

Walking in Divine Authority



Gary Wilkerson May 9, 2016

There's a lot of teaching in the church today about how God's power is released in our lives. What they're really talking about is divine authority. Whenever this subject comes up, I think of Elijah. His life illustrates the divine authority God wants to endow us with, especially for times like these.

Elijah lived in a period a lot like ours, one marked by spiritual decline and honoring God was at an all-time low. There was strife in Israel at the time, with God's people divided into two kingdoms—Samaria in the north and Judah in the south. The Samaritans' faith became corrupted because they allowed other religions to mix with Judaism. Ahab, the notorious king behind all this, took God's ways lightly, "as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam" (1 Kings 16:31).

Under Ahab's rule, the people sinned freely and felt no conviction over it. If there was sexual immorality or bribery, it was no big deal. Ahab even tolerated child sacrifice, erecting altars to the terrible religion of Baal. He did it all for greed, to keep tithes and taxes pouring in from any religious source. The Bible says this wicked man committed more evil than anybody in history up to that time: "And Ahab...did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him" (1 Kings 16:30).

We're living in a time of spiritual declension as well. Experts say the world has never seen the kind of downturn in belief we're experiencing. Atheism and agnosticism have spiked sharply as Americans leave the church in droves. I believe it's all happening because Satan knows his time is short—and he's using every weapon possible to chip away at divine authority, not just in cultural expressions but in the heart of every Christian.

Most followers of Jesus today are facing some kind of conflict. In some parts of the globe this manifests as deadly persecution. Here in the west we see fierce cultural battles over Christian faith. And everywhere, followers of Jesus struggle individually, with finances, in marriage, even with church. The very foundations of belief are being shaken, and some Christians are withdrawing completely from faith. Others choose a more casual faith than before. Spiritual practices that they once considered important, such as prayer or fasting, they now take lightly.

The truth is God has a role for each of us to play in this darkening generation. We've all been called to bring hope and life to the lost and doubting, especially in this hour. So let me ask: Have you been tempted to compromise what you believe? Are you facing hardships that have brought doubts about God's love? Have you felt overwhelmed, discouraged, even defeated?

We've all been given divine authority in Christ, and right now the enemy of our souls is doing all he can to rob us of it. Elijah's example is meant to instruct us during such times. His life tells us we can stand firm in our darkest hour, that we can resist temptation, that we can withstand every deadly onslaught of the devil—because God has imparted to us his own authority for his kingdom purposes.

In the darkest hour of both the nation and the church, Elijah stood for God.

Elijah easily could have compromised himself as everyone around him did. He could have joined with others who said, "There's no need to be so intense. Why get stirred up? Better to roll with the punches." Instead, here was Elijah's attitude: "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).

Every phrase of this verse is packed with meaning for us. Let me start by saying that up to this point in the Bible, there was no mention of Elijah. Nothing here suggests he was significant in any way—no words of qualification, education, training or position. Yet to me, there is no more powerful phrase than the one used here to introduce this man of God: “Now Elijah...”

Let me ask you to do something: Fill in your own name here—“Now (*Steve, Mary, Josh, Heather*)...” Like Elijah, you live in a troubled generation, a dark hour spiritually, a time of great compromise in the nation and the church. How do you respond when you see your name in a Bible verse that reads, “Now (*you*)...”? I hope it sparks faith in you—because God calls all his children to action.

You may wonder, “Who am I to think I can affect things? I’m just an average Christian and a weak one at that. I’ve got nothing to offer.” Elijah’s story reveals that pedigree has nothing to do with spiritual authority, which comes from God alone. It doesn’t matter what our background is, who our parents are, what sort of degrees we may have. One word came to Elijah in his day, in his small town of Tishbe, summoning him, “Now...” When God calls us, the time is always now!

You may have felt forgotten by God, neglected in your calling, relegated to the sidelines. But there is a time in all our lives when God calls our name and says, “Now!” Now is your time. By his power, God will stir up in you all that he has called and equipped you to do.

What qualified Elijah was his secret life with God.

There was no need for a list of Elijah’s qualifications. He was already qualified to do what God would ask of him because he had a history with God. Elijah had devoted himself to knowing the Lord and his ways, and the only way to do that is through prayer. So when God said to him, “Now,” Elijah was ready.

According to James, Elijah was an ordinary human being who accomplished supernatural works of God: “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit” (*James 5:17-18*).

All over the world there are ordinary Christians like Elijah who have quietly and diligently had a hidden life with God. The Lord says of them, “This one isn’t concerned about cultural trends. She doesn’t put her finger to the wind to find out what’s relevant. She is an attentive servant who puts no voice above mine.” These are the ones God seeks out when he moves to bring about change.

