

Elijah Ensnared by Disappointment

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon focuses on the story of Elijah in the Old Testament, highlighting God's deeper reality in revealing Himself through His dealings with Elijah. It emphasizes the importance of expecting the unexpected from God, training oneself to listen for His still small voice, and understanding that God's ways are beyond human comprehension. The sermon encourages a fresh surrender to God's leading, reminding listeners that God orchestrates unique journeys for each individual to deepen their understanding and experience of Him.

Scripture: Romans 11:33, Psalm 46:10, Isaiah 55:8, Ephesians 3:20

Topics: "Expecting the Unexpected", "Surrender to God's Leading"

Description

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Transcript

Hello, I'd like to welcome you this morning. Whether you know it or not, you've just joined a Zoom meeting of the Christian Fellowship in Abbotsford and we're so pleased to have you. If you wanted to contact us at all, you can do that.

Our web address is, or email address, what is it? Forgive me, it's the web address, is mackenziefellowship.com. Just one word, mackenziefellowship.com. So there you are, you're very welcome anyway. This morning, my attention has been drawn back to a very sort of romantic figure, I use the word advisedly, in the Old Testament, Elijah. And I started reading about Elijah again just the other day and decided it was in the Lord's will for me to share some things about him here today.

The only problem, and it's a big problem, it's a huge problem, is although there are only three chapters here in 1 Kings where we read about Elijah, there's just so much information, so many things that would be a great pleasure to share. So I'm not gonna really get very far with it this morning, I know that. But the story of Elijah is very familiar, I think familiar to most, almost all of us, I'm sure.

And it's a story that takes me back to Sunday school days where we were first introduced to Elijah. So the story's familiar, but I have a question. What if I were to say, okay, we've got these three chapters, 17, 18, 19 of 1 Kings, what is the story about? Or if you like, who is the story about? The obvious answer to that question would be, well, it's about Elijah.

And that's right, and it is indeed about Elijah. And what an amazing man he was. But you know, there's a fact that we need to take into account, and I wanna focus on it a bit this morning, and that is that there's a much deeper reality here to be found as we read here in this section of scripture.

Because really, I'd like to suggest to you that the story here is really about God. It's a story about God. It's a story about God revealing himself through his dealings with a man.

I think of it this way, it's as though God is using Elijah as a visual aid. And through what we read concerning the interactions between God and Elijah, and then Elijah back to God, we're transfixed with just the uniqueness of God in his dealings with this man. And you know, the thought that's crossing my mind right now, there's no snow here in the parts of the world where I live at the moment.

But you know, we've been told, I've never done an examination and never will, that every single snowflake is different. And that's a stunning fact, if indeed it's true, and I've got every reason to believe it is. I've heard it for so many years now.

But for me as a Christian man, when I'm given that kind of information, it causes me immediately to think of the one who is the creator of the snowflakes. And what an incredible mind this great God, this creator God has to do such a thing. And this is just one very small element of this entire creation, which is so remarkable.

We get to know God in a variety of ways that we can talk about, but one of them certainly is by what we see he has created. And we wonder at that. And we get to know God by his dealings, the way he deals with people, the way he's been dealing with each one of us individually indeed.

And so I've got that kind of in mind as I'm thinking about Elijah in this section of scripture, because there's an interaction between God and him as the story unfolds. His name means quite literally, God is my strength. And Elijah comes on the scene very abruptly so far as the text of scripture is concerned.

We don't know anything about his background really in terms of parents or anything of that. So we have an idea which area he was from. We'll not pause to think about that just now.

But he emerges on the scene at a time when the nation which is called of God has become so engrossed with sin and idolatry, were to quote a text from another passage of scripture, where they were drinking iniquity as though it were water. Mind you, as I quote that text, I think about our contemporary situation in the world at large right now, where people drink iniquity as though it were water. And Elijah comes on the scene.

He comes on the scene as a man, although we know nothing about his background, we can be absolutely certain that God knew him even before he was born. In fact, I think we'll go further back than that. And we can say before even the foundations of the earth were created, God knew this man who would be known as Elijah.

And I do know that he was a man who prayed intensely to God. I read that in the book of James in the New Testament, which is a very interesting quotation and statement certainly. But evidently, and quite clearly, that took place before we actually meet Elijah in the 17th chapter of 1 Kings.

But God ordained that this man would come on the scene and to quote another scripture, he would be a man who would be a sharp cutting instrument with teeth. Do you remember that text? In other words, he was ordained to be an implement in the hand of God with sharp cutting teeth. That was from Isaiah 41, incidentally.

