

Frustrated or Faithful Followers

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[0 : 00] for a time to our reading in 1 Kings. 1 Kings chapter 19. We're going to have a look at the section that we read, verse 1 to verse 18, but we can read again at verse 9.

There it says, there he, Elijah, came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, what are you doing here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. And I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away. Are you a frustrated or a faithful follower of Christ?

Next, as we look at the life of Elijah and the experiences that he went through, you find in his own life, a mixture of many different emotions, many ups and downs along the way. And we are reminded as we read this account, and as we look at our own lives, and we look at what goes on around us, how quickly our emotions can change, and how situations and circumstances can so quickly change the way we're feeling. You see it happening in many different walks of life.

You see the emotions involved in sport. By one minute, people are on a great high. The next minute, people are on a great low. You see it among every level of life and every walk of life. You see it with rich and famous and powerful people. People who, in one minute, have everything at hand, and in the next, because of some scandal or wrong decision, they are left with nothing. All the different ups and downs. It happens to every one of us. Our lives are often filled with so many contrasting emotions, emotions of joy, emotions of sadness, and so it goes on. But you may say the Christian life is different. The Christian life is a life that's stable, secure. You're settled.

You're sure of everything. No worries. No anxieties anymore. Nothing changes our emotions as Christians. If I was to ask you if that was the case tonight, I'm sure you would all say, well, that's just not true. We all know that we are not immune to all these different ups and downs in life. We are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made, and the Lord knows every emotion that we go through. The reality of the Christian life is one of ups and downs along the way. But one where we have a Lord and a God, and the one who does not change, and that we can be sure of him and sure in him. And that's what we learn in Elijah's experience here. His experience reminds us of the highs and lows that come of being a follower of God, of being a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. There were times when he was faithfully following with joy the Lord. Other times when he was frustrated in his following of the Lord. And it's these two lessons that we want to think about this evening. Frustration and faithfulness in following the Lord.

[3 : 50] If you go back to the previous chapters, chapters 17 and 18, and you can maybe just look over it later on, and you see what's happening there in this overall story of Elijah's life. There was a time of severe drought in the land, and yet God had miraculously provided for Elijah. He had provided also for the widow who looked after him and her son. And even when tragedy struck that home and her son died, Elijah, through the power of God, brought him to life. Then you read on and you see Elijah facing up to the followers of Baal, those who challenged him to see if he could call down fire onto the altar.

And again, you see there God's awesome power. The prophets of Baal destroyed, Elijah's prayer answered, and how God miraculously sent rain. And you would think here is someone who is strong in the Lord and all is well. Things are going well for him, faithfully following God. But then you come into chapter 19, and here we see a different side of Elijah's life. Here we see how a threat surrounds him.

His very life was under threat here. And in all the highs that he enjoyed, now we see the lows that he experiences. There are times when we will be frustrated too. We all experience frustrations in our life, frustrations with ourselves. How often we let the Lord down, how often we let others down. We're often frustrated with ourselves. We'll be frustrated with others. We'll be frustrated with things that are going on around us.

We'll be frustrated with the way things are going around us. Maybe even in church, there can be frustrations that so easily creep into our hearts. Things aren't going the way we would want them to be going. Things aren't moving as quickly as we want them to move. There are so many different kinds of frustrations that come in. And perhaps even we become frustrated with God. What is he doing?

Why isn't he acting? Why isn't he working as quick as we would want him to work? No one is immune to frustration. But we remember in all our frustrations that God is never far away. He is never far away to help. And he reminds us to be faithful, even in our times of frustration. God calls us to trust him.

[6 : 49] And that's what we are seeing with Elijah here. There is an element of frustration in the way in his experience with the Lord here. But the Lord is saying, be faithful. And remember, I am with you. And remember, you are not alone. When everything seems to conspire against us, we remember God is faithful. And that's the lesson we want to see from Elijah here this evening. In the midst of frustration, a call to faithfulness. There's two ways we want to look at this. The first thing we see is Elijah's problem and God's provision.

