

Sermon: **These Are the Days of Elijah**
Scripture: **1 Kings 17:1-7**
Date: **April 8, 2018**
Preacher: **Rev. Becky Smithey**

These are the days of Elijah. It's a popular modern hymn. It always amuses me that this song has been so popular among young people and sung at various events all over the world—not just in our congregation. It makes use of a great deal of Biblical imagery but if you're not familiar with the imagery then the song is completely meaningless and all that's left is just a fun, catchy tune. Who was Elijah? What was so special about the way he proclaimed the word of the Lord? While we might be experiencing a great heat wave during our hottest summer, it's hardly a time of famine for us. And while our military are involved in a variety of situations around the globe, is this really a time of the sword? What is the year of jubilee? Wasn't that the year that we all received checks from the federal government several years back? What about Ezekiel and dry bones becoming as flesh? Now some of you will know some of these things but maybe you won't recognize others. But it makes me wonder whether we really pay attention to the words we are singing or whether we just get carried away with the music we enjoy.

So we are going to look at some of the imagery involved with this song over the next few weeks. We are going to start with, of course, "*These are the days of Elijah, declaring the word of the Lord*".

But before we do that, let's look at the overall context of the song. Is there a theme running through the song or is it just a hodgepodge of Biblical imagery that really has nothing to do with each other stuck together. Well, the song is generally and principally a song of 'hope.' The themes this song explores are to do with the characters of the Old Testament stories. Even though they are historical factual people, living in the old covenant days, their actions and character can be used to teach and represent the character of God under the new covenant and they continually and repeatedly point to Christ.

So let's start at the beginning and see what we can learn about Elijah and declaring the word of the Lord. Who was Elijah? Well, to be honest we don't really know. On, there are a few stories about him in 1st and 2nd Kings but we know nothing of his background, where he came from, who he was other than a prophet of God. Was he rich or poor? A farmer or a priest? Was he related to the royal family that he criticized so often? We just don't know. He makes his first appearance by

walking in to the presence of the notoriously wicked King Ahab and announcing that God's judgement is about to fall in the form of a drought. Then he confronts the prophets of Baal in a showdown to see which god can produce fire from heaven to light the sacrifice. Elijah wins and has the prophets of Baal killed. Then he has a crisis of faith and flees from Jezebel, the wife of Ahab. Then God comforts him. Elijah is sent to find his successor Elisha, it would have made things much easier for us if he had found a successor with a more different name, like Bob, but hey, God told Elijah to choose Elisha. Next, we find Elijah confronting Ahab over the murder of Naboth, which Ahab orchestrated to get his hands on Naboth's vineyard. Ahab repents and Elijah announces God's forgiveness. Then Elijah is given a message of judgement against King Ahaziah, where he again calls down fire from heaven, this time to destroy armies sent against him. Finally, he is taken bodily into heaven in a whirlwind.

Throughout his ministry, Elijah was known for his willingness to publicly declare the Lord's will and judgement fearlessly in the face of great adversity. We know he was not always as fearless as he sometimes appears, when he ran from Jezebel. His ministry was marked by his declaration of the word of the Lord to people who did not really want to hear it. Of risking his own life to pass on the message that God had given him.

So what lessons can we learn for today about declaring the word of the Lord? In what sense are these the days of Elijah? In what sense are the days of Elijah parallel to ours and in what sense do we need to take on the role of Elijah?

The first thing we can look at is the parallels between Elijah's time and our time. In Elijah's time the King was all about himself, who ruled wickedly purely for his own benefit and ignoring the needs of his people. Israel was of course God's chosen people and nation. The nation had started out godly, but ever since they had broken away from the southern two tribes of Judah, things had gone downhill. The people had turned from God and the kings had gradually gotten more and more wicked. Ahab, was really wicked or very easily led by his very wicked wife, Jezebel. The people in general had turned from the worship of God to the worship of the pagan Baal. But it was not only the object of people's worship that had changed but their behavior as well. Instead of the justice of the law that God had laid down, they were sinning left, right and center. Sound familiar? In our country, there used to be many who worshipped God and followed him. But now, people seek after other religions, and follow the false gods of pleasure and commercialism, and yes, even sports that take over our high and holy day of Sabbath rest.

