

The LORD speaks to Elijah

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Date: 28 August 2015

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn again to chapter 17 of 1 Kings.

And I want us this evening just to spend a little bit of time considering this first section down to the end of verse 7, although inevitably we might drift into the incident that follows from that too.

And perhaps I know that people like a verse or a text or something to hold on to, and perhaps one of the great statements even in this section is that the word of the Lord came to him.

You have that in verse 2. The word of the Lord came to Elijah. I always feel it's good for us to consider some of the characters, the personalities of the Bible.

Well, we can learn a lot from them. We can learn even the bad characters and the traits that they had, and the consequences that followed as a result of the way that they abandoned, deserted the law and the word of God.

[1 : 32] And when we think about that, we don't have to go any further than the last part of this portion that we read, the last part of chapter 16, where we see something of the liaison that takes place here with Jezebel and the way in which she and Ahab set about to destroy and to bring down, and especially as they did it in particular relation to this man that, in a sense, bursts on the scene at the beginning of chapter 17, this man Elijah.

Now, he's an interesting character. Apart from anything else, we don't know anything really about him, other than that he appears for us here in 1 Kings 17.

And we're told a little bit of his background. He's a Tishbite from a place called Tishbe, which was in Gilead. And yet he's called of the Lord, perhaps in a sense almost from obscurity.

And yet he's given a very important task to go and confront Ahab. And as a consequence, of course, of confronting Ahab, he's also going to confront Jezebel.

And it's reminding us that God works for his own purposes and for his own glory, often through individuals, through characters that appear on the pages of Scripture, and from which, as I said a moment ago, you and I can learn.

[3 : 22] Now, it should be something that is of great importance to us, to be wanting to learn.

Some of us came to learning a bit later on in life than perhaps we should have. But nevertheless, it's good for us to learn. And it's good for us to learn, especially with believers, to learn from God's Word, to see and to hear what God's Word has to say to us.

And while I'm sure, as I was looking at this myself, I probably read this, I don't know how many times over the years, and even this week since I kind of set my mind on speaking about this, a number of times I've read this short passage.

And the interesting thing for us sometimes as we do that is to discover that perhaps something we've missed, perhaps something we've never really thought about, comes to the fore.

I'm not saying that's going to take place tonight, but I'm saying that it is often the case when we're sometimes very familiar with Scripture that we can just skim read it and not really stop and listen and learn from the words, from the passage, and the context of the passage.

[4 : 49] And that's partly why I went back to the last part of chapter 16, because it sets in focus the actual challenge that will confront this man pulled, by human reckoning at least, from obscurity, to be God's prophet, to be God's spokesman.

And when you set him up against what we've read there from 29 down to the end of chapter 16, you see something of the task that lay before him.

In a sense, the enormity of the task, because he's pitting himself in the hands of God, but nevertheless against extraordinary forces of evil, whose whole bent was on destroy, and whose whole bent was on more and more idol worship being set out within the land.

In other words, the dismissal of what is called here, what Elijah calls here, the God of Israel, the dismissal of the God of Israel, and the proliferation of idolatry and of idol worships.

And of course, that was wholly against what was originally set out by the hand of God, by the commandments, by Moses, and right down through the history of God's people.

[6 : 23] It was that thou shalt have no other gods before me. And so, this was clearly the order, and yet here is this formidable pair and their cohorts, and they're set on bringing disorder out of the order that God has made.

Indeed, they have already succeeded to a great extent in that. So, we're seeing something of the challenge that confronts this man. And I use that illustration to remind us of sometimes of the challenge that faces you and me as we try and live out our lives as God's people in an era, in an age that is to a great extent anti-Christianity, that is anti-God, that is anti-anything to do with the way of Christ and the way of the Church of Christ on earth.

And as that was a challenge for Elijah here, so sometimes, perhaps always, it's a challenge for you and for me.

And it's as we deal with these challenges, it's as we confront these challenges, it's as we see the, perhaps the pitfalls and the challenges, that we will need to come to listen and to learn again what God's word has to say to you and to me.

And it's as we do that, that sometimes his word is reinforced in our minds and in our hearts. And in that reinforcing, we are strengthened and of course the important element within the idea of strengthening is this, that we are not strengthened by ourselves or in ourselves, but strengthened by him and through faith believing in him.

[8 : 29] And in that sense of seeing almost the foreboding of the powers of evil as they wash against us, we are in one sense weak.

But in another sense, in this strength that he gives us, we are strong. And that's what you see with Elisha, that's what you see with Elijah.