And then the second thing we see is Elijah's passion and God's promise. So the first thing we see is Elijah's problem and God's provision. To begin to read through this chapter, it's easy to conclude that Elijah is running away in fear. And as he comes to this mountain, as he comes to Mount Horeb and to this cave where he lodges for a time, that God comes and rebukes him to return to where he came from.

You read verse three there. And it says, then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came up to Beersheba. But you can actually read that another way. And other translations will use not the word afraid, but that Elijah saw and he arose and ran for his life. And that changes things for us.

It's a subtle change. But it changes things for us in the way that we see Elijah's life here. What was it that Elijah was seeing? What was he seeing around him that made him run?

And run to where he went as God led him, even without his realizing? Well, Elijah was seeing a people who were disobedient to God.

[9 : 10] A people who were out to get him and any who worshipped God. A people who were unresponsive to God, despite all that they had seen and heard of him.

All the miraculous things that they'd seen. Elijah calling down fire and fire coming upon the altar.

Rain coming when it hadn't rained for so long. And yet when Elijah prayed, the rain came.

And you would say to yourself, well, surely they will see God. And yet what do we find the familiar problem? It doesn't seem to matter what we do or say at times.

Nothing seems to change people's hearts. There is often the problem of frustration. Frustration in seeing a people just turning blindly away from God.

Not heeding anything that we or anyone would say to them. No matter how much you warn, no matter how much you say, no matter how much you maybe feel you're praying for them.

[10 : 20] Nothing seems to make a difference. I've heard people say, you have been encouraged under God's word. How can people not believe?

And yet we know that unless the Lord opens their heart and the spirit awakes, that they cannot see. But sometimes it's a frustration.

And that's a frustration that Elijah had here as well. He was looking around. He was seeing what was happening. He was feeling alone in it all.

And he ran away. Ran for his life. Came to Beersheba. And we ask ourselves, what are we to do in our situation of frustration?

Where are we to go? Well, we are to take it to the Lord. Elijah and his frustration goes away. So that Jezebel might not have victory over him.

[11 : 22] He is saying to the Lord, Lord, you deal with my life. Don't let my enemy take it from me. You take it. But what we see is the Lord has a different plan.

Elijah's initial frustration may have the wrong motives. But what it does is it has the right results.

And Elijah here, he comes away. He comes away from the situation for a time. And in coming away from the situation.

He begins to realize, even without realizing, God is working alongside him. And what you see is, as he goes on this journey through the wilderness, as he comes to the broom tree, as he has all this

somber feeling upon him and the frustrations weighing heavy upon him, the Lord comes to him. In verse 5, it says, he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, arise and eat.

[12:32] And his frustration in all that was going on. And his frustration in all that was going on. The Lord remembered him. He gave him encouragement. He gave him something to eat.

But he spoke. He gave him a word. In verse 7, we see the same thing happening. The angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, arise and eat.

For the journey is too great for you. What journey, we might ask. What journey was Elijah on? Had he planned this?

No, but the Lord had. The Lord was taking him to a place where he would show him who he was and give him a powerful reminder.

He came away. It may have been in the wrong way initially, but it was for the right outcome. And there's a lesson for that in us too.

[13:31] There are times maybe when we have this sense of frustration in the way things are going. And frustration can easily eat away. Frustration can easily cause division.

And we have to guard against it. And the way to guard against it is to sometimes just take a step back. Take a step away and allow the Lord to help us get things in perspective.

When you look at the life of Christ Jesus, not that he was frustrated in things, but you see the lessons you learn from him, that he often took time away for himself in prayer with the Father.

In the midst of everything that was going on and all the people who were crowding around, wanting to hear him, wanting his touch, wanting his healing, the Lord Jesus took time away to spend with the Father.

And there's a great lesson in that for ourselves too. In our frustrations, we can easily allow them to boil over. But instead, we are to take them to the Lord.

