

09/05/2010 Evening Service Alex Cowie

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[0 : 00] we'll remain seated and we'll just pray now almighty and ever blessed God we turn again to you we bless and magnify you for the wonderful privilege of drawing near to you in prayer of hallowing your name O Lord our God we thank you for prayer we thank you that we can come to you and we can adore in your presence we can think about you as you've revealed to us how we should think about you and we can acknowledge our own sin and shortcoming our unworthiness of the least of all your mercies but O Lord our God we bless you for your provision for us in Jesus we thank you that as we were singing there we see light in him he is the light who gives life and we thank you that he came into the world we thank you O Lord for the light of the glorious good news in him and it is our heart's desire and prayer that people may learn your ways we have been considering here today already the huge problem of idolatry and how in 21st century Britain there are so many places that are built to the worship of of God's aplenty and people are third to these and we know O Lord that there is a word for them to set them free from that kind of darkness and to bring them into the light of life may it be therefore O Lord that you will bless all the efforts in the whole mission field to bring people to see the truth in Jesus and to receive him to receive your salvation in him

O Lord we thank you for our own privileges as we recognize before you this evening that you have blessed us with a wonderful spiritual heritage give us grace O Lord to lay hold of the things you've freely given to us and what we pray for ourselves we pray for all those who are in our family circle in our circle of friends and indeed all those we are acquainted with O Lord we long that your kingdom may come in hearts and lives in young and old we pray too this evening as we've been thinking about Israel we know that in a real sense Israel the Israel of God comprises believing Jews and Gentiles but we know too that there is that ethnic grouping called Israel whether it's in the land or scattered all over the earth we pray for those who are of the stock of Israel we know that the gospel came to them at first and we pray for all those who are engaged in seeking their salvation uphold them and strengthen them and lead others into that difficult work that the gospel may prosper among these folks but we pray too this evening O Lord for those involved in our own home mission endeavour in cross-cultural mission here in the city we think about Duncan Peters and Colin MacLeod and we pray for their work and those who uphold them that you will prosper them and give them to see O Lord folk believing the report and coming into the faith as we pray this evening too Lord we remember all those who are upon our hearts that are missionaries of the cross and we pray for them whatever aspect of missionary endeavour they're involved in look after them we think about the many women folk who have gone so courageously in your name to minister to children and older people too and we commend them to you look after them and bless what they do we remember those who are involved in church planting and in Christian education and in theological education and we pray that in all these endeavours you would crown the work with your blessing

O Lord remember us now as we turn to you we've been thinking about those who are involved in army chaplaincies indeed in chaplaincies to the forces and those who are scripture readers and we pray that you would continue to open doors of opportunity so that those who are in the forces and whose lives are often in deadly danger that you will bring them to know the Lord Jesus Christ that whether they live or die they may be his so be with us O Lord receive our thanks for all your mercies and help us O Lord to apply ourselves with diligence to your service we're here for such a little while even at best we know that that life is short and we pray that you will be round and about us guiding us enabling us to know how best to acquire what we need to serve you and getting these things to apply ourselves in all our activities with an eye to the kingdom of grace and of God so be with us O Lord and blot out our transgressions applying to us as ever the benefits of the death of Christ that we may know that we have the forgiveness of sins and peace with you open to us the word and blessed to us each as you see our need and the praise and honour and glory will be gladly given to you in Christ

Amen Well now let's turn to 1st Kings this evening and chapter 18 1st Kings chapter 18 and we'll continue our study in this we may just read together at at verse 17 then it happened when Ahab saw Elijah that Ahab said to him is that you O trebler of Israel and he answered I have not trebled Israel but you and your father's house have in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals now therefore send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table so Ahab sent for all the children of Israel and gathered the prophets together on Mount

Carmel particularly this evening verses 17 to 20 of 1 Kings 18 and we want to think about this in terms of Elijah confronts idolatrous Ahab now we've noticed in the previous study that the time came for the prophet Elijah to leave the relative seclusion of the town of Saraphath near Sinon and there is a reminder to us in this and indeed in this study here as Elijah confronts idolatrous that there is a time for everything under heaven a season for every purpose Ecclesiastes 3 from verse 1 gives us a list of the sort of things that God has in mind there is a time to be born and a time to die and so on there's a time for everything under heaven and in this particular section indeed from verse 1 to 16 we noticed that the time came for

