

Elijah's Effective Fervent Prayer

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now then to 1st Kings chapter 18 and you'll find that on page 323.

3-2-3 and we'll just read at verse 41.

The context of course is Mount Carmel, that part of it that looks out over what's now the modern city of Haifa. Then Elijah said to Ahab, go up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of abundance of rain.

So Ahab went up to eat and drink, and Elijah went up to the top of Carmel. Now he bowed down on the ground and put his face between his knees and said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea.

So he went up and looked and said, There is nothing. And seven times he said, Go again. Then it came to pass the seventh time that he said, There is a cloud as small as a man's hand rising out of the sea.

[1 : 12] So he said, Go up, say to Ahab, prepare your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.

Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel.

Then the hand of the Lord came upon Elijah, and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

Well, as we said a moment ago, we want to think about Elijah's effective, fervent prayer. And this is really the second one we're looking at.

It has its difference. You remember how he prayed when all Israel gathered round him, and Ahab and his band of priests, the priests of Baal, and so on.

[2 : 15] And we saw how in the public place Elijah prayed, and the Lord wonderfully answered him. And we've noticed in our study, and we'll repeat it just now, Elijah is set before us as a man of faith and courage, with great zeal for the Lord God of Israel.

But he's also a grand example to us of a man of prayer. And we notice, going back to verse 40, that once the priests of Baal had been dispatched in keeping with the law of God, because of course they had corrupted the theocracy, Elijah sets about prayer for the return of the rain upon the land.

And to do this, he withdraws himself from the crowd up to the top of Mount Carmel itself. They're well up there, of course, but he goes up to the very peak that's beside where they were.

And we read that he is about this business of prayer. But it's not prayer in isolation. It's prayer in relation to what he had said way back some three and a half years before that.

Verse 1 of chapter 18. And it came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.

[3 : 56] You see, he knows that he is going to meet with Ahab and tell him the time has come. God is going to send rain on the earth.

And so it's in connection with this. The contest is passed, and now he's about to see the promise of God, so to speak, fulfilled.

And this incident is helpful to us, I think, chiefly in the whole area of our own individual prayer life, in terms of our secret communion with God in prayer, getting alone with God.

I want us just to think about four things this evening, and hopefully enter God's blessing we'll learn from them. The first is the obvious, the place of prayer.

And by this, of course, we mean the location. Elijah went up to the top of Carmel. He got away from the crowd.

[5 : 04] And although his servant went with him, his servant wasn't beside him. He simply called out to him, do this. But essentially he removed from the public arena into the quiet place.

That's important. And it's all the more important in our own day, because there's such a lot of pressure on us. Things to do, deadlines to keep, visits to make, phone calls to make.

And if you're afflicted with a computer and emails, then it's even worse. Because there's rafts of emails to answer. And the brain never gets arrested.

And prayer gets skipped all too often. We need to remove, we need to get away to be quiet. And there on Mount Carmel, Elijah gets away from the crowd.

Now, it's an interesting thing, and I want to refer to it right away, that Jesus himself, as man, often withdrew to the solitary place.

[6 : 11] The study of Jesus in prayer is a really interesting area of revelation, of what God's word unpacks for us. Because Jesus, though he was and is the eternal son of God, who became man, he was very much the man of prayer.

And he often withdrew to the solitary place to pray. We notice, for example, if you look at Matthew 14, 23, after he had fed the 5,000, he went to pray.

He went into the solitary place. The disciples, you remember, went across the lake in the boat. And Jesus went up into the hills by himself to pray.

There are quite a few other examples, which we're not going to look at this evening. But one other I want to highlight. You know where it tells us Jesus was transfigured in the holy mountain.

Well, whichever mountain that was, it was a high mountain. And he took Peter, James, and John with him onto that mountain. And Luke tells us, and only Luke, in chapter 9, verse 29, that when Jesus was praying, he was transfigured before his disciples.

[7 : 43] He was there suddenly radiant with heavenly light. And effulgence, he shone with that heavenly brightness.

He was transfigured. And so to return to Elijah, Elijah, as it were, strategically removed from the crowd to be alone with God.

His servants standing by, of course, sufficiently close to hear what Elijah would instruct him to do. But you see, the emphasis here is on Elijah going into the quiet place to pray, to meet with God on his own on these matters that lay upon his heart.

