

On A Roll With God - God is Good

1 Kings 17:8-16

Second in a VBS Series

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**Intro**

Many of you know how it goes: When I say “God is good” you say, “all the time.” And “all the time,” “God is good.”

How do you know? When you look at our world. When you see the trials, pain, and challenges in your own life or in the life of others, how do you know? What does that mean for our understanding of the nature of God? How can you trust that indeed God is good?

I have struggled with that little saying myself because if we are honest, it is hard to see how God is good sometimes. When children suffer. When war breaks out. When our family members are in pain. When our friends struggle with anything from infertility, job loss, and broken relationships, to financial stress, tragedy, or the loss of their own child, It doesn't make sense. How is God good? I wonder if any of you have struggled to truly embrace, believe, and put your trust in knowing that God is good.

It wasn't until I came to understand and reframe that little saying, and say, “yes, God works for good in all things all the time and all the time God works for good in all things.”

**Prayer:** Dear God, we seek to know you. We seek to understand your ways. Help us to see your goodness in the midst of uncertainty, pain, fear, and suffering..

## **Message**

Last week I spoke about how God is great - his power, might, and displays of unexplainable provision of manna to the people of Israel who were living in the wilderness.

This week, I hope to speak about how God is good. Meaning God works for good, calls forth the good in the midst of bad, and how out of that goodness, God provides for us in unexpected ways.

To do that we turn to the life and lessons of the prophet Elijah. Ranked with Moses for his courage, boldness, and overall purpose in God's greater plan, Elijah's experiences show us a great deal about God's goodness.

Turn with me to 1 Kings 17 where we find the prophet Elijah taking on King Ahab. Read Text:1 Kings 17:8-16

I now have 15 minutes to cover some 400 years of Israel and Canaanite history which involves several kings, a handful of takeovers, false prophets, the pagen god Baal, sexual misconduct, exile, murder, drought, famine and so much more!

For our purposes today, the condensed history lesson is this: When King Ahab took the throne it did not take long to see that he, as the scripture tells us, "...ruled from Samaria and did even more open evil before God than anyone yet - a

new champion of evil! It wasn't enough to copy previous kings, he went all out; first by marrying Jezebel who, with her large contingent of pagan priests and prophets, spread her native Baal worshipping religion among the Israelite people and second, Ahab not only accepted Baal worship himself, but then built a sanctuary for Baal in the royal city of Samaria. Baal was a pagan god and worshiped as the god of fertility. He was also called the Lord of Rain and Dew, the two forms of moisture that were indispensable for fertile soil in Canaan (remember that later). This meant that some Israelites accepted Baal as well as Yahweh, putting Yahweh on a par with a god of nature whose supreme expressions or revelations were believed to be the elements (the weather) and biological fertility. Often Baal worship was included temple prostitutes, all night orgies, and other sexual misconduct in an attempt to please this false god. Jezebel's policies intensified the gradual contamination of the religion of Yahweh.

Ahab and Jezebel perpetuated a culture of a tumultuous, free-for-all, polytheistic, believe what you want to believe but you better believe what the king, or in this case, what the king's wife believes kind of atmosphere. Where honor and shame rule. Where position meant power. Money meant status. Connections meant control. And the more you have of any of those, the more secure your position in society, the more authority and influence you have over those with less, those who are outcast, deemed unworthy, and those who live on the margins of mainline society.

Enter Elijah, whose name means, "Yahweh is my God." Elijah goes to King Ahab with a word and warning from God. He basically tells the King, you are not God, you do not have the power or authority of Yahweh God. He tells Ahab that there was no reality except the God of Israel, stressing that no matter how many

other gods you put your trust, there is but one God above all and in that God is where your trust shall be.

It was the following statement however, that pushed Ahab over the edge: “As surely as God lives, the God of Israel before whom I stand in obedient service, the next years are going to see a total drought...” (17:1) That did not sit well with the king who worshiped a god of rain and dew. The Spirit of God tells Elijah to get out of town for his own safety. END PART ONE.

#### PART TWO:

That is where things change for Elijah. This bold, courageous, spirit-filled, nothing will stop me prophet, now must learn that he too must completely trust that God is good and will provide and protect. He learns this in the most unexpected way, through the actions of a widow, who doesn't even believe in Yahweh God. She is a nobody with no standing, worth, or significance in that society. She was not an Israelite, but a foreigner. In other other words, God's command to Elijah sends the faithful prophet to receive nourishment from outside all the expected and predictable places of well-being. (Brueggeman 81).

What does this tell us? What does it take to trust God? Strength? Status? Answers? Influence? Power? Highly developed spiritual formation and discipleship skills and practices? None of that. To trust God takes vulnerability.

Who are the most vulnerable among us? In Elijah's day it was orphans, widows, and strangers (foreigners). Both the widow and Elijah are vulnerable in this interaction. Out of her vulnerability, she provides food, water, and a place to stay for this stranger. From Elijah's vulnerability, he experiences the faithfulness

of God even in the toughest of times and in unexpected circumstances. Elijah is sent by the Lord to depend on the gifts and resources of a nobody. There is an abrupt reversal of roles. The one whom we expect to be strong is needful and must submit to what was considered wretched of the earth.

What is happening here, church, is that God is doing what God does best: breaking into our ways of thinking, doing, and being and using the absolute unexpected to show us we can depend on God no matter what. To show us even when we think we know, there is more to learn. To show us that God's goodness is made known through our courageous acts of vulnerability.

Whether you identify with Elijah and are secure in your faith, feel solid in your understanding of your relationship with God and believe you pretty much have your spiritual formation and faith journey figured out OR you relate to the widow as one who works hard and has little to show for it, who because of the way the world is you feel alone, pushed aside, overlooked, or not enough, hear this: unless you recognize and can come to grips with your vulnerability, you do not fully understand what God is doing and why Jesus walked among us.

We are called to trust God completely every day. Some days that's easier than others for sure. We may not be lost in the wilderness but can you look me in the eyes and tell me your soul / spirit / or sense of self has never felt lost? We may not be in the middle of a drought or starving in the desert but can you look me in the eyes and tell me you have never been thirsty for more? Never thirsted for meaning? For purpose? Understanding? There are many here and outside these walls who are lost, and who hunger and thirst for hope, acceptance, forgiveness, mercy, peace, and love.

It is difficult for me to say, “God is good - all the time - and all the time - God is good.” Call it semantics. Call it over thinking. Call it Pastor Jenothy being Pastor Jenothy. I can’t help but wonder if it might be more helpful to say God is working for good in all things all the time and all the time God is working for good in all things. Perhaps the story of Elijah helped us understand that a little better today. What do you think?

AMEN