

God's Time

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[0 : 0 0] well just before we go back to the word let's just take a moment and bow in prayer oh lord we come to you again rejoicing that the way is open for us through your own dear son our savior we bless you that we have at your right hand in the glory one who is our merciful and faithful high priest and we bless you oh lord that we can draw near to you and know that we are accepted in the beloved and that we have in him the ground of our confidence we bless you oh lord that for his own name's sake you answer us according to your will and we draw near to you this evening remembering the families and the congregations we represent oh lord you know our every need and you know those for whom we pray tonight and may it be oh lord that your good spirit would be at work in us and those who are near and dear to us and those who are dear to us as the congregations of your people oh lord our god we are living in difficult days days in which it's difficult for us to be composed and at peace in our hearts we see so many things that are that are increasingly antagonistic to the christian way of life and we see so much has been removed from the statute and so much has come in that is contrary to the teachings of your word and on every hand your people are under pressure and we pray tonight oh lord that your people may hold fast that the thing the things that are freely given to them of you that they may fight the good fight that they may run and not be weary they may walk and not faint we pray oh lord that you will be with us and help us in our own lives to to glorify you we thank you for the wonderful testimony we have in scripture of those who were wonderfully transformed and whose lives adorned the doctrines they professed they became imitators of those who were sent to them and principally of the lord himself and it is our hearts desire oh lord that we may be increasingly imitators of our lord jesus christ that it may be seen by others that we walk with jesus day by day give us oh lord that that grace and the love and the patience we need to be your witnesses in this world to shine for you and grant that as we turn to the word now we may have your help and blessing that there may be something here for us that it may be as heaven sent and that it may be applicable to us where we're at in our experience oh lord we give you thanks for all your mercies truly they are more than we can number we thank you for safe keeping for preventing us from being harmed this happens and we maybe don't see it at the time but we

look back and realize that our ways are ordered by the lord both the stops and the starts and we thank you for keeping us and even when it seems that we have been hindered nevertheless we would see the bigger picture and recognize that our days our times are ordered by you and we ask oh lord that you would be with us now that you would purge away our sins that you would deliver us from the sins that so easily entangle us and spoil us in our witness and service for you receive us oh lord and do us good and grant that we may know afresh the joy of sins forgiven through faith in our lord jesus christ amen well now let's turn to the passage we read from and particularly first kings 18 and we're going to look at the first section to verse 16 from the beginning and what we're looking at here is how that elijah obeys god and seeks ahab and he does it through obadiah he obeys god and he seeks ahab through obadiah whom as we read is also a man of god but before we go on i just want us to remind ourselves of where we've come from in our study and how in the early part of the study we observed that god gave israel for its sins over to judgment over to the drought and the famine that that came on the back of the drought and how that he had protected elijah and he removed him away to the brook kereth just east of the jordan and we saw that he instructed his servant there and taught him to be patient and persevering he taught him that he was sovereign in all that was happening and he was just to wait upon god's time and you and i know i think that that's not an easy thing to do if we're if we're very straight to ourselves about it it's easy to say it it's not easy to do it we're we're impatient and we find waiting his time something difficult but then we saw that god moved him from brook kereth right across the country a dangerous journey it was and he brought him out to sidon to the town of zaraphat and this was to strengthen elijah still further but also to be a means of blessing as we read there to the widow of zaraphat and to her son now it's clear that elijah stayed there quite some time but they but the actual time came when he was to arise and to go from zaraphat and to go and seek uh the king the wicked king ahab and so he what we might say is he emerged from obscurity into the public light and into this next stage of his ministry and clearly he was going on a difficult mission because he was going to find the king who was looking for him to kill him and he was going on a mission to rebuke proud and idolatrous ahab now like you i know there are many