[14:39] Elijah's problem is met with God's provision. And God reminds us often that he provides for us in every way.

And it's no coincidence where this journey takes Elijah. As you see in verse 8, He arose and ate and drank and went in the strength of that food, 40 days and 40 nights to Horeb, the Mount of God. The place of God's blessing. A place that Moses had known in his own past as well. In Exodus chapter 3, verse 1, it says, Now when Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and he came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

It was a place where God reminds his people in the Old Testament of his covenant, of his promise, and a place where God provides and helps them to go on in his strength.

And it's a reminder to us to keep coming back to the provision that God has made for us. To keep coming back to his word. To keep coming back to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[16:00] To keep returning with, yes, sometimes all our frustrations, but faithfully coming to God who is able to provide. Charles Swindle, in one of his books called One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, he says this, Every problem is an opportunity to prove God's power.

Every day we encounter countless golden opportunities, brilliantly disguised as insurmountable problems.

So do we see problems or do we see opportunities? Are we frustrated or are we faithful?

If we're frustrated, we'll see insurmountable problems. But the more we are faithful, the more we will see golden opportunities.

We take our frustrations to the Lord. The Lord of the covenant. The Lord of promise. We come through Jesus Christ.

[17:11] Through that place that has been opened up for us. Through the way that is the Lord Jesus. Elijah's problems were met with God's provision.

And so can our problems be met with God's provision too, if we faithfully come to him. But then we have the second lesson in Elijah's life here.

And then we see Elijah's passion and God's promise. Having journeyed to the Mount Horeb, God then asks Elijah a question.

We see that in verse 9. He asks him, what are you doing here, Elijah? And again, some take this as a rebuke. What are you doing here?

This is not the place you should be. But rather than seeing it a question of rebuke, you should maybe see it more as a question of concern. That God is concerned for Elijah.

[18 : 15] God is concerned for the burdens that he has. God is interested in what he is doing. And when he asks this question, God is giving Elijah the chance to respond.

And as Elijah responds, what we see is his great passion. What brings Elijah here? What is his response in verse 10?

He says, I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars.

They've killed your prophets with a sword. And I, even I only am left. And they seek my life to take it away. You see here, yes, his frustration, but also his passion.

He's hurting. He's hurting. He's hurting over unrepentant sinners. He's hurting and upset over their indifference to God.

[19 : 20] And do you read verse 10? Do you see him complaining or compassionate? He's compassionate. He's concerned. And his great concern, he's jealous for the Lord's cause.

The Lord's cause is what is so important to him. He wants to see God's cause flourish. We see here Elijah's passion.

And as we do, we ask ourselves, is that the same passion that we have? As we look around ourselves, as we look and see what is around us and the people that are around us, do we have this passion?

Are we jealous for the Lord? Are we jealous for the people that we see around us? Do we see that indifference? How they have forsaken his covenant, thrown down his altars.

There's no worship of God. Are we more concerned about what we want ourselves out of church or what we are putting in?

[20 : 25] Are we jealous for the Lord? Do we have that passion for him? Twice here, you see the same question asked, verse 9 and 10, and then verse 13 and 14.

And each time Elijah's answer is the same. He is jealous for the Lord's cause. He has a passion.

And do we have this passion for the Lord's work and the lost souls around us? In this, God's reminder is that he is pleasant with Elijah.

He feels alone. He feels frustrated, but God is saying, Elijah, I am with you. Not in the amazing, wondrous signs of the earthquake or the fire or the wind, but in the still, small voice.

God is speaking. And as somebody said, faith can be content with the word of God and not with the one that assigns.

[21 : 36] Because God's word is living and active. God's word is powerful. That's what Elijah is being reminded of here. That's what we are being reminded of too.

God reminds him, I am with you. And he reminds him too that he is not alone in the question that he says, I, even I, only am left.

God says, no, I have 7,000 more who have not bowed the knee to Baal. You are not alone. And we are not alone.