We need someone like Elijah to stand up and preach the truth, no matter what the consequence. We need people who are willing to be like Elijah who are willing to stand up and point out where we are going wrong and help us to know how to truly follow. We need somebody like Elijah who is willing to stand alone if necessary for the truth. We need somebody like Elijah who is willing to face down the worshippers and priests of the false gods and win. We need people of dynamic faith so that when they pray, things happen, the rain stops, and the fire falls. We need people like Elijah who are willing to offer God's offer of repentance when people turn from their sins and seek God. These truly are the days when we need people like Elijah but are these really the days of Elijah? Can such people be found? And if so, what message should they be preaching? We need Elijahs! We need people to speak the truth even when it is uncomfortable.

The Bible is our standard of what is truth. This should be fairly obvious but it has some implications that sometimes bear pointing out. It means that it's not the pastor that is the standard of truth. I've heard from some friends who have the attitude that if it was preached from the pulpit it must be right. Well, as much as I'd like that to be the case, it is not true. I do my best and don't knowingly preach error, but I also am human and make mistakes, and sometimes, I get things wrong too. Hopefully, not too often when I'm preaching, but I'm not the standard of truth, the Bible is. That's why I encourage you to study your Bible, read it for yourself so that this truth will be imparted to you and you are not just spoon fed from Pastor Mike and me.

But it also means that tradition is not the standard either. Tradition can be a good guide to a correct interpretation of Scripture, it's good to know we stand in agreement with a long line of Biblical preachers all preaching the same message, but tradition is not infallible either. Martin Luther shook the church to the core when we found that church tradition had gotten the interpretation of Scripture substantially wrong and the protestant movement was born. We also need to remember that we can't continue to do things the way our parents/grandparents did 50-60 years ago in the "Good Ole Days". To only sing the old hymns written prior to the 19th century. It doesn't work to go back to those old traditions. Times change. Tradition is not infallible.

The message is the truth of scripture. If we need to find new ways of expressing that truth, that's okay. If we find ourselves in a new culture and we need to work out anew how that truth expresses itself in that new culture then that's okay, too. Missionaries do that all the time. But we need to remember that this is a different culture to what existed even 50 years ago. But what we must never do, is

compromise the truth. Twist scripture to make it fit new fashions and new ways of life. The truths of scripture stand uncompromised and must be expressed or the church is not the church. We need Elijahs, people who preach the truth no matter the cost.

But there is also a second point about the truth Elijah preached that we can learn. It's not just about preaching a message that is uncomfortable to hear, it's about preaching a message that's uncomfortable to preach. It's one thing to preach a message that's uncomfortable to hear. Some people have difficulty with this because they don't like to upset people, but others don't mind upsetting people as long as the truth is preached and to be quite honest, they argue that some people need upsetting. Remember the pastor's call is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. It is one thing to preach a message that is uncomfortable to hear. But it is much harder to preach a message that is uncomfortable to preach. It's message that would force a change even in the preacher. Or a message that would set us against others in the world or even in the church. A message that leaves us like Elijah, alone and facing attack from all sides. A message that is unpopular. A message that is uncomfortable to preach. But that is what it means to declare the word of the Lord. To not compromise on truth even when it is uncomfortable for us. There are many times when God has given me a message to preach that I wish he had not, when it would be much easier to just let things be than to preach the truth and try and effect change. But we are called to declare the word of the Lord even when it hurts us.

These are the days of Elijah, declaring the word of the Lord. God needs modern Elijahs. People who will declare the truth of the Bible. Who will not compromise so as not to upset people. Who will not compromise to make it easier on themselves. Who will not seek to preach tradition or the latest fad and what everyone wants to hear. People who will faithfully declare the word of the Lord.

Will that be you?

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I've attached the words to "Days of Elijah" so for those who may not be familiar with this song, you can see the lyrics. You can also go on to [www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com) and search for "Days of Elijah" and hear the music as well.

# Days Of Elijah

Donnie McClurkin

These are the days of Elijah  
Declaring the word of the Lord, yeah  
And these are the days of Your servant Moses  
Righteousness being restored

These are the days of great trials  
Of famine and darkness and sword  
Still we are the voice in the desert crying  
Prepare ye the way of the Lord!

Say, behold He comes, riding on the clouds  
Shining like the sun at the trumpet's call  
Lift your voice, year of Jubilee  
Out of Zion's hill, salvation comes

And these are the days of Ezekiel  
The dry bones becoming flesh  
And these are the days of Your servant, David  
Rebuilding a temple of praise

And these are the days of the harvest  
The fields are all white in Your world  
And we are the laborers that are in Your vineyard  
Declaring the Word of the Lord

Say, behold...