

Under a Broom Tree

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- [0 : 00] Let us now turn to the passage that we read from the first book of Kings on chapter 19. The first book of Kings, chapter 19, and we may read again at verse 3.
- Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.
- But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, It is enough now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.
- And I'd like to set three thoughts before you from the phrase, Under a Broom Tree. Who is under a broom tree?
- The first point is, a prophet of God. Secondly, a picture of dejection.
- [1 : 16] And thirdly, pastoral concern and exercise. Who is under a broom tree? A prophet of God.
- If you were following the life story of this man, Elijah, up until now, I do not think you would have anticipated finding him dejected, despondent, and forlorn under a broom tree.
- For when we are first introduced to him in the Bible, he is presented to us as a man of action and vigor.
- If reported in the media today, the headlines might be, Fiery prophet confronts authority, prophet challenges, bail worship, and so on.
- He comes across as a bold person, as a fearless person. God's spokesman. A bright shining light in a climate of spiritual darkness and decline.
- [2 : 27] A courageous figure. Unafraid of confronting authority in the person of King Ahab. A person who trusted in the providential provision of Almighty God.
- He was obedient to the divine instruction to go to the brook Kareth, where there was a water supply and where he would be fed by ravens.
- Almost a contradiction in terms. A man who still trusted the Lord to provide. When the effect of the drought caused the brook to dry up.
- For he was instructed, you remember, to go to Saraphath, to be fed in the house of a widow. But on arrival, she is in penury. And he is told that all she has is a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug.
- And yet for the duration of his stay as a lodger, despite how apparently limited the food supply, appeared to be, we read, that the jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord.
- [3 : 49] Whilst he was there, he was instrumental under God in restoring to life the son of the widow. A zealous man, unafraid to rebuke sin and speak against it.
- A critic of the direction that Israel, as a nation, was pursuing spiritually. A man who stood alone on the top of Mount Carmel and challenged the people of Israel, how long will you go limping between two different opinions?

A man who frequented the throne of grace. A man who had the mind of God. We are told he prayed fervently that it might not rain, the Apostle James tells us.

And for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again and heaven gave rain and the earth bore its fruit. He prayed for the glory of the Lord to be revealed and the hearts of the people to be turned back to their God.

And so we read in chapter 18, at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel.

[5 : 06] And you have to note in looking at the life of this man that he is the prophet of the covenant-keeping God.

And that is why the language that he uses in prayer there is so important. O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, or the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and that I have done all these things at your word.

Answer me, O Lord. Answer me that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have turned their hearts back. A man who persevered in prayer.

Seven times he prayed that rain would fall in Israel. A man of God, a spiritual giant. A humble spiritual giant.

I think that is true of all true spiritual giants, that they are humble. The last verse of chapter 18 would suggest humility in the life of this man.

[6 : 17] And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah. He gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. That was a distance of approximately 18 miles.

He ran in front of a horse-drawn chariot. Why does the writer give us this information? Was this man of God an athlete, along with every other gift that he possessed and that was true of him?

Well, I don't know that. Was the horse a broken-down hack? Hardly, given that it was drawing the chariot of the king.

Why then does the writer give us this information? Well, two reasons come to mind. First, by running ahead of the chariot, he is indicating that he is subservient to the king.

He runs ahead like a fruit man. And just in passing, you remember how Jeremiah raises this very searching question, if you have raced with men on foot and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses?

[7 : 38] And if in a safe land you are so trusting, what will you do in the thicket of the Jordan? It was the practice of the fruit man to run ahead of the king's chariot.

It was one of the methods that was used to herald the approach of the king. And here is this prophet of God identifying himself as a servant of the king, subservient to the king.

Perhaps you remember how Mordecai in the book of Esther was led about the streets of Zuzah on a royal horse.

You remember the king asked Haman, what should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor? And Haman, you remember, was such a vain man.

And his thought process, who else could the king possibly have in mind but himself? There were none more worthy in the estimation of Haman of honor.

