

Elijah a man of prayer

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[0 : 00] Seeking the Lord's blessing, let us now turn to 1 Kings, the first book of Kings, and chapter 17.

1 Kings chapter 17. And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be June or rain these years, but according to my word.

Our focus this morning is going to be upon this man named Elijah.

And we are going to focus especially upon him as a man of prayer, as that was brought to our attention by James in chapter 5.

Elijah stands unique among God's servants. In all of history, there are only two men who were permitted to bypass death, namely Enoch and Elijah.

[1 : 28] And two men who were privileged to appear with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration was Moses and Elijah.

He lived in a day when the northern kingdom of Israel had grown very, very strong.

But sadly, it had also grown in spiritual darkness. From the very start of the divided kingdom of Israel, when a division came among the twelve tribes of Israel, and ten went north, and is known as the northern tribe or the northern kingdom, and two remained in the south and became known as Judah.

So when the division came, there was Israel and Judah. And the northern kingdom of Israel was plunged into a spiritual drifting away from God.

Jeroboam was the first king of Israel, and he started that drifting away. He feared that his people would turn their allegiance back to Jerusalem, to the southern kingdom known as Judah, if they were to continue worshipping at the temple there.

[3 : 06] And so he had centres of worship set up at two of the cities that belonged to Israel, to the northern kingdom, namely Dan and Bethel.

And in each of these cities he placed a golden image of a calf as a symbol for the worshippers. He ordained priests from other than Levites, and he set up altars for sacrifice.

Now God rebuked Jeroboam by sending a man of God. That story can be read in 1 Kings chapter 13. And despite the message of the man of God and the signs that were given by him, Jeroboam persisted, and all those who followed him in kingship in Israel did the same, and that sin became known as the sin of Jeroboam.

And as you read through the book of Kings, you'll often find that phrase coming up, the sin of Jeroboam. Now in Elijah's day, the king of Israel was Ahab.

And it is recorded about him in chapter 16. And Ahab, the son of Omri, did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him.

[4 : 35] And the reason cited is that he not only continued the practices of the sin of Jeroboam, but he went and he served Baal and worshipped him.

Ahab took to wife Jezebel, who was a worshipper of Baal. Baal worship was not new to Israel.

It was the religion of the Canaanites before the conquest of the children of Israel into the land. And many Israelites had been influenced by Baal worship upon entering the land of Canaan.

And God had beforehand warned Israel about these dangers that they would be confronted with as they entered into the land of Canaan.

And he commanded them to drive out the former inhabitants of the land, to try and avoid Israel from being taken over and being influenced by the gods of the Canaanites.

[5 : 47] But Israel did not obey. Baal was supposed to be the god of rain and good crops. And the Canaanites believed that one had to worship Baal in order to prosper as a farmer.

And sadly, many in Israel, having come out of the desert and turning their attention to learn agricultural ways, followed the advice of the inhabitants of the land so that many of them turned to Baal worship.

Another thing that happened during the reign of Ahab and shows us how far they had drifted away from God was that a man by the name of Hiel of Bethel, he built the city of Jericho.

And the Bible tells us that he laid its foundation at the cost of his firstborn. And said, David skates at the cost of his youngest son.

And this was according to the word of God, as we find it in Joshua chapter 6. There we read, And no one up to this day had defied God's curse against Jericho.

[7 : 16] But now, in the days of Ahab, this man deliberately went out to defy God and rebuilt the city of Jericho. And what God had said in his word was fulfilled.

It just shows us how far Israel had drifted away from God. They were worshipping Baal and defying the word of God.

Then Elijah comes suddenly on the scene. We have little information about Elijah.

He just suddenly appears on the scene here in chapter 17. His name, Elijah the Tishba. And the region from which he came, Gilead, is recorded for us.

But we are told nothing about his parents. We are told nothing about his education or his general background.

[8 : 23] However, the information that is given may provide small hints for us. Elijah means, My God is Jehovah.

And his name was given to him by his parents. So, I think we can quite rightly assume that his parents were godly parents and worshipped the true God.

And therefore, they gave to his son, their son, this name, Elijah. My God is Jehovah.

Tishba probably refers to his birthplace. And Gilead is said to be his home country. Gilead was thought of as a place that was very backward in culture.