lessons we could draw out from 16 verses of scripture here but i want us this evening under god's hand to concentrate on how elijah goes from zaraphat in god's time and how he um resolves to carry out the lord's command and how he meets up with obadiah and is is is wonderfully sympathetic to uh obadiah's uh plight uh first of all then and as we look at this obviously we want to draw out some lessons for ourselves from these points and chiefly on obedience i think and on overcoming our fear of those who have not the faith first of all then elijah leaves zaraphat in god's time he leaves zaraphat in god's time and it came to pass verse one after many days that the word of the lord came to elijah in the third year notice that saying go present yourself to ahab and i will send rain on the air so clearly what is confronting us here is god's time had come the time of waiting had been fulfilled after many days in the third year it says now we want to spend just a few moments or in a kind of digression here on the duration of the drought because you'll know that that there are the the reference in in kings way back there at the beginning of chapter 17 is that there would be three years without rain but we know too that in the letter of james in chapter 5 and verse 17 we're told that it didn't rain for the space of three and a half years we're told in luke's gospel chapter 4 in verse 25 the sky was shut up for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land and all i want to do is just to notice that there is a difference there of six months and to suggest that the best way of of resolving that apparent contradiction is to simply see this in in terms of of the king's reference of three years having to do with the period that that elijah stayed in in in zarifath he was about six months in at the brook kereth and he was three years in zarifath in sidon and it seems to me that that i'm going along with what others have investigated more thoroughly than i have but it seems to me that that is a perfectly reasonable and sensible understanding of it and that accounts for the difference you see in in first kings three years and the reference in james and in luke to three and a half years so what is most important about this is not trying to get bogged down in the three years or the three and a half years but that god's time came when the rain would return god's time had come and it came for a man who was confined to zarifath inside and outside the land of promise waiting upon god yes being a blessing where he was but there waiting upon god and there's a reminder to us in this and boy it is a reminder i have to say that waiting upon god's time

is simply not easy for us it's not easy for us we want to hurry the thing along we want the thing done when we think it should be done but god is not hurried by us he has his own time frame and he has the times and seasons they're appointed by him our trouble is of course that at best our life here is short some of you know i was at a funeral just last week of a lady who a christian lady and by all accounts a very fine christian lady who was almost a hundred and two when she died but her brother who was surviving brother who was 90 was talking about this and was talking about his own life as short i've heard it time and again from people who have reached 90 and beyond it you know it's all passed so quickly and that's true it just passes so quickly even for people who live to a great age like 90 and beyond it passes by so quickly and the logic you see is we want things done within our time frame a week a month a year 10 years these are long times for us when we long to see god work i remember reading somewhere it was it was it was put in in careful language that you couldn't say that the man was disappointed with god but the great a preacher of the gospel dr martin lloyd jones was a great man for revival and when he came to the end of his days he had a disappointment and i say i don't think he was disappointed with the lord he was disappointed at the his unrealized expectation he had become convinced that he would live to see a reviving of the work and there are many good and godly men and women now before the lamb in heaven who thought they would see that but god's time frame is different and so it came to pass after many days in the third year that's your clue that the time came for elijah to get up out of that place of seclusion and to get out into the the limelight now and to go and to meet with ahab as we've been thinking about this surely this is a something that we need to really get a grip of afresh and take note of and be encouraged because the the tendency is that when when our when our hopes are deferred and our expectations are unrealized we can sink in a kind of in a kind of discouragement and and we can almost feel we don't want to do anything more but we are to be up and doing and busy always abounding said the apostle in the work of the lord as long as we have the strength to do it let us do that with all our might and so our savior said as much blessed are those who hear the word of god and who do it in other words who get on with it and so then to return to the prophet he gets a word from the lord the many days have passed the three

years have gone three and a half if you take the total and the time has come for him now to go and to meet with king ahab but before we leave this i want to underscore again again that as much as there's there's there's there's the delay in god fulfilling his own purpose the time we spend has to be spent well it is unthinkable that elijah did nothing we know some of what he did it's recorded but that's not the whole story of his three years there time is a precious gift to us and it ought to be filled up with valuable living for the lord and we were thinking about that in first thessalonians this morning we're to fill it up with service to the lord and not serving ourselves and fulfilling our own desires and elijah you see where he was in the land of the foreigner where he was in saraph of sidon to be sure used his time there wisely and well as he waited upon god and i think we can learn to do this and we can learn afresh to commit ourselves to using our time wisely and well but now we must go he must be up and doing because his time has come to move and to apply himself in the lord's service it's been my own experience along the way of meeting with people who have been deflected by by sometimes family concerns sometimes a sense of having spent too much time in the lord's work and they've gone off and they've done other things and perhaps this is more to do with those who are retired but but it's not exclusively that way because we can always find plenty to do but the the situation in my mind's eye is of someone who had served the lord in an exceptional way and then retirement came and and he was deflected into doing all sorts of things i say deflected because he had planned out how he was going to best serve the lord in his remaining years and for it turned out for years it was uh he was sidelined by by other things and that same person would tell that if he would hear the point i'm making is this that we can easily find things to do that are to the side of serving the lord and elijah in waiting upon god waited upon him by faith and he busied himself about his lord's business where he was he sought to glorify him there and that's our business always to be looking at how best we can function for the lord where we are at our stage in life and with what we've got and so he has to go and the second point therefore is elijah's obedience to the lord's command go is the command show yourself to ahab and i will send rain upon the land and it's interesting here you see that elijah acts he he obeys he simply goes at the lord's bidding go and present yourself to ahab

