

Elijah - Man of God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 May 2010

Preacher: Rev Iver Martin

[0 : 00] We're going to turn back to that chapter and think together of the three episodes that take place within this chapter.

1 Kings 17, verse 1, and we'll just read one or two verses introducing the chapter. Now, Elijah the Tishbite of Tishbe and Gilead said to Ahab, as the Lord, the God of Israel lives before whom I stand, there shall be neither June or rain these years except by my word.

And the word of the Lord came to him, depart from here and turn eastwards and hide yourself by the brook Kereth, which is east of the Jordan. And we'll look at the whole of this chapter right down to the end.

And the woman said to Elijah, now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth. And indeed, what I want to do here is to look together at four perplexing questions that arise out of this chapter because there are four different events that take place I want us to focus on.

Each one of them gives rise to a question, and it should do if we're reading the chapter carefully. The first question is this, why is it that Ahab, the king of Israel at that time, got away with so much evil?

[1 : 27] Why is it that if God is reigning throughout this book and throughout the history of his people Israel, why is it that he allows a king who is monstrous in his evil and his violence and his corruption to reign in such an unrestrained way?

Why does evil reign? And then the second question that I think the chapter throws up for us is, why is it that God allows the only thing that Elijah needs, the water, why is it that it runs out?

Why is it that God, having commanded Elijah to go and to spend time in this solitary place and having begun by feeding him by the ravens and allowing him to drink by the brook providing for him, why does he allow the water to run out?

The second thing, the third thing rather, is when Elijah went to the widow, to the town where the widow was, why is it that God wants from the widow the only thing that this widow has left?

Why is it that God acts in such a way? And then lastly, looking at the last episode of this chapter, when the son of the widow dies, why is it that God allowed the widow's only son to die before her very eyes?

[2 : 52] These are four perplexing questions, I think. And by answering them, I hope, we'll be able to have a better understanding, gain a better understanding of the whole chapter.

And I hope at the same time, we'll be able to see perhaps the ways in which God uses his word and these ancient events to speak to us even today itself.

Now, what happens, now what happened at this point in history was that a monstrous king had taken over. But he was the son, the man's name was Ahab, and he was the son of Omri.

And Omri was an incredibly powerful and a successful king. And historians, Israelite historians will tell you that the reign of Omri was a massive one indeed.

He was an incredibly successful king, and Ahab was his son. And it's interesting that Omri was by far the more powerful king at that time, and yet very little is told about him.

[3 : 56] Ahab was not so powerful, and yet we've got chapter after chapter that tells about his life. And that is simply because of the kind of moral character that Ahab was and how he offended God in such a stark and such a vivid way.

He brought God's judgment upon himself. And part of this, of course, was his marrying because of diplomatic reasons. There were neighboring countries, and it was usual in those days if you wanted to be diplomatic towards your neighbors, you married your son to a daughter of the king of a neighboring country, and Ahab married Jezebel.

And she came from Sidonians, and her father was called Ethbal. And when she decided to leave her father and mother and become the wife of Ahab, she didn't come alone.

She took her baggage with her, which, of course, amounted to, first and foremost, her idols. And if ever you doubted the influence that women have in the Bible here, we have absolutely no doubt whatsoever.

If Ahab is the head, she is the neck. And she turns him and influences him and affects the way he lives at every turn. So right behind Ahab is Jezebel all the time.

[5 : 15] She's whispering in his ear, telling him what to do, guiding his every movement. Not that he was unwilling. He wasn't unwilling. He was very willing because everything that he tried, it brought him fame and fortune and great notoriety within the country.

See, it's the same as, I don't know if, for those of you who were here last Sunday evening, we looked at Manasseh, who was one of the kings of Judah later on in the book of Kings and Chronicles.

And it begins like this. You don't overnight become a wicked king. You become a wicked king by trying out things for yourself and testing God to see if what you're going to do is really going to bring God's wrath.

So you try out something that you know to be wrong. And then you wait and you see, well, what's God going to do about it? And then he does nothing. And then you say, well, obviously God is not concerned.

So I'm going to become a little bit worse. I'm going to try something a little bolder and braver than before. So you do it and you discover nothing happens. He allows you to do what you want to do.

[6 : 20] And then you try something else, a little bit bolder. And as the years and as the months go on, you're trying, you're becoming more adventurous all the time. You don't have to be a king to do that.

You can do that now. Perhaps you've done it. Perhaps you look back over your life and you say, well, that's my life. That picture's my life. I remember as a young man or a young woman. And that's exactly how I started off living.

