



Some have said that the building of the Golden Gate Bridge was the greatest engineering challenge of the 20th century. The dream and vision to span the channel was birthed in the heart of Joseph Strauss in 1917. Strauss had to span 4,000 feet between the shallows on either side of the gorge, more than twice the distance of the longest bridge at that time.

After 12 years of work, they were closer but they still hadn't broken ground on the bridge. They had plans drawn. They had legislative support and War Department support. They had buy-in from the Northern counties. They had money from taxes to cover the initial costs. But they hadn't started the bridge. It wasn't until 1933 that the project actually started, 16 years from the moment the dream for the bridge birthed in the heart of Joseph Strauss. For 16 years Strauss lived in-between.

We all deal with in-between seasons in life—unresolved conflicts, uncompleted projects, hard years of marriage, hard years of parenting, singleness. We think to ourselves, "This certainly is not what God wants for my life."

In today's sermon in 1 Kings 17 I'm going to show you that God uses these in-between seasons of life in powerful and surprising ways. In our Bible verses Elijah is in an in-between. He is in-between confronting King Ahab with the message that the land will experience a drought.

"As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word" (v. 17).

This would be the equivalent of someone going to the President of the United States and saying, "As the Lord lives, whom I serve, there will be a stock market crash and soaring unemployment for the next few years except at my word." Just as our economy would crash, the economy and country of Israel is going to crash without rain.

In chapter 17:17-24, he is living somewhere in the middle, toward the end of his 3.5 year in-between.

Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah,

"What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

"Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the Lord, "Lord my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, "Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!"

The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"

Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth."

It's interesting how human nature searches to blame someone else or something outside of ourselves when hardship and tragedy strikes. It's like the desire a child has for the world to be just. When things aren't fair, they search for an answer.

Elijah knows how to deal with this situation—he turns to God. Remember that Elijah is a normal man from a nothing town, Tishbe. And God calls him to do something extraordinary! He delivers a challenging message to King Ahab.

The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. This is the first raising from the dead in the Bible. There's also the widow from Nain's son; Jarius' daughter; Lazarus; in Acts the person who fell from a window while Paul was teaching.

Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"

Did you catch onto the theme of Elijah living in-between? In these verses we're not given any detail to Elijah's day-to-day activities. He raises this boy to life from death. That's as exciting as it gets! But he's also doing what at the widow's house? Nothing.

Verse 17 says that he's been there for "some time." This could have been for as short as a few months or as long as a year or two. Picture his life: Elijah is a foreigner, living in an upstairs room, waiting for instruction from the Lord to go back to Israel and finish what he started with King Ahab.

This resonates with our E100 Bible readings lately. Last week we read about Joseph in prison. After he gave the dream interpretation to the chief cupbearer, the cupbearer forgot about him. Two years later when Pharaoh had a dream that nobody else could interpret, the cupbearer remembered Joseph. Two years in-between interpreting the cupbearer's dream and Pharaoh's dream.

Last week we also read about the heartbreak of Jacob. Jacob thought his son, Joseph, was dead. He lived with this pain every day, like a hole in his heart, until he was reunited with his son. Do you know how many years Jacob was in-between? Fifteen years.

This week we read about Moses. After a 40-year upbringing of pampering and prestige as royalty in Egypt, Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness as a shepherd. Forty years in-between being royalty in Egypt and returning to Egypt as Israel's rescuer.

None of these in-betweens were the grand purpose for these men's lives, but look how God uses the passage of time to accomplish what a rush cannot. In 1 Kings 17 and 18, it is clear that God is using the slow ticking of time for his purposes.

Three Reasons God Works Slowly

To get the attention of other people

King Ahab and Queen Jezebel are gaining respect for God and respect for his power, even though they have hard hearts. Every day the drought continues, it is more and more difficult to explain it according to natural weather patterns. As much as they want to deny that God is real, the passage of time is becoming a heavy weight of verification that Elijah's God is true. It's growing more and more difficult to worship Baal and deny God.

The widow now trusts the Word of the Lord is true. Maybe we'd say that she should have believed after seeing the flour and oil provided every day. But it seems she needed more evidence. As much as we'd like to bring seasons of in-between to an end, sometimes the slow passage of time isn't about us at all. Maybe it's about those around us.

Think about this boy. He'll remember getting sicker and sicker. From reports that people give, they also know when they die. He'll remember for the rest of his life that Elijah brought him back to life. And you know that if he ever forgot, his mom would remind him!

God was using the slow passage of time to get the attention of other people.