[8 : 50] And so he goes on to describe to the king what ought to be done, thinking all the time that the king is going to honor himself. And so you find an embittered, humiliated Haman, hurry, take the robes and the horse as you have said.

Do so to Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king's gates. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned. It's Haman's worst nightmare. So Haman took the robes and the horse and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city proclaiming before him, thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.

Haman is an example of subservience, albeit unwilling subservience there. Well, Elijah, in running before the king, is subservient to the king.

He was zealous for the king of kings and therefore he showed respect for the king of Israel, fulfilling a principle that is emphasized in the New Testament.

Bond servants, who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye service, as people pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

[10 : 11] Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

And again, Paul, and writing to Titus, remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities. And so, Elijah seems to illustrate that principle in his own life.

So that, though he was a bold, fearless man, yet he was also humble. Humble before God, but bold in standing on the side of God in the world.

And the second reason that I think this information is given at the end of chapter 18 is that it is possible that Elijah thought that it was the beginning of a new dawn.

The prophets of Baal had been decimated. The people had acknowledged, lying prostrated on the top of Carmel, the Lord, he is God, the Lord, he is God.

[11 : 24] God had answered by fire, then he had answered by sending rain. And perhaps, Elijah could be forgiven for thinking, perhaps the kingdom of God has come in power.

The king and queen will know that the Lord is God and they will worship the living and the true God. But back in the palace, Queen Jezebel was probably thinking that Baal had been victorious when she saw the rain and Ahab returned soaking wet.

Why would she think that? Because Baal, in their view, was the God of rain. Her expectations were severely dashed as Ahab related to her the slaughter of the prophets of Baal.

This queen was not used to being on the losing side and she didn't like it. So there was no new dawn, humanly speaking.

Elijah had to learn, as we all have to learn, that every victory gained in this life is but preparation for the next hurdle in your journey towards eternity.

[12 : 46] Who was under the broom tree a one-time fearless champion, a prophet of God? Secondly, a picture of dejection.

What a forlorn, dejected figure is set before us under the broom tree. Why does the Bible paint this image for us of this prophet?

We are told at the beginning of chapter 19 about the account Ahab gave to Jezebel of the events on Mount Carmel.

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, how he had killed all the prophets with a sword. When they were reading it, did you notice the glaring omission that is made from Ahab's account?

Ahab gives an edited, jaundiced version of what took place on Mount Carmel. Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done.

[13 : 57] Although Ahab was present on Mount Carmel, he says absolutely nothing about what God has done. He told Jezebel all that Elijah had done.

There is a deafening silence with regard to what God had done on Mount Carmel. And what was more important on Mount Carmel was it not what God had done, not what Elijah had done.

yet Ahab omits that from his report. The most important part of all is omitted what God has done.

He doesn't tell how the fire of the Lord fell and how it consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust and leaked up the water that was in the trench.

There is no indication that he told anything about the profession of the people. His account focuses on what Elijah did and not on what God did.

[15 : 09] But even his edited account fuels the fire of incandescent rage in the heart of Queen Jezebel. She sends a messenger to Elijah with a message.

So may the gods do to me and more also if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow. She threatens Elijah with death.

There is something very evil about this queen. And so we read Then he was afraid or it could be translated then he saw and he arose and run for his life came to Beersheba which belongs to Judah and left his servant there.

A man whom we saw who fearlessly confronted the prophets of Baal and the king and is now running for his life.

And as long as he keeps running he cannot deal with the issue of the threat of Jezebel. Instead of meeting the threat he runs.

[16 : 28] And I think that is always true. If we run from something then we will never adequately be able to deal with it. When you are confronted with issues it doesn't matter how difficult they may be.

It is always better to confront them than to run from them. For as long as you run from them you will never be able to deal with them adequately.

And this is what happens here. Matthew Henry in his commentary asks the question shall we praise Elijah for this that is for running.

