

Standing Before the LORD

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. Just a warning. A short reading doesn't necessarily mean a short sermon.

Your favourite music is or who your favourite musician or singer is.

If it's football, perhaps some time ago it might be Messi. Or now Mbappé. I can't even say it.

Mbappé. Or if you're English, Rice or Kane.

And it might depend, of course, on what team you support, who you think is the best footballer at the moment, woman or man. If it's tennis, it might be Sinner or Alcaraz.

They seem to be the two who are doing the best at the moment and nobody seems to be able to beat them at the moment. Or in the women's game, a little bit more open, but Swiatek and Sabalenka seem to be the ones that you need to beat.

[1 : 17] I don't know about your favourite singer. I love that Anne played Three Kings. It's one of my favourite songs. It really gets me. I can remember...

God, I... Can I remember? Um... About 30, 35 years ago, I was listening to the King's College Festival, Nine Lessons and carols.

And this young tenor came and started singing Three Kings. And it's the most beautiful rendition of that hymn song I've ever heard.

And there is something about music that gets you. There's something in our souls that sometimes words don't get, but music touches you.

It makes me cry many, many times when I hear songs, favourite songs of mine, perhaps favourite songs of Sylvia. It just gets you. And there is something...

[2 : 22] That's why we worship. That's why we sing worship, because it's something that gets into our spirits. It's something that's real. That wasn't in my sermon.

But as a, I don't know, favourite singer, I always loved Joan Baez. I loved her voice. I love what she sings. Apparently, as someone called Charlie XCX, there is some told.

Apparently, some people like her. So, and it is a her. But, you know, we're all different. As we come to a new year in this church, we have to look around at each other and say, look, we're different.

We're different people. We've got different backgrounds. We have different feelings. We have different backgrounds in what we believe, how we came to Christ. But, we're a community.

We're all one in Jesus Christ. So, as we come to this new year, let's, as we've been praying, come out together as people who have the spirit of Christ in us.

[3 : 35] Right, back to the sermon. I don't know whether you... I'll talk about favourites. I don't know whether you have a favourite prophet. Mine is Ezekiel. I just love Ezekiel.

Well, the poor bloke had to do so many terrible things because God told him to. But he did do them. And he taught the word of God to the people of Israel.

But what about Elijah? What about Elijah? So, as Anne said, we're starting this series on Elijah. The first thing that came to my mind when we were thinking about this series was the verse in James 5, 17, where it says, Elijah was a man just like us.

James says that Elijah was a man just like us. Yeah, right. Just like us. This morning, we'll take a quick overview of Elijah's life and the events that happened in his life to see how we are like him and how we are perhaps not like him.

Some of the events I mention will be covered in more detail in our series on Elijah. But let's look at this. How many of us can correctly forecast the weather and make rain?

[4 : 53] How many of us, when hungry, are fed by ravens? How many of us, many of us can cause a packet of flour never to be empty, although used daily, cause an empty olive oil bottle filled with oil and despite being used many times, can you be full?

Now, that's quite useful today. Olive oil costs a lot of money. So, you know, if you could do that, you'd make a fortune. How many of us can bring a boy back to life? Bring fire down from heaven on a water sudden sacrifice?

Sacrifice. Or be on a mountain with thunder and lightning and so on, but suddenly hear the voice of God in a small voice, a whisper.

And something we can't know at the moment, but I suspect none of us will, be carried up in heaven in a whirlwind accompanied by a chariot of fire and horses of fire.

I don't think it will happen. I'm not a prophet. I can't forecast that. I suspect not. Now, Elijah comes on the scene abruptly.

[5 : 56] There's no introduction. Whereas with other prophets, we hear that Isaiah was the son of Amos and he had a vision of God in the temple, which is where he was commissioned to prophesy to the people of Israel.

Jeremiah was the son of Hilcar and he had a word from the Lord telling him that before he was full, before he was born, before he was even a fetus, he was set apart by the Lord to be a prophet.

We know that Ezekiel was 30 when he had wondrous visions of God. The word of the Lord came to him. In fact, the word of the Lord, he was made to eat the word of the Lord.