Now, of course, it has to be said that praying together is important. And it's right and proper that we should. Of course, sometimes in church life, ladies find it difficult to pray with the menfolk in an informal setting.

But that doesn't stop the ladies praying together. It doesn't stop the men praying together. Prayer, corporate prayer, togetherness prayer is important. And we wouldn't want to minimize that.

[9 : 04] It's important. But very important to us is going apart, going aside to be on our own with the Lord.

We need that. And we neglect it at our peril. Elijah himself, who only a short time before it, having prayed publicly, earnestly to the God of Abraham and his own God, saw God answer by fire.

You remember? Dramatically answering. But that same Elijah, who was in the public arena, needed to go to be with the Lord on his own.

He withdrew. And I think we have to take a lesson out of it. We have commitments. Most of us have lots of things going on in our lives today.

Life's like that nowadays. There's so many things to do. And commitments. There's meetings. A plenty. There's duties. There's studies.

[10 : 12] There's all sorts of things. People depending on us for this and that. We have so many commitments. But it is important to make time to communicate in prayer with the Lord.

You know, it's said sometimes to our embarrassment, that those of us who profess Christ, who profess to be Christians, it's often said we are what we are in our own home or at our own fireside, which means the same thing.

And that's challenging. We are what we are in our own home. And I submit to you, we are what we are in prayer on our own with the Lord.

And the minister is saying it, and he knows it. It's easy enough to find words to utter in public. But that's not what prayer is about. Prayer is communion with the Lord.

It's not just communication. It is engaging with him in living, active fellowship. And we are what we are as Christians in the quiet place in prayer.

[11 : 37] See therefore that we do not neglect the solitary place of prayer. That's the first thing. The second thing is the posture in prayer.

And we are told that he, having gone up to the top of Carmel, verse 42, he bowed down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

Now I want to say a word before we look at Elijah's posture here. I want to emphasize there's no merit, there's no virtue in a particular posture.

We're not answered because we stand or sit or kneel or even prostrate ourselves flat on the ground. There's nothing magical about one way or the other there.

It's true that Elijah bent down to the ground and he kneeled and he put his face in his hands on the ground there.

[12 : 43] Verse 42. But you see the important thing about posture is not simply our physical posture. We were thinking, we referred to Nehemiah not terribly long ago in a context.

Nehemiah was standing before the king and his face was sad and the king said, why are you sad? What's wrong? And he prayed. He was afraid.

And he prayed. He stood before the king but he prayed to the Lord. He prayed. He prayed. He prayed. It's an attitude. It's a posture of mind and heart that ought to concern us.

That we're in that spirit of prayer. Paul calls it praying always with all kinds of prayer in the spirit.

Now what does it mean to pray always? Can we be praying always? Well, if we're in the right posture in our mind and heart, then we are in that attitude that we pray to the Lord readily.

[14 : 01] But there's a time to go aside, as we've noticed. To get away from all the pressures and people.

People often bring pressures. The important point here about the posture is not just that he got down on his knees and put his head in his hands, so to speak.

But that in his heart he bowed down low. You know, we often sing in Psalm 95, at verse 6, O come and let us worship him.

Let us bow down with all. And on our knees before the Lord our maker, let us fall. Well, there's some of us can't get down on our knees, for our knees are sore.

And there's others who are impeded because of disability. It's not an option. Are we not able to have the right posture in prayer because we can't get on our knees?

[15 : 03] Of course not. It is a posture of mind and heart. That we bow down in our hearts. That we adore in our hearts. That we're in living contact with the Lord in our hearts.

And Elijah had this great burden on his mind. The Lord is going to send rain. And he has privileged me to be involved in praying for that to come.

He knew his dependence on the Lord to make things happen. And so he bowed down low to the ground, in this case, before the awesome answer of prayer.

You see, Elijah knew very well, like many another godly person, before him and after him. He knew that he was not deserving of anything from the Lord.

Jacob said, I'm not worthy at the least of all your mercies and all your kindness. But he still was a man of prayer. Who prayed like Jacob at Penuel?