Now I know that you can fast forward into chapter 19 and we might do that yet, but, and there you'll see something of his own weaknesses.

But we're reminded, and it's interesting because when you look for information about Elijah, you have to go to the New Testament, you have to go to the references in the Gospel, but you have especially a reference in the book of James.

And it's there perhaps you just get a key to something of this man's psyche, of the way he operated, the way he thought, and his own vulnerability.

[9 : 31] He was, James said, a man of like passions, like you and like me. And when we grasp these little words, which are so powerful in what they tell us about him, we are then, I suppose, encouraged, because we say he's not some sort of superhero that often the images that kids will have for something or other, there's always some sort of superhero.

that is invincible. We're not seeing anything of that. We're seeing that he is a man who shows sometimes his own frailties and his own weaknesses.

Again, that's why I say it's good for us to study something of the character of God's people, because that's what they were. They were God's people for God's time, for God's purpose, to bring glory to his name.

So that's perhaps a longer than usual introduction. Let's move on and see what we can glean from this man, Elijah. Well, first of all, his name means, the Lord is my God.

Now, that is highly significant. And you know, often you see through scripture that names have meaning. most of us here probably could find some kind of meaning for our names.

[11 : 03] Some of them might not be all that flattering, but others of them, you know, they might give us, which we don't need mostly, an ego booster. But here we have something that is significant, and it tells us something about his own nature.

We see something about his relationship with his Lord and with his God. And there are several things that burst out on the scene that show us something of his character.

For example, you're here in verse 1, as the Lord God lives, before whom I stand, even a phrase like that, you know, some of you might have a footnote in your Bible, and it manifests this, it says another way of describing that is to say this, I stand in the service of a king.

Now, when I read that, it kind of challenged me, and I hope it challenges you tonight, as I hope it challenges me, that when we're professing to know and to love the Lord Jesus Christ, we are able

to say, I stand in his service.

And of course, if we stand in his service, it extracts from our minds and from our things a whole lot of thoughts, I think. It challenges us, I think.

[12:40] It makes us ask ourselves, is this so with my life? Is this so in the way I live, in the way I walk and talk, and is it so in my witness as a believer?

Can it be said of me and of you tonight, I stand in the service of the king? That's what, I think, a significant thing to see right away in the life of this man, Elijah.

Not just that the Lord is my God, but I stand in service to him or for him. As I say, you ask yourself, and I ask myself tonight, is that so with me?

Is this a willingness that is, as I call it, a burning flame within me? Which makes me say, again, not in my own strength, we've touched not a moment ago, but in the strength he gives me that I stand in the service of the king.

Well, it does mean so many things, doesn't it? It means that I need to take up my cross and I need to follow him. And then it tells me, if I'm doing that, I need to follow him closely, walking closely with the Lord, following closely, my ear close to his mouth, hearing what he has to say to me, and many, many other things that we can extract from that.

[14:28] And I was wondering also to think especially about this prophecy that he gives, because it's quite amazing in many ways, because, you know, the way in which Ahab and Jezebel operated, it was such that the gods that they built, and especially the god Baal, he was a god of fertility.

And here is this man from Tishbe, this unknown quantity, obviously known to the two who he stands up against in particular, known to them, but unknown to us to a great extent, and yet well known now.

And he's saying to them, listen, with all you've got, and with all your gods which you have multiplied throughout the land, I stand in the service of the living God, and I'm telling you that in spite of you having set up this god of fertility, there's going to be no rain.

rain. And it's interesting and highly significant because he doesn't say there's not going to be any rain, he says it's going to be neither dew nor rain. Now we're told that even in these countries where sometimes where there would be periods of drought, there would often be an element of dew on the ground in the morning and in the evening.

but all of that is taken away. Now there's something else I think that's significant here, and it's simply this, that Elijah has the courage, the belief, the faith to utter what he knows God has said to him.

[16:20] Now I readily acknowledge that sometimes we can be wrong in our interpretation, but you know, the Lord caters even for our wrongness, and that's the wonder of his love and of his mercy, that he caters for our faults and our failings, which are to acquaint with all my ways, and he caters for these, but nevertheless there's this clear message that God has communicated to him, and God has made known to him, and this is not self-assurance, this is belief in what God has spoken to him, and the command that God has given to him, and he is to fulfill that command.

And I think there's a lesson in that for us too, isn't there? That as God's word speaks to you, and speaks to me, as it makes clear to me and to you, the path, the way, the different elements that comprise living in this world, as he makes these known to us, isn't it important for us to recognize them as his word to us, to you, to me, and as a consequence of that, to act upon, to fulfill what he asks you and me to do or to be in his service, the God whom I serve.

