

Elijah Runs for His Life

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back then to the passage we read in page 232 and we look at the opening verses of chapter 19.

And that is 1 Kings chapter 19 verses 1 to 8.

And we're entitling this Elijah runs for his life to the Negev, that's south of Beersheba. For those who don't know it, in modern times Beersheba is well to the south in the land of Israel.

And then you have the Negev, what they call the Negev desert area, before you get down to Elat, down towards the Gulf. I want just to think for a few moments about how we rate the prophet Elijah, this man who was so robust, so strong, so courageous.

We, who know quite a lot about him because we've studied the Bible and been taught it for years and years. Folks like ourselves who know the Bible well, we know that Elijah was a great man of God.

[1 : 35] He was strong morally and strong spiritually. He was strong in faith and in courage too. Not many people, if any, would simply go right in to the king and say to him, there's going to be a drought in your land for years.

But that was Elijah. He got a word from God and he went and he told Ahab. Ahab was no friend of him. Ahab could have had him caught and killed, but it didn't happen.

So he was a courageous man. Ahab, we saw that when he came back to the land looking for Ahab, a godly man called Obadiah met with Elijah.

And when he heard that Elijah wanted Obadiah to go and say, Ahab, Elijah is looking for you. He said, I will get killed if I do that. And yet, you see, Elijah was willing himself to go.

So he comes across to us as a very courageous person, a strong man, a man who feared God and who did what he was told by God. And the fact is, Christian believers cannot but admire the prophet Elijah.

[2 : 53] We look upon him as one of the great champions of the faith, as one who, like the apostle Paul, was bold in the Lord. And yet here in this section we've been reading, we find him running for his life from a woman, from Queen Jezebel.

We read that when Ahab, her husband, the king, verse 1, told Jezebel, his wife, all that Elijah had done and how he had executed all these prophets, the 450 prophets of Baal with the sword.

So, she then threatened Elijah, sent a messenger to him, threatened him that he would die for that. And we find that he ran for his life.

And what we learn, and what we'll learn as we look at this a bit more closely, we are taught the age-old lesson that the best of godly men are men at best.

They're not perfect. They're not altogether free from showing great weakness. We're also taught that in the Christian life, after every season, every period of blessing, when we're near to the Lord and we see the Lord working, right on the back of that, there'll come some great trial.

[4 : 32] And we'll wonder what's happened, and we'll wonder where God is. That is often the way. And it happened here, in Elijah's experience.

Sometimes the old preachers used to say, he came from the mountaintop experience down into the dark valley. And it was very much like that. So, we want first of all to consider, Elijah runs for his life. That's the first and obvious point at which to begin. And in looking at Elijah runs for his life, I want to underscore that this was prompted by Jezebel's message.

We've touched on that. She sent a messenger to him and told him, verse 2, Let the gods do to me. That's the Baals. And more also, if I don't make your life as the life of one of them. That's the prophets that Elijah had commanded that should be killed.

[5 : 41] You're going to be like them, dead. By this time tomorrow. And when she heard, you see, what Elijah had commanded to be done, the men of Israel took these prophets down to the valley, down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.

And when Jezebel heard from her husband what had happened, she told Elijah he was going to die just like them. And you see, she had bottled up her wrath from the moment her husband told her, the king told her, of the destruction of the prophets.

She burned with feelings of revenge. And she yearned to avenge herself on Elijah. And she sent this messenger to Elijah to make sure he got the message that she intended to kill him.

Some people say, some Bible teachers say, that she couldn't really carry out that threat anyway. But the truth of the matter is, Elijah was in no doubt about it.

If you look at verse 2, when he heard from the messenger, verse 3, and when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life.

[7 : 15] The word saw there is interesting because clearly Elijah didn't share the view that she couldn't really do anything to him. And when he saw it, when he weighed it, he became very afraid and he panicked and he said, I need to get out of here.

I'm off. And this shows us really the weakness that he succumbed to, the fear he succumbed to. It was only a short time ago, a day or two before that, he had witnessed the power of God in a remarkable way.

He saw God send fire down from heaven and burn up the sacrifices and the stone altar and the water that they had placed around it. He saw God demonstrate his power.

And that in answer to his prayers. Had he not seen the swift destruction of all those hundreds of prophets?

[8 : 20] Yes, he did. Did he not hear the people of Israel cry out there on the mountainside, The Lord, he is the God.

Yes, he did. And how is it then with all that encouragement, he now decides, I'm out of here. I'm getting away. My life's in danger.