[20:18] and verse 2 tells us he went elijah went to present himself to ahab now the thing about this is you can pass by the the ramifications of this command and how these things bear upon the prophet and you can just say oh well he was obedient yes that's good but think about it he has resolved to keep the word of god he has resolved to go at the lord's bidding and there's no argument as to why it would be wise for him not to go he could have said to lord think about it reverently of course lord think about it lord he hates me that was true lord lord he'll kill me that was true lord he has done many things to those who call upon your name that was true he used his wife to kill we read it to kill many of the prophets of the lord in the land lord he has polluted your worship he's a hater of all that is called by your name and he hates your people and i'm i'm the chief uh object of his hate he searched all over the countries for me but there's not a word go and show yourself to him verse 2 so elijah went to present himself to him and it's it's it's wonderful to see the the instant response of elijah there was no argument about it he would go risky so it was he would leave himself in the lord's hand he would trust and obey and we're told that as he was going the famine was so severe in the land in samaria there was evidence of it the people were suffering the animals were suffering and elijah was the cause of it as far as the ebb was concerned so nothing had changed except well it had changed in this regard it had become worse ahab was still hunting all those years on he was still hunting for elijah he was even personally involved in it as we read he blamed elijah the man of god for the problem little has changed ancient history tells us that very thing biblical history new testament history tells us as that thing extra biblical history around the time of of the apostles tells us that when the emperor's policies got him into trouble it was christians to the lions the christians are to blame how many countries of the world can you think of today sudan comes to mind immediately indonesia there are other countries too alastair and i were talking about where the lord's people get the blame for all the trouble and they're persecuted to death there was plenty to daunt elijah the prophet and to dissuade him from going and to make him argue with god that it wasn't safe for him to do it

but he went knowing full well that there was a price on his head he was a hinted man he was hunted by the chief hunter of him ahab himself and we're told he went and he's not long in the way and he encounters verse 7 obadiah obadiah as we're told was the was the the the the chamberlain or the the the man who was over the house of the king the palace of the king he was an important fellow verse 7 tells us as obadiah was on his way to hint for elijah that suddenly elijah met him and he recognized him and of course he is in awe of elijah elijah is a real somebody and he reveres him is that you my lord elijah and he answered in verse 8 it is i go and tell your master that elijah is here and then we enter into a fascinating a angle on this story we notice that that that obadiah is scared stiff and he's he's not letting elijah off with this at all so he said how have i sent verse 9 you see he blames he said elijah are you are you calling up some sin of mine when you're telling me to go and speak to ahab about you to tell him that elijah is here well i'm not going to do it i'll be killed how have i sinned verse 9 that you are delivering your servant into the hand of king ahab to kill me and then he goes on and he says look this is the truth as the lord your god lives there isn't a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you and you see that gets into the nitty-gritty of it ahab was obsessed with finding elijah in order to kill him he was a root cause of all the trouble not himself he had turned it round and blamed elijah whereas we know the truth of it was that it was his own his own wicked idolatrous ways but obadiah is convinced that that for him to go at elijah's bidding to ahab was certain death for him and he is interesting how how he works this out and how he's bold to say look he says he says the moment i go to do this the spirit of god will take you away and you'll be safe and i'll be killed no i'm not doing it there must be another way and even when elijah repeats it there in verse 11 go tell your master elijah's here he's he's he's still arguing he's he's not going to do it he wants to to to get elijah off this track don't do it it's not safe and sometimes you know this is just at a practical level but sometimes it's all too easy for one believer to try to turn another believer out of the way of obedience and perhaps it's because of fear fear of what may happen clearly that's in the frame here

