

Elijah's prayer part 2

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[0:00] Once said, what a man is on his knees before God, that he is and nothing more. That was by a Scottish preacher, Robert Murray McShane.

! What a man is on his knees before God, that he is and nothing more. We are human beings coming before a great and mighty God.

As we saw this morning from this chapter, we are utterly dependent upon our God to answer prayer.

And as we'll see again this evening, we see in these few verses, Elijah on his knees before the Lord.

And we'll learn four more lessons for our prayers as we look at these few verses. As you may recall from this morning, the situation for Israel is that they're in a time of drought.

[1:09] This chapter is kind of bookended by the thought that rain is going to come and rain coming again. So if you have a look there in verse 1, we see this.

After a long time, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah. Go and present yourself to Ahab, the king, Ahab, and I will send rain on the land.

Elijah hears from God that rain is going to come again on the land. His judgment is coming towards an end.

But first, God's people need to see something. They need to see that he truly is God and they need to bow down and worship him and not Baal.

Not other gods. There's something more important than their physical needs. It's their spiritual needs. Their need to be worshipping the Lord.

[2:18] And so we saw this morning that contest, that kind of God contest. Who is the real God? Who is the God who answers by fire? And we saw that it is the Lord Almighty who rains down fire from heaven in direct contrast with Baal, who does not hear, who does not answer people's cries, who is totally powerless.

But there's still no rain. God answering by fire has not solved the problem of no rain. In fact, it probably makes it worse, really, fire in a land that's suffering a drought.

The sky is still scorching. The ground is still dry. Or as Moses spoke to God's people in Deuteronomy, the sky of your head will be bronze and the ground beneath you iron.

A warning that if they turn to other gods, a drought would come. The sky like bronze. The ground beneath like iron.

God was doing what his word said if people turned to other gods. But it could be easy for us to think, as we've been looking at this passage today, that Elijah's kind of in charge in this chapter.

[3:41] It's him who organizes everything to do with the contest. He sets up the altar. He does things. But we mustn't take our eyes off.

It's really God. It's really God who answers prayer. It's only God who could have answered by fire. And we see now that it's only God who can answer Elijah's prayer for rain.

It's only God who could send rain, who can control the weather. It's not Elijah. Elijah is just on his knees before the Lord. So, verse 42.

So, Ahab went off to eat and drink. But Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground, and put his face between his knees.

He is bowing down before God, praying that God will remove judgment on the land. But there is nothing there that tells us he's praying.

[4:42] But we have a little commentary on this part of God's word. If you turn to James chapter 5, verse 17 and 18, we read this very helpful thing about Elijah praying here.

James 5, 17 to 18. You might want to put a finger in 1 Kings 18 so we can go back there. It says, Elijah was a human being, even as we are.

He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, but it did. And it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

We get a real insight here into what's going on in 1 Kings 18.42. Elijah is praying earnestly to God that it would rain again.

And God indeed, as we'll see, does send rain. So we are going to learn four more things from Elijah as he prays.

[5:58] And the first is a praying posture. A praying posture. Elijah, it says, is on his knees before the Lord.

He bent down to the ground, put his face between his knees. He's in a praying posture. He recognizes that he's a human being coming towards the Lord.

And he's showing that just in the way he is praying. And though we are not told or commanded anywhere in particular a posture of praying, we can pray sitting, we can pray standing, we can pray walking, kneeling.

It is helpful to note the posture that Elijah comes. Helpful to note because it's like he's bowing down before the Lord Almighty.

He is the king. He is the sovereign one. Only he can send the rain. He comes as a creature, helpless, coming before his creator.

[7:04] The one who governs all things. The one who can answer by fire, as we have seen. The Lord who rules and reigns.

And so he bows his knees towards the sovereign Lord Almighty, saying, please do something only you can do and make it rain. Send this rain that you have promised.

So even if we don't ourselves fall on our knees physically before the Lord, in our praying, it's important that we remember who we pray to.

We're not trying to bend God to our own wills, not trying to come before him and saying, God, I want this, I want that. Although I think, I know that I can sometimes come like that and forget that I'm coming to the Lord Almighty.