We are all in this together. As we've heard in our prayers this evening, prayers for unity, prayer for togetherness, prayer for going forward together in all of these ways, we remind ourselves we are together, brothers and sisters in Christ.

bringing, yes, our frustrations at times, bringing them to God in prayer and remembering what God can do. The missionary Hudson Taylor went to China many years ago.

[22 : 46] We had a complete trust in God's faithfulness. And in his journal, he once wrote this, our heavenly father is a very experienced one.

He knows very well that his children wake up with a good appetite every morning. He sustained 3 million Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years.

We do not expect he will send 3 million missionaries to China. But he said, if he did, he would have ample means to sustain them all.

going on to say then, depend on it. God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply.

He trusted in God's faithfulness. And Elijah is here encouraged to do likewise. As you see in verse 15, the Lord said to him, go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus.

[23 : 49] He puts him back. He's saying, you are not alone. I am with you. Yes, Elijah, you've been frustrated. But keep on being faithful.

Do you get frustrated in the work sometimes? Are there frustrations that you feel even now in the work of the gospel?

You know, I hope you do. Because if you're frustrated, it's a sign you want greater. It's a sign you want greater things from God and you want greater things for God.

The day we're satisfied with what we have is the day we should be troubled. While there are lost people around us, we are to be frustrated.

We are to be jealous for the cause of the Lord, praying more earnestly to him that he would bring them in, being jealous for his cause and in our frustrations faithfully coming to God.

[25 : 02] There are so many stories told by God's people down through all the years of time, down through every generation, people who experienced hardships for the Lord, suffered for the Lord.

You read biographies and autobiographies about Christians serving God in all parts of the world. So many different experiences. One lady called Helen Rosevia, she was a missionary in the African Congo and she was taken prisoner for a time in 1964.

She suffered much at the hands of those who took her captive. She suffered terribly and she found herself asking the question over these days, she was saying, is it worth it?

In all her suffering, she was asking, is it worth it? But then as the days were going on and she was thinking through all of these thoughts, she started to count and look at the cost of following Jesus. But she sensed God speaking to her and reassuring her. And years later, she explained it in this way. She said, when the awful moments came during the rebellion and the price seemed too high to pay, the Lord seemed to say, me, change the question.

[26 : 23] It's not, is it worth it? It's, am I worthy? And she concluded, in spite of everything she had suffered, always the answer is, yes, he is worthy.

And you see with Elijah here, through all that he was suffering, he's able to say, he is worthy. He is worthy to be praised, for he is a great and a glorious God.

And as we think of our own way of living here, as we think of serving the Lord, is it worth it? Well, he is worthy.

worthy. He is worthy of all of our giving. In the book of Revelation, you see there gathered around the throne, a great crowd in a loud voice saying, worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.

And that is the one who we serve. Yes, frustrated at times. And rightly so, but may our frustrations be jealous for the Lord, concerned for the lost, concerned for his cause, and may it bring us to be faithful, to faithfully serve, remembering we are not alone.

[27 : 57] God is with us. and in this place he has his people. Let us be faithful and passionate, taking our frustration to the Lord, being reminded that he is a God of faithful covenant promise.

May we meet with him day by day, put our trust in him and go forward in his strength. Let us pray. our Father in heaven, we thank you that we learn so much through the experience of your people. We learn through the experience of your people throughout your scripture. We thank you for Elijah, for the way he served you, for the way he was faithful to you, and even in his frustration, the way you restored him and brought him back to yourself to see your glory, to go on serving you in his strength.

We thank you for the many you have called to serve you. In many different parts of the world, we have so many great examples to us. We thank you above all, Lord, that you have called each of us to serve you.

We all have a part to play. We all have the experience of frustrations in this life. But we thank you that we are all too called to be faithful to you.

[29 : 21] So may you encourage us and strengthen us and help us to that end to be faithful and to pray to the God who is able, one who is able to do abundantly more than we ask or imagine.

Make us jealous for your cause as we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to