There was a scroll with the word of the Lord on him. He was meant to eat it, but thankfully it didn't taste like paper. It tasted like honey, so it wasn't so bad. And the hand of the God was on him.

In Deuteronomy, God says, I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites and I will put my words in his mouth.

[7 : 04] The prophets of God are people who have the words of God in their mouth and proclaim those words. But for Elijah, it was simply, now Elijah, Tishbite from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, as the Lord, the God of Israel lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except in my word.

Suddenly, he appears, no background, no son of, no nothing. He just comes before Ahab. whom I serve actually means before whom I stand.

What we know about Elijah was he served God and he stood before God. And again, the word Elijah actually means the Lord is my God because El means Lord.

Yah is Yahweh, God. So his name tells us what he was. But why did Elijah come? Why was he sent? Why did he stand before Ahab?

Because Ahab, the king of Israel, did evil in the eyes of the Lord. And he wasn't the only one who did that. The reason we had prophets because time and time again, the people of God, the Israelites, did evil before him, disobeyed him.

[8 : 29] And Ahab was worse than all of them. He set up altars to Baal and worshipped him. And Baal was the name for the most significant God of the Canaanites. He was the chief deity in many of their places.

So in this brief, first mention of Elijah, we learn that Elijah was a servant of God. Elijah, as it says, comes on the scene and announces no family background, no son of.

He just appears, apparently from a place called Tishbe in Gilead, which you now cannot find on a map. No one knows where it is. What was the first thing this prophet says?

It wasn't words of comfort or teaching or exaltation. No, it says there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word. There is going to be a drought, drought, drought, not just the possibility of a hosepipe ban, but the full-blown drought.

No rain, rivers and lakes running dry, crops dying, people going hungry. And why does he say this? Why does he say this difficult thing to a person who could have had him killed?

[9 : 42] It's because he serves the Lord, the God of Israel, and brings his word. A servant is one who does his or her master's bidding.

They do not question what they are asked to do, or in the case of prophets, who they are to go to and what they are to say. If I was Elijah, I think I would have been reluctant to go to Ahab knowing that he was someone who did evil in the sight of the Lord, especially to tell him there would be a long drought in his land and he could do nothing about it.

But as Elijah was a servant of God, we can be servants of God. We can live for him, we can be open to what he says, and in this we will be following Jesus. Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love and whom I delight.

I will put my spirit on him and he will proclaim justice to the nations. That was God anointing Jesus. And one of my favorite verses, for even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus was a servant but we are called to be servants as well. Sitting down, Jesus called the twelve and said, anyone who wants to be first must be the very last and the servant of us all.

[11:08] Not so with you instead. Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. that's completely upside down logic to the world.

We don't want people as Christians to serve us. We are people who serve one another and try and see what they want and not what we want. It's a servant heart is what we should be after and what the Spirit of God should make us to be.

As we look for a new minister, one of the underlying things that we should look for is someone with a servant heart.

Someone who is coming to serve God and to serve the people of God. Secondly, Elijah was obedient. Elijah heard and obeyed God.

We don't know how he heard him because we're not told but obviously God told him go to Ahab and he obeyed God. Even when he was told even what he was told may have seemed a bit strange.

[12:22] For instance, go to the brook to drink and ravens will feed you. Go to the widow who will feed you. A widow who would have no resources to feed him. Or when obeying God could be dangerous.

Go and present yourself to Ahab the king who was out to get him. Or when he was the only one among a number of Baal worshippers that obeyed God and called him down fire.

Or indeed when anointing his successor Elisha anointed him knowing that meant that was probably one of the last things he would do. And again Jesus obeyed.

He was obedient to death even death on the cross and we are told to be obedient. Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities to be obedient to be ready to do whatever is good.

That's the point. Not necessarily to be subject to rulers and authorities but obey and do what is good. And Paul told to Timothy no one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs but rather tries to please his commanding officer.

[13:39] Our commanding officer is Jesus Christ and as his people as his followers we must obey what he tells us to do.