We need to remember who we are coming to. The king of kings, the creator of the universe. God, the Lord. Praying for things that only he can do.

[8:14] Praying that he will turn people's hearts to him. Praying his kingdom will come. Submit to his will. And maybe it could be helpful for some of us, maybe at some point this week, if we're able to, maybe just helpful to pray on your knees before the Lord.

Just to think, this is what I'm doing. I'm coming as a humble servant before the Lord. My king. A very kind of tangible, clear way for us to see what we are doing as we come to the king in prayer. Lesson number one, praying posture. Lesson number two, praying promises. They're all beginning with P. Praying promises.

Elijah is sure that rain is coming. He says that with great certainty in verse 41. And Elijah said to Ahab, go eat and drink, for there is the sound of heavy rain.

But as he sends his servant off, there's no sign of rain. But Elijah is sure that it's coming because he's heard from the Lord at the beginning of chapter 18.

[9:36] And so he's praying that would happen. He's praying, reminding, almost like reminding God, not that God needs reminding, but saying, you have said this. Please do it, Lord. Taking his promise and turning it into prayer.

It's like when someone asking, like when you know someone who maybe said, well, if you ever want this doing, just let me know.

And you come to them and you say, you know when you said that? No, I forgot about that. I recently had the joy of asking a friend of mine to bake a wedding cake.

He's very into baking. And I remember him baking a wedding cake for some people a couple of years ago. And I said, do you remember when you baked that wedding cake? Do you think you

could bake one for us?

The answer was a yes. Yes. Sorry for leaving you in suspense. And God wants to hear from us like that, praying the promises of Scripture, praying to God, you know you said this.

[10:45] Well, please do this. A few promises of Scripture I was thinking of. In Habakkuk it says, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

And then Jesus, and I think these are connected, Jesus in the Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray, your kingdom come. Surely, as we ask God that his kingdom would come, it's asking him that he would fulfill this promise in Habakkuk.

May the earth be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Or as some of us were praying on Friday, reminding ourselves of Matthew 9.38, where Jesus says, ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest field.

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. So we ask him, we say, you have said this, and we ask for it, Lord. Or at the end of Revelation, Jesus says, behold, I am coming soon.

And God's people pray, come, Lord Jesus, come. We still pray that. He has promised, and we pray, come, Lord Jesus, come. As we pray that word of God back to him, he uses our prayers to fulfill his purposes in his promises.

[12:10] It's exciting to think that prayers, which we can offer up even this evening, God may use, be using to fulfill his promises, to fulfill his purposes here in Brighton and Hove and beyond around the world.

That's really exciting. So surely, as Elijah prays for this, reminds God, you've said you're going to bring rain, so please bring rain.

Surely it's going to be like the fire, and God answers straight away. Well, no, not exactly, as I'm sure you know. Verse 43, Elijah says to his servant, go and look towards the sea, and he went up and looked.

There is nothing there, he said. Seven times, Elijah said, go back. And not until the seventh time, the servant reported, a cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea.

Lesson number three, praying persistently. Sometimes God will answer our prayers, and we've seen that in this passage, more or less straight away.

[13:31] But here, Elijah must have agonized with prayer. You've just told me, God, that you'd send rain, but there is no rain, so please send it. Seven times later, there's a sign of the rain coming, as he sees that cloud.

Just a small cloud, but it's the beginning of the answer. Why does it say, take seven trips?

Why doesn't God just do it? But Elijah is praying in accordance with God's promises, knowing that this seems to be God's will.

But God seems to just take his time. He seems to be slow, but God is not slow, as we would understand it, as the Bible says. I think many of us would love it if God was kind of like Amazon, where we order our thing, and it comes the next day.

And sometimes God is like that. We've seen recently, Mark and I were praying that new people would come to see why, and two days later, over double the numbers.

[14:40] Praise God for that. But other times, he'll make us wait. More often than not, it seems. Sometimes we may have to agonize with him in prayer, it feels like.

