

MOSES (2)

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Date: 02 August 2015

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[0 : 00] Well, if we open our Bibles again at that passage we read back in chapter 18 of 1 Kings, I want to speak today about confidence in the supremacy of God.

Confidence in the supremacy of God as seen in this showdown that we read about of Elijah confronting the prophets of Baal, jealous for the honour of the Lord, anxious to see his people, his fellow Israelites, turn wholeheartedly back to the Lord.

But it's this sense of confidence that I really want to speak to us today, that it may profit and encourage and challenge us on in the Christian life. It's the security of knowing that with God that we are able to face all sorts of difficulties and challenges, that on our own we are overwhelmed by, over-faced, that we are in fear of, that we would rather do a U-turn and go away from.

But sometimes there are problems in life that are part of our circumstances and we cannot turn away. And so I pray that this message will be a comfort to us as if you are going through a period of unemployment or there is maybe a health, life and death type of health incident in your life, or whether it's a marital breakdown or just a breakdown in the kind of family unit.

All of these things, facing bereavement, of suddenly being stripped of your life's partner and having to go it on your own.

[2 : 02] These are big challenges and often too big for us to face on our own. And we need to know that sense of God walking with us and our sense of our seeking and thirsting to know more of him.

That the reality of his presence in our life may be that much more felt. That we'd know his prompting, his still and quiet voice whispering to us and encouraging us forward and making all the difference.

So that's our theme, the big theme this morning. And what I'm wanting to look at through this passage is the process that Elijah went through to acquire the confidence to move ahead in confidence of the power of God to face this ultimate showdown that we read about here.

I want to highlight three things in this passage, which addresses this process of finding confidence in the supremacy of God.

One is that we see Elijah as a man in tune with God. A man in tune with God. We'll look at that. Secondly, that he was a man that had a jealous honor for the Lord.

[3 : 25] He wanted to see the Lord in his rightful place at the center of the nation where the people would reject their idols and their other worship to follow the Lord wholeheartedly.

And lastly, we see the prophet with a sense of great risk-taking trust in a very hostile environment.

So those are the three things we're looking at. And they result not just in a show of power, a demonstration of the almightiness of the Lord, but it results in the ultimate goal, and that is the restoration of God's people, to come to their senses, to repent, and find the gracious and forgiving arms of the Lord to be received once again by him.

That is the ultimate picture and the ultimate thing of all mission. Just to put this passage in context, I'm aware that many of you will know the story from old days, from Sunday school days, and you probably read it and heard sermons on it from time to time.

But just for the benefit of some revision, and perhaps for those that are not so familiar with it, why is there this showdown with the prophets of Baal?

[4 : 53] Well, Ahab was the king that was installed in Israel, and it says back in chapter 16 of 1 Kings, there's a helpful praises as you go through Kings, about whether 1 King did good or did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and it comes out very strongly that Ahab did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

And two things that his wickedness was renowned for, is that it's said that he committed the sins of Jeroboam, and Jeroboam, he, when the nation was divided, and they no longer had Jerusalem at the hub, Jeroboam set up two golden calves, one in the north and one in the south of the country, and he said, he declared, these are your gods, here are your gods who brought you up out of Egypt, putting, substituting the greatness and the magnificence of the living God with an image made of gold.

And so Ahab reintroduced this abomination, and he built high places, shrines in the high places where human sacrifice was practiced, and he married Jezebel, not even a fellow Jew, but the daughter of the king of Sidon, who really promoted idolatry in the nation.

She provided food at her table for 450 prophets of Baal, and 450 prophets of Asherah. So a big move to instigate a new worship, a turning away from the Lord.

And so the life of the nation had really hit rock bottom at the stage. But at this low ebb, and this is where it's always encouraging with the Lord, when we see things that are going from bad to worse, God does not abandon us, and we need to take hope in our own times as well, as we see things deteriorating, and the nation becoming increasingly secular and hostile to the Christian message, that God does not abandon his people.

[7 : 10] At this low ebb, God called a prophet. And what a prophet. So the prophet Elijah was brought into the foreground, and it seems that he suddenly emerges on the scene in chapter 17, verse 1.