[9 : 43] Elijah to be moved back into the land of Israel but it was God's time we looked at that and we saw that it was time the precise time the God appointed time for Elijah to go back and to confront the idolatrous king Ahab but we saw too in that opening section that it was a time for Elijah to meet Obadiah who was in charge of Ahab's palace and his affairs and so God ordered as only God could with the utmost precision that meeting of Elijah and Obadiah Ahab's servant and we read that there was at that meeting there was a particular determination on the part of Elijah to meet up with King Ahab whatever and we saw in that last study how Obadiah who was a godly man and had saved a hundred prophets he hid two groups of fifty in caves and fed them and so on and we saw that when he was asked to go and tell the king

Elijah is here and he's looking for you that poor old Obadiah was terrified and he said you want to get me killed and so on but we saw how Elijah's determination to see King Ahab that day emboldened Obadiah we saw that verse fifteen for example then Elijah said this is to Obadiah as the Lord of hosts lives before whom I stand I will surely present myself to him that's to Ahab today verse sixteen so Obadiah emboldened by what Elijah said Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him and Ahab went to meet Elijah so we saw that in God's wonderful way in God's precise ordering of these events

Elijah meets Obadiah he ministers through this determination to see Ahab he ministers to Obadiah he emboldens him and he goes and tells the king Elijah wants to see and clearly what is in Elijah's mind is he's going to confront Ahab and he's going to confront him about his way of life his idolatry and what that has brought upon the people and there's a reminder in this even by way of introduction that there's a place in Christian life for humbly and yet specifically rebuking sin when we see others going on in sin we ought to prayerfully and yet boldly confront them and challenge them as to their lifestyle now that's a delicate area and we'll look at it a bit more carefully in a few moments maybe we're not to take the Elijah approach simply or the Jeremiah approach they were pretty much from the hip or even

John the Baptist who was also pretty much from the hip but the point is there's a place for doing this actually the whole business of love in the human heart and the Christian heart the love of Christ the love of sinners constrains us at times to speak and not be silent to rebuke sin and to call people to repentance and we ought when we're doing this we ought not to feel bad about it there's a place for it and we do it as I say out of love to the Lord in the first place but out of love to our fellow sinners as well and it's with this in mind we approach Elijah in his determination to confront idolatrous King Ahab well the first point then we have to consider is Ahab falsely accuses

Elijah verse 17 then it happened when Ahab saw Elijah that Ahab said to him is that you oh troubleer of Israel and here are the words of an impenitent man maybe a king yes but the words of an impenitent man those three and a half years of drought and famine and misery in the land had softened him not a whit is that you oh trebler of Israel he says to the man of God and this is such a revealing question that he poses to Elijah it shows the hardness of his heart his impenitence his refusal to accept his responsibility in this he is he's not going to blame himself not at all you're is that you oh trebler of

[15 : 26] Israel and he expects the answer yes not no my dear friends this takes us right back to the beginning of human history it takes us right back to the garden takes us right back to the fall of our first parents into sin it takes us right back to the response when they were found out and they saw not merely their physical nakedness but their moral and spiritual nakedness and they began to blame they began to blame Adam blamed the woman actually Adam blamed God for giving him the woman the woman you gave me she enticed me and I ate the woman blamed the serpent the serpent deceived me and I ate the blame culture is in the heart of man it's in the sinner's heart in some of course it's more developed

I accept that but in general it's there and every time a parent discovers it in his children the parent remembers his own ways or her own ways we think well I was just the same the blame the blame culture is there we have inherited it but it's our own you can't say as somebody sometimes says I got that from you I got that from you no no it's our own even when Paul is talking about indwelling sin he says it's his own and we have to accept that but you see Ahab is full of this blame culture he's going to blame he blames Elijah he believes in his hardness of heart that the cause of the drought and the famine and the human misery in

Israel was all Elijah's fault not that he himself had forsaken the Lord for the Baals and Ashtaroth no no no no it was Elijah not that he had anything to do with all this calamity that had come all Ahab was concerned about you see was holding on to power and getting his revenge on Elijah and I think you see that in the the record here we have he's out there searching personally searching for Elijah verse 6 so they divided the land between them to explore it

Ahab went one way by himself and Obadiah went another way by himself the king himself was so intensely desiring to get a hold of Elijah and deal with him that he's out there himself he wants revenge and so Ahab remains the hard hearted idolater and he is unprepared to confess that he himself had sinned if he had but stopped to think of the law of the lord that he as king had committed himself to keeping and to helping the people to keep there would have been some chance but no no he had no sense at all of blame on his part he had not a spark of conscience about all the idolatry that he had fostered in the land those of us who have been studying this remember that he married

