

Author	Gary Johnson
Text	1 Kings 19:1-18
Series	Immanuel
Title	<i>Not Home Alone</i>
Type/Season	Christmas
Original Delivery	December 11, 2016

Introduction

Merry Christmas, everyone. We are in the heart of the Christmas season. Christmas is in full swing. People are putting up their decorations, while listening to some Christmas music, or while watching their favorite Christmas movies. Do you have a favorite movie or two? There are many timeless Christmas movies that have become a traditional part of the holiday, and a favorite of many is ***Home Alone***.

The movie, ***Home Alone***, came to the screen in 1990, and remains the highest grossing Christmas film in North America. We know the story line of the movie—and we even know some of the movie lines like, “Keep the change you filthy animal.” Kevin, who appears to be close to Middle School age, is left “home alone” while his family leaves for Christmas vacation in Paris. Kevin wakes up and realizes that he is in the wrong place at the wrong time. He should be on a plane with his family flying to Paris. As the story develops, Kevin successfully defends his house—their family’s home—against two would-be thieves. The movie is full of hilarious moments as it reflects a far-from-perfect Christmas.

At The Creek, we realize and admit that Christmas is far-from-perfect; always has been and always will be. Christmas, from time to time, even looks like the movie ***Home Alone*** in that we are in the wrong place at the wrong time – and it’s not a comedy.

We are looking at Christmas through the eyes of the Old Testament this year. The people of God had been waiting for a long, long time when Jesus was finally born in Bethlehem. They knew He was coming because the Old Testament prophets said so, particularly Isaiah. He described the coming of the Messiah—and even the Messiah’s death—in vivid detail some 700 years before He lived and died.

Last weekend, we looked at one of the many verses that Isaiah penned about the Messiah. In Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah wrote that the Messiah would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. The Messiah was given the very names of God, for the Messiah IS God! Immanuel means “God with us.” When Jesus came, God came. God. This weekend, as we think of the name Immanuel, we are going to think on the word **WITH**. God **WITH**...

But first, we need to do a short walk through history—Old Testament history. For those who know the Bible well, just remember that repetition is a good teacher. Please be patient as I briefly share with those who aren’t as familiar with the Old Testament.

- At first, Israel was one united nation led by judges. Then, the Israelites wanted to be like the other nations around them and they demanded to have a king. Their first king was Saul, then David, and then David’s son, Solomon. When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam took the throne and the country was split by a civil war.
- The two new nations from one became known as the Northern Kingdom (referred to as Israel), and the Southern kingdom (referred to as Judah). Both kingdoms had 19 kings; and the majority of them were wicked, despicable men—men who led the people away from God—on purpose.

- What did God do? He sent prophets to speak to the kings, to be a voice of reason before them. Throughout life, you and I have known people who have tried to be a voice of reason with us. Right? They say things like, “Do you always talk to your wife/husband like that? Do you always treat your mom/dad that way?” When someone tried to be a voice of reason with us, how did we respond? Exactly! Not well! Nor did the kings in the Old Testament. They did not respond well to the prophets. So, it should not surprise us that the book of Isaiah opens with this...

Isaiah 1:1-2

The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth! For the Lord has spoken: “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.

From Jerusalem, Isaiah wrote and preached to the Southern Kingdom. During the reign of four kings spanning decades, Isaiah called the people to repent. From the king on his throne to the shepherd in the field, people were in the wrong place at the wrong time. They were far from God, and as a result, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon would be soon knocking at the door, and would eventually destroy Jerusalem, burning down the Temple, while killing hundreds of thousands and carrying off into slavery those they didn’t kill.

The same happened to the Northern Kingdom. Prophets like Elijah and Elisha got right up in the face of one evil king after another and told them to repent—but they didn’t. The kings led the Israelites far from God, and God sent Assyria to kill, pillage and destroy the Israel.

Nationally speaking, both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Nationally, they were far from God. Moreover, the same could be said personally. There were moments in the lives of the prophets, who were great men of God, when they were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The Story

Case in point, consider Elijah. He lived a bit earlier than Isaiah, and Elijah’s ministry was to the Northern Kingdom, the Israelites. Elijah is the prophet who got into the face of Ahab and said that there would be “no rain for the next few years except at my word” (1 Kings 17:1f). This is the guy who camped out in the Kerith Ravine, where he trusted God to send ravens bread and meat to him both morning and evening. This is the guy who trusted a widow to feed him because God gave her a jars of oil and flour that did not run out. This is the guy who went to the top of Mt. Carmel and he confronted 850 false prophets of the two gods Ba-al and Asherah. He said, “If Ba-al is god, then let him send fire down on this sacrifice!” Of course, it didn’t happen. But then, Elijah called down fire on the sacrifice from the one, true living God! Not only were there “fire-works,” but all 850 prophets were killed. Here’s what happened next.