Here's the first mention of Elijah. Now Elijah the Tishbite of Tishbi and Gilead said to Ahab, As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my word.

And that was the prophetic utterance that Elijah gives to Ahab. It is an utterance of judgment.

It is the Lord's judgment, not Elijah's judgment. He is repeating faithfully what the Lord has decreed, that there shall from that point be no more rain, no more moisture to bring life and nourishment to the crops and the plants, and that the people are going to descend into this period of drought that would lead to famine.

All signs of God's judgment upon the nation because they had rejected God and replaced him with the worship of worthless idols.

[8 : 36] So, coming back to our core theme about how did Elijah become this great prophet, first of all, I said that he was a man who was in tune with God.

And I want this to be something that we can apply to our own lives as well. He hears God because he made it his aim to seek and to know God.

There are no shortcuts to getting to know God. It is a devotional exercise of the heart, a desire with all our mind and soul, spirit and strength to want to know him through avidly reading his word, reflecting, hearing the preaching of his words.

Elijah would have grown up in the school of the prophets, and he was schooled in these things. But he stood apart as one who sought God exceptionally.

In verse 2 of that chapter 17, when he makes this announcement that there's going to be no more rain, that there's going to be a time of severe drought in the nation, God instructs him to go across the Jordan, out of the demarked boundaries of the land, and into a desert region.

[10 : 06] And there is a brook there called the Kedrith Brook. And if you think about it, there's a time of famine, time of drought. It's not the sort of place that you would expect to be told to go, into a desert place, into a ravine.

Our own logic would suggest be with people that are well to do, and maybe they will provide for you, maybe to work hard at it.

But no, God tells him to do something which is fairly unthinkable. And I think this is one of the trademarks that we see, not of Elijah, but of God's people, that they are prepared to trust God, despite human will and reasoning and rationale that often stands and thinks, this is absurd going into the desert to be provided for.

But he did. And there was the water in the brook, but God provided meat and bread two times a day, brought miraculously by ravens.

And we see the miraculous, because here is a man who is wholeheartedly desiring to follow God, and wholeheartedly obeying God, even though humanly it doesn't make much sense.

[11 : 34] And that's what sets him apart. And when the brook dries up, he's then sent by God to a widow. Again, not within Israel, but outside.

And there, again, it challenges faith, you know. Here's a lonely widow with a son, and, you know, not of the people of God, not the likely candidate you would expect to be the provider for God's prophets.

And again, we see Elijah as being, trusting, believing in the word of God, and following him wholeheartedly, even though, again, I'm sure it did not make sense.

But he knew enough about God that he was prepared to take the risk. And this is something that marks him out and prepares him for what is to come.

So, Elijah, we see as one who hears, one who trusts, and one who obeys. And that is the simple definition of a disciple.

[12 : 46] One who hears, one who trusts, one who obeys. It challenges us this morning that how great is our own desire to know more of God.

Does God have that priority in our lives? How regular are we in reading and becoming fully acquainted to regard this word of God like a love letter that we read again and again, just as we do when we are in love and receive a letter from our beloved?

It's not something that we just read once and then put away. It's something we read again and again. How is our love for the Lord this morning?

Are we avidly desiring to know more of him, wanting to be a people who are alert, people who are listening, people who are awake, people who are wanting to move forward?

And desiring more of God that he may be known fully in our lives and be reflected in our person, in our words, in our behavior.

[14 : 06] So how are we following God's word this morning, acting upon his instruction? How are we responding to God's call and his prompts?

Do we often dismiss the call of God as something, as a figment of our own imagination, our troubled, warped conscience, as something that is irrational?

Elijah could have passed away. These calls to go to the Kareth Brook and to the widow in Zarephath as figments of his imagination. It takes discernment.

It is not easy to determine the will of God. But it's not right if we're always bypassing it by our own human understanding and our take on things.

That needs to be challenged if we are to hear the quiet and still authentic voice of the Lord. I was thinking of an example of someone that came to mind as a person that wholeheartedly followed God.