Elijah is described for us in 2 Kings chapter 1. There it is said, He was a hairy man and girded with a girdle of leather about his loins.

[9 : 28] But as we turn to the New Testament, A significant information is given to us by James when he speaks regarding the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availing much.

Of course, in that chapter that we read, chapter 5, verse 17, he writes, From that information, it is obvious that this prayer preceded 1 Kings 17 introduction of Elijah.

Elijah, so that he was a man of prayer long before he is introduced to us here in the book of Kings. And again, James refers to Elijah's prayer for rain as an example of a fervent, effective prayer.

And he says, He prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. This information given to us by James tells us that Elijah was a man that was mighty in prayer.

And we shall return to that in a moment. But James also says that Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are.

[11 : 09] That statement about Elijah may be hard for us to swallow because of what we are told about Elijah.

He was hardly anything like us at all. This is a man who risked his life in speaking to King Ahab, pronouncing a famine that was to last three and a half years upon the land.

This is a man who faced the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and called down fire from heaven. This is a man who struck down 450 false prophets at the Kishon River.

A man who ran 17 miles from Carmel to Jezreel ahead of Hirsch and Chariots. A man who gave food to a hungry widow and child.

A man who brought the dead back to life. A man who was in constant communion with God. A man who did not die, but was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind and a chariot of fire.

[12 : 23] And so we have to ask ourselves, how could this man be a man subject to like passions as us? But that is exactly what the Bible says about him.

The Bible reminds us that although we have all these exploits done by this man Elijah, that he was still a real person with human passion, with human needs, with human weaknesses, like any other human being.

He was a real person who lived in an evil day. We have already made some reference to that. He lived in an environment that was hostile to God.

Where gross sin and practices were regarded as trivial matters. Does that not sound familiar to us in our own day?

Later on we find that Elijah descended into a very dark spiritual period in his life. In chapter 19 of this book.

[13 : 41] We are told that Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah saying, So let the gods do to me and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.

And when he saw that, he arose and went for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a juniper tree. And he requested for himself that he might die and said, It is enough.

Now, O Lord, take away my life. For I am not better than my father's. As he lay and slept under a juniper tree. This man who had recently been upon the mountain top.

This man who was a burning and shining light for God. This man who was a spiritual giant. Yet we find him here in the wilderness where he sits alone under a solitary tree.

[14 : 52] And he says, It is enough. Now, O Lord, take away my life. For I am not better than my father's.

This certainly shows us how our experiences may change so quickly. But for our purpose for the moment, this proves to us that Elijah was a real man.

And was a man subject to like passions as we are. Therefore, Elijah is a suitable example for us to learn from him.

Elijah teaches us that the secret of how to live in an evil day is prayer. The prayers of Elijah are a very interesting subject to study.

He was truly a man of prayer. Prayer may not sound very exciting to us.

[16 : 06] Because it requires a measure of discipline on our part to devote ourselves to prayer. It is very often that part of our spiritual life which we set aside during a busy week.

The first thing to let go is our daily routine of prayer. We can find many excuses to relinquish this spiritual exercise of prayer.

We may say, well, we are too busy. Or we may say, we are too tired. Or we may say, well, it's not convenient.

And so on. And the devil will never bother you regarding your lapse in prayer. Although the spirit may stop your conscience.

The devil will never bother you in your lapse of prayer. Because he knows that there is no other way to receive the blessings of God except through prayer.

[17 : 17] All spiritual blessings comes to us through prayer and intercession. Therefore we find that Jesus was a man of prayer.

And he is still a man of intercession. For we must remember that the spiritual blessings that we receive is through Christ's intercession.

That is part of the intercession of Christ today at the right hand of the Father. He is interceding for us to receive the blessings of the covenant.

So that as we are the recipients of the covenant. We must remember that they are given to us through the intercession of Christ.

So that there is no other way to receive the blessings of God. Except through prayer and intercession. Elijah is held before us as an example.

[18 : 31] Not as a preacher or a prophet. But as a man of prayer. One commentator says. Before the prophet came to the palace gates in Samaria.

He was in his prayer closet in Gilead. Before he was on his feet before the king of Israel. He was on his knees before the king of kings.