Jezebel whose father was priest king of Sidon and she was a missionary of of Baal she made the news of Baal known and she enforced the religion of Baal upon the people and she embarked upon the extermination of the prophets of God but she was allowed of Ahab to do it she was she was helped by Ahab not one moment did he hesitate from giving her all the encouragement that she needed and he refused to call for any reforms in the religion of Israel and in a return to the worship of the living

[21 : 03] God so he falsely accuses the prophet Elijah you trebler of Israel now I think we'll pause here for a moment and remind ourselves of something we have already observed that the biggest danger to God's servants to the people of God and to the cause of God is not is not the non religion but those who falsely align themselves to belief in God or the gods if you think about if you think about the reformation and you think about the system that opposed the the the the the protestants as they were who said to the church of Rome we're not teaching the people the truth we've overlaid all the the truth with the traditions of men and the church we're putting the church where the doctrines of

God should be and and the reformation was a time of bitter persecution of the Lord's people by those who professed to be the church of Christ and history is writ large with that our own country is writ large with the with the the killing times and the the covenanting times the persecutions you only you can go back to the Bible I mentioned Jeremiah already in the introduction Jeremiah himself ended up in the stocks because Pasha the son of Emmet the priest and governor in the in the Lord's house supposedly put Jeremiah in the stocks and why because he hated him he hated his doctrine because his doctrine was the doctrine of the word of God you read in Amos in chapter 7 verse 10 a Messiah the priest in Bethel sent to Jeroboam that's

Jeroboam the second and he he lied and he suggested that Amos was conspiring against the king and you find that all the way through the history of God's people Israel where those who were in the place of leading the religion as it were the worship of God were false and they were antagonistic to the people of God and the prophets of God and here we have the same thing in the king he falsely accuses Elijah as a trebler of Israel John the Baptist if you think about him for a moment again we mentioned in the introduction he was conspired against and eventually he was murdered because he confronted idolatry he called a spade a spade so to speak and

Herodias who was thoroughly unfaithful an unfaithful woman and she determined I'll get him for that she and her husband and her consort had brought in all sorts of evil into the community and John the Baptist in confronting their idolatry paid the price yes it was in God's providence I know but the fact is that is the persecuting spirit is that you O Trebler of Israel but our Lord Jesus Christ received the same kind of treatment he was hated without a cause he said himself and he was hated by the religious establishment he was hated by those who were supposed to be upholders of the religion of the

Lord and he rebuked their idolatry yes idolatry because they had they had overlaid the commandments of God with the commandments of men they had put their own version of the worship of the Lord in the place that belonged to the true and in their blind zeal they persecuted them to the death and they persecuted one who had come to do them good who had come as the salvation of Israel they saw him as a Trebler of Israel so Ahab falsely accuses Elijah and therefore we take note of that and we recognize that often we will be misrepresented as followers of Christ by those yes and in the church who have no real love for the things of the Lord and the truth of

[27 : 00] God the second thing then is that Elijah comes back on this Elijah reproves guilty Ahab I have not troubled Israel verse 18 but you and your father's house now Ahab was of the family of Omri and one of the darkest periods in Israel's history in terms of the kingly rule was the period in which Omri's family ruled it was a pretty bloodthirsty carry on Omri was a thoroughly bad man and so when Elijah speaks like this I have not troubled Israel but you and your father's house he's thinking about the line of Omri there and he's thinking about how that that from the time that

Elijah himself confronted Ahab with the words there shall be no rain or dew upon the land for these years Ahab set his mind and heart against against against Elijah and against the God of Elijah when he heard there shall be no rain or dew for these years except at my word the knives so to speak were out for Elijah and Ahab furthered the extermination of the people of God the prophets of God particularly but you see Elijah's words back there in chapter 17 at the beginning of it where we pick up the story of Elijah Elijah's words were not personal

Elijah wasn't embarking on a personal vendetta against Ahab Elijah was God's servant Elijah was in the business of communicating God's message he was given a message by God to declare to Ahab to tell him that there was there was going to be a drought a serious drought for these three and a half years and it would impact upon the people sorely but there was no malice in Elijah no personal vindictiveness no rather he acted as God's man with God's message and the task that God had given him he would fulfill and he says therefore you and all the house of wicked Omri your father's house you have brought all this destruction and desolation upon Israel and we've sought to look at this in our studies at how