obadiah is a man of god he fears the lord but he tries to turn elijah out of the way of obedience to the lord and he's he's up until this point refusing to go in the way of obedience he tries to make elijah afraid and to turn him from going ahead with his plan because he himself is afraid and we ought to see that for what it is it's easy to turn one another out of the way of obedience to to to advise caution to advise us to be careful and not to overdo things don't be too zealous we're looking at the our frailties and saying well you know be careful but god gave something to the prophet to do and duty's path was most important and when we are turned by one another out of judy's path the enemy only has advantage you remember well the passage in in matthew 16 where jesus had predicted his his impending death and peter took him aside in matthew 16 verse 23 peter began to rebuke him never lord this shall never happen to you and jesus said to him out of my sight get away satan you're a stumbling block to me pretty hard stuff but you see the savior knew what he was saying that even good and faithful and well-meaning peter was trying to turn the savior was trying to turn the savior from obedience path you don't have in mind the things of god but of me and i think that to me is the principle we take out of this as application we ought always when we're we're counseling one another to to a canier course in life is this in the best interest of our father's kingdom of the service of christ as the lord lives said elijah before whom i stand i shall surely show myself to ahab today he's in no mood to compromise verse 15 he could have said as surely as the lord of hosts lives before whom i stand i will surely present myself to ahab full stop but he doesn't today he's urgent about the master's business i'll do it today i'll be there today i'll find him if you'll not take me to him or you'll not get him to come to me and therefore i think it's good to take something from elijah here about obedience to be ready to it to be swift to it the great champions of the faith that are recorded for us in scripture they weren't the only believers there were millions of believers along the way of biblical history we get choice people lifted up men and women too we get them lifted up for us as exemplary in

their obedience and their faith we were thinking this morning on the wholeheartedness of the thessalonians and i remember i mentioned to you caleb the son of jephunneh he followed the lord fully and i was reminding you of his name a callaive is wholehearted his whole heart was in the lord's service and you see this is what elijah brings out for us here he was wholehearted in his obedience to the lord no matter how dangerous the task that he was given what was paramount to him is what he says i will do never fear only trust and obey and therefore let us shen hindering each other from the path of duty we have little enough time in this world to spend and to be spent for the lord and let us be about his business judge you which is better to listen to god or to men that's what the apostle peter said you'll find it in acts 4 and verse 19 acts 5 and verse 29 you judge which is best whether to obey god or men we cannot but speak the things that we have heard the third and final point then elijah treats obadiah sympathetically i love this i love the way he deals with obadiah elijah accepted you see the greeting it was a reverent greeting verse 7 made to a man who was admired as a great prophet of the lord and elijah doesn't tear obadiah to pieces as a as a fellow believer because of his mistaken approach to this whole scene he could have said to him how dare you suggest that i'm calling up your sin that i'm delivering you into the hands of am to have you kill he doesn't charge obadiah with guilt at all he doesn't ridicule his profession of faith he's a fearer of the lord he says it i feared the lord from my youth elijah could have said well your whole argument to dissuade me from obedience path and your argument against obeying means you're a poor pathetic believer no such thing no such thing he listens to him and he doesn't rebuke him at all he sympathizes with where obadiah is coming from a word before we move on here in this point to to to a view that some interpreters have about obadiah some say that he couldn't have been a real fearer of the lord a true believer at all because he stayed and worked for wicked idolatrous king ahab it seems to me that that's not a solid and safe conclusion at all because ahab was idolatrous and then godly and then impenitent it doesn't follow that obadiah was wrong to stay in fact what was allowed for obadiah to do was that he spared a hundred at least we're told about a hundred