[16 : 15] In his weakness he clung to the Lord. He wouldn't let him go until the Lord blessed him. And we ought to be quite frank. To the Lord and to ourselves, we know we're not worthy of an answer.

But we know the Lord loves to answer his people in accordance with his own will. And he knew, Elijah knew God was gracious and merciful, and God was determined to do good, to bring a return of the rain upon the land, as he had just turned the hearts of the people back to himself.

And therefore, whatever our physical limitations, friends, don't let's say, well, I can't get on my knees anymore, therefore I can't really pray.

Bank. It's a posture of mind and heart. And let's be about that. Let us bow down on our hearts before the awesome answerer.

of prayer. And that brings us to the third thing. And this is important, you see. The promise is the burden of prayer.

[17 : 37] The promise is the burden of prayer. I quoted verse 1 of 18, chapter 18. The second part.

Go, he says to Elijah, present yourself to Ahab. That wasn't a wise thing, because Ahab was out looking for Elijah to kill him.

And he's told, go and present yourself to Ahab. Why? And I will send rain on the earth. And Elijah takes the promise, you see.

Away on at this point that we're looking at. He takes the promise. It's the burden of prayer. It's the reason why he can ask. And ask with confidence.

And it is so important to us, when we think about prayer, is that we take to God his own promises on prayer.

[18 : 35] He is the living God. The God of Abraham. The God of Elijah. The God who, in his own dear son, came into this world on the great rescue mission to seek and save lost sinners and to bring them into a living relationship with himself.

And it is that same God who allows us to pray things to him that are agreeable to his own will. And Elijah comes with this word.

Just as all those years ago, three and a half years ago or so, he went to Ahab at the first. You find it in 1 Kings 17 verse 1.

There will be no rain on the land except at my word. And that was a shock to Ahab. It was a bigger shock. When it started to happen. And when it continued.

And then, as we saw a moment ago, at the beginning of this chapter 18, Elijah has a word from the Lord. The time is come. Tell them they have prepared.

[19 : 47] I'm going to send rain on the earth. And you see, Elijah remembered the Lord said in his servant's mouth those years before, there will be no rain on the land except at my word.

Well, he knew that was the word of God to him. And the time had come. And there was this certainty of God fulfilling his promise.

But my dear friends, notice what I said there. The certainty of God fulfilling his promise. That fact, that fact, in no way, invalidates begging God for that thing.

that's why we're told, Elijah prayed fervently that it would rain.

I said just recently, and I'm going to say it again. For all that I've preached on that passage that we were quoting in prayer a moment ago, the harvest truly is great and the laborers are few.

[20 : 57] Beg the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth laborers into his harvest field. Listen to the words. The harvest is the Lord's.

The fields are the Lord's. Why does he need us to beg him? The answer is, because he tells us that's the way it is. We take his word back to him.

Lord, you've said this and I'm begging you. Answer according to your own will. And that's what Elijah does. Far from him saying, there's no point, the Lord will do it anyway in his own time.

Not at all. He locks in there. And he prays earnestly for the fulfillment. What God has pledged to do, we must pray earnestly for him and fervently for him and believingly for him to actually do.

Elijah gets down there and he gets down to this eminent spiritual business. And he does so resting on the word of God, the promise of God.

[22 : 16] And when you turn to the New Testament, friends, the New Testament confirms that very thing. all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ Jesus.

and we take his promises to him and we ask him to fulfill them. Doesn't mean necessarily we'll have an answer when we want it.

It doesn't mean we'll have a return. We can't snap our fingers and say, right Lord, now. It's not like that. But that ought not to weaken our resolve or indeed kill off our expectation that he will do it.

You see, our Lord Jesus Christ, and we were reading there in Hebrews 5, in the days of his flesh, so much of what he obtained, he obtained by prayer.

Why did he take so much time in prayer? When he called the disciples, before he called them, we're told he spent a whole night in prayer.

[23 : 30] Why did he do that? He knew from before the beginning of the world who would be his disciples and who would betray him. What's this about prayer?

We learn from him. We learn from him much every way. There is much use in it. There is much appropriate. in seeking an answer from our Heavenly Father.

And nowhere is that better seen than in the life of Jesus, our Savior, in the days of his flesh when he prayed. We're told he prayed more earnestly in Gethsemane.