And every time I got more and more of a sense of an adventure, you see, there's something exciting about disobeying God. There's something within us that tells us that we'll have a better life if we disobey God.

There's something thrilling about it. There's something thrilling about the forbidden fruit. Instead of doing what God tells us and living as God wants us to live, there's something really stimulating about living as God doesn't want us to live.

And so we make choices. And the thing is this, just because God allows you to make these choices and get away with them at the time doesn't make it right.

[7 : 25] And just because God allows you to make these choices and allows you even to enjoy them for a while, even although you know it's not right, doesn't mean that God isn't watching you.

And it doesn't mean that a day will not come when you will have to give an account for the way in which you've lived your life and to the extent in which you've listened to God and surrendered to Him.

You see, we make these choices now and then you live with the consequences later on. And if ever you're tempted to live as the adventurous life that Ahab lived and to try playing with God the way that Ahab tried to, you just go to the end of his life.

All you do is you go to the end of his life and watch him dying without any hope whatsoever. Is that the way to live your life?

Is it really? Are you really looking forward to the prospect of dying without any hope whatsoever? A life of a death of despair?

[8 : 43] I hope not. That's why give the best of your life now to the Lord. There is no other way to live. And don't think that because God allows you to get away with something that God is not concerned about the way you're living your life and that God is not storing that day up.

The wages, says the Bible, of sin is death. And just because evil reigns as it did in those days doesn't mean that God Himself is not working out His own plan and His purpose.

You see, evil was on the throne. But ultimately, at all times, God is on the throne. Just like He was in the days of Pharaoh when Pharaoh was killing all the baby boys in Egypt and it appeared as if there was no hope and as if God was not listening to His people at all.

He was listening to His people. And He was in the process of raising up under Pharaoh's very eyes someone who was ultimately going to deliver the people of Israel and defeat the power of Pharaoh.

And that's exactly what's happening here as well. God is working all the time in small, tiny ways behind the scenes, bringing His own plan to pass.

[10 : 00] And so, when evil reigns, don't lose hope. We have to be faithful. God's people have to be faithful. No matter what time or what place we live in and who is on the throne, we have to be faithful because ultimately God is on the throne.

And sometimes it's difficult to be faithful. And the life that Elijah lived was a difficult life. It was a horrendous time. You know, I hear sometimes young people singing, these are the days of Elijah.

And I kind of think, well, do we really know what we're saying? I know what they mean, but do we really know what we're saying? Do we really want to go back? I hope not because these were horrendous, horrendous days in which God had to take horrendous measures in order to make Himself known to His people.

That's the first question then. Why does Ahab get away with so much evil? Well, he didn't. Ultimately, he didn't. And God had the last word.

And then secondly, I want to ask another question. Why does God allow the only thing that Elijah needs to run out? Now, perhaps we should just spend five minutes or so going through the story itself.

[11 : 16] From the beginning, Elijah went to Ahab and he said to him, As the Lord lives, you will not have dew nor rain these years except by my word. And then, at the same time, God spoke to Elijah and he said, I want you to leave this place and go where I'm going to show you by the brook Kerith and you're going to be there for a long period of time.

So, off he went into solitude and isolation. And there he found that God provided for him by sending ravens to feed him and he drank from the brook.

Now, why did God do that? And what's the significance and the meaning of God at the same time as speaking to Ahab, removing Elijah from Ahab's presence?

I mean, after all, you would think, wouldn't you, that if God was speaking and working in Israel, that he would keep his servant there, the prophet, right there in the heart of things.

Well, that's what we think. But in actual fact, think, remember this, that Elijah represented God's word. He was God's mouthpiece. He was a prophet. So, when you looked at Elijah, you saw, when you listened to him, you heard the word of God.

[12 : 29] And so, what God is doing in removing Elijah from public life in Israel is he's removing his own word. He's basically doing what Ahab wants him to do.

If you can't stand God's word and you wish that you didn't have to listen to it, then God may very well say to you, all right, have what you want.

And that's what God was saying to Ahab at this time. He was saying, if you don't want to hear my voice, then that's okay. You're not going to have it. But you know, that's the worst thing that could ever happen to us, for us not to be able to hear God's word.

And I wonder about a world that simply can't stand the Bible and wish that there was no such thing as the Bible and wants to be free from all the restrictions that the Bible brings upon us as a world and as a society.

And I wonder about a world that just really doesn't want it, whether God says to that world, the time comes when God says to that world, all right, have what you want. That makes me really shiver.

[13 : 41] Makes me tremble to think of a world with no light. A world that's allowed to do what it wants. Everyone doing what's right in their own eyes.