But before we look at that, there's more still. He had witnessed the return of rain at his word. We read that together. We went back into chapter 18 and we saw that how he prayed these seven times until at last that little cloud the size of a man's hand came up on the far coast, on the horizon. And within a short time, you had a great storm with a deluge of rain at the prophet's word. Then, we read in that same passage, No sooner had the rain come down in torrents than Ahab is off full tilt back home in his chariot, and Elijah catches up his garment, tucks it in, and he outruns the chariot to Jezreel.

All that happened. God empowered him to do it. And here he is, on the brink of running for his life.

[10 : 00] How did this come about? How did this sudden change come over Elijah, this great man of faith and courage? I think it's safe to say one thing, that for all that the people saw of God displaying the fact that he lives, there wasn't a true change in.

They were convinced, but they weren't converted. They were convinced that God lives, that the God of Abraham, the God of Elijah is a true God, but they weren't wholehearted in their conviction. You can be convinced about a thing when God tells it to you, and not be inwardly changed. You see that in Acts 2, when Peter preached that great sermon, you remember.

And that huge crowd, out of that crowd, 3,000 souls, turned to Jesus in faith. But there were many more who were convinced of what was said, but they weren't converted in their hearts.

They never turned to Christ. And for sure, that affected Elijah.

[11 : 23] They cried out, the Lord, he is God. But they stopped there, and they went back to the religion of Jezebel.

And then too, you see, for all that this great happening took place on Mount Carmel, Ahab was still ruling, Ahab had no love for the Lord, Jezebel was still queen, and she had no love for the Lord. And I think we're safe, therefore, to conclude that Elijah began to feel in his heart that the Lord had somehow or other deserted him. He had left him to it.

Things didn't turn out, you see, the way the prophet thought they would. Now listen to me here, because, believe it, this is something that's true to Christian experience.

Often, things happen in our experience, and they don't happen the way we want them to happen.

Those younger folk who are with us, talk to any of the older Christians here, and they'll tell you there are many twists and turns in their Christian life.

[12:36] Things came that they never expected, nor did they want. But they happened because God had planned them that way. And you see, Elijah wanted, it was almost like he was ticking the boxes in his brain.

Now this happened, and that happened. God showed he lives. The fire came down. The people cried out, The Lord, he is God. That's another box ticked, so to speak.

And then I go up to the top of the mountain, and after seven times in prayer, the rain comes bucketing down, pouring down. Another box ticked.

We're off to Jezreel. I outran the king and his chariot. Another box ticked. And you see, all the time, the prophet is building up for a huge change in the life and soul of a nation.

They're going to turn to the Lord. Never happened. It's all gone wrong. And you see, he hoped, and he planned, for far more than came to pass.

[13:50] And he was overwhelmed by that. It discouraged him. And he ran for it. And you see, there's a practical lesson in this for us.

First of all, we mustn't, when we think about Elijah, criticize him for the way he reacted. Those of us who have been following Jesus for a long time, we know that.

We know that we've been there too. God's workings in history, what we call providence, his ordering of life, as it unfolds, is strange and difficult.

It's beyond us really grasping. We can't comprehend it. We can't really get our mental hands on it and say, ah, that's it.

We were singing in the Psalms, such knowledge, is too high for me. I can't get this. There are those of us here tonight who know that just for along the road from us, we see a situation in our neighboring congregation that we never thought to see happen the way it's happened.

[15:14] We can't account really for the way God worked in that. A situation where his mighty and gracious blessing allowed the cause to grow and blossom and people added to the church year on year.

And then suddenly and incredibly they're bereft of a great preacher and teacher and leader.

The situations in the Christian life can change like that and they can impact us in a negative way.

So when we think about Elijah and feel and listen to him feeling that the Lord had somehow deserted him, let us bring it up to date and let's remind ourselves things happen that we never looked for, never expected.

You know that in your own experience as a congregation. But here we have Jezebel threatening to take Elijah's life away and suddenly he's very afraid and he's out of it.

[16:40] And what he did was you see he judged the Lord at that time by his own feeble sense. He just thought it's over. And he ran for it.

And we are reminded by the songwriter William Cooper's words Judge not the Lord by feeble sense but trust him in his grace.

Behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face. You know the story of how that when you look up on a dark, grey, cloudy day we often have them here in Glasgow and you can't see the sun. Sometimes you'll not see it for days but the sun is there. It's just that the clouds are hiding it. And the way God works sometimes is just like that.