And Henry answers his own question. He says we praise him not. Where was the courage with which he had lately confronted King Ahab and all the prophets of Baal?

And then Henry goes on to make the observation great faith is not always alike strong. And it's as if sudden fear overcomes the faith of the prophet.

[17 : 35] Now he's not alone in this in the Bible. You remember Peter in the New Testament he was going to walk on the surface of the Sea of Galilee.

And the Bible tells us after he had got out of the boat and began his walk. When he saw the wind he was afraid. Fear overcame his faith.

Fear made him look away from Jesus and look to the wind and the surface of the water. And here it seems to me that Elijah is taking his focus away from God and he ran for his life.

And you know a man can run a very long way when he is running for his life. This man ran 90 miles all the way to Beersheba.

Why does the writer tell us it was to Beersheba? Is it to give authenticity to the story? Well I believe there is another reason.

[18 : 50] You remember Beersheba was on one side of the circumference of the promised land.

Remember the promised land went from Dan to Beersheba. So on one side you had Dan. At the outer edge on the far side of the promised land you had Beersheba on the outer edge on the other side.

And you remember God had made a covenant with the people to bless them in the land. But if they were leaving the land then they were turning their back on the promise of blessing.

What did Elijah do? We are told when he got to Beersheba he went a day's journey into the wilderness. In other words he left the promised land.

He went out into the wilderness where he cuts a solitary figure and he came and sat down under a broom tree. I read somewhere and for the life of me I can't remember where I read it that the broom tree it's a kind of scrub tree it can grow to about a height of 12 feet but I read somewhere and I can't verify this at the moment that it's a tree that sends out an unpleasant aroma.

[20 : 25] Now I can't back that up right now but at the back of my mind I know that I read it somewhere and I can't point to it that it sends out an unpleasant aroma and if that is true and I'm not sure if it's true but if it is true seems to me to add to the picture that is set before us in the Bible a tree with an unpleasant aroma and a prophet with the smell of death spiritually in his own inner life and that seems to add to the picture that is set before us by the writer here.

I know from scripture that the roots of this tree are poisonous and I also know from scripture that its wood was used in fires particularly the psalmist speaks of burning coals of broom in other words charcoal so these are the two references other references in the Bible to this broom tree he wouldn't obtain much shelter under the broom tree from the heat of the sun and here the prophet prayed he was a man of prayer and his prayer is it is enough now oh lord take away my life for I am no better than my father's he is seeking death in his prayer and whatever you may however you may regard the prayer of this man and his petition

I think everyone would have to acknowledge he he is indicating in his prayer that God alone has the sole prerogative over life and death and however you may view his petition I think that comes across he wasn't the first in the Bible to ask this Moses I am not able to carry all this people alone the burden is too heavy for me if you will treat me like this kill me at once if

I find favor in your sight that I may not see my wretchedness Job why did you bring me out from the womb would that I had died before any eye had seen me and were as though I had not been carried from the womb to the grave Jeremiah cursed be the day on which I was born Jonah therefore now O Lord please take my life from me for it is better for me to die than to live and all of these people I have mentioned were people of God people who are set before us in the Bible as those whom the Lord has touched in mercy and in grace and I think from that you can conclude that there are times in the lives of the people of God where they long for death and they bring their longing for death to God because he alone is the

Lord of life and for me it seems here under the broom tree as if Elijah is perched on the edge of the pit of despair it is enough now O Lord and it seems to me the writer is conveyed to us that Elijah as it were peering down into the dark murky depths of the most discouraging of all pits but that he is not actually in it it is enough O Lord as if he were saying I cannot go any further and he is paralyzed and often that is what happens when we fail to deal with issues that threaten your Christian existence that is the effect you tend to become paralyzed and whatever you think of Elijah's petition one thing it does it overthrows the teaching that states if you trust in