[15 : 17] And many people came to mind, especially older people, older saints. But I want to share with you about one young man who went out on a Latin Link individual placement to Peru.

And he was working there for a year with street children. And I happened to see him, my wife and I were visiting this district in Lima.

And there was this young man. He looked different in appearance, but he walked the walk of these young people. He just seemed to be one with them and they just seemed to have such a rapport and a respect for him.

He was like a big brother type figure. And his Spanish was exceptionally good. And I could tell you many things about him, but one thing I want to recall, we had a conference for the Peru team.

And this young man, Steve Corbin, had written a worship song which he had the bravery to sing. And he wasn't particularly, he didn't particularly have a good voice, which made it kind of stand out even more that he was courageous enough to share what the Lord had inspired him to write.

[16 : 41] And the words were of someone that really desired to know the Lord deeply. And they were very touching. And I think perhaps because he was not of a very good voice, he took more note of the words that he was wanting to communicate.

Well, three or four months after that visit, we got news that Steve Corbin had died while she was in Peru. He wasn't attacked or anything.

It was just an accidental death of retrieving a football from a roof that collapsed underneath him. And he died. And what was particularly of note is how the community responded to Stephen's death.

It seemed that all the kind of, the undesirable people that he spent his time with really took note and thought Steve had come and lived a short time amongst us because he was so desperate to want us to know the freedom in Christ, the freedom to be able to overcome addictions, the freedom to overcome temptations of robbery and other vices.

And there was quite a turning to the Lord through that young man's life. We don't understand the mysteries of God and his providences, but there was a short life, but lived to the full and lived for his Lord, burning brightly for the Lord.

[18 : 20] And I'll never forget Steve as one who seemed to be very much in tune with the Lord. Well, moving on, I want to look at secondly the sense of jealous honour that Elijah has for the Lord.

It's clear from his opening words in 1 Kings 17. He says this to the king, As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my words.

an indictment of judgment to the most powerful authority in the land who was godless. And yet this prophet of God did not shy away from saying these difficult words because he was more concerned and fearful of the Lord.

And we see his boldness again in chapter 18, verses 17 to 18. When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, Is it you, you troubler of Israel?

And Elijah answered, I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the bowels.

[19 : 40] Here's one who doesn't mince his words. I would say, you know, this is appropriate for the situation of a very hostile king who had brought this drought, this judgment upon the land by his inciting the nation to worship idols.

And here's the application to us. Are we proud of the one that we serve? Is he our prize, our joy, our hope, our delight, our trust?

How vocal are we for the Lord? How clear is it to others that we follow the Lord, not just by being here on a Sunday, but through our manner, our grace, our ability to forgive, our sense of showing love to those around us?

How clear is our lives as a testimony of a people that who are following God? Do we feel a jealous indignation as Elijah felt when people worshipped the wrong things?

When I was in Brazil, a pastor took it upon himself to help me understand the local situation.

[21 : 11] And we went down a street in the city of Recife, up in the northeast of Brazil, and there were some of these mega churches, Protestant, Evangelical, these were the labels that were on these churches.

And one in particular stood out as being particularly big and splendid and we walked inside, it could seat 4,000 people.

And this pastor told me that he'd been along to this church a few Sundays before, just out of curiosity to see how the worship was conducted. And he told me that at the beginning of the service, the minister came onto this kind of raised stage so that everyone, all the 4,000 people could see him.

And he had a shepherd's crook which he had painted red. And he makes the analogy to Jesus' words, I am the good shepherd, and the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

And he brandishes this crook as like a visual aid to demonstrate that. And this was the kind of element of biblical orthodoxy. So far, so good.

[22 : 25] But then he turns the crook upside down and he asks the audience, the congregation, what is this letter? And it's the letter L. And in the Portuguese alphabet, it's the 10th letter.

And he reminds them that it represents a number 10 and that it's painted red. And it so happens that their bank notes, the 10 denomination, is a red note.

And he says, the good shepherd says to you that if you want to be blessed this morning, if you want your prayers to be answered, that you will give 10 rias into the offering and God will bless you.

