**Series: Questions God Asks**

**Sermon: What Are You Doing Here?**

In that great cinematic production, Dumb and Dumber, the stars ask a guy if he wants to hear the most annoying sound in the world, then they scream like a baby. While that is extremely annoying here’s a challenge for most annoying in the world:

(Play the sounds of engines trying but failing to start.)

What were you thinking/feeling as you heard that?

         *Oh, no. Here we go again*.

         Frustration?

         Anger?

         Did anyone experience some homicidal thoughts?

When it comes to irritants an engine that won’t start is right up there with leaky plumbing and computers that freeze up. For me, few things generate rage like pulling on a starter cord of something like a lawn mower that won’t start.

Question: If you have an engine, whether it be a car or tool, but it won’t start what do you do with it? Do you keep trying? Do you tear it apart trying to fix it? If you have such a non-functioning engine, even if it has previously served you faithfully but now it absolutely will not run, do you hold on to it in hopes that something will change, or do you get rid of it?

I’m no perfectionist but I think engines should run like they’re designed to and it irks me to no end when they don’t. When one doesn’t I have a simple plan. If Dick Brown can’t fix it I get rid of it. I have no use for a tool that doesn’t work.

In the Bible we read of a man. Elijah, who God called to be a prophet to Israel. His job was to teach God’s Word and lead the people in their relationship with God.

He was good at his job and served faithfully for many years. Along the way he had some wonderful experiences:

         Elijah was not very popular with the leaders of Israel, especially the nasty king Ahab, God sent Elijah to hide in a ravine. There he drank water from a brook and God sent ravens to bring him bread and meat twice a day.

         Eventually the brook dried up so God sent him to a place called Zarephath. Elijah met a widow with a young son and asked her for some water and bread. She said she had only enough flour for one more meal for the boy and herself. They were going to eat that last supper and die.

Elijah urged her to make bread for him and promised that God would take care of her. She made the meal for him and after that her jar of flour and her jug of oil never was dry.

         Some time later that woman’s son died. Elijah prayed over him and God brought him back to life.

Elijah’s most famous adventure involved a challenge between Elijah and Ahab. Ahab was following the false prophets of Baal and Asherah instead of God’s prophet, Elijah. So Elijah proposed a contest.

         They were to bring two bulls and prepare an altar.

         They got to choose either bull and prepare it as a sacrifice to their gods.

         Elijah would do the same with the other bull.

         The contest was that whichever God would send fire to consume their offering represented the true God.

         There were 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah involved in this contest. They did their thing and called upon their gods.

o   Nothing happened so Elijah started teasing them. *Shout louder*, he said, *he is god after all. Maybe he’s deep in thought and doesn’t hear you. Maybe he went on a trip or he’s asleep and needs to be awakened*. It’s ridiculous to think that any of those would describe a god, but idolaters tend to believe some strange things.

o   They did just what he said. They shouted louder and started cutting themselves with blades (swords and spears)

o   This went on all day but with no fire. It must have been quite a sight.

         In the evening Elijah said, *OK boys,* *It’s my turn*.

o   He had his altar and bull prepared.

o   Then he did a strange thing. He told them to pour water all over it. Three times they filled four large jugs and drenched the altar and wood.

o   Now you need to understand, water was the life blood of Baal. Elijah was giving his opponents every advantage. Essentially, he was playing in their home court.

o   Elijah then stepped forward and prayed. Paraphrase – *OK God. It’s time to show your power. Show them that you are God*.

o   God sent His fire burning up the bull, the wood, the stones, and all the water.

o   Elijah was celebrated and the people turned to God.

You’d think that after all that display of God’s power in his life, the ravens, the flour and oil, the boy raised from the dead, and then the contest on Mt. Carmel, that Elijah would be so pumped up he could face any adversity with the mighty hand of God.

Instead he ran to hide from Ahab and his witch of a wife Jezebel. Not only that, he started praying for God to take his life. Really? Think about that. God has done for him what he asked over and over, and he’s raising such a frivolous prayer.