It's dark and cloudy. As Colin sometimes prays, a dark and cloudy day. But he's there. His face as it were is smiling towards his people.

[17:51] He loves them still. And we're not you see to judge them in the wrong way as Elijah did and he ran for it. So that's the first thing.

Elijah ran for his life. The second thing is Elijah's unlawful prayer. We read here in the passage that having gone as far as Beersheba verse 3 he ran for his life and went to Beersheba which belongs to Judah.

He went south and he left his servant there but he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness that's the Negev and came and sat down under a broom tree and prayed that he might die.

Hence we say Elijah's unlawful prayer. Now the first thing we want to say about that is simply this remember exhaustion's impact on Elijah.

It is well known of the people of God in the days when the Bible was being put together under God's direction that often the great people of faith pushed themselves too much.

[19:27] They pushed themselves too hard. They almost forgot they were in the body. It was true in the New Testament too the apostle talks about Epaphroditus who was near to death because of

the work of the kingdom.

Look at Paul himself. If you look in 2 Corinthians 11 the things he went through are just incredible for the kingdom of Christ's sake.

He stretched himself we were reading in 1 Thessalonians in the morning sermon how he labored and toiled and the words are strong words to exhaustion.

But the trouble is my dear friends exhaustion can affect us. It can weaken us. there is a student who comes in here and he is often very tired near to exhaustion with working and we have to watch out you see exhaustion can affect us.

It can really seriously affect us. My wife is saying just now listen to the fellow that is talking but the fact is it is there it is a warning to us.

[20 : 53] And Elijah you see pushed himself and that exhaustion impacted him. You see if you think about it he was up there on Mount Carmel no small climb to get there.

then he was among all these all the people of course but there was all these hundreds of priests of Baal and Ahab and all these folk were against him.

And here he is on his own and he is looking to God to show that he lives. All that would have not only sapped his physical energy but his emotional energy too.

And then God answered and then off he went having dispatched the priests of Baal then he went up to the top of the mountain and prayed all these times as we have seen.

Then when the rain came he did not jump in a chariot and go these 50 kilometers or so down the road. No he tucked in his long robe into his waist and he legged it and he outran the chariot.

[22 : 14] You see what I'm saying? Emotionally and physically he pushed himself to extremities then having gone to Jezreel and having heard you're going to die Elijah off he goes again not on a bus or a plane or a train or even a donkey but on his legs.

see what we read verse 3 when he saw that is what Jezebel had in mind he arose and ran and ran not planes or boats or trains but he ran more demanding physical effort a hundred miles or so hundred and what thirty forty kilometers and all that affected him and so when he arrived at Beersheba he's exhausted he flung himself down well he went beyond Beersheba he went another day's journey didn't he and he got into under this broom tree a bushy tree and he threw himself down exhausted and it is important for us to realize then that when we push ourselves mind and body too far we run the risk of hurting ourselves when we go beyond what is manageable at a time we have to be careful

God doesn't expect us to struggle on at near exhaustion level I'm speaking to myself because it exposes us to depression of spirit and that's what we find Elijah was depressed he was cast down and he prayed verse 4 he sat first of all and he prayed that he might die he prayed that he might die in other words he plunged into a depression of spirit not madness or psychosis but simply depression of spirit the man was exhausted and he was puzzled and perplexed at God's strange workings it hadn't turned out the way

Elijah expected and he says I've had enough verse 4 and he prayed that he might die and he said it is enough I'm getting out I can't take any more it's all too much package it whichever way I like I've had it that's what he was saying it's bitterness to me take my life away he prayed that he might die and this is the unlawful prayer this is the ought not you see it's one thing for the Christian believer to long to be with Christ were allowed Christian believers are allowed to long to be with Christ where Christ lives in the glory of heaven it's not wrong to long to be there

Paul said the apostle said I have a desire to be with Christ but you see desiring to be with Christ is lawful praying that we might die is unlawful and Elijah lost it there in his what I call a spiritual depression depression of spirit he was wrong in what he said and what he prayed and no doubt as we've said already in his weakened physical state in his perplexity of mind he was very vulnerable and susceptible his mental stamina had failed him and he began to despair over the cause of God in the land you see he says I am no better than my father's way see verse end of verse 4 it is enough now

[27 : 17] Lord take my life because I am no better than my father's in other words you see what he's saying is I've been impatient with a state of the nation in its anti-God attitude and it worshipping false gods the bales of this world I had hoped to see great changes they never happen for all God that you did you didn't finish the job someone said and I agree with it Elijah hoped for too much too soon and we here tonight I think know what that's like we hope for too much too soon seems to us it's time but not to God someone said

