

Elijah - The Fearless Fearful Prophet

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn again to these chapters that we read in 1 Kings chapter 17, 18 and 19. And just to look briefly at this great prophet Elijah.

It says in verse 1, Now Elijah the Tishbite of Tishbe and Gilead said to Ahab, As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives before whom I stand.

And then in verse 2, The word of the Lord came to depart from here and turn eastward. Verse 5, So he went and did according to the word of the Lord.

And so on. But just chapters 17 to 19, just a brief overview. And given the title, this prophet Elijah, who is fearless and fearful.

And it seems a bit of a contradiction. Now there's no question whatever that fearlessness characterized the life of Elijah. He was quite a remarkable man.

[1 : 0 8] He was, there's no doubt about it, he was physically a very robust man. Strong as an ox. There's no doubt that constitutionally, very, very strong, strong man. But what set him apart was his burning passion and zeal for the honor and the glory of God.

He was somebody who put the Lord first. And he displayed the most remarkable courage and strength of character in his life. But he had this, as we say, this huge, great passion for the Lord.

And were it not for the fact that we see this dip in chapter 19, we'd almost think that Elijah was otherworldly. Because his whole life, from beginning to its end, is quite remarkable.

As somebody said, he came in onto the pages of the Bible like a tempest. And he went out like a whirlwind. And that was true. That's exactly what happened.

Because we remember the leaving of this world of Elijah is quite remarkable. Elijah was one of only two men, the other being Enoch, who never actually died.

[2 : 2 2] They were translated, they were taken straight, still living, and taken to glory. It tells us, if we read about it in 2 Kings chapter 2, Elisha, the prophet who was succeeding Elijah.

Elisha and Elijah were walking together, talking. And it tells us, and this is what it says, as they were walking and talking together. Behold, the chariots of fire and horses separated the two of them.

And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it and cried, my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen.

And he saw them no more. Just as it says in the scripture, one shall be taken on the other left. It was very, very powerfully and visibly opened out in the experience there of Elisha.

Something he would never, ever, ever forget all his days. You know, we have experiences that are often etched into our mind, into our memory. Well, this would certainly be one that Elisha would have for all his remaining days.

[3 : 3 2] He was privileged to see. He was given the spiritual insight to see. God opened the eyes of Elisha to see this amazing thing that took place.

You know, we often ourselves wonder, well, I often wonder about what happens when God calls for our soul when we die.

What actually happens? How are we taken? Well, scripture doesn't tell us an awful lot. But when we go to the incident of the rich man and Lazarus, and we find Jesus as he's talking there, he talks about how the angels carried Lazarus into Abraham's bosom or by Abraham's side, which was a picture for the Israelite of heaven.

And it's a picture that I love to think of, that just as the angels are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. All the time, angels are around and about.

They're tending. We don't see them, but they're there. And little do we know the number of times we've been protected and kept and delivered various stages in our life by angels.

[4 : 48] And they are in attendance, I believe, at death. You'll find that there were angels at the tomb of Jesus. We'll find that there were angels at the ascension of Jesus.

So there's no question but that the angels are involved around the time of death. And it makes it absolutely what we would expect if the angels are with us as we're living and as we're dying.

I believe that they're there with us at death. And our soul will be taken safely home to glory. It's a wonderful thought.

But anyway, this is what happened to Elijah. But as we say, Elijah just burst onto the pages of Scripture in really quite an amazing way.

And if it weren't, as we say, for that moment of weakness in chapter 19, we would think that he was different. Well, he was different, but we'd think that he was almost superhuman.

[5 : 55] And that's why in the epistle of James, James highlights the life of, just in passing about prayer, of Elijah. And he said he was a man just like yourselves, a natural man.

So the Bible makes very clear that Elijah was just an ordinary man in the same way as you and I are ordinary human beings. So this particular time in Israel was a dark period, dark spiritually, dark morally, because Eib and really the power behind the throne, Jezebel, were doing everything they could to remove the worship of God from the land.

There was still a token worship of God, but the nation was being turned more and more to Baal worship. And Asherah, because this was Jezebel's worship, and she wanted Israel turned in that direction.

And so it was dangerous being a follower of the Lord in these days, because virtually all the prophets of the Lord had been put to death. And the followers of the Lord, that's why, unknown to Elijah, it's part of what brought his collapse.

He thought he was virtually alone. That's one of his cries before the Lord. I, even I only, am left. And the Lord told him, no, actually there are 7,000 in the country, in the nation, that haven't bowed the knee to Baal.