Why won't he answer? And we may not ever really know. But we hold on to his promises, and we hold on to his word, what we know about him here, that he does hear, he does answer our prayers. We don't have a God who doesn't hear, who doesn't answer like Baal. He does hear. He does answer. We are merely servants bowing before the king.

We're not gods. And as Elijah keeps coming, seven times, keeps praying persistently, he is demonstrating where his faith is.

He knows it can only be God who can answer this prayer. Only gods can move the heavens to send fire, to send rain, to change things, to act.

[15:59] And we need to hold on to that as a church. It struck me as we were meeting on Monday evening over Zoom. For, was it, seven years you've been praying about this building to become yours?

Like, that's a long time. Elijah just prayed seven times. That's seven years of praying persistently. People in this church, and the building is now owned by us, and we've been able to do things with it, and it's good.

Another example is praying for future ministry. I know you've been praying for some years for that, and God seems to be beginning to answer that in very strange ways, but God seems to be beginning to answer that.

But we keep praying. As we've been reminding ourselves the last few weeks, we pray for a team of elders, not just one elder. We keep praying for that. We persist in our prayers.

Persevere in our prayers, knowing there must be a good reason for the delay, and God will act at just the right time. In the Old Testament, there were promises of a Messiah to come, and it must have just seemed like, why is he not coming now?

[17:15] Why do we have to wait so long? And yet the Bible assures us that just the right time, Jesus came. At just the right time, Jesus died. God is faithful.

He does hear, and he does answer our prayers. Prayers. And finally, prayers, power. This might be a slight stretch, but bear with.

Through these chapters with Elijah, we see King Ahab, who has led the people away from the Lord through his marriage and to Jezebel, and Jezebel bringing in Baal and other foreign gods.

But now God, and God was sending that judgment of the drought for three and a half years, but now God was relenting in his judgment through the power of prayer, through his servant Elijah.

Elijah, remember, he's just a human being like us. And the answer, what God does, comes in remarkable ways.

[18:23] So verse 44, as we've seen already, a cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea. Rain is coming. God is answering. So Elijah said, go and tell Ahab, hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.

Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rainstorm came on, and Ahab rose off to Jezreel. The power of the Lord came on Elijah, tucking his cloak into his belt.

He ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel. So he goes to speak to Ahab. He tells him, the rain is coming. You might want to get your chariot and get off quickly before the rain stops you.

And as that happens, the hand of the Lord who has been answering the prayers for rain is on Elijah. And we see this very strange thing, really.

The power of the Lord came on Elijah and tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab. Ahab was on a chariot. Elijah's running ahead.

[19:41] It's amazing. It seems like a complete miracle because it is, because the power of the Lord is on him. And we pray to a God who is powerful, who can answer in the most completely, ridiculously amazing ways.

The prophet through whom God's word was spoken, through whom prayer was answered, God was having his hand on him. And I think the idea, as I've been reading a few commentators on this because I've got no idea what it's about really.

But the idea is that King Ahab should be a king who is following the Lord. And so as he sees the prophet of the Lord who speaks God's word, he should see that's what I'm meant to be doing.

I'm meant to be following God's word. Remember Elijah's question to the people in verse 21.

As Elijah went before the people he said, how long will you waver or limp between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him, but if Baal is God, follow him.

[21:03] He's kind of saying to Ahab, will you follow me? And we know as we read on he doesn't. And the question we've been asking ourselves is today, is we following the Lord?

And if we are, are we turning to him in prayer as Elijah does time and time again in these chapters? Are we looking to him, the Lord who answers prayer?

Will we continue to do that? We have done this week. Will we continue to do that through the rest of this year and beyond? knowing that God does hear, knowing that he does answer.

Remember our posture in prayer. We're coming to the Lord Almighty. We come on our knees before him. Remember the promises. Pray the promises to God.

Remember we need to pray persistently. more often than not we need to pray persistently. Keep trusting, keep holding on to the Lord and know that he is and he will work.

[22:18] And know that he is powerful. We're going to pray together. We're going to pray together now. I'll lead us in a prayer and we'll sing and then we'll together.

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