Elijah was thinking I wanted to stem the torrent of idolatry in the land and to be so much better than my fathers but I failed I'm no better than my fathers and you see dear friends we are exposed to this same thing who love the Lord Jesus Christ that we can get into a depressedness of spirit hastened on by weariness in the work of the Lord and that's why I say we need to watch ourselves and I'm speaking to more than me here we need to watch ourselves that we don't push ourselves and go down in our spirits and become depressed spiritually depressed I mean there are situations in Scotland today few but they're there where the work of

God has progressed and Christ has seen people coming to him in faith he's seen them receive his cross work his death on Calvary as a death for them a sin bearing death a death that brings peace to believers but then in those very places suddenly inexplicably to us the work stops and the cause declines and the Lord's people are saying it's enough in other situations perhaps like our own we see little glimpses of blessing and then suddenly they fade and we have therefore to watch ourselves you see so that we don't get into the situation that

Elijah got into it is enough I am no better than my fathers and so the simple but profound point in this is let us take care lest we pray and lawful prayers let's be guided by the word of God on what we pray for and how we pray let us honor him in what we pray when our time has whizzed on let's finish with one last point because it's the best point in a way Elijah was divinely delivered this is really pleasant to look at in what was otherwise a pretty downbeat and despairing situation verse five then as he lay and slept we might add from exhaustion under a broom tree suddenly a messenger touched him and said to him arise and eat and we learn in the passage in verse seven that that messenger that angel who came to him was none other than the

Lord himself he came to him and he aroused him from his sleep and we read that he came to him in wonderful compassion and understanding he came to him to restore him but not before he gave him what was necessary to strengthen him arise and eat verse six and he looked and there by his head was a cake baked on coals and a jar of water so he ate and drank and noticed this and lay down again in other words back into deep sleep the man's exhausted and it was necessary for him to rest and to be restored and and in this you see we see a man who was his weakened and wearied and depressed in his spirits some bible teachers have gone haywire on this and have suggested

[33 : 14] Elijah was manic Elijah was psychotic and all sorts of gruesome things but Dale Ralph Davis says in his little commentary on kings Elijah was broken but not psychotic he needed not a psychotherapist but the divine touch of healing and we agree heartily with that what does Psalm 23 say here he stores my soul and that's what he needed and suddenly out of that second bout of deep sleep the Lord awakes him again verse 7 the angel or the messenger of the Lord the son of God before he became man came down to him and touched him a second time and he said arise and eat notice you've got to be fortified you've got to be strengthened yes you need sleep and you need to be strengthened for the journey is too great for you and that's true in the life of faith when we push ourselves too hard and beyond what we can cope with we run the risk of becoming weakened and depressed in our spirits some of us know too much what sleepless nights are like but we need sleep we need to remind ourselves of how important sleep is to us

I sometimes quoted a poem in one of Shakespeare's plays sleep doth knit up the raveled sleeve of care the death of each day's life sore labour's bath balm of heart minds chief nourisher in life's feast we need sleep and Elijah needed it there and then the Lord knew it and the Lord saw to it he needed to be strengthened he needed to eat and drink and he needed to be fit for the journey and in the Christian life it's like that too not the literal journey but just going on in the faith and serving the Lord Lord the Lord wanted him to be strong and ready for the next stage he was going all the way down to the tip of the peninsula down to

Mount Sinai where the Lord intended to bless him and so he was strengthened by his faithful Lord and he went all the way down there forty days and forty nights were told verse eight but but you see he arose and ate and drank and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb that's Mount Sinai the mountain of God so he was divinely delivered from his depressed state but notice the practical steps the Lord took he prepared him he restored him he needed not only to be restored in his soul but he needed to be physically refreshed and strengthened and fit for going and therefore as we bring this to a close we want to learn to be watchful in the way watching the sudden changes that

God brings into our lives because they can rock us they can shake us we can be deeply affected by them and we have to learn to rely on him when we simply can't understand what he's doing we can ask him to help us to understand to show us what it is he's saying to us and it's important to learn from this too that the very best of men and women in the faith who love the Lord Jesus Christ are just men and women at best that's you and me we dare not trust ourselves but trust the Lord who does not falter or fail or weaken in the way we are to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power we are to hope in him and strengthen ourselves in his prescribed way amen