When James says to us that Elijah prayed earnestly. The thought carried there is that he prayed constantly. Or in other words in praying he prayed.

He was a man who persevered in prayer. James tells us that Elijah prayed earnestly. And it did not rain for three and a half years.

And Jesus affirms this for us in the Gospel of Luke. Chapter 4. In the days of Elias. When the heaven was shut up three years and six months.

[19 : 42] When great famine was throughout all the land. And what that tells us is that Elijah had been in prayer at least six months before he appeared. Before King Ahab.

And that the drought had already started in Israel. By the time that he appeared before the king. And the words which Elijah spoke to the king were bold words.

As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand. There shall not be June or rain these years. But according to my word.

Let us look more closely at what this bold statement tells us. About the prayer life of Elijah. First of all.

It tells us that he was conscious of God. As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand.

[20 : 41] Which leads me to accept that every time he bowed his knee before God. He was conscious that he was coming into the presence of God.

Jehovah lives. He is the true and he is the living God. He knew as he came into prayer. That it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

He came with reverence and with godly fear. Let us look at another example of how to approach God in prayer. Which I am sure was true of Elijah.

As he approached God. For example. Notice the way that Jesus addresses God in the prayer of John 17.

He came conscious as the servant of Jehovah. With reverence and with godly fear. He came in John 17 just as his servant Elijah came here before us.

[21 : 50] Conscious of God. And let us see the names that he uses as he addresses God. Jesus says father.

He addresses the father. He knows the relationship. He was one with the father from all eternity. God is his father in the sense that he is the father in the order of the persons of the Godhead.

In that trinity of the father, the son and the Holy Spirit. But God is also his father in the sense that Jesus has now become man and servant.

And so he is looking to God as his father. God is now his father because he, the son, is the representative of the many brethren whom he has come to save.

And then in verse 11 of John 17, he addresses God as holy father.

[22 : 56] How vital it is for us to remember that God is holy. The writer to the Hebrew reminds us that we must always approach God with reverence and godly fear.

For our God is a consuming fire. And though Jesus was one with the father. And though nothing had ever come between them.

Because he was sinless. He still addressed God as holy father. And then in verse 25 of chapter 17 of John.

He says, O righteous father. Here Jesus is referring to the character of God. To the faithfulness of God.

In other words, he is saying that God is faithful in all that he has promised. So Jesus, there becomes an example for us of how we should approach God in prayer.

[23 : 59] He came with the language of sonship. And we too can draw near to God in prayer with the language of adoption. Our father, which art in heaven.

God has sent forth the spirit of a son into our hearts crying. Abba, father. But we must also come fully aware that he is a holy father.

Hallowed be thy name. To hallow is to set apart a thing from common use to a sacred use. The psalmist said, If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

We must not present unworthy desires or selfish thoughts before our holy father. But he is also a righteous and faithful father.

And as this example is given to us by Jesus in the New Testament, I am sure that when Elijah approached God, he was aware of all that we have just mentioned.

[25 : 05] Elijah approached God conscious of who he was. And conscious of his own relationship with God. And here we have then examples of, for me and you, on how to approach God.

Always to be conscious of God. Always to be conscious of the character of God. That he is a holy God. That he is a righteous God.

That he is a faithful God. So that is the first thing that we find that Elijah teaches us about prayer. To approach God, being conscious of God.

But secondly, Elijah was conscious of sin. This was one of the reasons that prompted him to this prayer to God.

It is easy for us to pray mechanically. To use form of words. That is the easiest way to pray.

- [26 : 10] To pray just mechanically using a form of words. But Elijah was truly conscious and troubled regarding the great sin of his own day.

Perhaps the cause of the lack of earnest prayer in my life, and maybe yours, is the fact that we are not truly conscious of the sin of our day.

And the fearful consequences of sin. Perhaps we are not aware that the Lord can judge our nation for their sin.

As was happening in Israel in the day of Elijah. But I would like us to think of personal sin and its consequences. My sin and yours also has consequences.

Have you ever paused to think of what it really is entailed in that phrase? But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness.

- [27 : 15] There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Have we ever paused to seriously think of the consequences of living a life in sin?

Well, Elijah knew the word of God. And he knew that in Deuteronomy 11, there it is written, to the children of Israel and to me and you, take heed to yourselves that your heart be not deceived.