And the informant that if you don't give, you won't be blessed. And this sort of marriage of presumably of what the minister is saying is that as we give financially, we will receive spiritually.

It is a warped message. And it's a message that is peddled by so-called church ministers in parts of Brazil for their own profits to live in mansions and living off the profits of the poor.

[23 : 42] In fact, to call yourself evangelical in Brazil is to associate yourself with these sorts of practices. It has become a word of shame and deception.

And this is being passed for some expression of Christianity. It's not a biblical message. And when you hear it, you become indignant.

You feel jealous for the honor of the Lord. And this is something what Elijah was feeling that the people had turned their backs upon the Lord and had brought this judgment.

And then finally, we see Elijah, the prophet, who has this ability to take risks because he fully trusts in the one whom he serves.

Despite the hostility of the environment, Elijah declares in verse 19 of chapter 18, Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asher who eat at Jezebel's table.

[24 : 59] And he prepares this contest and said that these, all these false prophets, they can shout and pray and petition the Baal to send down fire from heaven.

And when they're done, I will do the same. And the God who responds with fire, he is the true God. And they prepare this sacrifice. And a bull is laid on a wooden pyre.

And the prophets of Baal, they chant from dawn to noon. and they're working themselves into a frenzy. Noon passes still, there's no fire from heaven.

And they work at it all afternoon. They start slashing their body with swords. You can imagine the ferocity of their worship. The fervor there was certainly undented.

And come evening, there had been no answer. And you can see Elijah's sense of confidence in God.

[26 : 05] When you read verse 27, he challenges these prophets of Baal. He says, At noon, Elijah mocked them saying, Cry aloud, for he is God. For he is a God.

Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened. And there is that sense of confidence that it's only God who is going to answer in this way.

Despite the fervor of these false prophets, nothing is going to happen. And he has that sense of confidence that only in God will far come down from heaven.

And it's a foregone conclusion as far as Elijah was concerned. He's not intimidated by the shouts, the excesses, and the blood that is flowing from these Baal worshippers.

And when it comes his turn to demonstrate the supremacy of God, it's not enough to just call down fire from heaven. He has these water jars poured three times over the sacrifice so that the wood is saturated.

[27 : 19] The trench that is dug around the altar is filled with this precious commodity of water in the time of droughts. It reminds me of the epitaph that was put on Lord Lawrence's tomb.

He was a civil servant, a godly man in India. And written on his tomb these words, he feared man so little because he feared God so much.

And this is so true of Elijah. He didn't fear the king. the nation, these prophets of Baal and Jezebel at that moment. Because he was so full of the fear of the Lord and a sense that the Lord was going to be the one who would reveal himself to turn the people back to the Lord.

Paul says in Romans 8.31, if God is for us, who can be against us? I mean, I put it succinctly, simply. You know, whatever forces are against us this day, they are nothing compared to the absolute supremacy, the majesty, the almightiness of God.

Everything that stands opposed to God is minuscule when we look at the magnitude of our Lord God. If God is for us, who can be against us?

[28 : 49] think of, I'm sure you know of missionaries in volatile situations and working in refugee camps in Turkey, maybe even ministering in Iraq and Syria, people who are working in the streets of South America, living precariously, danger of life, day and night, and yet the Lord puts a hedge around them.

It's not a foolproof guarantee, but it's amazing that our workers continue in the work that they do because of that sense of God being with them.

And ultimately, what all this build-up, this show of strength, this answer of God by consuming that sacrifice that Elijah has prepared, is consumed with this bolt of fire that comes from heaven.

And the people, they cry out that allowed, he is God, he is God. And it's clear from Elijah's prayer, in verse 36, that he is not wanting a power showdown.

He says here in verse 36, O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, that I have done all these things at your word.

[30 : 38] Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know you. this is the main point, that these people may know you. It's not just to demonstrate the might and glory of God, but it's to demonstrate his love, his graciousness, his ability to forgive, his outstretched arms for people who are worthless in the sight of man, but in God's eyes, he desires to rescue us.