Think about it. Imagine God took his message away from this world, or at least part of it. It would be horrendous. That's what he did here. He took it away as a judgment, as a way of saying to Ahab and the rest of the country, all right, if this is what you want, this is what you've got.

But you're not going to be satisfied, and you're not going to be happy. It's going to be a place of misery, because I control the rain and the land. Now, again, the other significant thing here is remember that Baal, and I said this last time, Baal was the god of fertility, the god of rain.

And, of course, in those days, everything depended on the success of crops, the success of your harvest. And so the Baal worshippers in the towns and the countries round about Israel, they worshipped Baal because they believed that it was according to Baal's will or otherwise that the crops would grow or otherwise.

And so if the crops didn't grow, and if the rain didn't fall, if there was famine, then it was because of Baal. And it was because he must be angry with them, and so therefore they have to do more things to please him, and all that kind of thing.

[15 : 04] And I think I explained to you what that involved last Sunday evening. It was a fertility religion, and it involved all kinds of sexual practices, and so on. But here is Elijah with one word, and he stops the rain.

Now, you get the contrast. Here are all these people, and you see this, of course, in the next chapter, there's an even more stark confrontation. When Elijah says to the Baal worshippers, he says that he confronts them, and he challenges them to send fire, and they're not able to do so.

But as soon as Elijah prays, fire comes down from heaven and burns up the sacrifice. Well, it was the same here. God alone is the God of the elements, and the God of the weather, and the God of the water, the rain that falls.

And one word was all it took for Elijah, for God through Elijah, to stop the rain falling on Israel, and bring about a famine and a drought.

So there was a demonstration of God's power right away, but at the same time. Now, I wonder how Elijah must have felt to be taken away from the public life of Israel.

[16 : 23] I don't know how he felt, but I wonder if he felt, well, what's the point in me being by myself? Here I am a prophet, and a prophet's job is to bring God's word to people.

Now, what's the point in me being away from people, on my own, in isolation, and in solitude? Why did God do that? The fact is that there are times in a Christian life, and there are things in the Christian life that can only be learned by being alone with the Lord.

And sometimes, just sometimes, God arranges things so that we become alone with him. And if that was true here, how much more true is it in a world full of pressure, and stress and busyness, where we find it almost impossible to be alone with the Lord?

Well, if we find it so impossible, the Lord may very well find a way, even outside of our will, for us to be brought into his presence for a while, so that we can be alone with the Lord.

There are some things we can only do by being alone with the Lord. And that was God's way. This is God's way of bringing Elijah and forcing him to spend time with him in that way.

[17 : 50] But the river eventually ran out. The famine got so severe that the water was gone. It dried up. And this was another challenge for Elijah.

I wonder if he asked the question, why is God allowing this river to dry up so that I have no more opportunities to stay here? I wonder if he began to be comfortable in that existence, just in a similar way as Moses, perhaps became comfortable when he left Egypt and went to Moab and he married a woman and he became the shepherd of his father-in-law.

And it was then, it was as he lived and existed in that country that the Lord met with him in the flames of the burning bush. There are times when God forces us to change direction.

And this was Elijah's time where no longer was God going to allow him to stay next to the brook Kareth. Even though that was his will at the time, the time came when he was forced to change direction and to move away into another sphere and new challenges, a new chapter in his life.

And that new chapter was all about Elijah going to be with someone else to bring God's word to them. And I can't help thinking, I can't help seeing in this chapter something that looks forward to the gospel.

[19 : 26] And particularly to the way in which God brings his word beyond our shores to people living in areas where they have never heard the gospel before.

I can't help seeing in Elijah the call of God saying to him, you've been with me for as long as I want you to be with me. You've learned everything that I want you to learn.

Now the time has come to go. And to put what you know and what you've learned into practice because other people need to hear and need to see my power and need to see that I am the living and the true God.

And that's what happens when men and women go out on the mission field. When they're sent out on the mission field. When God arranges things in your life and convicts you that you need to go and you need to because he has a people, he has families, he has individuals who he has prepared to hear the gospel.

Now he needs you to go. The Lord said, the harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few. Pray the Lord of the harvest that he will raise up laborers for his harvest field.

[20 : 45] Now again, as I've done so periodically and I believe it is my duty to do so, to speak to you as a congregation and to ask, is there anyone in that position here today in which the Lord is placing on your heart and maybe arranging things providentially in your life so that he stirs things up a bit just like he stirred it up for Elijah.

Elijah couldn't stay there anymore. He had no more water to drink. God made it impossible for him to stay. And at the same time, God commanded him to go because there was somebody who needed to hear the gospel.