1 Kings 19:1-18

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.” 3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, 4 while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” 5 Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” 6 He looked around, and there by his head was

some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. 7 The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." 8 So he got up and ate and drank.

What's going on here? This is the great Elijah who has seen time and again, his great and mighty God do great and mighty things. Ahab and Jezebel put a contract out on his life and told him that he would be dead in 24 hours (i.e., "...if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."). He was afraid of what would happen **tomorrow**. He's on the run because he's afraid. This spiritual giant is in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was so afraid of his unknown future that he wanted to die (i.e., "...he prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors"). Despair, depression, anxiety and fear gripped the great, spiritual leader, Elijah! Not once, but twice, an angel of God made Elijah eat and drink. Spiritually, the nation of Israel was in the wrong place, and the person Elijah was in the wrong place.

1 Kings 19:8-9

8 Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. 9 There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Mt. Sinai and Mt. Horeb were one and the same mountain. Moses not only met God at a burning bush, but Moses climbed Mt. Sinai to meet with God. Mt. Sinai—aka Mt. Horeb—was associated with the presence of God. Elijah traveled 40 days to Mt. Horeb where he wanted to die, and he wanted to die while being close to God. Elijah was miles away from where he had been, and God asked him, "*What are you doing here, Elijah?*" In other words, "Elijah, you are in the wrong place at the wrong time."

1 Kings 19:10

10 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

"Why am I here? I'm the only one left fighting for you. I'm the only one left on your side—and now Ahab and Jezebel are trying to kill me!" God didn't buy into that.

1 Kings 19:11-13

11 The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then 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. 12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

God told Elijah to get out of that cave and to watch Him pass by. But when we read this carefully, Elijah did not immediately obey God. God revealed Himself with wind so strong that the mountains and rocks were torn apart, an earthquake shook the ground, a fire set the mountain ablaze, and then there came a gentle whisper. God showed up and He showed off! God was **with** Elijah in that remote place. Moreover, it wasn't until God spoke in a gentle whisper that Elijah got up and went to the mouth of the cave, where he heard God ask him the same question again: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Though Elijah was able to end a drought and famine by commanding rain to fall, even though he was able to call

down fire from God that consumed an enormous altar, Elijah wasn't able to control the evil Ahab and Jezebel from attempting to kill him. Fear, worry, anxiety drove Elijah to the wrong place at the wrong time. He could not control **tomorrow**, but God was **with** him. After God reminds him of this fact, check out Elijah's response.

1 Kings 19:14-18

14 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." 15 The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. 16 Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. 17 Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. 18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."

Elijah claimed that he was the only prophet left (v. 14)! In his thinking, all of the other prophets of God had been killed, and now it was his turn to die. In his thinking, he was the only one left. He was **alone**, painfully alone. Life for Elijah was about "me, myself and I." Elijah was in a bad place emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and physically. Like Kevin in *Home Alone*, Elijah felt **alone**, painfully alone. But, notice God's immediate response: "Go back the way you came..." (v. 15). "You are not the only one left you follows Me. There are 7,000 followers who are still faithful" (v. 18). God was pointing out to the great prophet Elijah that he was not the only one left who was living in an ungodly, wicked culture that was intent on destroying the kingdom of God. Had Elijah not met the 7,000 God-followers? How did he not know of them or personally know some of them? Did he distance himself from other believers, keeping them at arm's length? God told him, "Go back the way you came."