[25 : 34] Christ then your life will be without trial salvation that is conferred upon a sinner does not eliminate suffering affliction or trial perhaps your greatest trials are experienced after the Lord has come into your life the psalmist teaches many are the afflictions of the righteous afflictions can arise in many forms causing Christians to become discouraged causing Christians to become even depressed causing Christians at times to be fearful and apprehensive causing Christians at times like Elijah to run for the lives causing Christians at times to leave their work causing Christians at times to abandon their callings it can happen and I think what

James has written in his letter sheds light on how this came about in the life of Elijah James writes the apostle Elijah was a man with a nature like yours Elijah was a man a man he belonged to the fallen family of Adam a sinful man full of failings yes a spiritual giant but he was a man and that seems to me is the key to the dejection that is depicted for us here as he sits under the broom tree in his own strength he was but a feeble man but with the power of the Lord he was among the best and the bravest of men like the apostle

Paul he could say I can do all things through him who strengthens me without the power of the Lord he was powerless a complete coward he has to learn as we all do what Christ taught to his disciples apart from me you can do nothing for like every believer we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us Elijah under the broom tree like Samson shorn of his hair but what actually lay behind the petition well some people would suggest several reasons fatigue he was absolutely exhausted he had spent much time in fervent persevering prayer he had traveled extensively on foot on the verge of complete physical collapse and that left him vulnerable he experienced isolation salvation the

Christian requires the fellowship of fellow Christians in the world but this man lived almost in virtual solitude for about three years he didn't have much contact with people in general let alone with fellow believers and he had left his servant in Beersheba depression is not only caused by the absence of community but it actually perpetuates it and then there was spiritual opposition relentless spiritual oppression can be very discouraging that's what he experienced and then there was maybe his emotions he had just experienced a spiritual high in fact he had experienced several spiritual highs he had experienced the ultimate mountain top experience he had witnessed the mighty acts of

God in fire and rain on Carmel and now he is back in the real world you know perhaps at communion times and if the services grip your hearts and mind and you are as it were transported momentarily out of the world away from the daily grind of life and it's as if you're not in the real world for a few days when you experience that mountain top experience and then all of a sudden you are confronted by the cold reality of daily living you're back in the world the world is bigger than you remember it to be the world is more hostile than you remember it to be and you find yourself submerged and perhaps overwhelmed as you come face to face with the reality of the hostile world that momentarily you thought you had left you see communion time can be a time of exalted emotion but you cannot live on exalted emotion the believer lives by faith not on exalted emotion pleasant as it may be perhaps you see here was a man when he was on the mountaintop and it's as if the strength of the Lord had surged through every fiber of his being and now he's as it were running on empty

[32 : 12] I suppose those who preach when they've given their all in preaching they know something of the heightened emotions and then they know the feeling of emptiness when they're running as it were on empty having given their all in the preaching of the gospel and then there is the perhaps dashed expectations and I have referred to this already the battle was won but the war continued Queen Jezebel was still there of a formidable powerful influential figure in the land and she hated all that Elijah stood for and so he was afraid and he ran and he says I'm no better than my fathers some people would say that there's a trace of pride and what the claim that Elijah makes here before God

I don't know I'm not sure about that you would have to wait till you get to glory to question Elijah and to ask him if that is so but what I read into that is this you remember God had given a promise that he was going to raise a prophet I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers I will put words in his mouth shall speak to them all that I command him and in many ways Elijah must have appeared like the candidate that fulfilled the promised rule he could shut up rain in heaven he could raise the dead and pray and bring down glorious fire of God's presence he could turn the heart of God's people back to their

God but he is not the prophet who is spoken of in these words it points forward to the one whom Elijah is going to meet and with whom he is going to have a discussion about the exodus of the one who fulfills the role of the true prophet the Lord Jesus Christ so in that sense he is not any better than his fathers and so we find him dejected despondent depressed a prophet of God and finally pastoral concern in exercise and I think that is seen first of all in the very fact that we are reading about his experience if God had not lifted him out from this dark dismal place and the state that he found himself in then we wouldn't be reading about it and I think that demonstrates may sound obvious but I think that demonstrates the true pastoral concern of the

