

Can God really spread a table in the wilderness?

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[0 : 00] In 1975, Noddy Holder sang How Does It Feel, one of the great Slade ballads from the film Flame.

! Most of you don't know what I'm talking about, but it was very good. Noddy Holder normally sings about Christmas, but he sometimes sings other things. And I was thinking about all sorts of stuff this week, and how does it feel came to my head.

And all sorts of answers came to that, so the question tonight is how does it feel? If you read Psalm 78, you will find a psalm where the psalmist lists in some details the goodness of God.

And also, at the same time, the grumpiness of his people. And at one point in the psalm, verse 19, I beg your pardon, the Israelites ask, can God really spread a table in the wilderness?

They're hungry, they're thirsty, they're tired, they're grumpy, and they say, can God really spread a table in the wilderness?

[1 : 23] And I'll come back to that in a few moments. If we have the next slide, please. I'm going to read some verses from 1 Kings 19. Elijah was afraid. So the context of this is that Elijah had just had a set-to with the prophets of Baal, and there was a bit of a competition about who was going to, whose God would set fire to a sacrifice.

And of course, Almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth did, and the Baal gods didn't. And it all ended up a bit badly for the Baal prophets who got slaughtered.

And then Jezebel, dear old Jezebel, heard of this and said, by tomorrow you will be like the prophets of Baal. You will be dead. Elijah was afraid, no kidding, and ran for his life.

When he came to Beersheba and Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it, and prayed that he might die.

I have had enough, Lord, he said. Take my life, I'm no better than my ancestors. Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once, an angel touched him and said, get up and eat.

[2 : 48] He looked round, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and then he laid down again.

The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you. So he got up and ate and drank.

Strengthened by that food, he travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into the cave and spent the night.

And then, from there, he went and saw God not in the storm, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but in a still small voice, he met with God.

Elijah was fed up. He'd been anointed as God's prophet and seemed to be constantly persecuted. Somebody was always having a go at him.

[3 : 49] Somebody was chasing him around or threatening him or criticizing him or whatever. And then he just had this set to, as I said, with the prophets of Baal and Jezebel was really cross.

So he threatened Elijah and Elijah ran away. He was a man who had been called of God to do his work.

He was a man who knew he had been called of God to do his work. But by doing his work, he had a really tough time.

He had a really tough time. He was being given a load of stick. And one day, it just got too much.

And he said, Lord, I've had enough. Lord, I am fed up. I am fed up. And he lay down and he wanted to die. Now, there's precedent for this, isn't there?

[4 : 53] Job did it. Jodah did it. Others did it. It feels to me that we should sort of cultivate in our garden a bush where I can go and sit under periodically when I'm feeling fed up and have a sulk.

But that's what Elijah did. And he said, enough now. That's me done. Next slide, please. Being honest with God.

Really important part of our walk with him. God heard him. And God heard him in a way which was real.

He didn't say, oh, come on, Elijah. It's not that bad. Or stop being naughty, Elijah. Get up and do it. He did something very practical.

Here's some bread. Here's some water. Here's some freshly baked bread. It must be quite scary, by the way. If you wake up and there's a little sort of coal fire with some bread baking on it and a pot of water, you'd think, goodness me, what's going on here?

[6 : 05] And the angel said, eat. So he did. And he went back to sleep again. I'm the sort of person who, if I'm woken up at four o'clock by an angel giving me some bread and water, I wouldn't have gone to sleep again.

But he did. And a bit later, he woke up again. How small. Because the journey is too much for you without me, God, sustaining you.

Building you up for the next part of my calling on your life. In the same way, Jesus made breakfast for everybody on the beach.

And suddenly, he was feeding them fish and bread. Sustaining them for the next part of their journey. So twice this happened because there was a big job for Elijah to do.

Twice this happened because God knew that Elijah needed strengthening. And when we read the gospel stories and a blind man or a cripple or somebody says, Jesus, Jesus.

[7 : 31] Very often, Jesus' first words, what would you like me to do for you? What do you want from me? It wasn't when you shut up and stop making a noise.

What can I do for you? How can I help you? Slide please, Josh or Phil or whoever's doing it. Sorry. Just a quick, going back in 1 Kings chapter 18. And I'll not focus on this for too long. But Elijah went before the people and said, how long will you waver between two opinions?

If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal is God, follow him. When we're tired, when we're fed up, when we feel overworked or overwhelmed, when we don't know what to do, there's a choice before us.

A choice of who are we going to serve. My own grumpiness, my own overwhelmedness, which are real. My own sense of defeat.

[8 : 39] My own sense of defeat. Oh God. Almighty God. The creator of heaven and earth. Who will sustain us.

And be with us. And lead us. And bring us into a place of hope and future. On the bonkers of times, Josh, please.

Oh, I'm going to look at my notes then.

That would have been unusual, wouldn't it? And that's a big thing to think about. As I spoke to the question, what about us? What about you? What about me?

Zane, I don't want this to be a sermon about being grumpy and miserable. Because some of you here will be really on top of the world. Some of you will be feeling grand. Everything's smashing. And that's great.

[9 : 39] That's great. I have times like that. I think there are times when I think, you know, this is really good. God is blessing me. God is sustaining me.

So please don't feel that I'm saying that if we don't feel miserable, you're not being properly godly. That would be a very foolish thing to say. Things might be really good. Thank you, Jesus.

You might be feeling fed up, a bit weary, a bit disappointed, a bit the end of tetherish. I always feel at this time of year, even if we don't have a relationship with schools and education where it's the end of term.

I always feel like it feels like the end of term. We've got three weeks to go before we all go on holiday or the summer holidays start rather. And maybe that's just my sense, but it's a tiring time of year.

You might be somewhere in between. I'm all right. Fine, thanks. Yeah. But I think one of the things that we need to get good at, maybe better at, that we need to get good at, is being really honest with God.

[10 : 48] Telling Jesus how we feel. If Elijah can say to God, I've just had enough. I have had enough.