Elijah fell asleep thinking that maybe he would die in his sleep. Instead and angel of God led him to a place called Mt. Horeb where he spend the night in a cave. Then God spoke to Elijah asking, *What are you doing here?* 1 Kings 19:9

We can apply different accent but the message is the same:

         What are you doing here?

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As with the other questions we’ve been looking at, God knew why he was where he was. God knew he was hiding from Ahab and Jezebel. What He was really asking was, *Why aren’t you where you’re supposed to be doing what you’re supposed to do?*

There was some dialog between God and Elijah and another awesome experience and then God asked him again, *What are you doing here?* 1 Kings 19:13 And if you’ll allow my paraphrase, God said to him, *Get back to work!* 1 Kings 19:15f

Do you understand what happened here? God called Elijah to be His prophet and God did some wonderful things in Elijah’s life, things that should have sustained him in ministry, but still, after a while Elijah grew fearful.

I skipped a couple of verses that I want us to go back to now: Verses 11-12,

*A great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.*

Here’s an important lesson Elijah needed to learn and probably we also need to learn: **If you look for God only in the spectacular you’ll miss Him in the ordinary.**

Most of our relationship with God occurs in our everyday ordinary experiences. I don’t think God intends to provide us with a regular diet of spectacular experiences to keep us interested. Certainly He does sometimes, but I think God wants us to know Him in the mystery of His being.

I have enjoyed a few pretty cool times, things like worship services in which you felt like God was physically present, or times in my study when God just started dumping ideas for teaching on me and I had to write as fast as I could to save them all.

I’ve enjoyed some times in fellowship when I knew absolutely that God was guiding our connection. Times like that motivate me to work hard at what God has called me to do.

One of the men in our church had an experience in which he heard an audible voice of God telling him to go to a particular church. He obeyed the voice and he and his wife got saved.

Most of you probably remember Jeff Kling. He too heard an audible voice of God. That spectacular experience totally changed his life and he never looked back.

Let’s make this personal. Most people I know, when we first accept Christian faith enjoy a spectacular feeling of closeness with God. We know we’re doing the right thing and we’re going all in.

We can hardly wait for the next worship service; we praise with great enthusiasm; we want to be involved in Bible study; we read the Bible and pray every day; and we look for opportunities to do the word of the Lord.

But then, after a while, the excitement begins to wear off and we settle in to a ho-hum approach to our faith lives.

Does God really have to continually do spectacular things for us to retain interest?

This has been a consistent theme is this series of sermons. Why is it necessary for God to show Himself in new and greater ways for us to continue doing what we know we’re supposed to be doing? *Your grace is enough*; *You’re enough for me*; we sing.

A couple weeks ago Wilma and Mike sang the song “*Even If*”.

*I know you’re able. I know you can,*

*Lead through the fire with your mighty hand.*

*But even if you don’t, my hope is you*.

Elijah should have understood. We should understand. God probably is not going to provide us with a constant string of spectacular experiences. What He will do over and over is ask,

         *Where are you?*

         *What does someone else’s life have to do with your faithfulness?*

         *What’s in your hand?*

         *What are you doing here?*

         *Why aren’t you still doing what you did when I first showed myself to you?*

         *Why aren’t you actively doing what I called you to do?*

God is God. He’s always God. He’s done so much for us. Is it really necessary for Him to massage our spiritual lives with spectacular experiences?

         Instead of hiding from God when we mess up, we should run to Him and accept His forgiveness and get back to living for Him.

         Instead of being discouraged by other people’s success or failure, we should hold to what we know is true, that God is in control.

         Instead of thinking we’re not capable of getting into God’s mission, we should be offering Him whatever we have and following Him into service.

         Instead of running from our adversities concluding that God is no longer watching over us, we should trust what He’s already done and continue following Jesus whatever it means.