[7 : 20] But these 7,000 were what we would term secret disciples. They were in fear of their lives, because you risked death by coming out on the side of the Lord.

And it's amazing how quickly things degenerate, because you've got to remember that Israel were God's covenant people. And yet here they are, that it's dangerous to admit to following the Lord.

So it's against this background that we have Elijah burst in, whether it's to the palace or where, and he announces to Ahab that there was not going to be any rain upon the earth until such time as the Lord would bring it to pass.

And the Lord is going to show Ahab. Ahab, you think you're in control. You're not. Who stops the rain?

It's not you, Ahab. You're not even in charge of one raindrop. The God you are trying to remove and trying to turn Israel away from is the God who controls the rain.

[8 : 29] He will bring the rain when he chooses. He can withhold the rain for as long as he chooses. And this was a lesson that Ahab was going to have to learn.

Ahab, you're not.

Because as the drought would take hold of the land, things would become really difficult. And it's very interesting that in chapter 18, when Ahab meets Elijah, or Elijah goes to show himself to Ahab, straight away Ahab says, Oh, you troubler.

You're the troubler. You're the one who brings trouble to Israel. Isn't that incredible? Wasn't Elijah? It was Ahab himself who was bringing trouble to Israel.

But anyway, the Lord tells Elijah to go and to hide by this brook. And this is part of the secret of Elijah's greatness.

[9 : 53] is how immediately he lays hold upon whatever God tells him to do. Right away. That's one of the things you'll find that he says that the word of the Lord came to him.

Verse 2. So verse 5. So he went and did according to the word of the Lord. That was a feature of Elijah's life.

Heard God's word and obeyed it. And you know something? The more we do that, the stronger our faith will become. And the more the Lord will reveal himself to us, the more, the stronger our faith will become.

Because so often our problem is that we don't take God's word seriously. We pick and choose. Day to day we do that. Every time we disobey God's word, we're picking and choosing what we're going to obey in that particular day.

That's part of the struggle that we face within our Christian life. But Elijah was a man. God's word came. He did. Did right away. And I believe that this is the heartbeat of what made this man such a great man.

[11 : 15] Because the more you do that, the stronger a believer you become. And you become, you get such an insight into who God is.

God will reveal through his spirit more and more and more of himself. And that means that your confidence in God will grow more and more and more.

Because the more that God's spirit reveals the things of God to you, the stronger you will become in your trust of the living and true God.

And that's exactly what was happening in the experience of Elijah. And we find then that Elijah is there in the solitary.

And it's lovely how the Lord has actually commanded the ravens. For I have commanded the ravens to feed you there. So Elijah is away there living in the solitary, all on his own.

[12 : 21] And the thing is that we know that the raven is a very greedy bird. It's one that just will eat everything that's going.

It's almost a scavenging bird. And yet, here's a bird that goes against its natural instinct. And it's going to carry bread and food to Elijah every day, every morning and every night.

You see how God is in control of absolutely every single thing. And I would love to think, we have no idea, but I would love to think that these ravens were directed by God to an open window in Ahab's palace.

It would be just putting that extra touch that the ravens would be taking Ahab's food. But we have no idea of how. But the Lord who commanded the ravens to go against their own natural instinct and to bring every morning and every evening bread and meat to the prophet could send these ravens anywhere to do that.

So Elijah was living there by the brook, by the stream, as he was being fed. But we read that the brook dried up.

[13 : 41] And this again shows, I think, the greatness of the prophet. Verse 7, And after a while the brook dried up because there was no rain in the land. Elijah is still there.

Day by day he would be seeing the trickle of water getting less and less. I put myself in that place and I'd be saying, Poh, it's time to go.

I said, the brook is getting, the water flow is getting less day by day. And you'd be saying to yourself, time to leave here. And then one morning when Elijah woke, the brook had dried up.

He still didn't go. And that's what I love about Elijah. What's he doing? God told him, go and live by that brook. And Elijah stayed there until God told him to leave.

And that's what made that man great. He didn't decide, ah, I've had enough of this, I'm away. And that's what so often we do. We might at the very beginning start by obeying God and say, Yes, Lord, I'm going to do this.

[14 : 48] But after a while we sort of give up or get tired and say, oh, no. When the Lord gives us something, the Lord sends us somewhere, the Lord puts something into it, we stick with that and the Lord will show us differently.

And that's what Elijah did. And that's a great lesson for us to learn. The brook eventually dried up. He was still there. But then the next verse, then the word of the Lord came to him.