Note the phrase that Elijah used when he prophesied to wicked Ahab: “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, *before whom I stand*” (1 Kings 17:1, my emphasis). Elijah knew Ahab could have executed him on the spot. Yet the prophet said boldly, “The king I stand before right now is God, not you, Ahab. His presence is always with me.” Elijah could say this fearlessly because he spoke with divine authority.

You and I will never stand unafraid before any dark power unless we have first stood in the light of God’s presence. When our hour of boldness comes, we won’t need a title or a degree—we’ll only need his presence within us and beside us. If we have that, we will hear his word clearly in the moment, as Elijah did: “And the word of the Lord came to him” (17:2).

Elijah’s statement to Ahab contains a phrase that sounds strange. Note my emphasis in the verse: “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, my emphasis). Normally a prophet would attribute all divine reckoning to God’s word, not his own. Elijah was stating, “I have so immersed myself in God’s ways that I’ve come to know his mind and heart. I have aligned my own mind so closely with his workings that I know what he wants to do in this generation.”

Simply put, God had given Elijah divine authority. The words Elijah spoke here weren’t something he learned from a master teacher but came directly from God. How else could he predict when the rain would suddenly stop and when it would start again just as suddenly? Yet as Elijah says, all these amazing things would happen at his word.

The phenomenon we see taking place here is what I call a “now” word. It doesn’t come directly from Scripture

though it is grounded in and aligns itself with God's Word. Rather, it's a word that the Holy Spirit gives us for the moment, for "now." A word like that carries authority only if it's backed up by the holy life delivering it.

Think about how you might react the next time a politician says, "We all should have a compassionate heart for the poor." You'll be able to hear snickering all across America. Yet if the late Mother Teresa were to say the same thing, we might sit up and listen.

Do you know God's heart well enough to deliver any "now" word he might give you? Or have you grown indifferent to your relationship with him? When our time comes, it won't be enough to echo something we've learned from a noted Christian teacher. There is no authority in that. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you with a sure word—and the power of heaven will be behind it.

Our daily lives should be so near to God's heart that when we see the present spiritual decline we can say with authority, "This ought not to be."

God's feelings ought to be ours, especially right now. We should be able to do more than name evil—we ought to want to do something about it. As Elijah demonstrates, that's what divine authority is all about: acting prophetically in God's name. God gives us his authority not just to equip us but to place on us a responsibility.

We all know that speaking a word for God can be risky. It usually means going against the status quo. It can make us unpopular and label us as judgmental. But if we're faithful to speak his "now" word to us, God will empower us with all authority.

In the past decades, the church hasn't been very willing to step into this kind of risk. Instead, a lot of teaching about receiving words from God has centered on claiming selfish needs. The idea is that God desires to prosper us financially. It gets reinforced by a lot of best-selling Christian books. Of course God wants to bless us, but a careful reading of Scripture shows us that his "now" words to his people were rarely about blessings. Most were about soul-cutting challenge. Think about Elijah's commission to speak. I don't think he relished the thought of saying, "It's not going to rain for a very long time, so we'll all probably come close to starving."

Most of the words Paul received from the Lord were fiercely challenging. What famous Christian teachers today talk often about having a thorn in their flesh? Who considers that a testimony worth sharing? God told Paul there were cities on his missionary agenda where the gospel wouldn't be received, that he would be persecuted, beaten and jailed, that he would come close to dying again and again.

Perhaps the hardest "now" word Elijah ever received from God was to stop his ministry. He was at the height of his calling, leading a powerful revival in darkened Samaria when God told him this: "The word of the LORD came to him: 'Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan'" (1 Kings 17:3-4). God was telling Elijah, essentially, "I'm setting you aside for now. You're going to be hidden from view. That is my calling for you."

We have to ask ourselves: Are we just as willing to "hide" ourselves—to be anonymous in a self-marketing culture—as we are to speak for the Lord? God will test us on this, just as he did Elijah and Paul. You see, he gives his divine authority not to those who are necessarily bold, zealous or gifted—but who are willing to submit themselves to his will fully. That's one mark of those whom God calls forward in darkened times like ours.

Are you willing to speak for God when it's inconvenient and costly? Are you just as willing to be silent when suddenly you have everyone's ear? Right now, the important question for any follower of Jesus is this: "Will I be ready when I hear his word saying, 'Now?'" May we all be found hidden in his presence when that moment comes. Amen!

[Download PDF](#) [1]

Links

[1] <http://worldchallenge.org/printpdf/11738/>