And this is his ultimate aim in the showdown, that people would come to acknowledge and to know him, that he would be a father to them, and that this judgment of the drought and the ensuing famine may be lifted, which it does at the end of the scene, as people turn back to God.

And that is the big demonstration of God's absolute graciousness for us. And so in conclusion, in a sense, Elijah was God's special envoy for a very dark era of terrible persecution in the land where God's prophets were being slaughtered.

But the scripture reminds us in James 5.17 that Elijah was a man just like us. That is to say that we are all potential Elijahs.

We serve the same God. We have the same ability. potential to follow in this prophetic footsteps.

[32 : 19] And so it is a challenge to us this day about our own sense of devotion and our prayer, about being desiring to be in tune, in step with the Spirit, jealous for the honour of God and this readiness to take risks.

Hudson Taylor said, you know, unless there is an element of risks in our exploits for God, there is no need for faith. So often we are so earthbound calculating, can we do it?

Do we have the money? Do we have the resources? And sure we need to consider these things, but there are times when God calls us to step beyond, out of our depth, to reach beyond our grasp.

Elijah was a man like us. He fluctuated, he had his doubts. This was his finest moment, but he, afterwards, he ran in fear of his life.

He got seriously depressed, he ran away, he wanted to curl up and die. And I'm sure these are sentiments that we have at times been familiar with.

[33 : 38] But here is his finest hour, and here he is as a model for us. Let's pray, and we'll come to sing our final item of praise.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your strong hands that has been upon our lives. We thank you for those of us who can say and call you Father and Lord, that we have known that strong hand pick us up out of the pit and set our feet upon a rock, a firm rock that cannot be moved.

And we thank you for that salvation that we have in Christ. We thank you for that extravagance of your love that went the way of the cross to demonstrate your absolute love, your unconditional love for us.

Thank you for such strong affections. thank you for seeking us out. Thank you that you seek and speak to us this day through your word, desiring that we may be a people that will rise to the challenge of desiring to follow you more, to know you fully, to make you known, to delight in you, to highly prize you.

Make us a people after your own heart. Deliver us from our half-heartedness, from our lukewarm ways, we pray, Lord. Help us to be a people that are living on the edge of eternity, that want this day to count because you are at the end of it, you are in the midst of it.

[35 : 16] We seek our lives to be caught up in your spirit, that we may rise to bigger things. Help us to overcome the things that beset us, the sins that entangle us, the half-heartedness that creeps in.

Help us unreservedly to strip ourselves of these things of the world that hold us back and weigh us down and help us to run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Help us to fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus, who for the prize set before him scorned the cross. help us Father, in this time of analysis as you penetrate into our lives and the hidden things that are secret between us and you and no one else and deliver us from the shame, the ignominy, the temptations, the half-heartedness.

And thank you for your grace, your restoration that you clean us whiter than the snow. Thank you for the blood of Christ that is so effective in removing our disgrace and setting us as sons and daughters of our heavenly Father.

Thank you for your love and commitment to us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Our final psalm is Psalm 95 from the Scottish Psalter.

[37 : 04] You'll find it on page 357. Psalm 95 and we'll sing from verses 1 to 7 to the tune of Gainsborough. O come, let us sing to the Lord.

Come, let us, everyone, a joyful noise make to the rock of our salvation. let us before his presence come with praise and thankful voice, let us sing psalms to him with grace and make a joyful noise.

So I invite you that we rise and make that joyful noise to the Father who delights in hearing from his children.

Amen. O come, let us bid go, let us sing to the rock of our salvation.

salvation let us before his presence come with praise and thankful voice let God sing songs to him with grace and make a joyful noise for God our great God and great King above all God he is depth of the earth are in his hand the strength of his his to him the station see belongs for he that sins in me the pride that lost so from his hands its form at first that first did he that first did he

[39 : 57] O come and let us worship him let us bow down with all down with all and on our feet before the Lord our our and on our and on our and on peace our God the people we of his own pasture have and on his hand that sheep to him if he his voice will hear if you please allow us to get to the main door after the benediction thank you and now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever amen