

OLD TESTAMENT FIGURES

Civil War

One prophet, a jar of flour, and a war that was never ours to win

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, February 27, 2022
PASSAGES	1 Kings 18:17-39; 1 Kings 15:1-34; 1 Kings 17:1; Matthew 5:29-30; Colossians 1:13-14; 1 Peter 2:9; Romans 12:1; Isaiah 63:3; Revelation 19:11-16
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:04:32 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The wars in 1 Kings keep narrowing — kingdom against kingdom, then faction against faction inside one kingdom, then a crowd on a mountain standing silent because the war has gotten inside them. God answers all of it with one unknown man, a destitute widow and a jar of flour. Resources were never the issue. He is fighting for our hearts, and he does not need our help to win.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Scripture keeps score of these reigns by one measure. Omri was a success by every secular standard — money, building, a name that reached beyond Israel — and the Bible gives him a blurb and the word “unfaithful.”
- ◆ Rehoboam is David’s grandson. Two generations from the covenant king to high places and pillars under every green tree. Collapse is not slow.
- ◆ The conflict telescopes inward: north against south, then Omri against Tibni inside the north, then at Carmel the fight shows up inside the people themselves, who “did not answer him a word.”
- ◆ Elijah arrives from nowhere with no army and no funding, and the nation grinds to a halt on his word. The gravity around him is borrowed — he is, as Matt put it, God’s secretary.

- ◆ In the middle of a nationwide crisis God spends a chapter on one widow and one boy. Big things do not crowd out small ones with him.
- ◆ Carmel reads like the cross in advance: an offering that comes down from heaven, an attack on God's enemies, and the ransom of a people too stuck to speak — all at once.
- ◆ We do fight sin in our own members, hard. But not to win the war. We fight it to show loyalty to the one who already won it.
- ◆ Err on the side of loyalty rather than on the side of being good. Judges is full of people who did what was right in their own eyes.

► 1:04:32

We are in the stretch of the Old Testament where the names come fast and none of them stick. The week before, Solomon's son Rehoboam had lost ten tribes and the kingdom split in half. What follows is a motif of war and a motif of idolatry, and that is the stage onto which a prophet nobody had heard of walks.

The timing was not Matt's doing. The invasion of Ukraine was four days old, the service had opened with [Psalm 46](#), and the text for the morning was wall-to-wall war. "Entirely unrelated to our themes during worship, and also unrelated to goings-on in Ukraine — just the way it happened in our schedule," he said. Take it as chance, or take it as the Lord underlining something.

1. A list of names you will not remember

► 1:06:54

The pattern is relentless and repetitive on purpose. There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life; war between Abijam and Jeroboam ([1 Kings 15:6–7](#)); war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days ([1 Kings 15:16](#)). Underneath the fighting runs a spiritual collapse — under Rehoboam, Judah built high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree. Rehoboam, Matt pointed out, is David's grandson. That is not far.

► 1:09:10

These kings could have been remembered for other things. Omri, barely known to Christians, looks like a genuine success by secular measures — Israel did well financially under him, and he left real archaeological traces. The Bible's verdict is that he was unfaithful. The lens is deliberate, and the distance between us and them is part of how the lesson gets taught. Standing in that throne room you

would have seen gravity and gold and chariots and found it very hard not to be impressed. From God's side of it, the authority had gone illegitimate and only one thing was being weighed.

“And he walked in all the sins that his father did before him, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father.”

1 KINGS 15:3 ↗

It does not say he built a terrace. It says his heart was not wholly true. The same sentence comes back for Nadab and again for Baasha. David's faithfulness, Matt said last week, spoke God's love language. That is the scorecard.

2. A civil war inside the civil war

► 1:10:13

Then it gets worse, and faster. Baasha's son Elah is murdered by his servant Zimri. Zimri reigns about a week; the people hate him for it and make Omri, the army commander, king instead. Surrounded, Zimri burns the king's house down with himself inside it. And then the north splits again — half the people for Omri, half for a man named Tibni.

► 1:11:16

Trace the line: an external war under David, a peaceful nation under Solomon, a kingdom broken in half, then the two halves at war with each other — and now a civil war inside the civil war, the northern tribes fighting themselves over which usurper to follow. Total chaos, confusion and idolatry. God's response is to raise up one prophet.

3. One man, a widow, and a jar of flour

► 1:12:26

“Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.’”

1 KINGS 17:1 ↗

Where did he grow up? We do not know. Matt quoted a line he had come across that sums the man up: God can take relatively a nobody and make him somebody important in front of everybody without

asking anybody. Very concise, not a viral tweet — and it will get the whole country’s attention within a season, because people like eating. There is no mention of gold or soldiers. “He’s just saying what God said, and the world around them is going to grind to a halt because of it.”

► 1:13:46

Then the camera cuts away from the national crisis entirely and spends a chapter on a destitute widow in Sidon gathering sticks for one last meal before she and her son die. Elijah asks her to feed him first. She does — whether out of faith or because she was too far gone to care, Matt wasn’t willing to say — and the jar and the jug do not run out. Her son dies; Elijah prays; God raises him. In the middle of big things God still cares about little things. And it makes the point about the budget: a widow, a boy, and about a dollar’s worth of flour and oil. That is the whole war chest, and it is enough.