Am I clear? Do you understand? My car is faithful if it starts every time. If it doesn’t it’s not faithful. My chainsaw is faithful if it starts when I pull the cord. If it doesn’t it’s not faithful. Neither should require me to do something special beyond routine maintenance in order for it to do what it’s intended to do.

We are faithful when we follow Jesus and serve God without any special attention from God. If we don’t, can we be considered faithful?

If my car or my chainsaw aren’t faithful I get rid of them and find something that is faithful. Is there any reason to think God won’t do the same? Let’s not look for God only in the spectacular. Let’s look for Him in the ordinary day to day functions of life and know that He is involved and He cares.

         Let’s follow and serve Him faithfully even without spectacular experiences.

         Let’s faithfully do what we’re supposed to be doing.

I’m going to change tack for a few minutes. I suspect that some of you are thinking, *Yes I believe God and I know that He is there, but sometimes, especially when I don’t experience His presence, I have some doubt*.

Typically we’d rather not talk about doubt. We feel like we’re insulting God if we doubt, like we’re calling His integrity into question. Doubt seems like a sign of spiritual weakness, so we suppress our doubt. If we say anything to our Christian friends we’ll look stupid or un-Christian.

It’s not unusual for a believer who has doubts to run away and hide. *I can’t go on masquerading as a Christian when I doubt*.

Please listen carefully: don’t confuse doubt with skepticism. Skepticism is a decision to question everything. Skepticism is deliberate.

And don’t confuse doubt with unbelief. Unbelief is a decision to not have faith in God. It’s an act of will rather than difficulty in understanding.

Doubt is simply uncertainty from the standpoint of faith. You believe, but you struggle with your belief sometimes. **Faith and doubt are not mutually exclusive.** Faith and unbelief are, but not faith and doubt.

Allow me to read a story you’ve probably read before but maybe didn’t quite understand. We’ll start part way into the story,

*A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.”*

*“O unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”*

*So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.*

*Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”*

*“If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.”*

*Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”* Mark 9:17-24

*I believe, help me in my unbelief*. The man confused doubt with unbelief. Doubt doesn’t negate faith. Doubt is merely struggling with present experiences when God is not overtly active.

We probably all have to deal with periodic bouts of doubt. Sometimes they’re in the background of our lives. Sometimes they’re front and center.

You know how for some people, physical health is basically a battle to keep disease at bay? In the same way, for some Christians faith is a battle to keep doubt at bay. It’s a symptom of our human frailty.

I was listening to Focus on the Family this week when they interviewed Tim Keller. Keller is a brilliant apologist and Bible teacher. He talked about something I’ve been saying, for most people,

Christian faith or non-faith (atheism/agnosticism) is less the result of intellectual activity as it is the result of emotional experience.

Some people, having wrestled with doubt, conclude that faith excludes doubt and thus chose not to believe in God. Some grapple with the same doubts and overcoming them, find their way to faith.

Let me illustrate it this way. If you’re married you’ll certainly understand. Suppose you’re with a group of friends at some event and you meet someone you feel drawn to. You get to know him/her and go on to spend more time together. Eventually you find yourself falling in love.

Maybe you have some doubts so you don’t let the relationship develop any further. Hey, you don’t really know this person. Maybe there’s something you’re not seeing, some terrible behavior or character trait. Can you trust him/her? While you are attracted, your doubts beckon.

You have two choices now.

         One, you can hold back, a prisoner of your doubts, and maybe miss out on a wonderful life of love and adventure.

         Or two, you can take a risk and move forward with the relationship, and when your doubt is relieved, your anxiety resolved, you enjoy a marvelous life together.

It’s not unusual for believers to doubt. While we’re attracted to the Gospel, the idea that Jesus died for our sins and offers us eternal life, sometimes it just doesn’t seem to be working in our earth lives. It’s not requisite for us to run from God because of that doubt.

Doubt doesn’t mean we’re not believers, but if in our doubt we become unfaithful, well, **what are you doing here**? Does God have to do spectacular things for you to remain faithful?

The best way through your doubt is to actively pursue Christian living. Don’t run and hide. Be faithful.