are all alone in our devotion for God. Nobody really cares.

I'm the only one who has a burden for this. I'm just all alone. Or he will often use nasty letters to discourage us.

I get these nasty letters on about one a week. I get scores of letters that tell of the blessing that the Word of God is to them and the teaching of the Word and how God has transformed their lives and their families and things of that nature. But it's interesting how that one letter can bug you.

And, and it just, you know, they're always unsigned of course. And so it used to be that I'd get down when I'd get these nasty letters. And it'd sort of get on my, you know, mind for a while and I'd get discouraged because this nasty letter I got.

Now I've learned to just look and see if they've signed it. If they haven't signed it, then I just rumple it up and toss it away. I don't even read it anymore.

Why should I? They're not brave enough to sign it. Why should I read it? And I was reading in Romans 8, Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ who has died, yea rather is risen again, is at the right hand of the Father, making intercession. Who is he that finds fault? God who is justified.

So I realized God isn't finding fault with me. Jesus isn't condemning me. Well, if God isn't and Jesus, who is? Well, why didn't I think of that? Satan, of course, is called in the Bible the accuser of the brethren.

So whenever I get these nasty letters anymore unsigned, I just crumple them up and say another letter from hell, you know. Why should I read it? Satan seeks to use the tool of discouragement to drive us to inactivity and to hide in some cave. But the Lord comes to our cave and he asks, what are you doing here? The inactivity.

Now, don't tell the Lord all of your woes. Just say, what do you want me to do, Lord? Be ye doers of the word, as James said, not hearers only. It is interesting, as God commissioned him and put him back to work, he then sort of gave a little postscript.

He said, you're not alone, Elijah. I have 7,000 in Israel who have not bowed their knee to Baal. Things are not as bad as you paint them to be.

You know, if we allow negative thinking to take over and if we allow fear to rule in our hearts, the case always looks to be much worse than it actually is. Problems always look greater when you look at them through the eyes of fear. They grow.

But it's all in perspective. If I see my problems in the light of God's ability, they're nothing at all. If I see them in the light of my ability, I am baffled, I'm overwhelmed, I'm overcome.

And so we must look at these things through the eyes of our Lord. They're nothing for God. And he is the one who has promised to be with us, to help us, and to see us through.

And so here's Elijah, man of God, tremendous man of God, man of faith, yet experiencing discouragement because he got his eyes off of God and upon the threats of this wicked queen. And it caused him to flee when he should have been standing. It drove him into inactivity when God still had work for him to do.

Don't let that happen to you. Don't run. Stand firm in the faith and in your trust in Jesus Christ.

He'll see you through. Father, we thank you for these stories from which we can gain such valuable lessons for life because Elijah was a man of like passions just like we are. And he knew the excitement of victory, but he also knew the despair of being defeated by the threats of others.

And yet, Lord, you used Elijah in a tremendous way. And there are those here today, Lord, that have been hiding in caves, once active in their service for you, but things discouraged them. Maybe it was a nasty letter.

Maybe Satan used someone to send them a letter that just was degrading and it brought discouragement and they started to hide in the cave. Lord, we thank you that you'll meet us even in the cave and you'll speak to us there and recommission us, Lord, to get busy about the Lord's work. And so, Lord, may we hear that still small voice speaking to us this day.

Time to get back on board. Time to commit yourself again to serve the Lord. Time to come out of that cave of despair and into the glorious walk in the Spirit.

And may we respond to that voice. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Shall we stand? The pastors are standing down here at the front. And if that still small voice has spoken to your heart today through the Word, time for you to start living your life for Jesus Christ. Time for you to commit your way and your life to serving Him.

And you'd like to respond to God, we would encourage you to come on down to the front. As soon as we're dismissed, the pastors will be happy to pray for you. God can commission you for the work that He has for your life.

You don't want to be sitting in the cave. We want to be doing the work of the Lord. You don't want to be defeated and standing in despair and hopelessness, but take heart.

The Lord will be with you, the Lord will help you, and the Lord will commission you in the work that He has for you. So rather than just rushing out, I would encourage you to rush forward and meet with these men and respond to God and to the call of God upon your heart today and make yourself available. Here I am, Lord.

Send me, use me in the accomplishing of your eternal purposes. In Jesus' name, the Lord bless thee, and keep thee. The Lord make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee, and be gracious unto thee.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

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