May I just ask in passing, is this the God that you serve tonight? God, is he your God? Is he your Christ?

Is he your Savior? Is he your friend? Are you coming to his table on his day, your spirit, as one who has experienced something of God's love and God's mercy?

mercy. That is the great blessing that God bestows upon his people. And if he has, then you come to his table and you're doing so because you serve him and him alone.

[18:49] You stand in the service of the king. And it's our responsibility, it's our duty, it's our privilege that is laid upon us to fulfill his command until he comes.

So, you look back at this man and you say to yourself, well, God is speaking to him. And you know, sometimes we say to ourselves, perhaps if God spoke to me the way with all this drama, with all this action being played out, then I would be more obedient to him.

I wonder if you would. I wonder if I would. You see, God uses his own means for your life and for mine.

And he uses it often in ways that we never thought he would, and we never thought would be possible. But he does that because he is the one only, the living and true God.

So, he confronts Aab with this message. There shall be neither June or rain these years, except by my word.

[20 : 10] And we know that that was fulfilled if you know the story. If you don't know the story, you read it for yourself when you go home. It's an amazing incident in the midst of all that's going on.

And it's what's interesting to, just to take this out in passing, you know, in the midst of all that's going on, there is the hand of God at work.

And I think that's tremendously encouraging for us to recognize the hand of God in the midst of all that might be going on in your life, around you or whatever, to recognize his hand, his presence, his spirit leading and directing.

And since he has this consciousness of the fact that God is there speaking to him, that gives him the confidence, the boldness to go and confront this enemy of Israel, Ahab.

And he tells them this is what happens. There's going to be no rain in the land. And of course, as I said already, this nullifies the thought of the God of fertility.

[21 : 31] What's happening to this God? Well, of course, when you fast forward into chapter 18, you discover that they become frantic when they're on Mount Carmel. And there they see the power of Elijah's God, set against all that they themselves in a furious frenzy whip themselves up into.

But there's no answer. You see how important it is for us to have our dependence, as the psalmist says, on him dependeth all my hope and expectation.

Not looking to anything else. Not looking to man with breathes in him. But looking to the one only living and true God.

And that, of course, to come into the element of communion. That's what we do within the framework of the sacrament. We're looking towards that one man.

We're looking towards that sacrifice, that satisfied divine justice and reconciled us to God.

[22 : 47] And so Elijah is here and he takes this prophecy and he takes it, you know, when you think about it, he takes it before any word from man.

Now sometimes that can be challenging. Man can be very convincing in his or her talk. Very convincing.

But you know, we have to learn to discern the voice or the voices. Indeed, the multiplicity of voices that speak to us.

We have to discern we have to learn, we have to be attuned to the voice of the living God.

And you know, when that is the case, when other voices seem to crowd out our heads, our minds, our whole being, when we're attuned to God, there's that discern that he bestows upon us to know that he is speaking to us.

[24 : 04] I'll hear what God, the Lord, will speak. Now, sometimes I think, this is an illustration that you've all experienced.

You know, if you have an ear for music, sometimes, we go to Fort Williams sometimes, often in high street there's people playing music there.

And there's one person in particular, he has a knowledge of the tunes, and yet there's this inability to hold the true key.

And there's adjaring. And for those who have a wee bit of knowledge of that, you know, it kind of grates on you. And that's, I'm trying to illustrate something of how we know that God is speaking to us, and that we can discern when there's a jarring note that grates upon us, and grates upon our souls, because we know it's the spirit of evil, and it is temptation, it is all that is contrary to what we should be, and we have to step aside from it, get thee behind me, Satan.

And so here is a man, and nothing is going to deflect from his fulfilling what God has for him. And then you come into verse three, we said, well, at the end of verse two, in fact, the word of the Lord came to him.

[25 : 44] It's interesting how he's there, he's had the word of the Lord in the start of verse one. And then when he's done that, God speaks to him again.

And in a sense it's telling me, I'm telling you tonight that God is ever speaking to us. Isn't that a comfort to us? The problem sometimes and the challenge is sometimes this, giving obedience to

God's voice speaking to us.

You know, the way in which you and I handle God's voice speaking to us will to a large extent depend on the spiritual tempo within our lives.

You know, if you've kind of drifted off the radar, if you and you sit here at Manchester you, well, yes, that's my situation.