And ye turn aside and send other gods and worship them. And then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you.

And he shut up the heaven that there be no rain and that the land yield not a fruit unless ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you.

Elijah studied the word of God and he knew from God's word that God would judge the nation for their sin. And he lived in this expectation that the judgment of God would be revealed against the nation.

- [28 : 35] And I use this word expectation with caution because I think it is a word that can be missing from my prayer life as regarding the wickedness of our day.

And by that I mean, have I any expectation that the word of God tells me that God will judge the wickedness and the sin of a nation?

Have I that expectation through the word of God that the word tells me that he will punish the wicked?

That he will punish the sinner? That he will destroy the sinner that does not repent? Do I really expect that to happen? And if I expect that to happen, what about my prayer life?

What about my concern? For the sins of the nation? For the sins of individual people? For the sin of my own life? Do I expect God to punish the wickedness of our nation?

- [29 : 48] More so on, do I expect God to judge the sin of my own life? What about you? Do you expect God to judge the sin of your own personal lives?

Well, as Elijah prayed on his knees to God, he was conscious of who God was. And he was conscious through God's word of what sin is and of the consequences of sin.

And all that made Elijah a man of fervent prayer. And dear friend, if these elements were my concern and your concern, if we were conscious of who God is, if we were conscious of the consequences of sin that has not been forgiven through Jesus Christ, then surely it would lead us to our knees and to be like Elijah, a man, a woman of fervent prayer.

thirdly, as a man of prayer, he was zealous for the glory of God. A.W. Pink says, why was it that Elijah prayed that it might not rain?

Not because he was unreceptive to human suffering, not because he took a malicious delight in witnessing the misery of his neighbors, but because he put the glory of God before everything else, even his own natural feelings.

[31 : 28] You may think that it's love and kindness to keep from people the consequences of what their sins deserve.

Maybe you think that it is love and kindness and compassion to keep from people to tell them about hell, to tell them about the consequences of sin that is unforgiven through Jesus Christ.

Well, it's not kindness. It is not love. In fact, it is probably bordering upon the fact of deceiving people that all is well when the truth is that all is not well.

We must rise above our natural feelings and tell people that unless they repent and trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation, they are lost.

They are heading to that place of outer darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Of course, there is that natural feeling among us not to offend people.

[32 : 55] But as Martin Lloyd-Jones says, if the gospel does not offend, it is not a gospel. the gospel always offends because we don't like to be told what we are like.

We don't like to be told what our sins are like. We don't like to be told what our sins deserve. It always causes offence.

But we don't want to deceive anyone here today. We don't want to say all is well, go on in your sin. All is well, all will be fine at the end.

No, we want to tell you the truth. We don't want to deceive you. We don't want to say that all is well when all is not well with your life of sin.

There is much more in the prayer life of Elijah than we have spoken of today. And you become aware of that as you continue to read in the ensuing chapters.

[34 : 08] But here is a man subject to like passions as we are, living in an evil day when there was little if any regard for God, when sin was looked upon as being trivial.

Similar to our own day, but Elijah laboured fervently prayer, because he was conscious of the living and true God.

He was conscious of sin and its consequences. He knew the word of God and that God would judge sin in a most severe way.

His prayer may sound very harsh to us, but his motive was for God's intervention, to bring his people to repentance and to know the greater blessing of God, because we need God's intervention and we must pray for God's intervention and remember that it may be forged with hardships.

Elijah's life was immersed with the word of God. He lived out the word of God and that at times, as we see in the ensuing chapters of his life, was not easy, but forged with hardship and difficulties.

[35 : 35] And yet, here he is praying for God's intervention in order to bring the people to repentance, so that the people would know the greater blessings of God.

Elijah has many lessons to teach us about prayer life, how we are to learn from the word of God and how we are to turn the word of God into prayer.

May we then today learn to labour fervently, be conscious of the living and through God, to be conscious of sin and its consequences, to be immersed in the word of God and understand that God will judge sin in a most severe way.

prayer. So let us pray for God's intervention to turn the people to repentance so that they may know the greater blessing of God.

Let us be a people of fervent, earnest prayer. May the Lord bless our thoughts. Let us pray.