4. The troubler of Israel

► 1:17:12

Three years on, the word comes to Elijah to show himself to Ahab. By now the famine is severe and Ahab has been touring neighbouring kingdoms making them swear under oath that they are not hiding the man. Obadiah, who runs Ahab’s house, is certain that carrying the message will cost him his life. Ahab’s greeting is “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?” — and Elijah hands it straight back: “I have not troubled Israel, but you have.” Gather everyone at Carmel, with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel’s table.

► 1:18:18

Ahab is not entirely wrong that Elijah is stirring the pot — he is not saying sweet, consoling things. But the trouble was already there and needed addressing, and Ahab is the one who put it there. What is striking is how ordinary the prophet is. The weight around Elijah belongs to his employer. He is essentially God’s secretary, and that is the point: no armies raised, no alliances bought, just a man sent. This is God fighting his own battles.

5. Limping between two opinions

► 1:18:59

“How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.

1 KINGS 18:21 ↗

► 1:19:48

“This part cuts me,” Matt said. The silence is where the whole sermon turns. The international conflict and the civil war and the civil war inside the civil war have come all the way down to the individual, and the people standing on that mountain are genuinely conflicted and stuck. Some of the silence is fear — Ahab and Jezebel and 850 prophets are a real thing to stand against. But there is no power behind any of it. The prophets of Baal rave and leap and cut themselves until the time of the evening offering, and “there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.”

► 1:21:11

Elijah calls them near, repairs the broken-down altar of the Lord, digs the trench and soaks the whole thing — three times, until the trench itself is full. Nobody is going to accuse him of hiding a match. The people are still passive. They are near, and they are watching.

6. Fire, and a war God fights for himself

► 1:22:59

“O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word... Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.”

1 KINGS 18:36–38 ↗

► 1:24:24

Not just the offering. The stones and the dust and the water. Matt called it “a way over the top version” — at first you suspect a struck match, then the thing is soaked, then even the rocks and the mud are gone. The people fall on their faces, and for the first time all day they have something to say: “The Lord, he is God.” For all we know it was all they could think of. “It’s kind of an understatement. It might have been overwhelming to see.”

Matt jumped ahead of himself here, and the jump is the heart of the message. Carmel is a type of the crucifixion. A crowd that is passive and stuck. An offering that comes down out of heaven. An attack on God’s enemies and the ransoming of his people, happening in the same moment. And notice what Elijah asks for in his prayer — that the people would know God *has turned their hearts back*. Even at the level of the civil war inside a person, God was waging a battle only he could fight.

A note in passing on what a prophet is, since Elijah is everyone’s picture of one. It is not fortune-telling. Samuel tells Saul not to worry about donkeys that were found three days ago. Nathan tells David

“You are the man” about the present. Sometimes it is contingent — if you do this, then God will do that. Paul casts a spirit out of a slave girl who could predict things, which settles that. A prophet says what God is saying. Which is all Elijah did, even when it was awkward and hard.

► 1:26:04

That leads to the one piece of practical advice Matt gave about spiritual warfare, and it points the opposite direction from most of the genre. “I think our main focus is on God, not the enemy. Our main task would be to do what he wants.” Then, carefully: “Not to make fun of spiritual warfare ministries, but I don’t think our primary focus should be like naming demons and finding a Jezebel spirit and all that stuff.” Elijah did what God told him to do and showed loyalty, and look at what he had to work with — no bank account, an old woman with a handful of flour that never runs out, and camel hair. The power was God’s and the victory was God’s. If the battling around us is constant and cosmic, our focus should still be heavenly.

7. A dollar coin and a draft notice

► 1:27:25

Then the baskets came out — a reverse offering, which Matt cheerfully admitted he did not know how to run. Everyone was told to take a coin instead of giving one. A dollar. Maybe that is what the widow’s flour and oil were worth. The coin is a reminder of two things at once: that you have been drafted into God’s family, and that whatever you have is already enough. “I could serve God if I were stronger, or more famous, or if I had more money” — take that off the table. God is not running out of resources and he is not running out of ideas. No need to tape it to the mantel, he said; put it in your pocket.

► 1:29:55

Drafted into what kind of army, though? Go back to the riders on white horses read earlier in the service. There is one specific rider, with a sword coming out of his mouth, called King of kings — and it appears he does literally all of the fighting (Revelation 19:11–16).

► 1:30:48

And the layers land where we actually live: an international crisis, a nation with its own civil cold war, and the war inside you. Which raises the question Matt sat on for a minute. “Why doesn’t he just swoop in? Why doesn’t he just appear to me every time I falter in my faith? Why does he let me struggle?” Eliminate the options first. He is not running out of resources. He is not worried about losing a war he has already won. “In fact, he doesn’t need my help at all.” So what does he want? He left that hanging and came back to it.

8. So what is left for us to fight?

► 1:32:16

“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.”