prophets of the lord because he was right there in house he was in charge of ahab's house and he was able to do a lot for the lord that couldn't possibly be done in any other way and it seems to me that you can draw parallels from scripture was it right that daniel was right there by the shoulder of the king in captivity was daniel less godly because he was there i don't think so we're told that he was known for his godliness he was hated for his godliness he prayed three times a day even when he was told not to do it or you'll die you have nehemiah the king's cap bearer an eminent position he was a godly man the king even noticed there was a troubled look on his countenance he was a man that was distinguished by his his serenity his godliness and when he was troubled what was he troubled about by the way he was troubled about the cause at home he had heard how jerusalem was in such a terrible state and the cause of god was so poor and it worried him and the king said why is your countenance fallen was he less godly because he was there i think not he was a man he was a man he was a man he was a man he was a man he was a man he was a man he was a man and to serve the lord where he would go beside the king and so it goes on it's interesting actually that we're told we get lovely insights into the those who were converted in the new testament time those who came to faith in christ who trusted in him as their sin bearer and as the one who through his resurrection brought them right with god they were in in herod's palace they were in caesar's household they were right there for the lord and obadiah was no less for the lord right under the nose of ahab and wicked jezebel and it's interesting and revealing that elijah never says anything he never takes issue with the quality of the life of obadiah the man of god he saw how god used him when he was he understood and was sympathetic to obadiah's plight and obadiah's fear and i think there's something touching about this there's something very christ-like about elijah's elijah's approach to obadiah maybe obadiah was a bit weak and a bit fearful maybe he wasn't the most robust christian i'm not saying certainly i'm saying maybe maybe he shouldn't have been afraid the way he was maybe he shouldn't have tried to deflect elijah from the path of obedience we've actually already established he ought not to have done that but you see elijah doesn't sniff him out elijah's in the same spirit as the master the bruised reed he will not break and the smoking flax he will not sniff out and we can learn from elijah here we can learn the the sensitivity we are to show those who are

[40 : 47] are are weak or perhaps in the faith we're to use our knowledge wisely and well that's what scripture says isn't it the tongue of the wise uses knowledge aright it doesn't get a person to pieces in fact the scripture says that in the multiplying of words there is much folly and much strife no elijah hasn't anything to say about a obadiah but he sympathizes with his plight he reaffirms of course that he will come what may see ahab today i will surely verse 15 present myself to him today and you see that word in verse 15 does the trick so to speak in obadiah his fear is gone he takes courage he is strengthened by one stronger than himself elijah's words strengthen obadiah elijah's words enable him to say i'm going to do it now we're not told he said i'm going to do it but to be sure he did we're told verse 16 so obadiah went look at it obadiah went to meet ahab and told him and ahab went to meet elijah so the the whole thing came to pass because because of elijah's because of elijah's wise way in dealing with a a a perhaps a wee bit of a frail fearful believer and he moves him forward in duty's path he moves him to obey and not to be afraid the lord look after you now if you're thinking about this you're saying well actually obadiah was pretty courageous that he looked after those 50 times two prophets and i agree he was but our courage at one point doesn't guarantee courage at another point well in the life of faith we know that it's true we we we may be strong and courageous at one point and courage may fail us at another depends on the situation and it seems to me that that obadiah did what he did carefully and maybe somewhat craftily in looking after these prophets he had he had the freedom to operate but he had no freedom to operate facing ahab he it was a straight face to face and he obviously feared that more than anything and elijah as we've said understood and cared and sympathized with him and encouraged him and he was obviously strengthened by the words spoken there in verse 15 by the prophet and he goes and he does what's right to do so obadiah went to meet ahab and told him and ahab went to meet elijah it's important then for us to learn that no matter how difficult the task it is set for us the lord will give us grace to go in obedience path to go on in duty's path to look to him to strengthen and encourage us and as we were saying earlier on it's important for us to be sensitive when we're giving counsel to one another that we don't hinder each other in serving the lord we are to give ourselves holy to his work as much as the strength we have and the days we're given

every time that i i i think i'll need to slow down a bit i'm reminded they'll pardon me in the corner for saying it but i'm reminded by the savior again and again who came from the realms of glory into this world a world in which he was despised and rejected and we we scratch at trying to understand what it meant to him to be despised and rejected by men and when we've said all we can and we've read all we can we're still scratching at what it really meant in his heart of hearts the pain of it the sorrow but he went far beyond that in duty's path he went to the cross of shame and who could have thought looking at him there on the cross that here was redemption being wrought all that the people saw was a loser but he saw it otherwise and heaven saw it otherwise and it was otherwise let us therefore lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us and let us run the race with patience and diligence looking into him who gave us all for us and who bids us to never fear but to trust and obey amen you you