Lord he attends to the prophet and he attends to the prophet as a most knowledgeable physician and a loving shepherd as he prays it is enough he comes to be taught through the Lord's gracious dealings that the grace of God is more than enough and so in the Lord's pastoral concern for the prophet he sends an angel to minister to him and that in my view is exceptional and wonderful this discouraged dejected man of God required company and companionship but he didn't require the company and the companionship of those like himself you often find that people who are inclined to be depressed or discouraged frequently seek the company of those of a similar mindset but you see God sent an angel to this man and I don't think there is such a person as a melancholy or a sorrowful angel that being does not exist a melancholy angel they are not discouraged or depressed they give the glory to a victorious

God who works all things according to the counsel of his own will and one of the duties of the angel is to minister the letter to the Hebrews where the author is writing of the supremacy of Christ and he contrasts Jesus and the status of Jesus with angels and in the closing verse of that chapter he says are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation and we have several examples of that in the Bible Daniel in the den of lions King Darius a sleepless night he spent the night fasting and at break of day he comes an anguish of soul to inquire for Daniel he probably had no great expectation that Daniel would still be there but he heard this my God sent his angel and shut the lions mouths and they have not harmed me remember Peter in prison and how the angel came to him and brought him out of the prison

[38 : 30] Christ in the wilderness and the angels ministered to him Christ in Gethsemane and an angel sent to strengthen him Paul in the storm on the journey to Rome and here we read an angel touched him in other words he was saying to Elijah this is no dream God had permitted his exhausted servant sleep and the psalmist writes he gives to his beloved sleep was this man still beloved although he was despondent and rejected yes just as surely as he was when he stood in triumph on the top of Mount Carmel and so the eye of the divine shepherd follows the path of this man and the love of God comes close to Elijah to strengthen him he needed sleep he needed food and the angel awakes him with the instruction arise and eat you know when we are in situations like

Elijah spiritually it's as if you experience a loss of appetite you do not want food you perhaps turn away from where food is set before you it's as if you turn in on yourself and turn away from the church perhaps staying away from the means of grace perhaps not reading your Bible as you did in the past and you're like a sick person refusing a drink of water until you feel better but you know the sick person needs the water not when they feel better but before they feel better and it seems to me that is what the

Lord is urging the prophet here arise and eat don't wait until you feel an appetite but arise to eat even when you don't consider that you have an appetite for the food that was there and when he did awake there was on his head a cake bait on hot stones and a jar of water because you see this God is the God who sent a plenteous rain says the psalmist and when the people were weary did refresh again and so this angel perseveres arise and eat for the journey is too great for you in other words Elijah had prayed for death despite the fact that he was running for his life and here the Lord is saying to him you are not going to die Elijah because I have a purpose for you arise and eat for the journey is too great for you in other words

I have more service for you to do arise and eat there is a journey to attempt to and so it is when you feel despondent and downcast when you feel somehow that you are forsaken and isolated in the world remember the eye of the heavenly shepherd is still upon you and the eye of the shepherd is upon you to encourage you so that you may go from strength to strength and he says to you in these circumstances arise and eat don't say to you go and lie down under the broom tree and just die arise and eat that you may be equipped for further service in his cause and I suppose the ultimate is this when you are feeling like that where do you go go to the cross go to

Calvary and what do you see at Calvary you see the righteous suffering in the place of the unrighteous you see the sufferings of Christ perhaps set your own sufferings in a new way when you see the sufferings of the suffering saviour then perhaps you forget what is in your own life in comparison to what was in the life of Christ as he died in order that you might live when you come face to face with the love of God in Christ or a poor helpless unworthy sinner taking your attention away from yourself and towards him who was under the broom tree a prophet of God picture of dejection pastor of concern and exercise may God bless to us these thoughts honest truth let us