MATTHEW 5:29-30 ↗

So the fight against sin is real and Christ’s priorities about it are not subtle. Matt took away the usual excuse: you cannot say “this is just part of who I am.” I’ve always had my anger issue, so it’s part of me — “yeah, is your right eyeball a part of you?” But if that fight is not how we deliver ourselves — and it is not, because

he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom — then what is it for?

► 1:34:10

It is the same battle that was fought at Carmel: God actively pursuing his people and turning their hearts toward him. The battle is for our hearts, because we are the prize. “We are not SEAL Team Six,” Matt said. “We’re actually what the extraction was about.” There is a knight in shining armour in this story and we are closer to the princess than to the cavalry. There is a word in psychology for thinking you are the one who has to do what Christ does — a Christ complex. “Let us not have one of those.” There is a Christ who won the war against sin, who redeemed his people, and who is coming back to set things right.

What is left to us, then, is loyalty. We present ourselves as a living sacrifice, we give him our hearts, and we fight the sin that wages war inside us knowing he is the rescuer and not us. Even that fight is an offering. It is worship.

► 1:35:26

The shoestring budget does one more thing: it keeps the focus where it belongs. “If Elijah came in with a bunch of mercenaries from Persia, that’d be distracting.” He came in with words from God. And the loyalty asked of us has the same shape — doing what he asks “even if nobody else wants us to do that thing.” Matt then put both outcomes on the same footing: if it costs you something, count that a victory; if it costs you nothing, count that a victory too. Either way you have offered yourself to God.

9. Err on the side of loyalty

► 1:36:14

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

1 PETER 2:9 ↗

That is what all of it was for. He wanted a people. We get to be the treasured possession. Matt said he finds this genuinely freeing in the middle of spiritual conflict: when he fights, he is fighting knowing the war was already won at the crucifixion, that his strength to stand is on loan, and that the victory will simply be made visible when Christ returns.

► 1:38:27

Your role, then, is faithfulness in your own life — and even there the weight is not resting on you. “The true faithfulness that really matters is Christ’s, who gave himself for us as an offering. That’s the real faithfulness that matters.” So as we wage our war we stand in him, look to him, remind ourselves of his victory, and remember the resources were his the whole time. Which is the answer to the question he left hanging: what he wants is for us to focus on him. “Which is actually what he wanted anyway. Isn’t that weird?”

► 1:39:38

If what actually worries you is whether God is going to get his bride — whether the world is going to go to hell in a handbasket on our watch — put it down. That was never your battle. Even the winepress image in Revelation comes from [Isaiah 63:3](#), where the one coming in crimson garments says, “I have trodden the winepress alone.” He fights his own battles. He does not need your help.

► 1:40:09

Matt’s closing instruction was a single phrase, and he set it deliberately against the obvious alternative. “I know a lot of us think we should err on the side of being good. Well — what do you know what good is? Remember Judges: a bunch of people doing what was good in their own eyes” ([Judges 21:25](#)). Err on the side of loyalty instead. Loyalty to the one who is going to win anyway, and already has.

► 1:40:36

And he ended not on a warning but on an appetite. We are only waiting to see it — “and man, when you see it, it’s gonna be so satisfying. So satisfying.” He is coming back, and what he does will be better than the way we would have set things right: “you can be like, oh yeah — that’s better. It doesn’t matter

what I was gonna do. This is really good.” Nobody will have to be talked into worship at that point. “If you have the strength to stand up in his presence, it will just come out of you. You’ll be compulsive. You’ll be so overjoyed.”

► 1:41:04

Then he prayed the whole thing back in four lines. “Father, thank you for today. Thank you that you are our hero. You are our warrior king. Thank you that you redeemed us... I ask that you’d help us to focus on you. We trust you to fight our battles.” The prayer teams came forward, and the room was sent out to love and serve the Lord.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Psalm 46
- 1 Kings 15:6–7
- 1 Kings 15:16
- 1 Kings 14:22
- 1 Kings 15:3
- 1 Kings 15:26
- 1 Kings 15:34
- 1 Kings 17:1
- 1 Kings 17:8–16
- 1 Kings 18:1
- 1 Kings 18:17
- 1 Kings 18:18–19
- 1 Kings 18:21
- 1 Kings 18:29
- 1 Kings 18:30
- 1 Kings 18:36–38
- 1 Samuel 9:20
- 2 Samuel 12:7
- Acts 16:16–18
- Revelation 19:11–16
- Matthew 5:29–30
- Colossians 1:13–14
- Romans 12:1
- 1 Peter 2:9
- Isaiah 63:3
- Judges 21:25

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Scripture summarizes a whole reign in one sentence about the heart, not the accomplishments. If your life were summarized by that standard, what would the sentence say right now?
2. The people at Carmel did not answer Elijah a word. Where are you limping between two opinions and staying quiet about it?
3. Elijah had a widow, a jar of flour and words from God. What are you waiting to have more of before you do the thing you already know God is asking?
4. Matt warned against a Christ complex, and said our focus belongs on God rather than on the enemy. Which battle have you been carrying that was never yours — and what would it look like to hand it back?
5. Err on the side of loyalty rather than on the side of being good. Name one decision this week where those two would point in different directions, and say what you will do.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6-asg51TsQ&t=3872s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.