Segue

How does this speak to us, here in the heart of Christmas? Well, if we speak honestly from the heart, Christmas for many in this room is really a *Christmess*. And like the people of God who lived 700-800 years *before* Jesus was born, whose lives were a mess, we live in uncertainty about the **tomorrows** of life. Human nature has not changed. We live in uncertain days. We don't know what a Trump presidency bodes for America. We don't know what's going to happen to the economy, to relationships with Russia and other foreign powers. The list is long, AND the list has NEVER changed! Uncertainty about **tomorrow** has existed since the beginning of time! Elijah was afraid of **tomorrow** when Jezebel said, "By this time tomorrow, I'm going to kill you!" He couldn't control **tomorrow**, and nor can we! Uncertainty takes us to the wrong place at the wrong time. Why do we allow fear, anxiety, stress drive us to places where we have no business being? Elijah ran, and so do we. Why do we run from a marriage that's not going well, from family that doesn't get along, from a job that's less than pleasant? Why do we run to the wrong place at the wrong time—to drugs or drinks of choice, to internet porn, to relationships that are far from godly, and more?

Is this Christmas a *Christmess* because we are full of anxiety, fear, worry and despair? Fear is common on the road of life.

- [Read portions of Caleb's letter](#) in which he wrote to me about his fears as a nineteen-year-old.
- Our treatments might not be effective in the cancer battle, and the uncertainty is overwhelming. The recovery from surgery is not going as planned, the test results are not in yet, the illness is

chronic and the condition will only grow worse for the rest of my life. Tomorrow is uncertain, and we are afraid. No one else understands. I'm alone. I'm in the heart of a Christ *mess*.

- My spouse is moving further and further away from me. The arguments are more frequent and fierce. The kids can tell something is wrong. The future of our marriage and family is uncertain. When the whole family gets together this year, I feel so alone because no one else is going through this like me. I'm in the heart of a Christ *mess*.
- The attitude of my boss towards me has changed. The company is going through some big changes. The economy has impacted our company. My job is not secure and my future is uncertain. I don't want to go to the company party. I feel alone because no one else's job hangs by a thread. I'm in the heart of a Christ *mess*.
- My husband/wife/mom/dad/grandpa/grandma/child died this year. My future is uncertain and I'm afraid. And, I'm alone—really alone. Besides, I don't want to be around any one—especially those who are happy. I'm in the heart of a Christ *mess*.
- I've been in an accident—I've been named in a law suit, I've been arrested, I'm addicted to whatever, etc., etc., etc. I'm in the heart of a Christ *mess*. My tomorrow is uncertain.

Listen to this voice of reason. Do not say like Elijah: "I'm the only one left." Do not be like Elijah and think that this *mess* is all about me, myself and I. DO not think like Elijah that we are **alone**.

First, we are surrounded by thousands of people who are followers of Jesus, and who happen to call this place home. You and I are not **home alone**. Like Elijah, are we disconnected with other believers? Do we keep people at arm's length, choosing not to become acquainted, not be friends, not do life with one another?

This fall, CBS News ran a story (9/30/16) about a guy—a cowboy—out in Oregon. In the small Oregon town of Eagle Point, 28 year-old Robert Borba "is one of the last of a kind; a real honest-to-goodness, cow roping cowboy," said CBS News. This summer, Borba found himself roping more than just cows. He was in a Walmart parking lot—with his horse in tow—when he heard a woman screaming that her bike had been stolen. "All of a sudden this guy goes whizzing by me on a bicycle," Borba explained. What did Borba do? He jumped up into the saddle, and while his horse galloped after the guy on a bike, Borba took out his lasso. A cowboy's rope. He then managed to use that lasso to rope the thief, "just like [he] would a steer." When police arrived, Borba told them, "Man, you guys ought to pick up a rope and throw that gun away. You might have better luck with it." New methods can work. Beginning in January, we have a new method for you to get into groups here at The Creek [explain]. You and I are not alone, unless we *choose* to be alone.

Listen – the name of the Messiah is Immanuel, God **with** us. Just as God was with Elijah in the midst of his messy fear and despair, God, who does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17), is **with** us.

John 1:1; 14

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God and the Word is God. And the Word became flesh and lived for a while among us.