Baalism was deeply ingrained in the people and God was departed from further and further the whole history of Israel and by Israel remember and we're talking here about the ten tribes whose first king so to speak was Jeroboam the son of Nabat and he was a singularly idolatrous person a perverse person and we're thinking about how really down through the families of the kings of Israel things simply got worse and worse till the rejection of the Lord and his religion brought them to be carried off into captivity you remember that about 150 years or around about that from

Ahab's own reign 150 years later you had the first carrying away of the people of Israel Shalmaneser came the Assyrian king and carried off he besieged Samaria he crushed the people and he carried them off that was the first real deportment of the people into captivity and it all came from the departure of the kings and of the people from the religion of the Lord and sadly that has been the story not only of Israel the ten tribes but of Judah as well that they departed from the Lord and eventually were all carried away into captivity and although the return 70 years later brought a little blip of light alas the house was left desolate and the spirit of slumber was put upon the people for their idolatry and so we can say that

[32 : 42] Elijah in countering Ahab is warning him he's reproving for him for his guilt woe to you Ahab we might say you have abandoned the Lord's commandments you have followed the Baals you've brought about a departure in the Lord's own people I mean outwardly professing you've brought all this calamity on them and they've gone into Baal and you're responsible you're the guilty one Ahab at a practical level we are reminded here you see that there is a woe upon anyone who having heard the message of the salvation of God in Christ who departs from it who gives it the thumbs down and we have to help them we have to confront them with what they're doing and show them the wrongness of it and the danger of it not that we're to be unsympathetic we we're to be frank and we're to recognize why they are the way they are but we're to urge upon them to turn from that those who have been brought up into the gospel they need to be helped to see what a terrible thing it is to depart from these things those who have even professed faith and have slid and slithered away we have to help them to see what what a plight it is they have entered into they're embarking on a perilous course and in a sense where our brothers keep her there we're to reprove their guilt just as

Elijah did to Ahab I don't suppose that Ahab gave much thought to the eternal consequences of his idolatry and the guilt that lay upon him as a shepherd of the people for the kings were shepherds I don't know that he gave much thought at all to what it would mean for him in the eternal dimension for his stubborn refusal of the ways of God and his impenitence and I don't suppose people today give much thought to a dino those who have been brought up oh I used to go to church the tellers I used to go to that Sunday school I remember one poor champ across the road there when we were at the drop-in and he was 92 and all his marbles as to say and

I stopped him got speaking to him a wee bit see see that church he said over there this church he went in he said there used to be a church behind it and I used to go to this end of school there and so I of course tried to get round him no no he said no I don't believe in that anymore I got light so he said I got light and Jesus said to that kind of attitude if the light that is in you is darkness how great is that darkness people are like that and we have a duty as much as lies in us when they come into our orbit to try and help them to see it to reprove that position yes lovingly and gently but but with a firmness a directness not going round it let us remind ourselves my dear friends that even the smallest steps away from the things of

God ought to set the alarm bell ringing in our head it's an indication that we're moving away we're losing out our ties to the gospel it's indicative of spiritual trouble and we're to listen and we're to accept the rebukes that come our way remember that Ahab and all like him are guilty in their pride and in their impenitence they're guilty of departing from the Lord and from his ways Paul tells us of the Jews who didn't believe you find it there in Romans 2 that you are treasuring up for yourselves wrath and to the day of wrath despising the goodness of

God that constrains people to repentance the last thing Elijah's command to Ahab verses 19 20 now therefore he says send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table verse 20 so Ahab sent for all the children of Israel and so on Elijah's command then to Ahab lastly now clearly Obadiah's response to Elijah's ministry moved him to go and tell Ahab Elijah wants to see you and so Ahab went and met with

[39 : 16] Elijah as we saw and it's revealing to us you see that that when Elijah's words as it were touched the hard heart of Ahab that he complied with Elijah's command he complied he sent for all the children of Israel and the prophets some expositors have suggested that that this is because the because the king was desperate to see rain on the land again his wealth was in his stock and so on and it was going to die off and so he was desperate to get rain on the land and he knew that the very first contact he had with

Elijah was you'll not see rain or dew upon the land these years except at my word so I think that folk who take that line have something in what they say there's a measure of truth in it maybe not the whole story on it but certainly true Ahab remembered the word of Elijah but I think too that we want to say that Ahab would have seen this as a bit of a challenge he had become a confirmed idolater he had committed himself to Baal and it seemed to him like a challenge that he was willing to go ahead with so he he sent for all Israel and for the prophets of Baal and of