Maybe he's saying the same thing to you this morning. There's somebody who needs to hear the gospel. It's not going to be easy. I'm not calling you to a life of luxury.

It's not going to be that way. But it's going to be a life where you're obedient to me. Don't disobey the Lord. Whatever else you do, don't spend the rest of your life pleasing yourself instead of pleasing God.

There's a world out there that needs to be reached with the gospel. And it won't be reached until people are willing to go where God wants them to go.

[22 : 05] And to endure the kind of hardships and the kind of sacrifices that you need to make. But whenever we think of us making sacrifices for the Lord, all you need to do is to go to Calvary to remember what sacrifice the Lord made for us.

Is that the position you're in today? I'm going to challenge you with that. Why was it that God took away the only thing that Elijah needs?

Why did he allow it to run out in order to force him to the woman who needed to hear his word? Well, what about the woman herself? The water ran out. Elijah was forced to go.

And the interesting thing here is, of course, the woman lived in Jezebel's territory. Sidon was ruled by Ethbal.

He was the king that ruled over the city to which Elijah went. So he's going into the lion's den, if you like. He's going into pagan territory, people who have no knowledge of the Lord at all.

[23 : 18] And where he goes, he's taking God with him. And the first person, of course, that he meets in verse 8 is the woman herself. We don't know anything about her apart from she was, don't know how old she was.

She was a widow and she had a son and this famine had become so severe that she was just gathering whatever she could. She was gathering sticks because she only had a small amount of meal in her jar and she knew that once that ran out she would have nothing else.

And here was her, this woman suffering alongside everyone else because Val was incapable of doing what they all believed he could do.

And God was doing exactly what he could do and not, which was the opposite of what Val could do. And here was Elijah entering into Baal territory to show, I believe, that God, while he was powerful, was not harsh or not unloving.

He is going to provide for this woman and her household, which meant that he provided for those who put their trust in him.

[24 : 42] It wasn't just her that was provided for, it was her household. I don't know how large that was, but her household. And as they saw the care and the love that God had, they discovered a God who went beyond their every imagination.

They discovered the reality of God in the way in which he provided for them. But here's the way, this is what he did. It appears that God is asking for the only thing that this widow has.

The only thing that she had left. Now this seems impossible, isn't it? It seems almost cruel for Elijah to go in there. After all, Elijah worked many miracles on behalf of God.

He could have just said the word and God could have told him to say the word and all of a sudden her cupboard would have been filled with everything that she needed and much more. But that's not what happened. Because what's important here is God providing for her through her faith and her trust in God.

And that's exactly what happened. And it begins with what seems to us to be bizarre. Seems strange, it seems impossible. How can she give what she doesn't have?

[26 : 02] How can God ask her for something that she could barely give him? And that would mean that she would be left with nothing. And how can God today ask you for what you think you have or what you feel you have?

I wonder if there's anyone today and you feel that if you listen to God you'll be giving up everything that you have. Because that's the way that the gospel seems to some people.

It seems that way. After all, Jesus talks about those who follow me, they have to deny themselves. Let them deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Jesus demands our all. All of us. He asks everything that we've got. If I was to stand here today and say, oh well, it doesn't matter, you know, just give him a wee bit.

just give him what you think you can. Just give him a part of your life. Just give him a part of yourself. That's fine. I'm sure everyone here would be willing to do that.

[27 : 11] But that's not what Jesus demands. He comes to us today and he demands our all. Everything that we've got. And if you're a follower of Jesus, it's because we've come to surrender our all to him.

And perhaps you feel, well, God is robbing me of something. He's depriving me of something. He's taking away the life that I have and he's going to leave me with nothing.

You get people who think that way. They recognize that the gospel is true and that the Bible is true but yet they feel that if they go any further and if they take that step of faith then they'll have nothing left.

But the gospel is about God giving. New for old. God providing you with a new life and a new start, a new beginning altogether in which by trusting in God then you discover that you don't lack anything.

That's the way the Christian life is. You'll never ever be deprived of anything if you trust in God. God won't see you wrong.

[28 : 24] He'll provide what he has asked for. And there are times in the Christian life when we have to continually face the same challenge as this woman faced where God asks us to give what we think we don't even have.

What we think is impossible for us to give him. How often has God come into the person, not the person who has everything, the person who is well and powerful and successful, but the person who feels that they have nothing left to give.

And he asks us for that and promises that if we give him what we don't even have ourselves, then he will provide for us.

Now I have to be careful here because there are some people who preach the health and wealth gospel. And the health and wealth gospel goes like this.