The Messiah came. Jesus was born. He is Immanuel, God **with** us. He came down here, right into your mess and into mine. Dave Slagle lives in Georgia, and he described a recent time when he and some buddies went out to eat: "Being from the South, I love ribs. I remember hearing about this particular restaurant that had amazing ribs, and a bunch of my friends and I drove 50 minutes to get there. The place was packed, and the food was great. It was 'all you can eat rib night,' and rib bones were piling up as fast as the line to get in. Eating ribs is messy business. Barbecue sauce gets on your face, fingers, and

clothes; dirty napkins pile up next to half-eaten bowls of baked beans and coleslaw. When our crew had eaten all we could eat, we paid our tab and waddled out to the car. That's when I reached into my pocket for my keys and came up with nothing but lint. Starting to panic, I looked through the window at the ignition. I was hoping that I had locked my keys in the car, because in the back of my mind a more disgusting possibility was taking shape. I knew exactly where my keys were—the keys to my car, my house, and my office. Only seconds earlier, those precious keys had slid right off my tray and followed a half-eaten corn cob and several bones to the bottom of a trash can. I had thrown away my keys on all you can eat rib night. It was a long walk home, and my friends certainly weren't going to do my dirty work for me. So I dove in. I fished through bones, beans, barbecue, corn, cake, coleslaw, and a host of saliva-soaked napkins. A shiny layer of trash can slime had coated my arms before I finally grasped hold of those precious keys.

Slagle is more than right. Christmas is all about God becoming a man, who then dove down here into a Christ*mess*—the mess of our lives. Christmas is about Jesus coming down here and bringing hope to us for healed marriages and families, for provision of our needs in times of recession, for direction in the midst of our confusion, and more. Jesus dove into our messy lives to bring us help in the here-and-now, but to also bring us hope to live forever in the here-after with Him and other Christ-followers.

Through the angel Gabriel, what did God say to Mary before she became pregnant with Jesus? Knowing that Mary's tomorrow would quickly become very messy, how did the conversation begin?

Luke 1:28-30

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is **with** you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of a greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "**Do not be afraid**, Mary, you have found favor with God."

After Mary became pregnant and Joseph found out about it, his life would quickly become a mess. He was engaged to be married to Mary. Overnight night, his world was overturned! What was his response?

Matthew 1:19-20

Because Joseph was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, **do not be afraid** to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

Why did the angel say, "Do not be afraid?" Joseph was afraid! He feared the uncertainty of his **tomorrow!**

Luke 2:8-10

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby keeping watch over their flocks by night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shined round about them, and they were terrified. The angel of the Lord said to them, "Fear not! For behold, I bring news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ, the Lord."

Fear not! Do not be afraid! That wasn't just for people back then. It's for each and every one of us here and now! When life slowly or suddenly becomes a Christ*mess*, **fear not! Do not be afraid!** Why? We are not alone! Go is **with** us!

Remember what God told Elijah to do? He said to that strong, powerful man of God, "Go back..." Go back. We would do well to heed that command of God. Let's go back in our minds to the many times when God came through for us. Go back and remember the faithfulness, the goodness, the kindness of God. Fear and despair about the uncertainty of **tomorrow** makes us quickly forget God's presence **with** us in all the yesterdays of life. God never left us. He never forgot about us. He is Immanuel, God with us and *for us*.

The late Corrie ten Boom became known around the world as a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust. The ten Booms were devout Christians, living in the Netherlands at the time of World War II. They enabled many Jews to escape arrest by the Nazis until the ten Booms were arrested and sent to the concentration camps. Corrie's sister Bestie died 72 years ago this coming Friday while imprisoned in Ravensbruck, and just before dying, Bestie told her sister, "Corrie, there is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still." With her parents and family now dead, if anyone could have feared an uncertain future, it was Corrie ten Boom. Speaking with personal integrity and scriptural authority, Corrie said, "Never be afraid to trust your unknown future to a known God."

Fear, anxiety and despair drives us to a place we were never meant to be. We don't belong there. Yet, a Savior invites us, saying, "Come to Me, all you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Resources Consulted

Briley, Terry. *The College Press NIV Commentary: Isaiah Vol 1* Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing, 2000.

Konkel, August H. *NIV Life Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Kings* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.

Oswalt, John N. *NIV Life Application Commentary: Isaiah* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.

Tenney, Merrill C. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1977.

Walton, John; Matthews & Chavalas, eds.; *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Copyright 2016 by Dr. Gary L. Johnson. All materials presented by Dr. Johnson uploaded, posted, transmitted, or distributed in any way, except that you may print or download one copy of the material for your personal, noncommercial home use only, provided that 1) you retain all copyright, trademark and propriety notices, 2) you make no modifications to the materials. For any uses other than this, written permission is required. (e2: effective elders c/o Dr. Gary L. Johnson; 6430 S Franklin Road Suite A, Indianapolis, IN 46259).