You see, if Elijah had gone beforehand, he would have no direction where to go next. So he waited, even though the brook had dried up, until God's word came and told him, Right, arise, go to Saravath, which belongs to Sidon.

And so, again, we have this great example of faith. And he says, I have commanded a widow.

This would tell us in verse 9. Arise, go to Saravath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a woman to feed you. And you know part of the beauty of this?

[15 : 52] This is part of the irony. I love the way the Lord works. Sidon was the country that Jezebel came from. And the Lord is sending, he's sending the prophet to the Jezebel's homeland.

This is a woman who is determined to kill Elijah. And they're scouring the land for him, and he's in her homeland. But more than that, God is sending Elijah, not just to be safe and to be kept, but to act as a missionary, to be his prophet in that dark land.

And we see God's great grace as well. And so, it's amazing the way that the Lord actually works.

Because who does the Lord send Elijah to? You would think, here's a starving prophet who's got nothing. And if we were making up this, if we were writing this as a story, we'd probably put him to a rich person's house.

Might put him to somebody of great means. Somebody who has loads of resources. But no, God is sending Elijah to somebody who's got nothing.

[17 : 04] He's sending Elijah to a poor widow woman. She was obviously a young, fairly young woman, because her son was still fairly young. A woman who has nothing.

That's who God is sending Elijah to. And he has told him, I have commanded this woman. Now, this woman obviously didn't know that God was commanding.

What these words are showing is how God is ruling and overruling everything. The woman didn't know that that prophet was coming, and that God was going to be behind everything that happened.

Elijah didn't even know who this woman was. God said to him, I have commanded a widow woman to look after you. And Elijah, knowing what he knew of the Lord, when he comes to Zidon, and when he comes to Zarephath, and as he's just entering the gate of the city, there's a widow woman collecting sticks.

So Elijah says to himself, I'm sure this will be the one. And he does a wee kind of test, just the same way as Abraham's servant did the test with Rebecca.

[18 : 15] And he just said to her, bring me a little water in a vessel. And straight away she goes off, you can see that, as she was going to bring it. And Elijah says, yeah, this will be her.

He had such an awareness of how God was going to be leading and directing all and everything. And you know, in our bad moments, we sometimes have a completely wrong view of God.

This might sound harsh, but sometimes we almost think that God is making life difficult for us. Have you ever gone down that road, and where one thing after another seems to be going wrong, and you're saying to yourself, what's God doing?

Why is all this happening? Well, for Elijah's life, at one level, at one level life was really difficult. He wasn't living in the lap of luxury, following the Lord.

It was tough. He's living by a brook. He's an outlaw. He's all alone. It's the ravens who are bringing him food. That's how he was living. It's a widow woman, who has nothing, who's going to be providing for him.

[19 : 28] So at one level, it was tough for Elijah as well, because he's living just like hand to mouth. But he's living in absolute dependence upon God, because he knows God is overruling everything.

So we've got to guard against these moments, where we think that somehow, what's God doing in all this? God has a purpose in everything that he's doing, even in the things which may appear sometimes harsh, and difficult to understand.

Always he has a big picture, and we are a wee part to play in that big picture. He is working with a purpose, and we know for you as a believer, that included in that purpose is conforming you, changing you to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, Elijah says to the woman, will you bring me, since you've gone for the water, will you bring me something to eat? She says, I can't. She said, actually what I'm doing just now is, I'm out getting a few sticks to make a fire, and I've only got a wee drop of flour left, and a tiny bit of oil left in a jug, and I'm going to do a wee, the last baking, because I have no more for myself and my son, and after that, all we can do is wait for death, because we have no more.

And Elijah said to her, no, go and make me, go and bake a bit of bread for me, make me something to eat. And he said, I'll tell you how it's going to be, and that's what he said.

[21 : 12] For thus says the Lord, the jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty. That's what he said, until the day that the Lord sends rain.

And that's exactly what happened. Verse 15, And she went and did as Elijah said, and she and he and her household ate for many days. Jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty.

And you see what God is doing. When God sent Elijah into Zarephath, it wasn't just for the good of the prophet, but it was for the good of the woman, and for the good of her son.

Even although we didn't read through that, the son died, but Elijah brought the son back to life through the power of God. And God was at work.

And that was the reward. This woman, there was time she had took a while to understand the way God worked. Because you'll notice when she meets Elijah, she says in verse 12, As the Lord, your God lives.

[22 : 17] Not as the Lord, my God lives. She took a while to come to understand who the living and true God was. But do you believe, by the end, she has fully grasped who he is.