They say, God wants you rich today. He wants you to be successful in what you're doing, your business and your job and your family. And the way to become rich and successful is to give to God.

[29 : 33] And if you give to God, if you give to God sacrificially, then you watch him. He'll make you more successful than you have ever been in your life. You ever heard that? Sometimes you get it on the gospel channels.

That's just nonsense. And that's not what this passage is about at all. You can't play around with the Lord as some kind of way to get rich. And yet, this passage indicates that when we trust in the Lord, and when we surrender out all to him, then he will see us right.

He will never leave his people. He will never leave you. And he will never forsake you. And the fourth question, of course, is why does this, why does God allow this widow's only son to die?

You'd think that this widow, after having surrendered everything to the Lord, and after having come to rely upon him every day for her food, and having come to discover his power and his care over her, that she would now enjoy a peaceful and a happy life.

Yet, despite her giving everything to the Lord, she suffered the nightmare of the loss of her son. After this, the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill, and his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him.

[31 : 03] And she said to Elijah, what have you against me, O man of God? You've come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son. Then Elijah said, look, give me your son.

He took him from her arms and carried him up to the upper chamber where he lodged and laid him on his own bed. And he cried to the Lord, O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon this widow with whom I sojourned by killing her son.

Then he found, as he prayed for the dead boy, he discovered that his prayer was being led to pray for his recovery. Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the Lord, O Lord my God, let this child's life come to him again.

And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah and the life of the child came to him again and he revived. I want to suggest just in closing because the time has gone that God was saying two things to two different people.

He was saying something first of all to Elijah. He was showing Elijah what he can do in raising the dead. And here was Elijah. His work was to bring God's word to a dead country.

[32 : 12] A country that was just, it was so corrupt and ruled by a corrupt ruler and all the appearances were that God had disappeared and the country had no life in it at all. And God is saying to Elijah, this is what I can do with my people who are dead.

This is what I can do in raising them up. And I believe that that gave him encouragement to carry on in the work that God had given him to do. But this was also God speaking to the woman herself and revealing himself to her in the rising of her son.

And what this woman saw was that even having discovered God's care and provision for her in providing food for her every day, she now discovered something even greater about God.

That not only had he a power over giving her her daily provision, but he had power over life and death in raising her son to newness of life once again.

And she was brought to an even greater knowledge and an even greater, deeper faith in God. And that's what matters. God is making himself known to this woman in order to draw her, to put her confidence and her trust and her faith in him.

[33 : 28] And I believe that's what she did from that moment onwards that she became a worshiper, I believe, of the Lord, became a follower of him because she saw that he had power over life and death and he was able to raise the dead.

Now, here's the point. What she discovered that day of God's power is something that we have known probably all our lives.

It's something that we find when we go to the Bible and the numerous events in which God raises someone from the dead and supremely in the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead.

we have God's ultimate demonstration of his power to change lives, to forgive sins, to create within us new hearts and new beginnings and to give us the promise of everlasting life to those who trust and those who love him.

That's God's revelation of himself. Beginning here in the mysterious recesses of the Old Testament and ultimately revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ who rose from the dead on the third day having given his life on the cross to pay for our sins, the guilt of our sins and having risen again as God's demonstration that this death that Jesus died was the payment of our sins.

[35 : 02] we can now go to him as the risen living saviour and we can trust in him and follow him and know that as we like this woman give our all to him what we have and what we don't have then we can know for sure that we are doing the ultimate in security and safety.

If you today you feel that what God is calling you to do whether it's for the first time to take that step of faith in him or whether you're a Christian and you need to take another step of faith into the unknown God never calls us to anywhere where he hasn't been himself and where he doesn't lead the way and where he doesn't promise our ultimate security in him.

That's what we have. We have his word his promise his stamp his guarantee his guarantee I heard someone recently discussing religion on the radio and she was discussing it in very broad and general terms and then she said something I was trying to figure out where she stood and what exact beliefs were and eventually she said of course no one is ever guaranteed of their salvation.

That was a moment that's it I am guaranteed of my salvation because God's promised me not because I'm better than everybody else and not because I happen to want to be right and everyone else is wrong this is not about this is about can I be sure that I will be saved and I am saved yes I can because God in the person of Jesus Christ has said it that is the ultimate security and the safety that I have and you have if you belong to Jesus Christ this morning let's pray our father in heaven we thank you for your word that assures us and that draws us to Jesus Christ as our savior and we ask that you will bless it to us now Lord and we pray that it will be the living word working within us and moving us and guiding us into every step that you want us to take forgive our sin we pray in Jesus name

Amen Amen Amen