And as we read on about him and the various things which we're not able to go into in that kind of detail this morning. But we can see that the man that God chose and God created for this purpose was a man who himself was the product of God's own divine workmanship. He was a mere man, but at the same time, quite evidently, he was a trophy of the grace of God.

He was the result of God's own workmanship. And it's very evident as we read on through the various chapters that he was a man who had chosen to relinquish his self-life and to become a man who was like, to change the metaphor, who was like pliable clay in the hand of God. He was God's man and God ordained it that way.

And, you know, this is certainly the way that we really ought to think about ourselves as well. Perhaps we'll see this a little bit more as I continue a few minutes now. That God's hand has been involved in your life even before we were born.

And these things, they're too great for us to comprehend with our human minds. These are mysteries to us, but the Bible clearly tells us that God foreknew us and God has sovereignly ordained our lives that we should be here at this particular point in time. And he's been working in our lives and with this end in view, can I say, so that we ourselves may be those men and women who are responding to his wooing, his kindness, his grace, and yielding ourselves to him ever more fully that he might be all in all.

That's his plan and his purpose. It could be described in various ways, but Paul uses those words writing to the Ephesian church. Now, I know in saying all these things that we're in the Old Testament, in the Old Covenant, and we know there's a New Testament or a New Covenant, and we understand that the kind of things I've been referring to are not unique to the Old Testament, but as we move on into the New Testament, we find that these truths, these facts that I've mentioned already, they all come into a far crisper focus in the New Testament and take on a dimension that they don't possess in the Old Testament.

But we also remind ourselves of the words of the Apostle Paul, who referring back to the Old Testament said that these things were written for our learning. And so there's great profit in going back, as we are just now, into the Old Testament, looking at this particular individual and God's dealings with him, and to do it from our present perspective as men and women of the New Covenant, we can see how the unchanging God was working then in these lives. And in a sense, he's provided for us this visual aid, a reminder of just what in fact God is about with each and every one of us at this point in time.

Amen. And I hope as I'm talking to you this morning that these things I'm saying resonate in your own heart, not because they're new facts that you've never thought of before, but rather that they're echoing and resonating with the work of the Holy Spirit already working in your heart and in mind. Amen.

So I'm just gonna read the opening couple of verses from chapter 17 of 1 Kings. Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, as the Lord, the God of Israel lives before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dune nor rain these years except by my word. And the word of the Lord came unto him.

And so the text continues, but I'll break away from it at that point. What a remarkable thing, having said all I've said about this man, in that we know nothing about him except that he was a man who prayed earnestly prior to this. But clearly he was God's man.

And in this dark moment in the history of Israel, he is clearly being led of God to do an incredibly courageous thing. He goes right into the palace of the king, Ahab, this wicked king. And standing in front of the king of the nation, he makes this statement, as the Lord God of Israel lives before whom I stand.

Do you see that? What a remarkable statement. It's as though he's dismissing this king in so many ways, but in order to elevate the fact that there is a God, there is an almighty God, and that he himself is a man of that God. And he comes to the king of Israel with a word and a message from that God for him on this occasion.

Amen. Now, I'd like to talk about the development of what Elijah has just been announcing, but that will have to wait for another time. Maybe we'll do that sooner rather than later.

But I must move on. Let me just continue the reading. Having heard the pronouncement to the king, verse two says, "The word of the Lord came to him saying, "Go away from here and turn eastward "and hide yourself by the brook Jereth, "which is east of the Jordan." And it's this particular feature I want to just notice.

Having courageously gone before the king with this great pronouncement, now God says, okay, time to go. I want you to leave here and go and hide yourself. And this is quite remarkable.

This is not, let me emphasize this, this now departs or this go away and hide yourself is not some kind of punitive response from God or something. Of course it's not. And the fact is, as we go on and read the following verses, we'll find without any question that God certainly doesn't forsake him at all.

But nevertheless, God has instructed him to go and hide himself. Don't forget, and it would be easy to forget what I said at the beginning as we proceed, that we're watching the interaction between God and his man. And we're trying to learn something fresh to our own understanding about God himself.

So we're asking ourselves, well, why would God do this? Is God saying, okay, you've had your moments on the national stage. Now I'm finished with you. No, absolutely, that's not true at all.

But this that seems strange is not really that uncommon. I think there are many examples that I could find of this, whether I'm looking into the scripture or just looking into history. I wouldn't need to go very far back in history to call your attention to David Wilkerson.

But I remember listening to David Wilkerson on one occasion and he'd not been heard for six months. The fact of the matter is that God had spoken to David Wilkerson, who, as you know, was a renowned and recognized evangelist, a remarkable man in his own right. But clearly God had spoken to him in particular, because I was listening to him at the end of the six month period.

So he was retelling the events and how they'd unfolded. But he said, God spoke to me very clearly and sent to me that he was far more concerned to evangelize me than I was to evangelize the world. In other words, God needed to do a deeper work in his life and David Wilkerson was acknowledging that and so on.

If I had lots of time, I could talk about myself and my own experience, which I can't afford the time to say anything about myself, but I do know something about being hidden. But the fact is God was still working in him, working in his circumstances. And we could read, for example, just dropping my down to verse seven, and it happened after a while that he caused the brook where he'd been drinking to dry up and so on.

And then there was a unique way in which God provided with him through a widow woman. These events were very different. Just try and put these pieces together, will you? The man who's had such incredible courage and sense that God was leading him and that he had the word of God, he takes it into the palace of the king.

And of course, there's a famine that ensues as the result of what he said. And then we're looking at him and he's alone, he's in hiding. And he lived by the brook Cherith and the ravens brought him food.

And then the brook dries up. And then he goes to a widow who looks after him. Can you see the contrast? Tremendous contrast.

This is God who has engineered these particular circumstances, who is in control of everything that's going on. This is the man who's had such tremendous success on Mount Carmel. But let me add another dimension to this.

Because the next thing that he becomes aware of, I'm turning whole pages over here. I'm sorry if I have to do that. But Ahab, who was the king, of course, at the time, he goes, I'm now in chapter 19 of 1 Kings.

Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, so may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. Verse three reads like this.

And he, Elijah, was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. And he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a juniper tree and requested for himself that he might die and said, it is enough now, O Lord, take my life for I am not better than my fathers. And the story continues.

I'm trying to bring to your attention these contrasting features. This is not, what I'm about to say is not the title that I gave to this message in my notes that I had. But Sheila, who is somewhere out there listening to me, she said, she asked me what the title might be of the message and I said, you know, I'm tempted to call it A Man's Rollercoaster Journey to Heaven because it's an amazing story.

I need to just remind you again of Mount Carmel and the tremendous success. I want to remind you that there were 450 prophets of Baal that were on the other side of the opposing team, if you will, and they're all destroyed as a result of this man and his authority and so on. And yet now look at him, not only has the ravens been feeding him and drinking at the brook, and then the brook goes and dries up on him and then it's a widow woman.

But then the fact is the word of Jezebel has come to him. This is what we're reading about here now in this chapter. And the effect upon him is unbelievable.

We say, what happened to this man? He's heard that Jezebel's on his case and he runs away. The man who had faced 450 of the prophets of Baal and seen them destroyed by the power of God coming down like fire onto the offering, remember all of that and so on. And now he hears this woman's after him and he's running for his life.

And almost more than that, yes, more than that, he just wants to die. He thinks it's all over now. The man of God, it looks so incredibly weak.

We're reminded of the fickleness of the human heart. It's very easy to be critical, but then maybe we have to think a little bit more about ourselves and wonder about our own behavior on so many occasions. That's so contrasting and so incongruous at times.

And we can be ashamed. But the fact is he goes into this wilderness of his own making. Let me just say this though about Elijah, which would be true of any true man or woman of God, that the man or woman that is truly called of God cannot die until God's purposes are fulfilled with them and in them and for them.

And this is certainly true here. He may have felt like this was the end for whatever reasons and he may have been incredibly wrong and surely was in the things that he said, but the fact remains God hadn't finished with him. He needed to do more in him, that's quite evident.

And he wanted to do more through him also as the story continues to unfold. There was a journey that needed to be taken because there was more about God that Elijah needed to understand. And there was more of God's gracious work to be accomplished in his life.

And that very well could be true of many of you people who are listening to me this morning. There's more to be done, there's more to understand. A few weeks ago, we were talking about Priscilla and Aquila and they were talking to Apollos and they showed him the way of God more perfectly.

And it's very easy as professing Christians to become smug in whatever history or historical experience or experiences we've had in the past. But you know, when we're talking about God, there's always more that he needs to do in our lives. Now that sanctifying process needs to be enlarged, it needs to touch depths of our inner man that we hardly knew we possessed.

And this was certainly true for this man. And so there was a journey that needed to be taken. And I get the word from the text where God through the angel is speaking now to Elijah and he's providing food uniquely for him and it's unique food.

And the angel says, you need to partake of this because the journey is too great for you. This journey that he was to take would seem traveling, I think about a hundred miles. It was a journey to Horeb.

And I don't want to draw too tight a parallel here, but in my mind, I'm paralleling it with Calvary just now because the place Horeb of course was really Mount Sinai. Some say it was the other side of the mountain, but in any event, we know from earlier texts that this was a sacred place where others had experienced God. It was a place where God had revealed himself and manifested himself in some remarkable ways as you will recall.

And evidently God wanted to take him there. He's alone and God had this journey in mind for him. You know, in terms of God doing a deeper work or a broader work in our own spiritual lives, the way forward in the economy of God is always experienced by going backward.

The Lord by his Holy Spirit takes us back to Calvary again. He takes us back to the cross again, the principle and the power of the cross that we must understand more fully and experienced in a deeper way in our lives. And that journey to the cross is impossible.

I use the word advisedly. It's impossible for a man to do it. We can't do it in and of ourselves.

God is always the initiator. He is the alpha and he's the omega. He is the one and he's ordained the journey.

He's ordained what we go to on the journey and he has ordained a means by which he will get us there. I don't know everyone that's listening to me today, but this journey that is so crucial for us to take again and again and again is a journey which God will engineer for us. I believe I can safely say this, as surely as the call of God is upon your life, God will go to all lengths to get you there.

And this place, this deeper understanding and experience of God, it's not something that was fully accomplished on the day when we first went forward in an evangelical rally, for example. It's not the result of undertaking a six month series on sanctification where we learn all the information. It's more than that.

It's God by his spirit initiating something and leading us and directing us, perhaps through many, many circumstances to bring us again to that place of full and complete surrender to God. And I've already indicated, even though we've done it once, we've done it a hundred times, we'll find this is the way of the spirit. He's always leading us back to the cross again and again.

Not that we've wandered away, but he's taking us there again to learn something fresh, to experience something deeper and richer over and again. Now, having arrived at Horeb, I think all I have the time and opportunity to say here is that this place, which was the place where God had manifested himself by fire and by earthquake to Moses is the place where now God is bringing Elijah. Forgive me for not reading the text.

Please read these three chapters as soon as you have the opportunity and you get all the information there. But the fact is that, forgive me, I must just read this. God says to Elijah, go forth and stand on the mountain before the Lord.

This is chapter 19 and verse 11. And behold, the Lord was passing by and a great strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind, an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

And after the earthquake, a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire, a sound. And this translation puts it of a gentle blowing, a still small voice, says the Old King James translation.

I'm told that the Hebrew here really, it suggests a still gentle whisper. Okay, what does all this mean? God has brought him from the drama of Carmel and through these strange circumstances in the wilderness and has directed him here to this particular place, just as God would direct us through the various circumstances that are part and parcel of our personal history. And he brings us to this place.

And what is he doing? He's teaching Elijah something that each and every one of us need to learn again and again. Having, you know, he's been exposed again to the fire, the air and the earthquake and so forth. And then there's this voice of gentle silence.

And that was how God was manifesting himself in this horror of the Sinai place. But his method of communicating and what he's teaching to Elijah and to you and to me is that everything about God is unexpected to us. And, you know, in so many cases, this is why we miss him.

So often for this very reason, we're expecting him to come in a certain way, the way that he came before, the way that he's ministered to us before or the way he's ministered to others before. And we expect it's going to be the same again. And that's where we make a mistake.

And we often miss him at that time. And a dear man communicated with me recently and he said in his communication, I need a miracle. And I only had a moment and I was not able to make any response to that at all.

But as I walked away from that scene where I had just read that information, this thought crossed my mind, but you already have the miracle. The miracle is that God loves you. The miracle is that God is speaking to you right now.

The miracle is that God is putting a desire in your heart for him. Do you see how easily we find ourselves gravitating to the sensational, to the dramatic experience? We feel that's what we need. And by pursuing that, when God is no longer in the earthquake or the fire, but God is in this gentle whisper, he's whispering into our heart.

He may be whispering into your heart at this point in time. We so quickly become sort of sentimental about particular experiences or ways in which God has ministered to us in the past. And we miss the gentle silence of God.

And another thing that we're prone to do is because it's this new way that God is speaking, we're just not in tune to it. It's as though we turn the volume up, the worldly volume, whatever that is, because we're just unaware and insensitive to the fact that God is speaking here and we miss him in the immediate moment. It could be that God is speaking something completely fresh into your heart as you're listening to me.

Let me remind you of some of the scriptures. How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways are past finding out, we're told. This man, as we know from the unfolding story, he'd become ensnared with disappointment.

It reminds me of the two disciples on the Emmaus Road. Do you remember as they are unaware that they're in the presence of the resurrected Jesus at the time he's walking with them and they're talking together? Do you remember the little phrase that they use in responding to him? He said, one of them said, we had hoped it had been he who would have saved Israel and so on. The fact is we can live in that place.

We'd hope things were gonna turn out different. We'd hoped it would have worked out the way we thought it should have worked out and so on. And in that transition into disappointment, we lose the radiance of the life of the spirit of God in us.

We lose the sense of witness that he's with us. He's working nevertheless in my heart and we lose the effectiveness of his spirit working in our hearts. So God now has Elijah there.

Maybe he's got you and me there, freshly just now in that place at the cross. And the Lord says to Elijah, okay, Elijah, what doest thou here? The question was asked twice in this part of the text. What are you doing? Can I paraphrase that deliberately? I think the way I'm understanding that statement, what doest thou here would be in terms like this.

Elijah, do you know why you are here? And if God had put it that way and if God were continuing in this hypothetical response that I'm thinking of just now, God would say to Elijah and he would say to you today, my dear friend, you are here where you are right now because I led you here. That's why you're here. So that I could demonstrate these great principles to you and you could stop trying to stereotype me if God uses that word.

It's as though God is saying, Elijah, I am God. Don't stereotype me. Don't expect me always to do the same thing that I once did in the past.

Train yourself, Elijah. Train yourself, Fred Tomlinson. Train yourself, Peter Boyle, and then put your name in there.

Train yourself to be attentive to the flowing progressive work of the spirit of God. Elijah needed to hear that, perhaps. That's exactly what you need to hear this morning.

Now, before I pull away from this text and from these thoughts this morning, whoever you are, just remember this, that he has you at this Horeb Calvary place and you are safe. You are safe. You're utterly safe because it is he who is handling your life.

He who is the king of love. He who is seeking to fall afresh into your inner heart, into your life. He's here with his rhema word, his cleansing word, speaking to your heart.

This today, in the mind and heart of God, I believe, as surely as God speaks to any of us by this living, quickening, life-imparting, faith-imparting word, is because it is the day of a new beginning. When he speaks, it's in order to accomplish something new and something wonderful. Of course, the story of Elijah in this passage continues on and to do justice to it, we didn't have to leave the three chapters and go into 2 Kings and chapter two.

And, you know, Elijah reaches the whole climb, the climax of his journey is that somehow in a scene that is not described in the kind of detail we'd like it to be described, but God provides a flaming chariot with flaming horses and somehow Elijah is now in that chariot and he is whisked away into God. His cloak, symbol of the authority of God and the anointing upon him, falls away from him even as the chariot begins to soar away and the cloak falls and lands on the man who's been his companion for some time now. I think you know about that, we'll talk about that on another occasion.

Let me grant me just a little bit of license here. Can I suggest that as the chariot is lifting, I don't know at all, I have no idea whether it was like this, but in my mind's eye, I see Elijah and he glances back down to the ground which is disappearing away from him and he sees his dear friend, Elisha, there. And it's in my mind, he's got a message for Elijah and he says, Elisha, remember to expect the unexpected from God because his ways are past finding out, train yourself, Elisha, to listen for his still small voice and know this for sure, that when he acts, when God acts, he does things you would never even have imagined and

could never even to have imagined.

I think God's doing something like that for me right this moment as I sit here, talking to a camera and I have the ability to speak to so many of you out there. May God bless you and may God work these things out in your life. Let me just pray and then I'll hand over to Peter.

Father, we thank you, we thank you from our hearts, Lord, that you've not just done something wonderful for us and then just set us free to go and make the best of it out there in the world, but we thank you, Father, that you've come by your Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, to be God even within our breast. Lord, how wonderful, you're not even walking just alongside of us and holding our hand, but you live in our, you've made our hearts your temple. We bow down and worship you, Lord.

And we pray, Father, that you'll find each one of us attentive to you, that our inward ears may be so tuned to hear your whispers in our heart and our feet, and that is our responses to be so ready to run in your will and in your bidding or to sit and wait and rest if that be your leading. Lord, we love you. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity to be together and to share and to listen.

We pray that by your Holy Spirit, you will accomplish your purpose in it all for your namesake, for your glory. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

What a blessing, Faith, what a blessing. Amen.

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