To develop personal faith

Elijah's personal faith is strengthening. He's seeing flour and oil provided daily so he and this household can eat. He naturally turned to God for supernatural help when the boy died. Elijah doesn't seem to perceive this boy's death through human eyes. "Give me your son." That's a strange response! In my 20 years of ministry I have never said this to a person who's told their son is dead. I've offered condolences and sympathy. I've offered hugs and prayers. But I've never said, "give me your son." He turns to God to perform a supernatural miracle.

Add to this two events from earlier in chapter 17—at Elijah's word rain quit falling in Israel, and Elijah experienced ravens bringing him meat and bread every day.

Elijah has four powerful experiences that teach him God is a provider and possesses supernatural power. Remember Elijah is portrayed as a very normal guy. He's from a nowhere town. In chapter 19 he runs away because he's scared Jezebel is going to kill him. And in James 5, Elijah is described as a guy just like us. God is using this time of in-between to strengthen Elijah's faith.

God was using the slow passage of time to develop Elijah's personal faith.

To prepare people for His purposes

The Lord is preparing Elijah's for something **big**. In chapter 18 Elijah goes head to head with 500 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. Imagine the hostility of those prophets toward Elijah. Imagine the hostility of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel towards Elijah. Imagine the faith required to stand strong against such opposition! That faith was forged in his soul through these four experiences in chapter 17. And the Lord needed time to do it.

God was using the slow passage of time to prepare Elijah for a big purpose.

Often God uses the passage of time to accomplish what a rush cannot. When you're in an in-between season remembering these ways that God uses them can be the difference between peacefulness and misery.

Back in January, I told you how God used Genesis 12 to speak to me and tell me to leave seminary. I was on the fast-track to pastoral ministry; taking classes in seminary, interning at my home church.

But God knew I was on a path that would outpace the godly character that was needed for the purposes He had for me. Here's one example. Hoping to get an easy "A" and fulfill a foreign language

credit I took German 1. Most people in the class already spoke fluent German. I didn't. So on the final I memorized the translation paragraph. In other words, I cheated.

I graduated from Baylor and moved on with life. Two years later, God called me to leave Seminary. One year later I'm in Atlanta working as an intern for a church and a Christian speaker and author. After one year in Atlanta God convicted me of cheating in college. I confessed it to God. I knew God wanted me to confess it to my college professor and ask his forgiveness; Baylor had an honor code that included no cheating.

Looking back, God sent me to Atlanta and surrounded me with two godly bosses and mentors. I perceived it as being off the main track of my life, and others did too. But it was a vital season in my life to start chipping away at Shawn and start building in Jesus.

This is how God uses seasons of in-between.

How are you reacting to your seasons of in-between? When life doesn't turn out according to your plans, how do you react? Have you ever felt like you've been sidelined? Have you ever wondered if a dream you had years ago is dead? Are you like the widow who after seeing daily miracles of flour and oil provided, immediately blames God when hardship comes? Or are you more like Elijah who regularly turns to God?

This sermon could end right here, but I've got one more thing to explain to you. It's not a new point but it will exponentially multiply the points I've already been making.

Who is the original audience of the book of 1 and 2 Kings? The conquered Israelites from the Southern kingdom. They are living as captives in Babylon. Thousands of Israelites were killed. The brightest young people from Judah were taken as captives to Babylonia with the intention to intermarry and strengthen their nation. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were four such men. But the trouble makers, the old and the sick, were

killed. This book was written to them as they were living in a foreign land, living in-between, in-between being God's nation and returning to Israel as God's people again.

The book of Kings is selective history written to demonstrate that the nation deserved exile, but restoration was possible through full repentance. As they were living in Babylon, they were reading this account of Elijah and God was giving them this message:

» Don't despair—I use seasons of in-between to strengthen people's faith.

» Don't cave in to Babylonian culture—I use seasons of in-between to strengthen people's faith for My purposes.

» Look for daily provision—I will provide.

» Turn to me for help when you're in trouble—I will help.

» Trust my Word as truth, trust it despite fears. Repent.

You can't speed up the season of the in-between because God uses the passage of time to accomplish what a rush cannot.

The application for us is the same:

» Don't despair—I use seasons of in-between to strengthen people's faith.

» Don't cave in to American culture—I use seasons of in-between to strengthen people's faith for My purposes.

» Look for daily provision—I will provide.

» Turn to me for help when you're in trouble—I will help.

» Trust my Word as truth, trust it despite fears. Devote yourself to reading and knowing the Word.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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