Thirdly Elijah was chosen he clearly was chosen by God for this particular task that he carried out. And the story of Elijah as in so many other stories in the Bible shows God turning things upside down turning the thoughts of the world back to front making those who are rulers slaves and those who are slaves rulers.

And he chose Elijah an unknown man from a village we now cannot find on a map. And he chose ravens who are known as scavengers to be providers.

He chose a widow and a son who would normally expect to be recipients of charity were the ones who gave charity to Elijah.

So God chooses the unexpected he does the unexpected and one area where we are like Elijah is that we are chosen and for most of us perhaps unlikely people to be chosen but chosen nevertheless.

[15:03] But God used Elijah and he can use us. And again Jesus was chosen. A voice came from the cloud saying this is my son whom I have chosen listen to him.

And we are chosen. We have been chosen according to the knowledge of God the Father through the sanctified work of the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.

Jesus told his disciples if you belong to the world it would love you as its own. As it is you do not belong to the world but I have chosen you out of the world. We live in the world we are part of the world we work in the world we got families in the world but in some ways we are not of the world because we are of the kingdom of God we are of the kingdom where Jesus Christ is king and lord. And Elijah was trusting and he must have been trusting Elijah had or if you like faith had complete faith in the lord or he would not have done what he did.

He would not have been he would not have confronted the prophets of Baal without complete trusting God. There were 400 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. There was one Elijah no one else.

[16:28] And this was a key event in Elijah's life. This was the time when it was going to be shown who was the true God of Israel. And here he was confronted by all the hosts of the false gods.

But he completely trusted in God he had complete faith in the lord God of Israel. To such an extent his faith and he made it more difficult for himself by pouring water over his sacrifice.

So much water that it filled the trench around the sacrifice. But he believed that the lord would bring fire down from heaven and the lord did. And we are people who should trust God.

May the god of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the holy spirit. Trusting in him will help that prayer we had about bringing the power of the holy spirit into our lives and into our church.

And finally more like us Elijah was human. Despite this trust and knowing what God had already done in his life despite the great events at Mount Carmel and the power that it showed the lord had Elijah ran away at the first sign of a threat from Jezebel.

[17:49] Mind you knowing what I know about Jezebel I think I'd run away. The wife of Ahab he lay down and wanted to die but the lord would not let him go and fed him and gave him water and then God showed himself to Elijah at Horeb.

Elijah was not a superhuman being. He was not some kind of all powerful hero.

He was flesh and blood like us and he knew fear. And like us we have flesh and blood we can know fear.

And as members of humanity we all make mistakes. Elijah made mistakes. He wasn't perfect. We all sin. But as God showed Elijah there is always a way back.

And with Jesus Christ there is always a way back from whatever we have done. The last words of the Old Testament say that the lord will send Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the lord comes.

[19:01] Now it's amazing he didn't say Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel. It was going to be Elijah. Elijah will be the herald of the coming of the Messiah.

Jesus said that John the Baptist was Elijah in what he proclaimed. In that he proclaimed the coming of Jesus. Elijah was the one who was looking forward to Jesus who was going to proclaim that the son of God was coming.

And it was Elijah again not Isaiah Jeremiah or Ezekiel who appeared with Moses at the transfiguration. It wasn't these big prophets with long books.

It was Elijah who had a relatively few verses in the book. And I think having looked at Elijah briefly we can safely say that perhaps we're not like Elijah Elijah in many ways.

But we can be like him. If we know Jesus as our saviour we know we are chosen like Elijah. And like Elijah we can stand before our Lord and God.

[20:18] We can be a servant of God. We can be obedient to God. And we can trust in God. and importantly we can be a herald for Jesus.

We can be those who proclaim the gospel the truth that God sent his son Jesus Christ to save the people from their sins by dying on the cross and by raising him from the dead.

so we may not be like Elijah in terms of the things that he did but we can be like Elijah and be in those who herald who proclaim that Jesus Christ is king and saviour.

And my prayer is that this church will be a true herald of Jesus Christ this year and bring many to know his kingdom. Amen.