Ashterah to come to Mount Carmel and the important lesson in all this to me is that we need to be prepared to challenge people where they are to find out where they are in the first place and to challenge their position remembering that the Lord has promised to be with us that we can speak and not be silent isn't that what the Lord said to Paul in Corinth Paul was afraid in the city of Corinth and the Lord came and said to him don't be afraid don't be silent speak for I have many people in this city the Lord is with his people and that's our encouragement and one is reminded of the word of the proverb the heart of the king yes even

Ahab wicked Ahab the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord and he directs him wherever he wills and we are helped in reminding ourselves of that it was said of John Knox that he did not fear the face of man or of that woman either fear God and you'll not fear man that's what we're told and so Elijah took courage and he spoke in this very specific way and challenged Ahab and bid him to do what was right here now therefore he says send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah so Ahab sent for all the children of Israel and so on and gathered the prophets together on Mount

Carmel he took courage he rebuked sin and he urged Ahab into this course of action and we are urged this evening in this course we're urged to in an understanding of the love of God in Christ to do our bit to speak and not be silent to declare ourselves on the side of the Lord in the first place and to be ready to speak a word for the Lord when we get the opportunities and we are to take them perhaps more frequently than we do to confront sin yes to reprove it yes but to do it with the sensitivity that God gives us our Lord Jesus Christ to me is the best example I was speaking to somebody about this just the other day to me

[44 : 29] Jesus in his wisdom in scripture gives us so much that helps us to see his own approach for all that he is the Lord of glory his own approach was so wonderfully sensitive and there's perhaps no better example of it than his dealings with the woman of Samaria in John 4 it's just a pearl in the middle of other precious stones he deals with that woman so sensitively he doesn't cut her to pieces he doesn't to expose her in a very explicit way he speaks to her most sensitively now if anyone had the right in the whole of the universe to speak to that woman and to denounce her lifestyle he had the right but he doesn't do that he gently unpacks a little bit of information for her that will convict her he doesn't ring out of her words that express her shame and confusion he simply unpacks a little to help her to see that sin is sin needs to be dealt with and he

Jesus is the one to deal with it when when Jesus you remember in the house of Simon the Pharisee had his feet washed with the tears of the woman when she came in to anoint him Simon the Pharisee and those who were with him at the meal spoke against it if this man was really a prophet of God he wouldn't let this happen he would know what manner of woman this is and Jesus turns the whole thing round and he says Simon see this woman see what she's done you didn't do the very basic thing for your guest you didn't wash my feet this woman has washed my feet with her tears and she's dried them with her hair he convicts of sin and he lifts up those who were broken in their sin and who had come to him by faith go and do likewise him to man and my mother's womb he saw that that there was faith there for healing and and he healed the man that the man walked and the priest of

Zeus and all the people wanted to offer sacrifices. The gods have come down in human form and they called Paul, you remember, Hermes and so on.

And Paul and Barnabas pleaded with them, look here, we're just like yourselves. And they pleaded with them to consider the living and true God.

They had come to make known to them. They confronted their idolatry in a very sensitive and practical and yet pointed way.

[48 : 31] And so when we're dealing with people, there is a way to do the thing. And it seems to me, and I would like to say that my own view on Elijah is that he was not insensitive.

Bold, yes. Direct, yes. But he was, there's a sensitivity about him too. He could have said a lot about Ahab himself and his father's house.

He could have catalogued all sorts of things, but he didn't. He made the point. A very precise summary.

No lead for him to take out all the dirty washing of Ahab and his father's house, which could have been done. And we're to do that, to have this sensitivity in confronting the idolatries of the age.

And remember we were saying earlier today about the Thessalonians. An idol is anything or person that stands between us and the Lord.

[49 : 41] Anything that we give the allegiance in our hearts that really belongs to the Lord. And so when we confront the idolatries of our day, we're to do it sensitively.

And to my mind, the best rule of thumb is the saying, you know it, there except for the grace of God go I.

That should temper our thinking. When we're dealing with others who are out of the way and perhaps far out of the way, there except for the grace of God go I.

And we'll finish with a good testimony on that very point. It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom, said the apostle, I am chief.

Elijah confronted idolatrous Ahab. But did it, yes, with directness, but with appropriate sensitivity.

[51 : 11] and let us examine our ways and learn what the Lord would have us learn in this regard. Amen.