So the Lord was going to work for this woman. He was going to work in her life, and he was going to provide for her. And this is another lesson we learn from this. If we put the Lord first, the Lord will never let us down.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you. Them that honor me, I will honor. And so here's this poor woman who had nothing, but God's going to look after her.

And he's going to provide for her as she provides for the prophet. And so, this is one of the great things that we find in this chapter.

But then, just moving on, time is going. Move on very, very quickly. We come to the last part here, into chapter 18.

[23 : 23] And, God says to Elijah, I'm going to send rain again, but you've got to go and meet Ahab. So that Elijah does.

Even although he knows that Ahab, in that first instant before Elijah could say a word, Ahab could order his killing. But he still goes. Complete trust in the Lord.

And so he tells how it's going to be. But then he says to Ahab, look, he said, I'm setting out a challenge. I want you to call Israel and all the prophets, all these false prophets, prophets of Baal and all of them, to Carmel.

And we're going to sort this out once and for all. And so, Ahab, to his credit, does what Elijah says. And then Elijah addressed the Israelites.

And he said to them, listen, how long do you go on limping or halting between two opinions? If God is God, serve him.

[24 : 27] If Baal is God, serve him. Let's do a test. People didn't say anything. And then he said, this is what we'll do. Prophets of Baal, they'll build an altar.

They'll put their sacrifice on the altar. And then they will call to Baal to send fire down from heaven to consume that sacrifice.

And then I will do the same. I will build an altar and put a sacrifice on it. And I will call upon the living and true God. And the God that answers by fire, let him be the true God.

And all the people said, yes. It's a huge moment. And we can never take away the faith of Elijah. He's standing all alone against all the might of Israel.

All alone. And he's a human, just an ordinary man. But he's full of the zeal and the fire and passion and his love for God. And we read what happened.

[25 : 33] The Lord did hear Elijah's cry. Prophets of Baal spent all morning, and they were shouting and cutting themselves and yelling. In fact, Elijah started mocking them a bit.

Ah, you're not shouting loud enough. Maybe he's sleeping. Such like. Of course, Baal wasn't going to answer. And then at the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah, then we read his prayer.

It's a humble, it's a powerful, it's a sincere prayer. And it is seeking that God will reveal himself as a living and true God to all Israel that needed a wake-up call because they were drifting and God answered.

And not only did he burn up the sacrifice, but even the stones and the wood and the dust, everything, everything was obliterated. What a display where God was revealing himself.

And then God said, I'm going to send the rain. But what does Elijah do? He goes up the top of Carmel and he prays and he prays and he prays and he prays. And he's setting out before us an example there.

[26 : 42] When God gives us his word, that word is there as a lever for us to go to the Lord and say, Lord, do as you have said. And that's what we've got to do with the promises of God in the Bible to take his word and go to him and say, Lord, this is what your word says.

And ask the Lord to do what he has said in his word he will do. That's faith where we take God at his word and turn it into prayer.

And you know, the more we do that, the stronger our faith will become as we will see God at work. And that's exactly what happened. The Lord sent rain.

All Elijah needed to see was a cloud no bigger than a man's hand beginning to form. And he said, that's it. Here's the rain. There's a sound of an abundance of rain. Great faith.

And the Lord was with him. We see, and he ran before Elijah. And of course, the prophets, all the false prophets were put to death. And people say, that's fearfully harsh.

[27 : 47] And yes, it was harsh. But what we've got to remember is this, that all these false prophets were leading these people to hell. That's what they were doing.

By their false religion, they were destroying the name and the honor and the glory of God. And God is a jealous God who will give his glory to none other. These were his people, the people of Israel.

And their souls were being ruined and destroyed. And that is why, yes, it seems so harsh. But it was to protect his people from the fearfulness of what these people, these men, were doing.

And then we have, Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done in chapter 19 and how he'd killed the prophets with the sword. And Jezebel sends a message to Elijah.

By this time tomorrow, Elijah, you're dead. You are dead. And it's at that moment, verse 3, then he was afraid. It's the first and really the only time that the word fear of any passion comes into Elijah's thinking.

[29 : 00] Then he was afraid and he arose and ran for his life. He was one of the strongest, most courageous, God-centered men.

And he's running for his life. What's happened? Well, there's been a collapse. There's been a few things happened. First, for the first time, he lost his focus. You know what made Daniel great and what made David great and what made Joseph great and made Paul the apostle great was their focus upon the Lord.