We're told he prayed so that his sweat dropped, mingled with blood from his brow. And we're told here that Elijah bowed down to the ground and put his face between his knees and he prayed.

We're not let in to this prayer in the solitary place, but we're just told he tells the servant, go up and look out onto the Mediterranean and look to the horizon and see what you can see.

[24 : 48] Not once, but again and again, seven times. And we're indebted to the Spirit of God giving us through James in chapter 5 and verse 16 that Elijah was just like ourselves.

He wasn't superhuman. He wasn't a super saint. He was a man with like weaknesses to our own.

And yet he was a man of prayer. He prayed fervently. that it would rain. And God graciously and lovingly gave an answer.

Actually, it says in the original the effective fervent prayer of the righteous man is being made effective.

We better not, time's gone, so we better not get into the particular verb that's used there. But that's an excellent way to translate it. the strong prayer, the effective fervent prayer of the righteous man, of the man of God or the woman of God is being made effective.

[26 : 09] and within moments of that seventh look on the part of the servant, he saw a little cloud the size of the palm of a hand and that was a sign of more to follow.

well, in Scotland and Glasgow in particular we're nae short of rain and at one level we're thankful for it but we're nae short of it.

What we are short of is showers of spiritual blessing. We're short of a real deluge of spiritual blessing from the Lord that the Holy Spirit of God would come and pour out upon us refreshing showers upon not only our thirsty nation but our nation that's dying in sin and godlessness.

And surely we've got a promise that we can take to the Lord and ask him for showers of blessing.

Thy kingdom come Thy will be done on earth as in heaven Jesus' own words I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

[27 : 47] These are just two or three that come to mind immediately. We take his promises to him the Bible tells us that we who have families can pray for our families.

Those of us who have children pray for our children and our children's children. We're not to do that in a casual almost matter of fact way but with fervency with energy.

why did our Savior cry out with vehement cries and tears? The answer is the occasion demanded it.

and the situation we have here in Scotland the dearth of spiritual living religion following the Lord Jesus Christ requires it that we ask him to send us showers of blessing.

Well our time's gone. The last thing persevering prayer. It is a law of the kingdom of God and a rule in prayer that we ought to persevere.

[29 : 12] Keep on praying. We once had years ago in Helmstil Principal Cameron preaching I think it was at a communion and I've been reminded about this a few times.

probably when I needed it. That he said towards the end of his sermon pray on my friends. And that's what we need to do.

Pray on persevere. How often the Saviour encouraged his disciples. We ought always to pray. The parable of the persistent widow.

We want to plead with him and plead with him and plead. until he gives an answer in peace. We mentioned Jacob.

We've got to have that attitude not to let him go. And Elijah prayed once and again and again seven times until he had an answer from the Lord.

[30 : 18] What Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan, called a return of prayer. a small beginning, but a great ending. However, the answers to prayer in terms of the return are a wee bit too like what was told to Habakkuk there in chapter 2.

The vision is yet for an appointed time. It's a way ahead somewhere. But then he says this, the Lord says this, Though it tarries, wait for it.

Don't give up. Wait for it. Habakkuk 2 and verse 3. Wait in the activity of prayer.

many of the promises of God regarding the growth of his kingdom in ourselves individually and in our congregations and in our churches and in our land.

Many of the promises of growth regarding Christ's kingdom have their fulfillment in his time. And when we scan back on history we see fulfillments of these promises.

[31 : 42] But that's not the end of them. There is such a thing, wonderful thing, as successive fulfillment. Yet there is more. And that's the way it will be until all the people of God are gathered from all the earth.

And therefore we must encourage ourselves to perseverance and to persistence in prayer. And when we feel like giving up, let us remember there is only one being in the universe that wants us to give up.

That old serpent, the devil. And when we are cast in a cloud and downcast and say, what's the use of praying?

Remember where that thought came from? Let's learn from Elijah, the prophet, the man of prayer, and perhaps more than all, from Jesus, the Son of God, who in the days of his flesh, when he made vehement cries with tears, was answered because of what?

Because of his reverent submission to the will of his Father. If it's the Father's will to give us who believe his kingdom, then let us pray and persist in pray for the coming of that kingdom.

[33 : 30] In ourselves individually, and in the world at large. Amen.