It's often the case that there's an inbred dislike that wells up within you. Why is that? Because the voice of conscience, the voice of God, is speaking to you through his word.

[27 : 14] So he's, and this is the astonishing thing about it. It's showing us, it's showing you, this is your case, it's showing you that he cares for you.

And he still does care for you. And he still wants you back to himself. And he's never let you go. While you haven't let go of him, he's never let go of you.

and you have this great sense of, of, of, perhaps, him placing within your heart a desire to come back to him.

Return to him. And, and, and acknowledge. And you know what? He will, he will, he will have mercy, and he will pardon.

And sometimes even for those who are, you and like me, perhaps, who have been on the journey a long time. You know, we can so easily get into a rut.

[28 : 20] Almost unknowingly. And then, all of a sudden, his word comes, and it challenges us. And sometimes it leaves, me, and you uncomfortable.

Because we know it's, it's revealing to me something of myself. When you look at this, you see that he recognizes God's word.

He believes it as God's word. And he is obedient to it as God's word. And so he says, this is the word from the God of his love.

Now you wonder, how it was, and how it, how it came to be that the prophets who were worshipping Baal, how they were reacting to all of this.

Because darkness dislikes when the light shines and reveals the awfulness of darkness. And yet, here was Elijah facing up to realities.

[29 : 39] And what happens then? Well, we'll just pick up briefly on this and we'll finish. And then he says, depart from here, verse 3, and turn eastwards and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, east of the Jordan, and notice there, you shall drink of the brook.

What's that telling us? While he is obedient, God is willing to serve him. He's willing to supply his needs, even his very physical needs.

You shall drink from the brook. And notice something else, there's something quite amazing there. I says, Elijah, don't be surprised, but ravens will come and give you food.

Interesting, because ravens were unclean. And yet, God uses nature to feed his servant. God, you see, never leaves his people, neither his own inheritance.

Quit or forsake, will he. I know there are God's people tonight, you know yourselves, in many different parts of the world, and they're suffering, and they're dying.

[31 : 04] But you might say, why does God allow that? Well, you know, if they're dying, he's taken them to a far better place, and the awfulness in which they might be settled. And you know, he knows their cares, them.

And I believe he surrounds them with his love. And I believe he gives to them comfort that perhaps our television screens don't manifest, or our newspaper pictures don't manifest.

But he's there, and the wonder of it all is this, that he knows every single one of them. Not one of them is hidden from him.

And you bring that back to this island. He knows every one of his own. He knows you here tonight as one of his. And as he supplied for the needs of Elijah, so he supplies for your needs and for mine.

That's the kind of God he is. And that's the kind of love and mercy he freely bestows upon us. And he takes Elijah to all of these places.

[32 : 23] The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening and he drank from the brook. And after a while the brook dried up because there was no rain in the land.

Now we need to stop there but just let me tell you what verse 8 says. You have it here in your text. The word of the Lord came to him. You see the way my point is simply this that no matter what no

matter what was confronting God was coming to him with his word and that word was sufficient for him to drive him on and he goes on beyond that to this place called Saraphath which is in itself a most interesting but for another time most interesting story.

so there is something of the care God has for his people. There is something of the benefit it can be to you and to me to read God's word and to study some of the characters in that word and to see there is something of the provision that God makes for his own people.

And we need to hope and pray that as we come towards a time of communion that we will be conscious of his providing for us of his coming in our midst of our being conscious of our being aware of him being with us and going from his house filled with that awareness of the God of Israel being our God and being willing to say as Elijah said I stand in the service of the king.

Let's pray. Lord our God we thank you again for your word. We pray it we bless to us. You take it what was in order and what was according to your will and use it for our good and for much blessing.

[34 : 35] Continue with us and bless us as we meet in fellowship after the service. Take away sin in your name we pray. Amen. Psalm 85 on page 113 from verse 8.

Page 113 from verse 8. I will hear what God the Lord says. We'll sing it to the end of the psalm to God's praise.

I will hear what God the Lord says to his saints he offers peace but his people must not wander and return to foolishness.

Surely for all those who fear him his salvation is at hand so that once again his glory may be seen within our land.

Love and truth have met together righteousness and peace and grace.

[36 : 09] Righteousness looks down from heaven from the earth brings faithfulness.

What is good the Lord will give us and our land its fruit will bear righteousness will go before him and his royal which be bear.

We ask Lord as we gather for a time of fellowship that your blessing will be upon us. We give thanks for the food and the fellowship we will enjoy. and we pray that we would benefit from being together.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father communion and fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest on and remain with you now and always. Amen.