

PROCLAIM

STUDY #1

LONG READING: I SAMUEL 17

SHORTENED READING: I SAMUEL 17: 4-11; 32-58

THINK ABOUT IT

There is tension in the Israelite camp--a nervous energy running through the men who face the Philistine army. A man calls out against them, "This day I defy the ranks of Israel!" (vs.10). The entire army is terrified and dismayed. What about hope? Why did they run? Was the Almighty not on their side? Let yourself feel that fear and tension.

Then David, a young Israelite boy from the fields, enters the scene. He doesn't seem to notice the man's hugeness in contrast to his small frame. He doesn't allow the Israelites' dismay and fear to affect his motivation. The boy only sees this Philistine challenging the people of God! Even when Goliath mocked David, the young boy stood firm proclaiming, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel... All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands" (vs.45-47). David took his unwavering faith in God, proclaimed the truth, and then let his actions speak truth afterwards. He proclaimed the truth with his entire being!

DISCUSS

- 1- What do you think it was like for Israel to face that army? How did David walk into that battle with such assurance, when the others didn't?
- 2- Do you let other people's discomfort or fear prevent you from speaking the truth? In what ways is it easier to follow the crowd? Has there been a time when you've spoken up when others haven't. Is there a time you wish you had spoken up and you didn't?
- 3- How do you try and match your actions with the truth that you proclaim?

PRAY

TRY THIS: As you pray today, list your needs, fears, frustrations, and temptations before God. After each one, proclaim with boldness the words of the boy, David: "The battle is the Lord's!" If you are praying with others, proclaim this truth together with the assurance that you face your trials "in the name of the Lord Almighty.

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STUDY #2

LONG READING: I KINGS 18

SHORTENED READING: I KINGS 18: 21-39

THINK ABOUT IT

How bold of Elijah—calling out Israel in such a dramatic way! Elijah was vastly outnumbered by the prophets of Baal. Yet he even heckles them as they pray for their gods to answer in vs. 27. Then comes Elijah's turn and he increases the stakes even higher. He douses the alter with so much water that nothing, short of a miracle, would light it. There would be no accident. There would be no trickery. Only the true appearance of God would light it. And it happened, leaving no excuse. Elijah proclaimed the mighty power of God in a way that left no question in the minds of the onlookers.

This story of proclamation may be familiar to us, but have you ever considered the trust that Elijah must have had to call on God in such a visible way. He risked everything. He would have looked quite foolish and likely lost his life if his alter did not burn. Yet Elijah obeyed God and went before Ahab trusting that God would show up! God called Elijah to proclaim the truth and Elijah trusted that God would go with him with those words. Do you feel God calling you similarly—and how do you trust that God might God with you?

DISCUSS

- 1- Consider the power of the Holy Spirit on the mountain in this story. Do we trust that this kind of power works in our lives? Are we ever in situations like Elijah, where this kind of power is needed to enable our proclamation?
- 2- Are there ever times in your life when you feel pressure to hide your faith or aspects of your faith—even with other Christians who you fear might disapprove of what you believe? What might it mean to “proclaim” truth in those situations?
- 3- God calls us to proclaim the truth of the gospel and while this is rooted in salvation through Christ, it speaks to all kinds of freedom from oppression. What kinds of truth do you feel our world in need of today?

PRAY

TRY THIS: Find your favorite scripture that talks about trusting in the Lord (Psalm 56:4 is a good one). Use this scripture to guide your prayer. Memorize it, write it down, pray a phrase and then expand on it in your words. Let yourself sit in trust and consider how it manifests in your life.

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STUDY #3

LONG READING: LUKE 1: 1-25; MATTHEW 3

SHORTENED READING: MATTHEW 3: 1-12

THINK ABOUT IT

The great proclaimer! The one predestined to lead the way for Jesus! The herald for the King of all Kings! The man who ate locusts in the desert!?? People came from Jerusalem into the desert looking for John the Baptist. They came to hear his words. They came to be baptized. He spoke truth without fear and called out the sins of people who considered themselves righteous. He may not have “fit in,” or said things to make people like him. And he certainly never shied away from a chance to speak truth. He proclaimed the Messiah and people came to Him. John the Baptist came prior to the King, telling people to watch for Him. We come after the King, reminding people of His goodness. We probably shouldn’t “fit in” either. We probably shouldn’t say things just so people will like us. And we probably shouldn’t shy away from speaking the truth! Just as John the Baptist was predestined from birth to herald the King, so we are also predestined to live as shining lights for the King who came before us. We are also great proclaimers!

DISCUSS

- 1- Can you relate to John the Baptist at all? Is there anyone you can think of who might? Martin Luther King Jr. was a great proclaimer. During the civil rights movement, many flocked to hear him proclaim truth while at the same time many, including many Christians, hated him and rejected his message. While we are called to be united in Christ, we are also called to proclaim truth. Discuss this tension. How do we see this in our homes, our church, our world?
- 2- Talk about great proclaimers in history and great proclaimers that you might know. Is there a time when you saw someone’s light shine in a way that inspired you?
- 3- Talk about opportunities that you might be able to find in the next week or two to let your light shine in a way that it hasn’t before.

PRAY

TRY THIS: Turn off all the lights in the room (hopefully so it’s dark) except for one lamp or a candle. Think about that light reaching the different surfaces. Look for places that might reflect that light. Pray that God will empower your light to shine in a way that cannot be hidden, pray against the evil that may try to hide it, pray that your light reflects and bounces into parts of the world in ways you could never imagine yourself.

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STUDY #4

LONG READING: LUKE 2: 8-14; REVELATION 19: 1-10

SHORTENED READING: LUKE 2: 8-14

THINK ABOUT IT

Imagine the shepherds in the fields, with the glory of the Lord all around them. Luke said that they were terrified. Revelation describes a scene that is probably similar to what the shepherds experienced. Sounds that were powerful—like a rushing water proclaiming the greatness and holiness of God. Do you think the shepherds might have turned their worship toward the angels, that impressive heavenly presence, just as John did in the Revelation passage? When John tried to worship the angel he was told, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!” (Rev. 19:10) The praise and glory in these passages were both awe inspiring but also channeling elsewhere. For the shepherds, it was to an unexpected yet familiar scene. God proclaimed the glory of Christ with a heavenly host but doesn’t leave the shepherds there. The message directs them to a barn filled with the sights and sounds and smells reminiscent of their own lives.

Do you think there might be times in our life when we get caught up in the proclamation, in the awe-inspiring message? Are there times when we’re standing in a field staring at the sky and forget to take the next steps to the stable? We like to get caught up in the bright and shiny message of the gospel, but do we follow it further, into the low places where its miraculous nature truly resides?

DISCUSS

- 1- Talk about what the shepherds experienced when the heavenly host appeared in the sky. What would you have done?
- 2- Do you feel like God has proclaimed *good news of great joy* in your life? How do you hear that proclamation?
- 3- Think about other types of “proclamation” in your life (from friends, social media, advertisement, etc.) How do those messages resonate with your faith? Are there times when you feel like you should proclaim something different? Are there times when they seem to match up, but also seem to be caught up in the sky and ignore the stable?

PRAY

TRY THIS: Write down a list of messages you’ve encountered recently. Consider them in connection to what God is proclaiming in your life. Pray for clarity and guidance to keep what is good and reject what is wrong. Pray that the gospel messages are not just words in the sky, but manifest in the reality of our lives.