And the more they were focused upon the Lord, the more they knew him and the stronger they became. Take your focus off and like Peter on the water, you begin to sink. That was the first thing Elijah did. He could only hear the words of Jezebel as focus had gone.

He was also absolutely physically and mentally and emotionally shattered. Because if we had read right through it, it's everything is going at a fearful pace.

And he has been through, he's run between a half marathon and a marathon just in front of Elijah. It's about 18 miles running to Jezreel. He ran that after being up and down Carmel, after the slaughter of the priests, of standing alone with the sacrifice.

[30 : 19] He has been pushing himself to the very limit. And when he took his eyes off the Lord, everything collapsed.

And that can happen to all of us so easily. Because we are physical beings, we're mental, spiritual, all the emotional, all the different parts of us collectively together.

And it's, we're not nearly as strong as we think we are. And here's this great man, even he had his collapse. And I love the way the Lord deals with him.

It's very funny that the man who prayed for death never dies. He says to the Lord, oh, take me away. Take me out of this world. I'm done. No better than my father.

The man who prayed for death was never to die. But I love what the Lord does. The Lord knows what he needs. He needed rest. He needed food.

[31 : 18] He needed drink. And that's what happened. An angel came with him, arise and eat, and he slept, and he lay down and slept, and he ate and drank and slept, and ate and drank and slept.

That's what was needed. He needed physically and mentally and emotionally rebuilding up. And the Lord knew these very practical. The Lord deals very practically with us.

And the Lord did something else lovely for Elijah. Elijah still got work to do. God found him hiding in the cave and God revealed himself again.

Not through the fire, not through the earthquake, but through the still, small voice. And that's why we need to get alone with God into the silence. Hard in this world that we live in that's so noisy and time-consuming.

But we need the time the wee secret place to get alone with the Lord to hear what he's got to say to us. And the Lord showed again, Elijah, I've got work for you.

[32 : 17] But he did something else really nice. He gave him a friend. He gave him a fellow, a colleague. He gave him Elisha. And God called Elisha as a prophet.

And he went and he ministered to Elijah. And so, they were, for a while, with a togetherness. So that it was a great thing.

He had somebody who he could share the burden that he had of being prophet of the Lord to Israel. This man, Elisha, who was to take over the reins.

And then, of course, Elijah was taken. He was ready. Great question is, are you ready? Are you ready to be taken?

Because, you know, we always put it away, but one day we're going to be taken. Maybe not as spectacularly as Elijah, unless the Lord comes first.

[33 : 17] I often wonder about that. Wouldn't it be amazing if in our lifetime the Lord was to come all of a sudden? And it's going to be all of a sudden. And we, who are alive, if that happens, will be caught up with the Lord in the air.

It's an amazing thought. It's going to happen for some generation, whether it's ours or whether it's future generations. That's going to happen. And for some people who are alive in this world, they will not taste death when the Lord comes.

Great thought. But the fact is, we will all have to leave this world. Are you ready? Are you trusting? Are you believing in the Lord?

Let's pray. Lord our God, we pray to bless us and we give thanks for thinking about this great man, Elijah. We give thanks for the lessons that we learned from it and his great trust in you, his ready obedience to obey your word and do what you said.

We pray, Lord, that you will help us and that you will bless us, that you will do us good, and that we will hear what you have to say to us. We ask, O Lord, that you will be our shield and our shelter and that you will be our rock and our defense.

[34 : 36] And we pray, Lord, that you will be with us the remainder of this day. Blessed cup of tea and coffee in the hall and take away our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. We're concluding our singing in Psalm 107.

Psalm 107. Verses 26 to 30. This is in the Scottish Psalter. It's on page 384 on the Tunisloch Broom.

Psalm 107. Psalm 107. Psalm 107. Verse 26. They mount to heaven, then to the depths they do go down again.

Their soul doth faint and melt away with trouble and with pain. They reel and stagger like one drunk at their wood's end they be. And they to God in trouble cry, who them from straight stoth free.

The storm is changed into a calm at his command and will, so that the waves which raged before now quiet are and still and so on. Psalm 107. 26 to 30.

[35 : 44] The Tunisloch Broom. They mount to heaven, then to the depths they do go down again.

Their soul doth faint and melt away with trouble and with pain.

They reel and stutter like one drunk at their worst and they be.

Then they to God in trouble cry, who them from straight stoth free.

The storm is changed into a calm at his command and will, so that the waves which raged before the heaven is.

[37 : 21] Now quiet are still. Then are they glad because at rest and quiet now they be.

so to the heaven he then brings which they desire to see.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen.