

Elijah, Ensnared by Disappointment

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon delves into the story of Elijah in the Old Testament, highlighting God's unique dealings with him as a visual aid to reveal Himself. It emphasizes the importance of expecting the unexpected from God, being attentive to His gentle whispers, and understanding that God's ways are beyond human comprehension. The sermon encourages listeners to be open to God's leading, even in times of disappointment or when facing unexpected circumstances, as He works in mysterious and transformative ways.

Scripture: 1 Kings 17:1, James 5:16, Psalm 139:6, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 2:9, Proverbs 3:5, John 10:27, Hebrews 13:5, Ephesians 3:20

Topics: "Expecting the Unexpected", "God's Gentle Whispers"

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 First Kings that 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 going to 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 First 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 want to 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 when 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. 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 could 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 sort, 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, to quote a text from another passage of scripture, 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 First 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 are 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 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 and 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 mine. Amen. So I'm just going to read the opening couple of verses from chapter 17 of first 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 dew 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 you know in that we know nothing about him except that he was a praying 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'll 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 the having heard the pronouncement to the king verse 2 says the word of the Lord came to him saying go away from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith 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 now this is quite quite remarkable um this is this is not let me emphasize this this now departs or this go away and hide yourself is not it's 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 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 why would God do this um you know it's God saying okay you've had your moments on you know the national stage now I'm finished with you no absolutely that's not true at all but you know 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 and said 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 his circumstances and we could read for example just dropping my eye down to verse 7 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 these events were very different just try and put put these pieces together will you you know 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 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's 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 uh who is is in control of everything's going on this is this is this is the man who's had such tremendous success on mount carmel but let me add another dimension to this because um the the next thing that uh that he he becomes aware of i'm turning whole pages over here i'm sorry i have to do that um but ahab who was the king of course at the time uh he goes i'm now in chapter 19 of first 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 and verse three reads like this and he elijah was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to be a sheba 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 oh lord take my life for i am not better than my father's 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 uh but but sheila who is somewhere out there listening to me um she said she asked me what the title might be of the message and i said you know i'm tempted to call it uh a man's roller coast 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 that there were 450 prophets of bail that

were on the other side of the you know 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 raven's 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 what happened to this man is he's heard that jezebel's on his case and he runs away the man who had faced 450 of the prophets of bail and seen them destroyed by the the power of god coming down like fire onto the offering remembered 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 he just wants to die he thinks it's all over now the man of god it looks so incredibly weak and 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 you know there was a there was a journey that needed to be taken because there was 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 that there's that there's more to be done there's more to understand a few weeks ago we were talking about priscilla and aquila and they're talking to apollo 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 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 see him traveling i think about 100 miles it was a journey to whoreb and i i don't want to draw too tight a parallel here but i'm in my mind i'm paralleling it with calvary just now because the whole the place whoreb 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 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 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 experience understand more fully and experienced in a deeper way in our lives and and that journey to the cross is impossible i use the word advisedly it's impossible for a man to do 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 he 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 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 this place this 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 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 is 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 over again now having arrived at Horeb the the 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 by fire and by earthquake to mooses 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 the fact is that that um uh 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 as the old king james translation uh i'm i'm told that the 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 he's he's teaching elijah something that each and every one of us need to learn again and again uh and having 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 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 uh and uh you know in so many cases this is 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 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 and and he said in his communication i 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 that we find ourselves gravitating to the sensational to the to the dramatic experience we feel that's what we need and by pursuing that when god is no longer in the the earthquake or the fire but god is in this this gentle whisper he's whispering into a heart he may be whispering into your heart at this point in time we 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 speaking to us and and another thing that we're prone to do is is because it's this new way that god is speaking that we're just not in tune to it it's as though we 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 were 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 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 he said they one of them said we we had hoped we had hoped it had been he who would have you know saved Israel and so on uh the fact is we can live in that place you know we we'd hope things were going to turn out different we'd hoped it would have worked out the way we thought it should have worked out and so on and then and in that 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 he God now has Elijah there maybe he's got you and me there freshly just now in that place at the cross and uh and the Lord says to Elijah okay Elijah what doest thou hear the question was asked twice in the in this part of the text what do you do can I paraphrase that deliberately I think the way I'm understanding that statement what doest thou hear would be in terms like this Elijah do you know why you are here and and if God had put it that way and if God were continuing in this hypothetical response that I'm thinking of 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 for me if God uses that word uh 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 um whoever you are just remember this that he has you at this Horeb Calvary place and you are safe you are safe it's 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 into your inner heart into your life he's here with his rarer 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 because the story of Elijah in this passage continues on and to do justice to it we'd even have to leave the three chapters and go into Second Kings and chapter two and you know Elijah reaches the whole climax of his journey is that somehow in a scene that is not described in 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 be 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 Elijah there and it's in my mind he's got a message for Elijah and he says Elijah remember to expect the unexpected from God because his ways are past finding out train yourself Elijah 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 mentioned 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 love 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 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 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 name's sake for your glory we ask in jesus name amen amen what a blessing

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